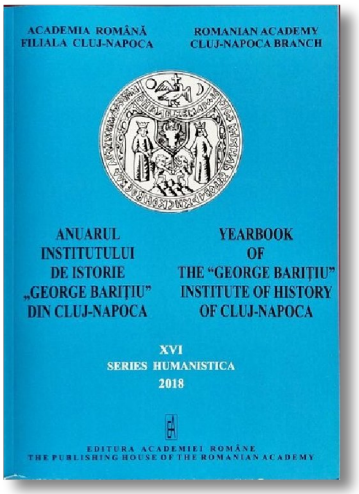

ISSN 1584-4404

Yearbook of the George Barițiu History Institute of Cluj-Napoca
Series *Humanistica*

humanistica.ro

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How to cite this article:
Dioșan, Livia (2018) *The tents of Shem and the speech of Japheth. On translation and the Other in the writing of Emmanuel Lévinas*, Yearbook of the George Barițiu History Institute of Cluj-Napoca, Series Humanistica, Vol. 16, pp. 149–169. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22966707

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THE TENTS OF SHEM AND THE SPEECH OF JAPHETH. ON TRANSLATION AND THE OTHER IN THE WRITING OF EMMANUEL LÉVINAS

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Abstract. *We will be exploring the way in which, in the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, the primordial Saying, as unique word, God, signifies as trace in the face of the Other. If the manifestation of the Face is the first discourse, then the infinity that reveals itself in the Face implies that, in the relation to the Other, in the primordial addressing of the Other, language is not anymore a place of the meaning, but instead it is the meeting with the Other that sets the condition of possibility of any meaning, because this meeting is not a fact of the subject, but is primarily provoked by an appellation originating from the Highness. The relation between the original Saying and the Said that introduces the meaning is analogous to the irreversible translation of the Septuagint, being in a first time a translation of the unsayable, and secondly a call to responsibility. Greek is worked from the inside by the word of the Other, that is, the word of the Hebrew, and what gets translated into Greek is merely the trace of the Infinity. The translation is a movement without return, just like the voyage of Abraham who leaves behind his homeland and his possessions in order to follow the word of God.*

Keywords: *Saying, Said, Other, Face, language, subject, ethics, Septuagint, Hebrew, Greek.*

SAYING AND SAID

In the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, language is the relation between the Same and the Other, in which the Other remains transcendent in relation to the Same (Lévinas, 1998 p. 28-29). The word you is a Said, but it is not an ordinary Said in relation to the Saying, instead being "the Said of the Saying as Saying" (Lévinas, 1978, p. 505). Ethics, which the philosopher defines as "language, i.e. responsibility", originates in the face-to-face situation of the language. As Lévinas (1991) says:

An. Inst. de Ist. „G. Barițiu" din Cluj-Napoca, Series Humanistica, tom. XVI, 2018, p. 149-169

> The distance between the same and the other, where the language occurs, is irreducible to a relationship between concepts that limit one another, but describes instead the transcendence in which the other does not press upon the same, but merely compels it, making it responsible, that is, speaking. (p. 46, emphasis added)

The language establishes the relation with the "nudity detached from any form" which is the face, for the sight of the face cannot be separated from language: "Transcendence is not an optic, but the first ethical gesture" (Lévinas, 1998, p. 190). Thus, Lévinas sends to what is beyond, to transcendence, which is inseparable from the founding event of subjectivity in relation to language:

> The relation with the Face, with the other absolutely other which I cannot contain, the other in this sense infinite, (...) has a positive structure: ethical. (...) I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation. (Lévinas, 1998, p. 213)

Language is not at play within the conscience, but it comes, instead, from the Other and questions the conscience, because "the being of signification consists in putting into question in an ethical relation constitutive freedom itself. Meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face to face of language." (Lévinas, 1998, p. 213). As the commanding face renders the subject responsible, the Saying becomes the most passive passivity, because in the "sincerity of the Saying" resides the dis-interestedness, the other than being, a for the other. However, the Saying always unsays itself, imprinting in the Said the trace of the rupture with the categories of discourse, as the essence of the language consists of "unsaying the said" (Lévinas, 1982a, pp. 103-104, 1993, p. 146, 1998, p. 16).

The original Saying is not something to which the subject has access, but it inscribes itself, failingly, in the gaps of the discourse, of the said. The first word says the Saying itself – which is in the realm of the act – and It does not designate, doesn't set themes, doesn't identify. Without It, proximity would be subsumed to the ontological. The first word only says the Saying before any being and any thought in which the being regards and reflects itself. And if the first saying is the Saying with a capital letter, the Saying and the Said cannot be equal. Because the Saying, as it says itself, breaks in every moment the definition of what it says and produces the explosion of the totality it encompasses. "The first saying exceeds its own forces and its own reason. The original saying is a delirium" (Lévinas, 2001, p. 329). For Lévinas (2001, p. 329) "ce premier dire n'est certes qu'un mot. Mais c'est Dieu". The trace signifies in the face of the other this unique word, the Name by which God signifies Himself. (Bernier, 1996, pp. 620-621)

The glory of the testimony lies in "Here I am", that is, in a Saying whose Said consists precisely in saying "Here I am", which in another sense is a form of act. And conversely, glory is but another form of passivity, assigned now to the firstcomer. The sincerity of the Saying cancels its absorption in the Said, as sincerity is "a Saying without Said" (Lévinas, 1993, p. 224). The Saying formulates itself as "Here I am", falling into the category of the accusative, not of the nominative. This passivity, which is older than any passivity, is the sincerity of the

