NONPHENOMENALITY AND THE IM/POSSIBILITY OF GOD: IMPLICATIONS OF JACQUES DERRIDA'S "VIOLENCE AND METAPHYSICS"

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Using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of Levinas's other, the paper argues that philosophy's involvement with nonphenomenality necessarily leads to a discussion of the im/possibility of God. Because the nonphenomenal is proper to God, then the theological trap becomes explicit in the study of philosophy. The paper operates within an exposition of Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics," while arguing in three sections. The first section discusses the theological trap implicit in Levinas and the language that he engages. The limitations of this theological language and the negativity involved in the discussion of the other leads us to consider difference as nonphenomenal. The second section investigates the violence that language entails in Derrida's understanding of Levinas's Husserl and Heidegger. This is to demonstrate the point made in section one and to bridge the idea to section three, which investigates the limitations of this language and its implications to any understanding of God as the effect of the trace. If anything, the paper utilizes Derrida's reading of Levinas to argue for the theological trap and the understanding of God as the effect of the trace.

> God is not simply the 'first other', or the 'other *par excellence*,' or the 'absolutely other,' but other than the other, other otherwise, and other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical obligation to the other and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of his possible confusion with the agitation of the *there is*.
> —Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (1998, 69)

INTRODUCTION

Jacques Derrida (1978a, 81) agrees that philosophy is Greek because "the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, and it would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophically, outside this medium." Doing philosophy necessitates constant reference to Greek thinking. Philosophy and Greek thinking are so united that it is impossible to think of *philosophia* apart from its Greek founding concepts. According to Derrida, (1978a, 82) both Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl agree with this understanding; thus, "[a]ny possible dialogue between Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian 'ontology,' … can be understood only from within the Greek tradition". This means that Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian 'ontology' operate within Greek thinking and is intelligible only in this tradition. What is the implication of this? If Husserl and Heidegger are dependent on Greek thinking, then Emmanuel Levinas (on using and criticizing Husserl and Heidegger) presupposes and operates in this Greek conception of being. Derrida considers this inevitable and inescapable when doing philosophy and conversing with Husserl and Heidegger. Because doing philosophy entails the use of language and thought - which are essentially Greek, then Levinas is also Greek - in the same way that Husserl and Heidegger are both implicitly Greeks (see Eisenstadt 2005). In speaking about Levinas, Derrida recognizes that his thoughts are Jewish, but are, also, Greek.

Although thinking complicitly Greek, Levinas distances himself from the Greek tradition when Derrida explains that Levinas "fundamentally no longer seeks to be a thought of being and phenomenality" (1978a, 82). By distancing himself, Levinas is not interested with the Greek understanding of being, which manifest in phenomenality. Instead, he is interested with the face of the "other," or that which escapes phenomenality; this is supported by the phrases 'otherwise than being' or 'beyond essence' (Levinas 1981). Being is reducible to the same (*identitas*) and, as the same, it remains identical within and through time (Abel 1974, 3). In contrast, the "other" of Levinas can only be different; the thinking of the "other" incorporates the 'saying' of that which is added to the 'said.' This means that the thought of Levinas is the "other" of Greek thinking. As the "other" of Greek thinking, according to Derrida (1978a, 83), Levinas "seeks to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the same and the one (other names for the light of being and of the phenomenon) as if from oppression itself."

Levinas criticizes the privilege given to vision and to any references to 'light.' The privileging of this imagery is from the Greeks and it refers to our ability to see things panoramically and reflectively. The Greek ideal, according to Derrida (1978a, 90) is:

> … a world of light and of unity, a "philosophy of a world of light, a world without time." In this heliopolitics, "the social ideal … is the collectivity which says 'us,' and which, turned toward the intelligible sun, toward the truth, experiences the other at his side and not face to face with him."

In arguing for the face that escapes being, Levinas divorces himself from Greek thinking and he demonstrates the failure of the metaphor of light. It is not accidental

that the Greek words for light (*phos*), appear (*phainein*), and phenomenon (*phainomenon*) share the same etymology; phenomenon is that which appears in the context of light. Derrida (1978a, 92) clarifies: "What language will ever escape it? How, for example, will the metaphysics of the face as the epiphany of the other free itself from light? Light perhaps has no opposite." This begs the question: Is Levinas able to escape the metaphor of light and the conditionality of Greek thought?

