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Emmanuel Levinas
Basic Philosophical Writings

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Enigma and Phenomenon
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"Enigma and Phenomenon" marks an important stage in the transition from Totality and Infinity to Otherwise than Being.1 Levinas draws attention to one of the changes himself. In a note he observes that he has overcome his previous reluctance to use the term neighbor. Previously the focus had fallen on the stranger. Stranger suggested itself to Levinas as a term for the Other for whom I am responsible, not least because it suggested the alterity of the Other as someone to whom I was not already in debt or with whom I was not communally bound. The introduction of the word neighbor alongside the word stranger would be relatively unimportant did it not bring with it the notion of proximity. Proximity, like neighbor, had already played a minor role in Levinas's thought. In "Enigma and Phenomenon," it was not yet the central notion that it would be in the exposition of substitution a decade later, but there are indications of the change. For example, at the end of the essay, you is no longer the Vous of Totality and Infinity, but Tu. What saves this from being a reversion to the Bubrian Du is the II of illeity that Levinas had introduced in "The Trace of the Other" and "Meaning and Sense" (chapter 3 in this volume). In "Enigma and Phenomenon," Levinas writes that a you (tu) is inserted between the I and the absolute He, but in terms of the development of Levinas's work one could equally say that the Vous of the stranger opens up into the relation of the Tu of the neighbor to the absolute II.

The central issue of "Enigma and Phenomenon," although it is not posed as such, is the question of whether Levinas's thought is a phenomenology. The answer Levinas gives here, as elsewhere, is, that he draws on phenomenology, but that the Other is not a phenomenon. The Other does not appear within the world but is an interruption or disturbance of it. In other words, the Other does not appear, but phenomenology gives access to the Other's nonappearance. The word Levinas uses here and in Otherwise than Being is enigma. It is a word that Levinas had rejected in the discussion following the lecture "Transcendence and Height" (chapter 2 in this volume). It is to explain how the enigma is retained that Levinas has recourse to Kierkegaardian subjectivity: "it is up to me."

Levinas sometimes seems to say that alterity is encountered in an experience. In "Enigma and Phenomenon," he is more cautious, particularly if experience is in some way thought of as an experience of the present. That is why the notion of the trace plays such an important role in the exposition. This role is particularly apparent in the fact that Levinas here changes his account of the trace in order to specifically distance it from the present. Whereas in "The Trace of the Other" and "Meaning and Sense," Levinas had written that "the trace is the presence of whoever, strictly speaking, has never been there (ce n'est là); of someone who is already past," in "Enigma and Phenomenon" Levinas says that "the past of the other must never have been present" and refers to "a past which was never
a pure now." This shows Levinas acknowledging the characterization of ontology as dominated by the idea of presence and attempting to distance himself from it.

In short, we still do not know if, when someone rings the doorbell, there is someone there or not... Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano*

**Rational Speech and Disturbance**

As rational speech, philosophy is taken to move from evidence to evidence, directed to what is seen, to what shows itself, thus directed to the present. The term *present* suggests both the idea of a privileged position in the temporal series and the idea of manifestation. The idea of being connects them. As a presence, being excludes the nonbeing that marks the past and the future but assembles their residues and their germs, which, in structures, are contemporary. Being is a manifestation in which uncertain memory and aleatory anticipation are moored; being is a presence to the gaze and to speech, an appearing, a phenomenon.

As a speech directed upon the present, philosophy is an understanding of being, or an ontology, or a phenomenology. In the order of its speech it encompasses and situates even what seemed first to contain this speech or overflow it, but which, when present, that is, discovered, fits into this logos, is ordered in it, even making what is discernible of the past or of the future in the present enter into it. Being and speech have the same time, are contemporary. To utter a speech that would not be anchored in the present would be to go beyond reason. Beyond what is discernible in the present, only meaningless speech would hold forth.