Saying, of the Saying as Saying of the Saying that enunciates the "Here I am" and constitutes the origin of the language. Which, in turn, for Lévinas, enunciates the promise, because the Face is not incarnate. If, in Christianity, "the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us", in the Lévinasian text, flesh becomes verb, or, in the Christian tradition:

> Incarnation makes the generic Soul (indeterminate) a specific soul (indeterminate). By analogy, it is no longer a dead body (Körper) that would (only) be animated by a «heavenly" Soul. From its own birth, the physiological body is (always and already) a living body (Leib). And only such a body is – alive – the "one" that can feel simultaneously with its appropriated soul. (Ciomoş, 2008, p. 21)

For Lévinas, "the infinity of duty becomes an absolute choice" (Chrétien, 1991, p. 270), a choice that can be acknowledged in the hostage-responsibility to which the subject is promised and by which he is unique. The Scripture, in a paradoxical interpretation of the Book of Job (Chrétien, 1991, pp. 270-271), "reproaches" to Job his failure to answer for what he has not done, not wanting to be responsible "beyond his freedom". Is there evoked a meaning that doesn't enter the world from Job, but from God Himself? Is it conceivable that God reminds Job of his absence from Genesis precisely to make him understand that, despite this absence, he must answer for Genesis itself? The subject is guilty of all, and the atonement finds a meaning in the Lévinasian ethics precisely because the sacrifice of the subject has already taken place since the beginning of time and it's this sacrifice that makes me an I. The subject is promised to the sacrifice, being already sacrificed, beyond any distinction, and has atoned for its being by its very coming into being. The mute and primordial Saying, "more passive than any passivity", is the sacrifice of a hostage who, however, has not chosen himself to be hostage.

In this sense, the Saying originates in the face-to-face relation. The face speaks, the face is gaze and voice, but this "primary discourse" implies a paradox: it is untranslatable and, at the same time, does not need translation. The untranslatable rest, however, is the Saying, for the excess of the Saying over the Said can never be said In a Said. The Saying without Said cannot be said in a Said. The Saying, however, is also transparency, escaping from any appearance of form, imposing itself, because "the event that is proper to the expression consists of bearing witness for oneself, while also guaranteeing this testimony. This self-confirmation can only be achieved through the Face, that is, through the word." (Lévinas, 1998, p. 220). The language "implies the pre-eminence of a Face" whose transparency breaks any form of presentation, guaranteeing itself:

> To seek the truth, I have already maintained a relation with a face that can guarantee itself, whose epiphany itself is, in a certain way, a word of honor. Any language, understood as an exchange of verbal signs, already refers to this primordial word of honor (...) The verbal sign already implies an authentication of the signifier." (Lévinas, 1998, p. 220, emphasis added)

The Face as a word: a word that speaks silently from a dimension of Highness, a word that identifies with a responsibility understood in a new sense, a

word from which the subject cannot escape because it carries the weight of its transparency inscribed even in his body. Moreover, another occurrence of silence is found in the passages where Elijah climbs up Mount Horeb, and God gives wind and earthquake and fire without being any of these, as, after the fire, Elijah finds God in a "still small voice" (1Kings 19, 11-13).

There is something in the nudity of this original word, something that the subject has never translated and will not translate it in his own self, in his own terms. Something that called him (translated) to responsibility. The discourse that forces the subject to enter into discourse thus establishes a transcendentally asymmetric relationship. The translation of the Saying into the Said – or any attempt to do so – can only be a betrayal. For Lévinas, the correlation between traduttore and traditore is essential in this sense: "In the language as Said, everything is translated in front of us – even at the expense of a betrayal. Ancillary and therefore indispensable language" (Lévinas, 1974, p. 7, emphasis added), a language of philosophy that is par excellence the language of translation, indiscretion regarding the unspeakable. "It is a betrayal at the cost of which everything is shown, even the unspeakable, and by which the indiscretion towards the unspeakable is possible, which is probably the very task of philosophy" (Lévinas, 1974, p. 8, emphasis added). However, this translation of the unspeakable is, at the same time, primordial as a passage from Saying to a coherent and rational Said, as well as it is uninterrupted. But it is the Saying itself that translates the Saying into the Said, and thus the untranslatable takes place in the very essence of the translation, which is betrayed in its very betrayal. It is the "Trojan Horse of the untranslatable" (Chrétien, as cited in Lévinas, 2000, p. 314) which makes the translation not automatic, but a permanent un-saying of the Said.

The nodal point of such a course is, however, the original Saying, which is "delirium" (Lévinas, 2001, p. 329), the delirium of the primordial Saying, id est revelation. A primordial discourse that forces the subject to enter into discourse, a discourse prior to any philosophical order. That is, Hebrew, where the first word is "Do not kill," it translates itself – into the Saying itself – into Hebrew for the first time. Into the Hebrew which establishes itself as a proto-translation of the silence of a Face that is not visible – "My Face you will not see" – but only leaves a trace of Its passing. Which is a proto-translation. From this primordial translation to treason there is just one step. And the passage is done by the Septuagint. From Hebrew to Greek. "I believe that Europe means the Bible and the Greeks", says Lévinas (1987c, p. 22), the and being precisely the meeting of the two, that is the Septuagint. The beginning of the history of being – which Says itself in Greek – is the first-order translation – first in the order of synchrony, but second in a time of diachrony – that is, the silent event of the Septuagint. The Greek is, therefore, disturbed by the irruption of the Other more than it may contain, disturbed by a Saying which is more than the Said. It was not the Greeks who learned Hebrew – they did not comprehend it, it remained foreign – in order to translate the Torah, but the Jews learned the Greek. "There is a transcendental necessity for the Bible to

be translated, so that what Hebrew originally says about the origin be transferred into other languages as well" (Chrétien, 2000, p. 319).

