THE QUESTION OF THE TEACHER: LEVINAS AND THE HYPOCRISY OF EDUCATION

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The following paper traces the relevance of teaching and pedagogy in Levinas’s philosophy of transcendence and ethics. By turning to his philosophy of language—including his posthumously published lectures on the phenomenology of sound and the voice—this paper addresses some difficulties with the attempt to develop a philosophy of education departing from his work. Education appears to be the uniquely well-suited site for an ethical philosophy, and yet any claims about education and attempts to teach ethics risk hypocrisy as a structural possibility of transcendence and teaching.

Throughout his oeuvre, Emmanuel Levinas’s major project consists in finding a transcendent, radical exteriority. Levinas attempts to secure a truth that would be transcendent with respect to the banality of historical events measured objectively—according to the faculties of perception or the universality of logic and structural language. Such a transcendence would not have or be the truth for conforming to the categories of my perception or to my powers of comprehension. A meaning that would conform to my cognitive powers in order to present itself “objectively” would reduce to an internal part of my own workings. It would become part of my own totality. Such an “objective” truth reduces to a solipsism in which everything exists on a single plane over which I would dominate or preside. Such knowledge is power, as educational public service announcements occasionally remind us. Within this totality nothing can radically affect me because everything exists already within my own domain. Distinct from this would-be objective knowledge, the transcendent is that which is genuinely exterior to me, that which I can encounter.

The fundamental unrest in the soul that characterizes human existence is not explained by an internal lack. My desire for truth and the good are not a utilitarian response to a deficiency. Metaphysical desire is the gnawing feeling that, after everything has been done, there is still something to do. This is why the good cannot be accomplished once and for all. Omniscience is prohibited in advance. Desire always demands more from us. This is also why Levinas characteriz-
es the Truth or the Good\textsuperscript{1} as transcendent, as Other, and not as something I can accomplish, apprehend, or objectify.

One glimpses the transcendent in the interpersonal, characterized by language and a linguistic relation. Language is thought to be the relation with the other that does not subsume the other. Language is said to be one of the categories constituting the idea of infinity or metaphysics.\textsuperscript{2} What is special about the advent of language is that language does not emerge and go forth on the presumption of eliminating its conditions—namely a separate Self and Other—as does the relation of comprehension which would be intentionally reductive. Comprehension seeks to reduce alterity to sameness, to encompass everything within a totality, and to thus render it known. Language rather operates only on the premise that the interlocutor remains separated as an autonomous interlocutor. Transcendence belongs to linguistic beings.

But the truth, as transcendent, is not ‘attained’ or ‘accomplished’ through the expressed contents of language. Language as logos, as a system of signs, tends to re-present, thematize, and objectify. Words function by way of ideal meanings, by way of a kind of universality, and in terms of a system: a system by way of which words (and that which words would designate) receive their meaning. Language as a system of universal meaning—which would allow me access to a kind of objectivity—does not reveal the Other. Rather, language as a concrete system of signification glimpses the other only through the generality and universality proper to language and objectivity. At his most critical, Levinas says that the word carries with it an essential lie with respect to the interlocutor.\textsuperscript{3} The interlocutor who would give the impression of being manifest in her words is never present within that language but remains exterior to it, as the transcendent “source” of language, so to speak.

My interlocutor is significant as the transcendent, then, not for the contents transmitted to me in language. The interlocutor is significant as the speaker herself to whom I never have access, who

\textsuperscript{1} On my reading of Levinas, the truth and the good become one, hence (as I will discuss) his positing of ethics beyond the division between practice and theory.

\textsuperscript{2} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, (tr.) Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 62. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as TI.

\textsuperscript{3} My paraphrase of “\textit{La parole comporte un mensonge essentiel}.” “\textit{Parole et Silence},” in \textit{Parole et Silence et autres conférences inédites: Œuvres 2} (Grasset & Fasquelle, 2011), 65–104, 99. The essay (of the same title as the volume) will henceforth be referred to parenthetically in the text as PS. All translations from the volume \textit{Parole et Silence et autres conférences inédites} are my own.
makes the linguistic relation possible. The interlocutor is significant for standing outside of language, for being that which cannot be contained in language or intuition. The ineffable Other, my interlocutor, is the necessity and condition of language—language which would seek a relation between two terms (between interlocutors) without either of them being reducible to that language. It is the Other, in this sense of the speaker, that Levinas will describe as the Teacher. And "the essence of language," he will say, "is teaching."

The first "word" of the teacher is the teacher herself. The first word or teaching would not be a simple sign amongst others, not a simple word or component of language, or in language. Levinas describes the teacher as a first teaching that conditions all teaching. What the teacher teaches is her own radical exteriority that makes teaching through concrete language possible and meaningful because the teacher is the interlocutor needed to effect the linguistic relation to begin with. The Other is the teacher in the sense that: "The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us. And it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me." The transcendent truth, the good, and that which animates my metaphysical desire, is the transcendent other as interlocutor, as teacher, who makes possible my attempts to pursue the truth and the good through language and learning.

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4 Levinas calls this person the master [le maître] presumably to give a connotation of eminence. In French it also implies the notion of "schoolmaster" which it does not in English. Levinas claims that this master offers a teaching [un enseignement], and I thus justify the use of the word "teacher" as opposed to "master." However there is something elevated or magisterial about the teacher beyond that of an ordinary "instructor."