In implicating the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas in this paper on Jacques Derrida, I argue that philosophy can not only be interested with phenomenality, but with nonphenomenality. Playing with the above logic of implication, every attempt to articulate the phenomenal is an attempt to articulate the nonphenomenal. But because nonphenomenality is proper to any discourse about God, then Derrida's engagement with language (applied to theological themes) not only sets the tone for the paper but also the discourse on the im/possibility of God. To make the above thesis, I use the exposition of Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics" as a heuristic. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part investigates theological language and the negativity implicit in its attempt to discourse and engage the other. Pushing the implication of this discovery to refer also to the totally other, the second part considers Derrida's reading of Levinas's critique of Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology. This section pushes further the ideas identified in the first section and prepares the third section, which investigates what it means to understand God as an effect of the trace.

Derrida enumerates three instances where Levinas succeeded in using the imagery of light apart from Greek thought. The first instance is Levinas's reduction of ego to the same and the other as difference. According to Derrida (1978a, 93), Levinas thinks that "the alterity or negativity interior to the ego, the interior difference, is but an appearance: an illusion, a 'play of the same,' the 'mode of identification' of an ego whose essential moments are called body, possession, home, economy, etc." The ego, that remains in time, is the same; this is the logic of identity, and this is only possible because of self-identification. However, this 'sameness' is also at the same time divided, that is—different. Derrida (1978, 93-94), explains that this 'sameness' "entails a *certain* negativity. A finite negativity is an internal and relative modification through which the ego affects itself by itself, within its own movement of identification. Thus, it alters itself toward itself within itself." The ego is the same (and as such is identity), but it is also divided internally, and is always altered by itself, within itself, and for itself.

The second instance where Levinas spoke of light without any reference to Greek thought can be found in his references to history. Levinas does not speak directly about history, but of the other as beyond history. Does the other presuppose a history? In this case, is history simply to be understood as the same? Derrida (1978, 95) replies to these questions in this way:

> One may wonder whether history can be history, *if there is history*, when negativity is enclosed within the circle of the same, and when work does not truly, meet alterity, providing itself with its own resistance. One wonders whether history itself does not begin with this relationship to the other which Levinas places beyond history.

The quote above explains the negativity implicit in history. It shows how it is impossible to think of the "other" apart from the conditionality and limit determined by history. This means that the "other" can only be thought within a history, and never apart from or beyond it. The "other," whether Levinas wants it or not, can only be understood historically, contextually, and conditionally.

The third and last instance that Derrida pointed out refers to the language that makes possible or not the conceptualization of the encounter with the "other." As Derrida (1978, 95) explains:

> [T]here is no way to conceptualize the encounter: it is made possible by the other, the unforeseeable "resistant to all categories." Concepts suppose an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized as soon as it is announced precisely because it has let itself be foreseen. The infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recognized. Thus we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believed— which we still cannot not believe — to be the very ether of our thought and language.

The lack of concepts is due to the lack of intuition. Concepts operate within intuition, which is not possible beyond the horizon of the same. In this sense, language is an attempt to conceptualize the encounter with the other, which is understood to be "resistant to categories." The other is reluctant to be seen in the horizon of the same. As such, the encounter is full of surprises. More often than not, these surprises are beyond conceptual possibility. How is it possible to have no concept of the other without reference to being? This leads us to the first part of the paper.

LANGUAGE   AND   NONPHENOMENALITY

Emmanuel Levinas's use of language demonstrates the difficulty of conceptualizing the other. Allow me to consider two points. The first one is Levinas's use of language, which prioritizes identity (or sameness/presence) over difference. In this grammar, terms are not only definite; they are endowed with fixed meanings. This is the same as the classical reduction of presence and being. Presence makes possible being's definite and fixed description, vice versa. But, if difference is anterior to being, then this affects presence and whatever comes from it (see Katz 2005). In short, presence also manifests difference. But it can only do so by means of fissures, which involves the play of both presence and absence, and being and difference at the same time (Derrida 1982, 19). In this sense, the play disturbs presence or being.