The movement from Hebrew to Greek is without return, the translation remains irreversible. And it is a translation made by the Alexandrian Jews, about whom Lévinas speaks in Au-delà du verset:

> long ago, when Yom Kippur happened to be Friday, and on the eve of Shabbat the Jews were not allowed to cook, the Alexandrian Jews, Greeks who came from Egypt, ate the raw ram, but they were called Babylonians in a pejorative sense because they were among those who, when they returned from the Babylonian exile, had not wanted to return to the country where the new Judea was being built. The Alexandrians who ate raw food, we called them Babylonians. (Lévinas, 1982b, pp. 49-50)

THE TEN CREATIVE WORDS

The asceticism of the Jews, from as early as the time of the oral transmission of the tradition, was not to change any of the letters in the transmitted text, as they were responsible for the whole world. Therefore, we believe that this is the lens through which Lévinas reads the words of Father Zosima from "The Brothers Karamazov": "Man is interiority through his responsibility for the universe. The power of God subordinated to responsibility becomes a moral force. Man does not sin against God when he disobeys commandments; he destroys worlds." (Lévinas, 1982b, p. 195). This Lévinasian reading (Malka, 1991, pp. 366-377) must be understood in the light of the interpretations Lévinas made on occasion of his oral teaching in the morning of Shabbat concerning the first verses of the Genesis, read in the light of the traditional commentary of Rabbi Rachi (Wygoda, 2006, pp. 215-225). The creation ex nihilo does not mean a negation because the Hebrew language allows the "nihilo" vocable to resonate otherwise, taking its meaning, according to Lévinas (1982b, p. 187), in the human question par excellence: "What am I?" (ma ani?). However, the answer to this question should not be sought through efforts of positioning in the being, but by meditating on the idea of "the image and likeness of God", as the Hebrew term that names God in this passage is Elohim. But this meditation must pass the painful test of our own strangeness on the earth. "I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me" (Psalm 119:19). This is an irreducible strangeness in the context of a good creation. "The primordial goodness of creation" does not mean that it is in the property of man, but only man sometimes has the illusion of being rooted in the earth and of the appropriation of space, and it is reminded to him: "... the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and sojourners" (Leviticus 25:23) Or, this strangeness to a creation whose authors we are not, this "strangeness to the being" (étrangeté à l'être), as Lévinas says, does not turn to nostalgia for regaining a lost kingdom – be it celestial –, but calls for the fulfillment of the commandments right here on earth. "This difference between the ego and the world is extended by obligations toward others. Echo of the

permanent saying of the Bible: the condition – or incondition – of strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt brings the man closer to his fellow man." (Lévinas, 1972, p. 97)

Lévinas radicalizes this reflection by making the stranger's shame or lack of boldness – who is hesitant to enter because he knows he does not have the right – the quality par excellence of the human subject, and in this sense the stranger is not the strange, but the subject himself as "stranger on the face of the earth":

> Presence that again casts doubt on the presence, which again casts doubt on the continuity of the identical self, emptied of all its attributes. (...) Reserve of the non-investment, of the non-justified, of the "stranger on earth", according to the expression of the psalmist, of the one without a fatherland or of the "homeless", who does not dare to enter. (...) Not being-in-the-world, but being-in-question. (Lévinas, 1991, p. 164)

Inasmuch as he or she seeks to become or remain human, the created human being must answer for its right or rightfulness to be in the fear for the other:

> Have not my being in the world or "my place under the sun", my own at-home (chez moi) been an usurpation of the places that were already the other's, the one's oppressed or hungered by me, expelled to a third world: a rejection, an exclusion, an exile, a dispossession, a killing. (...) Fear of occupying in the Da of my Dasein the place of someone. (…) Fear that comes to me from the face (visage) of the other. (Lévinas, 1991, p. 166)

In fact, no one can kill or do violence to another without despising the very idea of creation:

> I can kill as I hunt or slaughter animals, or as I fell trees – but only when I have grasped the other in the opening of being in general, as an element of the world where I stand, where I have him on the horizon. I have not looked him in the face, I have not encountered his face (visage). The temptation of absolute negation, which measures the infinity of this attempt and its impossibility, is the presence of the face. To be in a relation with the other face to face (face-à-face) – is to be unable to kill. (Lévinas, 1991, p. 22)

Or, as Lévinas (1982b, p. 187) then adds in the Talmudic lessons, the Bible has never asked us to look at people in the opening of being, but has taught us that they are all, without exception, creatures "in the image and likeness of God" and not elements in my horizon. This teaching also requires the proof of the sense of strangeness by which man discovers himself to be "his brother's keeper". Without choosing or desiring it, this vigil over the other imposes itself as though without it the meaning of creation would be lost forever:

> Why does the Other concern me? What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper? – These questions have meaning only if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned only with itself, is only a concern for itself. In this hypothesis it indeed remains incomprehensible that the absolute outside-of-Me, the Other, would concern me. However, in the "pre-history" of the Ego posited for itself speaks a responsibility." (Lévinas, 1982b, p. 150, emphasis added)