5 Levinas’s conception of teaching and learning is not just one that corresponds with his notion of transcendence. It also responds to a debate in the history of philosophy. Already Plato asks whether language can be used to attain knowledge, and whether language can be used to teach another. In both the Cratylus and the Phaedrus Plato seems to imply that there must be some super-linguistic access to the truth. In The Teacher, St. Augustine takes this apparently Platonic position to its extreme. See The Teacher in Against the Academicians and The Teacher, (tr.) Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 94–146. Augustine uses linguistic analysis to show that a truth is only verified internally by way of one’s own reasoning light. Thus the words of others—concrete language—never actually teach us. Words may direct or provoke our thoughts, but never teach us anything since the real confirmation of truth is always an internal, super-linguistic moment. Jacques Rancière’s thesis in The Ignorant Schoolmaster is congruent with this Augustinian thesis. See The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation, (tr.) K. Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. Incidentally Rancière accuses Socrates of thinking himself the
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Any philosophy that would have theoretical comprehension as its only goal would not only ignore the responsibility to a greater truth, for Levinas, but would be positively detrimental to this responsibility. Yet language is always dialectic, representational, thematic. (It is the “Said” of language, as Levinas will later say). Concrete language is logocentric: it is comprehension insofar as its essence is to render meaning universally accessible. This is problematic for a would-be education (and a corresponding philosophy of education) that presumably teaches practically using concrete forms of language. In any case, it is for this reason that the ‘Teacher does not give the truth in the words she speaks. The Teacher, the ‘speaking-to,’ is the truth—in the ethical sense—as that which stands behind the original possibility of an intelligible message being carried forth in language.

This presents a problem that Levinas catches sight of at least from 1948 (thirteen years before Totality and Infinity). In “Parole et Silence,” Levinas gives an account of language and the teacher much like he will in Totality and Infinity (as I have reproduced here). He points toward the fundamental problem and asks: “What is the place of signification [language as system of signs, logos] in the relation with transcendence?” (PS, 96) That is, in addition to being the pure expression of the teacher as the fundamental teaching of transcendence, why do words also signify by naming, by signifying things other than themselves, and other than the Teacher? Why does language form a system for representation? It is an essential question for understanding how education and transcendence work. The answer

bestower of knowledge—curiously, considering the traditional Platonic thesis of anamnesis and Socrates’ claims about midwifery and his own lack of knowledge. For Levinas, all of these accounts of teaching would take learning to be an intellectual possession. Levinas is rather concerned with the transcendent conditions of language that make this debate concerning theoretical knowledge itself possible. Thus for Levinas, too, concrete language cannot actually teach, but this is because the essential teaching is the teacher herself who is beyond concrete language as a condition of it. Clarence Joldersma offers a good account of why the subject viewed as self-consciousness and as the proprietor of conceptual thought cannot be shown to learn anything from the Other; but Levinas of course is interested in a different kind of learning. See Clarence Joldersma, “The Importance of Enjoyment and Inspiration for Learning,” in Levinas and Education: At the Intersection of Faith and Reason, (ed.) Denise Egéa-Kuehne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 44–45.

6 Some of the terminology Levinas uses at this time is different, but he works within a similar framework and is broaching the same question towards which I gesture here.
he gives in that essay is that the infinite delay of signifiers pointing towards signifieds—which will never ascend all the way back to their transcendent origin at the Teacher—is simply the necessary way for the genuinely Other to appear on my horizon while remaining transcendent. This supposed insufficiency of language would not be a testament to the inferiority of concrete language, but a testament to the infinite Other, the transcendent teacher who herself cannot be contained in that language. If concrete language could capture the Other there would be no Other; and thus there would be no language. It is not, then, the theoretical content of language that is essential for Teaching. “Ethics as first philosophy”—as opposed to epistemology or ontology—means that ethics is not simply a question of theoretical truth.

And yet, theoretical truth and ontology cannot exactly be inessential. The tendency of many Levinas scholars is to seek a Levinasian ethics in a sort of pure practice, or in a kind of sociability or charity that would not take any theoretical claim or propositional truth as its point of departure. But an action—any action qua physical or phenomenological event (animated by an “ethical” intention or otherwise)—is not of itself the transcendent moment. This is part of Levinas’s explicit denial that the Other can be approached through works, hers or my own. Something that the Other produces does not reveal her to me in her transcendence, and I do not transcend myself through actions that qua phenomena would originate and end with me. For Levinas, only speech or teaching can “accomplish” (or even broach) the transcendent relation. But even speech in its transcendent significance is not the act of speech. As simply an act, or an activity, it signifies as does a product or a tool. “From my speech-activity I absent myself, as I am missing from all my products.” (TI,

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7 See PS, 96–101. The point is summarized at the end of section 12 on p. 101. This response foreshadows Levinas’s notion of the trace, as well as his later claim that the Saying necessarily operates through a Said: a Said which translates (traduit) and betrays (trahit) the Saying, but necessarily so. He also has recourse to a similar argument in “Écrit et Sacré,” where he claims that the infinite possibility of interpretation and exegesis of a text is not to be blamed on the “dissimulation of the signified” by linguistic signs. This supposed “privation of the intuitive plenitude” is rather a testament to the fact that language contains more than it contains. That finite language contains the infinite Other. See “Écrit et Sacré,” in Introduction à la philosophie de la religion, (ed.) F. Kaplan & J.-L. Vieillard-Baron (Latour-Marbourg: Les Éditions du cerf, 1989), 353–62, 356. Translations of this text are my own. To translate this into Levinas’s earlier terms, this means that the concrete system of language (that the transcendent teacher makes possible) is simply not commensurate with the teacher herself who is of another order than the phenomenal.
To put things back into questions of theoretical truth and its shortcomings: if an ethical speech-act can be thematized, circumscribed, described as an event in objective time, or be made part of a program, then it cannot be the ethical act.

