Locating and Losing the Self in the World

Locating and Losing the Self in the World: Cross-Cultural Reflections on Self-Awareness and Self-Transcendence

Edited by

Laura Specker Sullivan and Masato Ishida

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-6535-4, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-6535-7

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference would not be possible without the support of the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education, the Hung Wo and Elizabeth Ching Foundation, and the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. We also wish to thank the students, faculty, alumni, and staff of the Department of Philosophy for assisting in conference preparation, whether it be reading student manuscripts, coordinating post-conference activities, or processing paperwork. Ruth Kleinfeld-Lenney has also been instrumental in the conference’s success, motivating students to give their best presentations through an award given in her name.

INTRODUCTION

This volume is a selection of papers that grew out of the 2012 Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference held at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Bringing together talented students and faculty members in a space of open discussion and inquiry, this annual conference has become the leading graduate student conference for comparative philosophy. In addition to the twenty-three students at the 2012 conference, who together comprised six full panels over two days, the conference also showcased the work of three advanced scholars, including two keynote speakers, Dr. Karma Lekshe Tsomo of the University of San Diego and Dr. Masato Ishida of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, as well as yet another distinguished speaker for the opening night, Dr. Carl Becker of the Kokoro Research Center at Kyōto University.

The topics discussed at the 2012 conference represented a broad swath of the field of comparative philosophy, from perennial questions in ethics and aesthetics to emerging studies of salvation and emptiness. Over the course of the conference, however, a definite theme began to emerge through many of the presentations and panels. This theme revolves around the questions of how human beings come to recognize themselves as selves, how they discover the nature of these selves, and how they then relate to the world at large. Thus, the three sections into which this volume is divided reflect the movement of thought through these three stages along the path from self-awareness to self-transcendence: searching for the location of the self, acknowledging the loss or radical transformation of the “absolute self”, and allowing for a reestablishment of a relation with the world.

While such issues are also addressed in philosophy as a larger academic field, they have come to have special import in the field of comparative philosophy. To a certain extent, one might say that all philosophy is comparative, in that the ideas of different thinkers are brought into dialogue, compared, and evaluated. Nevertheless, comparative philosophy with a sharper focus refers to philosophical comparisons or relationships found across vastly distinct or contrastive cultures. The recent growth of this field is, in some ways, a response to the unfortunate fact that, despite the extent to which globalization has reshaped our world, most philosophy departments in the United States (as

well as in other countries) continue to focus primarily on philosophers and philosophical frameworks in the Western canon, leaving aside those that arose in Eastern Europe, Africa, South America, Asia, and other areas of the Pacific. This exclusion may be due to the historical development of philosophy as an academic field and the specializations that have been available to scholars of philosophy. However, there are some departments that have committed themselves to expanding this field and increasing the variety of specializations available to future generation scholars. The Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is one such department, and provides a background to the questions raised by the papers in this volume.

Comparative Philosophy Finds Its Stride

Established in 1936 by Charles A. Moore and Wing-tsit Chan, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa's Department of Philosophy has been the flagship department in the comparative philosophy movement since its inception. This is due in part to Moore's launching of the East-West Philosophers' Conference (EWPC) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, first held in 1939 and subsequently convened at the same location ten more times, with the most recent EWPC taking place in Honolulu in 2011. During this time, the number of participants in the EWPC has steadily grown from six in its first year to two hundred sixty in 2011.

As Moore writes in his introduction to the 1959 conference, part of the success of the EWPC comes from Hawai‘i's superb location for scholars of comparative philosophy. Positioned in the center of the Pacific, between the academies of the United States and their partners in Asia, and surrounded by the rich cultures of the Pacific Islands and the multicultural environment of Hawai‘i itself, Hawai‘i offers a natural vantage point from which to consider philosophy, broadly construed. The advantages of this location are also conferred on the Department of Philosophy, which serves as the year-round home of accomplished scholars of Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Islamic, and Korean philosophy, as well as supporting the premiere journal for comparative philosophy, *Philosophy East and West,* published by The University of Hawai‘i Press. Receiving the benefits of this world-class department are about forty graduate students who come to Hawai‘i for the express purpose of specializing in comparative philosophy. These students represent the future of comparative philosophy, and the Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference is designed to both encourage their growth as comparative philosophers and to bring graduate students from institutions worldwide into the comparative discussion.

The Present and Future of Comparative Philosophy

Supported primarily through the generosity of The Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education, which was established by Tetsuhiko Uehiro to promote the use of ethical discourse and education to bridge the gap between the academy and society, the Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference has been growing steadily since its inauguration by graduate students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in 2003. While the 2003 and 2006 conferences were relatively small in relation to other graduate student conferences in the mainland United States, the conference quickly expanded to include numerous young scholars, not only from the United States, but also from China, Japan, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, and beyond. Themes of past Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conferences include “Navigating a Pluralistic World” (2006), “Comparative Philosophy Today and Tomorrow” (2007), and “Comparative Responses to Global Interdependence” (2011). As these themes highlight, the concern of the Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference has been predominantly to inquire into comparative philosophy as a field, to ask how students of different philosophies can come to understand each better, and to support wide-ranging cross-cultural dialogues.

