

November 2017

## From Object to Other: Models of Sociality after Idealism in Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer

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From Object to Other: Models of Sociality after Idealism in Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig,  
and Bonhoeffer

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Philosophy  
with a concentration in Philosophy and Religion  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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Date of Approval:  
November 3, 2017

Keywords: ontology, dialogue, intersubjectivity, anthropology, revelation, responsibility

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## **Dedication**

For Danielle

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation offers an account of the different ways in which putatively idealist and transcendental models of sociality, which grounded the subject's relation to other human beings in the subject's own cognition, were rejected and replaced. Scrapping this account led to a variety of models of sociality which departed from the subject as the ground of sociality, positing grounds outside of the subject. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, Franz Rosenzweig, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer represent alternative positions along a spectrum of models of sociality which reject the idealist concept of sociality.

The central argument of this dissertation claims that the responses to idealism and transcendental models of sociality ultimately find fault with an inadequate ontology, one which grounds sociality (as well as all of reality) in the cognition of the subject. The ontology of the transcendental model locates the subject as initially unconnected to other subjects such that the first move in relating them together must be epistemological. The social relation is grounded in the subject's cognitive grasp. Each of the thinkers I examine identifies this as the key problem with idealism; however, their solutions to this problem differ. The differing solutions of Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer can be identified as occupying different representative positions along a continuum, call it the "scale of social grounding." What I offer here is a topography of responses to the idealist model of sociality.

The ontological ground of sociality, instead of being the subject, is posited as situation of dialogue (Gadamer), the face of the other (Levinas), or divine revelation (Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer). In each of these alternative models, we see that the subject is conditioned rather

than autonomous, that sociality is enacted through temporality and language, and that sociality is principally a normative relation rather than an epistemological one. The story that emerges from my analysis, then, is a richer topography of responses to idealism than has hitherto been mapped out. The responses, represented by Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer each provide an alternative ontology on which any adequate model of sociality must rest.

While my account of the spectrum of ontological responses to idealist sociality does not claim to be exhaustive, it does give a better topography of the field of responses than has hitherto been offered in studies of models of sociality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, this dissertation shows the centrality of providing an alternative ontology to idealism in these projects. Far from rejecting ontology wholesale or merely offering moral revisions to the existing social order, each of the figures I examine in this study radically revise the ground of sociality by articulating a fresh ontological vision which can support social life.

## Introduction

The shadow of Hegel cast itself long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, forcing both philosophers and theologians to grapple with the legacy of Hegel's philosophical system. His early and influential critic, Søren Kierkegaard, is well-known both for his arguments against idealism and for inspiring the 20<sup>th</sup> century movement of existentialism, which can be thought of as a response on behalf of the individual to the impassive system of philosophy which Hegel was seen to have promoted. While the rejection of idealism based on concerns of the *individual* has been well charted, idealism was just as frequently faulted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for producing an inadequate model of *social* relations. This dissertation offers an account of the different ways in which putatively idealist and transcendental models of sociality, which grounded the subject's relation to other human beings in the subject's own cognition, were rejected and replaced. Scrapping the *I*-centered model led to a variety of models of sociality which departed from the subject as the ground of sociality, positing grounds outside of the subject. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, Franz Rosenzweig, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer represent alternative positions along a spectrum of models of sociality which reject the idealist concept of sociality.

The concept of sociality in this context, while relating to the whole social life of a human being, expresses both a descriptive and a prescriptive content. Descriptively, sociality expresses the ways in which one human being comes into contact and relation to another human being, whether this be through sensory contact, intentionality, language, etc. The key question here is whether one has correctly described what happens in social relations. Prescriptively, sociality expresses the ways in which an individual *genuinely* or *ought* to come into relation with others.



Two key questions arise here: whether the prescription is correctly articulated, and what it is that is required to move from a state of inauthentic sociality to a state of authentic sociality, that is, from what is to what ought to be. The criticisms of idealism examined in this project operate at both descriptive and prescriptive levels. Gadamer and Levinas argue that idealism has misdescribed the basic way in which human beings come into relation with each other, and on that basis, it has misunderstood the ways in which human beings ought to rightly be related to each other. Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer, for their part, argue that idealism has fairly accurately articulated the basic ways in which humans relate to each other; only, idealism has taken this identification as persons relating *rightly* to each other while in fact it has only correctly described *inauthentic* or even harmful forms of sociality.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, sociality is considered to be a relation, considered together with the means of that relation, between two or more human beings.

The most influential narrative offered with regard to concerns over the social implications of idealism, Michael Theunissen's *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, has flattened out the variety of responses to idealism. While Theunissen sees this response as consisting of just the dialogical philosophy movement spurred on by Martin Buber, I argue for a more diverse set of alternatives. Theunissen articulates a typology of what he calls transcendental models of social ontology in contrast to dialogical

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to use the term "sociality" instead of "intersubjectivity" or "social ontology" for multiple reasons. First, "intersubjectivity" is often, though not always, taken to refer to the epistemological relationship between subjects which is at issue in the criticism of idealism. Hence, Gadamer rejects the concept of intersubjectivity as correctly articulating the social relation between individuals. Next, "social ontology," while getting at the heart of my argument in this project, itself is of dubious usefulness in part because of Levinas' suspicion of anything called ontology in traditional terms. Further, "social ontology" is used in multiple ways in different philosophical discussions. In addition to being used to describe the subject matter of my dissertation by Michael Theunissen's project cited below, "social ontology" has been a topic of discussion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist theory, following the writings of Georg Lukács. More recently, "social ontology" has come to denote ideas of group agency and collective intentionality as discussed by John Searle, Raimo Tuomelo, and their commentators. Following Searle, the "Cambridge Social Ontology Group" uses the phrase to describe the structures of social reality, however, primarily in an economic sense. In order, therefore, to avoid a measure of confusion, I have opted for "sociality," a broadly applicable term which is operative in both theological and philosophical circles and which has not been co-opted for particular polemical or partisan purposes.

models of social ontology. Theunissen's classification of transcendental and dialogical social ontologies is meant to provide a representative, though not exhaustive, exposition of twentieth century continental views of the self-other relationship. Although Theunissen admits that "transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of dialogue are not the only positions from which the thought of the first half of the twentieth century approached 'the Other,'" he asserts that "the standpoints that we have selected constitute the extreme limits comprising all the other possibilities of thematizing the Other that have actually been developed to date."<sup>2</sup> And although Theunissen leaves the question open whether these two positions suffice "to cover the field in its entirety,"<sup>3</sup> the upshot of Theunissen's analysis is that the movement of dialogical philosophy represented by Buber constitutes the principal alternative to transcendental and idealist models of sociality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Theunissen documents this counter-idealist movement, the philosophy of dialogue, as marked by its departure from grounding the subject's relation to other persons in the subject itself. Instead, "dialogicalism" posits the locus of that relationship in between self and other. Quoting Buber, Theunissen notes that Buber's thinking invokes "a relation that is 'no longer grounded in the sphere of subjectivity, but in that of the between.'"<sup>4</sup> The contrast that Theunissen draws, therefore, between transcendental models of social ontology and the philosophy of dialogue concerns the grounding of the social relation. While the transcendental and idealist models ground sociality in the subject's cognition, dialogical sociality is grounded in the dialogue itself, in the space "in between" I and Thou.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. Christopher Macann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 271.

While the dialogical model of sociality represents one rejection of idealist and transcendental models of sociality, it was by no means the only nor the most radical response in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beyond the transcendental and dialogical models of sociality lie models which ground the social relation neither in the subject nor in the dialogical encounter between subjects but rather in the “other.” Instead of the social relation being engendered through the subject’s constitution or through the situation of dialogue which encompasses interlocuters, these other-oriented models argue that idealism is only overcome when sociality finds its origin and account in the personage of the other. I split these other-oriented models into two camps: the *ethical responsibility* model as articulated by Levinas and the *revelational* model as exemplified in Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer. A common theme among these models is the idea that the subject lacks the capacity for initiating proper social relations on its own; in fact, when it attempts to do so, it fails by absorbing the other into the subject. In other words, idealism fails to secure appropriate relations with others on behalf of the subject because it enables the subject to comprehend the other in abstraction from the subject’s normative obligations to the other. Hence, there is no concrete obstacle to prevent the other from appearing as an extension of oneself.

The inadequacies in Theunissen’s oft-cited account call for a renewed examination of 20<sup>th</sup> century models of sociality which self-consciously departed from their transcendental heritage. The central argument of this dissertation claims that the responses to idealism and transcendental models of sociality ultimately find fault with an inadequate ontology, one which grounds sociality (as well as all of reality) in the cognition of the subject. The ontology of the transcendental model locates the subject as initially unconnected to other subjects such that the first move in relating them together must be epistemological. A subject must first gain knowledge of the other in order to rightly relate to it. Thus, the social relation is grounded in the

subject's cognitive grasp. Each of the thinkers I examine identifies this as the key problem with idealism; however, their solutions to this problem differ.

The differing solutions of Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer can be identified as occupying different representative positions along a continuum, call it the "scale of social grounding." What I offer here is a topography of responses to the idealist model of sociality. Gadamer exemplifies the dialogical approach, which sees that persons are not initially unconnected from each other from the outset. Instead, all persons participate in the ontology of language whereby the ground for sociality is not in one subject or in another, but in the dialogue between them. Gadamer, who fits appropriately into Theunissen's typology of dialogicalism, serves as a prominent and influential advocate of a model of sociality which is grounded not in the subject's epistemological power nor in the power of any other subject, but in their both being caught up in the being of language which encompasses them.

Levinas exemplifies the ethical responsibility approach, which in fact *depends* upon the independence of the subject, that is, the separation between persons, but argues that the effort to relate persons through cognition is bound to failure. Instead, the social relation is initiated through the expressive presence of the other person, a command which precedes cognition and binds one person to another in responsibility. Rather than grounding sociality in the subject or in the "space between" persons, sociality has its ground in the other person who faces me. Sociality is preeminently defined on this model as being responsible for the other rather than as comprehending or understanding the other person. Ethical responsibility here precedes epistemology.

Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer exemplify the revelational approach, which grounds sociality in the divine other in contrast to a merely human other. Both Rosenzweig and

Bonhoeffer maintain that persons exist at a baseline level of connectedness in the context of everyday social relations in society. Yet, in different ways, this relation between persons is found to be covered over by a profound tendency to isolation and self-enclosure on the part of the individual. It is therefore necessary for the isolation of the self to be broken open by divine self-revelation, an encounter which alone makes possible *authentic* relationships. The break with idealism on the part of Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer runs along a number of fronts, but the deepest fault line is in the rejection of the epistemological approach as providing an adequate account for sociality. The knowing subject ends up knowing only himself or herself, i.e. only perpetuating isolation.

These three approaches, the dialogical, responsibility, and revelational models therefore share the same diagnosis of the idealist/transcendental prioritizing of cognition in sociality. Yet, as we have seen, their solutions lie along a spectrum: grounding sociality in between self and other, grounding sociality in the human other, grounding sociality in the divine other. Because the issue at hand is the grounding of sociality, the solution must provide an adequate ontology which avoids the problem of grounding sociality in a cognizing subject. However, we must first understand what is meant by the notion of grounding sociality in the subject, why that is so problematic, and what it could mean to say that sociality is grounded elsewhere.

The charge that sociality is “grounded” in the subject means that sociality has its origin, both logically and temporally, in the cognitive faculty of the subject. In other words, the social relation is made possible by – has its necessary and sufficient conditions in – the subject’s intellect. In order for one person to relate to another, the subject must have knowledge of the other person. In classical terms, this means engendering an adequation between the intellect and

the thing cognized. The mind of the subject encompasses and brings into itself the object of cognition; in this case, that object is another subject.

In their introduction to the concept of the self in classical German philosophy, David E. Klemm and Günter Zöller write,

The classical German way of thinking about the self is characterized by a decidedly idealist bent. The self is understood not only as the ground of all knowledge concerning the world, but also as the ground of the very reality of the world. The idealist extension of the self's original, epistemological function to a larger, metaphysical role made it imperative to develop a specific terminology that addressed the radical, world-constituting function of the self. The absoluteness of the self as the universal condition of reality was expressed by such constructs as 'subject,' 'subject-object,' and 'spirit.'<sup>5</sup>

This characterization of self and world in German idealism is perhaps not as nuanced as one would like with regard to the particular subtleties of thinkers typically lumped into this category such as Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Nevertheless, the figures I examine for the most part (though Gadamer may be an exception to this) care less about accurately detailing a particular philosopher's position than identifying idealism as a kind of perennial trap that philosophers of different time periods get sucked into. Hegel is perhaps most often identified as the antagonist in these narratives, but Husserl and other 20th century figures are routinely identified as falling prey to idealist tendencies.<sup>6</sup> The common target, therefore, is less a particular philosopher or set

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<sup>5</sup> David E. Klemm and Günter Zöller, "Introduction," in *Figuring the Self: Subject, Absolute, and Others in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. David E. Klemm and Günter Zöller (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), vii.

<sup>6</sup> See, however, the assessment by Walter Jaeschke that Hegel does not fit this criticism: "Hegel, the philosopher of the principle of subjectivity, begins the epoch of his systematic philosophizing as a critic of the principle of subjectivity, as a critic of the absolute subject, one can even add, as a critic who prefigured the same objections that are raised against the principle of subjectivity today. For Hegel's critique of the standpoint of subjectivity is also a critique of a relation of predominance, a critique of the predominance of the understanding over sensibility, a critique of the tyranny of the concept over that which is alive." Walter Jaeschke, "Absolute Subject and Absolute Subjectivity in Hegel," in *Figuring the Self*, 194. Jaeschke explains this a few pages later by arguing of Hegel that "one cannot object to his approach, at least not with justification, that it is a model of the predominance of the monological or even a monomaniacal subject, and that it excludes intersubjectivity. In fact, the opposition of subjectivity and intersubjectivity is post-Hegelian abstraction. The fact that thinking does not belong merely to the subject qua individual subject, like an opinion that is only 'mine,' but rather that thinking is the very element in which the identity of all the individual subjects is realized, is for Hegel precisely the characteristic mark of thinking.

of philosophers as it is the continual temptation of idealism, namely to ground our relation to others through the subject's cognizing powers. Hence, this work is not concerned to justify a particular criticism of German Idealist philosophers as valid. I leave that question aside, concentrating instead on what Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer *do* with their criticisms, regardless of their accuracy in application to the likes of Hegel, Husserl, et al.

The model (or caricature) of the ramifications of idealism is as follows: the subject is the *fundamentum inconcussum*, the foundation for all knowledge of and relation to the world. This feature of subjectivity means that it is different in kind from the objects it relates to, and that it has freedom or autonomy with regard to those objects.<sup>7</sup> Even when the object of knowledge is acknowledged to be another subject, with its own powers, the other subject is still presented to one's own subjectivity as something to be identified, known, and related to. All normative relationality is subsequent to the epistemological grasp. Further, because rationality is the primary means of relating to others, this relation takes on the character of rationality: being timeless and above the varying contingencies of context and language. Sociality is therefore construed as the rational comprehension of those around me. All normative or affective commitments are seen to flow out of this primary determination of the subject's cognition.

Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer each share this basic articulation and critique of the idealist model and position themselves as providing an alternative, rooted in a

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Without the moment of intersubjectivity, thinking would always in fact stand exposed to the danger of being private, unable to realize the universality claimed by thinking." Ibid., 201-202.

<sup>7</sup> See the assessment, from a theological point of view, of Eberhard Jüngel, *God as Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 83: "Since Descartes, the 'I think' ('cogito') is regarded as the actual foundation of all that exists. The human ego is *subiectum* to the extent that it thinks, is mentally active...When this ego then 'knows,' what it knows becomes its 'object.' In knowing, the ego goes forth from itself as a seeker, finds something against which it 'collides,' and thus finds its 'object'...That the knowing subject in the act of knowing draws the object into itself, overcomes its object as object and destroys it, reveals the extent to which the 'subject' desires as ego to be the absolute *subiectum*. All objects should ultimately be dependent on the subject, which can endure its dependence on the world of objects only temporarily but not permanently."

curative ontology. The ontological ground of sociality, instead of being the subject, is posited as situation of dialogue (Gadamer), the face of the other (Levinas), or divine revelation (Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer). In each of these alternative models, we see that the subject is conditioned rather than autonomous, that sociality is enacted through temporality and language, and that sociality is principally a normative relation rather than an epistemological one. The story that emerges from my analysis, then, is a richer topography of responses to idealism than has hitherto been mapped out. The responses, represented by Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer, far from merely criticizing the idealist model of sociality, actually each provide an alternative ontology on which any adequate model of sociality must rest.

Chapter One is devoted to articulating the dialogical model of sociality laid forth by Gadamer. I show how Gadamer's criticisms of the subject-object ontology of his German forebears leads him to develop a hermeneutic ontology of language, wherein being emerges in the history of the events of language. This event ontology serves as the ontological ground of sociality. Social relations occur in the event of language which occurs in the dialogue between two persons. Gadamer clearly argues that the ground of sociality lies in neither of the persons who engage in the dialogue, but in the being which is presented in language between them. The persons participate in something which surrounds them and guides them, and which carries the initiative in sociality. In Gadamer's account, then, we find a fully developed ontology which is capable of undergirding a philosophy of dialogical sociality.

Chapter Two presents the ethical responsibility model of sociality as articulated in the writings of Levinas. In many ways, Levinas represents the complete inversion of the idealist model of sociality insofar as Levinas endeavors to ground sociality in the subject which faces and opposes one's own subjectivity. While Levinas explicitly rejects the correlation between



reality and subjective cognition which he sees at the heart of idealist ontology, he does affirm an ontology, a vision of reality, one which is unavailable to the impartial observer, but which nevertheless serves as the foundation for all sociality. Levinas sees sociality as bound up with the responsibility for others. On Levinas's account, this responsibility is revealed as the rupture of the human face into the self's egoism and is insistent that the self lacks the capacity to initiate or enact social relations. The first move is made by the one who faces me, engendering my responsibility. Foundational to Levinas's account is the idea that sociality cannot be described in a system which lines up subjects and orders the relations between them as in a diagram. The ontology which Levinas rejects conforms to such a pattern; it sets out the beings which are to be related to one another then sketches the lines of relationality between them. Levinas's own view is that the experience of the relation itself reveals what the other is and what I myself am. Only one invested in and by that social relation can truly articulate what is. While Levinas often uses religious language in articulating his model, in the final analysis, the concept of God does not ground sociality; instead, that relation must have its necessary and sufficient conditions in the human being who faces me.

Chapter Three introduces and sketches out the ontology and subsequent model of sociality developed by Rosenzweig in response to the failures of idealism to adequately account for time, language, and religious experience. In contrast to models which ground sociality in the subject, in dialogue, or in the human other, Rosenzweig argues that sociality can only find its ground in divine revelation, in the divine action upon the human being which opens up the soul to relate rightly to the world around it. Rosenzweig's ontology, which serves as an influence on Levinas's account, begins in the fundamental separation and closedness of the elements of reality, God, world, and the human, from each other. This represents a stark contrast to

Gadamer's account of ontology wherein all beings are open to each other by their participation with each other in language. On Rosenzweig's view, language in its true sense is only given to the self through divine revelation. While Levinas shares Rosenzweig's view that human beings originate from a place of separation and relative isolation from each other, Rosenzweig maintains that no human being can of her own accord generate authentic social relations with another person. Instead, God, human beings, and the world come into relationships with each other through the unfolding of divine initiative in dialogue and revelation. The soul who receives this self-revelation of the divine is then empowered with the capacity to relate rightly to others, ultimately bringing the world to redemption through the religious community. Rosenzweig thus constructs an elaborate and interwoven system of reality in which sociality and the redemption of all things unfolds through their temporal relations.

Chapter Four lays out the model of sociality which Bonhoeffer charts in his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, as well as in his *Habilitationsschrift, Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer's account of sociality is an explicitly theological reckoning of the ways in which persons rightly relate to one another, grounding social relations in divine revelation. Much like Rosenzweig, Bonhoeffer argues that human beings cannot place themselves into genuine sociality, and that God alone can serve as the grounding for such an activity. Bonhoeffer, too, delivers a detailed critique of idealist conceptions of sociality, and presents his own account of the ontological basis for right relationality. This revelational model of sociality, however, lays out a different ontological vision than does Rosenzweig. Although many components of what constitutes true social life are shared in common between the two thinkers, they part ways on the configuration of these features as well as the ultimate locus of social grounding. For Bonhoeffer, divine revelation comes in the person of Christ, who is revealed in the church community. From

this claim emerges an ontology which accounts for the way in which persons are encountered by Christ and related to each other. On Bonhoeffer's account persons always exist within a broader ontological category which he calls "collective persons." Persons exist and relate to one another by means of the social-basic relations inherent to each collective person. *Authentic* sociality, however, is grounded through the initiative of Christ's self-revelation in and as the collective person of the church.

I conclude in Chapter Five by recalling that the ways of dealing with models of sociality in the secondary literature, most prominently represented by Theunissen, are insufficiently attentive the spectrum of responses to idealism in 20<sup>th</sup> century continental thought which develop an alternative to ontologically grounding sociality in the subject. Not only do Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer articulate explicit criticisms of this idealist project, but they also recognize that the solution to the problems they point out must have its sources in an ontological configuration of sociality. These figures offer a variety of replacement ontologies which lay claim to be the ground of genuine sociality, and in this way succeeding where idealism has failed. While my account of the spectrum of ontological responses to idealist sociality does not claim to be exhaustive, it does give a better topography of the field of responses than has hitherto been offered in studies of models of sociality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, this dissertation shows the centrality of providing an alternative ontology to idealism in these projects. Far from rejecting ontology wholesale or merely offering moral revisions to the existing social order, each of the figures I examine in this study radically revise the ground of sociality by articulating a fresh ontological vision which can support social life.

## Chapter One: Gadamer and Dialogical Sociality

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Gadamer's criticism of idealism paves the way for his alternative view of social relations which I characterize as an original *dialogical* account of sociality. Gadamer sees the enactment of language in conversation as constituting the self's relation with others. This dialogical view situates Gadamer at a kind of midpoint between models which ground sociality in the subject and those which ground sociality in the other who encounters the subject. In his criticism of German idealism, Gadamer rejects the notion that the social relation is grounded in the initiative of a constituting subject. By the same token, he rejects the idea that sociality could be grounded in the free initiative of an other, as Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer in different ways assert. Thus, I show in this chapter how Gadamer articulates his view of dialogue as not just an incidental event that occurs between persons, but as a founding event which constitutes the ground of their relationality.

I begin by showing how Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology is articulated as a response to the features he finds problematic in the idealist tradition. His alternative ontology thus provides the cure to the diagnosis of idealism as providing an inadequate basis for social reality. Gadamer's ontology accordingly drives other features of his philosophy. Gadamer views (intelligible) being as the history of the events of its coming to presence in language. This event is a movement that begins in the prior continuity of language, which becomes disrupted in the encounter with otherness and resolves in the integration of that otherness into a fuller linguistic understanding. Gadamer's view of sociality follows this general pattern of the event of understanding in the concrete movement of dialogue between self and other. Here, dialogue is

enacted neither by the agency of the self nor by the agency of the other, but rather through the initiative of the play of language itself which encompasses both parties. Thus, sociality is grounded, on Gadamer's view, in the "in-between" of language rather than from the I or the Thou. In the concluding section, I show how Gadamer represents an innovative account of dialogical sociality which rejects idealist and transcendental models while avoiding the criticisms that Theunissen levies against other dialogical models.

### **Gadamer's Critique of Idealism**

While discussing the contemporary philosophical trends, Gadamer asserts that the critique of the philosophy of the subject in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has made an advance over the German idealism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through what he calls the critique of the idealist naïveté of reflection. In Gadamer's telling of the story of philosophy, the concept of *substance* in Aristotle, as "that which underlies," was transformed in modernity to the concept of *subject*. Since Descartes, says Gadamer, the only thing which truly underlies all changes and remains constant is the I. Gadamer asserts that German idealism, following Kant, "recognized the function of subjectivity in the transcendental synthesis of apperception, which must be able to accompany all our ideas, and which gives them unity."<sup>1</sup> This led to the primacy of subjectivity as the absolute, as the abiding foundation for knowledge of both the self and the world in Kant and his followers.<sup>2</sup> This means that knowledge is grounded in the subject's certainty; its accompaniment of the object of knowledge certifies any claims to knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Person," trans. Peter Adamson and David Vessey, *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000), 277.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, 278: "Transcendental idealism gives subjectivity the rank of the absolute." See also, *ibid.*: "the successors of Kant grounded all knowledge on the first, highest principle of self-consciousness. This represents precisely, as Kant called it, a 'Copernican turn.' It fell to Kant's successors to give content to the formal notion of self-consciousness."

Of particular interest here is the notion that the subject knows itself: the I is self-reflective or reflexive. Because the subject knows itself, it has clear access to itself. The subject is able to distinguish itself from what surrounds it, lifting it out of the field of objects. Yet on Gadamer's assessment, this idealist subject documents the objects it cognizes as pure objects and assimilates them into itself. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes that this concept of self-consciousness "consists in its ability to make everything the object of its knowledge and yet in everything that it knows, it knows itself. Thus as knowledge it differentiates itself from itself and, at the same time, as self-consciousness, it folds back on and returns to itself."<sup>3</sup> This process of knowledge by which the subject arrives at the comprehension of an object implies the *autonomy* of the subject with regard to what it knows. Gadamer notes, "It seems at first as if the reflective spirit is the absolutely free spirit. In coming back to itself it is completely at home with itself [*bei sich*]. In fact, German idealism – for example, in Fichte's concept of action or even Hegel's concept of absolute knowledge – considered this achievement of the spirit that is at home with itself as the highest mode of existence or presence."<sup>4</sup> The subject knows its object, integrating the object into its own abode. The subject has certainty with regard to the object of knowledge because it certainly knows its own self, which is present in each act of intellection. Hence, the validation of the object is confirmed in abstraction from the context out of which it is intended.

Gadamer makes this point emphatically with respect to what he regards the idealist objectification of the work of art. The idealist concept of aesthetics, on Gadamer's view, abstracts the work of art from its situatedness in tradition and culture, and demands it be

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<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 244.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 122.

experienced as pure aesthetic object.<sup>5</sup> Because the work of art is abstracted in this way, it is considered *in-itself*, “existing in its own right,” untouched by the environment it in which it was embedded. Hence, Gadamer sees the idealist model of aesthetics as an exemplar of the idealist concept of reflection.

Gadamer criticizes this conception of reflection primarily by arguing that this concept of reflective consciousness is falsely objectifying. In promoting a model of identifying objects independently of their context, idealist reflection abstracts from the concreteness of life and therefore distorts the understanding of both the subject and the object. Gadamer appeals to the phenomenological tradition which he maintains shows that consciousness is not primarily an act which targets an object and identifies that object’s being-in-itself.<sup>6</sup> Instead, “not all reflection performs an objectifying function, that is, not all reflection makes what it is directed at into an object.”<sup>7</sup> It is a prejudice inspired by the modern scientific mindset which suggest that being is encapsulated in measurability. Thus, in perhaps a somewhat surprising move, Gadamer claims that the idealist concept of reflection errs in precisely the same way that scientific realism does: by reducing entities to the status of empirically measurable objects.

What figures like Husserl and Heidegger show us, says Gadamer, is that being is given in manifestly different ways than simply or primarily in a thing’s empirical dimensions. The objectifying mindset distorts not only the concept of the object perceived but also the concept of

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<sup>5</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 74: “What we call a work of art and experience (*erleben*) aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the ‘pure work of art.’ In performing this abstraction, aesthetic consciousness performs a task that is positive in itself. It shows what a pure work of art is, and allows it to exist in its own right. I call this ‘aesthetic differentiation.’”

<sup>6</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,” trans. G.B. Hess and R.E. Palmer, in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 35: “from Husserl (in his doctrine of anonymous intentionalities) and from Heidegger (in demonstration of the ontological abridgment evident in the subject-object concept in idealism), we have learned to see through the false objectification inherent in the idealist conception of reflection.”

<sup>7</sup> Gadamer, “Philosophical Foundations,” 123.

the subject which is said to reflect its own image back into itself. Gadamer writes, “Heidegger’s critique shows the narrowness of such a conception of being. He shows that on this conception, the primary, fundamental composition of human Dasein is misjudged. Dasein is not constituted in the always retrospective attempt to recognize oneself in the very act of becoming aware of oneself.”<sup>8</sup> Gadamer sees himself following in Heidegger’s path, participating in this critique of idealism, extending it to disciplines to which it has not been specifically applied.<sup>9</sup>

Gadamer finds that this concept of subjectivity corresponds to the objects of study in the human (and natural) sciences such that the object of understanding is bound up with self-understanding. One of his most important theses in *Truth and Method* maintains that “long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.”<sup>10</sup> That is, consciousness is not primarily objectifying, but rather is permeated by bringing one’s preunderstandings to bear upon the world and having those preunderstandings altered. There is neither an isolated consciousness nor an isolated object; both are surrounded and conditioned by their historicity.

While Gadamer shows that the idealist model of aesthetics is a symptom-bearer of the failure of its subject-object ontology, he also argues that idealism’s model of *sociality* bears witness to its process of reflective abstraction. Whether in the reiteration of this process in the romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher or in the historical school of hermeneutics culminating

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<sup>8</sup> Gadamer, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity,” 280.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, 281: “My own works have proceeded in this direction, asking what interpretation in fact is when one goes so far as to fundamentally question the ideal of the self-transparency of subjectivity. This does not mean only that de facto one will always find every understanding to be limited. It also means that an unlimited understanding would cut away at – indeed, abolish (*aufheben*) – the very meaning of understanding, just as a perspective that sees everything would abolish the very meaning of perspective.”

<sup>10</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278.



in Dilthey, Gadamer argues that other persons whom we are trying to understand are abstracted from their actual historical conditions. In the case of Schleiermacher, “the individuality of the Thou” presents us with an alienation which must be overcome by extracting the pure kernel of “free production” expressed by the individual.<sup>11</sup> In other words, a subject come into proper relation with its other by means of a process of “divination,” abstracting both subject and object from their historical contexts. In the case of Dilthey, despite focus on historical knowledge, this knowledge relies on a common bond of human nature.<sup>12</sup> The achievement of understanding relies on an appeal to something beyond history, a timeless human nature, which again is an abstraction from concrete historical relations. Either attempt, then, to understand others falls into the idealist pattern of a subject freely abstracting others from history.

In his writings, Gadamer often praises Heidegger for decisively demonstrating the failure of the lack of consideration for the historical in these ultimately idealist ways of thinking. However, in telling the story both of his following of and deviation from Heidegger, Gadamer explains that though he agreed with Heidegger’s account of the facticity and thrownness [*Geworfenheit*] of Dasein, this could not fully account for the human being set in sociality. Gadamer writes, “It is not only that everyone is in principle limited. What I was concerned with was why I experience my own limitation through the encounter with the Other, and why I must always learn to experience anew if I am ever to be in a position to surpass my limits.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, while Heidegger’s thought monumentally marks the departure from idealism’s assumption of subjective autonomy in demonstrating the fundamental limitation or

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<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, 180-187.

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, 226.

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity,” 285.

conditionedness of the human being, simply asserting this limit is not enough to capture the human condition.

Instead, Gadamer maintains that the experience of sociality paradigmatically exemplifies the way in which persons relate to the being which surrounds them and therefore is intrinsically tied to his project of hermeneutic understanding. As he puts it:

the very strengthening of the Other against myself would, for the first time, allow me to open up the real possibility of understanding. To allow the Other to be valid against oneself – and from there to let all my hermeneutic works slowly develop – is not only to recognize in principle the limitation of one’s own framework, but is also to allow one to go beyond one’s own possibilities, precisely in a dialogical, communicative, hermeneutic process.<sup>14</sup>

Although *Truth and Method* opens with idealist conceptions of art as the symptom-bearer of the inadequacies of the subject-object ontology, this autobiographical recollection suggests that Gadamer’s point of departure in articulating a corrective vision of ontology was actually located in conceptualizing the self-other relationship.

### **Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Ontology**

The identification of the failures of idealism’s subject-object ontology leads Gadamer to propose what he calls a hermeneutic ontology, out of which his account of dialogical sociality unfolds.<sup>15</sup> This ontology can be broadly characterized as a *participatory* or an *event* ontology in which the temporal manifestations of entities are not distinct from their true being but rather constitute that very being itself.<sup>16</sup> Gadamer articulates this ontology in opposition to the idealist view that there exists an abstracted being-in-itself which can be fixed by means of scientific

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>15</sup> Gadamer advances this ontology first by introducing particular examples: the being of the work of art, the being of history, and the being of texts. Only in the final part of his *magnum opus* does Gadamer begin to reflect thematically on this ontology as such. While sociality as such receives relatively minor thematic treatment in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s articulation of the being of social relations is interspersed throughout the second and third parts to serve as a backdrop for the other themes.

<sup>16</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 470.

objectivity and the subject's properly and methodically intending such an object.<sup>17</sup> Characterized in this way, Gadamer's polemic targets 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific empiricism as much as it does German idealism. Contrary to these views, Gadamer maintains that the being of entities does not exist *in* or *as* an inert object, but is rather an event of coming to presence in understanding. Being is not dispersed in static or discrete units, but temporally unfolds in self-presentation.<sup>18</sup>

In the final part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains his ontology in relation to the Platonic concept of the beautiful and suggests that in the course of his investigation "the mode of being of the beautiful proved to be the characteristic of being in general," namely, that "what presents itself in this way is not different from itself in presenting itself. It is not one thing for itself and another for others"<sup>19</sup> Gadamer here claims that just as there is no gap between a purported beauty-in-itself and beauty-for-us, so there is no dichotomy between reality-in-itself and reality-for-us either. This expression of reality allows Gadamer to link human understanding of a being with that entity's very being.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to highlight Gadamer's rejection of a subject-object ontology in favor of an event ontology. This first becomes evident in his articulation of the being of the work of art, which he claims is "not an object that stands over against a subject for itself." Ibid., 103. Rather, Gadamer suggests that the being of art, as well as the understanding that grasps it, "is a part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*." Ibid., 115. On this view, the work of art *is* the history of the events of its self-presentation. The work of art, then, is not a statically available object for the viewing subject, but is rather something that occurs, an event. Each presentation of the work of art engenders "an *increase in being*." Ibid., 135. This event ontology therefore includes both temporality and understanding as intrinsically tied to what is. That is, the work of art here exists as a temporal occurrence that is presented *to* the understanding. Gadamer describes the event of being as a process of participation, and thus evokes Platonic and Neo-Platonic ontologies of participation. See *ibid.*, 291-293, where Gadamer speaks of understanding as a participation in tradition. See also David Carpenter, "Emanation, Incarnation, and the Truth-Event in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 98-122. Carpenter argues that for Gadamer, "Being is self-presentative; it makes itself available for our understanding and therefore we understand. This speculative structure of Being, its self-expressiveness, which the Neoplatonic tradition conceived of as the self-diffusiveness of the Good, and expressed in the fundamental metaphor of emanation, is a basic presupposition of Gadamer's entire enterprise...Gadamer's *Truth and Method* can in fact be read as an extended meditation on the mystery of the expression and self-presentation of Being, and its incarnation in language as the 'record of man's finitude.'" Ibid., 98-99. See also Frederick G. Lawrence, "Ontology of and as Horizon: Gadamer's Rehabilitation of the Metaphysics of Light," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 56 (2000): 389-420.

<sup>19</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 481.

Because our understanding of being is not divorced from reality, the process by which human understanding comes about becomes constitutive of being, on Gadamer's view. Whereas idealism abstracted subject and object in order to overcome their opposition in reflective self-consciousness, Gadamer sees what he takes to be a more primordial unity between being and consciousness. This bond is one wherein the ground of the unity is not in the subject's cognition but in the self-presentation of being in the process of understanding. Because understanding comes about only fully through language, being comes to presence paradigmatically through language. Thus, as Gadamer puts it, recognizing that being emerges in the event of the understanding of language means that "this activity of the thing itself, the coming into language of meaning, points to a universal ontological structure, namely to the basic nature of everything toward which understanding can be directed. *Being that can be understood is language.*"<sup>20</sup> For Gadamer, the world of human beings comes to presence in language such that the human world is essentially a linguistic world; without language, being would not come to presence for us, at least not in the form of world. Further, language's expression of the world is not different from the being of the world itself. Rather, the being of *what is* exists just through and as the language that expresses it.

The presentation of being in language is not a diminution of being but rather is the very manifestation and realization of being as it is there presented. As Gadamer puts it, "Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. Thus, that language is originally human means at the same time that man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic."<sup>21</sup> On Gadamer's view, then, "language is a medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 469-470.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 440.

together.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, any relationship between I and the world is the continuity of I and world in language which is enacted by the process of understanding.

If being is truly expressed in language, Gadamer maintains that language has its true being in conversation. He writes, “language has its true being only in dialogue, in *coming to an understanding*...For language is by nature the language of conversation; it fully realizes itself only in the process of coming to an understanding.”<sup>23</sup> For Gadamer, it is the linguistic exchange which presents the world in language for human understanding. Like the work of art, each presentation of the world in language engenders an increase in the being of the world, in the sense that the world is more richly articulated through the proliferation of presentations and therefore more fully realized in its being. Gadamer’s ontology therefore can quite appropriately be called a dialogical ontology. The being which is presented in the language of the dialogue is the very being of the thing itself, *die Sache selbst*. The *Sache* emerges, not as an object which an unaffected subject gains mastery over, but rather through the speaker’s participation in the event of dialogue with the other person and with the subject at hand. Gadamer applies this model of conversation to the way that texts and history come to presence in their true being as well.<sup>24</sup>

One might be tempted think, on this account, that so long as language is spoken, whether in dialogue or in monologue, the world achieves progressive fulfillment simply by virtue of the propagation of language. However, this would leave out the crucial element of *understanding* in Gadamer’s account. Gadamer thinks that language is fundamentally expressed for understanding, for presenting and receiving an articulation of the world to and from those around us. Thus, that the world is both *presented* in language and *understood* through language is what constitutes the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, *ibid.*, 466: “the way tradition is understood and expressed ever anew in language is an event no less genuine than living conversation.”

world come to fruition. Understanding is the human event of participating in the unfolding of the being of the world in language. Hence, Gadamer's specific account of the structure of understanding comes into play at this point.

### **The Structure of Understanding**

On Gadamer's view, understanding is, following Heidegger, a constitutive feature of human Dasein, as well as constituting a temporal event.<sup>25</sup> That is, understanding *the* primary way in which humans interact with the world. Further, understanding is conceived as a temporal event which persons are constantly experiencing as they move about the world. Gadamer describes the temporal structure of understanding as a dialectical process of participating with the world which is enacted in language. For Gadamer, understanding is the mode of engaging the world, made possible by the way that the human and its world belong together through language, which can be applied across different domains. Gadamer speaks of understanding texts, works of art, and history as concrete examples of the general structure of understanding.

Gadamer's distinct articulation of the nature of understanding corresponds to his participatory ontology and its rejection of the idealist subject-object model. With reference to understanding history, he writes, "Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated."<sup>26</sup> With reference to understanding texts, Gadamer maintains, against romantic hermeneutics, that understanding is not the excavation of the mind of an author or other

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<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, xxvii: "understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself." See also *ibid.*, 157: "Understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 291. See also *ibid.*, 293: "Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a 'methodological' circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding."

person, but it is rather a process of grasping the *Sache*, or subject matter, of what presents itself in language.<sup>27</sup>

According to Gadamer, Schleiermacher's approach to hermeneutics attempts to abstract the meaning of the text from the linguistic tradition in which is rooted in order to come to a pure psychological or spiritual [*geistige*] meaning. Thus Gadamer writes, "understanding means, primarily, to understand the content of what is said, and only secondarily to *isolate* and understand another's meaning as such."<sup>28</sup> For Gadamer, grasping the intentions of an author is an abstracting, derivative, and in fact *inauthentic*,<sup>29</sup> hermeneutic operation which overlooks the fundamental continuity of humans who have their being in language. Because the world is presented through language, "it is always a human – i.e., verbally constituted – world that presents itself to us. As verbally constituted, every such world is of itself always open to every possible insight and hence to every expansion of its own world picture, and is accordingly available to others."<sup>30</sup> Because humans always have the verbally-constituted world in common, no tradition, text, or spoken word is alien to me as object is to subject. Thus, understanding moves from the commonality of the world given in language to the more specific grasp of the subject matter at issue in a particular presentation of language.

In this way, Gadamer presents understanding as a movement or process which originates from the "facticity" of language, that is, the "being situated within an event of tradition, a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 180: "Understanding each other (*sich verstehen*) is always understanding each other with respect to something. From language we learn that the subject matter (*Sache*) is not merely an arbitrary object of discussion, independent of the process of mutual understanding (*Sichverstehen*), but rather is the path and goal of mutual understanding itself. And if two people understand each other independently of any topic, then this means that they understand each other not only in this or that respect, but in all the essential things that unite human beings."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 294. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*, 486 n. 1: "If one transposes oneself into the position of another with the intent of understanding not the truth of what he is saying, but him, the questions asked in such a conversation are marked by the inauthenticity described above."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 444.

process of handing down, [which] is a prior condition of understanding.”<sup>31</sup> Gadamer here utilizes Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity to argue that we are always already embedded in a linguistic world which affects the way in which understanding, especially in the human sciences, proceeds. Thus, the achievement of mature understanding relies on what Gadamer calls “fore-understandings.” Accordingly, Gadamer claims that “the most basic of all hermeneutic preconditions remains one’s own fore-understanding,”<sup>32</sup> which is one’s originary grasp of the world as presented in language. Seeking to overcome the pattern of historical consciousness which immediately projects history as something foreign to the present, Gadamer argues that the otherness of history can only become apparent by presupposing the continuity of a tradition which has mediated that history to us. Thus, Gadamer posits the understanding of history as a process which begins in fore-understanding and only subsequently is confronted by otherness.

Further, in understanding, the otherness of the horizon of history does not remain alienated from the present, for it is at the same time fused with the horizon of the present.<sup>33</sup> In this account, the process of understanding history is a process of tradition mediating the otherness of history to us and our capacity to integrate that history into the present.<sup>34</sup>

Extrapolating from this case, then, we can say that the process of understanding involves (1) anticipations of meaning rooted in fore-understandings, (2a) being addressed or provoked by the otherness of the text or person, (2b) projecting a separated horizon, and (3) the fusion or

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>33</sup> On Gadamer’s view, “projecting a historical horizon, then, is only one phase in the process of understanding; it does not become solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs – which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded.” Ibid., 305-306.

<sup>34</sup> See Rüdiger Bubner, “On the Ground of Understanding,” trans. Brice R. Wachterhauser, in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 77-78: “The ground of our understanding lies...in the so-called history of effects [*Wirkungsgeschichte*] from which the *fact of the formation and continuity of tradition* explains itself...The hermeneutical activity of expanding horizons and stepping beyond limits, which makes up our true existence, unfolds itself by proceeding from a particular point of concrete involvement in tradition.”



reintegration of the encounter with otherness into a larger horizon or framework, one with a broader scope of vision.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, the process of understanding articulated by Gadamer has a basic tripartite structure. It is the recognition of a discontinuity which emerges out of continuity, which then reintegrates into more robust continuity, one with a greater degree of coherence. This dialectic, continuity-discontinuity-continuity, becomes for Gadamer the basic structure through which humans experience and interact with the world. This structure serves to replace the structure of knowledge implemented by idealism in which objects are freely abstracted by subjective cognition, reconstructed apart from their context according to subjective conditions, and thereby patterned after and integrated into the subject. In contrast to this, Gadamer argues that understanding is not a subjective/cognitive event, but the participation of persons in the context which surrounds it. The social relationship necessarily falls into this movement as well: we relate to others first through the continuity of language, then through the disruption of the other, *then* through a renewed continuity which moves us into a higher field of vision.

### **Self and Other**

Gadamer argues that the self's relation to other persons is conditioned by the ontology of understanding which he has developed. Because for Gadamer being in genuine relationship with another person means achieving an ever deeper understanding with the other, the self properly engages and relates to the other through the dialectical process of understanding described in the previous section. What this means for Gadamer and for his critics is that the person to person

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<sup>35</sup> See Jean Grondin, "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 44: "We start off with vague anticipations of the whole, which are, however, revised the more we engage the text and the subject matter itself. The basic hermeneutic experience (in the strong sense of *Erfahrung*), Gadamer will argue, is the experience that our anticipations of understanding have been shattered."

relation itself depends on his more global ontology of understanding. In other words, sociality, for Gadamer, is dependent, to a certain extent, on ontology.