Language, like *différance*, is constituted by the process of both differing and delaying. This process is "the operation of differing," which "... both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay" (Derrida 1973, 88). There seems to be an impossibility involved in putting into language our

experience of being and presence. Derrida discusses an example from Sigmund Freud. Freud refers to impossible presence in his engagement with the unconscious. But what is the unconscious? We cannot speak of it without collapsing and reducing our conscious life; the unconscious presents itself to us as symbolic substitutes. In short, they never come to presence, and are never conscious. Derrida refers to these unconscious as mere 'traces.' These 'traces' can neither point to a possible presence nor can they be modifications of it. They merely represent in the most possible way what can never completely come to presence. Traces preserve the conscious life by delaying its arrival (Derrida 1982, 20). Thus, the substitute goes first, and is prior to the reality being infinitely and being indefinitely delayed.

Applied to language, both Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure argue that language is a system of differences. Derrida (1982, 11), in quoting de Saussure, explains: "a difference usually implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*." This system of differences is necessary for language to function *as such*. This means that "every concept is, essentially and lawfully, inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to another, to other concepts by the systematic play of differences" (Derrida 1982, 11). The constant reference to something other than itself within a system of continuous referral constitutes the systematic play of differences. This implies according to Derrida (1982, 11) that the meaning of concepts can never be intuited. This is the same as arguing that intuition has no place in a concept's meaning; instead, "the signified concept is never present in itself in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself." The signifier is separated and differentiated from the signified. This separation and differentiation separates the signified from presence, which is really never present. Because there is no presence, the relation between the signified and the signifier can only be arbitrary. We are, then, confronted with a network of signs referring to other signs and to endless signs.

In the absence of intuitions, the significance of the sign is dependent on the system of differences from which it emerged. As Derrida (1982, 10) comments on Saussure:

> Saussure first of all is the thinker who put the *arbitrary character of the sign* and the *differential character* of the sign at the very foundation of general semiology, particularly linguistics. And, as we know, these two motifs—arbitrary and differential—are inseparable in his view. There can be arbitrariness only because the system of signs is constituted solely by the differences in terms, and not by their plenitude.

This means that language is not intuitive. It does not operate on the presence of being because it operates within a system of differences. The ambiguous nature of any description limits the presupposition of presence in language. Understood in this way, Derrida's first point about language speaks of the inevitability to articulate the other while maximizing the classical language of philosophy (which prioritizes being).

The second point of Derrida concerning language and negativity is based on how philosophical language already presupposes an unambiguous presence. Derrida (1978a,

103) opens his deconstruction of Levinas in this way:

> In the face, the other is given over in person *as other*, that is, as that which does not reveal itself, as that which cannot be made thematic. I could not possibly speak of the other, make of the other a theme, pronounce the other as object, in the accusative. I can only, I *must* only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category, a *case* of speech, but, rather the bursting forth, the very raising up of speech. Categories must be missing for the other not to be overlooked; but for the other not to be overlooked, He must present himself as absence, and must appear as nonphenomenal. Always behind its signs and its works, always within its secret interior, and forever discreet, interrupting all historical totalities through its freedom of speech, the face is not "of this world."

The face of the other can never be understood as an object, a concept, and as a theme. For, to speak of the "other" is to reduce the "other" to the same, to presence, to identity. The other can never be reduced to a phenomenon. In this sense, no category can capture it. The face (and the other) manifests itself as an absence—thus, as something nonphenomenal.

As something understood nonphenomenally, the other can only be understood behind the signs and works that operate discretely and interrupt all totalities. I clarify this nonphenomenality by considering two difficulties that were raised by the previous quote. The first difficulty is the need to clarify how the other is to "present himself as an absence." Derrida (1978, 123) raises this question in this way:

> … it is impossible to encounter the alter ego (in the very form of the encounter described by Levinas), impossible to respect it in experience and in language, if this other, in its alterity, does not appear for an ego (in general). One could neither speak, nor have any sense of the totally other, if there was not a phenomenon of the totally other, or evidence of the totally other as such.

Derrida explains the impossibility of encountering the other as nonphenomenal— that is, beyond any concept and beyond any language. I can only encounter the other if and only if the other is made possible as a 'phenomenon' of the totally other. I need to provide an evidence of the totally other *as such*—to speak of it as something intelligible at least.

