

## Is Ontology Fundamental?

(1951)

Levinas is engaged here in a questioning of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, that is to say, his attempt, in *Being and Time*, to raise anew the question of the meaning of Being through an analysis of that being for whom Being is a question: *Dasein*.<sup>1</sup> In Heidegger's early work, ontology - science of Being in the Aristotelian sense - is fundamental, and *Dasein* is the fundament or condition of possibility for any ontology, a being whose "a priori" structure must first be clarified in an existential analysis. For Levinas, the exceptional character of Heideggerian ontology is that it presupposes the factual situation, or existential facticity, of the human being. The comprehension of Being (*Seinsverständnis*), which must be presupposed in order for Heidegger's project to begin, does not assume a merely intellectual attitude, but rather the rich variety of intentional life - emotional, practical, and theoretical - through which we relate to the Being of various beings. Thus - and this fundamental agreement with Heidegger can already be found at the basis of Levinas's critique of Husserl in his 1930 doctoral thesis, published as *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* - the essential contribution of Heideggerian ontology is its critique of intellectualism: the fact that ontology is not simply a contemplative science but is grounded in a fundamental ontology of the existential engagement of human beings in the world which forms the "anthropological" preparation for the elaboration of the question of Being.

However, as Levinas's writings prior to this essay make clear (for example, the introduction to his 1947 book *De l'existence à l'existant*), although Levinas's work is to a large extent inspired by Heidegger and by the conviction that we cannot put aside *Being and Time* for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian, it is also governed by what Levinas calls "the profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy" (DE 19; EE 19). "Is Ontology Fundamental?" shows the basis for this claim and demonstrates for the first time the ethical significance of this critique of Heidegger. The enduring importance of this essay for Levinas's subsequent work can be seen in the way its argumentation is alluded to and repeated in the analyses of *Totality and Infinity* (see "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology" [Tel 12-18; TaI 42-48] and "Ethics and the Face" [Tel 172-75; TaI 197-201]). And yet the essay has many attractions for the reader coming to it from Levinas's later work, for example the two significant allusions to Kant's ethics, and the proximity and distance of Levinas's account of the ethical relation to Hegel's dialectic of intersubjectivity ("the life and death struggle").

The central task of this essay is to describe a relation irreducible to comprehension, that is to say, irreducible to what Levinas sees as the *ontological* relation to others where alterity is reduced to the Same. Even the Heideggerian ontology that exceeds intellectualism is unable to describe this relation, because the particular being is always already understood within the horizon of Being. Thus, for Levinas, Heidegger rejoins the great Platonic tradition of Western philosophy, where in order to comprehend the particular being, it is always understood with reference to the universal *eidos*. Yet how can a relation with an entity be other than comprehension? Levinas's response is that it cannot, "unless it is the other (*autrui*).<sup>2</sup> The claim here is that the relation with the other goes beyond comprehension, that it does not affect us in terms of a concept or theme. For Levinas, this "original relation" takes place in the concrete situation of speech. In

speaking or calling or listening to the other, I am not reflecting upon the other, but I am actively engaged in a noncomprehensive, nonsubsumptive relation to alterity where I focus on the particular individual in front of me and forgo the mediation of the universal. It is this event of being in relation with the other - variously described in the essay as "expression," "invocation," and "prayer" - that Levinas describes first as "religion" and then, and only on the basis of an allusion to Kant, as "ethical." This leads to a significant insight: that Levinas does not posit, a priori, a conception of ethics that then instantiates itself in certain concrete experiences; rather, the ethical (rather than "ethics") is a name that describes, a posteriori, a certain event of being in a nonsubsumptive relation with the other.

### 1. The Primacy of Ontology

Does not the primacy of ontology among the branches of knowledge rest on a most obvious evidence? Does not all knowledge of relations by which beings are connected or opposed to one another already involve the comprehension of the fact that these relations and these beings exist? To spell out the significance of this fact, i.e., to take up once more the problem of ontology (implicitly resolved by everyone, be it only under the form of forgetfulness), is, so it seems, to establish a fundamental knowledge without which all philosophical, scientific, or common knowledge remains naïve.