In Totality and Infinity, this would apply a fortiori to the question of writing; and many scholars have mistakenly taken this defence of speech over writing to be a defence of the practical over the theoretical. Writing, as Plato claimed, would be the word without the ability to defend itself, the word left without an author or teacher. Levinas gives pre-eminence to speech as the living word of the teacher who attends her own teaching, who is her own teaching. In "Parole et Silence," Levinas even gives an apparently "phenomenological" account of the privilege of sound over other mediums of sense, and over phenomenality itself. That is, he tries to explain (beyond the popular rhetoric left in the wake of Plato's work) why speech should be privileged concerning truth and learning.

For Levinas, light allows for a kind of penetrability. It stands for the elimination of shadow and mystery. But light would then only give us the theoretical kind of comprehension that we are seeking to get beyond. Sound would instead arrive as a kind of interruption, says Levinas. It would not unveil something to me which I can then take in hand. Sound alone would apparently disrupt my interiority and make me aware of a genuine exteriority in a way that light and other media cannot. However, even this is importantly qualified by Levinas: "As a sensible quality, as phenomenon, sound is light; but it

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8 Levinas largely gives up his explicit defence of speech over writing after Jacques Derrida's intervention in "Violence and Metaphysics," which he also develops in Of Grammatology and other places. See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in Writing and Difference, (tr.) A. Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), 79–153 and Of Grammatology, (tr.) G. Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976). Much earlier, in the context of trying to distinguish writing from the transcendence of the spoken word, Levinas says that "A thought that would content itself with writing [with being written] is a thought fundamentally relative," i.e., not absolute, immediate, or transcendent. However, Levinas later confirms that even spoken language taken otherwise than in this special transcendental sense is "already writing." See "L'Écrit et l'Oral," in Parole et Silence, 215 and 226. This shows that his position was already far more subtle than the facile and arbitrarily privileging of voice over writing. Already for Levinas in 1949, what is special about speech is only a kind of immediacy or presence that would already seek to extricate itself from synchrony or coincidence, beyond phenomenality and the logos—which is to say that Levinas does not privilege speech simply as words emanating from the mouth and larynx, nor as self-presence, nor as self-illuminating reason. Taken simply as a concrete speech act, the spoken word is already writing!
is a point of light at which the world is breached, where it is overflowed. This overflowing of sensible quality by itself, its incapacity to carry its own content—that is the sonority itself of sound.” (PS, 90)

Thus, contrary to the impression that an impatient reading of Levinas might give, the concrete performance of a speech act—as any other phenomenal event—does not of itself signify the transcendent or teaching. (TI, 182)

Sound, as a phenomenon, has nothing transcendent about it, and finds itself on the same plane as light. As phenomenal, speech cannot distinguish itself from writing in any important way. This is all to say that the “practical” element involved in transcendence, or even in ethics, is not simply the physical-phenomenological manifestation of the right kind of psychological intention, nor the right kind of act, be it a speech act or another type. Just as the transcendent dimension of language is not in the contents of language, neither is it in the outwardly-manifest practice of language (which as manifest could be translated back into the contents of language). The Other, the teacher, to whom metaphysical desire and the transcendent relation are directed, is beyond (or prior to) the division of theory and practice, prior to phenomenality.

9 Thus Joldersma makes much of listening and touch as ways to describe a kind of ethical reverse-intentionality, but always as metaphor without making clear for what these are a metaphor—for something ineffable, perhaps, but this is part of the problem at hand. See A Levinasian Ethics for Education’s Commonplaces (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 76–79.

10 And again, “One can, to be sure, conceive of language as an act, as a gesture of behaviour. But then one omits the essential of language: the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed in the face, which is accomplished in being situated in height with respect to us—in teaching.” (TI, 67) See 175–76 for a further discussion of the work as unable to reveal its author. Levinas makes similar claims earlier in "Les Enseignements," (in Parole et Silence, 173–98), where he tries to dissociate teaching from action and power: "But this movement is not precisely an act, not a power" (186), since the latter would have its origin in the subject rather than in the transcendent other.

11 Joldersma points to the necessity of embodiedness (as do many others) for ethics by an appeal to a footnote in Levinas’s “Substitution.” See “The Importance of Enjoyment,” 48. The footnote is reproduced in Otherwise than Being, (tr.) Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 195 n.12. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as OB. Levinas there claims that the body is the possibility of susceptibility to the other. But if the ethical finds its proper dimension in the bodily, it is not in the bodily of the common phenomenal or physical world. Referring to Gibbs and Peperzack, Joldersma claims that evidence of ethical inspiration (as opposed to egoism) is found in “responses such as working with one’s hands for another person, feeding the hungry with food drives, and building shelters for the other” (“The Importance of Enjoyment,” 49). Joldersma and the others are not wrong. As Joldersma
A given linguistic exchange, a dialogue, a question, a word, may or may not be an ethical action. Actions qua activities are ethically indeterminate. It would depend on whether the singular teacher is manifest in the teaching. It would depend on whether what is really being learned is the teacher herself. Within concrete events and intelligible language, all we get is a question mark with respect to the transcendent or the ethical. Likewise, a given activity, a given event in a classroom, a given exchange between she who is designated the teacher and she who is designated the student may or may not be an example of the transcendent teaching that is relevant to a concrete ethics because these are phenomenal events and are thus ambiguous with respect to the transcendent. This makes it unclear how to relate an account of the transcendent teacher to a concrete, human instructor. It is unclear, in other words, how education is supposed to be a real response to ethical demands and metaphysical desire.

The Question of Education

This indeterminacy does not necessarily mean that there is no Teacher in the transcendent sense. For Levinas, the fact that a question can arise about transcendence—about the infinite, about the Other—itself attests to the transcendent. An inquiry itself into education presupposes the kind of ethical teaching that Levinas thinks is so important.