How different is this from Husserl's nonphenomenality? Husserl argues for a phenomenal system of nonphenomenality. Levinas refuses these modifications of the ego by virtue of their violence and totalitarian tendencies. Derrida (1978a, 125) clarifies it in this way:

> But by acknowledging in this infinitely other as such (appearing as such) the status of an intentional modification of the ego in general,

> Husserl gives himself the right to speak of the infinitely other as such, accounting for the origin and the legitimacy of his language. He de-scribes the phenomenal system of nonphenomenality. Levinas in fact speaks of the infinitely other, but by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego—which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him—he deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language. What authorizes him to say "infinitely other" if the infinitely other does not appear as such in the zone he calls the same, and which is the neutral level of tran-scendental description?

Derrida, although symphathetic to Levinas, thinks that unless the latter recognizes that the other is a self (or an ego, or the same) like he is, then he has no basis for whatever descriptions he makes of the other. The basis for all these claims can only be the first person—the ego or the 'I.' Our immediate experiences are what we use to transfer to (or even speak of) the other. Despite the claims supporting the nonphenomenality of the other, Levinas thinks that the other only manifests as an other with the use of language; this points to the second difficulty pointed out by Derrida in the earlier quote above.

The second difficulty raises the question: How do I ground alterity on a language that is based on the 'same'? This question explains why *Totality and Infinity* carries the subtitle an 'Essay on Exteriority' (Levinas 1969). The contention is rooted on the possibility of language—that is, grounded on the same—to present the other as really an other. Derrida inquires, "Why is it necessary still to use the word 'exteriority' (which, if it has a meaning, if it is not an algebraic X, obstinately beckons toward space and light) in order to signify a nonspatial relationship? And if every 'relationship' is spatial, why is it necessary still to designate as a (nonspatial) 'relationship' the respect which absolves the other" (Derrida 1978a, 112)? What we consider here is the nonspatiality that exteriority demands. The possibility of a nonspatial relationship in the context where every relationship is spatial. To this inquiry, Derrida (1978a, 112) responds that "it is necessary to state infinity's excess over totality in the language of totality; that it is necessary to state the other in the language of the same; that it is necessary to think true exteriority… by means of the Inside-Outside structure and by spatial metaphor." It is inevitable to speak of the other, and to do so using the language of the same, of being, and even of presence. The invitation is to consider the other as an exteriority limited by the metaphor of spatiality—that is, the inside and the outside structure; "there is no philosophical logos which must not first let itself be expatriated into the structure Inside-Outside" (Derrida 1978a, 112). Every language is intelligible within the metaphor of space and must be expatriated within the inside-outside structure. This "amounts to thinking the metaphor within the silent horizon of the nonmetaphor" (Derrida 1978a, 112); this is the sense of spatial exteriority. The thinking of the other, of exteriority, can only be metaphorical (analogous, if you will), but it can only do so against the background of the nonmetaphorical. The repercussion of this insight is that "one can

say that true exteriority is nonexteriority without being interiority, and one can write by crossing out…. crossing out writes, still draws in space" (Derrida 1978a, 112). The refusal of exteriority to be absorbed into interiority is analogous to a writing that is under erasure.

For Derrida (1978a, 114) language and spatiality are inseparable when we are referring to the empty linguistics of space. This means that knowledge can only be drawn from concrete experiences. Spatiality plays a necessary and significant part in the construction of meaning. If our experiences are never simply our own and are intelligible only within the assertions of a language, then we can say that language necessarily is communal and is linguistically a third person phenomenon. Language points not only to what is available to me, but to what is available to them. Language is about us; it not simply about an 'I' not a 'you.' If this is the case, then we can adduce the impossibility of what language *as such*. Derrida (1978a, 113) concludes this second difficulty.

> To say that the infinite exteriority of the other is *not* spatial, is *non-*-exteriority and *non*-interiority, to be unable to designate it otherwise than negatively—is this not to acknowledge that the infinite … cannot be stated? Does this not amount to acknowledging that the structure "inside-outside," which is language itself, marks the original finitude of speech and of whatever befalls it? No philosophical language will ever be able to reduce the naturality of a spatial praxis in language.

In this sense, infinite exteriority is non-spatial, and is beyond the dualism mentioned. This means that it can only be beyond negativity. If discourse is spatial, then it is automatically and without question violent as it automatically operates within a totalitarian structure. Derrida (1978a,116) opens his understanding of language by asking these questions:

> How to think the other, if the other can be spoken only as exteriority and through exteriority, that is, nonalterity? And if the speech which must inaugurate and maintain absolute separation is by its essence rooted in space, which cannot conceive separation and absolute alterity?