And yet human thought has known concepts or has, as though mad, operated with notions in which the distinction between presence and absence was not as clear-cut as the idea of being or the idea of a becoming assembled and tied about the present would have demanded. Such are the Platonic notions of the One and the Good. Such is the notion of God, which a thought called faith succeeds in getting expressed and introduces into philosophical discourse. Is it not folly to ascribe plenitude of being to God, who, always absent from perception, is no longer manifest in the moral conduct of the world, subject to violence, where peace is established only provisionally and at the price of blood tribute paid to some Minotaur, the price of compromises and politics - where, consequently, the divine "presence" remains an uncertain memory or an indeterminate expectation? To endure the contradiction between the existence included in the essence of God and the scandalous absence of this God is to suffer an initiation trial into religious life which separates philosophers from believers. That is, unless the obstinate absence of God were one of those paradoxes that call to the highways.

The impossibility of manifesting itself in an experience can be due not to the finite or sensible essence of this experience but to the structure of all thought, which is correlation. Once come into a correlation, the divinity of God dissipates, like the clouds that served to describe his presence. All that could have attested to his holiness, that is, to his transcendence, in the light of experience would immediately belie its own witness already by its very presence and intelligibility, by its chain of significations, which constitute the world. To appear, to seem, is forthwith to resemble terms of an already familiar order, to compromise oneself with them, to be assimilated to them. Does not the invisibility of God belong to another game, to an approach which does not polarize into a subject-object correlation but is deployed as a drama with several personages?

But we have anticipated our conclusions. Let us fix the point of departure: the nonmanifestation, the invisibility which language sets forth. This refusal to exhibit itself does not necessarily contain a complacency for hidden abodes. The extravagance or hyperbole which language can express by the superlative of the supreme being retains the trace of a beyond-being where day and night do not divide the time that can make them coexist in the dusk of evening, the trace of a beyond borne by a time different from that in which the overflows of the present flow back to this present across memory and hope. Could faith be described then as a glimpse into a time whose moments are no longer related to the present as their term or their source? This would produce a diachrony which maddens the subject but channels transcendence. Is transcendence a thought that ventures beyond being or an approach beyond thought which speech ventures to utter and whose trace and modality it retains?

But is not to glimpse into a time whose moments do not refer to the present to connect everything together again in the present of that glimpse? Already correlation or structure returns: transcendence is synchronized with speech and reenters the indestructible order of being in its undephasable simultaneity, that is, into a totality which gives it meaning. Is there nothing in the world that could refuse this primordial order of contemporaneousness, without immediately ceasing to signify? Is a truly diachronic transcendence nothing more than something to delude gratuitous imagination, opinion, and positive religions?

Everything depends on the possibility of vibrating with a meaning that is not synchronized with the speech that captures it and cannot be fitted into its order; everything depends on the possibility of a signification that would signify in an irreducible disturbance. If a formal description of such a disturbance could be
attempted, it would have us speak of a time, a plot, and norms that are not reducible to the understanding of being, which is allegedly the alpha and the omega of philosophy.

- The Call to Order

How could such a disturbance occur? If the Other is presented to the Same, the co-presence of the Other and the Same in a phenomenon forthwith constitutes an order. The discordance that may be produced within this order proposes itself as an invitation to the search for a new order in which this first discord would be resolved: the discordance becomes a problem. The science of yesterday, before the new facts of today, thus makes its way toward the science of tomorrow.

Bergson has taught us that disorder, like nothingness, is a relative idea. For there to be an absolute disturbance, must there erupt into the Same an absolute alterity, that of the Other (Autrui)? Someone unknown to me rang my doorbell and interrupted my work. I dissipated a few of his illusions. But he brought me into his affairs and his difficulties, troubling my good conscience. The disturbance, the clash of two orders, ends in a conciliation, in the constitution of a new order which, more vast, closer to the total, and in this sense ultimate or original, order, shies through this conflict.