Gadamer describes the relationship between the self and its human other as occurring in language, and preeminently in conversation or dialogue.<sup>36</sup> The interpersonal dialogue is for Gadamer the most paradigmatic embodiment of his ontology. He writes, “When two people come together and enter into an exchange with one another, then there is always an encounter between, as it were, two worlds, two worldviews and two world pictures.”<sup>37</sup> In conversation, the world is presented in language, meets another presentation of the world, and ultimately, the world as such increases in its being. The other person presents to the self a world which causes the self’s own world to be enlarged.<sup>38</sup>

As with Gadamer’s concept of understanding, the concept of conversation is operative at multiple levels. It plays the role of a condition or initial moment of the self-other relation as well as the role of the *telos* of that relation. A conversation or dialogue on Gadamer’s view can be an empirical event, one which may fail to achieve a normative sense of understanding or agreement in content; that is, there may be a basic level of communication but which fails to bring forth a true interchange between individuals. Gadamer explains, “In any form of dialogue, we are building up. We are building up a common language, so that at the end of the dialogue we will have some ground. Of course, not every dialogue is fruitful, but it should at least aim at being a dialogue. (Very often it is the opposite of that: two monologues following one upon the other.)”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Gadamer’s “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Han (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1996), 46, where he describes the formation of his project as a seeking “to ground the linguisticity of our orientation to the world in conversation.”

<sup>37</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Incapacity for Conversation,” trans. David Vessey and Chris Blauwkamp, *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006): 354.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, 355: “It is not that we have found out something new that makes a conversation a conversation, but that we have encountered something in the other that we have not encountered in the same way in our own experiences of the world.”

<sup>39</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” *Man and World* 17 (1984): 322.

There is a sense here in which a dialogue can fail to be a dialogue; two people talking *to* each other can in reality be talking *past* each other, and this can happen either intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, there is a normative sense of conversation or dialogue that Gadamer often has in mind which reaches at least a certain level of understanding and agreement about a subject matter. It is in this kind of linguistic exchange that Gadamer sees the locus of genuine self-other relations being enacted. Gadamer claims that “conversation has a transformative power”<sup>40</sup> because it can open up and change one’s own field of vision.

Thus, in a genuine dialogue, the worlds presented in language are mutually realigned by virtue of the fusion of each person’s linguistic horizon. Gadamer writes, “The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us.”<sup>41</sup> This notion is that, in coming to understand the subject matter, the horizons of both interlocutors do not remain static, but undergo an important change.<sup>42</sup> Gadamer explains what is involved in our “movement” by means of his famous image of the fusion of horizons: “*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*”<sup>43</sup> This movement “always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other.”<sup>44</sup> Though Gadamer uses a Hegelian methodology to describe the process of the fusion of the horizons, he denies that this

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<sup>40</sup> Gadamer, “The Incapacity for Conversation,” 355.

<sup>41</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 303.

<sup>42</sup> See Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes,” in *Dilemmas and Connections* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 29: “The road to understanding the other passes through the patient identification and undoing of those facets of our implicit understanding that distort the reality of the other. . . . When we allow ourselves to be challenged, interpellated by what is different in their lives. . . . we will see our peculiarity for the first time, as a formulated fact about us and not simply a taken-for-granted feature of the human condition as such; and at the same time, we will perceive the corresponding feature of their life-form undistorted.”

<sup>43</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

“higher universality” can ever reach a final, absolute position. Rather, the movement is an ongoing process by which different horizons continue to be fused into one another.

Gadamer describes a conversation or dialogue as requiring a few conditions in order for it to accomplish this fusion and broadening of horizons. The first condition is that both partners must be attuned not to each other as individuals, but to the subject matter at hand. In other words, in a true dialogue, the process of understanding does not involve understanding the other person as such, in her subjectivity, but rather it involves understanding the other person’s claim, that is, what is said. The otherness which is presented in dialogue, then, is not the otherness of the person but of the claim.<sup>45</sup> Thus Gadamer describes the true conversation as the creation of a shared language<sup>46</sup> in which both dialogue partners are *participants* of the bringing to presence the common subject matter.

The second and related condition is that the participants in the dialogue must be open to the superiority of the other’s claim. This condition represents the way in which Gadamer understands himself to move beyond Heidegger’s position in which each Dasein is fundamentally limited and conditioned in its existence. Beyond this claim, Gadamer insists that the principal limits we find ourselves exposed to are revealed to us in the claims of the other person with whom we are in conversation. Dasein comes to authenticity only in the “strengthening” of the other against myself. Hence, for a genuine dialogue and understanding to occur, the self must recognize that the other’s view on the world bears a truth that my own horizon lacks. Gadamer asserts, “Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself

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<sup>45</sup> Gadamer does, however emphasize that it is important “to experience the Thou truly as a Thou – i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us.” *Ibid.*, 355. Here, though, Gadamer maintains that the experience of the Thou is the experience of the Thou’s claim.

<sup>46</sup> Gadamer, “The Incapacity for Conversation,” 359: “communication between humans creates a shared language just as much as it presupposes one.”

must accept some things that are against me even though no one else forces me to do so.”<sup>47</sup> The implication of this view is that true dialogue and understanding occur only when each dialogue partner is open to giving up mastery of his or her own horizon and position as the unchanging central field of meaning.<sup>48</sup> This marks a crucial distinction between Gadamer’s view and idealism, in which the subject is necessarily the ground of meaning.

The third and overlapping condition is that the interlocutors must really listen to what the other has to say. One could say that this is really an aspect of being open to the other. Gadamer maintains that “the general condition of conversation” is “that in order to be capable of speech, one must listen.”<sup>49</sup> Gadamer recognizes the difficulty of this requirement and acknowledges that there is often a failure of listening in conversations. Nevertheless, he suggests that even business negotiations can be genuine conversations, that “the encounter with the other rises above the limitations of its concern with dollars or with the interests of power.”<sup>50</sup> Thus it appears that there is no kind of conversation which in principle obstructs listening to the other person’s claim. For Gadamer, then, it is always and again possible to listen with openness to the other, for in Gadamer’s words, “to become always capable of conversation—that is, to listen to the Other—appears to me to be the true attainment of humanity.”<sup>51</sup>

Through these conditions, we can see that the self-other relation in an authentic linguistic encounter conforms to the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity. It begins in the continuity of language and pre-understanding, gets ruptured through openness to the other’s claim, then forms a more comprehensive and integrative continuity. Again recounting his differentiation from

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<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 355.

<sup>48</sup> See also Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 36: “In a conversation, on the other hand, one seeks to open oneself to him or her, which means holding fast to the common subject matter as the ground on which one stands together with one’s partner.”

<sup>49</sup> Gadamer, “Incapacity for Conversation,” 357.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

Heidegger, Gadamer notes, “what I was concerned with was why I experience my own limitation through the encounter with the Other, and why I must always learn to experience anew if I am ever to be in a position to surpass my limits.”<sup>52</sup> The dialogue with the other person contains a moment of self-negation; the other’s claim functions to disrupt my preconceptions and my self-continuity. However, Gadamer remarks that ultimately, “the elevation of the dialogue will not be experienced as a loss of self-possession, but rather as an enrichment of our self, but without us thereby becoming aware of ourselves.”<sup>53</sup> Through the reintegration of the other’s horizon into an enlarged field of vision, the disruption of the self’s understanding by the other is overcome.

However, the self neither remains fragmented from the encounter nor returns to simple self-identity in the integration, on Gadamer’s account. Gadamer is quick to maintain that “the otherness of the Other is not overcome in understanding, but rather preserved.”<sup>54</sup> The understanding that is reached in dialogue with the other is always a *provisional* understanding, one continually marked by the situatedness of history and linguistic perspective. Understanding is provisional because it is temporally situated such that the next moment can always bring about further negation and revision. In Gadamer’s words, “we are in this ongoing process of approximation and overcoming error by dialectically moving towards truth.”<sup>55</sup> This dialectical movement is the movement from pre-understanding to ever-enriched understanding.

This theory of the dialectic of dialogue is sketched out as an activity between two poles, self and other. Over the course of his writing, the way in which Gadamer articulates the character of these poles shifts, and thus the way in which his theory of sociality is constituted by and stretches over these poles should be investigated more closely. Gadamer picks up and uses the

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<sup>52</sup> Gadamer, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity,” 285.

<sup>53</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 41.

<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” 322.

language of *Ich* and *Du* in articulating his thinking on sociality in some of his earlier writings as well as in *Truth and Method*, a usage which he will later eschew.<sup>56</sup>

Gadamer introduces his discussion of I and Thou in *Truth and Method* in his discussion of the negativity of genuine hermeneutic experience.<sup>57</sup> He notes that “‘experience’ in the genuine sense – is always negative.”<sup>58</sup> This means that any true experience is one which refutes preconceptions and makes possible the growth of one’s view on the world. In contrast to the ways in which we experience texts or history in general, Gadamer notes that “the *experience of the Thou* must be special because the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us. For this reason the elements we have emphasized in the structure of experience will undergo a change. Since the object of experience is a person, this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, because the encounter with the other person involves a different kind of relationship with the self than a text or a piece of artwork, Gadamer’s analysis must adapt to the conditions of this interaction. Texts or works of art cannot be morally violated, while persons can.<sup>60</sup>

Gadamer speaks of three ways in which one might confront the human Thou. The first is a knowledge of human nature which does not actually confront the other person as such, but rather reduces the other to a commonly given set of human characteristics.<sup>61</sup> This way does not do justice to the other person, for it treats her as an object. The second is the experience of the

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<sup>56</sup> For Gadamer’s use of I-Thou language from the 1940’s, see “Das Problem der Geschichte in der neueren deutschen Philosophie,” in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Kleine Schriften I. Philosophie, Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, Paul Siebeck, 1967), 27-36.

<sup>57</sup> See Axel Honneth, “On the Destructive Power of the Third: Gadamer and Heidegger’s Doctrine of Intersubjectivity,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 29 (2003): 5-21, who situates this key passage on I-Thou relations as an analogy which serves to make a different point about understanding history.

<sup>58</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 347.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>60</sup> In fact, however, Gadamer does not limit the self’s relationship with the Thou to the relationship with persons. Rather, he claims that both texts and tradition itself addresses the self in the manner of the Thou. See *ibid.*, 352: “tradition...expresses itself like a Thou,” as well as, *ibid.*, 271-272: “a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something...so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

Thou which recognizes the Thou as a person, yet is still a form of self-relatedness because it too quickly claims to understand the other person.<sup>62</sup> Gadamer is instead interested in a way of experiencing the other such that she is not subsumed under one's own horizon but rather is able to change that horizon, as we noted above. Thus, Gadamer presents the third way, the experience of the Thou which treats "the Thou truly as a Thou – i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us."<sup>63</sup> This means that we are open to the other in the sense that the Thou can interrupt my way of being in the world.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Gadamer fits the language of I and Thou neatly in his ontology of understanding: the Thou in dialogue with the I negates the pre-understandings of the I, yet not so as to leave the I fragmented in its identity, but that the I may be enriched in its identity. Pre-understanding is converted into mature understanding through the encounter with the Thou.

Nevertheless, Gadamer expresses his discomfort with I-Thou language in his writings after *Truth and Method*. In his essay, "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Person," he writes, "To say 'the I' and 'the Thou' seems to us, at least since Wittgenstein, no longer quite allowable."<sup>65</sup> In "Man and Language," Gadamer alludes to Wittgenstein's argument against private languages to articulate what is problematic with the positing of I and Thou: an "essential feature of the being of language seems to me to be its I-lessness. Whoever speaks a language that

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 354: "The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>64</sup> Gadamer's point in this section had already been basically developed by 1943. See his "Das Problem der Geschichte in der neueren deutschen Philosophie," 35, where he describes "an element of our moral life experience that we all know: the understanding in the relation of I and You. As experience shows: nothing stands as a true understanding of I and You more than in the way someone raises a claim to the other in his being and his mind to understand. 'Understanding' all counterclaims of the other ahead of time serves in truth to negate the other, as to keep the claim of the other at arm's length. It is a way to be told nothing. But where one is able to be spoken to, where he accepts the claim of the other, without understanding and thereby delimiting him beforehand, he gains real self-understanding" (my translation).

<sup>65</sup> Gadamer, "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity," 282.



no one else understands does not speak. To speak means to speak to someone.”<sup>66</sup> What Gadamer is getting at here is that there exists no I separated from a Thou in a dialogue, even in its initial condition. Dialogue partners do not approach each other from a state of alienness, as Schleiermacher’s model would have it, for example, but rather from one of commonality. So Gadamer claims that “speaking does not belong in the sphere of the ‘I’ but in the sphere of the ‘We’”<sup>67</sup> Gadamer argues that it is language which “unifies I and Thou;”<sup>68</sup> that is, prior to a decision of I and Thou to come to an understanding with each other, they are already unified in language. As Gadamer puts it, “language is the real medium of human being, if we only see it in the realm that it alone fills out, the realm of human being-together.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, Gadamer’s claim is that the language of I and Thou suggests an initial separation between the two which in fact is always already overcome in language. In essence, then, the language of I and Thou tends to repeat the mistake of idealism – the separation and alienation of the ego from what confronts it as if it were foreign from the outset.

Gadamer extends this idea of the bond of language as the medium of sociality to say that *intersubjectivity* is not an appropriate model for sociality because of its neglect of the centrality of language.<sup>70</sup> Because the notion of intersubjectivity presupposes the concept of two subjects initially isolated from each other, Gadamer criticizes intersubjectivity by way of a criticism of

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<sup>66</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Man and Language,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 65.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>70</sup> See also his criticism of I-Thou language here in “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity,” 282: “It seems to me an important modification that now one does not only avoid speaking of ‘the Thou,’ nor does one (like Fichte) simply speak of the ‘Not-I,’ which sounds like an opposition or a reduction against which one must struggle, or which one must overcome. Rather, one speaks of the Other. It changes the perspective to say here ‘the Other.’ Immediately, there is brought in a change in the state of the I and Thou. Every Other is at the same time the Other of an Other, as one may learn from Michael Theunissen’s book.”

the philosophy of subjectivity.<sup>71</sup> Because on the idealist model, the subject autonomously configures its objects, it is not conditioned by language or tradition. Hence, the concept of intersubjectivity is simply the consequence of the attempt at sociality on the idealist model. Gadamer here relies on Heidegger's criticism of concepts of reflective self-consciousness as abstractions of "factual life experience." Humans are not primarily self-reflective consciousnesses, but are rather practically and pre-reflectively enmeshed with the world in multiple ways.<sup>72</sup> For Gadamer, language is the fundamental mode of the human being's interaction with the world, and particularly, with other humans. Language is the atmosphere we live in and therefore is bond between humans. Therefore, Gadamer writes, "Who thinks of 'language' already moves beyond subjectivity."<sup>73</sup>

Having thus disposed of both the model of I-Thou relations and the model of intersubjectivity as inappropriate for conceiving of genuine sociality, Gadamer suggests two alternative models on which to build a theory of sociality, not surprisingly borrowed from tradition: from the concept of person developed in the Christian theological tradition and from the ancient Greek concept of friendship.<sup>74</sup> Gadamer does not really develop the former notion and for the most part leaves it as suggestive,<sup>75</sup> but he does articulate his view of sociality as friendship in multiple essays.

For Gadamer, the concept of friendship is an appropriate model of sociality because instead of focusing on knowing subjects as in idealism or its descendants, it emphasizes

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<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, 276: "the concept of intersubjectivity is only comprehensible once we have expressed the concept of subjectivity and of the subject, and its role in phenomenological philosophy."

<sup>72</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 72-73 and 82-83.

<sup>73</sup> Gadamer, "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity," 286.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 282 and 285-286.

<sup>75</sup> See, however, the development of Gadamer's suggestions on personhood in David Vessey, "The Role of the Concept 'Person' in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88 (2014): 117-137.

reciprocity and the role of language and conversation in the development of relationships.<sup>76</sup>

Gadamer relies on a model of friendship that comes out of the writings of Plato and Aristotle which sees the condition for true friendship with others as a recognition of one's own limitations and finitude.<sup>77</sup> To seek and form friendships is to realize that one is not self-sufficient, that one's own horizon needs expansion, and that "what is lacking is precisely the increase that friendship signifies."<sup>78</sup>

Gadamer suggests two further criteria for friendship. First, he claims that friendship must be reciprocal: "One recognizes himself in another...in the sense of the reciprocity in play between friends, such that each sees a model in the other – that is, they understand one another by reference to what they have in common and so succeed in reciprocal co-perception."<sup>79</sup> In other words, each member of a friendship recognizes that the other has a horizon that both overlaps and is distinct from one's own horizon and recognizes the need to integrate that horizon into one's own standpoint "for the sake of his own self-fulfillment."<sup>80</sup> Friendship, by its very

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<sup>76</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Friendship and Self-Knowledge: Reflections on the Role of Friendship in Greek Ethics," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 129: "a phenomenon like friendship, its consistency and constancy, could not be properly understood by beginning with self-consciousness."

<sup>77</sup> This model bases friendship with others on a friendship with oneself. Gadamer says that friendship with oneself consists in a certain kind of self-love and a certain kind of self-knowledge. He admits that self-love is often conceived of as the basis for a very unfriendly egotism, but he suggests that the idea here that the Greeks are getting at is a certain unity of the soul with itself. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," trans. David Vessey and Chris Blauwkamp, *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009), 7: "In self-love one becomes aware of the true ground and the condition for all possible bonds with others and commitment to oneself." See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Isolation as Self-Alienation," in *Praise of Theory*, trans. Chris Dawson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 111: "friendship is based on a sense of solidarity...solidarity always presupposes what the Greeks called 'friendship with oneself,' which is brought about, as was shown above, by valuing solitude, and made possible by the capacity to be contentedly alone." One must be at peace with oneself in order to engage in true friendship. So this friendship with oneself relates to the effects of the negation of self-supremacy brought on by genuine experience: to know oneself means to know one's own limitations and finitude. This then founds the bond of friendship with others. Gadamer writes, "From this cognizance of one's own limitations, however, immediately follows that the other, the friend, signifies an accession of being, self-feeling, and the richness of life." Gadamer, "Friendship and Self-Knowledge," 137.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

nature, cannot be one-sided, but rather exists on the basis of the mutual recognition of foreignness in familiarity. The second criterion is that “the partners cannot remain concealed from each other.”<sup>81</sup> This follows from the supposition that true friendships flourish where each person has something to learn from the other. The otherness of the other is not suppressed in favor of shared interests, but can also “correct or strengthen” our views and intentions.<sup>82</sup>

Friendship is thus Gadamer’s conclusive model for genuine sociality, one which coheres with his hermeneutic ontology of understanding. Just as understanding comes in degrees and never arrives at completion, friendship comes in various kinds and is always an approximation of the best friendship. More importantly, however, friendship embodies Gadamer’s ideal of reciprocity in dialogue.

For Gadamer, the primacy of language in dialogue leads directly to the claim that reciprocity is essential in the self-other relationship. This is because neither partner in dialogue has a monopoly on openness or language; “the language in which something comes to speak is not a possession at the disposal of one or the other of the interlocutors.”<sup>83</sup> Rather, the truth of the subject matter itself which comes to language is what leads the dialogue.<sup>84</sup> Thus, while both persons must be actively attuned to the subject matter, the primary agent in dialogue is not one or the other of the persons, but rather the truth which comes to presence through what is spoken. Hence, the language receives its primacy from its being the medium where the *thing itself* presents itself. Achieving true understanding in dialogue with other persons occurs when the interlocutors allow the truth of the subject matter to emerge through their conversation. This

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>83</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 371.

<sup>84</sup> See *ibid.*, 385: “conversation has a spirit of its own, and...the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e...it allows something to ‘emerge’ which henceforth exists.”

results in a situation in which both partners are bound together and changed by mutually allowing themselves to be encountered by the subject matter.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Gadamer concludes that “when two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person ‘understands’ the other.”<sup>86</sup> Understanding could not occur if only one person was attuned to the subject matter, for its truth only emerges from out of the linguistic exchange *between* persons. Therefore, on Gadamer’s view, the self-other relationship, best embodied in friendship, is a phenomenon which is accomplished only by a joint effort in approaching truth in the process of understanding.

### **Initiative and the Between**

As noted above, Gadamer maintains that neither the self nor the other has absolute priority with regard to initiating the social relationship. Rather, he holds that there is a reciprocity which occurs between the two parties which happens in language, and neither party is the initiator of this reciprocity. Gadamer writes that in a dialogue, “neither partner alone constitutes the real determining factor; rather, it is the unified form of movement as a whole that unifies the fluid activity of both. We can formulate this idea as a theoretical generalization by saying that the individual self, including his activity and his understanding of himself, is taken up into a higher determination that is the really decisive factor.”<sup>87</sup> For Gadamer, the event of being occurs in dialogue as a presentation which is enacted through linguistic interlocutors, but which neither partner is the primary agent in bringing it to presence. It is neither the self nor the other, but

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<sup>85</sup> See *ibid.*, 371: “in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.”

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>87</sup> Gadamer, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” 58.

rather something higher, the truth that emerges from out of the conversation between them that constitutes genuine sociality.<sup>88</sup>

This model of sociality is part of his critique of the idealist conception of subjectivity: people are not isolated subjects but are already drawn together in language. Gadamer departs from the view that we are separated from language such that we can use it as an instrument at our own whims. He asserts that “it is literally more correct to say that language speaks us, rather than that we speak it.”<sup>89</sup> Because the world we inhabit is a linguistic world, all of our reflective endeavors are linguistically formed. When we appear to use language as a tool, willing to use it in one way rather than in another, we engage in comparative evaluations, judging one use to be better or more advantageous than another. But even these comparative judgments presuppose language. Thus, before we come to any particular conversation, language has already shaped us by virtue of our having been formed in a linguistic tradition. This is why Gadamer claims that “the language in which something comes to speak is not a possession at the disposal of one or the other of the interlocutors. Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language. Something is placed in the center, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another.”<sup>90</sup>

Gadamer then adds to this by claiming a kind of agency which arises from neither dialogue partner, but rather from the conversation itself:

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way,

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<sup>88</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 458: “as in genuine dialogue, something emerges that is contained in neither of the partners by himself.”

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was ill fated. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists.<sup>91</sup>

Gadamer is here articulating his own model of conversation in opposition to a model which sees two subject poles communicating with their other as an object pole. On such a view, each side may alter its position with respect the other, but need not do so for a genuine dialogue to occur. Gadamer rejects this view by rejecting that the dialogue partners are separated from each other as a subject from an object. Further, he rejects the autonomous power of either dialogue partner to stand over and above the other. Rather, both speakers are immersed in language which is both their common bond and the agent which directs their conversation. One may wonder here what Gadamer can mean by attributing agency to language; at first glance it could seem like an unwarranted hypostatization of an impersonal process. However, Gadamer explains his view with two models which are meant to demonstrate this agency of language in conversation and its priority.

The first model comes from the concept of play, as something which happens to persons at play. Gadamer writes, “The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players.”<sup>92</sup> Although the players participate in the game, they are bound by and caught up in the rules of the game such that their subjectivity as distinct from play itself is of little or no importance to the enactment of the game. Their subjectivity is only effective, with regard to the game, as governed by play. Thus, Gadamer affirms “the *primacy of play over the consciousness of the player.*”<sup>93</sup> In this way, Gadamer can talk about the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 105.

agency of play without constructing play as an agent. It is not that play is a center of intentional acts, but rather play is the medium through which intentionality is structured. Gadamer explains, “The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence.”<sup>94</sup> In relation to the situation of dialogue, it is the context of language itself, of the language game, which governs the consciousness of the interlocutors. The persons do not need to struggle to communicate to each other as to some foreign agent because both persons are already participants in the play of language. Gadamer thus emphasizes “the importance of defining play as a process that takes place ‘in between.’”<sup>95</sup> The initiative of the play of language on Gadamer’s view is what enacts the social relation *between* persons. Any agency of the self or the other in this process must be described as a participation, and not an initiative.

Gadamer’s second model which articulates the agency of language is explicitly phenomenological, drawing from the language of Husserl and Heidegger. Gadamer describes what he takes to be an important insight in Husserl’s theory of intentionality:

Husserl spoke of anonymous intentionalities, that is, conceptual intentions in which something is intended and posited as ontically valid, of which no one is conscious thematically as individually intended and performed, which nonetheless are binding for everyone. Thus what we call the stream of consciousness is built up in internal time consciousness. The horizon of the life-world too is such a product of anonymous intentionalities.<sup>96</sup>

Gadamer is here picking up on a strand of Husserl’s thought which articulates a kind of intentionality which does not proceed from an ego or subject, but rather presents itself “anonymously” to an individual. By directing my focus on the picture across the room, I simultaneously become aware of the wall as its background, the bookshelf underneath it, that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>96</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Martin Heidegger and Marburg Theology,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 203.



there are books on the bookshelf, and so on. Gadamer explains, “This horizon of intentionalities, the constantly cointended, is not itself an object of a subjective act of meaning.”<sup>97</sup> A phenomenal horizon, or context, surrounds each intentional act, is copresented with it, and situates and therefore gives meaning to what is subjectively intended. For Gadamer, this means that subjective intentions are always passively synthesized with or integrated into anonymous intentions.

Gadamer suggests that “a clear line leads directly from the concepts of passive synthesis and anonymous intentionality to the hermeneutical experience.”<sup>98</sup> What Gadamer wants to take from these concepts is the idea that our experience of reality always supersedes and conditions our subjective intentionality. We never are in a position to absolutely constitute and therefore control our reality as subjects master objects, but rather our intentional acts are a participation in the continual presentation of the world in the horizon of intentionality. And for Gadamer, this horizon is presented to us in language. In this way, Gadamer explains that the linguistic world from which our own speaking arises precedes, conditions, and operates upon our own use of language. Language is the agent and our speaking is the participation in language’s activity.

Gadamer also explores this idea from another phenomenological angle, this time with reference to Heidegger’s retrieval of the scholastic division between the *actus signatus*, a reflective act, and the *actus exercitus*, a direct act. The *actus exercitus* is a direct, non-objectifying apprehension of reality which precedes and is distinct from the act of reflection on what is captured in consciousness. Gadamer then identifies this distinction in consciousness with Heidegger’s basic concept of being-in-the world.<sup>99</sup> We first and foremost apprehend the world

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<sup>97</sup> Gadamer, “Philosophical Foundations,” 118.

<sup>98</sup> Gadamer, “Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” 50.

<sup>99</sup> See Gadamer, “Martin Heidegger and Marburg Theology,” 204: “This *actus exercitus* in which reality is experienced in a quite unreflective way – for example, the experience of the tool in the inconspicuousness of its

not through objective reflection but through this more direct *actus exercitus*. Following this idea, Gadamer claims, “Language is language when it is a pure *actus exercitus*, that is, when it is absorbed into making what is said visible, and has itself disappeared, as it were.”<sup>100</sup> Here, language functions in its normal and most basic state not merely when the speaking subject disappears but when the words have ceased to stand as distinct from what they express. On this view, it is the activity of the *Sache*, the thing itself which has priority, which emerges through the means of language. Thus Gadamer appropriates the intentional concept of the *actus exercitus* for his own project of demonstrating the priority of the *Sache* over the initiative of reflective subjectivity. This analysis of the two modes of intentionality directly combats the idealist reliance on the *actus signatus* as the regulatory mode in which subjects come to know themselves and the world around them.

Gadamer’s examination of the models of consciousness leads him to reject the idealist, subject-centered model in favor of the ontology of the self-presentation of the world to Dasein. Because the human being’s interaction with the world is explained in terms of the metaphor of play and through the phenomenological mechanisms of intentionality, it follows that sociality is grounded through the activity of the subject matter between persons rather than from the initiative of either person. As Gadamer describes the event of conversation, “it really is true to say that this event is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself.”<sup>101</sup> In the next section, I situate Gadamer’s view within Theunissen’s typology of social ontologies, showing

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actual use, or of the past in the inconspicuousness of its receding - is not transformed into a signified act without a new concealment. The upshot of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world was rather that the being of beings experienced in this way, and especially the worldliness of the world, is not encountered objectively.”

<sup>100</sup> Gadamer, “Philosophical Foundations,” 126.

<sup>101</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 459.

how Gadamer's view uniquely distinguishes itself from both the transcendental and dialogical models of sociality.

### **Gadamer and Dialogicalism**

What I have been calling Gadamer's dialogical model of sociality, which focuses on the agency of what is between persons in dialogue, fits into Michael Theunissen's model of dialogical social ontology exemplified by Martin Buber.<sup>102</sup> Theunissen sees the philosophy of dialogue as an attempt to correct the reductive tendencies of both German idealism as well as the transcendental approach as exemplified by Husserl. Theunissen takes Buber's thought as representative of, though not identical to, the counter-idealist movement of dialogical philosophy that flourished in post-World War I German thought. On Theunissen's account of Buber, "the explication of dialogical life is supposed to lay the foundation of ontology."<sup>103</sup> Here we can note that on Gadamer's view, dialogical life is the most salient illustration of his ontology of understanding, but that his ontology extends beyond the interpersonal dialogue to art, history, and texts, marking a difference from Buber. Nevertheless, Buber, like Gadamer, proposes a model of sociality which arises not from a subject relating to its other as object or even as another subject, but rather one which arises from a more fundamental relation in *between* them.

Buber says that this "relation is reciprocity,"<sup>104</sup> which indicates the reaction to single-directional concepts of sociality as proposed by idealism. Buber's project thus charts the way in which persons encounter each other which serves to undermine idealism. Theunissen notes that this relation between I and Thou "is now above all characterized by 'immediacy'"<sup>105</sup> as well as

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<sup>102</sup> For a concurrence of this assessment, see David Vessey, "Gadamer's Account of Friendship as an Alternative to an Account of Intersubjectivity," in *Philosophy Today* 49 (2005): 61-67.

<sup>103</sup> Theunissen, *The Other*, 269.

<sup>104</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 58.

<sup>105</sup> Theunissen, *The Other*, 274.

being “a relationship of *mutuality*.”<sup>106</sup> The immediacy invoked here is primarily a rejection of the mediation of the intentionality or constitution by a consciousness. In other words, the between [*das Zwischen*] is the very presence of the relation which is said to be both logically prior to the interlocutors and immediately present in the dialogical encounter.<sup>107</sup> Further, each person is mutually constituted in genuine existence from out of the meeting; it is not the case that the self constitutes the Other through intentional consciousness, nor can it be properly said that the Thou constitutes the I. Rather, it is the encounter itself, the between, which alone carries the agency of constitution. That is, both self and other emerge in their presence to each other only through the between. On this view “the meeting happens at the same time to I and Thou” which ultimately posits “the origination of the partners out of the between.”<sup>108</sup> As Theunissen describes Buber’s thought, then, “genuine persons only exist in a genuine relation, in other words, that the relation, as encounter, first brings forth those who meet each other as persons.”<sup>109</sup> On Buber’s view, thus represented, there are no persons prior to the meeting; the relation is the beginning of the person.

Theunissen will come to criticize Buber’s dialogicalism on just this point. He claims that “the philosophy of dialogue, the phenomenon that dispenses with transcendental philosophy, can itself only be discovered in its essentials on the basis of transcendental philosophy.”<sup>110</sup> What he means by this is that although Buber’s thought seeks to posit the between as the originator of both I and Thou, it must implicitly presuppose two subjectively-constituting poles which the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>107</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr here traces Buber’s concept of the “interhuman,” *das Zwischenmenschliche*, which Buber often abbreviates as *das Zwischen*, “the between.” Mendes-Flohr notes that this concept “points to an ontological reality realized in sociation, men in interaction.” Paul Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber’s Transformation of German Social Thought* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 44. Although this is experienced in the psyches of the I and Thou, it exists as “a realm transcendent to those psyches.” Ibid., 91.

<sup>108</sup> Theunissen, *The Other*, 286.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 363.

between then acts upon.<sup>111</sup> Theunissen's argument for this hinges on "perspectivity." He says that advocates of the philosophy of dialogue such as Buber "hardly succeed in describing convincingly the genesis of *perspectivity* out of the non-perspectival reality of the between. Since perspectivity is the essential component of the subjectively constituted world, this means that they are not at all capable of validating their thesis."<sup>112</sup> A genuine dialogue would appear to be nothing without the encounter between different perspectives. But if persons arise directly from the meeting, there is no explanation for perspectivity; the between itself is not the sort of thing that constitutes or generates perspectives. Perspectives arise from subjectivities which constitute the world from distinct vantage points. Hence, subjective perspectives must properly exist before a true dialogue can occur. Because Buber's view does not account for the existence of perspectivity prior to the between, Theunissen claims that the philosophy of dialogue which Buber represents ultimately fails to provide a convincing model of sociality. That is, dialogical philosophy must implicitly presuppose the transcendental foundations it purports to repudiate.

Theunissen concludes his study by proposing between the transcendental and dialogical models of sociality a mediation which begins from the subjective constitution of the world and therefore other persons, but then enters into genuine relations with the other through the event of dialogue. Theunissen thinks that the philosophy of dialogue cannot account for the genesis of the perspectives required for dialogue and hence must admit that subjects predate their relations with others by means of intentional constitution. The proper place, then, of dialogue is not as the origin but as the fulfillment of subjects – a conversion from subjects to selves or persons. The

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<sup>111</sup> Theunissen argues that dialogical thinkers should "fully recognize that the meeting presupposes that the ones meeting each other exist upon a particular being level, and concede to the between solely the power to transform the poles that impinge upon one another." *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 367-368.

philosophy of dialogue, Theunissen reasons, is unsuccessful at providing a comprehensive model of sociality, but its value comes in its emphasis on the human *telos* toward relationships.

As I have claimed that Gadamer's thought fits into Theunissen's category of a dialogical social ontology, it would seem to follow that Gadamer also succumbs to the criticisms that Theunissen levies against the philosophy of dialogue. However, I will now show how Gadamer's account diverges from Buber's view such that it avoids Theunissen's criticisms while remaining robustly dialogical. To do this, I need to show that Gadamer's ontological grounding of sociality in between persons is not itself generative of persons such that subjective perspectives are left unexplained. At the same time, however, I will show that the individuals who encounter each other in dialogue are ontologically anchored in their linguistic and historical context such that their subjectivity is not free to constitute the world around them.

It is first important to point out that although Gadamer draws on a notion of an "in-between," he does not claim, as Buber does, that *personhood* as such begins from the dialogue between persons.<sup>113</sup> For example, with regard to interpreting texts, Gadamer speaks of a "tension...in the play between the traditional text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*"<sup>114</sup> What Gadamer has in mind here is hermeneutics as playing the mediatorial function between past and present, between foreign and familiar. It is the fusion of these two horizons, transforming the senses of both sameness and strangeness in the process, that constitutes the "in-between" for Gadamer. Transposing this framework from the interpretation of texts to the encounter between persons, we can say that this in-between for

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<sup>113</sup> See Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue*, 38.

<sup>114</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

Gadamer is the emergence of the truth of the *Sache* in the reciprocity of the partners in dialogue.<sup>115</sup>

On this account, persons must exist with differing horizons, or perspectives, for the understanding in between them to develop. Were there no differing horizons that different persons bring to the dialogue, there could be no true dialogue, no progression or enhancement of understanding. Therefore, while Gadamer rejects conceiving of persons as subjects which relate to their others as objects in favor of the play of language encompassing both figures, he does not thereby reject that perspective-laden persons exist prior to their meeting each other. Günter Figal explains, “When Gadamer takes issue with the subjectivity of a game and its historical life, he does not mean that there are no persons participating, but rather that the game and its historical life do not find their basis in the fulfillment of a knowing and self-conscious life. The concept of subjectivity indicates an understanding of life as a principle.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, Gadamer’s objection is to the idealist notion of subjectivity as a grounding principle through which the rest of reality is filtered. Instead, it is language which serves as the medium and ground through which the relation between partners in dialogue exists.

Although each person is always already “traditioned” in language and therefore not prior to language, each person genuinely exists and possesses a linguistic world prior to coming to each particular dialogue which enlarges that world. Instead of proceeding from non-linguistic

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<sup>115</sup> See Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 16: “The event of hermeneutical understanding is the emergence of such a being-in-between. The gift of the other is not merely their otherness per se. It is much rather that such otherness discloses possibilities that are not presently my own. This places us between ourselves, so to speak, between what is disclosed of how we have in the past understood ourselves as being and what is intimated of how we might be transformed by future understanding. However, the gift is reciprocal. While the other invites me to become open to alternative possibilities that are not *my* own and to develop and enhance my own understanding, in so doing I become more other to the other. Yet it is precisely because of this transformation that I can offer to the other alternative possibilities that are not immediately her own.”

<sup>116</sup> Günter Figal, “The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Ontology of Language,” trans. Robert J. Dostal, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, 105.

subjective constitution and reaching fulfillment in empathy or communicative exchange, Gadamer's view proceeds from linguistic pre-understanding to fulfillment in dialogue. Because Gadamer's model views the social relation as embedded in linguisticity all the way down, this also suggests that at no time is the social relation merely subjectively constituted.<sup>117</sup> Thus, Gadamer provides an alternative to models of sociality which argue that the social relation must originate from the subjective constitution of the world prior to linguistic acquisition. This model suggests that initiative in sociality, even at the limit case of infancy, begins neither from the I nor the Thou, but from the dialogue which emerges from between them. At the same time, rather than the dialogue between persons authoring the self and other *in toto*, Gadamer's claim is that the *relation* of sociality is not grounded in either person in the dialogue. While sociality itself is grounded in the "between," on Gadamer's view, this is not the same as saying that the persons themselves are grounded in the between.

While Gadamer clearly offers a form of dialogical sociality which departs from Buber's view, he nevertheless does fit Theunissen's characterization of the dialogical repudiation of transcendental sociality.<sup>118</sup> However, because Gadamer does allow that persons exist prior to

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<sup>117</sup> On Gadamer's view, experience prior to language acquisition is not *a-linguistic*, but is rather *nascently* linguistic. To apply Gadamer's model of conversation to the limit point of empirical origin, the case of the infant, we should say the following: the cry of the infant and the response of the mother in comfort is the primordial dialogue. Both mother and child exist as individuals in relation to each other, and each responds to each other in the mode of language appropriate to their context. There is here a reciprocity of call and response, of question and answer, which for Gadamer lies at the heart of every dialogue and of language itself. Here too, the mother and child are participants in the encompassing play of family dynamics, as opposed to either one subjectively constituting the other. They too are far less the leaders than the led.

<sup>118</sup> Theunissen stipulates that "it is on account of its primary concern with the subjective constitution of the world" and therefore the subjective constitution of the other person as an alteration of myself that a philosophy can be called transcendental. Theunissen, *The Other*, 2. On the other hand, Theunissen maintains that for dialogicalism, "the Other is originally only to be encountered in the Thou." Ibid. As we have seen, this does not mean that the Thou is the progenitor of the relationship with the I, but rather the Thou is truly experienced *as Thou* from the relation of the between. In other words, the ground of the encounter with the other is in the between. Here, Gadamer agrees with Buber. Thus, to the question whether social constitution begins from the self or whether it begins from the situation of the in-between in dialogue between persons, Gadamer definitively answers the latter. That is, Gadamer clearly grounds sociality in the dialogue between persons in response to the idealist grounding of sociality in the subject.



their engagement in the event of dialogue, the worry may arise that his account amounts to a little more than a variation on Theunissen's mediation between the transcendental and dialogical categories and thus also must presuppose the transcendental grounding of sociality. That is, because Gadamer's view proceeds from individuals to the mutually-enriching dialogue between them, it appears that it subordinates the principle of dialogue to playing an ornamental role to sociality rather than being its origin and ground. It is true that, like Theunissen, Gadamer speaks of dialogue as bringing persons into authenticity, that the "between" more fully develops persons in the process of joining them together in the process of dialogue. However, Gadamer's more fundamental argument is one which rejects the idealist or transcendental premise that the subject inaugurates the social relation.

To combat the "transcendental" characterization of Gadamer's view, we can recall Gadamer's rejection of the idealist philosophy of subjectivity as promoting a mistaken model of how the self relates to the world around it. He writes, "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life."<sup>119</sup> Gadamer's contention here is that the activity of an individual's reflection on the self *qua* subject is derivative of the person's social embeddedness in a community. He follows this up by maintaining that the "*prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*"<sup>120</sup> Gadamer's point is to demonstrate the individual's historical situatedness in contrast to the idealist concept of the subject who constitutes the world around her as if in a vacuum. The play of language and anonymous intentionality always outstrips the

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<sup>119</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

subject's attempt to autonomously give meaning to objects, events, and others. That is, none of us operates, let alone starts out, as a subject who intends in such ways.

In perhaps Gadamer's strongest statement on the matter, he says, "the pure transcendental subjectivity of the ego is not really given as such but always given in the idealization of language; moreover, language is already present in any acquisition of experience, and in it the individual ego comes to belong to a particular linguistic community."<sup>121</sup> Here Gadamer maintains that the assertion of pure, transcendental subjectivity apart from its mediation in language is belied by the historical and factual conditions which constitute selfhood. Hence, Gadamer provides an alternative to the mediation between transcendentalism and dialogicalism that Theunissen provides. Instead of presupposing a transcendental subject, Gadamer presupposes and articulates a *factual* subject, one who moves from linguistic pre-understanding to ever richer social relation through dialogue. Thus, Gadamer's model serves as an alternative model of sociality – not only an alternative to idealist and transcendental models but also an alternative to the dialogical model represented by Buber.

### **The Contribution of Gadamer's Account of Sociality**

Let us recall that Gadamer's account of sociality has its roots in his critique of idealism. Gadamer argues that idealism places subjectivity at the foundation of all cognitive activity such that it freely determines the world around it as object under the conditions of the knowing subject. But for Gadamer, this account simply does not do justice to the way human consciousness operates in concrete reality. Citing Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger, Gadamer claims that phenomenological research has shown the ways in which consciousness is conditioned by given reality much more than is reality conditioned by consciousness. Hence,

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 342-343.

there is no such thing as an independent subject freely lordling over being by means of its intentionality. Further, experience teaches us, on Gadamer's view, that our limitations are given to us primarily in social life.

Therefore, while relying on Heidegger's critique of subjectivity, Gadamer endeavors to advance beyond his teacher's criticisms by proposing a participatory ontology which accounts for the hermeneutic character of all of being. Gadamer primarily wants to show how being is universally linguistically mediated to human beings and in so doing, he offers a replacement for idealist subject-object models of reality. Instead of subjects constituting objects, Gadamer's model presents dialogue as the leading example of how persons come to an understanding of the world around them.

Not only does Gadamer illustrate his ontology through the example of conversation, but he also articulates his account of social life by means of the event of understanding which characterizes his ontology. This means that sociality is driven by the event of persons engaging each other in the process of understanding each other through language. This dialogue between persons serves as both the ground and agent of the sociality which draws persons together. What is particularly unique about Gadamer's account is the agency that he gives to the dialogue, which is why he says that "the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us."<sup>122</sup> Gadamer's claim, then, is that the sociality is grounded in event of understanding in dialogue, which exceeds and is external to the initiative of either the self or the other who encounter each other.

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<sup>122</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 385.

In order to see the originality of Gadamer's account, recall Theunissen's assessment of the dialogical models of sociality which seek to overthrow the transcendental models. On Theunissen's evaluation, Buber, who serves as representative of the philosophy of dialogue, must implicitly presuppose that which he explicitly rejects, namely, the transcendental grounding of the individuals who encounter each other in dialogue. Hence, while Theunissen maintains that the philosophy of dialogue brings important points to bear upon the question of a social ontology, he concedes that any successful account of sociality must begin from the transcendental model of subjects constituting the world around them. In contrast to this assessment, as I have argued above, Gadamer fully rejects the idealist grounding of sociality in transcendental subjectivity while offering a dialogical model which grounds sociality in the dialogue between *factual* subjects. This model therefore avoids the defects which Theunissen attributes to Buber. Seen from this vantage point, Gadamer represents an innovative position in his account of dialogical sociality. It rejects the idealist grounding of the social relation in the transcendental ego while at the same time rejecting the Buberian claim that persons themselves must be grounded in the dialogue between them. Gadamer achieves this by providing a hermeneutic ontology which undergirds the grounding of sociality in the dialogue between persons; it is this ontology which Gadamer presents as a corrective to idealism.

## Chapter Two: Levinas and Sociality as Responsibility

The aim of this chapter is to lay out Levinas's model of sociality as a direct and distinctive response to what he understands as idealist concepts of sociality. Levinas inhabits a unique position in the topography of responses to idealism which I chart in this project in that he argues that sociality is grounded not in the subject, nor in the dialogue between subjects, nor in the divine, but rather in the human other. To be specific, Levinas holds the social relation to be constituted by the personal, ethical responsibility of the subject toward the person who faces her. This stance opposes what Levinas takes to be the idealist absorption of the other into the same, that is, into the subject. Hence, Levinas decisively rejects any claim that sociality can begin from the intentionality of the subject. Further, responsibility for Levinas is prior to empirical dialogue and conditions any further interactions between persons. Dialogue is thus only a derivative effect of sociality on Levinas's view. Levinas therefore advances what he takes to be a more radical rejection of idealism than found in Gadamer in claiming that sociality is both enacted and maintained wholly prior to dialogue between persons. The ground of sociality for Levinas is in the other person's self-revelation to the subject and the subject's experience of responsibility as a result of this encounter.