This inquires into the possibility of thinking the other as exteriority and by means of exteriority or nonalterity (Davenport 1998). Can one think of speech without space? Is this even possible? Space is necessarily part of the same. If so, then language can only be violent. Or is the reduction to language also a reduction to the same? Derrida (1978a, 116) continues:

> If, as Levinas says, only discourse (and not intuitive contact) is righteous, and if, moreover, all discourse essentially retains within it space and the Same—does this not mean that discourse is originally violent? And that the philosophical logos, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by war?

While Levinas asserts that peace is only possible when relating to the other (or exteriority), the process of peace is complicated by the discursive nature of this relation to the other. Since the relation to the other is peaceful, the necessity of discourse in this relation is inhabited by the violence brought about by the same and by its spatiality. This is the same as saying that the peaceful relation with the other is divided within itself by a never-ending war.

LEVINAS'S HUSSERL AND HEIDEGGER

To demonstrate the point made above, I consider Levinas's approach to Husserl and Heidegger respectively. The first point to consider is Levinas's understanding of Husserl's phenomenology. In this sense, Derrida questions Levinas that the "other, as other, is not only an alter ego. It is what I myself am not" (1978a, 125). The other is other than me. For Derrida (1978a, 125), the face of the other can only be recognized if it is an-other or an alter-ego:

> If the other were not recognized as a transcendental alter ego, it would be entirely in the world and not, as ego, the origin of the world. To refuse to see in it an ego in this sense is, within the ethical order, the very gesture of all violence. If the other was not recognized as ego, its entire alterity would collapse.

The quote above explains the other's need to be recognized as an other ego. But the other is not simply an other ego, the other is the origin of the world. This means that, as a subject, he or she can only be an end-in-itself. And as end-in-itself, the other can only be someone that we can relate to ethically (like Immanuel Kant). As such, we need to assume the horizon of being for us to be able to speak to and relate with the other. Alterity can only work within a certain level of tolerable symmetry. In Derrida's (1978a, 125-126) words:

> The egoity of the other permits him to say 'ego' as I do; and this is why he is other, and not a stone, or a being without speech in my real economy. This is why, if you will, he is face, can speak to me, understand me, and eventually command me. Dissymmetry itself would be impossible without this symmetry.

If there is an aspect that makes possible the relation to the other, then it must be egoity. It is this sameness that makes possible difference. It is being that makes possible the other. It is because he or she stands in front of me that I recognize him or her. This recognition makes him/her eventually able to command me. If this is not even possible, then "[t]he violence of which Levinas speaks would be a violence without victim. But since … all egos are others for others, the violence without victim would be also a violence without author" (1978a, 126). Symmetry makes possible the violence that Levinas speaks of; it is assumed in Levinas's understanding of violence. If the other is not an ego, then there can neither be a victim nor a victimizer. Without a symmetrical relationship

between and among the ego and/or the other, there cannot be any violence. In this sense, and following Levinas's assertions, violence is only possible if the relation to the other is pushed to the extreme. In that case, it can also reduce Levinas's claim to the assertion that the other is who I, myself, am not. This is the same as saying that he is not an ego. And since he cannot be an ego; he can only be a thing. Because, Levinas does not say any of these things, Derrida (1978, 128) claims that: "There is a transcendental and pre-ethical violence, a (general) dissymmetry whose *archia* is the same, and which eventually permits the inverse dissymmetry, that is, the ethical nonviolence of which Levinas speaks."

Husserl refers to the nature of same as the "irreducibly egoic essence of experience" (Derrida 1978a, 131). Because this experience begins linguistically with the first person, it is about my present; I constitute my past and my future. For example, when I teach my classes, there is a retention of my past experiences and a protention of my coming experiences. In the context of my retention and protention, I am situated between my past and my present; this present is constantly in the now (like Husserl and Saint Augustine). Every self possesses this structure and all are the same. But this sameness makes them also an *other* more than an each other, that is—an each in a now that is located differently here.