The Other (Autrui) can also not appear without renouncing his radical alterity, without entering into an order. The breaks in the order reenter the order whose weave lasts unendingly, a weave these breaks manifest, and which is a totality. The unwanted is understood. The apparent interference of the Other in the Same has been settled beforehand. The disturbance, the clash of two orders, then does not deserve our attention. That is, unless one is attached to abstractions. And who would admit to such bias? The disturbance was a precursor of a more concrete totality, a world, a history. That strident ringing of the bell is reabsorbed in significations; the break in my universe was a new signification that came to it. Everything is understood, justified, pardoned. And what of the surprise of that face behind the door? That surprise will be denied. Attention will be directed to the order that annuls the disturbance, the history in which men, their distress and their desairs, their wars and their sacrifices, the horrible and the sublime, are summed up. Like Spinoza, one will contest the possibility of an error that would not be born by a partial truth and be on its way toward a whole truth. An uninterrupted discourse will be exalted which death alone could stop, if the immortal intersubjectivity did not ensure it against death itself (is it indeed immortal? - one can raise this question, formerly taken to be absurd). Everything that is real would thus be meaningful and every action would arise in the real as the conclusion of a reasoning, in an advance without shortcuts; a short circuit would, it seems, produce only the night of dreams.

Proximity, Expression, and Enigma

But is the disturbance produced by this abrupt coming completely reduced in the light of the new order, which, in its triumphant dawning, would absorb the unwonted visitation, as history effaces the trace of blood and tears? Across the unbreakable chain of significations, standing out against the historical conjuncture, was there not an expression, a face facing and interpelling, coming from the depths, cutting the threads of the context? Did not a neighbor approach?  

How did the neighbor tear himself up from the context? How could he approach and face without being forthwith petrified into a signification silhouetted against the context? Where could proximity and uprightness in a universe of mediations come from? Whence comes expression, saying, in this universe of significations said, of structures - Nature and History - visible to everyone in their display as phenomena? Would expression and proximity contain a reference to a dimension of depth?

One would be right to distrust this formula if it had to mean that phenomena indicate an order of “things in themselves” of which they would be signs, or which they would hide like a screen. For indications and relations reestablish a conjuncture, a simultaneity, between the indicating and the indicated terms and abolish depth. A relationship that would not create simultaneity between its terms but would hollow out a depth from which expression approaches would have to refer to an irreversible, immemorial, unrepresentable past.

But how refer to an irreversible past, that is, a past which this very reference would not bring back, like memory which retrieves the past, like signs which recapture the signified? What would be needed would be an indication that would reveal the withdrawal of the indicated, instead of a reference that rejoins it. Such is a trace, in its emptiness and desolation. Its desolation is not made of evocations but of forgettings, forgettings in process, putting aside the past. The forgettings are surprised before this “forgettingness” (“obliviscence”) could reverse into a bond, reconnect this absolute past to the present, and become evocative. What is this original trace, this primordial desolation? It is the nakedness of a face that faces, expressing itself, interrupting order. If the interruption is not taken up by the context interrupted, to receive a meaning from it, this is because it was already ab-solute. The context was given up before beginning, the breaking of contact took place before engagement: a face is decomposed and naked. In this defeatism, this dereliction, this timidity that does not dare to dare, this solicitation that does not have the effrontery to solicit...
and is nonaudacity, this beggar’s solicitation, expression no longer participates in the order from which it tears itself but thus faces and confronts in a face, approaches and disturbs absolutely.

But a trace would then simply be a sign of a remoteness. A trace can, to be sure, become a sign. But in a face before signifying as a sign it is the very emptiness of an irrecoverable absence. The gaping open of emptiness is not only the sign of an absence. A mark traced on sand is not a part of a path, but the very emptiness of a passage. And what has withdrawn is not evoked, does not return to presence, not even to an indicated presence.