The dignity of contemporary ontological research results from the imperious and original character of this evidence. On the basis of it, thinkers straightaway rose above the "illuminations" of literary coteries in order to breathe afresh the air of the great dialogues of Plato and the metaphysics of Aristotle.

To question this fundamental evidence is a reckless undertaking. But to take up philosophy by such questioning is, at least, to return to its source, beyond literature and emotional problems.

### 2. Contemporary Ontology

The renewal of ontology by contemporary philosophy is unusual in that the knowledge of being in general - fundamental ontology - presupposes the *factual situation* of the mind that knows. A reason freed from temporal contingencies, a soul co-eternal with the Ideas, such is the self-image cultivated by a reason that has forgotten itself or is unaware of itself, a reason that is naïve. Ontology,

allegedly authentic,<sup>2</sup> coincides with the facticity of temporal existence. To comprehend being as being is to exist here below.

Not that the *here below*,<sup>3</sup> by the trials it imposes, elevates and purifies the soul, enabling it to become more receptive toward being. Not that the *here below* opens a history, the progress of which alone would make thinkable the idea of being. The *here below* gets its ontological privilege neither from the ascesis it comprises nor from the civilization to which it gives rise.<sup>4</sup> Already in these temporal concerns the comprehension of beings is spelled out. Ontology is not accomplished in the triumph of human beings over their condition but in the very tension where this condition is assumed.

This possibility of conceiving contingency and facticity not as facts open to intellection but as the act of intellection, this possibility of showing in the brutality of the fact and given contents the transitivity of comprehension and a "signifying intention"<sup>5</sup> (a possibility discovered by Husserl, but linked by Heidegger to the intellection of being in general), constitutes the great novelty of contemporary ontology. Henceforth the comprehension of being does not presuppose a merely theoretical attitude but the whole of human comportment. The whole human being is ontology. Scientific work, the affective life, the satisfaction of needs and labor, social life and death - all these moments spell out the comprehension of being, or truth, with a rigor which reserves to each a determinate function. Our entire civilization follows from this comprehension, even if this comprehension was a forgetfulness of being. It is not because of the human being that there is truth. It is because being in general is inseparable from its *openness*, because there is truth, or, if one likes, because being is intelligible, that there is humanity.<sup>6</sup>

The return to the original themes of philosophy - and it is in this that the work of Heidegger remains striking - does not proceed from a pious decision to return finally to who knows what *philosophia perennis* but from a radical attention given to the urgent preoccupations of the moment. The abstract question of the meaning of being qua being and the question of the present hour spontaneously reunite.

### 3. The Ambiguity of Contemporary Ontology

The identification of the comprehension of being with the plenitude of concrete existence risks drowning in existence. This *philosophy of existence*, which Heidegger for his part refuses, is only the counterpart, albeit inevitable, of his conception of ontology. The historical existence that interests the philosopher insofar as it is ontology is of interest to human beings and literature because it is dramatic. When philosophy and life are intermingled, we no longer

know if we incline toward philosophy because it is life or hold to life because it is philosophy. The essential contribution to the new ontology can be seen in its opposition to classical intellectualism. To comprehend the tool is not to look at it but to know how to handle it. To comprehend our situation in reality is not to define it but to find ourselves in an affective disposition. To comprehend being is to exist.<sup>7</sup> All this indicates, it would seem, a rupture with the theoretical structure of Western thought. To think is no longer to contemplate but to commit oneself, to be engulfed by that which one thinks, to be involved.<sup>8</sup> This is the dramatic event of being-in-the-world.

The comedy begins with the simplest of our movements, each of which carries with it an inevitable awkwardness. In putting out my hand to approach a chair, I have creased the sleeve of my jacket. I have scratched the floor, I have dropped the ash from my cigarette. In doing that which I wanted to do, I have done so many things I did not want. The act has not been pure, for I have left some traces. In wiping out these traces, I have left others. Sherlock Holmes will apply his science to this irreducible coarseness of each of my initiatives and thereby, the comedy may well turn tragic. When the awkwardness of the act turns against the goal pursued, we are at the height of tragedy. Laius, in order to thwart the deadly predictions, will undertake precisely what is necessary for them to be fulfilled. In succeeding, Oedipus contributes to his own unhappiness like the prey that flees the noise of the hunter across a field covered in snow, thereby leaving the very traces that will be its ruin.