But then how does the transcendent teaching work in a concrete way? Levinas offers a transcendental account (in the broad sense of an account of the conditions of some phenomenon) of teaching and learning: a description of how “instruction” in the more quotidian sense becomes possible. But if this description of an always-presupposed ethical relation is exclusively what a Levinasian ethics can offer—without import concerning how we ought to conduct ourselves concretely and respond to this condition—then such a philosophy is moot with respect to ethics as something that demands

quotes, Levinas even says that the body is the susceptibility of the soul itself (and not its container or tomb). But in the same book Levinas says that “Proximity”—the ethical relation between human beings—“does not belong to any image, to anything that appears. Proximity goes from soul to soul, outside of any manifestation as a phenomenon, outside of any given.” (OB, 190 n.35) It may be that ethics cannot exist without the bodily and without action any more than language can exist without concrete signifiers and a system of signs. But the actual moment of ethics is not in any specific action; it is not part of the phenomenal, bodily realm.
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a response. A purely descriptive transcendental account would be ontology, not ethics; and a Levinasian philosophy that considered its work done at the end of a description of always-already-present conditions would be hypocritical and unethical to the extreme. The question is how one's work is ethical, how one ought to respond to the Other. As first philosophy, this is also the question that any philosophy of education must address. On the other hand, one could decide to approach philosophy of education only with the practical concern of offering technical instruction; but this is precisely to ignore ethics, to ignore the question of meaning and transcendence that would make such a pedagogy important; such an approach should be better called a science of education. It is for this reason that I want to use Levinas's understanding of the transcendent teacher to identify who might fulfill the role of the teacher and how concrete teaching and learning can be said to be an attempted response to the ethical demand instead of a simple transcendental philosophy with no obvious relation to transcendence or ethics as response. Without this element, Levinas's work cannot be known to have any ethical importance; without some such account it will not be clear why education would have any ethical relevance whatsoever.12

12 The compartmentalization of "practical" teaching versus the special ethical teaching, or cognitive language versus ethical language, and so on, is precisely what has let Levinasian scholars off the hook with respect to the supposed ethical import of philosophy. I do not see how Levinas's work is at all relevant to a bare science of education, which would be better based on psychological evidence and the sciences of child development (see below for the ethical problems with this approach). On the other hand, if Levinas's ethical philosophy has no import for real education, for our actions and theoretical research, then it is hard to see how it has any ethical relevance itself. It is in attempting to bridge these ethical and ontological concerns that I attempt to describe the concrete situation of the teacher as transcendent. In one sense Levinas would suggest that every other human being is my teacher in the ethical sense; at least the potential for such a relation would always seem to be there. But Levinas also denies this interpretation for the following reasons: for one, it cannot be that every human interaction is equally valuable to every other. If it were, there would be no sense of demand since the demand would always be equally satisfied irrespective of what one does. Not all human interactions can be equivalent. On the other hand, if the justification for one's being considered a teacher is simply a certain technical prowess and effectiveness of instruction, then there is nothing ethical about philosophy or education in the genuine transcendent sense of "ethics." What is essential, then, is to attempt—however impossible it may be—to inform concrete educational practice, in all its dimensions, according to one's being put into question by the other, by the Teacher in the transcendent sense; and this demands an attempt to understand some criteria that would make one concrete
The obscure relation between teaching in the transcendent sense and instruction in the quotidian sense is unclear, and it is also unclear what exactly should be taught. It seems impossible to say what (theoretical) information is of ethical significance by itself because the theoretical and ethical would seem to operate on different planes. One might then think that inquiry itself is the ethical dimension of research and educational content, that the “process” of inquiry is the “content” that should be taught. Education would proceed by questioning and would teach how to question. Levinas suggests this when he writes:

The truth is not the adequation of the thought and the thing, but the inadequation—transcendence, one might say—of the response and the question; transcendence “assumed” by a new question. The assumption of the truth is, then, an exegesis. The place of the truth is neither in judgement (Aristotle), nor in unveiling, in being itself (Heidegger); it is in the question.13

Teaching would have its locus in language, in the never-ending exegesis and exegesis of exegesis—in “open-ended discussion,” as Levinas says in another essay. The teaching proper to transcendence would be heard in the question; and the teacher would be the one who teaches questioning. “And is not the question, which is also a calling into question, the distinctive feature of the voice commanding from beyond?”14 But this suggestion invites the familiar paradoxes encountered in trying to account for the transcendent: what kind of question would one pose in order to effect the transcendent relation and learn? Concerning the question what? for example, Levinas says, teaching ethically better than another, would allow us to align concrete teaching and ethical teaching in some sense. To make a profession of philosophically describing ethical responsibility without properly reflecting on how this responsibility bears on one’s ethical responses—how it bears concretely on one’s research and profession—is the possibility of hypocrisy I will address in the final section.

13 "Les Enseignements," 186–87. Diane Perpich holds a similar thesis in The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 144–45. My criticisms of her position have been published elsewhere. See also Ian McPherson, “Other than the Other: Levinas and the Educational Questioning of Infinity,” in Levinas and Education, 85–99. Earlier and in the context of an investigation into Levinas’s claims about language and transcendence Étienne Féron also makes this claim in De l’idée de transcendance à la question du langage (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1992), 312–13.