Disturbance is a movement that does not propose any stable order in conflict or in accord with a given order; it is movement that already carries away the signification it brought: disturbance disturbs order without troubling it seriously. It enters in so subtle a way that unless we retain it, it has already withdrawn. It insinuates itself, withdraws before entering. It remains only for him who would like to take it up. Otherwise, it has already restored the order it troubled - someone rang, and there is no one at the door: did anyone ring? Language is the possibility of an enigmatic equivocation for better and for worse, which men abuse. One diplomat makes an exorbitant proposition to another diplomat, but this proposition is put in terms such that, if one likes, nothing has been said. The audacity withdraws and is extinguished in the very words that bear and inflame it. Such is the duplicity of oracles: extravagances are lodged in words that guarantee wisdom. A lover makes an advance, but the provocative or seductive gesture has, if one likes, not interrupted the decency of the conversation and attitudes; it withdraws as lightly as it had slipped in. A God was revealed on a mountain or in a burning bush, or was attested to in Scriptures. And what if it were a storm! And what if the Scriptures came to us from dreamers! Dismiss the illusionary call from our minds! The insinuation itself invites us to do so. It is up to us, or, more exactly, it is up to me to retain or to repel this God without boldness, exiled because allied with the conquered, hunted down and hence ab-solute, thus disarticulating the very moment in which he is presented and proclaimed, unrepresentable. This way the Other has of seeking my recognition while preserving his incognito, disclaiming recourse to a wink-of-the-eye of understanding or complicity, this way of manifesting himself without manifesting himself, we call enigma - going back to the etymology of this Greek term, and contrasting it with the indiscreet and victorious appearing of a phenomenon.

A New Modality

What is essential here is the way a meaning that is beyond meaning is inserted in the meaning that remains in an order, the way it advances while retreating.

An enigma is not a simple ambiguity in which two significations have equal chances and the same light. In an enigma the exorbitant meaning is already effaced in its apparition. The God who spoke said nothing, passed incognito, everything in the light of phenomena gives lie to him, refutes, represses, persecutes him. The Kierkegaardian God is revealed only to be persecuted and unrecognized, reveals himself only in the measure that he is hunted - such that subjectivity, despairing in the solitude in which this absolute humility leaves it, becomes the very locus of truth. The Kierkegaardian God is not simply the bearer of certain attributes of humility; he is a way of truth which this time is not determined by a phenomenon, by the present and contemporaneousness, and is not measured by certainty. This truth is irreducible to phenomena and is hence essential in a world which can no longer believe that the books about God attest to transcendence as a phenomenon and to the Ab-solute as an apparition. And without the good reasons atheism brings forth, there would have been no Enigma. Apart from the salvation drama whose play in existence Kierkegaard, a Christian thinker, fixed and described, his proper philosophical work seems to us to lie in the formal idea of a truth persecuted in the name of a universally evident truth, a meaning paling in a meaning, a meaning thus already past and driven out, breaking up the underphasable simultaneity of phenomena. The God “remaining with the contrite and humble” (Isaiah 57:15), on the margin, a “persecuted truth,” is not only a religious “consolation” but the original form of “transcendence.” He is the node of an intrigue separate from the adventure of being which occurs in phenomena and in immanence, a new modality which is expressed by that “if one likes” and that “perhaps,” which one must not reduce to the possibility, reality, and necessity of formal logic, to which skepticism itself refers.

Disturbance is then not the breakup of a category too narrow for the order, which this breakup would then let shine forth in the setting of a broader category. Nor is it the shock of a provisional incomprehension which will soon become understanding. It is not as something irrational or absurd that disturbance disturbs. For the irrational presents itself to consciousness and lights up only within an intelligibility in which it ends by being situated and defined. No one is irrational knowing that he is.

The disturbance that is not the surprise of the absurd is possible only as the entry into a given order of another order which does not accommodate itself with the first. Thus we exclude from disturbance the simple parallelism of two orders that would be in a relationship of sign to signified, of appearance to thing in itself, and between which, we have said, the relationship would reestablish the simultaneity of one single order. But it is also not a question of the meeting of two series of significations that each, with equal rights, lay claim to the same phenomenon, as when a revolution is ascribed both to economic and to
political causality, or a work of art both to the biography of the artist and to his philosophy, or when, in the ambiguity of metaphors, a literal meaning is inseparable from the figurative meaning and neither vanishes nor is absorbed in the meaning that nourishes it, but the two meanings glimmer in the same dawn, both turned to the light. In both these cases the different orders are simultaneous, or have a point of contact and synchronism. The tearing up of one order from another would already be a reciprocal participation. The difference between contents is not strong enough to break the continuous form, the unbreakable plot, in which this difference is still regulated.