In what follows of this chapter, I will set out the elements of the face-to-face encounter which for Levinas constitutes sociality. Levinas chiefly describes sociality *as* the encounter with the face. This articulation will begin with an explanation of Levinas's rejection of the ontology which typifies idealism on his view and his defense of the separation of the subject and the other. I will then lay out the various elements and metaphors Levinas uses to describe the enactment of

sociality in the revelation of the face of the other. Levinas argues that the social relation, grounded in the face of the other, precedes the initiative of the subject. This remarkable claim constitutes a response to idealism that distinguishes itself from both the dialogical philosophy of Buber as well as Gadamer's dialogical model of sociality. On Levinas's view, the positing of the ground of sociality merely "in-between" persons is not sufficient to escape idealism's self-centered approach to social life.

### **Idealism, Ontology, and the Rejection of Ontology in Levinas**

While Levinas famously repudiates the whole tradition of ontology in Western philosophy, he has in mind a particular conception of ontology which he rejects. What Levinas labels ontology is the identity of "what is" and what is thought, the identity of thinking and being. The fundamental claim of ontology, in Levinas's view, is that "what is" is intelligible, graspable within the confines of one's own thought, one's own interior. As we shall see, in denouncing this view of ontology, Levinas is rejecting what Franz Rosenzweig rejects in the idea that there is a single comprehensible totality of all that is. What we find in Levinas, then, is not so much the denial of an accounting for what is, but the denial that *what is* can be accounted for in a single, comprehensive frame of vision. Indeed, Levinas does describe elements of reality and their relations to one another, and these descriptions do in fact form the basis for his model of sociality, much in the way that the avowed ontology of Gadamer provides the grounds on which his models of sociality is constructed.

Levinas defines ontology as the unification of being and thinking as exemplified in a lineage of Western philosophical systems which he identifies with idealism. In *Totality and Infinity*, he writes, "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of

being.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, any entity putatively distinct from the subject becomes bound to the subject. It becomes designated as a member of the class of beings or as located within the totality of being itself. “Being” becomes the third term, shared by subject and object, which makes things intelligible to us, but in so doing, ultimately flattens out any crucial difference between entities. This means not only that there are no consequential variations between entities, but also that no pivotal differences ultimately remain between the *subject* and the entities it comprehends.

Levinas is particularly concerned with the comprehension between self and other, between me and the other person who comes to me from outside myself. In idealism, according to Levinas, every object of knowledge submits to the subjective conditions for knowledge. On Levinas’s view, the categories of the objects of possible cognition are not merely formal constraints on how entities appear to the subject, but concretely affect the ways in which others appear to me as well.<sup>2</sup> What Levinas objects to here is the way in which the I reduces the individuality of the other to the general characteristics shared by all persons. He writes, “The relation with the other is here accomplished only through a third term which I find in myself.”<sup>3</sup> The problem with this move is that it assumes that I contain in myself already all the necessary conditions for existing beings. I am self-sufficient. Thus, when I consider the other from the standpoint of being, she is grasped according to the categories of being and the possibility that she can teach, surprise, or interrupt me is eliminated.

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 43.

<sup>2</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” trans. Simon Critchley, Peter Atterton, and Graham Noctor, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 9: “everything which comes to me from the other starting from being in general certainly offers itself to my comprehension and possession. I understand him in the framework of his history, his surroundings and habits.”

<sup>3</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

This has deleterious effects, thinks Levinas: “To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom.”<sup>4</sup> Put another way, Levinas argues that ontology, in its identification of persons as existents which fit into the scheme of being, not only reduces persons to knowable objects, but also thereby puts persons into its own cognitive box. Persons, as objects, are relegated to products of the meaning giving act of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Ontology, on Levinas’s view, supports the priority of the thinking subject over the freedom of the other; the subject is free to determine the other, but the other is not free to resist the categorization of the subject.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Levinas claims, “Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power.”<sup>7</sup> Levinas’s charge, then, is that ontology fails to respect the freedom of the other when it attempts to apprehend *what* the other is in the impersonal prioritizing of Being over personhood.

While Hegel’s version of idealism for Levinas represents a kind of pinnacle of the folly of ontology,<sup>8</sup> Levinas sees in the articulations of phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger a reversion to idealism and therefore to ontology.<sup>9</sup> In the essay “Intentionality and Sensation,”

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 45. Levinas has in mind here Heidegger’s distinction between *Sein* (Being) and *Seiendes* (existents or *what is*).

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, 123: “the object of consciousness, while distinct from consciousness, is as it were a product of consciousness, being a ‘meaning’ endowed by consciousness, the result of *Sinngebung*.”

<sup>6</sup> Levinas comments, “The strangeness of the Other, his very freedom! Free beings alone can be strangers to one another. Their freedom which is ‘common’ to them is precisely what separates them.” *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. See also, *ibid.*, 47, where Levinas writes that ontology “is a movement within the same before obligation to the other.”

<sup>8</sup> On Levinas’s view, ontology is found in different ways in a number of different philosophical schools. See, for example, *ibid.*, 102: “The positions we have outlined oppose the ancient privilege of unity which is affirmed from Parmenides to Spinoza and Hegel.” See *ibid.*, 36: “Hegelian phenomenology, where self-consciousness is the distinguishing of what is not distinct, expresses the universality of the same identifying itself in the alterity of objects thought and despite the opposition of self to self.”

<sup>9</sup> The phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger expresses a more seductive form of ontology – enticing because of the appeal of the phenomenological method. Levinas hails the phenomenological method of intentional analysis as a breakthrough in philosophy and regards it as the path to follow. See *ibid.*, 28-29, where Levinas claims that in his



Levinas writes, “Phenomenological idealism is strongly committed to this correlation between the structures of meanings that are thought and the thoughts – noeses – that think them, and that thus rationally follow from one another.”<sup>10</sup> On Levinas’s view, this mode of phenomenology is idealist and exemplifies ontology in its correlation between thinking and being: all others show up as *noema*, intentional objects, which must correspond to the subject’s intentional acts.<sup>11</sup> What Levinas finds particularly objectionable here is the meaning-giving function [*Sinngebung*] accorded to the I in Husserl’s thought. The I gives meaning to the object; the object does not get to define itself. Hence, as in classical idealism, the other is reduced to the same.

Another way that Levinas characterizes philosophies of ontology is to say that they feature *participation* in a totality, by both self and other. In such a system of thought, Levinas says, “The individuals would appear as participants in the totality: the Other would amount to a second copy of the I – both included in the same concept.”<sup>12</sup> On Levinas’s account, participation is little more than the domestication of the foreign into the familiar. This is a reiteration of the claim that if self and other share a third term which unifies them, the alterity of the other is denied. On a participatory ontology, nothing can remain truly other than me if we both participate in the same totality of being. What is essential on this account is the shared nature of the beings in question. When the other is understood to share in the essential qualities I possess, I

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work “the presentation and the development of the notions employed owe everything to the phenomenological method. He further claims that “Husserlian phenomenology has made possible” his project of moving from ethics to exteriority.

<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Intentionality and Sensation,” in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 136.

<sup>11</sup> While this indictment fits Husserl’s approach to phenomenology much better than it does Heidegger’s, Levinas maintains that Heidegger is not thereby off the hook: “In Heidegger coexistence is, to be sure, taken as a relationship with the Other irreducible to objective cognition; but in the final analysis it also rests on the relationship with being in general, on comprehension, on ontology. Heidegger posits in advance this ground of being as the horizon on which every existent arises, as though the horizon, and the idea of limit it includes and which is proper to vision, were the ultimate structure of relationship. Moreover, for Heidegger intersubjectivity is a coexistence, a we prior to the I and the other, a neutral intersubjectivity. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 67-68.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

understand the other *as* myself, as an alter-ego. And from Levinas's perspective, this means that no other can interrupt my own perspectives and outlook – my continuity of self-identity.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Levinas rejects from the outset an ontology of the likes espoused by Gadamer which advocates the participation of two parties in the same ontological bond of language. For his part, Gadamer would deny that his hermeneutic ontology turns the other into a “second copy” of the I. Because humans share some things in common, such as language and tradition, need not lead to the claim that persons are reduced simply to their commonalities. Rather, these common traits make possible the access to the other. Communication would be impossible apart from the conditions which alike we share in. Without dialogue, we could not learn of the otherness which exists from beyond our limited horizon. Yet from Levinas's point of view, a sociality grounded in the bond of language which exerts its agency over individuals does not escape the idealist tendency of the ego to understand the other as alter-ego. While Gadamer gives lip service to changing one's own views before the other, the other is always understood in terms of the language which is shared in common. For Levinas, the agency of the *Sache* which presents itself in language is insufficient to combat the ego's predisposition to reduce the other to the same.

Levinas's solution to the problem of participation – the problem of creating the other in my own image – draws from a key feature in Rosenzweig's philosophical system: *separation*.<sup>14</sup> Rosenzweig argues that the three fundamental elements of reality are God, the world, and the human being. Other philosophical systems tend to reduce these elements to its own privileged keystone. For example, idealism reduces God and the world to the cognition of the human being.

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<sup>13</sup> Levinas writes that in participation “the I posits itself as the same and as I” (ibid., 58) and “draw[s] from itself its own existence.” Ibid., 90.

<sup>14</sup> Levinas notoriously claims in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* that Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* is “a work too often present in this book to be cited.” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 28. This remark has left it to commentators to dispute the range of Rosenzweig's influence on Levinas's thought.

Hence, Rosenzweig argues that the true philosophical system is one which preserves the distinctiveness and separation of these three elements from each other.<sup>15</sup> Following this idea, Levinas argues that the I must remain separated from the other and from being itself in order to retain both its genuine identity, what Levinas calls the *ipseity* of the ego, and the identity of the other. Levinas writes, “For the idea of totality, in which ontological philosophy veritably reunites—or comprehends—the multiple, must be substituted the idea of a separation resistant to synthesis.”<sup>16</sup> The concept of separation for Levinas means allowing the same and the other to truly be different from each other, not comprehensible into a single totality.

The clearest manifestation of this separation, this non-collapsibility into totality, is accomplished through the subject’s own inner life, or interiority. Levinas characterizes interiority as *enjoyment*, which is the embrace of the nourishing contents of life.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Levinas claims that “subjectivity originates in the independence and sovereignty of enjoyment.”<sup>18</sup> Levinas thus invokes a sense of the separation of the subject rooted in its inner conscious life in its enjoyment of the basic constituents of life. We live from and through food, water, air, and shelter, but these are not merely objects we consume, but contents which we embrace and which give us fulfillment. Enjoyment is an affective relation to the world around me, which precedes both the intentionality of representation as well as the alterity of the other. Here, Levinas offers phenomenological evidence for the independence of our interior life which separates the subject from the other person as well as from God.<sup>19</sup> With similarity to Rosenzweig before him, Levinas maintains the separation of the self from God and from the other human being in the world.

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<sup>15</sup> See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), 83-84.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 293.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> The objection which comes to mind here asks how our experience of something we depend upon is supposed to provide evidence for our independence. Levinas responds: “Physiology, from the exterior, teaches us that need is a

While Rosenzweig has no qualms with using ontological language to describe the elements of reality in their separation, as we will see in the following chapter, Levinas's designation of ontology as the correlation between thing and thought problematizes any ascription of ontology to his project. In fact, one might think that Levinas rejects ontology *tout court*. However, it is important to note what Levinas is not rejecting when he disavows ontology. He is not rejecting Rosenzweig's model of the three elements of God, world, and human, for as we will see, these elements only truly unfold temporally. Nor is he rejecting out of hand the describability of phenomena which appear to us. Rather, he rejects the human capacity to grasp and encompass the totality of beings in a single panorama, a single field of vision. Phenomenological description, properly circumscribed, is still *in principle* viable, though it cannot be a description which considers itself to be neutral, total, or final.

Levinas argues that the multiplicity of beings is fundamentally opposed to their being reconciled into a homogeneity, into a concept of "Being itself." But this opposition to totality reveals an alternative understanding of those beings and invites further investigation into their appearing. Levinas writes, "This impossibility of conciliation among beings, this radical heterogeneity, in fact indicates a mode of being produced and an *ontology* that is not equivalent to panoramic existence and its disclosure."<sup>20</sup> Here, Levinas actually uses the language of ontology to advocate for what he calls a *mode of being*, albeit a non-totalizing one, which instead of lining everything up in a panorama of being, alters its mode of access to beings. Levinas asserts, "Being is exteriority...or, if one prefers, alterity."<sup>21</sup> In this way of describing the matter, using the spatial metaphors of interiority and exteriority, Levinas claims that being is to found

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lack. That man could be happy for his needs indicates that in human need the physiological plane is transcended, that as soon as there is need we are outside the categories of being." Ibid., 115.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 294. Emphasis my own.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 290.

not as the collocation of the breadth of all beings, but in the veering of perspective into the depth of one being's relation of otherness to another being. That is, being is not found in viewing, say, the two dimensions of a photograph of a grand panorama, but instead is found in entering into the third dimension of depth which the photograph can never adequately represent.

Utilizing a different spatial metaphor, Levinas characterizes this depth as a "curvature of space" which "inflects distance into elevation" because its movement consists in "the being situated in a subjective field which *deforms* vision, but precisely thus allows exteriority to state itself, entirely command and authority: entirely superiority"<sup>22</sup> Thus, Levinas articulates this non-totalizing form of ontology, this deformed yet *true* vision of being, as a relation of height that comes to the subject from that which is exterior to it. Preferring the label "metaphysics" to ontology, Levinas writes, "The aspiration to radical exteriority, thus called metaphysical... constitutes truth."<sup>23</sup> For Levinas, metaphysics signifies the transcendence of the other to the same, the exterior to the subject, in a way that denies the correlation between what is denoted by the metaphysical and the subject which attempts to grasp it.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Levinas argues that "metaphysics precedes ontology,"<sup>25</sup> by arguing that the relation to exteriority actually precedes and conditions the correspondence between idea and reality effected by intentionality.<sup>26</sup>

However, it is not just any exterior being which makes possible this opening up of the dimension of height to the subject. Concretely, this must be accomplished by the dispossessing of the intentional consciousness of its propensity to draw all being into itself, when "that which

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*, 41-42: "Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance... We have called this relation metaphysical." See also *ibid.*, 35: "Thus the metaphysician and the other can not be *totalized*. The metaphysician is absolutely separated."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, 24: "We can proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions the totality itself. Such a situation is the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence."

is *aimed at* unseats the intentionality which aims at it.”<sup>27</sup> To be sure, Levinas remarks, the world of objects, inhabitations, and implements is often quite foreign and other to me, but ultimately the perceptual alterity of the world remains subject to my intentionality.<sup>28</sup> Thus Levinas argues that an It, an object in the world of appearances cannot break free from the grasp of the I. He therefore claims, “A relation whose terms do not form a totality can hence be produced within the general economy of being only as proceeding from the I to the other, as a *face to face*.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the human being, and more specifically, the face of the human other, is the locus of the relation of exteriority which for Levinas expresses the truth of *what is*, that is, that reality is not seen other than in the human face before my eyes.

For Levinas, then, the primordial social relation of the face to face is constitutive of a non-totalizing ontology, which he prefers to call metaphysics. While for Gadamer, sociality is determined in large part by a more comprehensive ontological structure, for Levinas, sociality just is true ontology, if we may put it that way.<sup>30</sup> Or rather, the sociality found in the face to face meeting between two human persons overturns all other totalizing ontologies. Instead of working from broad structure to specific applications of that structure, Levinas begins from the concrete situation of the confrontation of one face to another and spins out his entire project from the implications of that encounter.<sup>31</sup> In the following sections, then, I will unpack the elements of the encounter with the face of the other which for Levinas constitutes sociality.

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<sup>27</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” trans. Simon Critchley with Tina Chanter and Nicholas Walker, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38: “the alterity of the I and the world inhabited is only formal; as we have indicated, in a world in which I sojourn this alterity falls under my powers. The metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal.”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> While Levinas prefers the term *metaphysics* as a contrast to the term *ontology*, it is important for my argument that Levinas does give an underlying account of *what is*, which serves to ground his account of the self-other relation.

<sup>31</sup> In the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas puts his method like this: “we can proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions the totality itself. Such a situation is

## The Encounter with the Other: Revelation and Face

The face to face encounter for Levinas constitutes the locus of sociality and the production of true experience. Social life is generated out of this encounter, which both presupposes and enacts the radical separation between beings which is necessary to prevent the lapse into totality.<sup>32</sup> While it might be thought that the encounter with the other binds the two beings together into a circumscribable relationship, Levinas maintains that “the face to face is not a modality of coexistence nor even of the knowledge (itself panoramic) one term can have of another, but is the primordial production of being on which all the possible collocations of the terms are founded.”<sup>33</sup> So the face to face is the event which makes possible arranging beings in description, but is not something which itself can be described in that way. Thus Levinas has the unenviable task of attempting to articulate what cannot be captured in the third-person, from an uninvolved point of view.

Nevertheless, Levinas proceeds to analyze the face-to-face encounter in multiple ways, using diverse metaphors to articulate the various facets that the encounter brings to light. Phenomenologically, the face presents the I with a “counter-intentionality,” one which inverts the I’s consuming gaze and questions the legitimacy of the self. Levinas describes this inversion of intentionality as *revelation*, the revelation of the other to the same. This revelation has a unique content and mode of enactment. The revelation of the face, for Levinas, is enacted through discourse or language. However, this is not an empirical language, but rather a pre-

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the gleam of exteriority in the face of the Other. The rigorously developed concept of this transcendence is expressed by the term infinity. This revelation of infinity does not lead to the acceptance of any dogmatic content, whose philosophical rationality cannot be argued for in the name of the transcendental truth of the idea of infinity. For the way we are describing to work back and remain on this side of objective certitude resembles what has come to be called the transcendental method (in which the technical procedures of transcendental idealism need not necessarily be comprised).” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> See *ibid.*, 68: “The face to face both announces a society, and permits the maintaining of a separated I.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

linguistic expressivism. The content of this discourse is the ethical command summed up in the words, “Do not kill!”

To back up several steps, however, we need to clarify what exactly Levinas is talking about when he invokes this encounter between one face and another. For although Levinas is speaking about encountering the literal, corporeal face of another human being, he argues that this mundane phenomenon in our field of vision gives way to something beyond the corporeally tangible. Levinas writes, “The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, Levinas claims that the face is a “sensible datum,” but that nevertheless “the face rends the sensible.”<sup>35</sup> Levinas thus holds that the face is at once concrete and abstract: it has concrete phenomenal appearance, but its meaning is not exhausted in that concretion.<sup>36</sup> Instead, that face manifests an abstraction from the phenomenon. For Levinas, “the abstractness of the face is a visitation and a coming which disturbs immanence without settling into the horizons of the World.”<sup>37</sup> This means that the speaking or the revelation which comes from the face is not to be identified with or found in the concrete features of the face. Although the face never reveals apart from its phenomenality, its revelation is not to be confused with the particular way a face looks at any given time. Levinas maintains that the “face of the other – underlying all the particular forms of expression in which he or she...plays a role – is no less pure *expression*.”<sup>38</sup> That is, the face expresses beneath and apart from particular facial

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 198. See also Emmanuel Levinas, “Language and Proximity,” trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 116: “The precise point at which this mutation of the intentional into the ethical...is the human skin and face.”

<sup>35</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

<sup>36</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 59. See also, *ibid.*, 88: “The face of a neighbor...escapes representation; it is the very collapse of phenomenality,” as well as *ibid.*, 91, in Levinas’s description of the face as “a ‘concrete abstraction’ torn up from the world, from horizons and conditions, incrustated in the signification without a context of the-one-for-the-other.”

<sup>37</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 59.

<sup>38</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Diachrony and Representation,” in *Entre Nous*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 167,



expressions. With Paul Ricoeur, we should say that the true character of the face is heard as a voice rather than seen as a vision.<sup>39</sup>

Levinas's core thesis in this quasi-phenomenological description of the face is that this encounter with the other human being reveals that the intentionality proceeding from the subject "does not define consciousness at its fundamental level."<sup>40</sup> The face of the other reveals a rift in the heart of human consciousness. Levinas argues that there are in fact two modes of consciousness: the intentional consciousness of representational knowledge and a nonintentional, *moral* consciousness which precedes and is the condition for the former mode of consciousness.<sup>41</sup> This nonintentional consciousness is described by Levinas as a passivity which aims at nothing, but rather functions as a receptacle for the disruption of the ego's intentionality by the other. Levinas asserts that human consciousness contains a distinction within itself, and the nonintentional component subverts the intentional component when confronted by the other and allows the other to constitute the self rather than the accomplishment of intentionality's goal to constitute the other.<sup>42</sup> This rupture or discontinuity of the self by the other occurs specifically in the experience of the *face* of the other, according to Levinas.<sup>43</sup> The face serves to break up the ego's self-continuity in its revelatory capacity which is unique to the human face.

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 336: "the face is not a spectacle; it is a voice."

<sup>40</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> See Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," 161: "Intentionality, in the aiming at and thematizing of being – that is, in presence – is a return to self as much as an issuing forth from self." See also Emmanuel Levinas, "Nonintentional Consciousness," in *Entre Nous*, 128-129: "the prereflexive consciousness of self...preceding all intention...is not act, but pure passivity. Not only by virtue of its being-without-having-chosen-to be, or its fall into a jumble of possibles already realized before all assumption, as in the Heideggerian *Geworfenheit*."

<sup>42</sup> See Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," 16: "the relation with the Other does not immediately have the structure of intentionality...The absolutely Other is not reflected in a consciousness; it resists the indiscretion of intentionality...that which is aimed at unseats the intentionality which aims at it."

<sup>43</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas "From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time," in *Entre Nous*, 147: "The orientation of consciousness by being in its ontological perseverance...is interrupted in the presence of the face of the other."

It is important, at this point, to understand what Levinas has in mind when he uses the term revelation. Revelation is said in many ways, and Levinas's usage is distinctive, if not idiosyncratic. It will first help to say what revelation is *not* in Levinas's thought. Revelation is not a transmission of knowledge in the ordinary, cognitive sense, nor is it the impartation of a kind of truth that is graspable by the intellect, a correspondence of proposition to reality. Most importantly, for Levinas's purposes, revelation is not *disclosure* in the Heideggerian sense of the term.<sup>44</sup> On Levinas's reading, Heidegger's definition of truth as disclosure or unveiling repeats the traditional mistake of ontology by allowing impersonal being to be the content as well as the agent of revelation.<sup>45</sup> For Levinas, Heideggerian disclosure is therefore ineluctably representational, a grasping and thus controlling of the horizon of beings, albeit disguised as a letting-be of those beings.<sup>46</sup> Hence, revelation is not the transmission of a body of propositions available to be known.

Following from this, Levinas argues that the revelation of the face is not to be understood as a divine or religious revelation, strictly speaking. There are two reasons for this. First, Levinas notes in his lecture course "God and Onto-theology" that revelation as textuality falls under the

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<sup>44</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 65-66: "The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation: a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form."

<sup>45</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, "Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony," trans. Iain MacDonald, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 99, where Levinas claims that in disclosure, "everything happens as though, behind the human, lies the subject that effaces itself *before* the being of its humanity, letting it link up, come together, and disclose itself. Representation governs the notion of truth, and thereby every meaning is governed by ontology." For Heidegger's view on the disclosure of entities, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §44. See also, Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," trans. John Sallis, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1993), 115-138.

<sup>46</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27-28: "Consciousness then does not consist in equaling being with representation, in tending to the full light in which this adequation is to be sought, but rather in overflowing this play of lights—this phenomenology—and in accomplishing *events* whose ultimate signification (contrary to the Heideggerian conception) does not lie in *disclosing*. Philosophy does indeed dis-cover the signification of these events, but they are produced without discovery (or truth) being their destiny. No prior disclosure illuminates the production of these essentially nocturnal events. The welcoming of the face and the work of justice—which condition the birth of truth itself—are not interpretable in terms of disclosure."

scope of the thematization and comprehension which is at best a part of ontological philosophy.<sup>47</sup> While revelation can speak *through* a text, if it were to be identified with a text, then it would collapse into a prefigured meaning. Revelation as text, then, is subsidiary to the model of revelation expressed in the face.<sup>48</sup> Second, the revelation expressed in the face of the other is not itself the revelation of God, in the sense of being either a knowledge or a manifestation of God. While Levinas does admit that “the dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face,”<sup>49</sup> access to God is neither the direct result nor the primary purpose of the subject’s encounter with the face of the other.<sup>50</sup> As Levinas puts it, “Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, revelation as the locus of sociality for Levinas must remain grounded in the human plane.

The meaning of revelation, then, on Levinas’s account is *expressive presence*. Levinas writes, “The proximity of the Other, the proximity of the neighbor, is in being an ineluctable moment of the revelation of an absolute presence...which expresses itself.”<sup>52</sup> Levinas contrasts the presence of the face to the phenomenon which appears as present and are available for us to view different vantage points without attending to or contending with our gaze.<sup>53</sup> The human face, however, is fundamentally different in that it has the capacity to attend its own appearance,

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<sup>47</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo, ed. and annotated Jacques Rolland (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 214-215, where he refers to “religious discourse in which the word ‘God’ is inscribed as composed of propositions concerning a theme” which is “invested by a meaning resting upon unveiling or disclosure...The religious revelation is already assimilated to the disclosure effectuated by philosophy.”

<sup>48</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, “Discussion Following Transcendence and Intelligibility,” in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 272: “The law of God is revelation because it enunciates: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ All the rest is perhaps an attempt to think this – a necessary *mise-en-scène*, a culture in which this can be heard.” See also, Emmanuel Levinas, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition,” trans. Sarah Richmond, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 190-210, where Levinas accounts for the *Torah*, as an “awakening” to one’s own responsibility to the Other.

<sup>49</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibid.*: “our relation with the Metaphysical is an ethical behavior and not theology, not a thematization, be it a knowledge by analogy, of the attributes of God.”

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

to be fully present to its phenomenality in expression. As noted above, this does not mean the taking on or production of a particular facial expression. Instead, Levinas maintains, the face *as such* expresses.<sup>54</sup> Seeking to convey the transparent nature of this expression, Levinas also describes the appearance of the other's face to the subject as an *epiphany* or as *manifestation*. It is the direct and unmediated "*frankness*" of expression which underlies and conditions any linguistic sign or semantic content.<sup>55</sup> These variety of locutions for Levinas are meant to indicate the sheer immediacy of the expressive presence of the face. The expression is not "taken as;" rather, it communicates with immediacy.

Levinas describes the manifestation of being, in the face, in similar terms to Gadamer's articulation of being as its own temporal self-presentation. Levinas says, "The thing itself expresses itself."<sup>56</sup> In both Gadamer and Levinas, what is presented in its temporal expression is not different from its being. What is expressed in the face, for Levinas, is not a diminution of the reality of the face; it is not a representation of a reality more real than mere appearance. Instead, the expression and the expressed coincide. Further, Gadamer and Levinas appear to share the focus on language as the bearer of this presentation of being. Levinas writes, "Being, the thing in itself, is not, with respect to the phenomenon, the hidden. Its presence presents itself in its word."<sup>57</sup> To put it more concisely, Levinas says that being (in the face) presents itself in language. However, as I explain below, the significance of language as Levinas uses it, and the expression in which the face speaks, differs markedly from Gadamer's conception of language.

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<sup>54</sup> See *ibid.*, 181-182: "Expression manifests the presence of being...It is of itself presence of a face, and hence appeal and teaching, entry into relation with me—the ethical relation. And expression does not manifest the presence of being by referring from the sign to the signified; it presents the signifier. The signifier, he who gives a sign, is not signified. It is necessary to have already been in the society of signifiers for the sign to be able to appear as a sign. Hence the signifier must present himself before every sign, by himself—present a face."

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

On Levinas's view, the human face expresses or speaks in a way that no other bearer of signification can. While for Gadamer, texts, works of art, and history can each speak and present being in the same way that persons can, Levinas argues that the expressive presence of the face is a radically unique mode of expression. In making the distinction between the appearing of the face in expression and the appearance of all other phenomena, that is, the distinction between expressive appearing and absent appearing, Levinas argues that in the artistic or literary work, the interlocutor "has not attended his own revelation."<sup>58</sup> That is, on Levinas's view, though the author of a text is labeled an interlocutor and there is a sense in which the text serves as a revelation, the author lacks the crucial element of expressive presence which characterizes the face to face encounter. So while a subject can form a dialogue with a text in some sense, it is an encounter of a different order than when one person faces the corporeality of another person. The encounter with the text remains at the level of encounters with any other phenomenon, while the encounter with the face is uniquely personal in a way that no other encounter is.<sup>59</sup> This forms a sharp contrast, then, with Gadamer's view that dialogue between persons is not fundamentally different from a dialogue with a text.

### **Language and Command**

Levinas's unique articulation of the language expressed in the face and the command which it declares distinguishes his position both from the dialogical model of Gadamer and from the revelational models of Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer. In contrast to Gadamer's model, for example, the human face, the signifier *par excellence*, presents itself prior to any sign which

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> In the transition from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas speaks less frequently of the encounter with the face, and more often of the notion of "proximity," or "the approach." However, I take these expressions to be roughly synonymous, fulfilling the same function of the revelation of responsibility. Proximity serves as a more formalized concept which perhaps serves to forestall the objection that the encounter with the face is laden with the bias of sight, which connotes the grasp of intellectual vision as well.

would itself point back to a signifier. Instead, the face presents itself directly, apart from the recourse to linguistic markers. Levinas articulates this situation over the course of his writings in numerous ways. *Language, speaking, discourse, expression, signification, and saying* each take up what Levinas wants to say about the role of the face in the impartation of meaning to the subject. So it is first important to note that Levinas uses each of these terms in the process of getting across his account of the face to face encounter, and often uses them idiosyncratically. Yet it is unsurprising that linguistic accommodation should need to be made for describing an experience which can only be had in person, on Levinas's view.

As the face of the other constitutes a revelation to the subject, that revelation is manifest in terms of language. Levinas says that the face emerges as discourse, and that this discourse "institutes the pure experience of the social relation."<sup>60</sup> Thus, sociality, for Levinas, comes into being from the language manifest in the face of the other.

In order to classify what Levinas is doing here with regard to language, we can say that he espouses a kind of *expressivism* which holds that the encounter with the face precedes representational language but which nevertheless expresses or signifies itself in a pre-linguistic language. Levinas consistently maintains that the face gives itself in expression, language, and signification prior to the uttering of a particular empirical language.<sup>61</sup> This is the case, Levinas

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 77-78. Again, Levinas writes, "the relation between the same and the other...is language." Ibid., 39.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 73: "In this revelation only can language as a system of signs be constituted. The other called upon is not something represented, is not a given, is not a particular, through one side already open to generalization. Language, far from presupposing universality and generality, first makes them possible." See also *ibid.*, 202: "Language as an exchange of ideas about the world...presupposes the originality of the face without which...it could not commence...Every language as an exchange of verbal signs refers already to this primordial word of honor. The verbal sign is placed where someone signifies something to someone else. It therefore already presupposes an authentication of the signifier." See also, Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 5: "Antecedent to the verbal signs [saying] conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification."

argues, because language is in its essence meaning, *Sinn*, or significance.<sup>62</sup> Meaning for Levinas is expressed *par excellence* in the face; more than that, all meaning stems from the manifestation of the face. Recall Gadamer holds that language as dialogue is the locus of our understanding of being. In parallel fashion, Levinas holds that language as the expressive presence of the face is the locus of meaning. All subsequent forms of language are derived from and gain their significance from the givenness of signification in the face. Levinas writes, “Meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face to face of language.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, for Levinas, language is not originarily or primarily the subject’s bestowal of meaning on the world through the representation of objects or concepts; instead, it is a meaning which comes to the subject from the outside, from exteriority. With reference to Husserl’s notion of the sense-giving function of human intentionality, Levinas claims here that “signification precedes *Sinngebung*,”<sup>64</sup> that is, the meaning expressed in the signification of the face precedes the giving of meaning as construed by the subject.

The upshot of this analysis is that language and the meaning which it expresses is not primordially controlled or produced by the I. Levinas writes, “Language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it in question.”<sup>65</sup> The primary function of language is to put into question the I, or in the terms that we put it earlier, to invert and shatter the intentional arrow of the subject. Note here the consonance of what Levinas says with Gadamer’s view of language as *conditioning* consciousness rather than being conditioned by it. However, Levinas maintains, in contrast to Gadamer, that the

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<sup>62</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 205: “The primordial essence of language is to be sought not in the corporeal operation that discloses it to me and to others and, in the recourse to language, builds up a thought, but in the presentation of meaning.”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 204. See also *ibid.*, 171: “The calling in question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the Other in the face, we call language.”

fundamental separation between persons, between I and other, is what makes possible language and that language as relation does not negate or overcome this separation.<sup>66</sup> Levinas thus rejects the concept of participation, both in ontology and in sociality as well. Levinas writes,

The relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the other to me. In other words, language is spoken where community between the terms of the relationship is wanting, where the common plane is wanting or is yet to be constituted. It takes place in this transcendence. Discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign.<sup>67</sup>

Instead of language being the common bond of tradition in which subjects are absorbed, language in Levinas's view originates and is expressed from the other to the subject. It is the face itself which is the origin of language, apart from the linguistic capabilities of the other herself.<sup>68</sup>

Levinas maintains that a consideration of this encounter reveals one's own *responsibility* for the other; indeed, this is the very content of the saying or the expressive presence of the other. The saying in the face expresses or signifies a *command* in and through its appearance as naked and mortal. The content of the command of the other can be represented as "thou shalt not kill," a command that articulates "the risk of occupying...the place of an other and thus, on the concrete level, of exiling him, of condemning him...of bringing him death."<sup>69</sup> In other words, the face of the other expresses its extreme vulnerability and thus also my obligation to not violate the other's weakness.<sup>70</sup> However, this exposure itself exposes the fact that I always already am in the

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<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.*, 77: "in order to welcome revelation a being apt for this role of interlocutor, a separated being, is required."

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>68</sup> Levinas rearticulates his account of language and expression in *Otherwise than Being* through the terms "saying" and "said." Roughly, the saying is the expressiveness found in the encounter with the other in the proximity of the face, while the said is the linguistic accretion of intelligible propositions and claims. Saying is primordial sociality which is otherwise than being; the said is the philosophy which expresses that sociality in terms of being. See especially Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 6-7. I do not, however, have the space for a full analysis of the developments of language in this text.

<sup>69</sup> Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," 169.

<sup>70</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, "Intention, Event, and the Other," in *Entre Nous*, 145: "Obedience is an imperative in the presence of the face of the other."



business of trying to usurp its place in my effort to exist, in my *conatus essendi*.<sup>71</sup> Thus, for Levinas, the face, as the primordial relationship with the other, awakens the self to responsibility, and it does this through the revelation in the primal language of the ethical command. Therefore, on Levinas's account, our experience of the other is shot through with this originary language of command, which is the basis for all other language uses.

### **Initiative and Passivity**

As we have seen, Levinas argues that sociality begins from the encounter with the face of the other. He further makes explicit that this encounter precedes and is independent of the subject's intentional initiative. He writes, for example, "The notion of the face...brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinngebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power."<sup>72</sup> To make it clear that sociality cannot begin from the initiative of a transcendental subject, Levinas claims that far from the subject participating in the construction of the social relation, this relation is engendered solely from the side of the other person with whom the subject is face to face. This emphasis is maintained in order to combat the ontological "tradition in which intelligibility derives from the assembling of terms united in a system...Here [in this tradition] the subject is origin, initiative, freedom, present."<sup>73</sup> In contrast, Levinas argues that for true sociality to occur, the subject's power must be subverted by the face of the other.

Levinas also distances himself from the dialogical model in which sociality originates from the situation in between interlocutors, for he is clear that the persons who face each other are not on a level playing field. Rather than the self and other participating in a common

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<sup>71</sup> See Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," 171: "the natural *conatus essendi* of a sovereign I is put into question by the death or the mortality of the other, in the ethical vigilance through which the sovereignty of the I can see itself as 'hateful.'"

<sup>72</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 51. See also *ibid.*, 38-39: "The metaphysical other...is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same." See also *ibid.*, 293, where Levinas claims that the other's "signification precedes my *Sinngebung* initiative."

<sup>73</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 78.

language and tradition, Levinas asserts that the other can only command from a position of height, from transcendence, from that which breaks with systems of immanence and totality.<sup>74</sup> Levinas states, “The facing position, opposition par excellence, can be only as a moral summons. This movement proceeds from the other.”<sup>75</sup> For Levinas, this moral summons is a putting into question of the I which cannot come from the I itself. Instead, the ethical relationship, which according to Levinas is the heart of sociality, begins solely from the initiative of the other.

Levinas articulates this event of the ego’s being put into question through a phenomenological analysis of the subject’s passivity. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas writes, “Responsibility for the other...is a passivity more passive than all passivity, an exposure to the other without this exposure being assumed.”<sup>76</sup> This responsibility for the other is made possible through the subject’s nonintentional consciousness, which is both a pre-reflective awareness of one’s own consciousness and an awareness of being acted upon by the other.<sup>77</sup> Here, the passive mode of consciousness precedes the subjective initiative of intentionality.<sup>78</sup> Again, much of this sounds generically like what Gadamer wants to say in terms of the subjective consciousness being itself subject to its factual context. And Levinas himself does not disagree with the analysis of facticity as such.<sup>79</sup> Beyond this, however, he argues that the passivity of the subject

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<sup>74</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 101: “language can be spoken only if the interlocutor is the commencement of his discourse, if, consequently, he remains beyond the system, if he is not on the same plane as myself.”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 196. See also ibid., 195: “For the ethical relationship which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other.”

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> See Levinas, “From the One to the Other,” 150, describing the encounter with the other as a “consciousness of consciousness, ‘indirect’ and implicit, without initiative, proceeding from a nonintending *I*. A passive consciousness, like time, that passes and ages me without me. An immediate consciousness of self, nonintentional, to be distinguished from reflection...”

<sup>78</sup> See Levinas’s description, for example, in “Language and Proximity, 114: “...consciousness without an active subject, from which the subject-object polarization, the initiative and intention of a subject proposing a theme to itself, is absent.” See also, Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness, 128-129: “the prereflexive consciousness of self...preceding all intention...is not act, but pure passivity.”

<sup>79</sup> That is, Levinas agrees that we are always already embedded in our world, but he disagrees with the implications that Heidegger (and presumably Gadamer) draws from this fact. See Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?”, 4:

exists “not only by virtue of its being-without-having-chosen-to be, or its fall into a jumble of possibles already realized before all assumption, as in the Heideggerian *Geworfenheit*.”<sup>80</sup> Recall that Gadamer, too, has argued that simply experiencing thrownness or being limited does not capture the human social condition. Gadamer emphasizes that we experience our limits chiefly through the encounter with the other. And upon closer examination, we found that this limitation on the self is primarily through the claim of the other. These are features which Gadamer and Levinas share in common in their accounts of sociality.

The decisive way in which Levinas diverges from Gadamer here is found in the fact that for Levinas, the claim or command of the other cannot be separated from the corporeality of the face – the expressive presence of the face *is* the command. Hence, while both Gadamer and Levinas advocate a kind of passivity of consciousness before the encounter with the other, the passivity of consciousness in Levinas’s view is not a resignation to the rule of the surrounding tradition or *Sache*. Recall that Gadamer claims that consciousness is conditioned by the language and tradition in which it is embedded. Passivity for Gadamer is the recognition that I am much more constituted by my environment than being the one who autonomously constitutes the world around me. By contrast, the passivity of consciousness in Levinas’s account is a subjection to the face of the particular other who faces me. On Gadamer’s view, I am passive before impersonal, linguistic conditions, whereas for Levinas, I am passive before a person.

Levinas argues that tradition and language is not what originally renders consciousness passive; only the face of the other can do this. This goes back to Levinas’s analysis of the

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“Consciousness of reality does not coincide with our habitation in the world...But the philosophy of existence immediately effaces itself before ontology. This fact of being involved, this event in which I find myself engaged, tied as I am to what should be my object by ties not reducible to thoughts – this existence is interpreted as comprehension.”

<sup>80</sup> Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness,” 129.

presentational phenomenality of the face in contrast to all other entities. It is only the face which can invert intentional consciousness. Ricoeur notes that for Levinas, “the ego before the encounter with the other (it would be better to say, the ego before it is broken into by the other) is a stubbornly closed, locked up, separate ego.”<sup>81</sup> While Gadamer posits an intrinsic openness at the heart of the self rooted in the breadth of linguistic tradition, Levinas contends that the subject is a locked door which can only be opened up by the experience of responsibility for the Other.

Levinas insists that the initiative and predisposition to responsibility is importantly prior to and independent of my will. Further, this responsibility to which the self is called is not, in Levinas’s analysis a responsibility which is assumed after ethical deliberation on the part of a subject. As Levinas puts it, “this is not about receiving an order by perceiving it first and obeying it subsequently in a decision, an act of will. In this proximity of the face, the subservience of obedience precedes the hearing of the order.”<sup>82</sup> Levinas admits that it appears paradoxical to claim that obedience to the call precedes the call. However, what he is pointing to is the experience of reflective intentionality always arriving “too late” to responsibility. By the time reflection has interpreted the call and subsumed it under the categories of knowledge, it is already aware through the nonintentional consciousness that “the I is, by its very position, responsibility through and through,”<sup>83</sup> and that being responsible is a condition “antecedent to my freedom.”<sup>84</sup> For Levinas, then, the self does not come into relationship with the other through

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<sup>81</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 337.

<sup>82</sup> Levinas, “From the One to the Other,” 151

<sup>83</sup> Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” 17.

<sup>84</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” revised trans. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 143. See also various comments in *Otherwise than Being*: “the Good is not presented to freedom; it has chosen me before I have chosen it. No one is good voluntarily.” Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 11. “Goodness is always older than choice; the Good has always already chosen and required the unique one” Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 57. See also: “...the subject finds himself committed to the Good in the very passivity of supporting” Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 122.

a moral decision to bind oneself to another, but rather one finds oneself already bound in responsibility to the other.

### **From Two to Three, or Beyond the Face**

While Levinas focuses on the person-to-person relationship – the face-to-face of two individuals – he does extend this account into the broader human community. However, he does not think of community as such as a culmination of sociality, but instead sees it as derivative and dependent on the face to face relation.<sup>85</sup> Levinas stipulates that the face to face encounter is not exclusive to the two individuals in the encounter; it contains all of humanity in its gaze. Levinas writes that the face “attests the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me.”<sup>86</sup> In distinction from what he perceives as Buber’s I-Thou enclosure, Levinas wants to maintain that the relationship between the subject and the other is fundamentally open, a window on humanity instead of a wall.<sup>87</sup> In Levinas’s words, “The *thou* is posited in front of a *we*.”<sup>88</sup> Levinas does not deny that the relationship is between two individual persons but argues that these two individuals cannot abstract themselves from the broader context of humanity. Further, Levinas argues that the appearance of the face is not simply revelatory of the one, the particular individual in front of me. Rather, “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other...the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity.”<sup>89</sup> Here, the other’s particularity is seen but is also seen through. The ethics manifest in the interpersonal encounter cannot be reduced to considerations of the neighbor’s particularity. There is a sense for Levinas that the

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<sup>85</sup> Levinas’s “Beyond the Face” section of *Totality and Infinity* gives an account of erotic love and of fecundity – the family. Here, however, we will focus on the notion of fraternity and the ways in which Levinas sees sociality operative at the level of the human community.

<sup>86</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

<sup>87</sup> See *ibid.*: “Language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient ‘I-Thou’ forgetful of the universe; in its frankness it refuses the clandestinity of love, where it loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter or cooing.”

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

other functions as a representative for all of humanity. What matters in the encounter is not any characteristics of physiology or identity adhering to the person. What matters is simply the revelation of expressive presence found in the face, that the other person is a bearer of the command which inverts my intentionality. As Jean-Luc Marion puts it, “The face opens to the humanity of the other man, but not to the particular alterity of a particular Other.”<sup>90</sup>

The *We* of humanity adds nothing to the responsibility which the I finds herself subject to in the initial encounter in Levinas’s thinking. It is not as if the recognition of human needs and concerns outside of the one who confronts me builds a layer of obligation onto what I have recognized in the face, for the destitution of the other *qua* humanity is present there in the face. I find no level of fraternity in humanity in encountering more or different faces. Levinas writes, “It is my responsibility before a face looking at me as absolutely foreign...that constitutes the original fact of fraternity.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, the responsibility found in the revelation of the face is constitutive of human fraternity. There is no sense of fraternity independent of the relation with the face. This means for Levinas that ethics is neither broadened nor deepened beyond the encounter with the face.<sup>92</sup>

In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* he writes that “politics is opposed to morality.”<sup>93</sup> From this remark, we can note that ethics, on Levinas’s view, is narrowly defined as being exclusively pre-reflective. Anything reflective, such as politics or justice, is not a broadening of ethics, but something like a necessary betrayal of ethics – necessary because we cannot do other

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<sup>90</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “From the Other to the Individual,” trans. Arianne Conty, in *Levinas Studies* 1 (2006): 110. For Marion, this feature of Levinas’s account presents a problem of anonymity which we do not have the space to take up here.