We are thus responsible beyond our intentions. It is impossible for the regard that directs the act to avoid the nonintended action that comes with it. We have one finger caught in the machine and things turn against us. That is to say, our consciousness and our mastery of reality through consciousness do not exhaust our relation with reality, to which we are always present through all the density of our being. Consciousness of reality does not coincide with our habitation in the world - it is here that Heidegger's philosophy has produced such a strong impression on the literary world.

But the philosophy of existence immediately effaces itself before ontology. This fact of being involved, this event in which I find myself engaged, tied as I am to what should be my object by ties not reducible to thoughts - this existence is interpreted as comprehension. From now on the transitive character of the verb *to know* (*connaître*) is attached to the verb *to exist*.<sup>9</sup> The first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "All men by nature aspire to knowledge," remains true for a philosophy that has too easily been believed to be disdainful of the intellect. Ontology does not come merely to crown our practical concerns with being, as the contemplation of the essences in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* crowns the virtues.<sup>10</sup> Ontology is the essence of every relation with beings and even of every relation in being. Does not the fact that a being is "open" belong

to the very fact of its being? Our concrete existence is interpreted in terms of its entry into the "openness" of being in general.<sup>11</sup> We exist in a circuit of understanding with reality.<sup>12</sup> Understanding is the very event that existence articulates. All incomprehension is only a deficient mode of comprehension. It turns out that the analysis of existence and of what is called its *haecceity* (*Da*) is only the description of the essence of truth, of the condition of the very understanding of being.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. The Other (*Autrui*) as Interlocutor

It is not on behalf of a divorce between philosophy and reason that we hold to a meaningful language. But we are entitled to ask whether reason, presented as the possibility of such a language, necessarily precedes it, or if language is not founded on a relation anterior to comprehension and which constitutes reason. The pages that follow will attempt to characterize in a very general way this relation which is irreducible to comprehension, even to that comprehension beyond classical intellectualism determined by Heidegger.

Comprehension for Heidegger ultimately rests on the *openness* of being. While Berkeleian idealism, because of the qualitative content of being, saw in the latter a reference to thought, Heidegger sees in the - in a sense formal - fact that beings (*l'étant*) are - in their work of being (*être*), in their very independence - their intelligibility.<sup>14</sup> This does not involve the prior dependence of a being (*l'étant*) with respect to a subjective thought but is like a vacancy awaiting its incumbent, opened by the very fact that a being is. It is thus that Heidegger describes, in their most formal structure, the articulations of vision where the relation of the subject with the object is subordinated to the relation of the object with light, which is not an object. The understanding of a being will thus consist in going beyond that being (*l'étant*) into the *openness* and in perceiving it *upon the horizon of being*. That is to say, comprehension, in Heidegger, rejoins the great tradition of Western philosophy: to comprehend the particular being is already to place oneself beyond the particular. To comprehend is to be related to the particular that only exists through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal.

One cannot oppose personal preference to the venerable tradition that Heidegger continues. One cannot *prefer* as the condition of ontology a relation with beings over the fundamental thesis that every relation with a being presupposes the intimacy or the forgetfulness of being. From the moment that one engages in reflection and precisely for the very reasons which since Plato subject the sensation of the particular to knowledge of the universal, one is forced, it would seem, to subject relations between beings to structures of being, metaphysics to ontology, the existential to the ontological. Heidegger

over, can the *relation* with *being* be, from the outset, anything other than its *comprehension* as being (*étant*), the fact of freely letting it be inasmuch as it is being (*étant*)?

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

Here the partisan of ontology will object: to speak of beings (*étant*), is this not already to insinuate that beings concern us thanks to a revelation of being and is therefore, since situated in the opening of being, from the very outset established in the heart of comprehension? Indeed, what does the independence of a being mean, if not its reference to ontology? To relate oneself to beings qua beings means, for Heidegger, to let beings be, to comprehend them as independent of the perception which discovers and grasps them. It is precisely through such comprehension that it gives itself as a being (*étant*) and not as a mere object. Being-with-the-Other (*Miteinandersein*)<sup>15</sup> thus rests for Heidegger on the ontological relation.