For there to be a possibility of disturbance, a fissile present is required, "destructuring" itself in its very punctuality. The alterity that disturbs order cannot be reduced to the difference visible to the gaze that compares and therefore synchronizes the Same and the Other. Alterity occurs as a divergency and a past which no memory could resurrect as a present. And yet disturbance is possible only through an intervention. A stranger is then needed, one who has come, to be sure, but left before having come, ab-solute in his manifestation. "At the same time" would not be enough for the breakup of order. In order that the tearing up from order not be ipso facto a participation in order, this tearing up, this abstraction, must, by a supreme anachronism, precede its entry into order; the past of the Other must never have been present.

This anachronism is less paradoxical than it seems. The temporal continuity of consciousness is overwhelmed whenever it is a "consciousness" of the Other, and "against all expectation," counter to all attention and anticipation, the "sensational" turns back the sensation that brings it. The voluptuous - acumen, while still rising, has already fallen. Self-consciousness is kept breathless with tension or relaxation, in the before or the after. In the meanwhile the event expected turns into the past without being lived through, without being equaled, in any present. Something takes place between the Dusk in which the most ecstatic intentionality, which, however, never aims far enough, is lost (or is recollected) and the Dawn in which consciousness returns to itself, but already too late for the event which is moving away. The great "experiences" of our life have properly speaking never been lived. Are not religions said to come to us from a past which was never a pure now? Their grandeur is due to this exorbitance exceeding the capacity of phenomena, of the present and of memory. To the voice that calls from the Burning Bush, Moses answers, "Here I am," but does not dare to lift up his eyes. The glorious theophany which makes so much humility possible will be missed because of the humility which lowers the eyes. Later, on the rock of Horeb, the prophet ventures to know, but glory is refused to the boldness that seeks it. As transcendence, a pure passage, it shows itself as past. It is a trace.

The enigma does not come from afar to obscure a phenomenal manifestation, as though this manifestation - proportionate to cognition, that is, rational - were interrupted by mysterious islands of the Irrational in which the double flowers of faith grow. The enigma extends as far as the phenomenon that bears the trace of the saying which has already withdrawn from the said. All the moments of historical time are fissile; the enchainment of the Story is exposed to interruption. This is new the anthropological particularity, since language does not come to double up phenomena, so that men could point them out to one another. The significations of Nature are but the result of a transfer of meaning from the anthropological to the natural. The human face is the face of the world itself, and the individual of the human race, like all things, arises already within the humanity of the world. This humanity is not anonymous but is the humanity aimed at in him or her who, when his or her face shines, is just him or her one had been waiting for. Human sexuality is perhaps but this expectation of an unknown, but known, face. Significations which link up cover over the traces of the saying that left them, as the perfect crime artist inserts the traces of his violence in the natural folds of Order. Phenomena open to disturbance, a disturbance letting itself be brought back to order: such is the ambiguity of an Enigma. A manifestation turns into an expression, a skin left desolate by an irreversible departure which immediately denies it, reverted to the state of a ridge of sand on the earth, driving out even the memory of this departure. But the earth's crust remains permeable to expression, and space, the "pure form of the sensibility" and the "object of a geometry," gapes open as a void in which the irreversible is not re-presented. Expression, saying, is not added on to significations that are "visible" in the light of phenomena, to modify them or confuse them and introduce into them "poetic," "literary," "verbal" enigmas; the significations said offer a hold to the saying which "disturbs" them, like writings awaiting an interpretation. But herein is the - in principle - irreversible antecedence of the Word with respect to Being, the irrevocable delay of the Said after the Saying. Of this antecedence, the significations which, meanwhile, suffice to themselves, bear a trace, which they forthwith contest and efface.