But this scenario constitutes violence too for Levinas—that is, when otherness all of a sudden presuppose the same. This means that "if one wishes to determine violence as the necessity that the other not appear as what it is, that it not be respected except in, for, and by the same, that it be dissimulated by the same in the very freeing of its phenomenon, then time is violence" (Derrida 1978a, 133). Determined violence takes place in the reduction of everything to the same. The same curtails the appearance of the other and disrespects the other. But because time makes possible this encounter between the ego and the other, then time can only be violent. The same is simply constitutive of violence.

Because the relation with the other is only made possible by sameness, then it becomes unavoidable to speak about alterity in the egological sphere without causing violence. Thus, Derrida provides a criticism against Levinas by which any discourse of the other presupposes the same:

> This movement of freeing absolute alterity in the absolute same is the movement of temporalization in its most absolutely unconditioned universal form: the living present. If the living present, the absolute form of the opening of time to the other in itself, is the absolute form of egological life, and if egity is the absolute form of experience, then the present, the presence of the present, and the present of presence, are all originally and forever violent (1978a, 133).

The living present is violent in its reduction of the other to the same. In fact, it is not just conditionally violent, but unconditionally violent. Understood from the deconstruction that utilizes Husserl's phenomenology from the perspective of Levinas,

Derrida concludes "Violence and Metaphysics" thus: "Levinas' [*sic*] metaphysics in a sense presupposes—at least we have attempted to show this—the transcendental phenomenology that it seeks to put into question" (1978a, 133).

After the first analysis, let me look into Levinas's understanding of Heidegger according to the perspective of Derrida; this constitutes the second analysis. Whereas Husserl's project is understood as a transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger's philosophy is labeled as a 'fundamental ontology,' which is the thinking of being as being. As is, Levinas's ideas are a reaction and a counter to those of Heidegger's. For Levinas, ethical violence is implicit in Heidegger, especially in his reduction of everything to both being and time. Derrida states this point as: "Not only is the thought of being not ethical violence, but it seems that no ethics—in Levinas' [*sic*] sense—can be opened up without it" (1978a, 137). Here is an interesting paradox that every thought of being presuppose ethical violence. This violence, on the one hand, is constituted by the reduction of the other to the same (or being), which we already discussed above. On the other hand, Levinas's ethics seems to be hinged on Heidegger's ontology. This means that it is Heidegger's ontology that makes possible, if not intelligible, Levinas's ethics.

But what is the thought of being if not the thought of what lets being be? The question begs the thinking of the very standard for the disclosure of being. For to disclose being is to do so according to some methodology or standard; this means that every attempt to make being present necessitates a 'precomprehension of being.' Derrida clarifies: "Just as he implicitly had to appeal to phenomenological self-evidences against phenomenology, Levinas must ceaselessly suppose and practice the thought of precomprehension of being in his discourse, even when he directs it against 'ontology.' Otherwise, what would 'exteriority as the essence of being' mean (TI)" (1978a, 141)? This re-emphasizes how both phenomenology and ontology are implicit in the Levinasian other (or exteriority). Importantly, in thinking the other, Levinas operates within the thought of a certain 'precomprehension of being.' Thus, the implication that if others are like us, then we can think of them as presenting being. In Derrida's (1978a, 143) words:

> [W]ould the experience of the face be possible, could it be stated, if the thought of being were not already implied in it? In effect, the face is the inaugural unity of a naked glance and of a right to speech. But eyes and mouth make a face only if, beyond need, they can 'let be,' if they see and they say what is such as it is, if they reach the being of what is.

Derrida thinks that it is impossible to encounter the face apart from any conceptions of being. For the face is only made possible by both vision and speech—that is, of being. The claim is simple: "There is no speech without the thought and statement of being" (Derrida 1978a, 143). This means that every speech is a disclosure of being. In the same way that every disclosure involves the thought of being and this guides the disclosure.

The implication argues that Levinas's other presupposes "the thought and

statement of being." But this means that the thought of the other is the 'violence' that Levinas identified with ontology. This violence (that is involved with the thought of being), according to Derrida, constitutes the standard of what counts as the manifestation of being; this violence lets being be while allowing being to conceal itself. This concealment shows how a particular standard for disclosure in a particular period of time is always already insufficient and partial as being is always already more than what is disclosed.