We respond: in our relation with the other (*autrui*) is it a matter of *letting be*?<sup>16</sup> Is not the independence of the other (*autrui*) accomplished in the role of being summoned? Is the one to whom one speaks understood from the first in his being? Not at all. The other (*autrui*) is not an object of comprehension first and an interlocutor second. The two relations are intertwined. In other words, the comprehension of the other (*autrui*) is inseparable from his invocation.

To comprehend a person is already to speak with him. To posit the existence of the other (*autrui*) through letting be is already to have accepted this existence, to have taken account of it. "To have accepted," "to have taken account," do not come back to comprehension and letting be. Speech delineates an original relation. It is a question of perceiving the function of language not as subordinate to the *consciousness* that one has of the presence of the other (*autrui*), his neighborliness or our community with him, but rather as the condition of any conscious grasp.

Of course, it is still necessary to explain why the event of language is no longer situated at the level of comprehension. Indeed, why not broaden the notion of comprehension according to a procedure made familiar by phenomenology? Why not present the invocation of the other (*autrui*) as the characteristic proper to his comprehension?

This we hold to be impossible. For example, the handling of everyday objects is interpreted as their comprehension.<sup>17</sup> But in this example, broadening

of the notion of knowledge is justified by the overcoming of known objects. It is accomplished in spite of everything there may be of pretheoretical engagement in the handling of "equipment." At the heart of such handling, the being (*l'étant*) is *overcome* in the very movement that grasps it. In this "beyond" necessary to presence "at hand" we see the very itinerary of comprehension. This overcoming is not only due to the preliminary appearance of the "world" each time that we concern ourselves with something manipulable, as Heidegger argues. It is delineated also in the *possession* and in the *consumption* of the object. But it is not at all like this when it is a matter of my relation with the other (*autrui*). There also, if one likes, I comprehend being in the other (*autrui*), beyond its particularity as a being (*étant*). The person with whom I am in relation I call *being*, but in so calling him, I call to him. I do not only think that he is, I speak to him. He is my *partner* in the heart of a relation which ought only have made him present to me. I have spoken to him, that is to say, I have neglected the universal being that he incarnates in order to remain with the particular being he is. Here the formula "before being in relation with a being, I must first have comprehended it as being" loses its strict application, for in comprehending being I simultaneously tell this comprehension to this being.

A human being is the sole being which I am unable to encounter without expressing this very encounter to him. It is precisely in this that the encounter distinguishes itself from knowledge. In every attitude in regard to the human there is a greeting - if only in the refusal of greeting. Here perception is not projected toward a horizon - the field of my freedom, power and property - in order to grasp the individual upon a familiar foundation. It refers to the pure individual, to a being as such. And this signifies precisely, if one wishes to speak in terms of "comprehension," that my comprehension of beings as such is already the expression that I offer him of this very comprehension.

This impossibility of approaching the other (*autrui*) without speaking to him signifies that here thought is inseparable from expression. But such expression does not consist in decanting in some manner a thought relative to the other (*autrui*) into the other's (*autrui*) mind. We know this not since Heidegger but since Socrates.<sup>18</sup> Nor does such expression consist in *articulating* the comprehension that I henceforth share with the other (*autrui*). Before any participation in a common content by comprehension, it consists in the intuition of sociality by a relation that is consequently irreducible to comprehension.

The relation with the other (*autrui*) is not therefore ontology. This tie to the other (*autrui*), which does not reduce itself to the representation of the Other (*autrui*) but rather to his invocation, where invocation is not preceded by comprehension, we call *religion*. The essence of discourse is prayer.<sup>19</sup> What

distinguishes thought aiming at an object from the tie with a person is that the latter is articulated in the vocative: what is named is at the same time that which is called.

In choosing the term *religion* - without having pronounced the word *God* or the word *sacred* - we have initially in mind the meaning which Auguste Comte gives to this term in the beginning of his *Politique positive*.<sup>20</sup> Nothing theological, nothing mystical, lies hidden behind the analysis that we have just given of the encounter with the other (*autrui*), an encounter whose formal structure it was important to underline: the object of the encounter is at once given to us and in *society* with us; but we cannot reduce this event of sociality to some property revealed in the given, and knowledge cannot take precedence over sociality. If the word *religion* should, however, announce that the relation with human beings, irreducible to comprehension, is itself thereby distanced from the exercise of power, whereas it rejoins the Infinite in human faces, then we accept the ethical resonance of that word and all of its Kantian echoes.