"[t]he answer required is from the start in terms of being, where one understands by it entity or being of entities, entity or being's essence. The question 'what?' is thus correlative of what it wishes to discover, and already has recourse to it." (OB, 23–24; see also TI, 178) The question what? would inquire into the Other in the way of an object or determinate entity. To pose the question what? of itself is not to effect the relation with the transcendent other. And to ask who? and expect an answer is similarly to ask about the other as something that can be expressed in terms of the logos. The question who? also does not arrive at any alterity. Who? Levinas says, reduces to what?15

So not all questions are educative in the ethical sense; but Levinas maintains that transcendence is found in the question, exegesis, inquiry.16 How do I know that a question I ask is ethical or that it effects the transcendent relation to the Teacher? How do I know that my question is directed to the transcendent? The ethical question must arise where a certain totality of knowledge is expressly lacking. A real question presenting ethical possibilities would have to respond to the transcendence of the Other. The question would have to be posed by the other. The question proper to ethics would be the Other's putting me into question. The question then does not originate with me, the student or the disciple. It is not a question that can be produced out of my own power and totality. To autonomously pose a question would be to inquire about a what, and to know in advance that in principle a response can be had that would satisfy my question. The question that effects or exists as a trace of the transcendent relation is that provoked by my metaphysical desire, animated by the Other. It is the question of the other—in both senses of the possessive "of." It would be a question with respect to the other, but also belonging to the other.

An authentic question—the kind that is part of education in the ethical sense—would arise from alterity. This is why Levinas at first claims that the student asks questions to which the master responds, but later claims that questioning begins with the other. The real ethical question is prior to my speech acts. It is "prior to dialogue, to the exchange of questions and answers, to the thematization of the

15 "In this form the question asks that 'the looker' be identified with one of the beings already known, even if the answer to the question 'Who is looking?' should be stated in the monosyllabic 'Me,'... [It is always] a 'me who...,' but in fact 'me who am known to you,' 'me whose voice you find in your memories,' or 'me who could situate myself in the system of your history.'... Such a 'who?' amounts to a 'what?,' to 'what about him?'" (OB, 27)
16 Especially in relation to the questioning and dialogue involved in Talmudic and philosophical exegesis. See "Écrit et Sacré."
said, which is superposed on my being put into question by the other in proximity.” (OB, 111) It is the teacher who demands something of me, stirs my metaphysical desire, and puts my being into question. The Teacher is the one who leaves me unable to be complacent in the face of her questioning.

But how do I receive the question? How can this inform concrete education? How does this transcendent being-put-into-question arise in questions posed in language, or questions posed in a concrete educational context? This would bring us back to the original problem of how to localize the teaching or the teacher in any concrete but ethical sense. It cannot be that the Other poses a question to me in the concrete language in which I answer. Any question that I would be able to answer would reveal itself to have been the what?-question that had never escaped my totality in the first place.17 It would be a question that had originated with me. Rather, teaching as teaching, and truth as the transcendent, suppose an indefinite questioning. If the Teacher poses a question to me, it must be that, insofar as I hear it, it provokes a question in me, not a sure answer. But then I would have to experience it as a question—that is, as a question that I pose for myself. It must be a question one can iterate in order to be understood. The Teacher must offer her question to me by way of my question. But then from whom does the question really arise? If it arises simply from me, then it is not the ethical question; and yet if the teacher alone is asking a question to which I cannot respond, which is not reduced to concrete or thematic language—how do I receive that question? What does it sound like if it is not simply manifest as another what? or who? that would in turn render it simply another question originating from my own lips? Thus I never get a first question arising from the teacher. All I get are a series of non-essentially-ethical questions that presuppose some such original teaching.

The sonority of the voice that teaches is super-phenomenal. Levinas on one occasion says that “The transcendence of the revelation lies in the fact that the ‘epiphany’ comes in the saying of him that received it.” (OB, 149) Transposing this claim to the present context,

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17 Again, the ethical being-put-into-question and the posing of questions through concrete language must be intimately related. If I have simply always already been put into question in the ethical sense, and the concrete questions posed for the purposes of instruction have a purpose totally distinct from their ethical origin, then there is nothing to suggest that education (philosophical or otherwise) plays any ethical role. This would be problematic for philosophy, which in a sense is all about education.
we could say that the question comes to me, to my own lips—and it must if I am to learn—but only in being posed to me by the other. But precisely because the question has to be the other’s question, or come from the other, it is not clear when a question is the educative, ethical question. To pose questions would be the necessary way of recognizing the teaching of the teacher—to recognize that I have been put into question by the other; and yet such questions will always appear to be presumptuous, idle, purely theoretical or practical rather than ethical and transcendent. The ethical import of a given question can itself always be put into question, just as the transcendent moment of a teaching can always be doubted. Just as concrete language is never simply ethical language, a real question posed in an educational context is never the ethical question simply for fitting the grammatical form of a question.

This paradox presents a genuine problem to a would-be philosophy of education, or any philosophical practice for that matter, that would seek to be ethical in any radical way. Amongst the difficulties that impede the attempts that have been made is the difficulty of identifying how one acts as a teacher in the transcendent, ethical sense in even the broadest practical way. Sharon Todd and Anna Strhan in their respective books both take the “other” to be the student and teacher; and both authors expect the student and teacher to each take on both roles at the same time. Claire Katz makes a reasonable claim that the son or the child is presented as the Other in Totality and Infinity.\(^1\) Her interpretation of Levinas then makes it sound as though the children are the teachers since it is the Other for Levinas that teaches. However, the claim of her book is that children need a particular kind of education to be raised into ethical subjects—and thus presumably children are in need of teachers. Strhan uses the opposite example in which the mother, as other, addresses the child, which would make the mother the teacher and the child responsible to her.\(^2\) In a few pages Strhan then says that the Other renders a common world possible through speech and offers me phenomena, for example when the mother offers food to the child (LSE, 21, 25), which returns responsibility to the mother, apparently; but then Strhan immediately refers to Lingis’s claim that the other turns to me, speaks, and demands something of me (LSE, 25), which

\(^1\) Claire Katz, Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 131, with reference to TI, 267.