Derrida (1978a, 148) asserts that for Heidegger being is always in time; being belongs to history. A historical epoch is determined by a standard for disclosure, and this standard, eventually, obscures all other standards. This means that being is not just the first thing we know. It is also the first thing to be disclosed. Being is concealed when we insist, dictate, and determine a specific standard for its disclosure. In Derrida's (1978a, 141) words:

> Being is necessarily dissimulated. The first violence is this dissimulation, but it is also the first defeat of nihilistic violence, and the first epiphany of being. Being, thus, is less the primum cognition, as was said [by Aquinas], than the first dissimulated, and these two propositions are not contradictory.

The quote above explains how being is dissimulated, and is a victim of violence in its very dissimulation. Nevertheless, this dissimulation is both the overcoming of nihilistic violence and, also at the same time, the epiphany of being. This makes being the first to be dissimulated and the first to be revealed. For Derrida, then, Heidegger's being is an example of how the principle of difference is prior to the principle of identity. In fact, being is a necessary product of difference (as difference). As Derrida (1978a, 150) puts this, "Since being is nothing (determined), it is necessarily produced in difference (as difference)."

The implication of this is that being is an impossible presence. As an impossible presence, being appears only by means of 'traces.' And as traces, these appearances are never enough to determine being; they are never fixed and constantly erased. As such, these appearances, standards of being (if you will), are simply traces of the impossible presence. The presence of being is first and foremost impossible. The impossibility of being is the foundation of Heidegger's distinction between being and beings, but it also is of Levinas's other understood as a face. This means that just as being cannot be determined, so can this also be said of the other. The other, that is never determined, can only appear by means of its traces, and nothing more.

Worth emphasizing among these theses is Levinas's claim that "all violence is a violence of the concept" and that to "interpret the thought of being as a concept of being" constitutes violence (Derrida 1978a, 140). This means that violence emerges from any concept and the concept of being is no exemption. However, Derrida notes that, for Heidegger, being is not a concept. Being can never be conceptualized: "The question of being as a question of the possibility of the concept of being arises from the

preconceptual comprehension of being" (Derrida 1978a, 140). According to Derrida, the misunderstanding that being can be conceptualized emerges from the preconceptual understanding of being and never from being itself. This means that being *as such* manifests itself by means of the different traces (or standards) of being, and these traces make possible the accessibility of beings. The traces (or standards) are concepts, but being is different from its traces (or standards). Being cannot be the standard; it cannot be the trace. Levinas recognizes this and, in fact, emphasizes that, for Heidegger, the question of being is an inquiry into the sense of being. This sense of being is made possible by the standard of disclosure. If we insist on the standard of disclosure, then we totalize being; this is violence *par excellence*. Derrida (1978a, 135) explains: "This situation would not have been totally modified later when the *eidos* became originally and essentially *noema* only in the Understanding or Logos of an infinite subject: God." In a way, Derrida is claiming that what is true of being and of the other is also true of our understanding of God.

Because of the traces of being in the Levinasian "other," the face is also accused of onto-theology. Derrida (1978a, 142) argues that in Levinas's understanding of the face as a resemblance of God, he can only be guilty of onto-theology. But this betrays Heidegger's main point that being is other than beings (including God). This means that if we are to think of God (in a Heideggerian way), then we are to do so apart from any conception of beings. This is Heidegger's mystical understanding of the 'sacred.' Derrida thinks that Levinas's understanding of the face (as beyond all categorization) is similar to Heidegger's concept of the 'sacred.' If this is true, then it can be argued that Levinas does presuppose Heidegger's understanding of being in his very understanding of the face of the other.

IM/POSSIBILITY OF GOD

After explaining how Levinas's argument involves the notion of the "other," let me now discuss Derrida's criticism of Levinas's understanding of God as the "other." On the one hand, Derrida puts into question Levinas's reduction of the positive infinity of God; on the other hand, he questions God's irreducible alterity to the "other." These two understandings of God constitute, for Derrida, an inevitable theological trap. Let us look at these two Levinasian reductions of God more closely. The first reduction is about the positive infinity of God. If the positive infinity of God relies on a negative one (relies on its opposite), then this positivity is not really as positively infinite as it is always claimed; instead, this infinity is really finite (1978a, 114). This is the same as saying that the very possibility of God really depends on an impossibility, which can be understood as the negation of possibility. If this binary logic is applied consistently, then the constant and necessary referral to the other points to the other side of the other. The other side of the other is being. The implication of this claim is the assertion that we cannot think of the other without, at the same time, thinking of being (Meir 2010). The other's alterity can only be being.