<sup>91</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 214. See also, *ibid.*, 279: “The I as I hence remains turned ethically to the face of the other: fraternity is the very relation with the face in which at the same time my election and equality, that is, the mastery exercised over me by the other, are accomplished.”

<sup>92</sup> In “God and Philosophy,” Levinas notes, “Responsibility does not come from fraternity, but fraternity denotes responsibility for the other (*autrui*), antecedent to my freedom.” Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 143.

<sup>93</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

than reflect on justice beyond the face. At best, it is something derivative of ethics. Hence, the concern for the wider human community and the justice which must be implemented in it, while important, must first pass through the encounter with the face. The responsibility for the neighbor which is constitutive for sociality on Levinas's account has no other locus or fulfillment than in the relation with the face.

However, Levinas admits that the face-to-face encounter is itself embedded in a wider context of fraternity. He writes, "The relation with the face in fraternity, where in his turn the Other appears in solidarity with all the others, constitutes the social order, the reference of every dialogue to the third party by which the *We*...encompasses the face to face opposition."<sup>94</sup> Levinas signals here that the Other who faces me appears as being in relationship, not only with me, but with all others as well. Part of my recognition of the destitution of humanity in the face of the other is the recognition that this particular other stands in solidarity with all Others. Here, I recognize that the face I encounter is not an aberration; it is not simply this one other who is in need, but a kinship of poverty is brought to my attention through the face of the other. Further, this context of fraternity in some sense constitutes my identity as I: "The human I is posited in fraternity: that all men are brothers is not added to man as a moral conquest, but constitutes his ipseity. Because my position as an I is *effectuated* already in fraternity the face can present itself to me as a face."<sup>95</sup> In other words, I find myself already implicated in the fraternity of human persons. Thus, the encounter with the face (1) points beyond the face to the third party, and therefore all human others, and then (2) identifies myself as among the human community. For were I not embedded in the fraternity, the face could not have aroused my responsibility for that fraternity.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 279-280.

For Levinas, this notion of fraternity suggests a level of human community which is prior to the empirical unity of the genus of the human race. Levinas writes, “When taken to be like a genus that unites like individuals the essence of society is lost sight of.”<sup>96</sup> Instead, Levinas suggests that society is better conceived of in terms of responsibility. Fraternity, being this normative bond, operates prior to the categorization of beings in a system of being or to the empirical recognition of biological sameness: “Here fraternity precedes the commonness of a genus. My relationship with the other as neighbor gives meaning to my relations with all the others.”<sup>97</sup> For Levinas, fraternity is an ethical bond which implies that each other is itself responsible for others. Here again, Levinas points out that the responsibility involved in fraternity is not that of calculation and willful action. The basic unit of responsibility is in each face-to-face encounter, and as such, precedes representation and intentionality.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, I recognize in the encounter with the face of the other that the “other stands in a relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer,”<sup>99</sup> but for whom the other is nonetheless responsible. Levinas identifies the third party as that recognition of the other who is my other’s neighbor: “The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow.”<sup>100</sup> Because each is responsible for another, no human being is left outside of the web of responsibility; each is a neighbor who is responsible and for whom another is responsible.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>97</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 159. See also *ibid.*, 166: “The unity of the human race is in fact posterior to fraternity.”

<sup>98</sup> See *ibid.*, 140: “Representation does not integrate the responsibility for the other inscribed in human fraternity; human fraternity does not arise out of any commitment, any principle, that is, any recallable present.”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Levinas notes that this web of responsibility is “the structure of the-one-for-the-other inscribed in human fraternity, in the one keeper of his brother, the one responsible for the other, which would be the-one-for-the-other *par excellence*.” *Ibid.*, 166.



Levinas admits, however, that the fraternity of neighborly responsibility, while not itself a result of rational reflection, calls for representation, analysis, and philosophy. He writes, “It is not that the entry of a third party would be an empirical fact, and that my responsibility for the other finds itself constrained to a calculus by the ‘force of things.’ In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness.”<sup>102</sup> Levinas argues in *Otherwise than Being* that justice is the necessary reflective procedure which confronts the subject with the entry of the third party, albeit posterior to the fraternity which is introduced with the third person as well. Justice is the necessary ordering of society which is essentially political in nature.

Despite the fact that the operation of justice is a work of intentionality, Levinas now claims that “justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect.”<sup>103</sup> Justice is the allotment of rights and duties, of judgments and consequences by the State, the concern for which, Levinas says, “is the spirit in society.”<sup>104</sup> While it is necessary for a political society to order itself by means of the justice which ensures the equality of its citizens, hence ordaining both duties and rights to individuals, Levinas maintains that “the equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights. The forgetting of self moves justice.”<sup>105</sup> That is, justice is first founded on the divestment of the self before the face of the other, as Levinas writes, “Justice is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity.”<sup>106</sup> Although justice moves beyond the immediacy of the face into the sphere of

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>103</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 157,

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. See also *ibid.*: “Justice, society, the State and its institutions, exchanges and work are comprehensible out of proximity. This means that nothing is outside of the control of the responsibility of the one for the other.”

reflection and rational deliberation, its judgments are founded, Levinas says, on the original encounter with the other. No justice would be possible without the responsibility engendered in the revelation of the other. This means that although justice prescribes actions to individuals vis-à-vis their position amidst others in society, the normative force of these actions is always grounded in the personal encounter with the face of the other.

We have here reached the full scope of Levinas's model of sociality. Justice is the final, empirical level of human community which exists at the level of representation and calculation. This is necessary, but still draws its force from the primal encounter, from proximity. While the justice of society and the fraternity of humanity represent human sociality at its breadth, the grounding of sociality, its normative motivation in responsibility, still resides in the face-to-face encounter. Sociality therefore rises or falls depending on whether the subject's encounter with the face appropriately initiates responsibility for the subject. And as we have seen, responsibility can occur only in the overcoming of the impersonal totality of being by the personal singularity of the face of the other. As Marion puts it, "ethics will become first philosophy instead of and in place of ontology only if it definitively transgresses anonymity."<sup>107</sup>

### **Levinas and Dialogical Sociality**

Levinas's ethical responsibility model of sociality in a number of places explicitly departs from the paradigmatic dialogical models espoused by Buber and Gadamer. Levinas specifically criticizes Buber's formulation of I and Thou on two fronts. First, he worries that Buber's concept of I and Thou, while breaking with the subject-object structure of intentionality, is insufficiently personal because of the breadth of its application. Levinas writes, "the I-Thou relation in Buber retains a formal character: it can unite man to things as much as man to man."<sup>108</sup> Levinas

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<sup>107</sup> Marion, "From the Other to the Individual," 101.

<sup>108</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 68.

commends Buber for recognizing the need to have a relation which is not determined by the content of what is related to, thus having already objectified it, but instead retaining the importance of the relation itself in its sheer formality.<sup>109</sup> That is, Levinas approves of the attempt to break with the idealist gaze of objectification in relating to the other. However, the issue that Levinas sees with positing the I-Thou relation as completely devoid of content is that in Buber's account, one relates to impersonal things in the same way one relates to persons.<sup>110</sup>

For Levinas, this simply does not "correspond with the facts,"<sup>111</sup> which leads to his second point: the reciprocity between I and Thou in Buber's view is not the fundamental relation between persons.<sup>112</sup> Instead, Levinas argues, in sociality the Other enters the relation from a position of height: "the I is distinguished from the Thou not by the presence of specific attributes, but by the dimension of height, thus implying a break with Buber's formalism."<sup>113</sup> The metaphor of height denotes the asymmetry of the relationship. I and Thou are distinguished in the first instance because they encounter each other from the vantage point of disparate planes.

Levinas thus provides a solution to the problem of formalism on the one hand and objectification on the other. The Other is not recognized by means of her particular attributes or content, but she is distinguishable from things by coming in a non-reciprocal fashion, by presenting herself in transcendence to the subject. Levinas maintains that height is necessary for responsibility, as a relation higher and more fundamental than the spiritual friendship of equals,

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<sup>109</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge, in *The Levinas Reader*, 68: The "sensitivity of the I-Thou relation lies in its completely formal nature. To apprehend the other as a content is tantamount to relating oneself to him as an object and is to enter into an I-It relation instead."

<sup>110</sup> See *ibid.*, 70: "the *ethical* aspects of the I-Thou relation, so frequently evoked in Buber's descriptions are not determinant, and the I-Thou relation is also possible with respect to things."

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>112</sup> See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 68: "One may, however, ask if the *thou-saying* [*tutoiement*] does not place the other in a reciprocal relation, and if this reciprocity is primordial."

<sup>113</sup> Levinas, "Martin Buber," 72.

which Buber has in mind.<sup>114</sup> Only in the break from immanence, from the idealist tendency to draw entities into its own plane, is it possible for the command of the Other to be heard.

Ultimately, Levinas concludes, “In my own analyses, the approach to others is not originally in my speaking out to the other, but in my responsibility for him or her. That is the original ethical relation. That responsibility is elicited, brought about by the face of the other person, described as a breaking of the plastic forms of the phenomenality of appearance...Here, then, contrary to Buber’s I-Thou, there is no initial equality.”<sup>115</sup> Levinas thus sharply distinguishes in own view which proceeds from the revelatory initiative of the other from Buber’s view which sees reciprocity as constitutive for sociality.

One clear way to illustrate the difference between a model of sociality constituted in reciprocity and Levinas’s view of sociality as grounded in the expressive presence of the face is by focusing on the situation of dialogue. It is this analysis which will bear out Levinas’s fundamental disagreement with Gadamer regarding the social relation. Though Levinas does not anywhere explicitly address Gadamer, what he does say about the place of dialogue in sociality is illustrative. Levinas describes ordinary dialogue as “the empirical reality of inter-human speaking,” a situation in which, “for each of the interlocutors, speaking would consist in entering into the thought of the other, in fitting into it.”<sup>116</sup> Levinas’s account of what dialogue is here comes quite close to the way Gadamer sees the dialogical relationship of persons who come together through the *Sache*. Levinas, however, contests that this position of dialogue is the

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<sup>114</sup> Levinas writes that for all that Heidegger is open to criticism in the sphere of sociality, his concept of *Fürsorge* actually is more adequate than Buber’s own concept of the reciprocity of friendship: “*Fürsorge*, inasmuch as it is a response to the essential misery of the other, *does* give access to the otherness of the other. It accounts for the dimension of height and of human distress to a greater degree than *Umfassung*, and it may be conjectured that clothing those who are naked and nourishing those who go hungry is a more authentic way of finding access to the other than the rarefied ether of a spiritual friendship.” *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>115</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Apropos of Buber: Some Notes,” in Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 43-44.

<sup>116</sup> Levinas, “Diachrony and Representation,” 162.

genuine locus of sociality. He will admit that otherness is posited in dialogue, but he notes, with Gadamer, that this otherness is only one stage in the conversation. Hence, Levinas questions the primacy of dialogue thus construed:

One must ask if this very discourse [dialogue], despite its allegedly interior scissions, does not already rest on *a priori sociality* with the other in which the interlocutors are distinct. It is necessary to ask if this effective, forgotten sociality is not nonetheless presupposed by the rupture, however provisional, between self and self, for the interior dialogue still to deserve the name dialogue.<sup>117</sup>

Here Levinas suggests that the situation of either interior or empirical dialogue, in which the partners are united in the subject matter, is derivative of the encounter with the face which demonstrates the true otherness of the persons from one another.<sup>118</sup>

This means that Levinas would think that Gadamer has misdescribed the enactment of the self-other relationship; on Levinas's view, Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology arrives "too late."<sup>119</sup> Both Levinas and Gadamer claim that the self is in formation (in some sense) prior to self-reflection. Self-reflective consciousness always comes too late, for both thinkers, and therefore finds itself always already underway. However, each thinker interprets this "always alreadyness" differently. For Gadamer, as we have seen, subjectivity is always already caught up in the continuity of (1) the flow of time, (2) language, and therefore (3) tradition. The self is already a bridge, before it knows itself as self. For Levinas, on the other hand, subjectivity always already finds itself ruptured, accused, by its proximity to the other. It is always already a You, responsible for the other. Here, discontinuity precedes the continuity of consciousness.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 163-164, emphasis my own. See also, *ibid.*, 164: "Does not the interior dialogue presuppose, beyond the representation of the other, a relationship to the other person as other, and not initially a relationship to the other already apperceived as the same through a reason that is universal from the start?"

<sup>118</sup> See Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 146: "The possibility of interparadigmatic dialogue thus rests upon my capacity to recognize that responsibility for the other, which is (ethical) truth, founds and governs the truth of *logos*, precedes and founds dialogue as the possibility of any circulation of information."

<sup>119</sup> See Levinas, "Language and Proximity," 119: "consciousness is always late for the rendezvous with the neighbor."

Further, the “prior sociality” which Levinas describes rejects the reciprocity of the dialogical encounter because Levinas argues that the revelation of the other demands an unconditional responsibility which does not depend on whether or not the other thinks itself responsible as well. While reciprocity is crucial on Gadamer’s account because it is the mechanism by which understanding, and hence sociality, occurs between persons, on Levinas’s view, sociality is not fundamentally grounded in understanding but in responsibility. Levinas may well agree that understanding as Gadamer sets it out requires reciprocity, but for Levinas, reciprocity itself presupposes unilateral responsibility.

From Levinas’s point of view, Gadamerian hermeneutics does however have a legitimate place in understanding and relating to the world, but hermeneutics does not exhaust the ways in which humans can interact with reality. In his important essay, “Meaning and Sense,” Levinas writes, “In all its analyses of language contemporary philosophy insists, and indeed rightly, on its hermeneutical structure and on the cultural effort of the incarnate being that expresses itself.”<sup>120</sup> However, while accepting a hermeneutics of culture and language, Levinas argues that the other person presents the self with a prevenient discontinuity that is not mediated by tradition and language. He asks, “Has a third dimension not been forgotten; the direction toward the Other (Autrui) who is not only the collaborator and the neighbor of our cultural work of expression or the client of our artistic production, but the interlocutor, he to whom expression expresses...?”<sup>121</sup> Levinas thus suggests that a hermeneutics of the other person is derivative of the primary expressiveness of the face of the other.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 52. Although what Levinas says here is directed specifically at Merleau-Ponty, I take it that his thrust also applies to Gadamer.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> See *ibid.*: “In other words, expression, before being a celebration of being, is a relationship with him to whom I express the expression and whose presence is already required for my cultural gesture of expression to be produced. The Other (Autrui) who faces me is not included in the totality of being expressed.”

Levinas, then, rejects the Gadamerian claim that hermeneutic ontology is the medium out of which the relation to the other first unfolds. While not rejecting hermeneutics out of hand, Levinas argues that hermeneutics is not what first gives the other to the self. He writes,

The understanding of the Other is thus a hermeneutics and an exegesis. The Other is given in the concreteness of the totality in which he is immanent, and which...is expressed and disclosed by our own cultural initiative, by corporeal, linguistic, or artistic gestures. But the epiphany of the Other involves a signifyingness of its own, independent of this meaning received from the world. The Other comes to us not only out of the context but also without mediation; he signifies by himself.<sup>123</sup>

The *revelation* of the other, which contains its own, transcendent, order of meaning, actually grounds hermeneutics on Levinas's view. Levinas claims that the "mundane meaning" of hermeneutics "is disturbed and jostled by another presence that is abstract (or, more exactly, absolute) and not integrated into the world. This presence consists in coming toward us, in making an entry."<sup>124</sup> Thus, although the other does come to the self in the full concreteness of the historical world, it is not this situation which can ground the ethical relation.

Levinas suggests that the "anti-Platonism" of contemporary philosophy mistakenly places truth as having its being in history. Instead, Levinas argues that to glimpse "the revelation of the Other (which is at the same time the birth of morality) in the gaze of a human being looking at another human precisely as abstract human disengaged from all culture, in the nakedness of his face, is to return to Platonism in a new way."<sup>125</sup> Levinas thinks that the immanence of history and culture are not sufficient to provide the kind of transcendence necessary for responsibility. This critique of the anti-Platonism of history is well suited to target Gadamer's articulation of the truth of being as not transcendent of its temporal presentation in history.<sup>126</sup> For Gadamer, no

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>126</sup> This is perhaps a somewhat ironic fit, in that Gadamer appeals precisely to Plato in articulating his ontology. However, Gadamer and Levinas appeal to different versions of Plato in their respective projects.

truth-in-itself exists apart from its temporal presentation. But for Levinas, this lack of transcendence means precisely a loss of moral orientation. The transcendence which is missing in historical being is provided by the transcendence of the face of the other and its truth which confronts the self. Thus, on Levinas's view, it is the revelation of the other alone which can ground sociality.

### **Levinas and Transcendental Sociality**

While Levinas clearly rejects the idealist model of sociality as he characterizes it, there is a question as to the degree to which Levinas articulates a *transcendental* concept of subjectivity. From Gadamer's point of view, many of Levinas's worries would be overcome if he departed from the concept of subjectivity altogether, opting instead for a model of selfhood which is not weighed down with a lineage of the subject which grounds reality in its own certainty. Yet Levinas argues that the project of overcoming subjectivity, as in Heidegger's prioritization of the Being of beings and in Gadamer's prioritization of the language as the articulation of being which binds us together, inevitably covers over the irreducible differences between persons, reducing otherness into sameness. Hence, subjects must have a radical degree of alienness from the persons which confront them. For this reason, Levinas emphasizes the *separation* of the subject from God and her fellow human being. This positions Levinas, like idealist and transcendental concepts of subjectivity, as having a subject which encounters that which is separate from and foreign to it. This otherness is different in kind and therefore transcends likeness. This *transcendence* is attributed to the subject in idealist thinking, while Levinas attributes transcendence to the other which encounters the subject. Thus, Levinas inverts the transcendental model of subjectivity, ascribing the agency of transcendence to the other who faces the subject.



While it may seem evident, therefore, that Levinas departs from Theunissen's categories of transcendental and dialogical models of sociality, David Klemm has argued to the contrary. In his analysis of Levinas's thought with respect to Theunissen's typology, David Klemm asserts that despite Levinas's attempts to repudiate the transcendental model of sociality, he implicitly requires the transcendental subjectivity he avows to do away with. In other words, Klemm levies Theunissen's critique of Buber against Levinas: that he must implicitly presuppose the transcendental subject which he claims to reject. Klemm claims that Levinas must presuppose an I which both recognizes itself and freely chooses to respect the other. He writes, "I must possess an immediate awareness of the unity of my own being in order to respond to the Other; I must freely decide to respect the being of the Other as presented. Both of these moments are implied in Levinas against his intentions and are not made explicit."<sup>127</sup> Klemm notes that while Levinas denies that the subject is free to welcome the other, his account of the face to face encounter requires this freedom and openness. And this is because Klemm reads the subject's encounter with the face as a *hermeneutic* encounter. Klemm reads Levinas as proceeding from a verbal encounter in language to the responsibility engendered by this event of communication.<sup>128</sup> On Klemm's interpretation, the human face as a bearer of meaning is the signifier which points to a signified and hence is interpreted by the subject.<sup>129</sup> Klemm writes, "When Levinas understands *this* presentation *as* a face, he does not transcend the 'circle of understanding' but rather

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<sup>127</sup> David E. Klemm, "Levinas' Phenomenology of the Other and Language as the Other of Phenomenology" in *Man and World* (1989) 22: 420-421. See also, *ibid.*, 420, where Klemm writes that although Levinas "claims an 'asymmetry' in the relation to the Other which forbids reciprocity, the structure of the face-to-face encounter necessitates that any 'I' turn to and welcome the face of the Other."

<sup>128</sup> See *ibid.*, 418: "Levinas's strategy is to move from the event of verbal communication through signs in analytic regress to the condition of its possibility in the face to face: Communication presupposes interlocutors who present themselves to each other in ethical responsibility."

<sup>129</sup> See *ibid.*, 419: "this self-presentation only occurs through the word 'I.' As an indexical, deictic expression, the first-person pronoun is indeed a sign. There is no pure speech apart from the signficatory capacity of language as the medium of the presentation of being."

reinstantiates it.”<sup>130</sup> That is, Klemm reads Levinas as implicitly presuming that presentation of the face bears a hermeneutic “*as*-structure,” that the face is something that is interpreted and therefore approached through the understanding.<sup>131</sup> This results in a transcendental conception of subjectivity because the subject must ultimately constitute the meaning of the face.

While Klemm is within his rights to argue that sociality in general requires hermeneutics, he is incorrect in claiming that Levinas’s own account presupposes it. As we saw above, Levinas claims that the face signifies prior to signs, prior to empirical language. The meaning imparted by the face conditions any further use of language between persons rather than that meaning being mediated through verbal exchange. Klemm thus misunderstands the radical passivity of the subject and the prevolitional nature of the encounter which Levinas articulates.<sup>132</sup> While retaining the concept of subjectivity, which Gadamer prefers to do away with, Levinas abandons the primacy of the intentional consciousness, maintaining instead that nonintentional consciousness is constitutive of subjectivity. The subject on Levinas’s account is not an epistemically transcendent entity; instead the subject is an ethical respondent through hearing the call of the other and being drawn by the other into responsibility. In this way, Levinas preserves the alienness (as a moral alienness) of subjectivity in the encounter while presenting the relational bond between them as having its origin in the revelation of the face of the other.

### **The Contribution of Levinas’s Model of Sociality**

Levinas’s articulation of social life begins with his critique of idealism, both classical German idealism as well as what he labels phenomenological idealism. The core problem with

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. As we have noted above, Levinas does not deny that the others we encounter are always embedded in a cultural context. What Levinas does deny is that this context has priority in the social relation.

<sup>131</sup> See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §32. “Understanding and Interpretation,” 188-195.

<sup>132</sup> Simon Lumsden makes the same basic move, assuming that there must be some mediation, some “*as*-structure,” which Levinas is smuggling into his analysis of the face. Lumsden’s assessment, too, is that Levinas does not evade Theunissen’s challenge to alternatives of transcendentalism. See Simon Lumsden, “Absolute Difference and Social Ontology: Levinas Face to Face with Buber and Fichte,” in *Human Studies* (2000) 23:227-241.

idealism, according to Levinas, is that entities are correlated with thought such that the inherent difference in beings is reduced to the sameness of the totality which can be thought in intentional consciousness. This totalizing power of the idealist ego eliminates the possibility that other persons can reorient the grasp of the I. Consciousness ineluctably absorbs otherness into its own categories. Levinas's critique is that this model cannot do justice to ethical and social reality. If the idealist model is true, persons cannot truly enter the moral and social life. No one genuinely realizes responsibility for the person which faces them. In contrast to this, Levinas's analysis accounts for ethical responsibility by radically revisioning the social relation.

Levinas's critique of idealism agrees with Gadamer that idealism has misidentified the way in which the subject's consciousness comes into relations with other persons. Both Levinas and Gadamer reject the notion that consciousness freely lords over the objects and persons it reflects upon. Each figure argues that consciousness is much more passive than idealism supposes. Rather than conditioning all of reality, consciousness is much more conditioned by what it encounters. However, while Gadamer argues that idealism is overcome by grounding sociality in the linguistic context that surrounds both self and other, Levinas rejects the claim that this dialogical grounding of sociality is sufficient to overcome the lure of idealism.

Instead, Levinas maintains that only through breaking with a participationist ontology can the other be truly experienced in her alterity, which is the condition for responsibility, the foundation of social life. Sociality cannot be articulated through an ontology which purports to describe the relations between persons from a third-person point of view. Rather, it can only be found in the experience of the expressive presence of the other who faces me. Levinas says that in this alterity we find "a mode of being produced and an ontology that is not equivalent to

panoramic existence and its disclosure.”<sup>133</sup> The encounter with the Other in her otherness produces a mode of being which is not totalizable. Here, sociality *is* metaphysics. Taking license from the ontological language he uses on occasion, and with the necessary caveats, we can say that Levinas’s non-totalizing ontology of alterity is nothing other than the social relation. Escaping idealism means for Levinas grounding sociality in an ontology of alterity.

That Levinas occupies a unique position in the topography of models of sociality has never seriously been in dispute. What has been more difficult to pin down is how to fairly and adequately articulate such an (admittedly) idiosyncratic view vis-à-vis its alternatives.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 294.

<sup>134</sup> Another attempt to fairly characterize Levinas’s thought is as follows: Levinas writes that his “analyses claim to be in the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology.” Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 183. While Levinas is often critical of the letter of intentional analysis as it correlates objects to the cognition of the subject, he does remark that Husserl’s phenomenology does rightly focus on the appearing of phenomena. Further, Levinas says that his account of sociality “remains faithful to intentional analysis, insofar as it signifies the locating of notions in the horizon of their appearing, a horizon unrecognized, forgotten or displaced in the exhibition of an object, in its notion, in the look absorbed by the notion alone.” Ibid. In this statement of his method, Levinas shows himself to be closer to the phenomenological methodology of Husserl than Heidegger. Husserl’s method of the *epoché* or bracketing is a reduction of the natural attitude, the natural way we view things, to the very manner of an object’s appearing. In other words, Husserl wants to brush aside the way we would normally ascribe meaning to objects of our comprehension, laying bare the way that they are presented to our consciousness. Heidegger’s modification of this methodology claims that this kind of reduction is actually in most cases an abstraction, that things are given to us, presented to our consciousness in the midst of our “natural attitude.” The natural attitude is not something to be bracketed but something to be included in our description of phenomena.

What Levinas does is return to the Husserlian practice of bracketing the natural attitude, which would say that things are just as they appear to us. Instead, Levinas claims that by performing a reduction of the ordinary meanings which we place on social interactions, we find beneath the surface unrecognized or forgotten significations. Levinas writes, “The said in which everything is thematized, in which everything shows itself in a theme, has to be reduced to its signification of saying.” Ibid. The idea here is that there is a kernel of meaning underneath thematized meanings that is most often missed. However, Levinas continues, “in extracting signification from the theme in which it presents itself to the comprehension of a subject gifted with reason, it has not reduced it to a lived datum of consciousness.” Ibid. In this, Levinas says that his account “ventures beyond phenomenology” Ibid. In other words, Levinas maintains that the signification extracted from the presented meaning of phenomena is not itself the object of description. Levinas uses the metaphor of breathing to indicate the attempt to keep hold of the signification beneath the theme. It is a rhythm of unveiling and revealing – signification is extracted from thematization and then reinserted into a theme to be comprehended. The said is reduced to the signification of the saying, which itself is given over to another said, which itself must be reduced in order to reveal the signification beneath it.

Levinas’s method therefore is a description of what just slips over the horizon of appearing. It begins in the phenomenological quest for describing what appears to consciousness, but then finds that what appears points beyond itself to that which is continually elusive. In this manner, Levinas admits that he has reached beyond phenomenology proper, in tracing what appears in consciousness back toward its finally nondescribable signifyingness.

However, as we have situated Levinas's model of sociality in the context of the critique of idealism, it appears as a natural plot in the logical space of positions to take in opposition to subject-centered models of sociality. While idealist and transcendental models ground sociality in the subject, and dialogical models ground sociality in the space in between self and other, Levinas's ethical responsibility model grounds sociality in the other human being who faces the subject.

The contrast with Gadamer is again instructive. Like Levinas, Gadamer rejects that sociality is grounded in the cognitive grasp of the ego. Gadamer's claim is that sociality is grounded in language outside of the self. But the self participates in sociality through the process of understanding – the progressive integration of the foreign with the familiar. The content and the goal of sociality, from Gadamer's perspective, *is* understanding, a kind of knowing which expands and evolves through sociality. From Levinas's point of view, this concern for understanding is a hold-over from idealism; it is still the project of grounding sociality in epistemology rather than in ethics. While Gadamer argues that idealism has misunderstood the way in which consciousness comes to understand others, Levinas argues that the whole project of trying to approach others through the understanding is misguided. Instead, we are related to others first and foremost in an ethical way – we find ourselves laden with responsibility for the other person who faces us before we find ourselves trying to understand the other person. The content and the goal of sociality, for Levinas, is the responsibility evoked by the command in the face of the other. Levinas argues for this contention with the analysis that the I, when faced with the other, bears an irreducible experience of responsibility. This analysis therefore constitutes the means by which Levinas positions his view of sociality as ethical responsibility as that which alone can stand as the true alternative to idealism.

### **Chapter Three: Rosenzweig and Revelational Sociality**

Having presented the dialogical and ethical responsibility models of sociality as exemplified in Gadamer and Levinas, I turn now to introduce the third key model of sociality in my topography of the responses to idealism: the revelational model of sociality. I present this view as articulated by Franz Rosenzweig before proceeding in the next chapter to explain its expression in Bonhoeffer. Like Gadamer and Levinas, Rosenzweig's model of sociality results from his negative assessment of idealism. Unlike these thinkers, however, Rosenzweig's key indictment of idealism is that it renounces the concept of revelation. Rosenzweig argues that idealism reduces reality to the subject's cognition, causing the subject's world, including its conception of sociality, to collapse in on itself. Only by incorporating the experience of divine revelation can the subject form genuine relationships with others. Like both Gadamer and Levinas, Rosenzweig rejects what he takes to be the idealist claim that the transcendent subject is the ground for sociality. However, in contrast to finding the ground in the dialogue between persons or in the revelation of the human other, Rosenzweig argues that the transcendence of *divine* revelation is needed in order to elude the snare of idealism. Rosenzweig's model of genuine sociality, inaugurated by revelation, unfolds in temporal stages: sociality is grounded in and unlocked by divine revelation, which is enacted through the human-divine dialogue, and culminates in the collective invocation of God by the human community beyond dialogue.

In order to see, however, the ways in which Rosenzweig departs from the other models of sociality I have discussed, I will lay out the structure and development of Rosenzweig's view. I begin by explaining his key criticisms of idealism and show how these lead to his articulation of

an alternative ontology. The sociality that Rosenzweig proceeds to promote arises from this ontology, but is also a crucial piece of its enactment. By unpacking Rosenzweig's account, I show that the idealist rejection of the concept of revelation is his core diagnosis, and that returning revelation to the forefront of an articulation of reality is crucial to obtaining a proper account. As the chapter develops, I show more specifically that Rosenzweig's view diverges from dialogical models of sociality such as Gadamer's as well as Levinas's ethical responsibility model by requiring a conception of God who personally engages with human beings.

### **The Critique of Idealism in Rosenzweig**

Rosenzweig's critique of German idealism in *The Star of Redemption* advances from two basic claims: that idealism endeavors to operate from reason's own capacities alone and that God's creation of the world is not available as an assumption for reason, strictly speaking. Because a proof for the act of creation cannot be given by reason, a substitute concept must be derived which explains the existence of the world. Rosenzweig says that this concept, "with which [idealism] seeks to circumvent as well as replace the idea of creation, is the concept of generation."<sup>1</sup> This effectively replaces the concept of God as creator with that of God as generator. However, in order for reason to find a rational unity, the content generated, i.e., the world, must be proportional in some way to the generator. Hence, God must be recognizable to cognition. But this means that once God is identified by cognition, both God and world alike are cognized content. As a result, God does not explain the world, but lies side-by-side with the world in cognition.

On Rosenzweig's analysis, then, cognition becomes the origin of all things in the idealist account because it is the source which underlies God and the world. Rosenzweig writes that only

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 135.

the self as “purely subjective and as this pure subject can assume the role of the origin of cognition vis-à-vis everything objective: the ‘I’ of Idealism.”<sup>2</sup> Now, reason again demands that the plurality of things which the subject cognizes be brought into a comprehensible unity. Hence, the things which the subject cognizes must bear a likeness to their origin, the subject. At the same time, the subject must avoid a complete identification with the objects it comprehends, in which case it would fail to offer a distinction from them which would be able to explain them. According to Rosenzweig, idealism solves this problem through positing that the subject generates entities both as mental concepts and as objects, as *non-I*. Hence, they are both like the subject *qua* concept and unlike the subject *qua* object of cognition.

Because the subject is like its object only in concept, the subject is concretely isolated from its objects. This results, for Rosenzweig, in the “absolute occlusion of the self”<sup>3</sup> which is the consequence of its transcendence from the world of cognition. The solitary idealist self must therefore turn to a means of concretely relating itself to the non-I through a system of ethics. However, this ethics can proceed in no other way than through rationality, according to idealism, in the self’s submission to a universal.<sup>4</sup> Concrete action must be governed by universal reason. Hence, says Rosenzweig, while generation moves from the universal to the particular, ethics closes the circle of reason by way of return, moving from the particular to the universal.

The universal law must be identified either with the subject’s own cognition or with divine cognition. If it is identified with the subject’s cognition, then the subject’s efforts to relate to what is outside itself results in relating only to itself. Things fare no better, however, if the universal law is identified with God. For Rosenzweig, idealism defines God ultimately not as an

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>4</sup> Rosenzweig clearly has Kant’s account of ethics in mind here. See *ibid.*: “The path upward begins with that original submission of the ‘maxim’ of one’s own will...to the principle of a universal legislation.”



I or a He, but as an It, as absolute spirit. Rosenzweig then claims that in idealism, spirit is but another name for what the self is; hence, “reason has triumphed, the end merges again with the beginning, the highest object of thought is thought itself; nothing is inaccessible to reason.”<sup>5</sup> The completion of the rational circle of thought is the pride and joy of idealism, but this comes at a cost: “God and man are reduced to the marginal concept: subject of cognition; world and man on the other hand to the marginal concept of a mere object of this subject.”<sup>6</sup> Because idealism seeks to operate and find its completion through reason alone, it finally succeeds by identifying the human being as subject, reducing God to that self-same subject, and identifying the world and other human beings as objects of this subjective cognition. Rosenzweig concludes that idealism collapses in on itself. The richness of reality has been truncated, failing to do justice to the *experience* of God and the world as separate and unquantifiable domains.<sup>7</sup>

The implication of this criticism of idealism for its model of sociality is that other persons, as members of the world of subjective cognition, are truncated by and absorbed into the rational subject. Others are rightly related to when they are properly ordered within a universal system of rationality. Sociality is enacted when other persons are recognized as representatives of universal reason and the subject fulfills its obligation to treat other persons as such. For Rosenzweig, such a view fails to account for the living event of real human relationships which are bound to each other in love and spontaneous action. Idealism only knows of relationships which are necessary, universal, and obligatory. A consequence of Rosenzweig’s analysis, then, is that idealism’s account of sociality is decisively lacking, and the root of this lack can be traced back to idealism’s reductive account of the subject as ontologically comprehensive.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, 188: “The monumental error of Idealism consisted in thinking that the All was really wholly contained in its ‘generation of the All. Our fragmentation of the All in the first Part should have disposed of this error.”

Because Rosenzweig sees idealism as the culmination of the whole philosophical project “from Iona to Jena,”<sup>8</sup> that is, from Parmenides to Hegel, he implicates all of philosophy in his critique. In particular, Rosenzweig argues that because idealism thought it could account for reality by simply replacing the concept of creation, it neglected (or defanged) the concept of revelation. Idealism thought that revelation, because of its appeal to something beyond reason, should be left on the sidelines in the construction of a system of philosophy. Rosenzweig argues that revelation in fact provides the crucial elements of language, temporality, and love, each of which is needed to account for genuine sociality. First, however, I turn to the way in which Rosenzweig offers his pluriform ontology as an alternative to idealism’s account of ontology.

### **Rosenzweig’s Ontology**

Rosenzweig’s model of sociality arises out of his articulation of ontology in *The Star*, much as Gadamer’s view arises from the ontology developed in *Truth and Method*. However, instead of a participatory model of ontology in which being exists as its historical manifestations, Rosenzweig’s view of reality begins as a dismantling of the notion of being in general, which he designates as the “All,” which he claims that German idealism has attempted to capture. Rosenzweig believes that the prime mistake of idealism was to begin from a unity, the concept of the All, which all beings participate in, and instead argues that God, the world, and human beings each exemplify a reality, *an All*, that denies that the other elements have an ontological share in it. Hence, we could say that Rosenzweig begins with three ontologies, three different articulations of the ways in which things can be, instead of one ontology.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>9</sup> Rosenzweig writes that *death* is the origin of the philosophy of the All, as well as the break in its totality. The philosophy of the All, as exemplified in idealism, is a defense mechanism erected in order to ward off the fear of death. The unthinkability of death drives us to posit totalizing explanations, masking the fact that only the individual can die. Rosenzweig labels death as “the Nought,” or “the Nothing,” against which the “Aught,” or the something, or the positum, the positive, is asserted. Materialism and idealism both try to explain the All, or everything, in terms of themselves, rejecting anything which claims independence, claims to escape from the grasp of totality.

In line with this idea, Part One of Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* sets out each of the three elements of the "All," God, the world, and the human, as having its existence solely in itself, not being derivable from any of the other elements.<sup>10</sup> On Rosenzweig's view, each irreducible element appears initially in a position of autonomy, self-sufficient, and resistant to being put in relationship with another element. He writes, "The three elements may appear to lie side by side in calm fixity, each with a one-and-all feeling about its own existence that is blind to whatever is outside. In this respect they are all three mutually equivalent...Not merely the world but man and God too are configurations enclosed within themselves and inspired with their own spirit."<sup>11</sup> Thus, God, the world, and the human being are elements which initially appear as self-sufficient, none of which experiences a need for an element outside of itself to constitute itself.

Rosenzweig's argument against idealism on this score claims that idealism ultimately reduces God and the world to the self-consciousness of the human being.<sup>12</sup> In part, Rosenzweig assents to idealism's own view of itself, affirming that the self in its initial position remains "without a view beyond its walls...fixing its own interior with a defiant gaze, incapable of

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Rosenzweig sees Hegel as a prime example of a philosophy which seeks to integrate everything into itself. Rosenzweig notes that Kierkegaard rejects this integration on the basis of his sinful consciousness and becomes the forerunner of the "new philosophy." The new philosophy maintains that philosophy must now travel through the individual human, as an element alienated from world and God. Rosenzweig's project is to distinguish between the human, the world, and God, and analyze them according to their own natures without reducing them to their others. Rosenzweig writes, "They are the Noughts to which the critique of Kant, the dialectician, reduced the objects of rational theology, cosmology, and psychology, the three 'rational sciences' of his time. We mean to restore them, not as objects of rational sciences but, quite the contrary, as 'irrational' objects." Ibid., 19. Thus, Rosenzweig has in mind the inverse of Kant's project. While Kant starts from rational sciences and ultimately ends up in unknowability, Rosenzweig starts from the Noughts, unknowabilities, and hopes to end up with a positive system.

<sup>10</sup> Strictly speaking, Rosenzweig claims that the All of idealism is here shattered into three Alls.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Pollock suggests that Rosenzweig argues against Fichte and Hegel in Part One and against Schelling in Part Two. See Benjamin Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5, 9, who argues that "Rosenzweig understood this [as a] task...of grasping, articulating, and indeed realizing truth as the identity and difference of 'All' that is. A 'system of philosophy,' as Rosenzweig understood it, seeks to understand all beings both in their plurality as diverse, different beings, and at the same time insofar as they share in a single, common unity...According to Rosenzweig, the German Idealist systems fail to grasp the inherent difference of individual beings – their particularity and finitude – because they assume the unity and, indeed, the divinity of 'the All' as primordial or original. Rosenzweig, to the contrary, conceives of this ultimate unity of all that is as the redemptive goal toward which all beings strive."

sighting anything alien except there in its own sphere and therefore only as its own property, hoarding all ethical norms within its own ethos so that the self was and remained lord of its ethos.”<sup>13</sup> Rosenzweig severely qualifies idealism’s claim by arguing that although the human being asserts itself as the lord of being, in reality both God and the world remain entities whose existence remains fully independent of the human and which stand against the human.<sup>14</sup>

Rosenzweig describes this “lordly” human being as *metaethical*, that is, evaluatively separate from God and the world. On this account, the human being is characterized by a kind of self-effectuated transcendence through the juxtaposition of the oppositional characteristics of *self* and *personality*. Self is inwardness and isolation while personality is bound up with society and its roles. At some point in a person’s life, which has been hitherto immersed in “personality,” it becomes a self: becoming a distinctive individual in isolation from its society, it lives only from its own solitude.<sup>15</sup> Rather than fusing together, self and personality alternate: what starts out as a socialized personality *becomes* a self, which in turn has the capacity to enter into cultural life, thereby temporarily renouncing itself *qua* self. Despite the fact that the human being can enter into social life in some respect, the enclosed and isolated nature of the self becomes the prime characteristic of the human being. In Part Two of the *Star*, Rosenzweig will show how this introverted human self becomes transformed, once and for all, into a “soul.”

### **The Initiative of Revelation**

In order for the elements to enter into a genuine relationship with one another, Rosenzweig argues that a *gratuitous initiative* is needed which can unlock the enclosedness of

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<sup>13</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> See Nathan Rotenstreich, “Rosenzweig’s Notion of Metaethics,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988), 82: “Rosenzweig’s description of the position of man, which he called metaethical, is meant to cut the basic tie between the human individual and the human whole or mankind.”

<sup>15</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 71. One could draw a parallel here to Heidegger’s concept of becoming an authentic self from its existence as a “they-self.” See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 167.

the elements upon themselves.<sup>16</sup> Neither the human self nor the world possesses the requisite initiative to truly engage the other elements.<sup>17</sup> This is important to note, in that the self, on Rosenzweig's view, is not characterized by openness as it is for Gadamer. Rosenzweig's positioning of the elements in his description of reality disallows a sociality stemming from openness. Rather, in order to rightly relate to others, for genuine sociality to come into shape, the individual must be disrupted from out of her self-enclosure, and Rosenzweig is emphatic that the self does not possess an ability to propel itself into sociality. On Rosenzweig's view, then, God is the only element which contains in itself the resources to accomplish genuine relationality. From the perspective of the first part of *The Star*, however, "how this is to happen, how one is to free the tongue and unlock the eye of the self, that is quite beyond the imagination of the self as we know it hitherto."<sup>18</sup> That is, although Rosenzweig will claim that it is God's initiative which sets in motion the relationship between the elements, it is so far unclear how or why this can happen, given Rosenzweig's claim that even God appears enclosed within himself.<sup>19</sup>

The second part of *The Star* begins to answer the questions left open in the first part, namely, the manner in which the elements of reality are to come into relationship with one another. Rosenzweig articulated the being of God in Part One as vitality, which is the admixture of divine essence and divine freedom.<sup>20</sup> Rosenzweig argues against views of "divine caprice"

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<sup>16</sup> See Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig*, 175: "The elements must turn outside themselves, as it were, because they do not have the tools, each within itself, to secure themselves over against their nothings any further than they have through the factual 'Yes' 'And' 'No.' For each element to be what it is – and not to fall back into nothing – we discover, it must enter into relation with its others."

<sup>17</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 61: The world "is entitled to remain blind and deaf as long as God does not strive and man does not speak." See also, *ibid.*, 78: "the self lacks all bridges and connections; it is turned in upon itself exclusively."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> See Rotenstreich, "Rosenzweig's Notion of Metaethics," 87, who notes that Rosenzweig's "whole anthropological approach is characterized by an attempt to make self-enclosure so radical that only revelation and divine miracles can open the 'doors' or 'windows.'"

<sup>20</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 49. For Rosenzweig, God in his vitality is composed of essence and freedom: one part a static necessity of being and one part the dynamic caprice of action. Joining together act and being, Rosenzweig's God is both constant and charismatic, both continuity and capable of discontinuity. For the

which argue that God creates in absolute freedom, but he also rejects the view that God creates out of necessity *simpliciter*. Rosenzweig thinks rather that God's creative activity is grounded in the necessity of his essence, but that this essence is a dynamic, vital essence rather than a static essence. Thus, God has no need to enter into relations with the world *qua* the concealed dimension of his nature, but does need to create *qua* the manifest dimension of his nature.<sup>21</sup> In this way, Rosenzweig is able to maintain that God can be both essentially enclosed within himself *and* an element which in his structure relates to the other elements, first through creation, then through revelation.<sup>22</sup>

A layer of complexity is added when discussing the sociality of divine-human relations in addition to interhuman relations. Gadamer's ontology does not have a specified place for God, and therefore his model of sociality does not explicitly address the divine.<sup>23</sup> Although Levinas discusses the dimension of the divine, he is clear that any proposed relationship to God should not alter one's relationship with another human being. The subject's relation to God is ancillary to the question of ethics, on Levinas's account. Rosenzweig, by contrast, expects that the human being should relate both to God and to other human beings, and that the relation to God conditions genuine relations with others. Thus, what constitutes "genuine" sociality will look different on an expanded ontological outlook than on a more purely "immanent" ontology, that is, an ontology which remains on the human plane. The question and complexity of the human-

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background to this set of claims, see Friedrich Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany, NY: SUNY University Press, 2000), 3-49. See in particular, *ibid.*, 5: "Even though the God who is necessary is the God who is free, both are still one and the same. What is a being from nature and what is as such through freedom are completely different. If God were already everything from necessity, then God would be nothing through freedom. And yet God is, according to general consensus, the most voluntaristic being...Even this 'nature' of God is living, nay, it is the highest vitality, and it is not to be expressed so bluntly. Only by progressing from the simple to the complex, through gradual creation, could we hope to reach the full concept of this vitality."