However, with the 2012 conference it became apparent that the focus of the conference is shifting. Questions about establishing comparative philosophy as a field have given way to more specific questions about how comparative philosophy can help scholars to understand perennial philosophical issues in new and different ways, and even to suggest philosophical topics of its own. Thus, the 2012 Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference included not one but two panels focused on emptiness, a theme that has come to be of primary concern to comparative philosophers due to its importance in Japanese and Indian philosophies. In addition, numerous presentations focused exclusively on non-Western philosophers, including a careful study of the soteriological importance of Nāgārjuna’s refutation of reality by Benjamin Zenk, an examination of the Diamond Sutra by Steve Goodrich, and a consideration of Dōgen’s Being-Time by Christina Da Silva. Several presentations addressed more general philosophical topics in new and exciting ways, including a study of religion and artistry in modern Buddhist Shōmyō works by Hanako Takayama, a feminist approach to Hawaiian identity by Brooke Schueneman, and a consideration of the relationship between subject and institution through the eyes of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Kiyoshi Miki by Shota Yokoyama. These presentations were enriched by two keynote lectures, the first by Dr. Karma Lekshe Tsomo of the University of San

Diego on the changing role of women in Southeast Asian Buddhism, and the second by Dr. Masato Ishida of UH Mānoa on perception as a geographically embodied concept.

While the full program of presentations at the 2012 Uehiro *Cross Currents* Philosophy Conference was diverse, much of the discussions over the weekend, both at formal panels and during informal coffee hours and lunch breaks, focused on three essential philosophical questions: How can we understand the self, both linguistically and phenomenologically; how can we overcome basic human self-centeredness to engage more fully with the world; and finally, once we are committed to this engagement with the world, how can we come to understand it better, whereby the self-centered perspective is transformed or overcome? This progression of questions is *comparative* in the best sense of the word, drawing on the interests of canonical Western philosophy as well as reflecting the fundamental concerns of non-Western philosophies. The papers published in this volume represent philosophical viewpoints along this path, from the first paper, Kyle Peters' careful analysis of how Emmanuel Levinas locates the self through linguistic separation from the other, to the last paper by Jeff Hoyt, a study of how Nishida Kitarō's radical ontology of the logic of place helps us to understand the concept of the holographic universe.

In exploring these papers, we hope readers will sit back, relax, and contemplate the multifaceted philosophical perspectives from which we can locate ourselves, lose ourselves, and approach the world in alternative ways. Comparative philosophy has a rich future; this volume presents just one of the most recent directions of its expansion.

Laura Specker Sullivan and Masato Ishida
Honolulu, July 2014

PART I

LOCATING THE SELF

Locating the self in the world is one of the first efforts of the human newborn and is also one of the first efforts of the philosopher. This section presents three essays that consider self-understanding from different perspectives: the intersection of language and morality, the connection between self-consciousness and bodily awareness, and the role of gender in embodied self-knowledge. All three essays seek to capture the elusive complexity of the self in terms of relationships with others, with the phenomenal world, and importantly, with one's own experience of the self. Such a theme is increasingly significant as philosophers become more aware of the diversity and richness of attitudes towards, and experiences of, the self around the globe.

The first paper in this chapter, "Levinas and Separation" by Kyle Peters, makes an effort to not only understand the self in isolation from the world, but to understand the self as it exists in separation from others, and to ask upon what basis this separation rests. Peters undertakes a close analysis of Levinas' use of the term "separation." According to Peters, "separation" can refer to two possible philosophical positions: We are separated from the other in that we are not reducible to the other, although there may be certain aspects of ourselves that we share with the other; or we are separated from the other completely and cannot understand the other in terms of any aspect of ourselves. Peters argues that "separation" is most often used by Levinas to refer to the latter philosophical position, and indeed that the idea of "separation *in toto*" is essential to Levinas' philosophy of language. However, Peters writes that the idea of "separation *in toto*" has undesirable philosophical consequences, arguing that if we have no overlapping aspects with the other, we have no way to assess their moral standpoint, such that Levinas' demand that we "heed the call of the other" places us in morally precarious territory. Peters concludes that in order to save Levinas' moral philosophy, we must interpret "separation" in the first sense, namely, as "separation in part."

In the second paper, "Self-Consciousness in Kant: How Much "I" do I Need?" by Matthew Izor, the self is analyzed both in terms of internal self-

consciousness and bodily experience in the world. Izor begins by considering how Kant fits knowledge of the self into his general picture of knowledge, presenting Kant's distinction between clear and obscure ideas and noting that according to Kant, we have no clear idea of the "I", only our experience as a subject without knowing ourselves as an object. This means that our only understanding of ourselves is our sense of "what it is like to be me," a sense that we have along with our experience of the world. However, Izor argues that in addition to the internal "I" accompanying the synthesis of the conscious manifold, the body also exists as that which synthesizes the sensory manifold, and further claims that the body-synthesis is a necessary condition for the experience of being oneself. In conclusion, Izor emphasizes the importance of the body in the Kantian picture of self-knowledge.