We propose, at this point, the idea that the prehistoric means, in fact, presubjective, in order to put it in correlation with the perpetual renewal specific to the Hebrew tradition, which is closely related to the ritual instrument of the shofar, with a function of (re)minding. This is the optics in which Lévinas regards the importance of the commandments and rituals in Judaism. The imperative of

creation – "Let there be light" (Genesis 1, 3) – is extended in the imperative of the Ten Commandments. The mitsva, commandment, keeps the Jew breathing, "it is the living presence of love" (Lévinas, 1987b, p. 84). The Ten Commandments pronounced on Sinai, addressed to a unique and irreplaceable "you", are already found in the Hebrew tradition (Sefat Emet, apud Chalier 2002, p. 40) at the heart of the ten creative words, because the Torah is the essence of creation itself. Lévinas admires the fact that the wise men of the Talmud "dare to put among the ten "verbs" that have served in the creation of the universe the word that says "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Lévinas, 1976a, p. 52). And then he continues: "the feminine does not derive from the masculine; rather, the division intro feminine and masculine – the dichotomy – derives from what is human" (Lévinas, 1977, p. 132). It is a separation which he refuses to reduce to a simple complementarity, because the latter would retain still the nostalgia of a retrievable unity that would abolish the alterity. In this sense, the trace of dependence evoked by Lévinas does not imply that man depends on God to live, so much as it inscribes a responsibility of the one for the other, without reciprocity, already from the dawn of creation.

For this reason, each subject has to look for the ten creative words – "let there be ..." – in the ten commandments, because this is the only way in which man can receive the Torah, namely in the constant renewal of his verb, in such a way that the words that give being to the whole reality become an interpellation of somebody. Thus, the universe reveals to the Jew a fragment of the Saying that inhabits him and makes him be, asking him to dedicate his life to a task which consists of putting together the creative words and the words of Sinai. The I is being interpellated by the Face (Lévinas, 1996b, p. 39), therefore one of the ten commandments – „thou shall not kill" – will always mean that we must do anything for the other in order for him or her to live. Therefore ethics is the original awakening of an I in his or her uniqueness: "the uniqueness of a I called and elected for the responsibility for the other" (Lévinas, 1984, p. 181).

Situating himself in the proximity of this vision that appears in the Sefat Emet of the Rabbi de Gur, Lévinas (1976b, p. 176) insists on the ethical significance of creation, seeing in rituals the "behavior of the one who, in the racket of our everyday actions, perceives the mystical resonance of things." He thus introduces a time of stopping in our impulse towards things, but not to forbid them, but rather to put a time of the word between the gesture and the word. Thus, the ritual reminds to the Jew that every beginning day is met in the miracle of its renewal by a word with which the subject must also resonate: "The entire Judaism wanted to place a time of reflection between the natural spontaneity and nature (...) The closing of roses is the minimum partition of the ritual that stops us." (Lévinas, 1976b, p. 176). Of course, for Lévinas this stop does not only reflect the ritualistic aspect, but also introduces an ethical meaning and a "wisdom of the desire" with which we come again to the metaphysical desire he speaks of already in Totality and Infinity (Lévinas, 1998), as an indestructible, "unsatisfiable desire", like the Freudian desire:

> For one speaks lightly of satisfied desires or sexual needs or, again, of moral or religious needs. Love, itself, is thus considered as the satisfaction of a sublime hunger. If this language is possible, it is because most of our desires are not pure and neither is love. Desires that can be satisfied resemble metaphysical desire only in the deceptions of satisfaction, or in the exasperation of non-satisfaction and desire, which constitute voluptuosity itself. Metaphysical desire has another intention – it desires the beyond of all that can merely fill it. It is like goodness – the Desired does not satisfy it, but renders it more profound. (Lévinas, 1974, p. 195sqq, 1998, p. 22)

The Lévinasian face, in a psychoanalytic perspective, reveals an object point that meets the subject and links it to nothing but his own desire. This means that there is an extreme directness of the face of the other, as Lévinas (1986, pp. 262-263) calls it. The immemorial past and the continuous renewal contain a ritual part, but moreover they imply the face of the other, since every time the subject finds himself face-to-face with the Other, the commands pronounced ritually come as an expression of the face – "we get to the idea of creation only starting from the experience of the Face" (Lévinas, 1987a, p. 45) –, that is, for Lévinas, they refer to the fiat of the creation, by repetition. This perpetual renewal is interpreted as reflecting what French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1966) calls the time to understand, which is more than the geometric time of the moment of gaze, but not yet a moment to conclude that would pertain to the realm of the act. Therefore, the ritual repetition of the demand is doubled by the loop of desire, which was already there and represents the choice of the subject and the desire as desire of the Other, as Lévinas defines it as hostage responsibility. The Lévinasian subject is like a torus captive around a central exteriority, that of desire, which, in fact, he must tour twice in order to free himself from the great Other to whom he is captive in infinite guilt and responsibility. The problem arises as to how we could discuss, in the context of the Lévinasian ethics, the fact that the object cause of desire is on the side of the Other, the latter being the one who guides, determines and supports it. But if, in Lévinas, through the Illeity that leaves a trace there remains a "radical exteriority" (Lévinas, 1998, p. 42), it might be question of an internalisation by the subject; however, in the Lévinasian text, the hypothesis that there is an Other, the radical Other of the language, remains, in fact, the invisible fabric of the "ethics as a first philosophy". And this is why the Other can, by the Face, be the guarantor of the subject.