<sup>21</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 114-116.

<sup>22</sup> Explaining this distinction in another way, Rotenstreich writes that "the revelation of God is a special act and is not a continuity of the essence of God." Rotenstreich, "Rosenzweig's Notion of Metaethics," 72.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer does, however, at times situate his thought in relation to theology.

divine relationship will remain with us through the rest of the project, yet for Rosenzweig, as well as for Levinas and Bonhoeffer, the self's relationship with God does not replace its relationship with other human beings. Rather, sociality is granted a richer vitality, and, for Rosenzweig, human sociality becomes *authentic* only in the context of the relationship with God.

For Rosenzweig, the initiative of God in the act of revelation is what sets the three elements into relation with each other, breaking the occlusion of the self necessitated by the systems of idealism.<sup>24</sup> Revelation is delivered first and foremost in the modality of love, in contrast to the modality of cognition. God reveals himself not as a content to be grasped but as a person to be loved. This fact has several consequences. The person to whom God reveals himself experiences love in the genuine sense for the first time. This love opens up the individual, granting her temporality, speech, and concrete action toward others. The human being who receives revelation thereby receives these features for the first time. Rosenzweig claims that genuine sociality cannot come about apart from love, temporality, and language, and therefore that this sociality does not come about apart from revelation. In what follows, I describe God's initiative of revelation as unlocking the capacity to love others, highlighting how these features constitute a break with idealism, in Rosenzweig's view.

Rosenzweig defines revelation in a broad sense and in a narrow sense,<sup>25</sup> roughly corresponding to the distinction between general and special revelation.<sup>26</sup> Rosenzweig's broad

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<sup>24</sup> Pollock writes, "Revelation, in the broad sense, names for Rosenzweig the opening up of God, world, and human being to each other in relation." Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig*, 185. In my view, this articulation of revelation as an activity of each of the elements mischaracterizes the way in which revelation proceeds from the initiative of God alone. Pollock continues on to say, "To realize the very self that it is, the notion of revelation thus suggests, each element must seek out the completion of its own self in its relation with its others" Ibid., 186. Although it is correct to say, on Rosenzweig's view, that each of the elements *needs* to be placed in relation with its others, it is much less clear that either the self or the world can be said to "seek out" relationality.

<sup>25</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 161, where he speaks of a "second" and "narrower" revelation.

<sup>26</sup> See Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 240, which defines general revelation as "God's self-disclosure and self-communication in the universe and the created world," and special revelation as "God's particular self-revelation at specific times and

definition of revelation is God's reaching out both to the world and to humans through his word.<sup>27</sup> Thus, according to this first sense of revelation, God's act of creation is also a revealing of his word to the world. The narrow, or second form of revelation, is God's specific self-presentation to the human self in speech, in the particular moment. According to Rosenzweig, this narrower revelation illuminates the revelation of creation, making creation known as God's action for the world. Thus, the two revelations bear a unique relationship to one another with respect to chronology and epistemology: the general revelation appears in the world prior to the particular revelation, but is only known as such posterior to the second revelation. Put otherwise, while God first creates the world and speaks his word to this creation, he only subsequently gives it true speech through humanity in revelation, and it is thus only through this revelation that the world can be recognized as creation at all. Hence, God's special revelation to human beings has epistemological priority, although not chronological priority.<sup>28</sup>

Rosenzweig claims that revelation, in its narrow and proper sense, is *self*-revelation. Thus, God's speaking in and to creation is not itself a revelation of love. Rosenzweig writes in his analysis of Genesis 1 that "God speaks...but so far he does not speak himself, not yet as self."<sup>29</sup> Rosenzweig is convinced that it is a mistake to wholly identify revelation with God's activity in creation, for then God's "factuality," the experience humans have of him, could fade

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places and to particular people." Rosenzweig is less confident that God's activity in creation is truly a *self*-revelation.

<sup>27</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 111: "the divine word...is revelation only because it is at the same time the word of creation."

<sup>28</sup> Historical revelation bears witness to creation, to the providence of God in the world, and "possesses its own space and time." Rosenzweig says it is grounded in the historical event of the revelation of the divine name. This historical revelation is of the narrower, self-presentational type, but as an historical event, it is experienceable only second-hand. Hence, while it is important for the foundation of the historical community and its witness to revelation, it cannot itself be the ground for temporality, language, or love, as it is not directly experienceable as such. See *ibid.*, 187-188.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 154. God, too, bears a kind of relational deficiency prior to revelation, on Rosenzweig's view. He writes that God "is an I which...contains the Thou immediately, an I which discourses only with itself and can discourse only with itself. It is, thus, an impersonal I, an I that still remains within itself, which does not step outside of itself in the Thou, does not reveal itself but, like the metaphysical God of the protocosmos, is alive only within itself." *Ibid.*



into obscurity by being reduced to a statically available idea, a single occurrence, or a historical process.<sup>30</sup> Hence, God's self-revelation must be of such a character as to be able to be experienced ever-afresh, and it must be a revelation of God's own self. This is why the historical revelation of the divine name to Moses, while indeed being a self-revelation and sufficient to ground the religious community, is insufficient to ground the inversion of the occluded self into the relational self. What makes this possible is that divine revelation *presently speaks* to the human self in the mode of *love*.

### **Revelation as Love**

For Rosenzweig, the intentionality of love is the act which fulfills the requirements of the personal character of self-revelation. The love of the lover is a giving of oneself to the beloved in the self-sacrifice of revealing oneself.<sup>31</sup> For Rosenzweig, love is an act, an event, rather than an attribute.<sup>32</sup> Hence he concludes that "God's love is ever wholly of the moment and to the point at which it is directed."<sup>33</sup> If love were an attribute, it would be eternal, necessary, and hence bound up with the universal rationality espoused in idealism. Rosenzweig thus rejects any abstracted notion of the "love of God" which floats in eternity apart from a concrete beloved. Instead, divine self-revelation is principally expressed in the momentary and self-giving act of love.

On Rosenzweig's account, the force of the love of God on the human being punctures the isolated and inwardly-focused self, transforming it into a soul. Rosenzweig writes that it is only "in the love of God that the flower of the soul begins to grow out of the rock of the self.

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<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, 160. See also Rosenzweig's analysis of what he calls "atheistic theology," that is, concepts of revelation which tend to flatten out the transcendence of God to human thought or activity, thus paving the way for modern, Feuerbachian atheism, in his essay "Atheistic Theology," in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 17-19.

<sup>31</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 162: "It is love which meets all the demands here made on the concept of the revealer...Only the love of a lover is such a continually renewed self-sacrifice; it is only he who gives himself away in love."

<sup>32</sup> See *ibid.*, 164: "love is not an attribute, but an event."

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Previously man had been a senseless and speechless introvert; only now is he – beloved soul.”<sup>34</sup> Rosenzweig defines the soul in contrast to his earlier articulation of the self: a soul is that which is able to enter into genuine relationships with what is outside of itself, while the self remains occluded in its own seclusion.<sup>35</sup> Rosenzweig maintains that the self cannot of its own resources transform its introversion into sociality; “a shock was necessary before the self could become beloved soul.”<sup>36</sup> What occurs in revelation is a rupturing of the self and a constitution of a soul, the creation of receptivity in what had previously been self-enclosed.

Because love confronts the individual without the individual being able to absorb the love into its own rational territory, it disarms the self’s defenses. The individual finds herself responding in contentment and humility.<sup>37</sup> Because the self was not an inert object, but rather a force, it contained the potential for outwardly-directed activity. The magnetism of defiance which turned the self in on itself, once unlocked by revelation, serves to draw the transformed soul to God in faithful trust.

### **Revelation as Temporality**

As noted above, Rosenzweig holds that the revelation of divine love is a moment-by-moment, contingent event which eludes the grasp of the universal reason extolled by idealism. This quality of love is significant for Rosenzweig’s alternative to idealism because it enables a dimension of temporality which is unavailable to idealism and which is necessary for true sociality. Specifically, Rosenzweig argues that the experience of the open-endedness of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 82: “Soul would mean stepping out of the introverted confinement.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>37</sup> Rosenzweig says that this response may occur because the soul had already “wanted” love. Rosenzweig speculates that perhaps this desire was buried in the self only to become realized in the experience of being loved. However, because love is concentrated only on the present moment, on Rosenzweig’s view, the question of why or how the soul was able to respond to this love fades in view of the experience of the love itself. Rosenzweig does, nevertheless, characterize the transformation of the self as a conversion of defiance into humility and faithfulness.

present moment is necessary for genuine relationships to occur.<sup>38</sup> But this open-ended quality of the present moment is not available for idealism because idealism dictates (1) that the objects of reason be circumscribed and therefore *past* in order that reason be complete and (2) that sociality is rooted in universal reason and hence is separated from temporality. Because of the demand of idealism to locate relations with others in reason, sociality is inevitably locked in the past, unable to account for the openness of the experience of the present. Rosenzweig maintains, then, that revelation alone provides the experience of temporality which is lacking in idealist thought.

Rosenzweig argues that idealist attempts to understand the world project it in thought as a completed object, something which can be grasped precisely because it is past. He writes, “all concepts which comprehend reality generally seek to assume the form of the past tense. To be recognized, the world is projected every time into the past.”<sup>39</sup> For Rosenzweig, something that is past is in itself barred from true relationality, for to be in relation means to be incomplete, unfinished, while the world as an object of knowledge would be figured as completed.

The key to opening up the world as creation, as God’s first relation with the other elements, therefore lies in opening the elements up to each other in temporality. But genuine temporality is not available to idealist philosophy in itself, which either tries to understand reality in thought alone, separated from temporality, or from the point of view which considers things only in their past. Rosenzweig argues that the elements can only be understood from the category of *experience*, which starts from *living* rather than mere thinking. Thus, Rosenzweig claims that

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<sup>38</sup> See Franz Rosenzweig, “The New Thinking,” in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 125-126, where he posits that genuine sociality needs time to unfold in the back and forth of conversation: “Speaking is time-bound, time-nourished; it neither can nor will abandon this, its nourishing environment; it does not know in advance where it will arrive; it lets its cues be given by others. It lives in general from the life of the other, where the audience of the narration or the respondent in the dialogue or the cospeaker in a chorus; whereas thinking is always solitary, even if it is happening among several ‘symphilosophizing’ partners.” Rosenzweig maintains that while the “old thinking,” best exemplified in idealism, operates in isolation and without regard for experiencing time, the new thinking is predicated upon “needing the other and, what amounts to the same, on taking time seriously.” Ibid. 127.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 132.

the theological category of particular revelation, God's second relation to what is outside of himself, provides the experience requisite to understand the elements in relation to one another, or what amounts to the same thing, revelation offers to human beings genuine temporality.<sup>40</sup> True experience and true temporality, then, for Rosenzweig coincide, and it is only from this standpoint that philosophy, which adopts theology's category of revelation, can truly come to an understanding of the elements of the All.<sup>41</sup> Thus Rosenzweig proposes an "absolute empiricism"<sup>42</sup> as the methodology best appropriate to articulating reality. This "empiricism" is a philosophy of experience which takes revelation as its presupposition.<sup>43</sup>

Hence, Rosenzweig claims that it is only revelation which can break the idealist transfixion on the past and bring it to true experience in and of the present.<sup>44</sup> And it is the mode of revelation as love, in its character as being located solely in the present moment, which makes possible experience and genuine temporality. Rosenzweig writes that only in the momentary expression of revelation "will the thing emerge from its subjective past into its vital present."<sup>45</sup> Human beings can only experience the present as truly and temporally open from the revelation

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<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, he writes, "What God has done, what He is doing and what He will do; what has happened to the world, what will happen to it, what happens to man, what he will do – all this cannot be disconnected from temporality." Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking," 124.

<sup>41</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking," 138.

<sup>43</sup> See Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Franz Rosenzweig's Concept of Philosophical Faith," in *Leo Baeck Institutional Yearbook*, 34 (1989), 366: "Broadly defined, revelation thus becomes the overarching fact of experience." Here I argue against Peter Gordon, who maintains that "like Heidegger, Rosenzweig subscribes to the ontological-hermeneutical thesis that it is temporal, human existence itself that first constitutes the ground of meaning." Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 183. While Gordon rightly emphasizes the basic temporal constitution of meaning, insofar as he omits that that it is revelation which makes possible this experience of meaning, he appears to fall subject to Rosenzweig's critique of Goethe's purely immanent temporality which lacks "the eternal for support." Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 288. While Gordon rightly emphasizes Rosenzweig's dictum that "eternity cannot go beyond time" (ibid.), it is revelation which comes to the human being apart from its own resources that properly grants the human being its true temporality which is the experience of relationship.

<sup>44</sup> See ibid., 157: "For the soul, revelation means the experience of a present."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 161.

of God's love, on Rosenzweig's view. It is this very experience of the present which enables the human to become "unfinished" and to begin to form relations with what is external to it.

### **Revelation and Dialogue**

Rosenzweig claims that the medium of God's self-revelation to human beings is *linguistic*.<sup>46</sup> This claim is significant for two reasons. First, with respect to his argument against idealism, language in the mode of speech is a personal medium, rather than the impersonal media of logic and of art which idealism extolls. In particular, God relates to humans in a dialogical rather than monological mode, requiring the interaction between the divine and human persons. Revelation takes place through the medium of dialogue. Second, it is this personal mode of revelation which enables human speech to attain genuine sociality with other persons. I will treat both of these claims in turn.

One of the most distinctive and vibrant parts of *The Star of Redemption* is the description of the dialogue which Rosenzweig envisions as occurring between God and the soul. This dialogue functions as the medium of divine love to the human being in which the linguistic response of the soul plays a vital role. On Rosenzweig's account, the dialogue between God and the soul unfalteringly unfolds as a back and forth movement: the locating call of God and the soul's readiness to hear, followed by the imperative call of God to the human being, which engenders the response (and responsiveness) of the soul in the love of God, to which God replies and the soul in turn responds in prayer. These are the words: "Where art thou?" – "Here I am." – "Love me!" – "I have sinned," – nevertheless, "I am thine." – "I have called thee by name: thou art mine." – "my God, my God."<sup>47</sup> The content of the revelation expressed in this dialogue is the command to love God (as well as the concomitant command to love the neighbor). However, this

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<sup>46</sup> See *ibid.*, 110, where Rosenzweig describes language as the "organon of revelation."

<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*, 175-184.

dialogue also exhibits what Rosenzweig takes to be essential in personal relationships. Self-revelation, expressed in language, requires the vulnerability involved in the declaration of love. Further, the dialogue between God and the soul unfolds as the expression of *mutual* love: as lover, God commands the soul to love, and the soul acquiesces to this command.<sup>48</sup>

Rosenzweig now claims that the divine act of revelation engenders the use of language in a new and genuine sense. He writes, “language, for all it is all there, all created from the beginning, nevertheless awakes to real vitality only in revelation.”<sup>49</sup> That is, although Rosenzweig grants that human beings are fundamentally linguistic beings, that language is a feature of one’s personality as a person embedded in society, human speech only becomes true speech in the encounter with revelation.

Recall that Rosenzweig endeavors in Part One to maintain the separation of the human self from its others. He writes that “the criterion of the self” is that “it keeps silent.”<sup>50</sup> For Rosenzweig, the tragic hero of Greek drama illustrates the language of the self: a monologue which really amounts to silence and withdrawal into the self. Rosenzweig maintains that “the self does not express itself, it is buried within itself. As soon as it enters into conversation, however, it ceases to be self. It is self only as long as it is alone.”<sup>51</sup> Here, Rosenzweig admits, through the example of the tragic hero on the stage, that the human being can enter into a dialogue with other persons, and this prior to any divine act of revelation.

However, he argues that this interhuman “dialogue does not create any relation between two wills because each of these wills can only will its isolation.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, will is an

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<sup>48</sup> Rosenzweig says that the beloved’s love first exists as “an awe compounded of humility and pride, together with a feeling of dependence and of being securely sheltered,” but is first expressed as shame. See *ibid.*, 168 and 179.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

operation of the self, which is lost when entering into a dialogue. The self, the only thing that can exercise a person's will, does not show up in a conversation, as Rosenzweig continually emphasizes: "the self lacks all bridges and connections; it is turned in upon itself exclusively...It remains self only in its complete speechlessness and unrelatedness."<sup>53</sup> Here we can see a particular deficiency of the person prior to her experience of revelation, who Rosenzweig will call the "pagan." The pagan can relate to others through language, in dialogue, but once she does so, she loses her individuality and her capacity to will.<sup>54</sup> Thus, persons cannot relate to each other on a volitional level. This suggests that persons can neither really will to agree nor to disagree with each other in conversation; they often are simply talking past one another.<sup>55</sup> While persons are able to communicate with one another in dialogue prior to divine revelation, they are not able to present themselves as a whole. By contrast, divine revelation enables the human being to truly speak for the first time, that is, to truly engage in *self*-revelation toward others.

Despite the fact that the human being is opened up to sociality for the first time in divine revelation and the dialogue contained therein, the soul is not fulfilled in this encounter with

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>54</sup> In explaining Rosenzweig's contrast between the pagan and the "fanatic," who wants to forcibly drag revelation and the kingdom of God in a particular direction, Leora Batnitzky writes, "the pagan remains open to revelation, to becoming a witness, while the fanatic does not. Even though the pagan is self-absorbed, the pagan recognizes her finitude" Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48. She further claims that the pagan is "is capable of proper performance in relation to God and other people, while the fanatic is not." Ibid., 58. Batnitzky here is too optimistic with regard to the pagan's capacities. Instead, the pagan in herself, is *not* open to revelation, nor is she capable of proper relation to God and others, on Rosenzweig's view. The thrust of Batnitzky's claim is that the fanatic is violently coercive in a way that the pagan is not, and thus the pagan occupies a kind of superior ground in this regard. I agree with this qualified claim. But I do not think that the pagan can be said to "open" to the divine of her own resources.

<sup>55</sup> Rosenzweig does think that the secluded selfhood of the self is comprehensible and communicable, not through word but through art. He writes, "Prior to any real human speech, art creates, as the speech of the unspeakable, a first, speechless, mutual comprehension." Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 81. Although persons cannot verbalize their selfhood to others in the context of conversation, the self can be expressed through the work of art. This means that selfhood cannot be directly expressed from one person to another, but rather it needs the impersonal dimension of art in order to act as medium for the understanding of another's self. See also *ibid.*, 147: "Not the word but art is the true language for the world prior to the miracle of revelation...the reality of art, as work of art, is not speech but something itself spoken vis a vis the lifestream reality of real language. Were it still speech here too, then it would be a language beside speech, and while there may be many languages, there is but one speech."

divine love. Rather, she finds herself longing for relations which are wholly worldly, and indeed, being propelled into human community by divine revelation itself. Rosenzweig writes, “the soul aspires beyond this [divine] love to the realm of brotherliness, the bond of a supernatural community, wholly personal in its experience yet wholly worldly in its existence.”<sup>56</sup> Thus I take up in the next sections Rosenzweig’s account of the genuine human community, in which human sociality finds its fulfillment, as the alternative to the idealist system of ethics.

### **The Love of Neighbor**

The human being can come into authentic relationships with others once she has gained the ability to love, for love is the genuine mode of self-revelation and therefore the genuine mode of sociality, on Rosenzweig’s view.<sup>57</sup> Rosenzweig argues that the love of God does not bind the soul in private, mystical dialogue; rather, it prepares the soul for love in human community. The soul is ultimately not fulfilled in the exclusivity of the human-divine encounter. After being opened up to what is outside itself, the soul finds a longing for brotherliness, for relations with that which belongs to the same plane of existence and can relate to the soul in solidarity. By definition, then, God cannot fulfill this longing. The soul must abandon the immediate dialogue with God and speak to others in what now has become her own voice. And her voice speaks to others in just the way she has found herself spoken to: through the self-revelation of love.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Rosenzweig claims that God’s command to the human being to love God himself at the same time contains the command to love others as well.<sup>59</sup> Rosenzweig asserts, “The love

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, 214: “Man can express himself in the act of love only after he has first become a soul awakened by God. It is only in being loved by God that the soul can make of its act of love more than a mere act, can make of it, that is, the fulfillment of a – commandment to love.”

<sup>58</sup> See *ibid.*, 204: “If this longing is to be fulfilled, then the beloved soul must cross the magic circle of belovedness, forget the lover, and itself open its mouth, not for answer but for her own word.” See also, *ibid.*, 205: “All commandments which derive from that primeval ‘love me!’ ultimately merge in the all-inclusive ‘love thy neighbor!’”

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



for man, in being commanded by God, is directly derived from the love for God. The love for God is to express itself in love for one's neighbor. It is for this reason that love of neighbor can and must be commanded."<sup>60</sup> Thus the imperative declaration for the love of God requires love for the soul's neighbor. Rosenzweig notes the peculiarity of this demand, that love is commanded, and this command is considered to be a paradigmatic expression of love. Nevertheless, he maintains that this command is the truly immediate expression of love and that "the declaration of love is in reality always too late."<sup>61</sup> What we might think of as the proper expression of love, "I love you," Rosenzweig claims is in fact derivative, the after effect of the more primordial expression found in the command to the beloved to love the lover. On Rosenzweig's view, the declaration of love in the formalized "I love you" is *considered*, and therefore posterior to the actual moment of love. The mature soul learns that to love God in return is also to implant itself in the world, carrying about the love of God to its neighbor.

Rosenzweig argues further that the love of neighbor is made possible *only* through the love of God made manifest in the revelational encounter with God. He writes, "Only the soul beloved of God can receive the commandment to love its neighbor and fulfill it. Ere man can turn himself over to God's will, God must first have turned to man."<sup>62</sup> This is a corollary of Rosenzweig's claim that the self, prior to revelation, is self-enclosed, incapable of true love. Here also we see Rosenzweig's commitment to the necessity of the initiative of God for the human being to have the ability to respond to God's commands. Only because God has revealed his love to the soul can the soul then reflect and embody that love to its neighbors.<sup>63</sup> Further, Rosenzweig maintains that the love of the soul toward others, as love, is enacted in the same

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>63</sup> See also *ibid.*, 218: "man 'first' received the revelation and 'thereupon' prepared himself for the world act."

temporal modality as God's love. Genuine human love, too, is always concentrated in the moment, unconcerned in itself with the time which surrounds it.<sup>64</sup>

For Rosenzweig, the way in which the soul's love mirrors the divine act of love is a crucial feature of the soul's action in the world, and he contrasts this view with what he takes to be Islam's conception of human action as a reflection of divine revelation. Islam becomes for Rosenzweig a kind of religious stand-in for idealism, particularly the universal and necessary account of ethics in idealism. On Rosenzweig's account of Islam, revelation is an attribute of God and thus necessary and universal, once and for all, as opposed to the contingent and particular revelation Rosenzweig has described thus far.<sup>65</sup> From the point of view of Rosenzweig's *Star*, for Islam, love is only a statically-proceeding mercy, and hence it is only a one-way affair.<sup>66</sup> God does not reveal himself, but a content. Rosenzweig argues that Islam's submission is not a quiet stance of the soul, but a string of acts of obligation.<sup>67</sup> Love is not received passively, but through constant action. Here, God is passive, and the human is active, in contrast to Rosenzweig's account of the initiative of God acting upon the inert self.<sup>68</sup>

Rosenzweig then argues that Islam's view of human responsibility reflects its view of divine revelatory action, just as the view of human responsibility that comes out of Judaism and Christianity mirrors its conception of God's activity. Thus, Rosenzweig claims that in Islam, the individual is bound permanently to a subservience to the static law, while on his own view, true love of neighbor is entirely spontaneous and free, because it is love.<sup>69</sup> In this way, Rosenzweig

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<sup>64</sup> See *ibid.*, 215: "Love of neighbor always...must be an act of love wholly lost in the (present) moment."

<sup>65</sup> See *ibid.*, 165: "In Islam, revelation is externalized from God as necessarily...as is creation."

<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.*, 166: "Here in Islam, revelation is not a living event between God and man, an occurrence into which God himself enters even unto his own complete self-negation, his divine self-sacrifice."

<sup>67</sup> See *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>68</sup> See *ibid.*, 172.

<sup>69</sup> Describing the difference, Rosenzweig writes that in Islam, the inner form of action in the world "is subservience by volition to the prescription established once and for all; in love of neighbor [by contrast] it is the ever-new disruption of the permanent mold of character by the eve-unexpected eruption of the act of love." *Ibid.*, 216.

asserts that the Muslim responds to God in the world not through love but through obligation. In Islam, adherence to the law means giving authority to the past, while in Judaism, following the command to love means privileging the present. Here, Rosenzweig suggests that Muslim ethics finds its secular counterpart in Kantian ethics, where the emphasis falls on following the universal law as opposed to individuality and relationship.<sup>70</sup>

Rosenzweig thus maintains that in Islam, revelation is given statically and universally, and therefore the only response is to act toward others in the same way. Because a law is given as a universal content, and not as living dialogue, the human being engages in social relations not through living dialogue, not through the particularity of love, but through obligation to the law. True sociality fails here because there is no precedent for individual and privileged relationship with another particular being. The act of love given in the moment is crucial for Rosenzweig's ideas because it establishes relationality in time, because it signifies a relationship with a person rather than with a law, and because it makes possible the love for neighbor as an end in itself, rather than one's action toward the neighbor being a means to fulfilling the law. By targeting Islam as consisting in obligation to the universal law, Rosenzweig is able to identify a common weakness in what he takes to be his main philosophical and religious competitors.<sup>71</sup>

### **Love of Neighbor as Ethics**

In setting a universalized model of ethics as a contrast to his own view, Rosenzweig situates his account in the sphere of ethical theory. That is, Rosenzweig provides his view of the

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<sup>70</sup> See *ibid.*, 217: "This straightforward, obedient piety is based on a free self-denial ever laboriously regained. And it finds an exact counterpart, strangely enough, in the secular piety of more recent times which freely conforms to universal law. The ethics of Kant and his followers, for instance..."

<sup>71</sup> Rosenzweig's criticisms of Islam have themselves garnered considerable criticism. See for example Jean Axlerad Cahan, "Rosenzweig's Dialectic of Defiance and Critique of Islam," in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 9 (1999), 3, who writes that on this score, "Rosenzweig regressed to the very Hegelian methodology he set out to overthrow. In his treatment of Islam he engaged in a speculative historical or anthropological typology of religions similar to that presented by Hegel in the *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion* and elsewhere."

love of neighbor as an alternative to competing views of what it means to live and act rightly in the world, both religious and philosophical. Rosenzweig can therefore be described as recommending a kind of ethics, in the sense of prescribing for the human being a normative orientation in the world. We must understand this “ethics” in a very particular way, however, because there have been numerous proposals as to whether or not Rosenzweig should be said to promote an ethics in *The Star of Redemption*.<sup>72</sup> To show the sense in which Rosenzweig’s model of the love of neighbor counts as an ethics, we should turn to the place in the *Star* where he most clearly presents his alternative to what he labels as the idealist model of ethics.

Rosenzweig distinguishes love of neighbor, which he says is both commanded by God and rooted in freedom, from Kantian ethics, which is absolutely and only rooted in freedom. On Rosenzweig’s view, the Kantian requirement for autonomy leads to a purely formal and therefore barren prescription for action in the world, as he writes, “the natural consequence of this requirement is that the laws which are to determine this act lose all content, for any and every content would exercise a power disturbing the autonomy... The moral law is necessarily purely formal and therefore not only ambiguous, but open to an unlimited number of interpretations.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, because nothing can impinge on the freedom of the will, in order to be autonomous, no prescription external to the will – “Do this!” – can be universally concretized.

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<sup>72</sup> The debate as to how “Levinasian” Rosenzweig is features prominently here. See for example, Robert Gibbs, who says that Rosenzweig advocates for “an ethics that orients intersubjective space without recourse to foundations.” Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21. Then see Peter Gordon, who writes that a key purpose of his study is “to combat the misunderstanding of Rosenzweig as primarily an ethicist or theorist of alterity.” Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 11. Gordon here states that he is responding to the work of Gibbs and Richard A. Cohen. After this, see Samuel Moyn’s (in my view judicious) remark in his *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 154: “Once the quite categorical distinction between God’s love for man and man’s love for one another in Rosenzweig’s thought is restored, the suggestion that there is not a theory of ethical intersubjectivity in *The Star of Redemption*, as in Peter Eli Gordon’s important recent study, will seem just as overstated as the contemporary belief among Levinasian commentators that the book is obviously about human ethics.” However, while Moyn appears to restrict the realm of ethics to the human-divine encounter, I argue that there is a form of ethics to be found in the *Star* in the human realm.

<sup>73</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 214.

Despite Kant's would-be protests to the contrary, Rosenzweig thinks that adherence to the moral law must always be an abstract affair – "Everything, after all, can be moral, but nothing is moral with certainty."<sup>74</sup> That is, the moral law can always only be applied in particular cases which are never identical to each other, and this results in the uncertainty of moral action. Because the concrete circumstances are different, the required action may be different as well. "By contrast," Rosenzweig says, "the commandment to love one's neighbor is clear and unambiguous in content."<sup>75</sup> On Rosenzweig's view, then, love of neighbor is a concrete directive which applies determinately in every situation in which another shows up in the soul's world. And for Rosenzweig, this clarity of action is provided by the love of God: the love of neighbor "is distinguished from all ethical acts by the presupposition of being loved by God."<sup>76</sup> Thus, the content of the love of neighbor is directly filled in through the love of God, on Rosenzweig's account. Here, where Kant cannot provide moral certainty, Rosenzweig claims that the love of neighbor commanded by God provides the certainty needed for moral action.

At the same time, however, Rosenzweig emphasizes that the love to be poured out toward the neighbor has nothing to do with that neighbor's particularity. Rosenzweig writes that "the neighbor is only a representative. He is not loved for his own sake, nor for his beautiful eyes, but only because he just happens to be standing there, because he happens to be nearest to me."<sup>77</sup> In other words, although the command to love the neighbor is particular, the object of that command is itself formal, a mere representative: "whoever be momentarily my neighbor represents all the world for me in full validity."<sup>78</sup> It might seem odd here that Rosenzweig

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 236.

decries Kant's ethics for being purely formal while his own view posits neighbor in formal terms as well. However, the formality on Rosenzweig's view exists only outside of the concrete circumstance in which the neighbor is encountered. The neighbor's function as representative serves to ensure the particularity of the act in the concrete situation. The neighbor is to be loved not for any feature that appears to me, but merely because she is the nearest part of the world which can be transformed by my love. It is here, then, that Rosenzweig sees the strength of his approach in contrast to other prescriptive worldviews: it provides both the correct internal motivation and the correct outward action. That is, Rosenzweig's model provides a certainty for normative action regardless of circumstance, and it grants the conditions under which the proper comportment (love rather than duty) toward its object can be fulfilled.

Although one may object to Rosenzweig here that the love of neighbor is itself an abstract command that can be applied in many different ways depending on the context, Rosenzweig would respond to this by arguing that love is never a command in the abstract. It is always and only a concrete command which is given in the moment. I cannot know ahead of time what actions love will prescribe. Hence, Rosenzweig sees his own view as providing proper internal and external moral behavior which he sees other views as lacking. While the sole motivation for action is love, the action has its end in the performance of world redemption. The event of redemption begins with the soul's love of neighbor and has as its end the conversion of the entire world into praise and thanksgiving of the goodness of God.<sup>79</sup>

#### *A Community for Redemption*

Rosenzweig argues that sociality reaches its culmination not in the I-Thou dialogue between God and the soul nor even in the love of one's neighbor, but in the temporal integration

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<sup>79</sup> See *ibid.*, 228: "The soul's action, wholly turned toward the neighbor of the moment in deed and consciousness, wants to anticipate, in so doing, all the world."

of the elements in redemption by means of the collective invocation and giving of thanks to God.<sup>80</sup> For Rosenzweig, this conception of the redemption of the world solves the problem left open by idealism, that the human being reduces God and the world into herself, into her own subjectivity. Instead of truncating the elements or keeping the elements isolated from each other, Rosenzweig presents the mechanisms by which God, the world, and the human enter into genuine relationships with one another as the activity of redemption. Hence, the way in which redemption is enacted in temporal life is the key, for Rosenzweig, to transcending idealism's neglect of temporality with regard to sociality.

While in revelation God speaks in the imperative and dialogical form, the soul itself brings about the redemption of the world through the *cohortative* mode of speech whereby soul

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<sup>80</sup> While Rosenzweig argues that the love of God is mirrored in the soul's love of her fellow neighbor, this does not also mean that the whole I-Thou dialogue between God and the self-turned-soul also takes place on the human to human plane. Rosenzweig says much less about interhuman dialogue in the *Star*, and it is left to the reader to stitch together what he does say into a coherent whole. He does position the human soul in relation to its neighbor in terms of I and Thou, writing that the task of redemption given to the I is to "say Thou to the He," that is, to love the other human not merely as an object, but as a person in direct address. Ibid., 274. See also *ibid.*, 240: "Out of the endless chaos of the world, one highest thing, his neighbor, is placed before his soul, and concerning this one and well-nigh only concerning this one he is told: he is like you...he is not to remain a He for you, and thus a mere It for your You. Rather he is like You, like your You, a You like You, an I – a soul."

The speech that occurs between persons does not, however, effectuate the dialogue of lover and beloved sketched out between God and the soul. Rosenzweig writes, "The love of the human, the earthly lover...was a direct likeness of divine love. But what we have found here resembles divine love only in being tied to the moment, in being ever newly present." Ibid., 212. While the soul who has received the love of God in revelation is described by Rosenzweig as also, at least in some sense, having the power to transform a self into a soul. See *ibid.*, 235: "where someone or something has become neighbor to a soul, there a piece of world has become something which it was not previously: soul." The means by which the soul does this is not through dialogue but through *duet*. Thus, here I concur with Samuel Moyn, who reads the interhuman relations in the *Star* as starkly different from the dialogue with God, against Leora Batnitzky, among others, who reads the dialogical structure between God and the human being as constitutive for interhuman sociality as well. See Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, 154: "Whereas God and man were assigned to the totally distinct roles of lover and beloved, between man and man, each one loving the other like himself, there is a certain equality and perhaps even symmetry...Rosenzweig certainly did have a theory of ethical self-questioning and judgment in relation to "the other," *but he applied it only to the relation of the self to the divine.*" For Batnitzky's view, see her "Dialogue as Judgment, Not Mutual Affirmation: A New Look at Franz Rosenzweig's Dialogical Philosophy," in *The Journal of Religion*, 79 (1999): 534, where she argues that on Rosenzweig's view, "just as mutual confirmation is not possible for, nor the aim of, Jewish-Christian dialogue, so too mutual understanding is neither possible nor desirable between individual people...In their particularity, individuals meet each other in the harsh and harrowing assessment of one point of view over and against the other. Change comes not from mutual confirmation, but from self-judgment that is inherently one-sided. Self-judgment is not a relation of mutuality but one that bears full responsibility for transforming oneself. Self-judgment requires everything from the self and nothing from the other, except that the other remain other." In the background to this disagreement is the debate in the literature on Rosenzweig's relationship to Levinas.

and neighbor together enjoin each other to invoke the goodness of God. The cohortative mode of language is a first-personal plea or exhortation; it often takes the form in English, “Let us...”. Rosenzweig characterizes this collective speech as a prayer, chant, or song which expresses praise and thanksgiving to God through the universally true sentence: “he is good.”<sup>81</sup> That is, by collectively proclaiming the words, “he is good,” the community is also thereby expressing the exhortation, “Let us give thanks and praise to God.”

This cohortative mode of speech is significant, on Rosenzweig’s view, because it progressively draws all of creation into its vocalization, thereby bringing creation into relationship with both God and the human being. Thus, redemption is accomplished, according to Rosenzweig, by the process of the soul’s continually enlarging the chorus by leading the world to join in the expression of thanksgiving.<sup>82</sup> Rosenzweig claims that the soul’s outpouring of love toward its neighbor results in the neighbor’s opening of her own mouth, and the voice that ensues joins the soul’s own voice in praise of the creator.<sup>83</sup> Hence, Rosenzweig sees the soul’s mission in the world as expanding beyond a dialogical sociality, integrating social life into the ever-expanding community of creation.

Rosenzweig then argues that this cohortative grammatical mood makes possible what had not been available for the soul to perform on its own: thanksgiving to God.<sup>84</sup> Because the soul and neighbor give voice to praise and thanksgiving to God, they perform the grammatical and vocal act of giving, that is, they perform in the *dative*. Here, Rosenzweig is concerned to give an

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<sup>81</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 231-232.

<sup>82</sup> See *ibid.*, 234-235: “The bond of the consummate and redemptive bonding of man and the world is to begin with the neighbor and ever more only the neighbor, the well-nigh highest. Thus the chant of all is here joined by a stanza sung by but two individual voices – mine and that of my neighbor’s.”

<sup>83</sup> Here we also note that the neighbor, as with the human being generally, is a citizen of two elemental spheres: the neighbor is part of the world as a redeemable individual, and she is also a human being capable of speech’s particularity. See *ibid.*, 49 and 70.

<sup>84</sup> See *ibid.*, 169: “If the object of love gives thanks, its thanks cannot be directed toward the lover. Rather it must seek outlets in other directions, symbolic outlets so to speak.”



account of what unifies the members who join together in the chorus. He asks, “What unites the one voice of him who exhorts with all the world? He is different from all the world; they are two different subjects, two different nominatives. And what he has and sees is also different from what all the world has and sees, two different objects, two different accusatives.”<sup>85</sup> On Rosenzweig’s view, the soul and the world occupy divergent perspectives, and it is the same with the soul and the neighbor, for the neighbor is a member of the world as well. Using phenomenological language, we can say that each I intends from a different point of view and therefore intends its object differently. As a result, there is a sense in which each I intends different objects, objects which are constituted differently. In response to this problem, Rosenzweig writes, “Only he [God] whom he [the soul] thanks is the same whom all the world thanks; he is not object for him and thus tied to him; he is something ‘beyond’ him and beyond anything that could become object for him.”<sup>86</sup>

Rosenzweig here presents two features of the situation of thanksgiving which provide a solution to the disparate intentionality of soul and world. First, Rosenzweig argues, as he has previously in his polemic against Islam, that God is not an object which can be bound to the human being’s gaze. God is an element separate from the world and the human being and therefore eludes the grasp of objectification by that mere fact. Second, there is a sense in which God can be reached in human intentionality, and reached as the same despite being intended by different persons. For Rosenzweig, this is the attribution of goodness to God in the giving of thanks to God. Rosenzweig explains, “The voices of the hearts separated in this world find each other in the dative which is beyond all. The dative is what binds, what comprises. He who is given something, such as, here, thanks, does not thereby become the property of that which he is

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 232-233.

given. He remains beyond the giver, and because he remains beyond the individual giver he can be the point at which all givers can unite.”<sup>87</sup> Because no giver of thanks binds, or can bind, God solely to itself in the act of giving thanks, this allows room for a multiplicity of voices to give the same attribution to the same God without God being exhausted by or captured in the giving. Further, Rosenzweig has it that this collective act joins the various members of the chorus together in their shared intentionality. No longer are the I’s separated in their perspective and intention, but are now bound together in a community of joint intention; no longer is the soul found in the relationship of I-Thou, but now it is shaped in the relation of *We*-Thou.

Rosenzweig designates this community of redemption as the kingdom of God. He writes, “The kingdom of God is actually nothing other than the reciprocal union of the soul with all the world. This union of the soul with all the world occurs in thanksgiving, and the kingdom of God comes in this union and every conceivable prayer is fulfilled.”<sup>88</sup> The community of the kingdom of God is characterized by its liturgical activity. Chant, chorus, and prayer each function not only to invoke God, but above all to accomplish the redemption of the world. However, the kingdom is not yet accomplished; it will be the fruit of redemption, but it begins, has its seeds in the vocal congregation. Thus, the task of this community is an ongoing, eschatological task: its purpose is to bring eternity into time. In fact, as we saw earlier in noting the importance of revelation for temporality, here, genuine sociality in the community is inconceivable apart from its temporal constitution. Rosenzweig argues that the kingdom of God, as an ultimately eschatological entity, serves to bring all of creation in to itself in a temporal process.

The mechanism by which the prayer of the community brings eternity into time, according to Rosenzweig, is *liturgy*. Rosenzweig sets the prayer of the community in the context

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

of the liturgical year in the life of the community. Liturgy brings eternity into temporality through ordering the discontinuous present, or “nows,” of revelation into the cyclical year of festivals and liturgical life.<sup>89</sup> Not only is the human being liberated from transitoriness, but world is as well. Rosenzweig suggests that liturgical life represents the future of the “hypercosmos,” the state of the cosmos in its true eternity, and as representatives of the redeemed world, “the structures of liturgy...anticipate. They take something future, and turn it into a Today... They are the silent anticipation of a world gleaming in the silence of the future.”<sup>90</sup> Thus the world appears here to be brought into redemption in a unique way. Liturgy mirrors in anticipation the character of the redeemed hypercosmos, enacting in present life what is truly future. But through this very act, the cosmos itself experiences its fulfilled state while still on its own temporal path, as it were. A large portion of the third part of *The Star* is dedicated to describing the liturgical life of both Judaism and Christianity, arguing that the empirical practices of these communities, each in their own way, function to draw God, the world, and the human into relation with one another by weaving eternity into the fabric of time.<sup>91</sup> The temporality of liturgical life serves as a concrete, lived integration of the elements, as opposed to the abstract integration of the elements attempted by idealism in thought alone.

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<sup>89</sup> See Stephen Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 97. For Rosenzweig, the liturgical *hour* is the temporal unit which mimics the “now” structure of the moment while enveloping it within a larger whole. He calls this a “stationary Now” which holds within itself both the character of the present and the of duration, writing, “In the hour, then, one moment is recreated, whenever and if ever it were to perish, into something newly issued and thus imperishable, into a *nunc stans*, into eternity. In the hour, instituted by himself, man frees himself from the transitoriness of the moment.” Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 289-290.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>91</sup> See *ibid.*, 324: “Thus the Days of Awe, New Year’s Day and the Day of Atonement, place the eternity of redemption into time,” as well as *ibid.*, 361: “These [Christian] festivals, pointing backward toward the creation of revelation and forward toward revealed redemption, incorporate the immeasurable eternity of the day of God into the annual cycle of the Church year.”

The community which is oriented in liturgical life is therefore Rosenzweig's completed model of genuine sociality.<sup>92</sup> The ritualized performances of prayer, gesture, and song constitute the manner by which human beings constitute genuine temporality for their own community and for the inclusion of the whole world into that community. Rosenzweig argues that this temporal orientation offers a way for the elements of reality to come into genuine relations with each other which idealism cannot provide. The heart of this temporal enactment of reality is found in the social life of the community. Thus for Rosenzweig, while divine revelation grounds human sociality, it is that human sociality in the religious community which in turn brings all of reality into a kind of sociality of the elements.

### **Rosenzweig and Levinas**

The question of the extent of Rosenzweig's influence on Levinas has occupied much of the secondary literature on the two thinkers. Here, I am not so much interested in the lines of convergence as in the points at which Levinas departs from Rosenzweig. For if there is significant ambiguity concerning what concepts or motives Levinas may have drawn from

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<sup>92</sup> A question which may arise here is that of Rosenzweig's controversial notion of the Jewish blood-community. In the discussion of the exclusive privileges of the Jewish community, Rosenzweig writes, "While every other community that lays claim to eternity must take measures to pass the torch of the present on to the future, the blood-community does not have to resort to such measures. It does not have to hire the services of the spirit; the natural propagation of the body guarantees it eternity." Ibid., 299. On Rosenzweig's view, Jewish blood ensures its community's claim for future redemption. While other communities are not thereby excluded from participation in eternity, they lack this decisive benefit.

Kepnes gives the assessment that Rosenzweig's discussion here may "sound strange for its ethnocentrism and its touches of Jewish racial superiority. Certainly, this could be seen as a result of the intense focus on 'race' as a category of both science and culture at the turn of the twentieth century and an obsession of many German intellectuals of this same period. Yet, I think that Rosenzweig, himself, provides a more fruitful context to understand Jewish blood than that provided by the pseudoscientific concept of race. This context is the structural form of the miracle, of prediction and fulfillment that we see Rosenzweig using throughout the *Star*. Here, the notion of Jewish blood signals the concrete sociological fulfillment of the promise of redemption. The notion of Jewish blood signals an anti-Hegelian and empirical move to the concrete, to a supra-rational principle or a given substance." Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 104-105. The idea in this explanation is that the reference to Jewish blood fulfills the same function as prophecy and miracle as an element within creation which testifies to divine action or to fulfillment. While Jewish blood attests to its bearer's future redemption, it is not itself the mechanism of that redemption. Kepnes explains, "it is liturgy, and not Jewish blood, through which the Jewish people's sense of their election, ethical ideals, and eternality unfolds." Ibid., 105. Liturgy is the common mechanism of redemption through which both the Jewish and Christian communities enact eternity in temporality.