The third paper "The Gendered Body of Perception" by Sumaya Noush, also considers the importance of the body in our understanding of the self, but from a perspective that emphasizes that all bodies are not the same, and thus that all experience is not the same. Noush looks at how Simone de Beauvoir sought to revise Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body in order to include the essential perspective of the *gendered* body. The paper begins with a rehearsal of Merleau-Ponty's attempt to surpass intellectualist and empiricist views with his *Phenomenology of Perception,* in which he sought to reunite the mind and body through the "body schema." According to the idea of a body schema, the body is a space of possible experience, and these possibilities are in turn shaped by bodily habits. However, as Noush writes, de Beauvoir criticized Merleau Ponty, arguing that his general picture of bodily experience missed the significance of bodily particularities. Noush presents de Beauvoir's argument in terms of the concepts of transcendence and immanence, ultimately finding de Beauvoir's position to be a necessary supplement to Merleau-Ponty's general theory. In so doing, she seeks to ensure that selves are recognized in their full complexity and particularity.

These three essays interrogate the questions of what it means to be an individual self and what it is like to be such a self. As such, they provide a springboard for the remaining essays in this volume, which problematize, on the one hand, our certainty in speaking of the self, and, on the other, our experience of the world from our own particular perspective.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS SEPARATION? THE JUMP IN LEVINAS' ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE

KYLE PETERS

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes, "[t]he idea of Infinity implies the separation of the same with regard to the other, but this separation cannot rest on an opposition to the *other* which would be purely antithetical."[1] Later, in the same section, he writes "[r]evelation is discourse; in order to welcome revelation a being apt for this role of interlocutor, a separated being, is required."[2] Levinas uses this term "separation" to range over a number of different issues, from the idea of the *other* as infinite to our relation to the *other* through discourse.

What Levinas exactly means by separation, however, remains unclear. In this paper, I analyze Levinas' understanding of separation in detail. I argue that there are two distinct notions of separation at work in his philosophy. The first notion of separation argues that, since there are certain moral dimensions of the *other* that are not reducible to ourselves, the *other* is separate in part. The second notion of separation argues that since there is a radical moral break between the *other* person and myself, the *other* is separate *in toto*.

Levinas, I further argue, primarily operates under the first conception of separation. He employs this in his writings on the infinite *other*, his argument against what is understood today as the simulation theory,[3] and finally in elucidating our asymmetrical relationship to the *other*. In his analysis of language, however, he argues for the more radical separation *in toto*. I will ultimately argue that the notion of separation *in toto*, used in his analysis of language (which is employed as a positive testifier to his writings on the infinite *other*, his argument against the simulation theory, and his asymmetrical theory), leads to two undesirable consequences:

irreconcilability with the rest of his philosophy and a severe distortion of the command of the *other*.

The Other and the *Other*

In his first major work, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas discusses our relation to that which is other. Levinas distinguishes between two types of other. The first type of other, the non-italicized other, does not have a person as its referent. In contrast, the italicized *other* refers to a specific person. Elucidating this distinction between the other object and the *other* person is the main task of *Totality and Infinity*.

Levinas expounds our relations to the other object through a phenomenological description of enjoyment. In our most basic mode of being in the world, when not involved with an experience of the *other* person, we encounter objects as manipulable and controllable. That is, in the weaker sense, objects give themselves such that there is no moral preclusion of control. Taken in a stronger sense, however, objects give themselves such that they are both epistemically and metaphysically controllable. I will discuss how to interpret the extent of this experience of enjoyment further below.

Levinas clarifies this phenomenon of enjoyment through the term "comprehension." Levinas argues that we *can* stand in a relation of comprehension to the un-italicized other, the other object. In *Is Ontology Fundamental?* Levinas writes, "[t]o comprehend the tool is not to look at it but to know how to handle it."[4] But, as interesting as Levinas' writing regarding the distinction between the other object and the *other* person is, the exact nature of his claim is not made clear. This has led to a schism in the secondary literature regarding the manner in which Levinas discusses our relation to the other object and to the *other* person. There are three major alternatives present. First, some argue Levinas is making an epistemic claim, and then deriving a moral claim from this position.[5] Second, others argue he is making a moral claim *in fine*.[6] Finally, many state he is starting from a moral claim and then deriving a further epistemic claim about the other object and the *other* person.[7]

Whether Levinas is making a claim in alignment with the first, second, or third claim is a difficult topic that would necessitate its own paper. Fortunately for our discussion, we can circumvent this topic and agree that Levinas is making a moral claim, regardless of its ambiguous epistemic status. Although I think that the first claim has the weakest argument, I will leave it as a legitimate interpretation because it does not conflict with the moral reading.

In accord with the above caveat, when Levinas says that our relation with a given object is comprehensible, he is at least arguing that nothing morally precludes us from reducing our relation with the other object to a relation of comprehension. He is claiming that there is nothing morally wrong with standing in a relation in which we understand, or at least attempt to understand, the other object.

Levinas deems these relations in which there is no moral preclusion of comprehension, ontological relations.[8] In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas calls these ontological relations totalities. Simon Critchley writes, "if I conceive of the relation to the other in terms of understanding, correlation, symmetry, reciprocity, equality…then that relation is totalized."[9] Totality is the relation we stand to things like tables, chairs, computers, and so forth. There is nothing morally wrong with standing in a relation of comprehension and totality to these objects.

However, the italicized *other*, the *other* person, is not a totality; the *other* is "transcendent."[10] Transcendent, here, does not mean supernatural; it is not something that is above and beyond this world. Rather, transcendence is something that is contained within this world. Transcendent, as used by Levinas, means beyond comprehension. Since the *other* is given as beyond comprehension, Levinas deems the transcendent manner in which the *other* is given as infinite.