THE SEPTUAGINT IS UNACCOMPLISHED

> „Nous n'avons pas encore fini de traduire la Bible. La Septante est inachevée…"
> (Emmanuel Lévinas, L'au delà du verset)

"Passing" represents the essence of the Hebrew word ivri – ivrit is the Hebrew language, and ivri is the Jew – which comes from lavoor, to pass: the Hebrew Ha'Ivri means not only to pass over to the other side, but also to make

pass. The Jewish passer is the one whose mission is to make man pass from death to life. It is antithetical to the mythical passers of the great pagan civilizations of the antiquity – Egypt, Greece, Rome – whose task was to accompany the soul of man from the realm of the living into the realm of death (Scemama, 2006, p. 34). The Jew is the one who passes, he reflects the passage from a world which does not cease to create itself, which exists and does not exist at the same time. To be, for the Jew, means to be in the passage; the man is not something that is, but something that will be, his manner of being is to produce the time, always to come – in French there is a play on the words avenir (future) – à venir (which will come).

If the Westerner privileges a subject in charge of his acts, who can respond in a comprehensible manner to the questions that are put to him through a spherical discourse based on knowledge, without changing anything neither in him nor outside of him, but being satisfied merely to be identical to himself, this means not trying to become in the sense of the Hebrew term lavoor, meaning that his world remains the world of the Same. On the contrary, for Lévinas, a person who was giving a Talmudic lecture every Shabbat morning, the one studying the Talmud does not seek to become a sage, and his art is not of answering questions but of asking them; he stops at questions he cannot answer; the notion of absolute knowledge is strange to him.

The Talmudic interpreter can understand the meaning of a text only if he considers it to be addressed to him, just as God on Mount Sinai addressed all people, those who had been, and those who were present, as well as those who were to be born. Just as the text is addressed to any reader who has the freedom to interpret it, the Sinai covenant links God to every human being: "Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those who are not with us here today (Deuteronomy 29:14-15). In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer commented: "All who will be born in the future to the end of all generations have been present with them on Mount Sinai." (Ouaknin, 1992, p. 78).

The Midrash resumed the biblical expression "opened and said", because to open means to undo the biblical verse and to open the word so that the text will not be approached linearly, but in its entire volume, an operation by which each word is broken, analyzed, until all possibilities are exhausted. "But even so, the alterity and exteriority of the text is not shaken. The warrant for its inexhaustible richness is that one cannot bite in its flesh." (Ouaknin, 1987, pp. 279-280).

The issue of this distinction also comprises the irreversible translation of the Septuagint, which reveals the same relation between Saying and Said. There is no Saying that is not accompanied by an "un-saying": from here on the Saying opposes the Said. The Said is the organized discourse, fixed and stabilized in a coherence; the Saying is the pre-primordial rupture, which disturbs and disquiets, always already, any Said, as if transcendence has already broken the immanence. The philosophical discourse pertains to an immanence that cannot let the Saying enter except in a way

in which the discourse is exceeded: an excess implying the fact that only the trace remains, in its very essence and which has never been present:

> Expression, saying, is not added on to significations that are "visible" in the light of phenomena, to modify them or confuse them (...); the said significations offer a hold to the saying which "disturbs" them, like writings awaiting an interpretation. But herein is the – in principle – irreversible antecedence of the Word with respect to Being, the irretrievable delay of the Said after the Saying. Of this antecedence, the significations which, meanwhile, suffice to themselves, bear a trace, which they forthwith contest and efface. (Lévinas, 2001, p. 296)

The other, in the election, is the Saying itself, the Saying that is external and constitutive of the Said, it is the distance of the Saying which can never be identifiable, but not because it is the Saying of a Said, but rather since it is Saying, a movement of distance, in which the Said is said. Saying as a constitutive precedence of any Said.

What matters in the relation with the Other, in the primordial interpellation of the Other, is not that language was no longer the place of meaning, but that the meaning occurs in the encounter with the Other who establishes it, and this encounter is not a fact of the subject, but it is first triggered by a call:

> As a mark of the interpellation, it (i.e. the language) dethrones the nominative and the accusative – the subject and the object – from their dominant roles, since the issue is to indicate that the meaning is at play elsewhere than in the description of the substantial being "before" it, i.e. in its putting into question, in the primordial interruption of its reign. (...) By designating the limits of the worry of being and truth, the Lévinasian ethics does not escape, however, to a strictly limited region of philosophy, which would be a mediation between the purposes of human life and action and / or an art of good self-governance. If Lévinas designates ethics as "first philosophy," it is not in the traditional sense of philosophy that bears upon the fundamentals, but to translate it: the appearance signifies only when if it starts from the ethical attitude." (Sebbah, 2000, pp. 59-60)

Who arrives to the ethics? The subject in front of his neighbor's face where the Illeity signifying the trace of the Infinite is sketched and erased. But it is also the trace of a Saying which has already withdrawn in the Said, a Said who betrays the primordial Saying. This matter of the differently told or differently said arises, for Lévinas, between Hebrew and Greek.