Rosenzweig, it is much more clear where their respective models of sociality formally diverge. First, I must backtrack, giving Levinas's account of the relationship between God and sociality, before proceeding to show the sharp contrast between the two thinkers.

Although Levinas invokes the terminology of God across his corpus, he takes care in his philosophical writings to delineate how we are permitted to use the concept of God in philosophical discourse. Insisting upon a philosophical (and phenomenological) starting point,<sup>93</sup> Levinas is wary of the use of the concept of God in philosophy, which, following Heidegger, he designates as *onto-theology*. Levinas stipulates, "Onto-theo-logy consists in thinking of God as a being [*étant*] and in thinking being [*être*] on the basis of this superior or supreme being."<sup>94</sup> Identifying God with Being or as the highest being for Levinas makes God complicit in or absorbs God into the totalizing violence of being, reducing otherness into comprehension. Placing God at the top of the chain of being, on Levinas's view, far from personalizing reality, instead subordinates any personhood associated with the concept of God to God's impersonal function as the keystone of being. In onto-theology, God becomes an anonymous figure, devoid of personhood, which exists solely to secure the architecture of impersonal being.

Levinas nevertheless strives to think of God in a manner other than as an onto-theological construct; he "seeks to think God as a beyond-being."<sup>95</sup> Levinas goes on to say in his lecture course on "God and Onto-theology" that the "non-onto-theo-logical approach to the idea of God goes by way of the analysis of the interhuman relationships that do not enter into the framework of intentionality."<sup>96</sup> Already in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas emphatically refuses a conception

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<sup>93</sup> See Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," 30: "ultimately my point of departure is absolutely nontheological. I insist upon this. It is not theology that I am doing, but philosophy."

<sup>94</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethical Subjectivity," in *God, Death, and Time*, 160.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. See also the last sentence of the prefatory note to *Otherwise Than Being*, xlvi: "But to hear a God not contaminated by Being is a human possibility no less important and no less precarious than to bring Being out of the oblivion in which it is said to have fallen in metaphysics and in onto-theology."

<sup>96</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Subjectivity as An-Archy," in *God, Death, and Time*, 172.

of or relationship with God apart from the human relationship. He claims, “There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men.”<sup>97</sup> In order for God not to be cast into ontological terms, the subject can only relate to him through the experience of the face of the other. The God who is seen in being, who is accessed directly but impersonally, is a God who circumvents the plight of the needy in favor of cementing a philosophical architectonic. The point is that a God conceived apart from the face to face encounter with humans is an impersonal God, one who is available for reflection but is abstracted from the needs of the human other.<sup>98</sup> “Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation,” Levinas asserts, “represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion.”<sup>99</sup> The way to block the concept of God from becoming a pawn of ontology and a possession of the ego is to locate God in the encounter with the human face – the sole place wherein subjective intentionality is displaced.

However, Levinas does say that while the human other neither serves to bring God and the subject together nor is to be conflated with the divine, the face of the other serves as the *locus* where God can be revealed.<sup>100</sup> The trace of God in the face is not presented as a proof or of

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<sup>97</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78. See also, *ibid.*: “To posit the transcendent as stranger and poor one is to prohibit the metaphysical relation with God from being accomplished in the ignorance of men and things. The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face. A relation with the Transcendent free from all captivity by the Transcendent is a social relation. It is here that the Transcendent, infinitely other, solicits us and appeals to us. The proximity of the Other, the proximity of the neighbor, is in being an ineluctable moment of the revelation of an absolute presence (that is, disengaged from every relation), which expresses itself. His very epiphany consists in soliciting us by his destitution in the face of the Stranger, the widow, and the orphan. The atheism of the metaphysician means, positively, that our relation with the Metaphysical is an ethical behavior and not theology, not a thematization, be it a knowledge by analogy, of the attributes of God.”

<sup>98</sup> Merold Westphal puts the problem this way: “*When the Other does not get in the way of my seeing God, God will end up getting in the way of my hearing the Other.*” “Levinas’s Teleological Suspension of the Religious,” in *Ethics as First Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan Peperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995), 158.

<sup>99</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79.

<sup>100</sup> See *ibid.*, where Levinas says that the human other “does not play the role of a mediator. The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed.” Levinas describes this occurrence in multiple ways, for example in Emmanuel Levinas, “The Proximity of the Other,” in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 104: “The face is the locus of the word of God. There is the word of God in the other, a non-thematized word.” See also, Emmanuel Levinas, “Intention, Event, and the Other,” in *Is It Righteous to Be?*, 148: “the human is not the knowledge of God, but rather the place where God *works*, where ‘God lives,’” as well as

God's existence to the atheist or the skeptic, for this trace does not definitively lead to any object or person. To claim that God is found in the face is not a knowledge provided by epistemological procedure; the claim of God's presence is not measurable by intentional consciousness. It may well be that God is present, speaking in the human face, unbeknownst to the subject or to the human other herself. God need not be identified as such to present his commands.

In the final analysis, Levinas thinks of God, from a philosophical point of view, as a possibility which can never be unswervingly affirmed – or rejected. Levinas maintains that God must be continually obscured by a question mark, by the “blinking light” of revelation.<sup>101</sup> That is, the revelation of God is not a light which we can capture and examine; it must always burst in and out of our phenomenal plane. Levinas writes,

God is not simply the ‘first other (*autrui*),’ the other (*autrui*) par excellence, or the ‘absolutely other (*autrui*),’ but other than the other (*autre qu’autrui*), other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other (*autrui*), prior to the to the ethical bond with the other (*autrui*) and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of a possible confusion with the stirring of the *there is* [*il y a*].<sup>102</sup>

God's transcendence transcends the transcendence of the human other to the extent that it may be indistinguishable from what Levinas terms the *there is*, which is, as one commentator puts it, “a dark and chaotic indeterminacy that precedes all creativity and goodness.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, God cannot finally be ascertained as something to be individuated from anonymous, impersonal chaos. For Levinas, the point is not to search for the identity of God, but instead to attend to the

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Levinas “Discussion Following Transcendence and Intelligibility,” 270: “the relation with the other, with the face (if the word relation is appropriate here), is the very place where ‘God comes to mind.’”

<sup>101</sup> See *ibid.*: “the question mark in this said, which, contrary to the univocal logos of the theologians, is alternating, is the very pivot of revelation, of its blinking light.”

<sup>102</sup> Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 141. See also the near-identical passage in Levinas's final lecture on “God and Onto-theo-logy,” 224: “God is not simply the first other but other than the other [*autre qu’autrui*], other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other person, prior to the ethical compulsion to the neighbor. In this way, God is different from every neighbor. And transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of his possible confusion of the *there is*.”

<sup>103</sup> Adriaan T. Peperzak, “Preface,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ix.

neighbor in front of one's own face. Hence, God cannot stand as motivation for ethics or for the love of one's neighbor. The neighbor must signify and command in and of herself.

Note here the stark difference from Rosenzweig that Levinas expresses. Levinas asserts that the genuine human to human relationship is the condition for a relation to God, while Rosenzweig holds that the relationship to God is a condition for genuine human relationships. For Rosenzweig, the love of neighbor is directly derived from the love of God, while for Levinas, there can be no love of God prior to the encounter with the face of the other.

In one of his few essays on Rosenzweig, Levinas summarizes what he considers to be two specifically Jewish elements in Rosenzweig's thought: "[1] Love is manifested as commandment; the imperative *par excellence*, it commands what nothing in the world could command, love. [2] Man is the mediator of redemption, the indispensable relay of the movement that began in God."<sup>104</sup> These two traits of Jewish thought, as Levinas sees them, are elements that Levinas himself works to affirm in his own writings.<sup>105</sup> However, his gloss on Rosenzweig's account of love, command, and divine purposes borne by human agency may serve to obscure the significant differences operative in each figure's view. While they share the rejection of an exclusive divine-human mysticism, Levinas rejects the priority of the revelation of God which Rosenzweig maintains. Further, on Rosenzweig's view, the revelation of divine love is synonymous with personal self-revelation, with the will to be fully open and transparent to the other. God's self-revelation to the human makes possible the love of neighbor. In contrast to this,

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<sup>104</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Franz Rosenzweig: A Modern Jewish Thinker," in *Outside the Subject*, 59. See also Emmanuel Levinas, "'Between Two Worlds' (The Way of Franz Rosenzweig)," in *Difficult Freedom*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 193: "Two typically Jewish elements have appeared: the idea of the commandment, as something essential to the love-relation; love is manifested in the commandment, it is alone in being able to command love; the idea of Man the redeemer and not of God the Redeemer. Although Redemption begins with God, it absolutely requires Man's intermediary role."

<sup>105</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, "Being-Toward-Death and 'Thou Shalt Not Kill,'" trans. Andrew Schmitz, in *Is It Righteous to Be?*, 132: "'Love thy neighbor' and 'thou shalt not kill' mean the same thing." See also, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78: "There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men."



Levinas claims that the face of the other of itself commands the love of neighbor. While the face is self-revelatory, this invokes no response of self-revelation in the other, for Levinas. He writes, “responsibility for others could never mean altruistic will, instinct of ‘natural benevolence,’ or love.”<sup>106</sup> The point is that the response of the subject to the other is not formed in any intention or reflection; instead, the subject is bound in responsibility prior to having been able to choose this response. Therefore, when Levinas uses the language of the love of neighbor, this love is interpreted in his account as the pre-volitional affection of responsibility into which the subject is drawn. While Rosenzweig’s view of love is the enabling of the will, Levinas’s view of love is as an operation antecedent to the will.<sup>107</sup>

The second component of Jewish thought which Levinas articulates bears out another difference, which has to do with the way that each thinker sees the human person as a representative of God. For Rosenzweig, the soul responds to revelation through bringing the neighbor and the world into the redemptive community of thanksgiving. For Levinas, on the other hand, the subject responds to revelation through responsibility for the Other. And while both Levinas and Rosenzweig articulate a concept of the authentic human community, for Levinas, this is ultimately reducible to the face to face encounter. For Rosenzweig, on the other hand, the community worshiping before God constitutes a higher level of sociality than the human to human encounter. These differences ultimately boil down to the fact that two fundamentally different conceptions of sociality are at play. Rosenzweig sees sociality as culminating in the communal praise of God, while Levinas sees sociality as fulfilled in one human being being responsible for the particular human being with which he is faced. For

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<sup>106</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 111-112. See also, *ibid.* 124: “The for-the-other characteristic of the subject can be interpreted neither as a guilt complex (which presupposes an initial freedom), nor as a natural benevolence or divine ‘instinct,’ nor as some love or some tendency to sacrifice.”

<sup>107</sup> See *ibid.*, 187: “The Good invests freedom – it loves me before I love it. Love is love in this antecedence.”

Levinas, this is a consequence of his commitment to the claim that “everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion.”<sup>108</sup> Thus, on Levinas’s view, a model of sociality which enjoins the subject to turn away from her neighbor, even if it be for the purpose of turning toward God, is defective.<sup>109</sup>

### **Rosenzweig and Dialogical Sociality**

Theunissen’s *The Other* identifies Rosenzweig as one of the chief representatives of the philosophy of dialogue, locating him in the same field of sociality as Buber, among others.<sup>110</sup> Theunissen identifies the philosophy of dialogue with the principle that “the Other is originally only to be encountered in the Thou, as the ‘second person’ of the personal pronoun.”<sup>111</sup> This adequately captures Rosenzweig’s characterization of the human being’s encounter with God, and it is not a false characterization of Rosenzweig’s view of how genuine human to human relationships *begin*. As we saw above, Rosenzweig thinks that genuine human relations begin through the soul’s love of neighbor, which commands that the soul treat its human other as a Thou. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify Rosenzweig’s position in contrast to theories of sociality which concentrate solely on the dialogical encounter. Although Rosenzweig uses dialogical language, he does not argue that sociality is grounded in the meeting between persons, nor does he argue that persons themselves are grounded in this way. That is, while Theunissen is

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<sup>108</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79.

<sup>109</sup> On this score, I agree with Moyn’s assessment of the relationship between Rosenzweig and Levinas in his *Origins of the Other*, 154-155: “Levinas’s relation to Rosenzweig is one of appropriation not because Rosenzweig did not possess a theory of ethical intersubjectivity but because it had to be translated into human terms. Of course, this translation violates the whole spirit of Rosenzweig’s thought, by reversing the attempt from ‘Atheistic Theology’ to *The Star of Redemption* to make human ethics depend on a prior theory of divine revelation, and by transferring to man what remained God’s prerogative: to inspire humanity’s humiliation before and obedience to the supernatural in this world.”

<sup>110</sup> See Theunissen, *The Other*, 257: “the thinkers who are to be presented agree with each other on one positive point, namely, the orientation to the ‘dialogical principle,’ and thus, despite all their divergences and disregarding their very different rank, can be brought under the common title of ‘dialogicalism.’”

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

right to see Rosenzweig as contesting idealism's claim that transcendental subjectivity can account for genuine sociality, Rosenzweig does not follow Buber in claiming that the dialogue between I and Thou is the source of sociality. Instead, Rosenzweig argues that sociality and personhood are grounded in divine self-revelation.

However, a question may arise for the distinction I claim between dialogue and revelation in Rosenzweig's account. As noted above, revelation is given through the medium of dialogue. Hence, it appears as though to say that sociality is grounded in revelation is on Rosenzweig's account the same as saying sociality is grounded in dialogue, because revelation comes in the form of dialogue, on this view. The most direct response to this charge is to say that it is simply not true that dialogue and revelation are identical to each other; on Rosenzweig's account, dialogue is dependent on the initiative of divine revelation. On the account of the dialogical models of sociality of Buber and Gadamer, the dialogue bears its own initiative, that is, itself is an agent. On Rosenzweig's account, by contrast, the agent is the divine person who through speech grounds the person's ability to come into genuine relations with others. Thus, the question is not so much whether sociality is formed in the back and forth movement of dialogue, but whether dialogue can be said to be the ground or the cause of the social relation. And on Rosenzweig's view, dialogue is the instrument of revelation rather than itself being the ground.

While Rosenzweig clearly distinguishes himself from models of sociality grounded in dialogue, it remains to be determined how Rosenzweig's view avoids the transcendental grounding of sociality, that is, how Rosenzweig eludes Theunissen's criticisms of Buber. Recall Theunissen claims that Buber must implicitly presuppose transcendental subjects which come together in the meeting between them in dialogue. In contrast to Buber, who claims that persons originate from the meeting itself, Rosenzweig maintains that subjects exist in their separation and

individuality prior to sociality. As noted above, his analysis of the metaethical human being articulates the human self as lord of his own being, as a subject who endeavors to reduce all of reality to his own sphere. Yet Rosenzweig argues that this effort is unsuccessful, resulting in a truncated and isolated human subject. That is, while this subject attempts to transcend God and the world by drawing them into itself, God and the world remain equally resistant to reduction.

Further, Rosenzweig does not argue that sociality can be built upon the solitary layer subjectivity. Instead, he argues that sociality only comes through the abandonment of this allegedly self-sufficient subjectivity. The introverted self must be transformed into the social soul outside of itself. Hence, Rosenzweig's rejection of idealism and proposed alternative occupies a distinct plot of logical space. Although he admits that human beings can be described as separated, constituting subjects, these must be converted into souls in order to achieve genuine sociality. Hence, his view diverges from a position which would claim that persons begin as transcendental subjects and then incrementally build up to sociality through language use. On Rosenzweig's account, the attempted transcendentalism of the subject must be wholly abandoned in order to enter into true social life. Next, I turn to a closer investigation of how Rosenzweig's model of sociality differs from Gadamer's dialogical model.

### **Rosenzweig and Gadamer**

Both Rosenzweig and Gadamer place importance on temporal continuity and discontinuity in achieving genuine sociality, highlight the importance of language for sociality, and cast aside an oversimplified I-Thou model of social relations in favor of a more comprehensive view. Yet in each of these three cases, the similarities begin to vanish once viewed in more detail. Further, while Rosenzweig and Gadamer both criticize idealism for grounding sociality in subjectivity, both their diagnoses and the cures they offer diverge

significantly: Gadamer thinks that the false objectification of others in idealism is overcome through the process of understanding others in dialogue, while Rosenzweig claims that the seclusion of the self is overcome only in the admittance of revelation.

Dealing with the first and second alleged similarities together, I should note that although Rosenzweig never addresses the question whether humans can be said to have a kind of language from infancy or if language is a contingent layer added onto the human subject, Rosenzweig does maintain that humans have and operate in language in their natural state, the state of creation. Rosenzweig does appear to connect one's personality, or one's connectedness to others, to birth, and hence prior to the emergence of the isolation of the self, but he does not explicitly identify language with personality.<sup>112</sup> Through one's personality, however, there is a constant connection to other humans in the atmosphere of society, which becomes disrupted by the birth of the self and its withdrawal into itself, into its own atmosphere. This discontinuity is one which pulls the individual out of its primal relatedness to others rather than serving to promote relatedness. Yet Rosenzweig does posit the event of revelation as a singular momentous discontinuity which engenders genuine sociality. This event serves to not only disrupt the self's introversion, but to weave the human being back into genuine relations with God, other humans, the past, and the future. Thus, Rosenzweig articulates revelation as the discontinuity which makes possible both temporal and existential continuity.

In the first chapter, I noted that Gadamer's model of sociality hinges on the continuity of preunderstandings which get disrupted by experiences of otherness and finally become integrated into more comprehensive understandings. On Gadamer's view, this process is a continual one,

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<sup>112</sup> See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 71.

whereby ruptures occur on multiple occasions and in multiple ways.<sup>113</sup> While it may be the case that this revelation occurs more than once in a person's life, it serves as a unique conversion of selfhood into soulhood. This serves as a contrast to Gadamer's view of discontinuity as progressive and infinitely repeatable.

The third feature, the apparent similarity of subordinating the I-Thou relation to a broader network of relations, is only a superficial comparison as well. While Gadamer ends up rejecting the pairing of I and Thou for its implicit separation of two subjects prior to their connection in language, Rosenzweig sees things differently. First, he does not reject I-Thou language; he simply thinks there is more to sociality than just I and Thou. Second, Rosenzweig encourages the notion that apart from revelation, self and other are in fact separated from each other. The I is closed off and isolated from God prior to its awakening by his word of revelation. While there is indeed a sense with which Rosenzweig affirms the relatedness of persons through society, the context in which the I-Thou dialogue comes into play is not in the original relatedness of persons in society, but rather the function by which that dialogue bridges the separatedness between persons, human or divine. This difference in the view of a person's initial situation leads to the difference in the ways that Gadamer and Rosenzweig criticize idealism.

Both Rosenzweig and Gadamer reject the claims of idealism that sociality can legitimately be grounded in transcendental subjectivity. However, the way that each goes about solving this issue is different. While Rosenzweig has it that persons begin from a position of separation, Gadamer rejects this claim. Gadamer argues that persons are fully immersed in their facticity, in language, such that their conditionedness precludes their freedom and autonomy as subjects. Rosenzweig, on the other hand, gives an account of both the facticity and the autonomy

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<sup>113</sup> See Gadamer, "Hermeneutics of Suspicion," 322: "we are in this ongoing process of approximation and overcoming error by dialectically moving towards truth."

of the human subject. He argues the individual contains both freedom and facticity, that both poles exist within the person, the one not to be lifted above the other. Rosenzweig's claim, then, is not that idealism has completely misdescribed the human subject, but rather than it has only partially described the person. This fact means, for Rosenzweig, that it has failed to account for the way in which persons genuinely relate to one another. By contrast, Gadamer thinks that idealism from the beginning misunderstands and misdescribes human consciousness.

Finally, the contrast between Rosenzweig and Gadamer can be demonstrated in the solution to the problem of where idealism goes wrong with regard to sociality. Gadamer's conclusive model of sociality is friendship, wherein the ideal of dialogue finds its full fruit in the mutuality of the friend relationship. Rosenzweig, by contrast, concludes that human sociality is fulfilled not in dialogue, but in shared intentionality toward a third, namely, God. While on Gadamer's view it is the reciprocity of dialogue that binds friends together, on Rosenzweig's view, it is the giving of thanks to God in liturgical activity that binds persons together in the community. This has the consequence that for Gadamer, most anyone at any stage can share in the sociality of friendship, while for Rosenzweig, it appears it is only those in the religious congregation who can partake in the fulfillment of genuine community.

This contrast can also be seen in the notion of initiative which each thinker employs. While for Gadamer, neither party can be truly said to take the initiative in inaugurating any social relation, for Rosenzweig, true sociality begins from the initiative of God. Further, the person who has been awakened by the initiative of God in turn initiates a relationship with her neighbor through love. However, Rosenzweig does describe the community of the kingdom of God as "the reciprocal union of the soul with all the world,"<sup>114</sup> and he writes that in the

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 233.

anticipation of redemption, “man and world act and react upon each other in indissoluble reciprocity.”<sup>115</sup> Thus here in the activity of redemption embodied in the community of the kingdom, Rosenzweig does describe a kind of back-and-forth movement in which neither party appears to have priority. Although he says that redemption is “not directly God’s work or deed,”<sup>116</sup> but instead that it is the soul who accomplishes redemption, Rosenzweig argues that the soul needs God in order to perform this activity. Rosenzweig writes that the soul and the world

are themselves unable to deliver themselves from this reciprocal deliverance, for in delivering themselves, they only deliver themselves more and more firmly into and onto each other. They cannot deliver themselves by themselves from each other; they can only be delivered together with each other – delivered by a third one, delivering one on the other, one by means of the other. Besides man and world, there is but One who is third; only One can become their deliverer.<sup>117</sup>

In other words, while the human being and the world, joined together in the community of the kingdom of God, reciprocally share in the direct activity of redemption through prayer and chant, it is God who makes this activity truly redemptive. Of their own accord, the soul and world cannot deliver themselves, but when God is the initiator and goal of this activity, then it becomes redemptive, on Rosenzweig’s view.

Rosenzweig’s model of sociality therefore presents a view in which genuine sociality must be grounded in and initiated by a single party, but the fulfillment of the social relation is carried out in mutuality. On the level of the human-divine encounter, the Other, God, initiates the relationship in revelation, but then this relationship is enacted in the back-and-forth movement of dialogue. On the level of the human community, it is the I, the soul, who initiates the relationship with the Other, the neighbor, in love, but then this relationship is enacted in the mutual union of shared vocalization toward God. Thus, in Rosenzweig we see a complex combination of the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 228.



notions of initiative and mutuality, dialogue and revelation, which make up the social relation. Nevertheless, Rosenzweig's account clearly claims revelation as the ground for genuine, redemptive sociality. I claim, therefore, that Rosenzweig's model of sociality is best described as offering an alternative to idealism's grounding of social life in the subject by arguing that true sociality requires divine revelation.

### **The Contribution of Rosenzweig's Account of Sociality**

In conclusion of this chapter, recall that Rosenzweig's model of sociality flows out of his critique of idealism. This critique says that idealism reduces God and the world to the human subject and the objects of its cognition. Further, it reduces the temporality of life to what is completed and past, and can assume nothing new or incomplete. From the way in which Rosenzweig articulates his response to idealism, we can see how social life in idealism would be considered to be defective. Persons cannot relate to each other in a genuine way, in idealism, because it cannot account for temporality and love, which are necessary to explain the richness of social life. Rosenzweig's argument is that idealism thought it could do without the concept of divine revelation, but by leaving out revelation, it has left out precisely what is necessary for social life, namely, love, temporality, and speech.

As Rosenzweig unfolds his account of genuine sociality, we see how he distinguishes it from what he understands the idealist (Kantian) account of ethics and social life. The proper relationship to others is described not as duty but as the love of one's neighbor. This love is derived from and commanded by the love of God. Further, this love is not simply a way to treat others but is an invitation, an incorporation of the other person into the mutual recognition of the goodness of God. The souls who are related to each other through love in the community of thanksgiving are now bound together in their shared invocation of God. This collective

invocation of God by the community serves in fact to bring the entire world into right relationship with God. This is the process of redemption, according to Rosenzweig: the temporal ordering of reality through the liturgical actions and expanding scope of the religious community. The action of redemption, accomplished by the community, orients social life toward God and toward the future fulfillment of all things in God, which is the proper relationship between God, the world, and humanity.

Rosenzweig's model of sociality occupies a unique position on the map of responses to idealism. Instead of replacing idealism's grounding of sociality in the transcendental subject with a grounding of sociality in dialogue, Rosenzweig argues that sociality, in a genuine sense, can only be grounded in divine revelation. While revelation is the source of this sociality, Rosenzweig claims that sociality is only truly fulfilled in the redemptive community, the kingdom of God. Hence, it looks as though Rosenzweig's account is theological rather than philosophical insofar as it presumes, and indeed demands, the presence of divine revelation. Rosenzweig would reject this simple dichotomy. Philosophy requires revelation in order to speak rightly of reality, on his view, and it does not thereby stop being philosophy. Hence, Rosenzweig's account, as he sees it, offers a grounding of sociality in divine revelation, which requires a distinctive ontology. This ontology takes its cue from the historical failure of philosophy, culminating in idealism, to account for the elements of God, world, and the human in their richness and vitality. Rosenzweig offers an account of these three elements which, while recognizing their distinctiveness, brings them into temporal relationship with each other by means of the human community which is grounded in the initiative of divine revelation.

## Chapter Four: Bonhoeffer and Revelational Sociality

The aim of this chapter is to articulate both Dietrich Bonhoeffer's critique of idealist models of sociality and the alternative model of sociality he offers, which is embedded in a theological ontology. More specifically, Bonhoeffer grounds his model of sociality in the initiative of divine revelation in Christ in the church community. Bonhoeffer thus provides an innovative ontology of persons which serves to correct the failings of idealist accounts of human beings and communities. Bonhoeffer's theory of sociality echoes a number of concerns we have seen in previous chapters. He finds fault with idealism for promoting a subject-object ontology which holds the subject as independent of the objects which it can only come into relationship with via epistemological means. Like the thinkers I have previously examined, Bonhoeffer finds the concreteness of I-You language as a helpful antidote to the abstraction inherent in idealistic philosophical systems. However, Bonhoeffer maintains that an adequate account of sociality which escapes idealism must venture beyond the language of dialogue and invoke divine agency for its success.

Similar to Rosenzweig and Levinas (and in contrast to Gadamer), Bonhoeffer emphasizes the fundamental closedness of persons prior to revelation. On Bonhoeffer's view, however, the self is not simply closed off from others, but actively subverts the social relation with others in its sinful state. Any account of sociality which does not account for the sinful self runs the risk of idealist abstraction, on Bonhoeffer's view. In what follows of this chapter, I will chart Bonhoeffer's criticisms of idealism as they arise in each of his two dissertations, *Sanctorum*

*Communio* and *Act and Being*, as well as how he constructs his alternative model of sociality.<sup>1</sup>

Along the way, I will have the opportunity to note the consonance of Bonhoeffer's views with Gadamer and Levinas, as well as the important ways in which their accounts of sociality remain mired in idealism on Bonhoeffer's view. Gadamer and Levinas represent successful versions of sociality in the primal state and the fall into sin, respectively, from Bonhoeffer's point of view. What they neglect is the divine initiative which places human beings into truth. I then argue that Bonhoeffer's ontology of persons, and specifically the person of Christ, grounds all other concepts of being, as well as the way in which human beings can enter into genuine sociality, on Bonhoeffer's view. This ontology for Bonhoeffer supplants the idealist ontology which underlies its failed account of sociality. I will finally show that neither Bonhoeffer nor Rosenzweig falls prey to the other's critiques of idealism despite the difference in ontology which each offers in response to idealism. This is because both of them appeal to divine revelation as the ground of their model of sociality, a ground which each sees as requisite for the break from idealism as well for the generation of the true unity of community.

### **The Critique of Idealism and Model of Sociality in *Sanctorum Communio***

Bonhoeffer's account of sociality in *Sanctorum Communio* is complex and has been misunderstood not only because of its complexity but also because Bonhoeffer's presentation of how various the elements of sociality ought to be related to one another is not clearly laid out. Bonhoeffer's ultimate aim is to give an account of the sociality of the church, both in its empirical structures and in its underlying ontological framework. To do this, Bonhoeffer first articulates the Christian concept of person in contrast to other philosophical models of

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<sup>1</sup> The scope of my investigation of Bonhoeffer is limited to these two early works. While Bonhoeffer does continue to articulate his model of sociality in subsequent writings, *inter alia*, in *Creation and Fall*, *Life Together*, and *Ethics*, his critique of idealism culminates with *Act and Being*. Hence, while a reexamination of Bonhoeffer's conception of sociality throughout his corpus would doubtless be fruitful, it is beyond the scope of my current investigation.

personhood, and in particular, in contrast to idealism. Bonhoeffer presents the concept of a social-basic relation [*soziale Grundbeziehungsbeziehung*] as the underlying ontological relation between persons apart from which persons cannot be adequately defined.<sup>2</sup> The Christian concept of person, which Bonhoeffer says is interdependent with concepts of God and community, is meant to articulate the underlying situation of humanity which presupposes both the primal state and the fall into sin, but which anticipates the redefinition of sociality in the church. The primal state, which can only be known from revelation in Christ, forms the founding strata of person and sociality whose social-basic relations become overlaid and therefore transmuted in sin. Upon entry into the church community, the social-basic relations become overlaid and transmuted once again – not as a mere return to the primal state, i.e. not as a repeal of the strata of sin, for sin, Bonhoeffer maintains, remains even in the church.

Throughout his project, Bonhoeffer articulates five interrelated criticisms of the idealist model of sociality, which I summarize here before presenting in detail. First, he argues that idealism begins by assuming the wrong starting point, thinking that subjects are from the outset unrelated to other persons. Second, he claims that idealism overlooks the significance of the role of sin in sociality. Third, he argues that this mistaken starting point leads idealism to ask the wrong questions, pursuing sociality through epistemology rather than through ethics. Fourth, the epistemological approach of idealism leads it to conceive of persons as abstract and timeless rather than concretely affected by time and history. Finally, idealism's inadequate conception of persons results in a model of sociality which relates persons through the abstract unity of rational spirit. This abstract unity fails to do justice to true plurality and community. Bonhoeffer's model

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<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer argues that concepts of person and community are interdependent such that neither can be understood apart from the other. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, trans. Reinhard Kraus and Nancy Lukens, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 34.

of sociality, then, is a solution to the failures of idealism which he lays out in both of his dissertations.<sup>3</sup> In the following, I reconstruct Bonhoeffer's multi-layered account of sociality in *Sanctorum Communio* before showing how it evolves into the sociality of *Act and Being*.

Before tackling this account, however, I should say a word about Bonhoeffer's methodology. Bonhoeffer's account of sociality relies on a number of theological presuppositions which are framed in the Lutheran tradition out of which Bonhoeffer was working. These presuppositions include the claim that the teaching of Holy Scriptures and "what is common" to the Christian church constitute truth and therefore are authoritative in the understanding of persons, God, and community.<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer's explicit theological grounding of his account provides a different backdrop for the kinds of ontological claims than the other figures I have examined. While Rosenzweig assumes certain theological claims and is certainly indebted to a theological and scriptural tradition, he also presents his arguments in traditional philosophical categories. By contrast, Bonhoeffer is not interested in presenting his claims in philosophical form. Instead, his method consists of using philosophical ideas for theological purposes.<sup>5</sup> Hence he presumes the Christian narrative of the creation of the world and of persons by God, the subsequent fall of persons into sin, which breeches the communion persons had with both God and other persons. Therefore, reconciliation is needed and provided through the life,

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<sup>3</sup> Note that while Bonhoeffer's criticisms of idealism are dependent at least in part on Wilhelm Windelband and Emmanuel Hirsch, he orients those criticisms as contrasts to his original model of sociality. See *ibid.*, 40 n. [17].

<sup>4</sup> See for example the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530), which seeks to affirm in its teaching "the pure Word of God and Christian truth. Since this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures and is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church, or even of the Roman church (insofar as the latter's teaching is reflected in the writings of the Fathers), we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above." *Creeds of the Christian Churches*, ed. John H. Leith (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 78.

<sup>5</sup> See Christiane Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," in *Ontology and Ethics: Bonhoeffer and Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Adam C. Clark and Michael Mawson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 33: "In his analysis of the church, it is theology and not sociology that is given priority. Although sociology can assist with this analysis, this is only after theological premises have been accepted."

death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's activity in the power of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the church, which itself participates in this redemptive activity.

This basic understanding of creation, fall, and reconciliation shapes the way in which Bonhoeffer construes sociality as advancing in distinct phases through the stages of humanity's existence. Further, divine redemptive activity in Christ through the Holy Spirit governs Bonhoeffer's conception of how genuine sociality should emerge in the world. Finally, his criticisms of idealism focus on the ways in which idealism fails to account for the theological premises assumed in this picture of salvation history.

### **Sociality in the Primal State**

According to Bonhoeffer, the primal state, which is defined as the state of persons prior to the fall of humanity into sin, is only conceivable through revelation in Christ. Under the assumption that Christ saves humanity from broken communion with God, Bonhoeffer maintains that unbroken communion with God can be postulated only in reference to Christ. Because human beings are called to in revelation, we can presuppose that persons are "active centers of intellect and will."<sup>6</sup> That is, they have the active capacity to receive a call and respond to that call. The next thing inferred from revelation is that human beings were created to be in unbroken relationship with both God and human beings, but that sin has effectively broken both community with God and social community between people.

From these presuppositions, Bonhoeffer argues that the human being is essentially a confluence of thinking, willing, and feeling, each of which depends for its exercise on external personal interaction. Bonhoeffer says that "we can conceive of these acts only as based upon human sociality."<sup>7</sup> Understanding, expression, and language, too, are possible only in the context

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<sup>6</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

of sociality. Bonhoeffer argues that “*only in reciprocal interaction with other minds is self-conscious thinking and willing possible and meaningful.*”<sup>8</sup> This leads to Bonhoeffer’s appropriation of the dialogical concepts of *Ich und Du*, positing an I-You relationship that is simultaneous and reciprocal: “the consciousness of being an I and the consciousness that there is a You arise together and from their interaction.”<sup>9</sup> Bonhoeffer’s reasons for thinking this are found chiefly in his analysis of the social nature of thought and of the will. He relies on Hamann and others to say that it is “language that renders thought possible.”<sup>10</sup> But language is a social phenomenon. Thus, thinking presupposes sociality. Next, Bonhoeffer argues that willing is only exercised and hence real in the resistance against another will. He writes, “Will as an isolated phenomenon is absurd.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, willing, too, presupposes other persons.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of this account of sociality in the primal state for Bonhoeffer’s critique of idealism is to be found in the essential interrelatedness of persons from the start. Bonhoeffer suggests that idealism’s first error is in its assumption of the self and its other as subject and object, categories of a different kind, and therefore in need of reconciliation.<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer writes,

the only question asked *by idealist philosophy* about I and You...is formulated wrongly. It starts from the assumption that I and You can be conceived quite unrelated to one another, and then it inquires about their point of unity, which obviously must exist. The question of the alien psyche, the question how one finds one’s way to the other, is not sufficiently informed by the fact of the *unity* of all activity of spirit. This question always

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer claims that the I and You are essentially interrelated and co-arising from the broader community of which they are both a part. See *ibid.*, 71: “Since I know myself as ‘I’, I lift myself as an individual above a vegetative condition of spirit in the community. At the same time, however, in this very act the essence of the ‘You’ jumps up to meet me, as the other spirit that is conscious of itself.” In other words, I and You simultaneously meet each other, arising from the context, or the “between” of the community. Bonhoeffer uses the Hegelian phrase, objective spirit, to label this broader social order, yet he will later emphatically distinguish what he has in mind by this idea from Hegel’s use of it.

<sup>13</sup> As noted in the introduction, the criticisms of idealism offered by Bonhoeffer, among others, may not be the most accurate or charitable readings of idealism.



assumes an individual conceived as fundamentally isolated, who subsequently seeks contact somehow with others.<sup>14</sup>

What Bonhoeffer calls the epistemological paradigm with which idealism operates is not equipped to ask the right question about the fundamental relationships between persons because it fails to see that the intellect and will distinctive of persons necessarily imply sociality, that they presuppose existence in community. Hence, Bonhoeffer concludes, “*human spirit in its entirety is woven into sociality and rests on the basic-relation of I and You.*”<sup>15</sup> This basic-relation can be articulated as the idea that I and You are co-arising and co-dependent. The I exists only through the You, and the You can only exist in its relation to an I. Thus, self-consciousness or selfhood is shot through with sociality.

Bonhoeffer’s account of social existence in the primal state very much exemplifies the dialogical model of sociality and its critique of idealism, especially as articulated by Gadamer. I and You are not separated as subject from object, but are rather both inheritors and participants in a broader or prior social structure, which gives them both language and understanding. Both Bonhoeffer and Gadamer thus criticize idealism as trying to solve the problem of sociality through a misunderstanding of the prior connectedness of persons. Further, Bonhoeffer’s account here holds that neither the I nor the You ground the social relation, but instead sociality is grounded in the community between them of which they are both members.<sup>16</sup>

What is decisive here, however, is that Bonhoeffer’s endorsement of a dialogical model of sociality holds only in the primal state, prior to the advent of sin.<sup>17</sup> This point reveals

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, 70: “It is our view that *there would be no self-consciousness without community – or better, that self-consciousness arises concurrently with the consciousness of existing in community.*” See also from SC-A, *ibid.*, n. [29]: “human beings cannot be thinking-beings without participating in this objective spirit, that is, that they would obviously lack a decisive ingredient of human spirit.”

<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer writes that the concepts of person and community in the primal state must serve merely as formal presuppositions which gain their content only from revelation. He warns that this discussion “cannot be a matter of

Bonhoeffer's second criticism of idealism, and for that matter, all contemporary social philosophy and sociology, which declares that it does not take seriously the reality of sin and the impact of sin on social-basic relations. Bonhoeffer writes, "we differ fundamentally from idealism, for which origin and telos stand in real, unbroken connection, the synthesis of which is expressed in the concept of 'essence'. There, sin and salvation are realities that do not alter the original essence of things. For us, though, the doctrine of the primal state is significant precisely because it enables us to grasp concretely the reality of sin, which infinitely alters the essence of things."<sup>18</sup> In other words, insofar as the realities of sin and salvation are taken up at all, idealism takes them as accidents of history which do not affect the substance of persons and community. Bonhoeffer argues to the contrary that sin fundamentally changes the basic-relations of one person to another.

In the course of his account of sociality in the primal state, Bonhoeffer uses the insights of both philosophers of community and sociologists, but he does so with the mostly implicit qualification that the concepts and resources he takes from them are really only applicable in the primal state.<sup>19</sup> However, while these sociologists think they are describing social reality as it exists now, for Bonhoeffer, this just ignores the reality of sin. Thus, they are actually quite close to giving an accurate account of the formal structures of human sociality pre-fall, in Bonhoeffer's view, and are useful to that extent. Hence, Bonhoeffer is able to affirm their analyses, but through setting their descriptions in a different context, one that is only available to

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developing speculative theories about the possibility of social being in the primal state not affected by evil will. Instead, methodologically, all statements are possible only on the basis of our understanding of the church, i.e., from the revelation we have heard." Ibid., 65. The question of the primal state is not one of archeology but of eschatology, that is, of "hope projected backward." Ibid., 61. It is revelation which shows us what we can hope for in redemption by showing us the formal sketches of what that redemption presupposes.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Bonhoeffer can quote Othmar Spann saying, "*this is the essence of spirit, to be oneself through being in the other,*" as a summary of his own conclusions for the primal state. Ibid., 73, quoting Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, 103ff.

revelation. Bonhoeffer argues that what the disciplines of social philosophy and sociology have missed is that with sin, the “spirit-form” of human beings takes a different shape.<sup>20</sup> That is, the basic-relations and structures of human being and community are altered at their fundamental level by the onset of sin into the world. Thus, the descriptions given in the primal state never apply to the world of the present day (except in eschatological prolepsis).

In the same way, Bonhoeffer would claim that although Gadamer has certainly made an advance over idealist philosophy in rejecting its subject-object ontology and epistemology, he has not taken seriously the effects of sin on persons in relation. For what Gadamer thinks applies in current social relations is applicable in the primal state alone. There is a genuine place for dialogical sociality in which I and You exist in seamless reciprocity, in which the between of the broader community provides the initiative and ground for relationality. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer would argue that Gadamer has not fully broken with idealism in that, like idealism, Gadamer holds that sociality remains uninterrupted from *arche* to *telos*. Gadamer’s view that sociality is always on the way to ever richer and more refined understanding in language is rooted in an ontology that is unaffected by the concept of sin, and its weakness is found in its inability to account for the ways in which persons manipulate, betray, and belittle others in language. Rather than being mere incidental variations on understanding in community, Bonhoeffer argues that sin changes the manner in which persons relate to each other in a basic way.

### **Sociality After the Fall**

In Chapter Four of *Sanctorum Communio*, “Sin and Broken Community,” Bonhoeffer explains the way that sin affects basic relations. He writes, “Whereas the previous spirit-form grew out of love, the fall replaced love with selfishness. This gave rise to the break in immediate

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<sup>20</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 106.

community with God, and likewise in human community. With this change of direction the whole spiritual orientation of humanity was altered.”<sup>21</sup> Bonhoeffer analyzes this shift in terms of will, maintaining that in the state of innocence, “*will is by its nature oriented toward other wills.*”<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer claims, “Whereas in the primal state the relation among human beings is one of giving, in the sinful state it is purely demanding.”<sup>23</sup> Bonhoeffer’s idea here is that the wills of persons in the primal state are oriented by love of others, which again is a theological presupposition made possible only through revelation in Christ, while after the fall this love of others turns inward, what Bonhoeffer, following Luther, will later call the “heart turned in on itself.”<sup>24</sup> This articulation of the change in social-basic relations in the state of sin serves as a *post hoc* set up of the I-You relationship Bonhoeffer argues for in his chapter on the “Christian Concept of Person.”

To advance the distinctiveness of what Bonhoeffer sees as the Christian concept of person, he outlines in Chapter Two a quick typology of philosophical approaches to the concept of person. Bonhoeffer breaks the history of philosophy down into two basic positions: social atomism on the one hand and idealism on the other. The former position advocated by the Epicureans and the Enlightenment maintains that persons are enclosed individuals who only externally relate to one another. On the other hand, idealism, as Bonhoeffer sees it, “fundamentally denies the person by subsuming the person under the universal.”<sup>25</sup> Hence, in addition to the usual list of German idealists, Aristotle and the Stoics fall into this category,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*, 107-108 n. [4]: “Human love, instead of being directed toward the other – whether that be God or other people – is now focused on oneself. Everything becomes a means to one’s own selfishness.” For the phrase *cor curvum in se*, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 46.

<sup>25</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 41.

according to Bonhoeffer. This way of framing the issue allows Bonhoeffer to position the Christian concept of person as the mean between two extremes, that which both respects the individuality of the person while also positing her intrinsic connectedness to other persons.

Bonhoeffer's third key criticism of idealism follows this typology by maintaining that in idealism, following Descartes and Kant, the metaphysical concept of person is transformed into an epistemological concept. In the wake of Kant, idealism "resolves the opposition of subject and object in the unity of mind, in intellectual intuition."<sup>26</sup> As a consequence, Bonhoeffer claims, the personal and ethical concepts of I and You are reduced to the epistemological categories of subject and object. Further, subjectivity, in the hands of the idealists, is equated with *Geist*, which relates to other persons on the level of spirit. Because this concept of spirit is constituted by what is rational, and because for idealism, "the I is person insofar as it is spirit,"<sup>27</sup> persons can only relate to one another in the realm of abstract rationality. On Bonhoeffer's view, this construal of the self-other relationship utterly misses the concrete reality of sociality.<sup>28</sup>

Against this, Bonhoeffer argues that the Christian concept of person must "overcome the idealist concept and replace it with one which preserves the individual, concrete character of the person as absolute and intended by God."<sup>29</sup> On Bonhoeffer's view, because idealism attempts to develop the self-other relationship from epistemology, that is, from the perspective of comprehending and knowing the other person, it is bound to fail. Rather, I enter the social sphere "only when my intellect is confronted by some fundamental barrier,"<sup>30</sup> and "idealism's 'object' is ultimately no barrier."<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer is concerned to preserve otherness through the concept of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 45: "The attempt to derive the social from the epistemological must be rejected."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 46.

a barrier, or a limit, to one's own self-consciousness. Thus, Bonhoeffer claims that the otherness, and therefore the true relationship with the Other, cannot be found in epistemology but rather only in an *ethical* experience. Bonhoeffer maintains that "only the experience of the barrier as real is a specifically ethical experience."<sup>32</sup>

At this stage, the fourth criticism of idealism appears. Bonhoeffer holds that for idealism, ethics follows from rationality, and therefore can be known timelessly, or apart from the concrete moment of confrontation. Bonhoeffer instead thinks that ethics is only founded in what he calls "concrete time,"<sup>33</sup> that is, in the moment of address. In this "moment," the whole person is addressed, not merely her reason, meaning that the will and emotions are included here too.<sup>34</sup> In idealism, the other presented in the moment of address is not a temporal or real barrier because ethics can be known apart from any encounter, and thus is really a subsumption of the other into what the I knows.