Infinity is the term that Levinas uses to describe the relation to the *other* person. He writes, "To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object."[11] Infinity is not the term that we use to describe the relation to the other object. As discussed above, totality, not infinity, is used to describe our relation to the other thing. This total relation is described as comprehensible. Consequently, the infinite relation to the *other* is described as something that is not comprehensible.

Levinas takes the term "infinity" from the Cartesian notion of infinity. Infinity, for Descartes, is a term used to describe The Other, i.e. God, whose powers completely and wholly transcend my own power. Now, it should be clear that Levinas cannot be using the Cartesian notion of infinity as a metaphysical description of the *other* person. There is no reason to think, metaphysically, that the *other* person wholly transcends my own power. Although there are some people whose powers transcend my own in some particular domain, the claim that they wholly transcend my power would be untenable, to say the least.

Rather, Levinas is arguing that when we experience the *other* person, we experience this *other* as overflowing. Whether or not he is making an epistemic claim I have left undecided, but without refute, this claim is taken as at least moral. That is to say, Levinas argues that, given their

infinite nature, we *should not* reduce our relation with the *other* person to a relation of comprehension or understanding. Levinas writes, the "infinite presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyses my powers and from the depths of defenseless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution."[12]

Levinas argues that there is something morally wrong with attempting to reduce our relation with the infinite *other* to comprehension. Of Levinas' theory, Joshua James Shaw writes, "(Levinas'claim is) that one's relationship to the *other* is primarily defined by moral responsibilities, and thus it differs in significant ways from the neutral, disengaged perspective that defines our relationship to objects of comprehension. The *other* is not something I *know* but something I *serve*" (Italics on *other* added).[13]

Maybe the best way to understand this relation of non-comprehension is to quote Levinas *in extenso*:

> Our relation with the *other* certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension. Not only because knowledge of the *other* requires, outside of all curiosity, also sympathy or love, ways of being distinct from impassible contemplation, but because in our relation with the *other*, he does not affect us in terms of a concept. He is being (*étant*) and counts as such. (Italics on *other* added by me).[14]

Thus Levinas argues that there is a clear distinction in our relationship to that which is other. Furthermore, he argues that it is morally reprehensible to stand in an ontological, total relation with the human *other*. They are beyond this.

One may argue, however, that there is no real moral distinction between our relation with the *other* person, and our relation with the other object. If we reflect, I argue, we can see that there are many important differences distinguishing infinite relations from total relations.

We can recognize certain differences in the way objects give themselves in experience. On the one hand, the total is given so that it is properly controllable and manipulable. That is, the total is given such that it does not morally preclude being controlled and manipulated. On the other hand, the infinite is given such that it *should* not be controlled or manipulated. When I experience a chair as it is given, I can *control* the chair. I can sit in it, I can stand on it, I can, assuming it is a fancy office chair, move it up and down, and I can adjust the back. I can also *manipulate* the chair. I can remove the leather padding on the chair, I can break the wheels, and I can add a cup holder. I can do various acts to make the chair give itself in a different manner.

When I interact with the human *other,* however, there is something that keeps me from freely controlling or manipulating him or her. This is because the *other* gives herself as properly uncontrollable and unmanipulable. The *other* is given in experience with her own thoughts, feelings, desires, will, and volition. Accompanying these is a certain moral obligation. Whether or not I have the ability to control or manipulate the *other* (a topic we remain mute on), there is a moral difference in manipulating the chair and manipulating the *other*.

The *other* is given in such a way that we should not reduce our relation with them to comprehension. This is part of what makes the *other* infinite. The fact that the *other* has feelings, thoughts, desires, will, and volition means that we should not manipulate or control the *other.* By ignoring these features, that is, by standing in a relation in which we do not take these features into account, we disrespect the *other*. There is no disrespect involved, however, when we stand in a relation of comprehension to total objects. These notions of feelings, thoughts, desires, will, and volition mark a fundamental distinction between the infinite *other* and the total other.

Our Relations with the *Other*

Levinas has come to be understood via a variety of metaphors, from an application of Isaiah Berlin's hedgehog who knows "one big thing,"[15] to the crashing of a wave on the beach,[16] more forcefully hammering down the same point. This "big thing," this same point "crashing" with more and more force, is contained within the notion of the *other.*

Against the Argument from Analogy

In one of Levinas' later articles, *Humanism of the Other*,[17] he criticizes certain liberal approaches that demand respect for the *other* on the grounds that they are similar to me, and thus try to integrate the *other* into myself. At the risk of being charged with anachronism, we can see modern equivalents in the simulation theory.[18] According to this view, I might say that Jill deserves personal freedom because, when I introspect, I realize that I merit personal freedom, and she is similar to me. Goldman characterizes something similar to this view:

> First, the attributor creates in herself presented states intended to match those of the target. In other words, the attributor attempts to put herself in the target's "mental shoes." The second step is to feed these initial pretend states into some mechanism of the attributor's own psychology... and allow

> that mechanism to operate on the pretend sites so as to generate one or more new states. Third, the attributor assigns the output state to the target.[19]

Levinas argues that this simulation theory, or argument from analogy, is a problem because we are only respecting the *other* so long as they are similar to ourselves. What happens, Levinas would ask, when we begin to see the *other* as different? What happens when, as Sartre says, we are able to see the *other* purely as an object?[20]

The problem with this view, for Levinas, is that we are not respecting the *other* due to their status as a transcendent, infinite being.[21] The *other* presents him or herself as having certain moral demands. These moral demands require that I provide respect. We must respect the *other* because they are valuable in their own right, not because they are similar or reducible to me.