Religion is the relation with a being as a being. It does not consist in *conceiving* it as a being or as an act in which a *being* is already assimilated, even if this assimilation were to succeed in disengaging it as a being, in *letting it be*. Nor does religion consist in establishing who knows what *belonging*, nor in running up against the irrational in an effort to comprehend *beings*. Is the rational reducible to power over an object? Is reason domination by which the resistance of being as such is surmounted, not in an appeal to this very resistance but as a ruse of the hunter who ensnares all that such a being contains of strength and irreducibility on the basis of its weaknesses, the abdication of its particularity, its place in the horizon of universal being? Is understanding as ruse, understanding belonging to struggle and violence over things, able to constitute a human order? Are we not paradoxically accustomed to seeking in struggle the very manifestation of spirit and its reality? But is not the order of reason constituted rather in a situation where "one chats," where the resistance of beings qua beings is not broken but pacified?

The concern of contemporary philosophy to liberate human beings from the categories adapted uniquely for things cannot therefore content itself with notions of dynamism, duration, transcendence, or freedom, as opposed to those of the static, the inert, the determined, as a description of the human essence. In order to say what is human nature, it is not so much a matter of opposing one essence to another. It is above all a matter of finding a place where the human no longer concerns us from the perspective of the horizon of being, that is to say, no longer offers itself to our powers. A being as such (and not as incarnation of universal being) can only be in a relation where we speak to this being. A being (*l'étant*) is a human being and it is as a neighbor that a human being is accessible - as a face.

## 5. The Ethical Signification of the Other (*Autrui*)

In relation to beings in the opening of being, comprehension finds a signification for them on the basis of being. In this sense, it does not invoke these beings but only names them, thus accomplishing a violence and a negation. A partial negation which is violence. This *partiality* is indicated by the fact that, without disappearing, those beings are in my power. Partial negation, which is violence, denies the independence of a being: it belongs to me. Possession is the mode whereby a being, while existing, is partially denied. It is not only a question of the fact that the being is an instrument, a tool, that is to say, a means. It is an end also. As consumable, it is nourishment, and in enjoyment, it offers itself, gives itself, belongs to me. To be sure, vision measures my power over the object, but it is already enjoyment. The encounter with the other (*autrui*) consists in the fact that despite the extent of my domination and his slavery, I do not possess him. He does not enter entirely into the opening of being where I already stand, as in the field of my freedom. It is not starting from being in general that he comes to meet me. Everything which comes to me from the other (*autrui*) starting from being in general certainly offers itself to my comprehension and possession. I understand him in the framework of his history, his surroundings and habits. That which escapes comprehension in the other (*autrui*) is him, a being. I cannot negate him partially, in violence, in grasping him within the horizon of being in general and possessing him. The Other (*Autrui*) is the sole being whose negation can only announce itself as total: as *murder*. The Other (*Autrui*) is the sole being I can wish to kill.

I can wish.<sup>21</sup> And yet this power is quite the contrary of power. The triumph of this power is its defeat as power. At the very moment when my power to kill realizes itself, the other (*autrui*) has escaped me. I can, for sure, in killing *attain* a goal; I can kill as I hunt or slaughter animals, or as I fell trees. But when I have grasped the other (*autrui*) in the opening of being in general, as an element of the world where I stand, where I have seen him *on the horizon*, I have not looked at him in the face, I have not encountered his face. The temptation of total negation, measuring the infinity of this attempt and its impossibility - this is the presence of the face. To be in relation with the other (*autrui*) face to face is to be unable to kill. It is also the situation of discourse.

If things are only things, this is because the relation with them is established as comprehension. As beings, they let themselves be overtaken from the perspective of being and of a totality that lends them a signification. The immediate is not an object of comprehension. An immediate given of consciousness is a contradiction in terms. To be given is to be exposed to the ruse of the understanding, to be seized by the mediation of a concept by the light of

being in general, by way of a detour, "in a roundabout way." To be given is to signify on the basis of what one is not. The relation with the face, speech, an event of collectivity, is a relation with beings as such, as pure beings.