\(^2\) Anne Strhan, Levinas, Subjectivity, Education: Towards an Ethics of Radical Responsibility (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 24. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as LSE.
would seem to make it the pupil who responds to the teacher and offers the world (LSE, 26), making the parent-child example again difficult to understand. Thus Strhan later says that “mastery” in the Levinasian sense is really a kind of vulnerability, and that an infant is Other, has mastery over its mother.20 (LSE, 39)

20 This indecision is ubiquitous in the scholarship. Elsewhere Sharon Todd tries to give a more explicit account of how teaching itself is a gift which a student accepts by giving something herself. The student does not return what she was given, which would establish reciprocity and symmetry (which goes against the postulate of teaching in the first place); but yet, as a student, learning would involve “making the master’s teaching my own,” which renews the difficulty of what distinguishes the other’s questioning from my own questions. See Sharon Todd, “Welcoming and Difficult Learning: Reading Levinas with Education,” in *Levinas and Education*, 180. Carl Säfström draws on Levinas’s philosophy to emphasize the needed responsibility of the teacher to her students. See his “Teaching Otherwise,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2003): 19–29. Joldersma claims that the speech, the sign of the spoken word, is a means of giving information to the other, but more primordially signifies the student’s responsibility to the teacher: the student speaks in an attempt to assuage the teacher and be validated (“The Importance of Enjoyment,” 53). In his recent book, *A Levinasian Ethics*, Joldersma tries to describe the “asymmetry” between teacher and student. He explains transcendence (what I have described here largely in terms of metaphysical desire) in terms of a call from an immemorial past and a kind of eschatological hope or “inspiration” from an unforeseeable and unreachable future. What differentiates the student and teacher is that the student receives inspiration (but not the call) from the teacher (23) whereas the teacher receives the call (but not inspiration) from the student. (44, 49) Yet both of these relations are characterized simply as an ethical responsibility to the other, and aside from a nominative difference, it is hard to see what differentiates these. Joldersma points out the “analogy” between the teacher and the parent, and says that responsibility is part of the teacher’s very subjectivity. (55) At every turn where one might try to concretize responsibility and say what, in particular, distinguishes the teacher (or the student) in order to have a real sense of what we mean by the most basic terms like “ethics” or “responsibility,” in relation to education, Joldersma arrives—as one does inevitably, I believe—at some ambiguity. Joldersma denies that education in the ethical sense can be conflated with institutional or formalized education. (56) The difference between teaching in these two senses is that a teacher, in the quotidien, institutional sense, teaches a subject, some kind of skill or knowledge. The teacher has “curricular knowledge” (62); but Joldersma also denies that this marks out the teacher in the ethical sense: teachers in the ethical sense are trustees of responsibility, a trusteeship that is “something more” than expertise (82); but the relationship between the teacher as transcendent and her expertise is left enigmatic. A proper response to Joldersma’s work will have to wait for another occasion. In short, Joldersma distinguishes between teacher and student only by multiplying “others”—the student is other, the teacher is other, the earth is other and makes its own call, he says; but then any specificity that can be given to teaching is lost. Everyone—everything, every other—must in some way be a
To avoid the obvious difficulties of making an ethically-based education into an exercise of bare theoretical apprehension, these authors generally emphasize things like learning from the other rather than learning about the other; or they put an emphasis on the concrete and interpersonal relations involved in learning rather than the contents learned. They emphasize the activities that students do together that teach them, not some specific information or skill, but a kind of mutual empathy. But as quickly becomes evident, these approaches make it difficult to say how a person becomes the teacher in the ethical sense and what makes a given teaching the original ethical teaching. It especially makes it difficult to see why a specialized discipline like philosophy has any ethical import beyond other arbitrary human interactions (with respect to their content); and given philosophy's necessary preoccupation with ontology and theoretical dimensions of thought, it would make philosophy sound relatively unfocused on the ethical. This indecision—what I would call an inability to concretely identify how concrete teaching fulfills the role of transcendence—reflects an inevitable indecision and failure of educational philosophy, as well as an inevitable kind of failure of education itself. To remain unaware of this is to remain unaware of the unethical possibilities of education in general.

There is often a tacit or explicit assumption on the part of scholars of Levinas's work that any dialogue is good dialogue, which I believe is false unless dialogue is specified in some further way. Levinas writes: "Not every discourse is a relation with exteriority. It is not the interlocutor our master whom we most often approach in our conversations, but an object or an infant, or a man of the multitude, as Plato says." (TI, 70) This need not be a reflection of Levinas's intellectual elitism (an elitism which I believe is paradoxically present in his work). But it is the claim that to simply speak—to simply exchange audible sounds tied to significations, emitted by the mouth—is not of itself to establish or develop an ethical relation.
"Not all speech is speech [toute parole n’est pas parole]" Levinas writes: "Only the teacher [le maître] speaks. The quotidian word or insufficient speech [La parole quotidienne et la parole insuffisante] of professors who are not teachers [maîtres], these are already writings." Levinas is even more clear in "L’écrit et l’oral" that being a professor in a pedagogical context is not sufficient for acting as the teacher in any ethical sense (something that concerns at least this Levinas scholar); and the previous quotation from Totality and Infinity is used to commence a discussion in which Levinas denounces pedagogy as a form of disingenuous rhetoric, that is, falsity in the face of the truth of the transcendent and original teaching. This is to repeat: the inability to specify what links the transcendent teaching with concrete teaching or the real, human teacher, is to be unable to defend any particular educational practice. And yet, Levinas’s claim that simply being a professor does not make one a teacher also

22 “L’Écrit et l’Oral,” 226. Across all of his conceptions of language (which change over the course of his work), Levinas maintains two modes of language: a properly ethical language, and a quotidian language into which ethical language is always in danger of devolving—or into which it has always already devolved. (For a detailed account of Levinas’s philosophy of language, its development, and its relation to ethical responsibility in a concrete sense, see Glass, “Theoretical Responsibility: Levinas on language and the ethical status of the philosophical question,” Philosophy Today, vol. 58, no. 3 (2014): 441–66. In the latter case writing refers to any logocentric language that would abstract from the immediate face-to-face relation that signifies of itself, behind all words and concrete aspects of language. This abstraction is a risk (or maybe an inevitability) of all language; but that does not mean that all language is ethically equivalent. If it was, there could be no ethical demand or weight of responsibility in the first place.