Asymmetry and the *Other*

In Levinas' essay, "The Paradox of Morality,"[22] we see his application of separation in a claim stronger than the previous argument against analogy. Levinas argues that *other* peoples' "calls" are so demanding that we have to value them above our own. In other words, as mentioned above, Levinas argues that our relationship with the *other* is asymmetrical. Once again, I would like to quote Levinas *in extenso* to get the point across:

> [W]ith the appearance of the human—and this is my entire philosophy—there is something more important to me than my life, and that is the life of the *other* (Italics on *other* added by me).[23]

In that same piece, his understanding of the asymmetrical relationship is explicated in his writing on saintliness:

> But we cannot not admire saintliness... that is, the person who in his being is more attached to the being of the other than to his own. I believe that is in saintliness that the human begins; not in the accomplishment of saintliness, but in the value. It is the first value, an undeniable value (Italics on *other* added by me).[24]

This is further demonstrated in a dialogue with Phillipe Nemo:

> Ph.N.: But is not the *other* also responsible in my regard?

> E.L.: Perhaps, but that is *his* affair… the intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense, I am responsible for the *other* without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the *other* and me is not reciprocal that I am subjection to the *other*… because I am responsible for a total responsibility which answers for all the *others* and for all in the *others*, even for their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility more than all the *others* (Italics on *other* added).[25]

Since the *other* is given as infinite and overflowing, our relationship with the *other* is so one-sided that we must recognize the *other* as more important than ourselves. In other words, we stand in an asymmetrical relationship with the *other* and we must put their needs ahead of our own.

Language, Dialogue, Discourse, and the *Other*

Levinas' argument for language is to be read as a positive testifier to this inherently valuable, asymmetrical relation-based account of the *other*. This analysis of language, as one might assume, is radically different both from what is deemed the "Linguistic Turn" in Fregean or Russelean philosophy, and the Structuralist approach of Ferdinand De Saussure. Unlike the other two, Levinas is not analyzing the structural or constituent components of language, nor is he looking at the referential aspect of language. Rather, Levinas' analysis is based on something prior to this breakdown of language, and even prior to the utterance of language. As Wild puts it, Levinas' analysis shows that language presupposes "the existing individual and his ethical choice to welcome the stranger and to share his world by speaking to him."[26] In other words, Levinas' analysis of language is prior to the tripartite sub-derivation in linguistics.[27] Rather, it is about an "encounter" before any words are actually spoken. This is why language, for Levinas, can be "spoken" without any utterance. Language is the primordial experience of the *other* which is the condition of the possibility of entrance into a communicative relationship.

For Levinas, in our relationship with the *other* person, we experience the *face* of an *other* who gives themselves as something both separate and irreducible. We must find a way to interact with the *other* without thereby reducing the *otherness* of the *other* and thus totalizing our relationship. This is done, according to Levinas, through language. He writes, language "permits me to render the things offerable, detach them from my own usage, alienate them, render them exterior."[28] In other words, language is how we get out of our own sphere and participate in discourse. It is how we render ourselves to the realm of exteriority and thus make ourselves

open to the *other*. Language allows us to gain "entry into the sphere of the *other*" (Italics on *other* added by me).[29]

Why, one might ask, do we even bother joining "the sphere of the *other*?" Why do we not simply go on with our lives, manipulating the various objects of enjoyment with which we are presented? This, Levinas would respond, is an impossibility.

Our experience of the *face* of the *other* person is imbued with a "call," and because of this "call," we are forced to respond. Further clarifying, Levinas writes, "[t]he calling in question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the *Other* in the face, we call language" (Italics on *Other* added by me, capitalization added by Levinas).[30] Language is the means by which we experience the face of the *other* as having demands to which we are obliged to adhere.

This notion, that in our initial experience of the *other* they are presented with a "call" that demands response, is treated at length in Levinas' discussion on the impossibility of murder. The face, according to Levinas, is given in its "call" forbidding murder. He writes,

> The first word of the face is the "Thou shalt not kill." It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and whom I owe all.[31]

Without dwelling on the asymmetrical relationship that our experience of the *other* entails, we can see that there are demands for responsibility inherent in our experience of the *other* person. These demands for responsibility attached to our experience of the *other* are what Levinas refers to when he writes "[t]he face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse."[32] The *face* not only opens up, but is discourse. This discourse, furthermore, is ethical. The *face* is the "call" of the *other* that demands responsibility. It requires a positive response.