The second reduction concerns God's irreducible alterity to the other. If the other

can only be what it is if it is an other that is relative, then the other "is no longer absolved of a relation to" another other and, consequently, "no longer infinitely," and "absolutely other" (Derrida 1978a, 127). This means that the other is already constituted by the relationship to the same—that is, to the ego and/or identity. The implication of this argument is that there is no such thing as an absolutely other; this is the same as saying that there is no such thing as an absolutely other apart from the same. Derrida (1978, 114-155) explains: "The other cannot be what it is, infinitely other, except in finitude and mortality (mine *and* its)."

Because it is impossible to separate infinity and alterity from the negativity of death and of annihilation, then a positive infinity and an absolute alterity called God must necessarily compromise with such a negativity or a death (see Calano 2014, 62-103). Because God is both positive infinity and absolute alterity, then, God cannot be spared from (nor can God be reduced to) the negativity of death and annihilation (Cauchi 2009). Even God is a victim of death and annihilation. This means that the exclusion of death from God means "the exclusion of every particular *determination?* And that God is *nothing* (determined), is not life, because he is *everything*? [*sic*] and therefore is at once All and Nothing, Life and Death. Which means that God is or appears, is *named*, within the difference between All or Nothing, Life and Death. Within difference, and at bottom as Difference itself" (Derrida 1978a, 115-116). This means that God survives death, and it is made possible by the play of difference (Kosky 1996). The play of difference allows us to speak of God beyond the binary distinctions of all and nothing, or life and death. The objections that go with the possibility of thinking full presence, positive infinity, or absolute alterity are indicative only of questions concerning language. These are questions that the philosophical discourse necessarily confronts to the extent that, in language, philosophy also tries to think of God, for example (Gasché 1994, 150-170). It is here that we bring back the discussion on trace above.

The understanding that the face is a resemblance of God is to speak of the face as the trace of God. After citing Levinas's argument that we are in the Trace of God, Derrida (1978a, 108) continues that this proposition:

> … risks incompatibility with every allusion to the 'very presence of God.' If the idea of divine presence (life, existence, parousia, etc.), if the name of God was but the movement of erasure of the trace in presence? Here it is a question of knowing whether the trace permits us to think presence in its system, or whether the reverse order is the true one. It is doubtless the *true order*. But it is indeed the *order of truth* which is in question?

The trace of God runs contrary to every allusion to God's presence. God's presence cannot be under the constant threat of an erasure like the trace (Siegumfeldt 2013). For the meantime, we can argue that instead of leaning on the skeptical conclusion that the claims of God must be abandoned because of its difficulties, Heidegger and Derrida actually makes room for God. For both of them, God is exemplary not of the historical

destiny of being, but of that which articulates itself in the very difficulty of language (Min 2006). God constitutes a theological trap, which points to an absolute erasure of the trace. The absolute erasure of the trace refers to the endless referral and inevitable negativity to the other; this makes the trace subservient to presence (Derrida 2004, 258).

The claim of the absolute function of the name of God also manifests in the best way possible how pure presence is not possible without a trace. For the trace necessitates a reference to an other no matter how minimal it is and without which no God can come into. In this sense, there is a necessity for God to always differ from God. God is necessarily the effect of the trace; God is the effect of a structure that necessitates the other as other in the presence of a self-sufficient God. But a trace is only a trace when it could be erased. For Derrida (1978b, 230), a non-erasable trace is the "Son of God" because his possibility is structurally grounded on the very idea of God. The 'theological trap' is then a necessary possibility and, as such, an inevitable trap. "The 'theological' is a determined moment in the total movement of the trace" (Derrida 1976, 47). If it is not possible to be effaced in the name of God, then the trace could not be more 'originary' than God. But how is this even possible?

CONCLUSION

The paper utilizes the criticism of Derrida as he converses with Levinas, Heidegger, and Husserl. While the criticism is only used heuristically, it was helpful in determining the logic implicit in every discourse. In this sense, any discourse about the other presupposes being; in the same way, being assumes its other. In this constant reference where one refers to the other, there can only be traces— traces of both the other and being. In this trace-structure, God is not reducible to either being or other; God is the effect of the trace—that is constantly under erasure. This effect is better understood analogously, or better yet, only as an example *par excellance*.

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