Subjectivity and "Illeity"

All speaking is an enigma. It is, to be sure, established in and moves in an order of significations common to the interlocutors, in the midst of triumphant, that is, primary truths, in a particular language that bears a system of known truths which the speaking, however commonplace it is, does stir up and lead to new significations. But behind this renewal, which constitutes cultural life, the
Saying, that is, the face, is the discretion of an unheard-of proposition, an insinuation, immediately reduced to nothing, breaking up like the "bubbles of the earth," which Banquo speaks of at the beginning of Macbeth. Yet what can an attentive ear hear, listening at the doorway of language, which by the significations of which it is made closes on its own apertures? It is perhaps reasonable to respect the decency of this closed door. This door thus both open and closed is the extra-ordinary duplicity of the Enigma. But the Enigma concerns so particularly subjectivity, which alone can retain its insinuation, this insinuation is so quickly belied when one seeks to communicate it, that this exclusivity takes on the sense of an assignation first raising up such a being as a subjectivity. Summoned to appear, called to an inalienable responsibility - whereas the disclosure of Being occurs in the knowledge and sight of universality - subjectivity is enigma's partner, partner of the transcendence that disturbs being.

How does it happen that there is subjectivity in being? Why is the silence of a breath held back produced in the bustling of the totality? In order to tear itself from the ontological weight, must not the subjectivity have to have received some most private convocation to appear from beyond being and the rational enchainment of its significations? This message is untranslatable into objective language, undefendable by coherent speech, null compared with the public order of the disclosed and triumphant significations of nature and history. It nonetheless summons with precision and urgency, because it first hollows out the dimension of inwardness. What good is inwardness, the extreme privacy of the singular ego, if it has to reflect beings or the being of beings, whose dwelling is in the light, which is of itself reason, and whose repetition in the psyche or the subjectivity would be a luxury in the economy of being? Must luxury double up the light? A quite different intrigue takes form in the I.

Phenomena, apparition in the full light, the relationship with being, ensure immanence as a totality and philosophy as atheism. The enigma, the intervention of a meaning which disturbs phenomena but is quite ready to withdraw like an undesirable stranger, unless one harkens to those footsteps that depart, is transcendence itself, the proximity of the Other as Other.

Other than Being. Being excludes all alterity. It can leave nothing outside and cannot remain outside, cannot let itself be ignored. The being of beings is the light in which all things are in relationship. Its very night is a mute and concerted hammering out of all things, the obscure labor of the totality, an uninterrupted thrust of generation, growth, and corruption. But the other distinguishes himself absolutely, by absolving himself, moving off, passing, passing beyond being, to yield his place to being. Passing beyond being: this is the supreme goodness that would belie itself if it proclaimed itself! It is, to be sure, possible to ask anew if this departure, this humility of being ab-solute, this divinity, does or does not exist. And nothing can stop this triumphant question. For how transparent is the shadow that troubles the clarity of coherent speech! How light is the voice of the "subtle silence" that covers its victorious noise, how irresistible the authority of the call to order! But how empty is the space that the word that knows how to speak as though nothing had been said leaves to being.

An enigma is beyond not finite cognition but all cognition. Cognition rests on apparition, on phenomena, which the being of beings unfolds, putting all things together by light, ordering order. Taken in the light, inevitably contemporaneous, things are present even in their most secret hiding places, as though being were a game of blind-man's bluff where a blindfold over your eyes does not prevent presence from calling to you from all sides. But what in an Enigma has signifyingness does not take refuge in a sphere that is present in its own way and awaits a concept capable of finding and grasping it there. The signifyingness of an Enigma comes from an irreversible, irrecoverable past which it has perhaps not left since it has already been absent from the very terms in which it was signaled ("perhaps" is the modality of an enigma, irreducible to the modalities of being and certainty). We hear this way to signify - which does not consist in being unveiled nor in being veiled, absolutely foreign to the hide-and-seek characteristic of cognition, this way of leaving the alternatives of being - under the third-person personal pronoun, under the word He (II). The enigma comes to us from Illeity. The enigma is the way of the Ab-solute, foreign to cognition, not because it would not shine with a light disproportionately strong for the subject's weak sight but because it is already too old for the game of cognition, because it does not lend itself to the contemporaneousness that constitutes the force of the time tied in the present, because it imposes a completely different version of time. While being designates a community, without any possible dissidence, of the totality of fate and the undephasable contemporaneousness of cognition or comprehension (even historical) to which the time tied in the present lends itself, in the trace of Illeity, in the Enigma, the synchronism falls out of tune, the totality is transcended in another time. This extravagant movement of going beyond being or transcendence toward an immemorial antiquity we call the idea of infinity. The infinite is an inassimilable alterity, a difference and ab-solute past with respect to everything that is shown, signaled, symbolized, announced, remembered, and thereby "contemporized" with him who understands. It is ab-solute, anchorism - unto what abode? Is abode is in the refusal to dare, in Goodness, which excludes precisely all complacency in oneself and in one's definition, is not petrified in an image, never tempts. The infinite is a withdrawal like a farewell
which is signified not by opening oneself to the gaze to inundate it with light but in being extinguished in the incognito in the face that faces. For this, as we have said, there must be someone who is no longer agglutinated in being, who, at his own risk, responds to the enigma and grasps the allusion. Such is the subjectivity, alone, unique, secret, which Kierkegaard caught sight of.