Thus we start out in the world with the phenomenon of enjoyment. We are freely able to manipulate and control other objects without the slightest crossing of moral boundaries. We are always, however, approached by the face of the *other*. The *other* gives himself or herself as infinite, and thus irreducible and separated from ourselves. Despite this fundamental separation between the self and the *other*, however, we are able to respond to the call of the *other* in dialogue. Through language and discourse we care able to gain "entry into the sphere of the *other*" (Italics on *other* added).[33]

Separation in Part or Separation *In Toto?*

The notion of separation runs throughout Levinas' philosophy of the *other* person, his argument against analogy, his conception of our relationship with the other as asymmetrical, and his analysis of language. In the second section of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas links this difference between the self and the infinite *other* to the notion of separation. He writes, "[t]o have an idea of Infinity it is necessary to exist as separated."[34] He further writes that the separation between self and *other* cannot exist simply in "opposition" between the two.[35]

This notion of separation will remain unclear unless we look at a slightly longer passage. In the introduction to Separation and Discourse (Section I of *Totality and Infinity*), Levinas writes,

> The idea of Infinity implies the separation of the same with regard to the other, but this separation cannot rest on an opposition to the *other* which would be purely anti-thetical. Thesis and antithesis, in repelling one another, call for one another. They appear in opposition to a synoptic gaze that encompasses them; they already form a totality which, by integrating the metaphysical transcendence expressed by the idea of infinity, relativizes it. An absolute transcendence has to be non-integratable (Italics on *other* added).[36]

According to Levinas, the self and the infinite *other* do not enter into a symmetrical relationship. Our relationship "has to be non-integratable." This is the separation between oneself and the *other*.

The exact nature of Levinas' separation between self and *other*, however, is still obtuse. There are, I argue, two ways to understand the claim that the infinite *other* is separate from myself. First, Levinas may simply be making the claim that there are certain moral dimensions of the *other* which are not reducible to ourselves. Thus the *other* is separate in part. The second interpretation, however, is much stronger. This interpretation states that there is a moral chasm between the *other* person and myself. We are completely separated beings, separate *in toto*. This stronger notion of separation, I argue, is untenable and leads to undesirable consequences.

Levinas' entire philosophy,[37] *sans* his analysis of language, is in accord with the first claim, separation in part. Levinas' analysis of language, however, is in accord with the stronger claim, separation *in toto*.

Transcendence, Infinity, and Separation

Characterizing the *other* as both *transcendent* and infinite is in accord with this notion of separation in part. This becomes apparent when we investigate his terminology; more specifically, it is clear when we investigate his use of the word "infinite." As mentioned above, Levinas took this terminology from Descartes, who used this term to describe God. We can better understand the way that Levinas understands the term infinity if we look at his interpretation of Descartes' proof for God's existence in the Third Meditation. According to Hilary Putnam, "Levinas believes that what Descartes is reporting is... a profound religious experience, an experience which might be described as an experience of a *fissure*, of a confrontation with something that disrupted all his categories."[38] If we continue Levinas' transfer of theological terminology to the *other*, we can see that Levinas understands the *other* as something that "disrupts all my categories."

Now, this "disruption of all my categories" must be investigated in detail. Does this disruption entail a complete or partial separation between self and *other*? To answer this question, we have to look at Levinas' understanding of God. The question becomes: does Levinas emphasize the utter transcendence of God at the expense of relatability, or does he emphasize relatability with God at the expense of complete transcendence? Levinas, interestingly enough, discredits both positions, understanding this choice as a false dilemma.

Levinas argues against the first half of our dilemma, the emphasis of relatability, through a scathing censure of rational theology. In *Beyond the Verse*, he writes,

> Rational theology is a theology of being where the rational is equated with the Identity of the Same, suggested by the firmness or positivity of the firm ground beneath the sun. It belongs to the ontological adventure which led the biblical God and man, understood from the standpoint of the positivity of a world, towards the "death of God" and the end of humanism, or the humanity of man.[39]

Levinas argues against the second half of our dilemma, the emphasis on transcendence, in "God and Philosophy." He writes,

> And this analysis implies that God is not simply the "first *other*," the "*other* par excellence," or the "absolutely *other*," but other than the *other*, *other* otherwise, *other* with an *alterity* prior to the *alterity* of the *other*, prior to the ethical bond with another 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 (Italics on *other* and *alterity* added).[40]

Levinas does not emphasize the relatability of God over transcendence, nor does he emphasize the transcendence of God over relatability. If he were to emphasize relatability, Levinas would totalize our relation to the *other*. This is problematic because it would not preclude comprehension. On the other hand, if Levinas emphasizes the utter transcendence of God, then we focus on God's difference "to the point of absence." Thus Levinas argues for a notion of God and, due to his transference of theological terminology, the *other* as infinite. Infinity exceeds any idea that we have of it. It does not necessarily follow, however, that we can have absolutely no conception of the infinite. Rather, infinity merely transcends the notion that I have of the finite. Our notions may be in accord with the notion of infinity, but the infinite will always go beyond them.

Comprehension and Separation

In his writings on comprehension, Levinas in no way makes the stronger move to separation *in toto*. This is because it would be difficult for Levinas to maintain that we should never stand in a relation of comprehension to the *other*. This becomes obvious if we take an example of an everyday encounter with the *other*. Assume you are at a bookstore, waiting in the checkout line. As the line dwindles and you get closer to the front, as you are approached with the *face* of the cashier, you place the book on the table and pull out your wallet. In order to pay for the $15.95 book, amid your grumbling about the ever-increasing price of philosophizing, you place a $20 bill on the counter. The clerk thanks you, gives you your change, then the book, and you move on.