Bonhoeffer argues that the ethical person "as conscious being is created in the moment of being moved – in the situation of responsibility, passionate ethical struggle, confrontation by an overwhelming claim; thus the real person grows out of the concrete situation."<sup>35</sup> This way of framing personhood reiterates Bonhoeffer's argument against idealism, according to which persons are conceived primarily as rational beings who enter the ethical realm solely by virtue of the universal reason which they bear. But for Bonhoeffer this results in a divided person, treating the person as abstract reason in separation from the whole person "in concrete, living individuality."<sup>36</sup> Thus, Bonhoeffer's criticism maintains that in conceiving of spirit as timeless

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, 49: "The idealist ethicist knows what he ought to do, and, what is more, he can always do it precisely because he ought. Where is there room, then, for distress of conscience, for infinite anxiety in the face of decisions?" Note, however, that Bonhoeffer's account of the concrete person does not here include any mention of corporeality.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 48.

rationality, idealism offers an abstract and fragmentary anthropology, divorcing the intellect from the situation of concrete encounters.

As a corrective, Bonhoeffer employs the categories of I and You, here arguing that they provide what is missing in idealist thinking, namely, the expression of a concrete personhood which confronts the self in time, space, and history. Bonhoeffer importantly distinguishes this account of the I-You relationship from the account he gives in the primal state. As noted above, the social-basic relation has changed from being rooted in love for the other to being rooted in selfishness. Now because of sin, the will of the other person confronts the I as a demand. Selfhood is now no longer defined by its confluence with the You, but rather by its confrontation with the You. The You here is defined by Bonhoeffer as “the other who places me before an ethical decision.”<sup>37</sup> The You as demand functions to engender the I as responsible. Thus, personhood and responsibility are intertwined on Bonhoeffer’s view such that the *real* person is the ethical person – the one who has been concretely addressed by a You in the entirety of her being in the moment.<sup>38</sup>

While Bonhoeffer argues that the You can be *both* God and another human being, he claims that genuine, that is, ethical, personhood arises only in relationship to the divine You.<sup>39</sup> Bonhoeffer claims,

The person-creating efficacy of the You is independent of the personhood of the You. We now add that it is also independent of the will of the human You. One human being cannot of its own accord make another into an I, an ethical person conscious of responsibility. *God or the Holy Spirit joins the concrete You; only through God’s active working does the other become a You to me from whom my I arises.*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>38</sup> This “real” person is the person after the fall, in the state of sin. For Bonhoeffer, concepts of personhood cannot be divorced from their place in history.

<sup>39</sup> See *ibid.*, 49: “For Christian philosophy, the human person originates only in relation to the divine; the divine person transcends the human person, who both resists and is overwhelmed by the divine.”

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

Thus, Bonhoeffer's claim has it that only God as You can truly encounter the self and create a responsible self, but that God's You performs this action through the human You. This claim is rooted in analysis of the will which is oriented toward selfishness. Bonhoeffer thinks that the human You on its own is not sufficient to be the barrier necessary to confront the self, that is to break through the inwardly directed will of the self. In large part, Bonhoeffer's strong and traditionally Lutheran doctrine of sin prevents his allowing for persons in themselves to reverse the orientations of the will in another human being.

Commentators have latched onto this description of the I-You relationship as the clearest and most concentrated expression of Bonhoeffer's account of anthropology and the sociality in which persons are embedded. A line of criticism of Bonhoeffer's account taken up by Charles Marsh and Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. has emerged at this stage, which is due to not carefully distinguishing the different layers of Bonhoeffer's exposition and taking this description of the I-You relation as constitutive for his entire project. This criticism maintains that Bonhoeffer imprudently adopts the categories of the philosophy of dialogue and thereby ultimately fails to sufficiently depart from the transcendental-idealist tradition.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> A second criticism, which falls out of the same kind of misreading argues that Bonhoeffer's anthropology in *Sanctorum Communio* as exemplified in the I-You relationship of chapter two is fragmentary, actualistic, and therefore cannot account for the continuity of existence. This criticism stems from Bonhoeffer's insistence here that the concrete moment of the individual's encounter with the You serves as a refutation of idealism's timeless account of ethical rationality and decision-making. Bonhoeffer's thinking is that the concrete, lived moment of reality in which the individual is faced with an ethical dilemma exposes the abstraction of idealism, which is unable to account for this kind of situation. In contrast to idealism's belief that a person's existence is most paradigmatically manifest in timeless rationality, Bonhoeffer argues that "*the individual becomes a person ever and again through the other, in the 'moment.'*" Ibid., 55-56. That is, "*the person ever and again arises and passes away in time.*" The person does not exist timelessly; a person is not static, but dynamic. The person exists always and only in ethical responsibility; the person is re-created again and again in the perpetual flux of life." Ibid., 48.

On the basis of these statements, Marsh, Clifford Green, and Michael DeJonge have declared Bonhoeffer's anthropology to be actualistic at this point, meaning that the person is constituted only through acts of encounter with the Other. Green writes, "In *Sanctorum Communio*, the main emphasis in the central concept of person is actualistic...[which] involves an extreme fragmentation of personal life: it cannot, as such, give an adequate alternative account of the continuity of human life...This is a sharp, unresolved issue in *Sanctorum Communio* which is explicitly taken up in *Act and Being.*" Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (revised edition) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 70-71. Charles Marsh objects that on the anthropology of *Sanctorum Communio*, "If social relations are 'ever falling apart,' and if they are shaped by the act-oriented claims of the other,



Marsh and Floyd see in Bonhoeffer's use of the language of I and You the influence of Buber's philosophy of dialogue, the position that sociality is grounded in the dialogue between persons. Theunissen's analysis of the philosophy of dialogue is key to both Floyd's and Marsh's criticism of *Sanctorum Communio*. Marsh maintains that Bonhoeffer appropriates the categories of the philosophy of dialogue while Floyd suggests that Bonhoeffer tends, at least in portions of the text, to adopt it wholesale.<sup>42</sup> Having foisted the dialogical banner upon Bonhoeffer's account, Floyd and Marsh both proceed to read Theunissen's criticisms of Buber's philosophy back into Bonhoeffer's account of the I-You relationship articulated in "The Christian Concept of Person."<sup>43</sup> What goes unnoticed in these criticisms is the fact that Bonhoeffer's use of the categories of I and You in Chapter Two is quite different from the philosophy of dialogue charted in Theunissen's analysis. Although it is clear that Bonhoeffer is familiar with a number of the thinkers in the movement of the philosophy of dialogue, he never interacts with nor even appears to have read the dialogical thought of Buber.<sup>44</sup>

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it would seem to be the case that community, and also subjectivity itself, splinters into particularized acts of encounter," a notion which Marsh suggests "backslides to the equivocal terms of Barth's crisis theology" Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 72, 73. Michael DeJonge, for his part, argues that "whereas Bonhoeffer endorses an act-concept of person in *Sanctorum Communio*, in *Act and Being* he attributes it to act-theologians before finding it wanting for its lack of continuity. The person of *Sanctorum Communio*, conceived in terms of act, gives way to the person of *Act and Being*, conceived as the unity of act and being," Michael DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 74.

Apart from these momentary encounters, the person apparently flickers in and out of existence, creating a punctiliar anthropology. Thus, in an ironic twist, Bonhoeffer is charged with proposing a fragmentary concept of person at just the place he argues idealism "fragments the *fullness of life* of the concrete person." Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> See Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 68, speaking of "Bonhoeffer's appropriation of...the philosophy of dialogue." See also Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 134: "Bonhoeffer himself at times appeared to tend towards such a position [the dialogical approach], particularly in *Sanctorum Communio*."

<sup>43</sup> See Floyd, *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness*, 133-142. See also Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 65-70.

<sup>44</sup> In his appropriation of dialogical language in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer cites Eberhard Grisebach, Friedrich Gogarten, Theodor Litt, and Emmanuel Hirsch. See Henry Mottu, "Similarities between Martin Buber and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Contribution to Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in *Bonhoeffer Jahrbuch* 4 (2010): 80-95, for the admission that no evidence exists to support the thesis that Buber served as a source for Bonhoeffer.

Nevertheless, considered in its form, Buber's scheme looks similar to Bonhoeffer's account of the I-You relation in that, for both, human beings are not in themselves the ground of sociality: the human You can no more autonomously engender sociality than can the I of itself relate appropriately to the You. Rather, something other than the persons themselves must intervene in order to bring about genuine persons. Marsh takes note of this similarity and claims that the "dialogical categories" Bonhoeffer adopts "restrict" his theological categories. Marsh has it that Bonhoeffer's "shortcoming" in *Sanctorum Communio* is that "the christological terms he uses are in large part informed by the language of dialogue."<sup>45</sup> Marsh suggests that Bonhoeffer's I-You language amounts to an adoption of the Buberian category of the *between* as the locus of the encounter between persons. On Marsh's reading of Bonhoeffer, the genuine person "proceeds out of the christological between... Christ is the divine subjective ground of the I and other; Christ as *between* is the source of community."<sup>46</sup> Marsh thinks this is a problem because the encounter with the divine in the other person flickers in and out of experience, fragmenting what should be a continuity in the community of persons.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the formal similarity between Bonhoeffer and Buber on this score, Marsh misreads Bonhoeffer as offering Christ as an in-between. The decisive difference Bonhoeffer has with Buber here is that for Bonhoeffer, the something that makes possible and intervenes into the human-human relationship is itself a You, a person, while for Buber, it is an *impersonal* relation or situation: the between. Although Buber's notion of the between makes possible intimacy and personal relationships between humans, this relation itself is no third person, but is rather an

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<sup>45</sup> Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 76.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*, 75: "Community based on dialogue, difference, and the occurrence of the between forfeits the continuity insinuated in the rich conception of God's I becoming concrete in Christ—a conception that requires thicker ontological and christological expression."

event. This is clear in the fact that Buber posits the relation as making possible persons, and his model of sociality does not clearly demarcate God as having a separate kind of encounter as a Thou with the I.<sup>48</sup>

On Bonhoeffer's account, sociality, in either of its vertical (divine-human) or horizontal (human-human) iterations is not grounded in reciprocity or in the meeting between persons. Instead, the divine person is alone able to situate the human being into truth that makes possible genuine sociality. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer would criticize Buber's view as leaving no room for revelation, as the person of Christ, to put into effect genuine human relationships because it allows persons to be placed into genuine relation with each other apart from revelation. In other words, Marsh, as well as Floyd, wind up criticizing Bonhoeffer for advocating for a form of dialogicalism that Bonhoeffer rejects. Of course, as noted above, Bonhoeffer does maintain a model of sociality akin to dialogical models in the primal state, but this social-basic relation is superseded by the entry of sin into the social plane, making necessary the initiative of the divine other to ground sociality.<sup>49</sup> Crucial to these criticisms, then, is the assumption that Bonhoeffer's concept of person entailed by the I-You social-basic relations of demand, is the defining concept of person for the model of sociality articulated in *Sanctorum Communio*.

### **Sociality in the Church**

While Bonhoeffer's account of the Christian concept of person in the second chapter is generalized, giving the underlying, descriptive conditions of personhood of both those in redeemed or unredeemed existence, it does not take into account how person and community in

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<sup>48</sup> A second objection may be offered here, that although does not arise directly from Buber's use of the between, may well arise in relation to Marsh's employment of Christ as between. Bonhoeffer rejects the view that the self's relation to other humans is derivative of or subsequent to the relation with God. Instead, Bonhoeffer holds that in the church-community the relationship with the human Other is direct. See Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 169 and 177 n. 39.

<sup>49</sup> Neither Marsh nor Floyd note the dialogical model present in the primal state, nor do they distinguish between the two types of I-You relations operative pre-fall and post-fall.

Christ, in the *sanctorum communio*, are overlaid with a new social-basic relation, the third form of the social-basic relation offered in the text. Just as person and sociality are fundamentally changed with the entry into sin, so person and sociality are fundamentally changed with the entry into the church. The primal state provides the formal, structural features of human existence in community, while the fall into sin provides an actualizing content to sociality, the governing principle by which persons relate to one another. Entry into the church does not remove this principle, sin, or the ways in which, when operative, it guides sociality. Instead, sociality in the church is governed by a new principle which makes possible a new orientation of the will.

Bonhoeffer outlines the new social basic relations in the community of the church when he claims that “the Christian person achieves his or her essential nature only when God does not encounter the person as *You*, but ‘enters into’ the person as *I*.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, Bonhoeffer claims that personhood is *not* fulfilled or complete in the I-You relation characterized by the punctiliar demand of the You. Instead, the person is only truly realized in true community, and this comes only in a distinct form of encounter with God. No longer is the relation to God and the other person the opaque encounter of a barrier, but the relation becomes a true *self*-revelation; God is known as an I, as a self, through the revelation of God’s love. Bonhoeffer explains:

The cord between God and human beings that was cut by the first Adam is tied anew by God, by revealing God’s own love in Christ, by no longer approaching us in demand and summons, purely as *You*, but instead by *giving God’s own self as an I, opening God’s own heart. The church is founded on the revelation of God’s heart.* But since destroying the primal community with God also destroyed human community, so likewise when God restores community between human beings and God’s own self, community among us also is restored once again.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 145. See also *ibid.*, 56: “*I know God’s ‘I’ only in the revelation of God’s love, so too with the other person; here the concept of the church comes into play.*”

In restored community, that is, the church, the social-basic relation of one person to another is changed from demand into love. Thus, the person who exists in the church exists through a new sense of personhood, the essential nature Bonhoeffer spoke of above.

This nature is constituted through the encounter with the love of God, this love forming the new social-basic relation. Bonhoeffer writes, “The person living in the community of the I-You relationship [in the church] is given the assurance of being loved, and through faith in Christ receives the power of love also...For that person the other member of the church-community is essentially no longer claim but gift, revelation of God’s love and heart. Thus the You is to the I no longer law but gospel, and hence an object of love.”<sup>52</sup> This change can be described in terms of the reorienting of the will from inwardly-focused selfishness back outward, toward the other in love. The person now receives the power to love, this having been lacking in the previous social-basic relation constituted by the demand of the You. This relation is similar to the social-basic relation of the primal state in that the will is oriented toward the other in love. However, the difference between the two is that while the relation in the primal state was a merely formal construction of persons in relation, the social-basic relation of love in the church is the concrete overcoming in history of the selfish relation of sin.

This power to love is grounded in what Bonhoeffer calls the “vicarious representative action” [*Stellvertretung*] of Christ, the standing in for humanity before God, paradigmatically found on the cross. Bonhoeffer writes that vicarious representative action “*is not an ethical possibility or standard, but solely the reality of the divine love for the church-community; it is not an ethical, but a theological concept.* Through the Christian principle of vicarious representative action the new humanity is made whole and sustained. This principle gives

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 166.

Christian basic-relations their substantive uniqueness.”<sup>53</sup> Vicarious representative action can be described as the specific form of self-giving love which not only makes possible the reorienting of wills in community, but serves as the basis for human love for others. Not only does this concept serve as the “the life-principle of the new humanity,” but it is also the case that “my service to the other person springs from the life-principle of vicarious representative action.”<sup>54</sup> The love for humanity demonstrated by Christ is implanted in the persons of the church community, who model this love to those around them. Hence Bonhoeffer describes life in the church-community as “the beginning of the new life...where the You reveals itself to the I as another I, as heart, as love, as Christ.”<sup>55</sup>

As a consequence of the articulation of this model of sociality found in the church community, a two-stage movement emerges with respect to how the divine and human other encounter the person living historical reality. First, the divine You encounters or *can* encounter the I in the human You as demand apart from the church. Second, this encounter is changed into the relationship with both the human and divine You as self-giving love, in Christ.<sup>56</sup> Because on Bonhoeffer’s account, a change in the content of the social-basic relation entails a change in the concept of person involved in the relation, the concept of person operative in the I-You relation of demand is a different concept of person operative in the I-You relation of love.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 213. See also *ibid.*, 183: “our action are the actions of members of the body of Christ, that is, they possess the power of the love of Christ, through which each may and ought to become a Christ to the other.”

<sup>56</sup> Bonhoeffer also emphasizes that the I-You relation as barrier remains even in the church: “Here the ethical social basic-relations described earlier are alive. The I-You relation (in the above sense) between God and us and within sociality still continues to exist, even though God has revealed God’s own self (God’s ‘I’), and even though within the church the other has become an ‘I’, that is, has been revealed as love. Sin, the law, and the wrath of God still exist...and thus the I-You-relation also still remains.” *Ibid.*, 161 n. [108]. In other words, the ethical I-You relation, that of encounter, still occurs in the persons of the church, through the Spirit encountering the person through their conscience as individuals. Nevertheless, this remaining of the initial I-You relation even in the church does not affect my reading of the I-You relation proceeding in two distinct stages.

In order to critique and supplant the idealist model, Bonhoeffer's argument now shifts from the examination of persons and their social-basic relations to an examination of the nature the communities in which they are embedded and which give shape to those social basic relations. Bonhoeffer argues that community is the ultimate locus of sociality, and that the true community, the church, is constituted through both divine and human I-You relations. In order to explain Bonhoeffer's articulation of the church community as an alternative to the idealist model, I will need to unpack two important concepts he uses to explain communities: collective personhood and objective spirit.

Bonhoeffer argues that communities bear the character of what he calls "collective persons," a concept he picks up largely from Max Scheler.<sup>57</sup> Bonhoeffer finds this concept useful because it allows for the positing of social being which does not at the same time dissolve or diminish the individuals within that community. In keeping with his emphasis on sociality only being adequately addressed in ethical categories, Bonhoeffer asks what it would mean to think of collective persons as the bearers of ethical responsibility. Because collective persons are, after all, persons, they participate in I-You relations: collective persons are I's that can be addressed by either a collective or an individual You, and they are You's which can address individual or collective I's. Further, and most importantly for Bonhoeffer's immediate purposes, collective persons are I's that can be addressed by the divine You. As the receiver of an address, a collective person itself possesses a will which encounters another will in the address.

The broadest such collective person is sinful humanity as a whole, which Bonhoeffer designates as the collective person of Adam.<sup>58</sup> Bonhoeffer locates the unity of the collective

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<sup>57</sup> See Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 519-560. See Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 77-80, for his reliance on Scheler for this concept.

<sup>58</sup> See *ibid.*, 118-121.

person in the encounter between wills found in the address by the divine You.<sup>59</sup> The significance of Bonhoeffer's proposal is to be found in the fact that the unity of community is found not in the likeness of rational spirit, but in the fact of being addressed by the will of God. Bonhoeffer says that the collective person of Adam "can only be superseded by the collective person 'Christ existing as church-community'."<sup>60</sup>

Bonhoeffer claims that the church is the collective person which is created from out of Christ's redemptive act; further, Bonhoeffer argues that Christ exists as this collective person. Bonhoeffer specifically formulates this concept as a contrast to Hegel's phrase, "*God existing as community*,"<sup>61</sup> arguing that Hegel conflates the divine spirit with the church community. Bonhoeffer's designation of Christ as the collective person of the church (1) is meant to be faithful to the New Testament identification of Christ with the church and (2) is qualified by that fact that the collective person of "Adam has really been replaced by Christ only eschatologically ... So long as sin remains, the whole of sinful humanity also remains in every human being."<sup>62</sup>

From the point of view of eternity, from God's reality, Christ has completed the church and exists as the church.<sup>63</sup> But the empirical church is still bound up with sin such that there can be no simple identification of the empirical church community with Christ. Rather, Bonhoeffer says, the collective person of the church can be identified with Christ "only insofar as God's own self is at work in the act of repentance. It is not the community of sinners but instead the holiness

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<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer writes, "Like every person, the collective person of humanity is also capable of being addressed ethically, as indeed the call can be heard for *all of humanity in the story of Jesus Christ*. The collective person of humanity has one heart." Ibid., 121.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 198 n. 68.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>63</sup> See *ibid.*, 144: "Humanity is new in Christ, that is, from the perspective of eternity." See also *ibid.*, 153: "(1) *The church is already completed in Christ, time is suspended.* (2) *The church is to be built within time upon Christ as the firm foundation. Christ is the historical principle of the church.*"



of this very church-community which is ‘Christ existing as church-community’.<sup>64</sup> In other words, Christ does not simply exist “there” in the church, but only in the vicarious representative action of Christ which reconciles humans with God. As Bonhoeffer puts it, “in Christ...humanity has been brought once and for all...into community with God.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, the concept of Christ existing as the collective person of the church functions as the concrete unity of the church community which avoids the pitfall of locating the unity of a community in abstract spirit, apart from the concrete action of Christ.

Bonhoeffer further sharpens his polemic with idealism through the contested concept of objective spirit, which he favorably credits Hegel with introducing.<sup>66</sup> What again comes to define Bonhoeffer’s notion of objective spirit is the concept of will. He writes that the “will of the structure” that emerges when the wills of two persons unite is “a third factor,” not reducible to the wills of the persons. “Precisely this structure,” says Bonhoeffer, “is objective spirit.”<sup>67</sup> Bonhoeffer maintains this volitional structure in contrast Hegel’s intellectualized concept of objective spirit, which he argues is “untenable.”<sup>68</sup> Bonhoeffer is concerned that the unbroken dialectic between absolute spirit and subjective spirit provides a too seamless transition into objective spirit, and one in which objective spirit inevitably becomes deified. Bonhoeffer objects, “Absolute spirit does not simply enter into the subjective spirits, gathering them up into the objective spirit.”<sup>69</sup> Instead, objective spirit, even the objective spirit of the church community, is not to be confused with the Holy Spirit, but rather is to be seen as the very human product of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.*, 74. Bonhoeffer owes his usage of the concept of objective spirit not only to Hegel’s original formulation of it, but also to a number of early 20<sup>th</sup> century sociologists who employed it in their social theories. See especially Hans Freyer, *Theory of Objective Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Culture*, trans. Steven Grosby (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 98.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

human wills. For Bonhoeffer, this means that the “concept of the objective spirit cannot be developed without sin as a constitutive element. *The reality of sin makes it clear that it is impossible to equate the objective spirit of the church as collective person with the Holy Spirit.*”<sup>70</sup> On Bonhoeffer’s view, it is just this neglect of the concept of sin that has led Hegel to identify “the Holy Spirit with the corporate spirit of the church.”<sup>71</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s final criticism of idealist sociality emerges from his previous criticisms and claims that idealism promotes a false unity of persons which is based on understanding persons as mere rationality. Bonhoeffer writes that on the picture of idealism, “the spirit is one, eternally identical, transpersonal, immanent in humanity; it destroys the concrete person, and thus prevents any concrete concept of community, instead replacing it with the immanent unity of spirit.”<sup>72</sup> Bonhoeffer has now repeatedly targeted idealism for advocating an abstract concept of person which amount only to rational spirit. Because rational spirit is identical in each person, unity of this spirit is achieved. However, this comes at the expense of recognizing either individuality or plurality in persons, that is, their concrete reality.

In contrast to this, Bonhoeffer maintains that the unity of true community, that is, “the unity of the Christian church is *not based on human unanimity of spirit, but on divine unity of Spirit.*”<sup>73</sup> In Bonhoeffer’s view, the Holy Spirit, in distinction from objective spirit, establishes or actualizes the unity of the church through bringing Christ to the individual, who realizes this unity in himself, as Bonhoeffer writes, “*The personal unity of the church is ‘Christ existing as church community’.*”<sup>74</sup> While the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of the unity of the community,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 198 n. 68.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 194-198.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 199.

Christ is the material cause, the actual substance of the unity of the church.<sup>75</sup> Beyond being the efficient cause of the community's unity, the Holy Spirit also brings about true plurality in the church through addressing the will of individuals through the divine will. Here, persons are recognized not simply in their unity but also at the same time in their particularity.

Finally, the Holy Spirit brings community to the church through the mediation of Christ's love to persons, which reorients the human will and gives it the "power to love."<sup>76</sup> Here, we see Bonhoeffer's solution to the false idealist concept of community as a unity. What stands out in Bonhoeffer's account is the continued insistence on the importance of the will which idealism neglects. It is the personal encounter with wills which accounts for individuality, and it is the reorienting of the will in love which makes possible true community.

To sum up the account of sociality given in *Sanctorum Communio* as an alternative to idealism: Bonhoeffer lays out three different social-basic relations corresponding to the person in the primal state, in human beings after the fall, and in the church community. The social-basic relation in the primal state is the I-You relation in which the wills are oriented toward each other in love, the I and You co-arising with one another in mutuality from the context of the community. The social-basic relation in sin is the I-You relation in which You presents itself to the I in the form of an ethical demand, bringing the I to ethical personhood in the moment of address. The social-basic relation in the church community is the I-You relation in which the power to love is restored to the will through the self-revelation and vicarious representative action of Christ. Persons in the church community exist in and through the collective person of Christ, while still retaining the I-You relation of sin, overlaid with the I-You relation of love. In

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<sup>75</sup> Here I do not mean to say that Bonhoeffer conceives of Christ as a substance in an Aristotelian/metaphysical sense, but rather that Christ in his person is himself the unity of the church.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

this way, Bonhoeffer articulates the person and community as having been brought from a formal, dialogical model of sociality into an ethical encounter model of sociality through the historical reality of sin, then transformed into a revelational model of sociality in the church.

At each stage of the development of persons and communities, Bonhoeffer offers his account as an alternative to the model developed by idealism. Persons are thought of as intrinsically related to one another in the primal state in contrast to idealism's positing of subjects in opposition to their objects. The significance of the reality of sin is shown to impact the basic ways in which persons relate to one another. This leads to the necessity of persons relating to each other in ethical encounter, in contrast to idealism's epistemological project of uniting subject and object through cognition. The ethical encounter outlined by Bonhoeffer recognizes the concrete and historical situation of persons, in contrast to the abstract and timeless person of idealism. Finally, the unity of persons with one another in true community, in the church, is brought about by the permanent action of the collective person of Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit, which both mediates that unity and ensures individuality through the continuing address of the will. Bonhoeffer maintains this concept of the unity of the church in contrast to idealism's notion of the abstract unity of spirit being the locus of the unity of persons.

### **The Critique of Idealism and Model of Sociality in *Act and Being***

Bonhoeffer's criticism of idealism and proposed model of sociality in *Act and Being* rely to a great extent on the categories developed in *Sanctorum Communio*. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer does sharpen his critique and refine his articulation of sociality in his *Habilitationsschrift*. The basic claim is that idealism, in following through on the transcendentalism of Kant, sets the I as

the determination of all reality.<sup>77</sup> In the process of developing this criticism of idealism, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between transcendental philosophy and idealism, a distinction not present in *Sanctorum Communio*. Transcendental philosophy, according to Bonhoeffer, orients thought toward a transcendent referent, toward that which exceeds the conscious act which points to it.<sup>78</sup> The concern of transcendental philosophy, however, is not so much to circumscribe the object of the intentional act as it is to delimit the power of the I and to define the I in terms of its act. Curiously, then, transcendental philosophy endeavors to say more about the subject than about the objects of consciousness. In contrast, idealism, on Bonhoeffer's view, attempts to follow the path of "true ontology" in securing the "primacy of being over against consciousness and to uncover this being."<sup>79</sup> In this endeavor, being is supposed to be articulated apart from the consciousness which thinks it – as being-in-itself. Bonhoeffer then argues that the attempt at true transcendental philosophy made by Kant and the attempt at true ontology made by idealism fail to successfully delimit the power of the I and define the object of consciousness apart from consciousness.

While Kant undertook to set limits on the knowledge that the I can attain, because those limits are self-imposed, through reason, they are really no limit at all for the I. Bonhoeffer writes,

despite the strenuous attempt to go beyond itself or establish its boundaries, reason remains by itself, understandings itself not 'in reference to' that which transcends it, but 'in reference to' itself. The miscarriage of the endeavor to ascertain the boundaries of reason is due to the fact that there are for reason essentially no boundaries, for even the boundaries are thought away until they are no longer genuine boundaries<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> As Bonhoeffer puts it, "the I, now thinking itself, simply becomes the *point of departure* instead of the limit-point of philosophy. But thinking cannot do this without losing two very different things, reality and transcendence, that is, *the one through the other*." Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 39.

<sup>78</sup> See *ibid.*, 34: "It is integral to the concept of genuine transcendentalism that thinking refers to something transcendent which, however, is not at its disposal."

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

On Bonhoeffer's assessment, despite Kant's best intentions and protests, the logical conclusion of his project ends in the idealist elevation of the I as the master of all things. The result of this procedure is that the acts of consciousness, which are meant to understand themselves only in reference to something transcendent of consciousness, always and only refer back to the being of the I itself. That is, act folds itself back into immanent being.

Meanwhile, idealism's attempt to construct an ontology from the concept of objective being proves problematic, too, on Bonhoeffer's view. While in ontology, beings is supposed to be delivered independent of the mental act which perceives it, Bonhoeffer argues that "idealism seems to have resolved the concept of being...entirely into the concept of act."<sup>81</sup> That is, in the very process of uncovering being-in-itself, idealism has simply given an account of all being in terms of the mental, that is, in terms of act. By reducing being (as object) entirely to the act of consciousness, idealism transforms being into something entirely immanent, within the domain of the consciousness of the I. This has the result that now, "to be is to be comprehended by the I in the a priori synthesis. Without the I, there is no being."<sup>82</sup> Bonhoeffer's claim here is the same as that of Levinas: idealism is the identity or correlation of being with thought.<sup>83</sup> Put either way, in terms of act reduced to one's own being or objective being reduced to one's own act, the point remains that act and being are conflated with each other in the immanence of consciousness.

This problematic leads Bonhoeffer back to his concern about the impact that act and being concepts have for theology, namely, for human self-understanding and for the understanding of God. For Bonhoeffer, because the I is now conceived of as generative of reality, both God and the self are understood solely through the I's own power. Bonhoeffer

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> See Bonhoeffer's comment that "the faulty conclusion of idealism" is "the identification of the I and being." Ibid., 91.

rhetorically asks, “if the I is the creator of its world, what is there outside itself from which it might derive knowledge of itself?”<sup>84</sup> The implied answer is that nothing is outside of the I; therefore, “I can understand myself from myself.”<sup>85</sup>

Because on the idealist model, the self that I understand is spirit, it is not only *not* unlike God, but in fact blends into divine spirit. God is understood by virtue of the I’s own self-understanding, according to the maxim criticized by Bonhoeffer: “Like knows like.” The resulting self-deification is not simply a doing violence to the concept of God; it also traps the self inside of itself, unable to experience anything beyond the creations of its own consciousness. So Bonhoeffer writes, “All who countenance that they need only to come to themselves, in order to be in God, are doomed to hideous disillusion in the experience of being-, persisting-, and ending-up-turned-in-upon-themselves utterly – the experience of utmost loneliness in its tormenting desolation and sterility.”<sup>86</sup> The idealist I, in thinking itself to be the lord of being, has in truth constricted and cut itself off from transcendence, that is, from any contact from the outside.

Bonhoeffer’s criticism here has two prongs. First, the idealist model of the autonomous I absorbs all things into itself, reducing the otherness of both other people and God into the mastery and identity of the I. Again we see the proximity to Levinas’s criticism of idealism, that the self-sufficient ego reduces the other to the same in its correlation of thought and being. Nothing from beyond the horizon of the I is allowed to impact or reorient the I. Second, Bonhoeffer claims that this autonomous I, in its command of all things, is enclosed within itself,

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 42.

unable to relate to anything genuinely other than itself.<sup>87</sup> The portrait Bonhoeffer paints of the idealist self is tragic: having achieved its goal of absolute knowledge, it is now isolated and alone. “The I believes itself free and is captive; it has all power and has only itself as a vassal.”<sup>88</sup> Idealism results in the most extreme form of individualism imaginable; in the end, nothing exists apart from the individual self.

While Levinas, in his similar form of criticism, argues that idealism has misdescribed the way in which persons come into relationships with each other, Bonhoeffer argues that idealism’s description actually obtains. Bonhoeffer identifies the movement of reason encompassing all things into itself with the state of sin. He says that in idealism, “the movement of the spirit is turned in upon itself. In Luther’s words this is *ratio in se ipsam incurva* [*reason turned in on itself*].”<sup>89</sup> This formulation is meant as a natural extension of Luther’s definition of sin as the heart turned in on itself. Thus, Bonhoeffer’s criticism of idealism is not a criticism of failing to correctly describe reality, but rather of failing to recognize that the model it describes is an articulation of sinful existence. From Bonhoeffer’s perspective, Levinas’s position fails to recognize just how accurately idealism portrays much of human existence. Idealism here champions the autonomous I which Bonhoeffer indicts as the very exemplification of sin.

Throughout the first part of *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer catalogues various philosophical attempts to solve the conflation of being with consciousness typified in idealism. Despite the best intentions of each attempt, none is able to escape the seduction of giving to reason the ability to set its own limits, which means enclosing all things into itself. Bonhoeffer reviews the positions

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<sup>87</sup> He writes, “It is clear now that, on its own, the I cannot move beyond itself. It is imprisoned in itself, it sees only itself, even when it sees another, even when it wants to see God. It understands itself out of itself, which really means, however, that it basically does not understand itself. Indeed it does not understand itself until this I has been encountered and overwhelmed in its existence by an other.” *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



of Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger, arguing that each fails to hold concepts of act and of being separate from each other. Bonhoeffer, like Levinas, argues that all philosophy ultimately succumbs to idealism because of its desire for the systematic closure of everything which thought encounters.

### **Levinas and Idealism**

Because the criticisms of idealism made by Bonhoeffer and Levinas appear remarkably similar, it would be natural to think of the two as allies in their fight against idealist models of sociality. It is striking, therefore, to note that despite the radical nature of Levinas's model of sociality, it still does not escape the lure of idealism, from Bonhoeffer's point of view. Consider the following objection from Bonhoeffer: "The inevitable objection against this position is that in the attempt to avoid all absolutizing, it is the You which is absolutized. But if the claim of the I to absoluteness is merely transferred to the You, and not the one who is above both and the absolute, then not only do we appear to be heading toward a purely ethicized conception of the gospel, but also the concept of history as well as of theology is obscured. And that means that revelation is lost from sight."<sup>90</sup> Although Bonhoeffer's charge is directed at the "unsystematic" thought of Eberhard Grisebach, it could equally well be pointed at Levinas.<sup>91</sup>

Wanting to depart from the system-building endeavors of idealism, Grisebach maintains that reality can never truly be experienced as constructed through the I; a reality in which the subject comes to knowledge of a system is a reality only of one's own imagining. Instead, "reality is 'experienced' in the contingent fact of the claim of the 'others'. Only what comes from the 'outside' can direct people to their reality, their existence. In 'taking on' the 'claim of

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>91</sup> Bonhoeffer also notes the theological appropriations of this philosophy by Friedrich Gogarten and Hinrich Knittermeyer, which in Bonhoeffer's view are either equivalent to or derivative of Grisebach's thought. See *ibid.*, n. 16.

the other', I exist in reality, I act ethically."<sup>92</sup> Hence Grisebach appears to elude the grounding of sociality through the idealist I, and instead declares sociality to only be legitimated through the contingent claim of the other.

Bonhoeffer says that "Grisebach is right, and he comes a long way to meet Christian thought, when he insists that human beings are directed into their reality only from outside."<sup>93</sup> However, in consonance with his development of the I-You relation in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer continues on to say, "But natural human beings do not perceive this 'from outside' in the claim of the neighbors, whose only function is, finally, to act ethically themselves by bearing that claim. No, the 'from outside' is perceived alone in what in the first place enables human beings to understand the 'from outside' adequately, namely in revelation through faith."<sup>94</sup> Bonhoeffer asserts that if "the I is called into reality by the You, is directed into its existence, then clearly the I and the You are given the possibility of being in reality, of understanding themselves in it, of 'placing' one another mutually 'into truth' without God, and without revelation."<sup>95</sup>

The problem that Bonhoeffer sees with Grisebach's thought is first that the human You is not sufficient to break the I out of its self-enclosure. Sinful humans do not recognize other person's claims; idealism is not broken. Second, when Grisebach posits the relationship with the human You as the enactment of genuine personhood, it enables persons to "authenticate" each other apart from revelation. Bonhoeffer argues that the mode of encounter in which I and You

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. See also *ibid.*, 106: "something that exists, something creaturely, is not able to encounter the existence of human beings, not even the 'You', the 'claim of the neighbor' (Gogarten-Grisebach), unless God takes hold of human beings and turns them around," as well as *ibid.*, 127: "Only through Christ does my neighbor meet me as one who claims me in an absolute way from a position outside my existence... Without Christ, even my neighbor is for me no more than a possibility of self-assertion through 'bearing the claim of the other' (Grisebach)."

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

can come to genuine relation with each other on Grisebach's account is in fact an *inauthentic* encounter apart from either person being encountered by Christ.<sup>96</sup>

Bonhoeffer's argument regarding the insufficiency of Grisebach's thinking constitutes an argument for the insufficiency of Levinas's position to break free from self-enclosure. For Levinas, the human You is transcendence *par excellence*, that which of itself commands the I and brings about ethical responsibility. The fact that for Levinas it is the expressive presence of the face that constitutes responsibility rather than the power of reason does not serve to mitigate Bonhoeffer's charge. For although Levinas seeks to place the human other as the boundary for the subject in a way that is not oriented by cognition, that boundary is still determined by the efficacy of that human other. And human initiative, whether in the rational or expressive faculties, in itself cannot truly place persons into truth, on Bonhoeffer's view. While Levinas does say that the face of the Other is where God can be made manifest in a non-thematizable way, it is not God who grounds sociality, on Levinas's view. He warns, "A face does not function in proximity as a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbor on me. It is a trace of itself."<sup>97</sup> God cannot stand as motivation for ethics or for the love of one's neighbor. The neighbor must signify and command in and of herself. Further, as we have seen, Levinas's concern is the inverse of Bonhoeffer's; Levinas maintains that the danger in including God in the picture of sociality is that the human Other remains a second-tier citizen in the realm of responsibility. Levinas worries that the concept of God functions to relativize the claim of human suffering in theological discourse.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> See *ibid.*, 116.

<sup>97</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 94.

<sup>98</sup> See Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self: Christology, Ethics, and Formation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), for a recent evaluation of Bonhoeffer in light of Levinas. While Elliston brings out Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Grisebach, he never applies them as criticisms of Levinas. Elliston argues that Bonhoeffer does not fall prey to Levinas's criticisms of theology, but he does not raise the question in the opposite direction, namely, whether Levinas can be accounted for under the criticisms of Bonhoeffer. See especially *ibid.*, 77-104.

Another point worth emphasizing appears here. In function, Bonhoeffer's account of the I-You relation of demand in the state of sin parallels Levinas's account of how the Other engenders moral responsibility in the subject. In both cases, the purpose of the encounter with the You is to bring about ethical responsibility. It is a concrete person who addresses another concrete person in concrete temporality. While their conceptions of time differ, both Bonhoeffer and Levinas claim that the revelation of the other constitutes a new sense of time which breaks from timeless unity of idealism. However, Bonhoeffer does not leave his model of sociality at the level of the command, the Other who functions simply to engender responsibility, but he proposes that a further change in the basic ways in which persons relate to one another. The social-basic relation of love is the true and ultimate relation to the other person, which is only possible through the action of Christ. Levinas would maintain, as we have seen, that love is included in the command, that love as the affective response to others is engendered in and with the demand for ethical responsibility manifested in the face of the other. However, for Bonhoeffer, the ethical demand is not sufficient to bring about the change in the will necessary for love. The difference here has to do with different conceptions of love, to be sure. On Bonhoeffer's account, love has its basis in the concrete action of Christ, which makes possible and grounds in a concrete model the action of human beings for others. A concept of love which does not include concrete action is therefore deficient on Bonhoeffer's view.

Because it is only the *contingent* revelation in Christ which makes possible this reorientation of the will necessary for love, Bonhoeffer maintains that only divine revelation is able to break the spell of idealism. The contingency of revelation is important because this signifies that revelation is not embedded in human nature or institutions such that it becomes graspable by cognition. Ultimately, no philosophical system which relies on human resources

alone, whether that be the resources of reason or the resources of other persons to place humans into ethical responsibility can break free from self-enclosure.<sup>99</sup> Bonhoeffer writes, “Godless thought – even when it is ethical – remains self-enclosed.”<sup>100</sup> Although Levinas might object that his account is not godless, the God he proposes is effectively reduced to the human other such that God’s activity cannot be distinguished from human activity. God is allowed to be thought only under the condition of the primacy of the revelation of the human other. In contrast to this, Bonhoeffer declares, “Revelation gives itself without precondition and is alone able to place one into reality. Theological thought goes from God to reality, not from reality to God.”<sup>101</sup> On Bonhoeffer’s view, then, Levinas places the reality of the human other as the condition for thinking God and therefore reverses the proper ordering of sociality.

Note how the contrasting methodologies drive the divergence in models of sociality. On the basis of his quasi-phenomenological methodology outlined in Chapter Two, Levinas emphasizes that the face of the human other grounds both sociality and the approach to God.<sup>102</sup> Bonhoeffer strongly opposes this by claiming on the basis of his theological commitments that

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<sup>99</sup> Paul D. Janz has argued that in contrast to Bonhoeffer, Levinas regresses into a “kind of idealism” when he rejects any comprehension, including sensible comprehension, from the self-other relation. For Janz, this means that the embodiment of the other person is surprisingly excluded from Levinas’s analysis of the face-to-face relation because the flesh of the other, as comprehensible, does not and cannot engender responsibility. Instead, for Janz, “it is for Levinas only by retreating back to *within* the primacy of the mental” that the non-totalizing relation to the other can occur. Janz thus argues that Levinas fails to escape idealism by virtue of his relegation of the empirical embodiment to a derivative role vis-à-vis consciousness. Apart from the fact that this is not Bonhoeffer’s criticism of the kind of position Levinas holds, I argue that Janz fails to recognize the significance of the fact that though the physical face is not a *sufficient* condition for the social relation, it is a *necessary* condition. And as such Levinas’s view cannot accurately be described as mentally enclosed on those grounds. See Paul D. Janz, “Bonhoeffer, This-Worldliness, and the Limits of Phenomenology,” in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought: Cruciform Philosophy*, ed. Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmermann (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 62.

<sup>100</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 89.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Recall Levinas says that his “approach to the idea of God goes by way of the analysis of the interhuman relationships that do not enter into the framework of intentionality.” Levinas, “Subjectivity as An-Archy,” 172. Recall also his claim, “There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men.” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.

divine revelation alone grounds true human relationships. Were humans able to attain a genuine form of sociality on their own, the work of Christ would be rendered expendable.

### **The Barthian Inversion of Idealism**

If revelation is the sole possibility for turning the self outside of itself, Bonhoeffer notes that the dialectical theology of Karl Barth represents a strong opposition to the immanentizing of idealism through the contingency of divine revelation.<sup>103</sup> Bonhoeffer maintains that Barth, in his insistence on the contingency of revelation for the disruption of the sinful self, avoids the conflation of act and being which reduces all things to consciousness so prevalent in idealism. On Barth's account, "revelation is interpreted purely in terms of act."<sup>104</sup> The act here is the divine act of revelation, not the mental act which grasps at what putatively transcends it. But because the divine act of revelation functions to determine how the I can know both God and the human, the being of both God and human beings becomes reduced to act.<sup>105</sup> Divine transcendence is safeguarded from absorption into the mental act through locating God's being wholly in God's free act of revelation.

This position leads to an important consequence for Barth's account of act and being, according to Bonhoeffer. Not only is God's being found only in God's act, but knowledge of human being, too, is reduced to God's act.<sup>106</sup> In Bonhoeffer's view, this resolves the problem of act and being by simply evacuating being into act. Neither the being of God or of humans is available anywhere but in God's act. But here, Barth has just flipped idealism's mistake on its head, according to Bonhoeffer. Instead of act and being concepts being reduced to immanence

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<sup>103</sup> Bonhoeffer affirms that Barth shares his view that in itself human "thought is a cohesive whole, incapable of radical self-disruption." Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 87.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>105</sup> On Barth's view, as Bonhoeffer sees it, "God's being is only act and, therefore, is in human beings also only as act, in such a way that all reflection upon the accomplished act takes place at a distance from it." *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>106</sup> "If the knowledge of self and of God that God has implanted in human beings is considered purely as act, it is for the purpose of utterly excluding any kind of being." *Ibid.*, 90.

and left under control of the human subject, in Barth, act and being are reduced to transcendence and left under control of the divine subject.

Bonhoeffer sees a particular anthropological problem in this reduction of the being of persons in Barth's account. Bonhoeffer specifically targets the way in which Barth's concept of revelation appears to be unable to account for the historicity and continuity of I as person. Bonhoeffer maintains that Barth's placement of the act of revelation and faith in the "supratemporal realm" and consequent avoidance of a theology of the objectification of God in human subjectivity "occurs at the expense of the historicity of human beings and, hence, of the existential character of act. As utterly supratemporal, the act of the new I (being the act of the Holy Spirit) has to be thought on the horizontal plane as well as from the infinity of the vertical perspective."<sup>107</sup> Bonhoeffer then argues that although Barth recognizes the need for historical continuity, his categories are already overdetermined; revelation and the life of faith for Barth by definition cannot reside in history. Thus, Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth primarily targets the way in which Barth's concept of revelation fragments the life of the Christian.