That the relation with a *being* is the invocation of a face and already speech, a relation with a certain depth rather than with a horizon - a breach in the horizon - that my neighbor is the being par excellence, can indeed appear somewhat surprising when one is accustomed to the conception of a being that is by itself insignificant, a profile against a luminous horizon and only acquiring signification in virtue of its presence within this horizon. The face signifies otherwise. In it the infinite resistance of a being to our power affirms itself precisely against the murderous will that it defies; because, completely naked (and the nakedness of the face is not a figure of style), the face signifies itself. We cannot even say that the face is an opening, for this would be to make it relative to an environing plenitude.

Can things take on a face? Is not art an activity that lends faces to things? Does not the facade of a house regard us? The analysis thus far does not suffice for an answer. We ask ourselves all the same if the impersonal but fascinating and magical march of rhythm does not, in art, substitute itself for sociality, for the face, for speech.

To comprehension and signification grasped within a horizon, we oppose the signifyingness of the face. Will the brief indications by which we have introduced this notion allow us to catch sight of its role in comprehension itself and of all the conditions which delineate a sphere of relations barely suspected? In any case, that which we catch sight of seems suggested by the practical philosophy of Kant, to which we feel particularly close.

In what way the vision of the face is no longer vision but audition and speech; how the encounter with the face - that is, moral consciousness - can be described as the condition of consciousness *tout court* and of disclosure; how consciousness is affirmed as the impossibility of killing; what are the conditions of the appearance of the face as the temptation and the impossibility of murder; how I can appear to myself as a face; in what manner, finally, the relation with the other (*autrui*) or the collectivity is our relation, irreducible to comprehension, with the infinite - these are the themes that proceed from this first contestation of the primacy of ontology. Philosophical research, in any case, cannot be content with a mere reflection on the self or on existence. Reflection offers only the tale of a personal adventure, of a private soul, which returns incessantly to itself, even when it seems to flee itself. The human only lends itself to a relation that is not a power.

## Transcendence and Height

(1962)

Shortly after the publication of *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (1961), Levinas was invited to speak to the *Société Française de Philosophie*. On January 27, 1962, he presented "Transcendance et hauteur" to the members of the society.<sup>1</sup> The essay can be read as a succinct summary of the opening arguments of *Totality and Infinity* from an epistemological perspective. Starting from the classical debate between idealism and realism, Levinas argues that both positions are forms of a fundamental monism: both try to reduce the plurality of beings to the unity of "the Same," thus excluding the otherness of any irreducible "Other." Levinas borrows the expressions "the Same" (*le Même*) and "the Other" (*l'Autre*) from Plato, who in his dialogue *The Sophist* had shown that to *auton* and to *heteron* are basic categories, which cannot be reduced to one another or to any other category such as "being" or "nonbeing." Levinas's characterization of philosophy as the endeavor to assure the triumph of "the Same" encompasses the whole history of Western philosophy, including Heidegger's meditation on the difference between beings and being itself. Traces of another conception of philosophy can be found in some of the classic texts of that history. Descartes, in the third of his *Metaphysical Meditations*, analyzed the irreducibility of the idea of the infinite, an idea found in human consciousness together with the idea of consciousness itself. Infinity is the "feature" that immunizes the Other against any assimilation or absorption by the Same, thus guaranteeing a separation between the two that, at the same time, is a relation.

The phenomenological verification of these seemingly abstract terms and distinctions is given through an analysis of the basic relation between myself and the human Other (*Autrui*). I, who am and remain the Same, discover myself as put into question and under the command of the human Other. The law of my "selfsame" economy, my auto-nomy, is unseated and subordinated by the law of the Other. The primacy of hetero-nomy expresses the asymmetry of the relationship between the human other, which reveals itself to be infinite, and the self, which is a conscience before being a consciousness. As a philosophy of the Same, ontology must make place for a thought that begins by recognizing its a priori relation to the height which is revealed in the other's face and speech.

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### Argument

Since Hegel, we are accustomed to thinking that philosophy exceeds the framework of anthropology. The ontological event accomplished by philosophy consists in suppressing or transmuting the alterity of all that is Other, in universalizing the immanence of the Same (*le Même*) or of Freedom, in effacing the boundaries, and in expelling the violence of Being (*Être*).

The knowing I is the melting pot of such a transmutation. It is the Same par