> It is not the mere effect of a discordance of vocabulary and semantics, but the very trial of the Spirit taking place in two adventures that the Scripture runs in reading, two adventures equally necessary. In the Jewish reading, the intelligible can be drawn from a spiritual experience or from a word that is always already passed, starting from a tradition where transmission and renewal always go hand in hand. Reading of a spirit that is never unwarned. Without this essential prevention being confused with a sterile partiality of dogmatism. It remains the secret of a creativity and an eternal new beginning which is, probably, the indelible trace of a thought marked by Revelation. And, on the other hand, the Greek reading – of books and of things – intelligence of a wonderfully unwarned spirit, through which symbols try to decipher themselves and, at least, to express themselves in clarity, which has become our university speech. Two inseparable adventures! (Lévinas, 1998, p. 46)

The infinite that reveals itself in the face of the Other is nowhere else but in the primordial word, but there is however something in the nudity of this primordial word that we have never translated and which the ego will never translate in its own terms, in the terms of the Same. So, it is something else that translated me and called me to responsibility. Lévinas uses the expression "traduire en responsabilité" to say that it is a hostage responsibility to which the subject is consecrated, but through which he is unique. The verb "traduire" has several meanings and several tasks to accomplish. It is a "primordial discourse" because "the face speaks". Lévinas says it in several places: "The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is the primordial discourse." (Lévinas, 1972, p. 48, 2001, p. 271). Or the primordial word as a visitation by the face is nothing but the untranslatable that does not need a translation. Therefore, the Saying originates in the face-to-face, and this untranslatable is the Saying itself. This Saying forms the unspeakable and opens the possibility of any language, and thereby the possibility of translatability which itself is untranslatable. The excess of the Saying upon the Said – because there is an excess – can never be said in a said. We cannot say in a said the Saying without said. So, an essential dimension of the word must be considered, an issue that brings us to the issue of the emergence of language in every human being. The transparency of the Lévinasian face separates itself from any other form of presentation, just as its word, as a first word, separates itself from any other word. The word that speaks in silence, from the height, the word that comes in contact and identifies with the hostage responsibility, is the only word I cannot help hearing, a word from which I can not escape: "Stripped of its very form, a face is paralyzed in its nudity. It is a distress. The nudity of a face is a denuding, and already a supplication in the straightforwardness that aims at me. But this supplication is an exigency; in it humility is joined with height. The ethical dimension of visitation is thereby indicated." (Lévinas, 1972, pp. 48-49). It is a discourse that obliges to enter the discourse and an asymmetric relation: "Speaking is, above all, this way of coming from behind the appearance, from behind the form, an opening of the opening" (Lévinas, 2001, p. 271, emphasis added). If the Saying would always remain silent in the fulgurance of the assignment to responsibility, it should be translated: "The Saying can not remain, for Lévinas, in the Said (...) The famous adage traduttore, traditore becomes with Lévinas an essential correlation. The translation of Saying into the Said, or the attempt to do it, is always a betrayal. But this does not mean that it must be abandoned, and the thought doesn't lack resources to limit or bridle this ineluctable betrayal." (Chrétien, as cited in Lévinas, 2000, p. 313).

The translation of the unspeakable is primordial and incessant for the fact that it is about going from saying to a rational said and of creating the primordial word by reason. In other words, to translate it. "In the language understood as said, everything translates before us – even at the expense of betrayal. Ancilary and therefore indispensable language." (Lévinas, 1974, p. 7) Or, about other-than-being:

> other-than-being is from the very beginning sought out here, and by its translation before us, it is immediately betrayed in the said that dominates the saying that utters it. Here arises a methodological issue. It is to ask ourselves whether the pre-primordial of the Saying (...) can be brought to its own betrayal by appearing in a theme (...) – and whether this betrayal can be diminished; if we can at the same time know and release the known of the signs which the thematization impresses upon it by subordinating it to ontology. It is a betrayal at the cost of which everything is shown, even the unspeakable, and by which the indiscretion towards the unspeakable is possible, which is probably the very task of philosophy. (Lévinas, 1974, p. 8)

„But philosophy must return to language to translate – even by betraying them – the pure and the unspeakable." (Lévinas, 1972, p. 95) There is, therefore, this "Trojan horse of the untranslatable" (Chrétien, as cited in Lévinas, 2000, p. 314) and yet the language of betrayal as the place where the non-place of the meaning is translated is the reason itself. But if the first saying says the saying itself, then the saying and the said can not equal each other, because

> the saying, saying itself, breaks at every moment the definition of what it says goes and makes the whole reality that envelops it explode. (...) The first saying exceeds its own forces and its own reason. The original saying is delirium. (Lévinas, 2001, p. 329)

Another face of the Lévinasian responsibility is to be the primordial writing of God that becomes an idea. The language with which the Holy Scriptures were made and which maintains its prophetic essence – for Lévinas, the language par excellence –, the word of God already audible or deafened in every speech, does not only pertain of the commitment of the beings who speak in the fabric of the world and history, in which they take care of themselves, that is, of their perseverance in being. The writing is always prescription and ethics, word of God who commands the subject and consecrates him to the other, holy writing before having been sanctified:

> This implication of the ethical responsibility in the firm and quasi-closed saying of the verse that is formed in language as if I were not the only one who, speaking, speaks and I would already obey, is it not the original writing in which God turned idea is named in the Said? (...) My condition or incondition is my relation to the books. It is à-Dieu itself. (Lévinas, 1982b, p. 9)