Ethics

This assignation - categorical in its straightforwardness but already discrete, as though no one assigned and no one checked - summons to moral responsibility. Morality is the Enigma's way.

How is a response made?

To the idea of the Infinite only an extravagant response is possible. There has to be a "thought" that understands more than it understands, more than its capacity, of which it cannot be contemporary, a "thought" which, in this sense, could go beyond its death. To understand more than one understands, to think more than one thinks, to think of what withdraws from thought, is to desire, with a desire that, unlike need, is renewed and becomes ardent the more it is nourished with the Desirable. To go beyond one's death is to sacrifice oneself. The response to the Enigma's summons is the generosity of sacrifice outside the known and the unknown, without calculation, for going on to infinity.

If what is Desirable to Desire is infinite, it cannot be given as an end. The infinite's impossibility to be an end for the Desire it arouses preserves it from contemporaneity, precisely by reason of its infinitude. The way in which Desire goes to infinity is thus not the correlation characteristic of cognition. Even if it, with a different intentionality, should become an axiology or a praxis, the movement would still go from a subject to an object and would imitate correlation. Desire, or the response to an Enigma or morality, is an intrigue with three personages: the I approaches the Infinite by going generously toward the You, who is still my contemporary, but, in the trace of illeity, presents himself out of a depth of the past, faces, and approaches me. I approach the infinite insofar as I forget myself for my neighbor who looks at me; I forget myself only in breaking the indephasable simultaneity of representation, in existing beyond my death. I approach the infinite by sacrificing myself. Sacrifice is the norm and the criterion of the approach. And the truth of transcendence consists in the concordance of speech with acts.

"Beyond Being"

The unwonted intrigue which solicits the I and comes to a head beyond cognition and disclosure in Enigma is ethics. The relationship with the Infinite is not a cognition but an approach, a neighboring with what signifies itself without revealing itself, what departs but not to disseminate itself. As Infinite, it cannot lend itself to the present in which this play of clarity and absurdity is enacted. The relationship with the Infinite then no longer has the structure of an intentional correlation. The supreme anachronism of a past that was never a now, and the approach of the infinite through sacrifice - is the Enigma's word. A face can appear as a face, as a proximity interrupting the series, only if it enigmatically comes from the Infinite and its immemorial past. And the Infinite, to solicit Desire, a thought thinking more than it thinks, cannot be incarnated in a Desirable, cannot, qua infinite, be shut up in an end. It solicits across a face, the term of my generosity and my sacrifice. A You is inserted between the I and the absolute He. Correlation is broken.

It is then vain to posit an absolute You. The absolute withdraws from the illuminated site, the "clearing" of the present, in which being is unveiled and in which speech about speech still claims, and perhaps legitimately, to be a speech about being. This speech will take pleasure in showing that order remains ever intact. But the absolute which withdraws has disturbed it: the illuminated site of being is but the passage of God. It is not a tomb in which his form would be sketched out, for the site of the Same, deserted by the absolutely Other, could never contain the infinity of alterity. He who has passed beyond has never been a presence. He preceded all presence and exceeded every contemporaneity in a time which is not a human duration, nor a falsified projection, nor an extrapolation of duration, is not a disintegration and disappearance of finite beings, but the original antecedence of God relative to a world which cannot accommodate him, the immemorial past which has never presented itself, which cannot be said with the categories of Being and structure, but is the One, which every philosophy would like to express, beyond being.