At the root of the anthropological problem is a faulty assumption: that the subject is to be conceived individualistically.<sup>108</sup> In such a case, the individual I is inevitably fragmented into the discrete acts of revelation and faith. In a key statement, Bonhoeffer writes,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>108</sup> Bonhoeffer also articulates an epistemological problem for Barth's view. Bonhoeffer says that in flipping the idealist scheme, Barth is still beholden to idealism's epistemology (and ultimately to its ontology). Instead of God being the object of the human subject's cognition, on Barth's view God is the subject *par excellence* who can only be thought "nonobjectively." Bonhoeffer puts the consequent dilemma as follows: "if revelation is nonobjective, it follows theologically that God always remains subject and always evades humanity's cognitive clutches. If, on the other hand, we are truly to speak of *revelation*, it must somehow be manifest to human beings and knowable by them." Ibid., 91-92. Barth resolves this dilemma according to Bonhoeffer by maintaining that God as knowing subject both acts and exists as the act of faith in the human being such that the human act of faith is truly the act of the Holy Spirit within the individual. Thus, the individual can never in herself grasp or account for that knowledge, which is provided only in the act of faith which God enacts. Outside of this miracle, God "is" not. Bonhoeffer summarizes the epistemological problem saying, "It would be possible to talk of God, or to know about God...only if revelation were not understood as pure act, if there were somehow a being of revelation outside of it, outside my faith, on which my faith, my thought, my knowledge could 'rest'." Ibid., 95.

There is a fundamental difference between thinking of revelation individualistically and thinking of it as something related to community. All that we have examined so far in this study was individualistically oriented. The transcendental attempt of pure actualism as well as that of ontology, which was to establish the continuity of the I, pointed to the individual human being and for that reason failed. In searching for ‘reality’ it overlooked the fact that in reality human beings are never individuals only, not even those ‘addressed by the You’. Human beings, rather, are always part of a community, in ‘Adam’ or in ‘Christ’.<sup>109</sup>

Bonhoeffer here articulates a diagnosis of both idealism and Barth’s inversion of idealism. The key reason standing the subject-object relation on its head fails to provide an adequate anthropology is that it assumes the category of “subject” to be that of the individual unconnected to the persons surrounding that subject in community. Hence the solution to idealism is not to invert its formula as Barth has done, but to throw out altogether the framing of anthropology and revelation in terms of subjects and objects. Instead, Bonhoeffer offers a model of persons whereby *person* is the key category. Persons, according to Bonhoeffer, in contrast to subjects, can never be conceived of in isolation to other persons.

### **Sociality in Christ as the Solution to Idealism**

Bonhoeffer proceeds to build on the account of persons in relation in terms of the concept of collective persons in *Sanctorum Communio*, now framed so as to provide a solution to the individualism both in idealism and in Barth. Bonhoeffer also develops his account as successfully bringing together the act of revelation and the being of God and of humans without reducing the act of revelation to the being of human consciousness (idealism) or reducing human and divine being to the act of revelation (Barth). Thus, Bonhoeffer offers the social ontology of being in Christ, which presupposes the notion of collective persons, as the solution to the individualism presumed in both idealism and in Barth’s dialectical theology.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 113.



The solution to the diagnosis of individualism that Bonhoeffer levies must provide a concept of contingent divine revelation which is socially oriented rather than oriented to the individual. As noted above, revelation must be conceived as something that has being over and above being a pure act; it must *be* something locatable outside of myself. As the first step to reconceptualizing revelation, Bonhoeffer writes, “God reveals the divine self in the church as person.”<sup>110</sup> Revelation is now defined primarily as person instead of as pure act. Further, Bonhoeffer continues to maintain that “the church is the present Christ, ‘Christ existing as community.’”<sup>111</sup> This means that both the act and being of revelation are brought together in the concept of the collective person of Christ existing as the church.<sup>112</sup> Revelation exists through the being of the collective person of the church and hence supersedes individual acts of consciousness, providing the basis for a nonindividualistic source and reception of revelation. Because the being of the church has temporal continuity, revelation has temporal continuity. Insofar as the human being participates in the church, she receives revelation in a way that does not fragment her personhood.<sup>113</sup> This revelation remains contingent and non-graspable by the cognizing I because revelation exists in the church, not as institution, but as person. The collective person of the church is the house of revelation, not cognition. Hence, revelation can never be reduced to my own cognizing efforts.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 112. See also, *ibid.*, 125: “the being of revelation [is] defined as the being of the person of Christ in the community of persons of the church.”

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>112</sup> See *ibid.*, 113: “The being of revelation ‘is’, rather, the being of the community of persons that is constituted and formed by the person of Christ and in which individuals already find themselves in their new existence.”

<sup>113</sup> See *ibid.*, 113, 114: “If the individual were the hearer of the sermon, the continuity would still be in danger. But it is the church itself that hears the word of the church, even if I did not hear in each instance...the continuity does not lie in human beings, but rather it is guaranteed suprapersonally [überpersönlich] through a community of persons. In place of the Catholic church as institution there is the community of faith as the transsubjective warrant for continuity and for the ‘outside.’” See also, *ibid.*, 118: “If faith were understood here purely as an act, the continuity of being would be broken up in the discontinuity of acts. But since faith as act comes to know itself as the mode of being of its being in the church, the continuity is maintained.”

Bonhoeffer thus argues that the revelation of the person of Christ in and as the church community, the sociality of being in Christ, truly escapes both the self-enclosure of idealism's I and the individualism presupposed in the subject-object ontology utilized both by idealism and Barth. This requires an alternative ontology, one which places persons at the center rather than the cognizing I. The concept of person is different, ontologically, than the concept of the I, the ego, for Bonhoeffer, because persons are always both individual and collective.<sup>114</sup> This means that human persons exist only in the context of the collective person of Adam or the collective person of Christ.<sup>115</sup> Persons are never simply context-less cognizing I's, but instead relate to other persons either in sin or in the church and can achieve *authentic* sociality only through the revelation of the person of Christ in the church.<sup>116</sup>

A further point revealed here is that although there is much continuity between his two dissertations, Bonhoeffer does shift his language and views on the encounter with the divine You between *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Rather than continuing to articulate a two-stage set of divine encounters in *Act and Being*, one as ethical demand and one as love in the church community, the genuine encounter with the divine just is the encounter with Christ. Thus Bonhoeffer now writes,

only through the person of Christ can the existence of human beings be encountered, placed into truth, and transposed into a new manner of existence. But as the person of Christ has been revealed in the community of faith, the existence of human beings can be encountered only through the community of faith. It is from the person of Christ that every other person first acquires for other human beings the character of personhood.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Bonhoeffer writes, "The person...is always the two in one: *individual person* and *humanity*." Ibid., 120.

<sup>115</sup> See *ibid.*, 151, where Bonhoeffer maintains "the ontological definition of being human as being-the-sinner [Sünder-Sein] and being-in-Christ [in-Christus-Sein]...There is no ontological specification of that which is created that is independent of God being reconciler and redeemer, and human beings being sinners and forgiven."

<sup>116</sup> See *ibid.*, 116: "Existence is defined as *pati*, as being acted upon; that is, one can speak 'authentically' of existence only as of existence to which things happen. Every concept of existence that is not formed by being encountered or not being encountered by Christ is 'inauthentic' (including Heidegger's authentic existence)."

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

Personhood is here defined as being acted upon, genuinely encountered, which only happens in Christ. While Bonhoeffer retains the encounter with Christ as having the character of a barrier, this encounter cannot now be separated from Christ in the church. However, Bonhoeffer does maintain a kind of encounter with Christ for the person “in Adam” which he calls “temptation,” although it could only be recognized as such in retrospect, in Christ. Bonhoeffer writes that temptation is the occurrence “in which Christ assails human beings through the law.”<sup>118</sup>

Bonhoeffer appears here to locate this temptation of Christ in the conscience rather than in the encounter with another human being.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, this shift in viewpoint does not fundamentally change Bonhoeffer’s criticisms of idealism, nor the manner in which Bonhoeffer’s model of sociality presents a distinct alternative to them. In each text, Bonhoeffer’s ontology of persons displaces idealism’s impersonal and individualistic underlying ontology.

### **The Ontology of *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being***

At this point, we can bring together the various strands of Bonhoeffer’s account of ontology which serves to replace the idealist model through his two dissertations. Bonhoeffer’s core claim in the realm of ontology is that there is no general or universal ontology, no system of being, which can comprehend all beings, considered apart from divine revelation.<sup>120</sup> For Bonhoeffer, any comprehensive system of being begins and ends in the abstraction of thought

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>119</sup> Note, however, that Bonhoeffer maintains that “conscience can be termed the voice of God only insofar as conscience is the place where Christ, in real temptation, kills human beings in order to give them life or not.” Ibid., 142.

<sup>120</sup> In contrast to theological systems, most notably Roman Catholicism, which would identify God as pure being, Bonhoeffer writes, “God is not primarily the sheer ‘is’...The ontological foundation for theological concepts of being must remain precisely the realization that this ‘is’ can in no way be detached from the concrete definition. A formalistic retreat to something ‘more general’ behind that kind of specificity fundamentally destroys the Christian idea of revelation.” Ibid., 75.

and therefore ignores the concrete reality of revelation.<sup>121</sup> On Bonhoeffer's view, then, ontology must be filtered through concrete divine revelation which is paradigmatically defined through the action of Christ. Thus, both God and human beings are defined through the revelation of the action of Christ wherein the reality of sin is overcome by the reality of grace.<sup>122</sup> Humans therefore have their being either as being-in-sin or as being-in-Christ. As we have seen, the church community is the place where Christ exists today for human beings in revelation, on Bonhoeffer's view.<sup>123</sup> Hence, while Levinas claims that the true portal to ontology is only through the human face, Bonhoeffer maintains that the gateway to ontology is through Christ's revelation in the church community. Revelation, as the person of Christ, functions to define the being of human persons, the world, and ultimately God.

Not only is the person of Christ existing as church community the basis for any true ontological statements, but it also serves as the ontological ground for genuine sociality. As we have noted, this is because the person of Christ exists as a collective person, and this collective person really exists as the church, on Bonhoeffer's view.<sup>124</sup> In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer puts the point like this:

A Christian comes into being and exists only in Christ's church-community and is dependent on it, which means on the other human being. One person bears the other in active love, intercession, and forgiveness of sins, acting completely vicariously. This is possible only in the church-community of Christ, and that itself rests, as a whole, on the principle of vicarious representation, i.e., on the love of God.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> See *ibid.*, where Bonhoeffer maintains that on Thomistic thought, "human existence is, once again, comprehensible through itself and also has access to God. This is the inevitable consequence of all systematic metaphysics."

<sup>122</sup> See *ibid.*, 151: "There is no ontological specification of that which is created that is independent of God being reconciler and redeemer, and human beings being sinners and forgiven. In the Christian doctrine of being, all metaphysical ideas of eternity and time, being and becoming, living and dying, essence and appearance must be measured against the concepts of the being of sin and the being of grace or else must be developed anew in light of them."

<sup>123</sup> For an excellent and clear explication of Bonhoeffer's view here see Tietz, "Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church," 32-46.

<sup>124</sup> It should be noted, however, that Christ's existence is not reduced to existence as the church, on Bonhoeffer's view.

<sup>125</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 190.

In *Act and Being*, despite a new set of concerns which occupy his attention, Bonhoeffer reiterates the same conception of sociality as grounded in the person of Christ: “The being of revelation ‘is’ ...the being of the community of persons that is constituted and formed by the person of Christ and in which individuals already find themselves in their new existence.”<sup>126</sup> The being of revelation is the being of the person of Christ existing as the church community.

Bonhoeffer distinguishes this personal conception of being from the standard ontological categories of existence and non-existence. He writes, “the being of revelation can be conceptualized neither as what exists [*Seiendes*], as something objective, nor as nonexisting [*Nichtseiendes*], as something nonobjective.”<sup>127</sup> Instead, the being of revelation as the person of Christ is conceptualized as the act of love in the collective person of the church. Christ encounters persons not as an objective thing, but as an act mediated through the being of the church. Christiane Tietz explains it this way: “Christ encounters us in *Seiendem*, but is not himself *Seiendes*. However, because he encounters us in *Seiendem*, he is also not *Nichtseiendes*. Christ is neither act nor being, but, rather belongs to this third ontological category.”<sup>128</sup> This third ontological category is that of person, what Bonhoeffer sometimes calls *Personsein*.<sup>129</sup> Bonhoeffer argues that this personal conception of being stands outside of the question of objectivity (and therefore outside of the question of subjectivity), escaping the subject-object orientation found both in idealism and in Barth’s inversion of idealism. Only by means of the conceptuality of the collective person of Christ, Bonhoeffer claims, can a model of sociality escape the isolation and solipsism of the cognizing I, while at the same time grant the condition

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<sup>126</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 113.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Tietz, “Bonhoeffer on the Ontological Structure of the Church,” 44.

<sup>129</sup> Bonhoeffer says that the personal being of God, which is God’s “being as such,” qualifies and defines the personal being of humans and the being of the world. See especially Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 151-153.

for the possibility of sociality, namely, love. In this way, Bonhoeffer argues, the ontology of the person of Christ serves as the corrective of the faulty idealist model of sociality.

### **Bonhoeffer, Rosenzweig, and Revelation**

Bonhoeffer's criticism of idealism and alternative model of sociality bear a number of parallels to Rosenzweig's account. I have noted throughout the chapter how Bonhoeffer maintains that the dialogical model of sociality and the ethical responsibility model of sociality cannot break the chains of idealism and remain under its power. Rosenzweig's model of sociality, however, does not appear vulnerable to Bonhoeffer's critiques for two reasons. First, Rosenzweig maintains an account of the contingency of divine revelation which alone is able to place human beings into truth and ground genuine social relations. Second, because Rosenzweig's account is not locked into a subject-object ontology, it does not succumb to the individualism of Barth's dialectical account of revelation. Recall that Rosenzweig's account of revelation holds it to be an act wholly located in the present moment, but that the soul's own faithfulness in response to that act provides the duration necessary to maintain the continuity of a life impacted by revelation. We can further point to Rosenzweig's insistence on the *We*-Thou relation against Buber as evidenced that Rosenzweig is intent on preserving the social relationship to the divine in contrast to the individualized I-Thou relation to God. Rosenzweig therefore insists upon the continuity of both the individual and the community of which she is a part in the face of the divine act of revelation. The person in this community is neither isolated from God nor from her neighbor.

Neither does Bonhoeffer's account succumb to idealism on Rosenzweig's view. Rosenzweig's criticism of idealism focuses on the reduction of God and the world to human subjectivity. For Rosenzweig, this results in an inability to properly relate the elements together

in the concreteness of time and language. Bonhoeffer's account of the contingency of revelation borne by the Christian community insists upon the concrete, temporal unfolding of interhuman and divine-human relationships. Indeed, as previously noted, Rosenzweig maintains that liturgical practices of Christianity serve to draw God, the world, and human beings together in proper relation with one another in redemption. Despite the fact that Christianity's claims are moderately relativized by the priority of Judaism in Rosenzweig's account, he affirms its legitimate role in bringing about redemption in contrast to the timeless and abstract method of idealism.

For both Bonhoeffer and Rosenzweig, the initiative of divine revelation serves as the ground of genuine sociality, making possible the love of neighbor in the community. Neither the subject, the situation of dialogue between persons, nor the face of the human other can serve as an adequate account for breaking persons out of their self-imposed seclusion. While each of these two thinkers articulates a different alternative ontology as the solution to the ills of idealism, we find that their models tend to reinforce the force of the attending critiques of idealism. The call to sociality can only come through divine revelation. Both Bonhoeffer and Rosenzweig see idealism as identifying human beings' greatest strength as being in their power of thought, but find that the force of reason, when left to its own devices, even in the power of the human being who faces me, serves to restrict and isolate rather than to join together persons in relationship. Idealism can only be escaped through a power greater than human capacity, and therefore, for Bonhoeffer as for Rosenzweig, divine revelation must be invoked.

Bonhoeffer's unique contribution to this project lies less in his claim that sociality is grounded in the revelation of the divine other, though with Rosenzweig, he does make that claim. Rather, within the space of a revelational model of sociality, Bonhoeffer's conception of

ontology is an innovative response to the problems of idealism as he identifies them. While Bonhoeffer shares many of the criticisms of idealism articulated by Rosenzweig (as well as by Levinas and Gadamer), his writing is shaped from the context of the Lutheran theological tradition. Hence, the ontology which he articulates is grounded in the presuppositions of a Protestant theology which is not shared by the other thinkers in this study. And it is this ontology which drives a distinctive conception of genuine sociality, one which grounds the true social relation in the self-revelation of the person of Christ in the church.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion – Sociality and Ontology

In the course of this project, I have organized the models of sociality articulated by Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer into a typology of responses to idealist conceptions of sociality. Recall that each of these figures criticizes idealism for grounding sociality in the cognition of the subject and proposes as an alternative a ground for sociality which moves outside of this locus. The dialogical model, here represented by Gadamer, claims that sociality is grounded in between persons, in the context of the dialogue between them. The ethical responsibility model, exemplified by Levinas, moves further out from the subject than does the dialogical model. This model claims that sociality is grounded in the other person herself who faces the subject. Finally, the revelational model, represented in different forms by Rosenzweig and by Bonhoeffer, departs further still from the subject, grounding sociality in the divine other. Each type of response to idealism, therefore, occupies a different point on a continuum, a different plot in the logical space of alternatives to grounding sociality in the subject. Although I do not claim that this topography of alternatives to idealism is exhaustive, it is a more comprehensive mapping of the territory than has hitherto been produced.<sup>1</sup>

From this mapping of the responses to idealism, two kinds of conclusion emerge which serve to guide further reflection on the matter of the grounding of sociality. The first concerns previous attempts to understand and categorize responses to idealist models of sociality. The second and more substantive conclusion is a *prolegomenal* assessment of the underlying

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<sup>1</sup> Theunissen's work in this arena still bears the mark of the *locus classicus* of charting 20<sup>th</sup> century models of sociality. See Vessey, "Gadamer's Account of Friendship," 61.

ontologies which drive the models of sociality I have thus far examined. The first conclusion I want to draw from this project responds specifically to the typology laid out by Theunissen, showing how my mapping out of the terrain goes beyond the project he inaugurated, both in the sense of being more comprehensive as well as providing an answer to the central question he raises. The second lesson I want to draw from this work has both a negative and a positive moment. The negative aspect comes out of my initial desire to construct a multi-dimensional approach to sociality which incorporates elements from each of the models into a grand synthesis of views. I now argue that this approach is not viable, at least in terms of models of sociality which are driven by differing ontologies. The positive aspect analyzes the prospects for the engagement and evaluation of the different ontologies and subsequent models of sociality in Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer.

### **Beyond Theunissen**

As noted in the introduction, Theunissen sets up his categories, transcendental and dialogical, in terms of subjective constitution, particularly around the question of how the *other* is constituted. Those occupying the transcendental position hold that the other is ultimately constituted by the subject or by the subject's intentionality. Those who occupy the dialogical position deny this and say that the other is first only mediated to the self in the form of the Thou.<sup>2</sup> In other words, my relation to the other is originally grounded in the dialogue between I and Thou, between myself and the other in the second-person. I have extended the typology of transcendental and dialogical in order to provide a better account of the phenomenon which Theunissen was tracking, namely the response to idealism and to transcendental models of sociality which were disputed by the philosophy of dialogue. This more comprehensive charting

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<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of dialogue "starts out from the assumption that the Other is *originally* encountered as Thou." Theunissen, *The Other*, 364.

of the alternatives to idealism does, however, shift the terms of the debate, if only in the weight given to certain criteria. For example, while Theunissen alludes to theological responses to idealism in the realm of social ontology, he intends to bracket those and focus on the philosophical models for his purposes. Hence, this project has extended further than Theunissen's account in more than one dimension.

As I have noted in various places during this study, Theunissen is critical of the dialogical model of sociality as he construes it because he argues that it must in fact presuppose the transcendentalism of the subjects in dialogue which it attempts to reject.<sup>3</sup> According to Theunissen's analysis of Buber, both I and Thou gain their true existence only from the fact of the meeting between them. Strictly speaking, on Theunissen's articulation of this problem, no I or Thou exist prior to the dialogue between them.<sup>4</sup> Theunissen argues, against Buber's account, that the relata, the subjects themselves, must be at least logically prior to the relation between persons. Insofar as a dialogical philosophy must implicitly presuppose that subjects exist prior to the relations between them, on Theunissen's assessment, it must depend on transcendentalism.

However, as my analysis of the models of sociality offered by Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer shows, none of these thinkers denies that subjects exist logically prior to the relations between persons. Instead, individuals exist as *factual* subjects rather than as transcendental subjects. Instead of construing subjects as transcendentially constituting the world and persons around them, the views of the figures I have examined hold that individuals are much more constituted by their historical, linguistic, and social contexts. Sociality is grounded

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 363: "the philosophy of dialogue, the phenomenon that dispenses with transcendental philosophy, can itself only be discovered in its essentials on the basis of transcendental philosophy."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 285: "The I and the between seem to compete with each other over the legitimacy of the point of departure...in this conflict, Buber is primarily committed to the between...the beginning of the person is the beginning, pure and simple: the reality of the between."

not in transcendental subjectivity, but in the conditions which ultimately give shape to a person's existence. For Gadamer, this means that sociality is grounded in dialogue; for Levinas, this means that sociality is grounded in the ethical responsibility for others. And for Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer, this means that sociality is grounded in divine revelation. In each of these cases, sociality is grounded in something outside of the self without the need for implicitly presupposing a transcendental subject.

My foregoing analysis therefore provides something of an answer to a central question Theunissen poses in his own work: Can the dialogical (or any such) response to idealism operate independently of the transcendentalism it seeks to overthrow? Theunissen admits that his initial hope was that dialogicalism could be successful in this regard, but that his analysis did not bear this out. On Theunissen's view, the ontological structures of the philosophy of dialogue are insufficient to ground its view of sociality independently of the ontology of transcendentalism. In the course of my project, I have shown how each of my four chosen representatives present an alternative ontology to that of idealism on the way to proposing a distinct model of sociality. What I have not argued for is for the *sufficiency* or *cogency* of these ontologies to stand on their own, as successfully defeating idealist or transcendental models of social ontology. To offer arguments to this end would take this project beyond its current scope. Instead, I have shown how each figure must ground his account of sociality in a distinctive, underlying ontology. In what follows, I offer a series of reflections which could serve as prolegomena to any future evaluation of the ontologies on display in this work.

### **Sociality and Synthesis**

One way to assess and give orientation to the models of sociality I have analyzed is to see them as each offering important dimensions for a more comprehensive model of sociality. There

are at least two ways for this play out. First, this approach, aimed at multi-dimensionality, could incorporate the dialogical, ethical responsibility, and revelational models into a synthetic and hence more comprehensive response to idealism than any one model on its own. Indeed, the idea of such an approach is what animated the genesis of this project. The other way to construct such an approach would be to include the idealist/transcendental model into the synthesis, showing how each model can be integrated into a more wholistic approach to sociality.<sup>5</sup>

What the synthetic or multi-dimensional approach to sociality fails to account for, however, is the way in which the underlying ontology of each of the models of sociality dictates a different grounding for sociality. In order to appropriate the central features of any one model of sociality for the purpose of incorporating it into a broader whole is to lift it out from the ontology it presupposes. As a consequence, the dimension in question, for instance, dialogue, once unshackled from its moorings, is transformed into a very different concept at best or an incoherent concept at worst.<sup>6</sup> For example, to claim that dialogue and reciprocity are essential to sociality, one can either claim, as Gadamer does, that sociality is singularly grounded in dialogue or that sociality, while retaining dialogue as an important feature, is grounded in some other locus. By grounding sociality in dialogue, one necessarily allots to subjectivity, to the face of the other, or to divinity, a secondary role in the establishment of the social relation. Casting dialogue in a derivative role amounts to a denial of the hermeneutic ontology Gadamer develops as the basis for dialogue. Hence, it radically revises the concept of dialogue in the context of sociality

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<sup>5</sup> See Dan Zahavi's numerous writings which argue for a multi-dimensional approach to sociality: Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014). See especially Dan Zahavi, "Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8 (2001), 166: "Ultimately, a convincing theory of intersubjectivity must necessarily be multi-dimensional and draw on considerations taken from [multiple] approaches."

<sup>6</sup> One could attempt to say that each of the central features of each model remains a ground for sociality in the new, synthetic model, but I fail to see how such a proposal would be coherent.

when it is separated from the event of understanding which maintains the persons in dialogue as participants in being as the unfolding of language. Dialogue henceforth becomes an incidental linguistic occurrence between persons, something very different from what Gadamer understands it to be. This kind of revision would be necessary, *mutatis mutandis*, for each of the other grounding features in the models I have explored.

Hence, a multi-dimensional account would require either an ontology of its own or a commitment to one of the ontologies offered in the course of this study. If such an account commits to the ontology of, say, Levinas or Bonhoeffer, it would not truly be a synthesis but rather it would be an affirmation of one model of sociality over the others. This assessment, of course, presumes that the ontologies underlying the models of sociality discussed are in fact incompatible. If, on the other hand, the multi-dimensional account offers an ontology of its own, it faces the same problem, namely, the question of whether grounding sociality in a different ontology can do justice to the central features of the models it attempts to synthesize. The prospects therefore look dim for the attempt to synthesize the models of sociality I have examined in this project.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, a softer approach may be worthwhile to examine, one in which each of the models can be said to *contribute* to the others a feature which serves to strengthen those conceptions of sociality.

### **The Contributive Approach**

This approach to orienting the models of sociality in relation to each other would show how the gaps or deficiencies in one model, X, are supplemented or corrected by models Y or Z.

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<sup>7</sup> An analogous case can be seen in the discussion surrounding the quest for a synthetic religious pluralism. The question there concerns whether various religious conceptions of ontology can be coherently combined into a synthesis of religions. For the classic articulation of this idea in the contemporary discussion, see John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). For responses, see *The Philosophical Challenge to Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000). See especially George I. Mavrodes' essay in that volume, "Polytheism."

Perhaps Gadamer's model of sociality lacks a certain critical apparatus that Rosenzweig or Levinas can provide. Or Bonhoeffer's account overlooks an element of dialogue which Gadamer's model can provide. On this approach to the typology, various of the models can be seen as capable of receiving insight from the other models. This path seems less ambitious and more feasible than the synthesis approach because it does not seek to provide a wholistic model of sociality. Instead, it attempts to enter into a fruitful dialogue among the models by seeing how they can inform each other. The complication with this approach is still found in the different ontologies from which these models develop. Because each of the accounts rests on a different underlying ontology, in order to say that model X is lacking something essential that model Y or Z fills in, we would need to do so from the basis of some ontology or presuppositions that X doesn't itself accept. The contributive feature therefore would need to be something which could be successfully integrated into the ontological commitments of the model in question.

Take the following scenarios as examples of this attempt. The ethical responsibility model championed by Levinas will fault Gadamer's model with being still too Hegelian – too committed to comprehension and the reduction of otherness into familiarity. In order for Gadamer's model to more closely approach truth, it needs to include in its account the radicality of the encounter with the other person which as such can never be reduced to thematization. Gadamer for his part, would admit, on one level, that the encounter with the other person is always one in which my own projects would be negated. In what appears to be a concession to the Levinasian point of view, Gadamer writes, "The mere presence of the other before whom we stand helps us to break up our own bias and narrowness, even before he opens his mouth to make

a reply.”<sup>8</sup> This sounds like a restatement of Levinas’s claim that the expressive presence of the face of the other functions to invert the subject’s intentional consciousness. Yet Gadamer ensures that this experience is subsumed under the rubric of dialogical experience. This experience in the context of dialogue, which he also calls experience of “the potentiality for being other,”<sup>9</sup> does not come from the other herself, on Gadamer’s view. Instead, it comes from the situation of dialogue, even if it precedes the act of speaking.

Gadamer explains further what he means here by asking, “Who has not had the experience – especially before the other whom we want to persuade – of how the reasons that one had for one’s own view, and even the reasons that speak against one’s own view rush into words.”<sup>10</sup> The critical impulse in dialogue comes not from subjectivity nor from the other person who faces me, but from the emergence of the *Sache* as the manifestation of the true, what Gadamer sees as the deep connection between language and thought.<sup>11</sup> It is the truth of the subject matter itself which comes to language and which leads the dialogue.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the experience of being-other, of the breaking up of one’s own biases, confronts the self from the standpoint of the *Sache* in question rather than from the face of the other. It is not responsibility for the other person which is commanded but rather the openness to change one’s own views.

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<sup>8</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” trans. Dennis J. Schmidt and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Debate*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 425: “The inwardness of the word, which constitutes the inner unity of thought and speech, is the reason for its being easy to miss the direct and unreflective character of the ‘word’...Hence the appearance is created that the formation of the word arises from the mind’s being directed toward itself. In fact there is no reflection when the word is formed, for the word is not expressing the mind but the thing intended...The thought seeking expression refers not to the mind but to the thing.”

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, 385: “conversation has a spirit of its own, and...the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e...it allows something to ‘emerge’ which henceforth exists.”



While this could include a recognition of responsibility for the other, it certainly need not be related to responsibility at all.

Although Gadamer does not directly deal with Levinas's writings, he does indicate that he is familiar with Levinas's views and has an appreciation of them. In his essay "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism," Gadamer anticipates Derrida's objection to his hermeneutic ontology of understanding which would claim that "understanding always turns into appropriation and so involves a covering-up of otherness. Levinas, too, values this argument highly, so it is definitely an observation that one cannot dismiss."<sup>13</sup> However, Gadamer continues on to give a criticism of the viewpoint that understanding otherness is always a return to self-identification in suggesting "that to make an assumption that such identification occurs within understanding is to disclose a position that is idealistic and logocentric, one we had already left behind after World War I in our revisions and criticisms of idealism."<sup>14</sup> In other words, Gadamer thinks that the criticism that Derrida and Levinas would make against him is in fact a criticism of a position that he does not hold. It is rather a criticism of German idealism in the vein of Hegel which seeks to confirm a perfect and complete identification of self with self in absolute knowledge. Gadamer thinks that twentieth century philosophy has moved irrevocably past such a position, primarily because of the recognition that human beings only appear to themselves through language, and language is always a finite and imperfect mirror through which to view oneself.

When Gadamer speaks of the achievement of self-understanding, this self-understanding "involves a moment of 'loss of self'"<sup>15</sup> which is never fully recovered, but is rather mediated back to the self through the play of language over which no one is master. Thus, Gadamer would

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<sup>13</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism," trans. Richard Palmer and Diane Michelfelder, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 119.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 51.

suggest that the intentionality which Levinas seeks to overthrow through the encounter with the face in non-intentional consciousness has already been overthrown in the taking seriously of language. Understanding is now not achieved through the dominance of the intention which would seek to reflect all things back into itself, but rather through language, which both frustrates idealist self-confirmation and is the condition which makes possible genuine relationships with others. Because language is the medium through which truth comes to presence, persons cannot rightly relate to one another in another way than through the reciprocity of dialogue.

Therefore, Gadamer's defense against criticisms of idealism also contains an argument against the Levinasian viewpoint which claims that the self is unilaterally responsible for the other. Gadamer's own critique would suggest that in setting up the self as unconditional responsibility, Levinas actually robs the self of being able to understand the other in dialogue. Gadamer suggests that attempting to escape "the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond."<sup>16</sup> Thus, Gadamer would claim that the self cannot be in a genuine relationship with others if the self is the sole responsible party, if the concrete other does not participate in dialogue.

On Gadamer's view, genuine sociality cannot occur apart from truth presenting itself in dialogical situations. In a similar manner, Gerald Bruns thinks Gadamer "might fault Levinas for setting the ethical relation too sharply against hermeneutics – for having, finally, too abstract a conception of the ethical."<sup>17</sup> In other words, because Levinas sets the condition of responsibility prior to the empirical interchange of language, ethics is abstracted from the concreteness of

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<sup>16</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 354.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald R. Bruns, "On the Coherence of Hermeneutics and Ethics: An Essay on Gadamer and Levinas" in *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Bruce Krajewski (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 48.

everyday life which is only made present through language. For Gadamer, Levinas's radicalized ethics as first philosophy would actually undermine ethics because it rejects the hermeneutic condition of understanding others in historical relationships. If ethics were to be operative at a level wholly prior to the conversation of a subject matter, there would be no content to ethics. As Bruns puts it, "from Gadamer's perspective Levinas's conception of the ethical is too purely ethical, not sufficiently social (not sufficiently historicized)."<sup>18</sup> Gadamer will think that because Levinas grounds the self-other relation solely in the disruptive moment prior to dialogue, he cannot sustain genuine self-other relations which must thrive in the language of the world.

From Levinas's own point of view, hermeneutics does have a legitimate place in understanding and relating to the world, but hermeneutics does not exhaust the ways in which humans can interact with reality. Levinas writes, "In all its analyses of language contemporary philosophy insists, and indeed rightly, on its hermeneutical structure and on the cultural effort of the incarnate being that that expresses itself."<sup>19</sup> However, while accepting a hermeneutics of culture and language, Levinas argues that the other person presents the self with a preventient discontinuity that is not mediated by tradition and language. Levinas thus suggests that a hermeneutics of the other person is derivative of the primary expressiveness of the face of the other.<sup>20</sup> Levinas, then, rejects the Gadamerian claim that hermeneutic ontology is the medium out of which the relation to the other first unfolds.

The outcome, then, of the confrontation between Gadamer and Levinas is less a mutual enhancement of each other's views and more a reassertion of the divergence in outlooks which is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>19</sup> Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," 52.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: "In other words, expression, before being a celebration of being, is a relationship with him to whom I express the expression and whose presence is already required for my cultural gesture of expression to be produced. The Other (Autrui) who faces me is not included in the totality of being expressed."

rooted finally in different conceptions of ontology. On Levinas's view, the Gadamerian appeal to dialogue is simply derivative of the true ground of sociality. Levinas does have a place for dialogue; it is located subsequent to and conditioned by the responsibility engendered by the face of the other. Likewise, Gadamer can affirm the importance of the radical interruption found in the presence of the other who faces me, but this interruption must be grounded in the being of the *Sache* which comes to presence in language and overcome in the restoration of understanding.

### **Philosophy and Theology**

The divergence in ontologies appears even deeper when considering views which require God to play a central role in the grounding of sociality. On the views of both Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer, true sociality cannot be understood without reference to God. Thus, an ontology which leaves the concept of God out of the equation is inadequate to deal with persons in relation to each other. For example, Bonhoeffer is especially emphatic on this score: "The goal of philosophy is not a 'picture-book phenomenology' but a system. A system is made possible, however, only by an immanent idea of God or, rather, by the exclusion of the idea of God from the context of philosophy altogether."<sup>21</sup> On Bonhoeffer's reading, the aim of philosophy is the systematic reach of reason in to every crevice of reality. God therefore must either be entirely explainable by means of reason (hence, an immanent God) or entirely eliminated from consideration.

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and theology, between reason and revelation, appears particularly rigid in *Act and Being*. He writes, "*Per se*, a philosophy can concede no room for revelation unless it knows revelation and confesses itself to be Christian philosophy in full recognition that the place it wanted to usurp *is* already occupied

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<sup>21</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 67.

by another – namely, by Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Philosophy, on Bonhoeffer’s view, attempts to place human reason in the seat of truth, as the ultimate arbiter of reality. Until it recognizes that it is trying to take Christ’s place, until it renounces its inherent aims, it cannot achieve the truth it seeks. Bonhoeffer claims that were philosophy to incorporate the social realities of sin and grace into itself, “philosophical anthropology is able to adopt such concepts from theology only at the expense of bursting its own framework. For in doing so, philosophical anthropology turns its analysis of human existence, too, into an analysis of humanity’s attempt to lay hold of itself; that is to say, it can do so only at the expense of becoming theological anthropology.”<sup>23</sup> If philosophy were to truly accept the reality of revelation, it would become theology. Bonhoeffer does nevertheless speak of a distinctive Christian philosophy, which, beginning from the presuppositions of revelation, can articulate the structures of reality which have been the traditional domains of philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Yet, this *Christian* philosophy would have already given up the systematic pretensions of the universality of reason, rendering it a diluted form of philosophy according to Bonhoeffer’s presentation of philosophy’s *telos*.

Rosenzweig, by contrast, articulates a somewhat softer division between the disciplines of philosophy and theology, arguing that they are ultimately “dependent on each other.”<sup>25</sup> This begins from Rosenzweig’s distinction between the “old” philosophy, exemplified in idealism, and the “new” philosophy, which takes as its point of departure the individual point of view. The new philosophy, arising from the path charted by Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, recognizes the failure of the project of comprehending the All from a universal point of view and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 76-78.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 77 n. 89.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Bonhoeffer speaks of “a distinctively Christian philosophy of time in contrast to the concept of time as something reckoned by motion.” Ibid., 111 n. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 106.

determines to begin from the subjective point of view. But, asks Rosenzweig, in what sense can such an approach truly be a science, be a rational discipline which attains objectivity?

Rosenzweig's answer argues that "the bridge from maximum subjectivity to maximum objectivity is formed by theology's concept of revelation."<sup>26</sup> That is, revelation is that which is subjectively received but which informs and confirms the objectivity which philosophy seeks.

Rosenzweig holds that "the theologian whom philosophy requires for the sake of its scientific status is himself a theologian who requires philosophy – for the sake of his integrity."<sup>27</sup> Philosophy requires the concept of revelation in order to reach reality without collapsing in on itself, while theology requires philosophy to foreshadow what is to come in revelation and redemption. Rosenzweig writes,

philosophy contains the entire contents of revelation, not, however, as revelation, but as precondition of revelation, as created contents, that is, and not as revealed contents. Revelation is providentially "foreseen" in creation – revelation in its entire contents, thus including, precisely in terms of current concepts of belief, also redemption. As practiced by the theologian, philosophy becomes a prognostication of revelation.<sup>28</sup>

Revelation becomes confirmed in its authenticity because philosophy has been pointing toward it, without giving it away, from creation. Although this view appears to give a more generous role to philosophy, allowing it to incorporate revelation within itself while still remaining philosophy, it is not far from Bonhoeffer's assessment that philosophy must undergo a fundamental reorientation in order to bear fruit.

Bonhoeffer and Rosenzweig appear to more sharply disagree on the prospect of constructing a system of philosophy. As noted above, Bonhoeffer thinks that philosophy's systematic aspirations reveal its drive for the subject to be the center and ground of reality. He

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 108.

writes, “In the system lies the master of being by the knowing I, hence its claim to divinity.”<sup>29</sup> The system of philosophy ends in idolatry, placing reason in the place of God, on Bonhoeffer’s view. Rosenzweig, by contrast, presents *The Star of Redemption* precisely as “a system of philosophy.”<sup>30</sup> However, what Rosenzweig has in mind by this notion of system is clearly different from the way Bonhoeffer thinks about it. Benjamin Pollock explains that “a ‘system of philosophy,’ as Rosenzweig understood it, seeks to understand all beings both in their plurality as diverse, *different* beings, and at the same time insofar as they share in a single, common *unity*.”<sup>31</sup> The problem with idealism’s systems was that they placed the unity of beings at the outset of the system, resulting in the ultimate inability to escape that unity in the recognition of a true plurality of beings. Rosenzweig’s proposal, by contrast, begins with plurality and places unity in the redemptive future.<sup>32</sup> The unity and finality of the system is not something which can be grasped and placed at the disposal of the thinking I; instead, it will only be experienced in its truth in redemption. Rosenzweig is only himself able to say anything at all about this unity in anticipation.

Rosenzweig’s articulation of the two types of system actually maps well onto the way in which Bonhoeffer describe the relationship between system and theology. Bonhoeffer writes, “In the system, the present is determined by the past, inasmuch as in the system there obtains the principle of the ‘priority’ of the coherence of reason...Christian revelation must not be interpreted as ‘having happened’...[but] must occur in the present precisely because it

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<sup>29</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> See Rosenzweig, “The New Thinking,” 111.

<sup>31</sup> Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> See *ibid.*, 9: “According to Rosenzweig, the German Idealist systems fail to grasp the inherent difference of individual beings – their particularity and finitude – because they assume the unity and, indeed, the divinity of ‘the All’ as primordial or original. Rosenzweig, to the contrary, conceives of this ultimate unity of all that is as the redemptive goal toward which all beings strive.”

is...always something ‘of the future.’”<sup>33</sup> Bonhoeffer’s idea here is that Christian theology, as the “proclamation of the cross,” is not merely or even primarily the proclamation of a past event, but more properly the proclamation of a future reality. The primary difference between the two thinkers on this score, then, is that Rosenzweig is willing to describe his project as a new kind of system, oriented toward future redemption, whereas Bonhoeffer leaves the language of system behind, while his directing his project toward the same temporal orientation as Rosenzweig’s.

Whether formulated in Rosenzweig’s vocabulary or Bonhoeffer’s vocabulary, the requirement the ontologies which presume revelation place upon those which do not is that if philosophy is to find the truth which it seeks, it must accept revelation. This is a claim which neither Gadamer nor Levinas accepts. While both Gadamer and Levinas are comfortable with appropriating theological concepts for their own non-theological purposes, neither of their projects grants the necessity of divine revelation for sociality. Hence, the ontological premise with which Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer begin, namely, the existence of a communicative God who is requisite for sociality, is denied by Gadamer and Levinas. While neither of the latter two thinkers denies God outright, each of them denies that the premise of divine revelation must be incorporated into their projects. By the same token, Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer deny that a philosophy devoid of the assumption of revelation can adequately account for sociality. Hence, the engagement between these projects results in a stalemate, with neither side accepting the starting point of the other.

### **Ontology and Sociality**

The models of sociality I have examined in this dissertation each articulate a grounding for the social relation which departs from the idealist grounding of sociality in the subject. And

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<sup>33</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 111.



each of these models is itself grounded in an ontology which serves to replace a subject-object ontology. Gadamer, representing the dialogical model of sociality, Levinas, representing the ethical responsibility model, and Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer, each representing a variation of the revelational model, articulate ontologies correspondent to their models of sociality. As I have noted in the foregoing analysis, these ontologies appear to be largely incommensurable with one another, with the possible exception of the ontologies of Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer. Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology excludes an ontology of alterity or a theistic ontology, as articulated by Rosenzweig or Bonhoeffer, from sufficiently grounding sociality in itself.<sup>34</sup> Levinas's ontology of alterity likewise argues that neither hermeneutic nor revelational ontologies which do not ground sociality in the expressive presence of the Other can correctly ground sociality. In the same way, Rosenzweig and Bonhoeffer argue that ontologies which do not admit the centrality of the divine for sociality must be radically revised so as to incorporate revelation into their account.

If the ontologies in question are incommensurable, then a synthesis of models of sociality requires the adoption of one particular ontology for its grounding of sociality or an articulation of a distinct ontology which rejects the claims to exclusivity made by the other ontologies. Because of the strong ontological grounding claims made for sociality by Gadamer, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Bonhoeffer, the most fruitful way to construe the relationship of the models is to see them as alternatives along the spectrum of responses to idealism. Where idealist and transcendental

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<sup>34</sup> Gadamer does, however, take himself to be articulating the hermeneutic structure of understanding assumed by theology. The particular theological worldview Gadamer has in mind is that of Rudolph Bultmann. Gadamer writes that "self-understanding only realizes itself in the understanding of a subject matter and does not have the character of a free self-realization. The self that we are does not possess itself; one could say that it 'happens.' And this is what the theologian is actually saying when he asserts that faith is an event in which a new man is established. The theologian says also that we must believe and understand the Word, and that it is through the Word that we overcome the abysmal ignorance about ourselves in which we live." Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding," 55. Bonhoeffer, for his part, chides Bultmann for conceding too much ground to Heidegger's philosophy and not taking seriously the claim of revelation. See Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 77-78 n. 89.

models of sociality ground sociality in the subject, these models offer differing visions for the appropriate grounding of the social life.

To the extent that models of sociality arise in contemporary philosophy and in future philosophical endeavors which seek to ground sociality in the subject, these alternatives will continue to offer important insights both for those who wish to develop such models and those who wish to dispute them. Further, understanding the spectrum of responses to idealist models of sociality illuminates the diversity of the accounts which challenged the grounding of sociality in the subject after idealism. Finally, this project has shown that the models of sociality which present themselves as alternatives to idealism are each grounded in an ontology which itself serves to replace the ontology of idealism. This points to the proposition that models of sociality *in general* rely either implicitly or explicitly on an underlying account of ontology which grounds its model. Therefore, a model of sociality can be affirmed, rejected, or qualified only on the basis of the affirmation, rejection, or qualification of the ontology which undergirds it. Insofar as a model of sociality purports to account for the grounding of social life in dialogue or in persons, in humanity or in divinity, such an account will be an ineluctably ontological affair.

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