"The idea of Infinity is, at the same time, relation with the other man" (Lévinas, 1996a, p. 55). If it is true that the relation with the other is essentially language, and that ethics is inseparable from the word, and transcendence is fulfilled in the discourse, an interpretation of Lévinas's philosophy starting from the problem of language can be proposed. In Énigme et phénomène, Lévinas (2001) questions the possibility of a philosophical discourse that would say the transcendence of the Infinite that appears in the concepts of Saying and Said in their quality as philosophical categories. Lévinas's critical attitude is motivated by the precariousness to which the philosophical discourse exposes itself when trying to say the transcendence. Once said, the transcendence appears as a meaning among others and already allows itself to be included in the linearity of the presence. The Saying of the irreversible past is Said in the presence, but then is the

trace found in the order of presence or in that of the past older than any past: “I opened, but he was gone"? (Lévinas 1974, p. 112) The philosophical discourse that attempts to say the transcendence says it already in terms of being, as an event susceptible of being retrieved in the presence. Once said, the transcendence already folds upon an ontological structure, and thus the distinction between Said and Saying, which is announced at the heart of the philosophical discourse, suddenly falls into ambiguity.

The philosophical discourse states the direction of its own surpassing and its own interruption. “All speaking is enigma” (Lévinas, 2001, p. 296) implies that the word signifier of the relation with the other can still be heard in the word “Logos,” but also that in the Logos itself a transcendent sense can already be allowed to open. In other words, the Saying betrays itself in the Said appearing in it as Logos. But “the Said betraying the Saying still translates it, showing it whole, veiling it, or pointing it out as absent.” (Feron, 1992, p. 123) Along with the inherent ambiguity of the philosophical discourse, a second access to the notions of Saying and Said is offered through the theme of proximity, in a small text called “Langage et proximité” (Lévinas, 2001). The discourse, while doing the work of the Logos, is still in the proximity of the other. Totalité et Infini (Lévinas, 1998) seeks to value a relationship with the Other, which is neither knowledge nor power, but an immediate relation from one particular to another, face-to-face with the Other. Lévinas attributes this immediacy to the appeal that is involved in any speaking. An immediate, but already meaningful event of humanity.

Inside what is felt by any human being, in the Lévinasian corpus, there is the transversal idea of an absence he describes starting from the worry which, in this sense, remains a contact that only touches with the tip of the finger, because, in fact, before any knowledge, something happened between the one who feels and what is felt. In this “passage”, a past is sketched in the primordial sense of sensibility. Thus, it is a relation with a past in which the contact has passed, a relation with a future that deepens in the contact, the sensibility being, here, temporalization. If there is an absence in the proximity as the primordial meaning of sensibility, this is because it is the timing of time. In fact, we can see in Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence (Lévinas, 1974) a frequent shift of the notion of proximity to the notion of closeness that would better account for the timing of the time of election.

> Whether language is described as an approach of the other, it also presupposes that it may be possible to think of it explicitly as time. (...) Affectivity that makes my present burst, affectivity as affection by the other, affectivity as passivity of time. (...) Lévinas always tends to take into account affectivity only insofar as it fits into the structure of the relationship with the other which is already thought as Saying. That is why proximity is not a tatonnage in the darkness but is of itself signification of a meaning, precisely Saying. (Feron, 1992, p. 128)

The concept of Saying, which expresses a relation between subjectivity and time, contains the relation between conscience and diachronicity. Thus, the Saying would be the very life of transcendence because Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de

l'essence (Lévinas, 1974) approaches the notion of Saying, in the line of the living word and of Desire, as a spirit that animates the language, as the inspiration of the Same by the Other. It is a Saying irreducible to a Said, but it animates any language that in turn has its two slopes. On the one hand, the Saying is always saying to the Other, or exposure to an Other, in the sense that language is movement towards exteriority, expression. On the other hand, Saying is a to say oneself to the extent that exposure to the other is the passivity of an exposed being. The two major works of Lévinas – Totalité et Infini and Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence – can be put in parallel, because in the first the description of the face as expression is accompanied by an approaching of the speaking subject himself, while the latter strongly emphasizes the fundamental passivity of subjectivity in the Saying. Since it is necessary to refer to the Saying that is before any act of speech, as hither of the identity of the self, which puts itself as a speaker or speaking, we find the position of a subject in the passivity more passive than any passivity in which it can only answer and to whom the answer itself comes from somewhere else.

The saying is the intrigue of language as shattering of the subject in its pure passivity and inspiration by the Other. In the depths of "I speak" resonates a "says itself". This is how Lévinas describes the profound passivity of language. The Saying is nothing but exposure to the Other, and the proximity becomes Saying because, as pure passivity, the exposure to the Other could only, in turn, expose itself instead of resuming itself in an act of exposure "to ultimately petrify itself into a faculty of receptivity, into a «possibility-of-being-exposed»", an "opening of the opening" (Feron, 1992, pp. 140-141, emphasis added). Indeed, the opening of the opening means that the proximity of the other is so close that one can say that it is a situation where absolutely everything concerns us (concerne), the movement of the proximity focusing in a point that supports the weight of the universe, a point from which the subject is responsible for everything and everybody all the way to substitution, that is, up to the hostage responsibility. Because he is responsible for everything and everyone in front of everybody, more than all the others; answering to the other means, for Lévinas, to answer for the other.