It seems that in this situation, you were, at least in part, using the cashier as a tool for monetary transactions. Given our above quote, "[t]o comprehend the tool is not to look at it but to know how to handle it,"[41] there is a sense in which we stood in a relation of comprehension to the *other*. She could have been a machine and we would have stood in, for all intents and purposes, the exact same relationship (indeed there is a growing trend in Japan, as well as American supermarkets, towards these self-checkout cash registers). It seems as if we are standing in a relation of comprehension to our cashier. If Levinas cannot maintain that we should never stand in a relation of comprehension to the *other*, there is no way that he can maintain a complete separation thesis.

Given that the notions of infinity and a preclusion of *comprehension* in no way necessitate a chasm between self and *other*, we have no grounds to

claim that Levinas' philosophy of the *other* argues for the more radical separation *in toto*.

The Argument against Analogy and Separation

We can further see that Levinas' application of separation in his argument contra analogy relies on this first notion of separation, separation in part. In his argument against the simulation theory understanding of *other* persons, Levinas states that the moral demands of the *other* require that I provide them with respect. We must respect the *other* because they are valuable in their own right, not because they are similar or reducible to me.

We have no reason to believe that Levinas is making the stronger argument to complete separation. This proof is rather simple. Remember, Levinas states that the *other* is not reducible to me. An argument against reduction, however, in no way precludes a certain level of overlap. In fact, it usually requires it. In other words, an argument to reduction does not necessitate extension to an argument for separation *in toto*. Rather, it warrants the less ambitious claim, separation in part.

We can see parity here with reductive arguments regarding the "hard problem" of consciousness. A reductive explanation of consciousness argues that the facts about our subjective experience are entailed by facts about neurology or physiology. In a reductive argument, the reductive base is meant to explain fully everything that there is to explain. So, regarding the "hard problem" of consciousness, a reductive explanation argues that all of our subjective experiences can be fully explained by neurology or physiology.

In responding to this reductive argument, these "hard problem" philosophers do not simply respond that neurological and physiological explanations have no bearing on the problem of consciousness. Rather, they state that, although you can have a detailed explanation of the physiological and neurological base of consciousness, there is still an explanatory gap in a reductive account of conscious experience. David Chalmers writes,

> [Further questioning] is the key question in the problem of consciousness... Why is it that when electromagnetic waveforms impinge on a retina and are discriminated and categorized by a visual system, this discrimination and categorization is experienced as a sensation of vivid red? We know that conscious experience does arise when these functions are performed, but the very fact that it arises is the central mystery.[42]

Arguing that the problem of consciousness, or the *other* person, cannot be *fully* explained in a reductive manner does not necessarily entail that they are completely unrelated. Rather, it shows that they have certain things in common, but also diverge on other points. In other words, Levinas' argument against reduction provides support for separation in part.

Asymmetry and Separation

Without going into too much detail, similar reasoning demonstrates that, in making the stronger move from an argument against the simulation theory to asymmetry, Levinas makes the more plausible claim of separation in part. He explicitly states that "there is something more important to me than my life,"[43] and further, "[i]n this sense, I am responsible for the *other* without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair."[44]

These quotes in no way indicate anything about an asymmetrical relationship, because the *other* is completely different than myself. The fact that the *other* and I enter into an asymmetrical relationship can be based on the fact that the *other* is given as transcendent and overflowing. This, as I demonstrated above, does not necessitate the more radical complete separation.

All that I have shown thus far, however, is that the notion of asymmetry is in accord with the reading of separation in part. We must further discuss why it precludes separation *in toto*. I present this in conjunction with my criticism of separation *in toto*.

Language and Separation

Rather than continuing his understanding of separation in accord with the rest of his philosophy, Levinas' analysis of language uses a stronger understanding of separation. Levinas argues not merely that there is *some part* of the *other* that is morally separate, but rather that the *other* is separate *in toto* from ourselves. This, I argue, is a much stronger and much more difficult claim to justify.

In "Ethics and Spirit," through his exposition of the "call" of the *other*, Levinas writes,

> ... a self can exist which is not a *myself*. This self, viewed face-on, is consciousness, existing by virtue of the fact that a sovereign self, invading the world naively—like "a moving force," to use Victor Hugo's expression—perceives a face and the impossibility of killing. Consciousness is the impossibility of invading reality like a wild

> vegetation that absorbs or breaks or pushes back everything around it. The turning back on oneself of consciousness is the equivalent not of self-contemplation but of the fact of not existing violently and naturally, of speaking to the *Other* (Italics on *Other* added).[45]

In this article, written approximately eight years before the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas strives to emphasize a self "which is not a *myself*." Via poetic imagery, even harkening to Victor Hugo to help him out, Levinas tries to emphasize a "sovereign self" that traverses the world, and if it was not repelled by the *face* of the *other,* would push forward "like wild vegetation." Here we see an understanding of the *other* as "sovereign." A "sovereign" self, encountering the face-to-face relation, indicates separation *in toto*.

However, one may argue that in characterizing this notion as "naïve," Levinas is arguing against the notion of a "sovereign" self, and thus against separation *in toto*. If the "naïve" in the above paragraph is referring to "sovereign," then our interlocutor is correct. Unfortunately, "naïve" is attached to the clause "invading the world naïvely." It is the invading that is done naïvely, not the notion of a sovereign self.