23 Levinas says that pedagogical discourse is rhetoric, and that the risk of rhetoric is the risk of “propaganda, flattery, diplomacy, etc.” (TI, 70) Rhetoric, the art of the sophist, “which philosophical discourse seeks to overcome, resists discourse...It approaches the other not to face him, but obliquely—not, to be sure, as a thing, since rhetoric remains conversation, and across all its artifices goes unto the Other, solicits his yes... It is for this that it is preeminently violence.” (Ibid.) Pedagogy, for Levinas, would be teaching sold to the Other as a product and for a profit. The prophet or the professor are in danger of becoming the profiteer that would make them, not ethically neutral, but positively pernicious. In Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism, Claire Katz points out Levinas’s refusal of the word pedagogy, but she elects to use the word anyway, as it can simply signify instruction or learning. (TI, 204, n.46) However, as I will discuss, I do not think she heeds all the arguments behind Levinas’s warning against pedagogy and rhetoric; and I think Levinas, too, is often guilty of ignoring his own warnings. Levinas claims here that rhetoric is "absent from no discourse," and I will discuss the difficulty in identifying an education that is not a rhetoric and pedagogy.
shows that not everything or everyone can be considered the teacher in the ethical sense if this “ethical sense” is to demand something of us that is not given in advance.

But education is never “accomplished,” and it always risks, at every moment, the possibility of being an oppressive pedagogy that frustrates the relation to the teacher and the transcendent. One has never asked the decisive question, and every question risks being idle inquiry or violent interrogation as opposed to the transcendent relation to the teacher. Even if we determine that inquiry—learning to pose and listen to questions—is itself learning, we do not seem to be in a better position to identify what it concretely means to be a teacher in an ethical sense and how the ethical question is heard in concrete or philosophical questioning.

### Education and Hypocrisy

Education as first philosophy presents itself as the only way philosophy could avoid hypocrisy. It is only in education—in learning and teaching, in dialogue and questioning—that philosophy might operate as neither idle theory nor as blind practice; where the teaching and learning are the doing and the knowing. It is in education that philosophy perhaps goes beyond the division of theory and practice, where philosophy would not be preparatory for anything (for the ethical work that would be deferred to adulthood, for example) but would be its own full ethical moment at each moment; where philosophy could be a genuine response to the metaphysical desire that animates human being. It might be in the openness implied and imposed by education that the transcendent is glimpsed or heard. Teaching and education pose themselves uniquely, I believe, as a site for the transcendent relation, for ethical philosophy.

But the word contains an essential lie (PS, 99), even in education. Hypocrisy is a base, contingent defect of human beings (TI, 24), and despite being the only possibility of avoiding hypocrisy, the teacher and the language of education are at the highest risk of being hypocritical. The formal education that sometimes turns into violent pedagogy is a possibility that always accompanies the presumption of ever having been educated and thinking oneself capable of educating others in an ethical sense. It is an inevitable possibility that

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24 On Levinas’s model the Other is always the teacher, just as it is always me who is responsible. Whether I am the other of the Other, and whether the Other is responsible to me, Levinas says, is the business of the Other and not something I
comes with asking a question. It is always unclear whether one has posed a question oneself or whether the other has posed it. “[T]he possibility of being the author of what had been breathed in unknownst to me, of having received, one knows not from where, that of which I am author” (OB, 148–49) is also the possibility of being the author of the teaching I think myself to have received from the Other. It is also the possibility of having interrogatively posed a question that the other did not pose, the possibility of having reaffirmed my own totality and denied the possibility of teaching or learning. Perhaps every word about education ought to be a little ironic. A Levinasian philosophy of education, as Derrida says, only “mimics the thesis and the code of the university community; it is ironic”25; but this only because educational philosophy prohibits a rigorous can comment on. To posit reciprocity as fundamental is to renounce the conditions of responsibility. Thus, I believe, one—or rather I—should only speak of responsibility where this is a genuine attempt to respond to my responsibility. This need not imply a necessary silence, but it may. Likewise, I think one ought to be hesitant to consider oneself the teacher in the ethical sense, except insofar as this is necessary to better be the student, which on this model would always be the original imperative. This risk of a step into hypocrisy, however, accompanies any would-be ethical philosophy, and any word pronounced on the philosophy of education in the ethical sense—this one included. Joldersma tries to give a sense of transcendence to both learning and teaching that I am skeptical can be rigorously maintained without making the other ubiquitous and thus re-establishing symmetry and sameness. Much of my interpretation of Levinas here might serve as an explanation of the final page of Otherwise than Being, where, amongst other enigmatic phrases, Levinas claims “Here I am for the others—an enormous response, whose inordinateness is attenuated with hypocrisy as soon as it enters my ears forewarned of being’s essence, that is, the way being carries on.” (OB, 185) As long as an ethical call is experienced within the concrete phenomenal world, it is contained in a hypocritical thought: the transcendent expressed in the immanent; and yet it is that ethical call itself which enables one to denounce the hypocrisy that accompanies the betrayal of the ethical in concrete, thematic language. Genuine responsibility is itself the possibility of rejecting hypocrisy—but this claim itself is necessarily “attenuated with hypocrisy.”