One may further argue that Levinas is claiming that this is impossible. If we look at the passage, however, it is the violent invading of reality, that which "absorbs or breaks...everything around it," which is impossible. The impossibility is not the notion of a sovereign self. Thus, the fact that Levinas is using sovereign as a description of the self, without any qualifiers, indicates that he is operating under the latter conception of separation, separation *in toto,* when elucidating the "call" of the *other*.

Regarding our analysis of language, this notion of separation *in toto* continues in *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas starts with an ambiguous account of separation, writing that "*discourse* relates with what remains essentially transcendent" (Italics on *discourse* added by Levinas), "[l]anguage is a relation between separated terms," and finally "[t]he fact that the face maintains a relation with me by discourse does not range him in the same; he remains absolute within the relation."[46] This beginning section can be read in accord with an account of the *other* as separate in part, or separate *in toto*. That is, either view is not necessitated in the aforementioned quotes.

As he continues, however, Levinas begins writing in stronger terms. In part five of the Separation and Discourse section, Levinas discusses the way in which we operate in a meaningful world. Levinas says that we do so by virtue of the fact that we are alongside *others*. He writes:

> Things acquire a rational signification, and not only one of simple usage,

> because an other is associated with my relations with them. In designating a thing I designate it to the Other. The act of designating modifies my relation of enjoyment and possession with things, places the things in the perspective of the Other (Italics on other added by me, capitalization added by Levinas).[47]

In the beginning of this quote, Levinas argues that we exist in a meaningful world because we are thrown in the world alongside the *other*. Levinas continues that, since we are afforded a meaningful world because we are alongside *others*, we must rely on signs.

In elucidating the role of signs in this meaningful world, however, Levinas harkens to a notion of the *other* as separate *in toto*. He writes,

> Utilizing a sign is therefore not limited to substituting an indirect relation for the direct relation with a thing, but permits me to render the things offerable, detach them from my own usage, alienate them, render them exterior... Objectivity results from language, which permits the putting into question of possession. This disengagement has a positive meaning: the entry of the thing into the sphere of the *other*. The thing becomes a theme. To thematize is to offer the world to the *Other* in speech (Italics on *other* added by me, capitalization added by Levinas).[48]

In this quote, we see a separation *in toto* understanding of the *other*. It is because the *other* has his or her own "world" or "sphere" that we have to "alienate" and "detach" things from our selves. Because the *other* is in a completely separate sphere, we must "alienate" the object in order to gain "entry" into their sphere. If the *other* were separate in part, we would occupy the same "sphere," and there would be no need to bring in locutions such as "detach them from my own usage," "alienation," "entry," and "sphere of the other." In using the aforementioned vocabulary to describe one major aspect of our relation to the *other*, Levinas seems to be continuing the separation *in toto* understanding of the *other* started eight years prior.

In this way, certain aspects of Levinas' analysis of language rely on separation *in toto*. This, furthermore, is in opposition to the understanding of separation in accord with the rest of his philosophy, including his understanding of: transcendence and infinity, comprehension, the argument against the simulation theory, and even the asymmetrical relationship.

Problems with Separation *In Toto*

This stronger reading of separation leads to two undesirable consequences. The first undesirable result of a jump to separation *in toto* comes to light in relation to the rest of his philosophy. Since, as shown above, his understanding of the *other*, all the way up to his understanding of our relationship to the *other*, relies on separation in part, we run into the problem of consistency. It is not possible to form a consistent set with the two members, separation in part and separation *in toto*. The first excludes the second, and the second excludes the first. For, if one is separated in part, then there must be some level on which the two are together. This precludes separation *in toto*. Similarly, if one is separated *in toto*, there cannot be some level on which the two are together. This precludes separation in part. Thus the first undesirable result is an inconsistency in Levinas' moral understanding of the person. It is impossible that the *other* is both separate in part and separate *in toto*.

Simply arguing for separation in part on the ground of inconsistency, however, belies the necessity to which Levinas must abandon this stronger claim. The best way to get the Levinasean to grasp the severity of the situation is to elucidate the undesirable ethical consequences of an analysis of the *other* based on separation *in toto*.

There are three things that we must keep in mind at this point. First, we are interpreting separation *in toto* as a moral claim. Second, Levinas cannot be maintaining a thesis that understands the *other* as both separate in part and separate *in toto*. If Levinas understands the *other* as separate in part, he does so wholly. The same is true regarding separation *in toto*. The third point is closely related to the second point. Levinas' analysis of language is a positive testifier to his phenomenological account of the *other*. Language is to be understood in relation to the rest of his philosophy. For these three reasons, if Levinas is arguing for separation *in toto*, he is arguing for it in all of his philosophy. Thus when elucidating problems with this complete understanding of separation, it is important that we do this on the level of his entire philosophy.

If we are completely separated from the *other* person on moral grounds, then it follows that, in an early encounter[49] with the *other*, we would not know anything about their moral values. This point is further complicated by Levinas' argument against the simulation theory. Recall Levinas' argument that we must respect the *other* because they are valuable in their own right, not because they are similar or reducible to me. This means that we cannot, via introspection, see that the *other* is similar to me, realize that I have upright moral values, and then place