philosophy of education. Philosophy as education demands an ethical rigour that would deny a complete philosophy of education.26

Claire Katz begins her Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism with the observation that formally well-educated people (philosophers amongst them) are often no more exemplary of ethical behaviour than are their lay counterparts.27 Katz is thus motivated against what would be an overly-intellectualist, secular humanism; one which is sometimes valued to the exclusion of empathy and ethical action. Katz notes that knowing in principle what is right (were that possible, I would add) does not necessarily lead to ethical action. Theoretical knowledge is not necessarily accompanied with the courage to take personal risks or to make personal sacrifices, which she regards as coextensive with ethics. To gloss her reported experiences with my own: education as an institutional system has a way of producing, for example, craven collaborationists, as well as Augustinian-rhetorician-cum-lawyering bullies. “Truth” is sometimes wielded like a sword, with an arbitrary violence that would be its own justification. Many academics care about “righteousness,” about abstract principles, and about “humanity in general” almost to the exclusion of doing what is right for the particular human beings that surround them. Moreover, having a formal ‘education’ forced on oneself can

26 Wary of a philosophy of education based on the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Michael Wimmer says that such a pedagogy and the question of “how and where, as a pedagogue, one would have to be mindful of the respect for the Other—how one might even have to practice it, or how one could teach children or students the respect for the Other and for the stranger—viewed against the background of Levinas’s philosophy, is not only unfounded but absurd, and would turn it into its very opposite.” See Michael Wimmer, “Thinking the Other—The Other Thinking: Remarks on the Relevance of the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas for the Philosophy of Education,” Levinas and Education, 115. As I have tried to demonstrate as well, Wimmer says, “If it is to be ethical, [pedagogical action] must be regarded as a response, as an action not grounded in knowledge, in goals, or in values only, since those precisely obstruct the claims of the Other.” (ibid., 117) And yet no philosophy, no education, and I believe no ethics either, can proceed without some appeal to knowledge and values.

27 In what follows I raise several objections to Claire Katz’s philosophy of education as she develops it in her book—a book from which I have gained a lot. I make frequent reference to her work in large part because I take it to be exemplary amongst the recent attempts in anglophone scholarship to develop a philosophy of education from the work of Levinas: attempts to escape the hypocrisy of either an idle theoretical pursuit or a blind program of action. Katz signals a similar intention in several places, such as in her article “The Presence of the Other is a Presence that Teaches: Levinas, Pragmatism, and Pedagogy,” Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, vol. 14, no. 1 (2006): 91–108, which foreshadows her book.
make one feel hopeless for some of the same reasons that the word and question in general sometimes fail to be ethical. One feels interrogated and assimilated rather than inspired. One feels shut-in in immanence without having received a real word. Formal education, of itself, is not necessarily a good thing; but this includes the Levinasian-influenced formulations of education.

It is not clear how formal education is even requisite for ethics or ethical behaviour. To say that certain Western academics are unethical because they have received the wrong kind of education is not precisely true. An education would be neither a series of delivered propositional truths, nor a specific series of concrete actions or activities; and least of all would an 'ethical education' be a certain knowledge or skill set to which one would refer in order to guarantee the ethicality of one's subsequent actions. That is, an education cannot be the foundation on which ethics or transcendence is based. If education and teaching are ethical, they are fully ethical at each moment that the relation between pupil and teacher obtains, without recourse to prior events (prior 'lessons') as guarantor. Ethical education cannot be founded on preconceived goals or any precedent, not on any kind of knowledge or reason about ethics that is later applied to similar ethical situations. And yet some element of this would seem to be necessary for any formal education, which requires infrastructure, goals, some notion of progress, and so on. The ethical is always unforeseen and unprecedented because the teaching of the teacher makes precedent—a phenomenal world of events—possible. Nor is one ethical or unethical according to the way one's habits have been shaped by her education, because no practical or theoretical component, of itself, is the essential moment of ethics; and to respond out of habit (acquired through education) is not to genuinely hear and respond to the ethical question, which is always immediate and singular, heard every time as though for the first time.28

28 Contrary to Katz's psychological hypothesis. Katz appeals to psychological studies to try to give an account of how, practically speaking, children can be conditioned to be empathetic (see Levinas and the Crisis, 104). We are not born fully-developed (emotionally, intellectually, etc., nor morally, in a qualified way). Thus, when one asks how the other affects me morally, Katz says it is not helpful to simply say, "she just does." Katz is right and instead proposes a model of how children can become educated to respond to the needs of the Other. (McPherson lodges a similar complaint against Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas. He claims they ignore phenomena specific to childhood. [See "Other than the Other," 88]). Instead of asking how we ought to understand the transcendence of the teacher that would condition education, Katz assumes this point, assumes what the ethical relation and action look like (vaguely in terms of empathy, interdepend-
No pedagogy is obviously educative. The education received from the transcendent teacher never arrives in this way. The kind of education that is the ethical relation with the teacher is a teaching that is always received for the first time. It has to be determined and renewed each time in the posing of the question; a question that, as coming from the transcendent other, cannot be prepared for in advance or answered with a correct response, theoretical or practical. To be educated is to be willing to recommence every time without using one’s supposedly-previously-acquired education as an ethical crutch. There is no progress in ethics or in ethical education because the ethical teaching would precede the language that would make dialectical progress possible. The ethical teaching is rather always presupposed and never yet reached; and the ethical moment or genuine teaching is never certain. Every question, every teaching, risks hypocrisy on the reverse side of transcendence; even if an educational philosophy is, as I believe it is, a candidate for first philosophy.

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