SHEM AND JAPHETH: THE HEBREW AND THE GREEK

„Supporter l'univers – charge écrasante, mais inconfort divin"
(Emmanuel Lévinas, Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence)

For Lévinas, the dissymetry that forces the subject to enter the discourse is nothing more than the dissymetry of two rationalities that are inseparable from two languages: it is the dissymetry between Hebrew and Greek. Because, he says, the proto-translation of the untranslatability of the face was done in Hebrew. Revelation is therefore the command "do not kill". When we see the face, we already hear "do not kill" because this commandment identifies itself with the

significance of the face itself. What the face silently says is a biblical word, a commandment that states it, but which, in fact, is only a saying. “If the first word is “do not kill”, the first word (i.e., God) is translated for the first time into Hebrew. Hebrew is the proto-translation of silence. (...) There is, from now on, a transcendental necessity for the Bible to be translated or to translate itself, to transfer into other languages what the Hebrew originally says about origin. But what other language is Greek for Lévinas or what is Greek?” (Chrétien, as cited in Lévinas, 2000, p. 319). Greek is philosophy, the language of reason, the universal language of the universal, so what is translated into Greek is consequently translated in all languages because Greek means rationality and universal translatability. Therefore, translating into Greek means making the universal.

For Lévinas, the history of being is nothing more than the history of a translation, for the Hebrew and the Greek meet in the translation of the Septuagint, within the Alexandrian Judaism. It is not the Greeks who learned Hebrew in order to know and translate the Torah; they did not learn Hebrew; it remained foreign to them; the Hellenic Jews are instead the ones who made the Torah become Bible. This translation gives birth to philosophy, and in this sense Lévinas's interpretation intends to oppose that of Heidegger, for whom the Greek must be translated. The “silent event” of the Septuagint constitutes, for Lévinas, an irreversible translation, because the Greek is being worked from within by a word other than its own, a foreign word. In this way, the Greek language is disturbed by the irruption of the Other. The Greek receives in it more than it can receive and says more than it can say. The translation of the Bible is the excess, what it translates is the trace of the Infinite. The way from Hebrew to Greek is without return, just like the “without return” of the Abrahamic adventure. The disruption of the Greek language by the word testifies to a primordial Saying, which must always be translated into Said. The word itself begins by translation, and, therefore, the original is already a translation. So, the Bible needs to be translated always and, for this reason, it can be said that “the Septuagint is unaccomplished”. What is said in the original word is only a “responsibility which, before the discourse about the said, is probably the essence of language” (Lévinas, 1982b, p. 157). The intrigue of the infinite in which this tradition is played is, for Lévinas, inspiration and prophecy, but let us not forget that always the face of the neighbor is what manifests itself as by speech, and that the face speaks translating the subject into responsibility.

> Without repose in self, without a solid base in the world, in that strangeness to all places, on the other side of the being, beyond being. (...) But that responsibility endured beyond all passivity from which no one can unleash me in raising me up from my incapacity to close myself in, that responsibility from which the Ego cannot escape – the ego for which the other cannot substitute himself – designates the uniqueness of the irreplaceable. Uniqueness without interiority, ego without repose in self, hostage of everyone, diverted from self in every movement of its return to self. (Lévinas, 1972, pp. 98-99)

"The Infinity of duty becomes an absolute election" (Chrétien, 1991, p. 270), through the recognizable election in the hostage responsibility to which the subject is consecrated – even in a religious sense – and by which it is unique:

> The contact in which I approach my neighbor is neither manifestation nor knowledge, but an ethical event instituting the possibility of the universality of statements. A transcendent contact of the ego with the neighbor, but not as its thematization, but the giving of a sign prior to any sentence, prior to any statement. This is the register of the enunciation. Language – ivy: a sign that says the very fact of the saying, in which we distinguished a complicity that is complicity for "nothing", that is, a fraternity. This sign – does it not bear, itself, the first word? The first word is the saying itself. (Lévinas, 2001, p. 329)

What is the sign that makes the book sacred? (Lévinas, 1982b, pp. 125-142). Its inspired content, and not its form, because the divinity of the Bible comes from its internal meaning that awakens an authentic obedience to the meaning of the meanings and to the face of the other man. The Bible is sacred and has this status because it disrupts our everyday interpretation and calls us to be responsible for others. If, for interpreters like Buber or Scholem, the Bible was sacred because it was revealed or because it was a primordial answer to the revelation, so it was based on this one, for Lévinas the voice that speaks to the reader through the words of the Bible is the voice of suffering and responsibility, and that which makes the Bible divine is the meaning of the other's face. Even when the name of God does not appear in the Bible, there is an ethical awakening:

> Another sense making a signal to a hearing which listens to what is beyond that which is being heard, to extreme knowledge, to awakened conscience. This other voice which resonates (...) in its purity as message, it is not only a certain form of speech, it actually dictates the content. The awakening is precisely this proximity of the other. The message as message in its way of reawakening is the modality, or even the "how" of the ethic that disrupts the established order of being. (Lévinas, 1982b, p. 137)

Learning from the Bible and its commentaries implies exploring it in our terms, linking it to the problems of modernity, and thus translating its motives, figures, stories into our language, into Greek.

The irreversible translation, about which Lévinas speaks, assumes that there is still a remnant, which is precisely the unpronounceable Name – the unsayable, unknowable is the effect of origin at the level of the signifier. The Name of the Father, unpronounceable and incomprehensible, is signifier of the Other of the Other; so again, it is important how, at the symbolic level, the real inscribes itself as Name of the Father, barring the symbolic. Lévinas says that the Hebrew – the Torah in Hebrew – is the expression of the Name, while the Greek is said – the Hebrew being the original saying – and the trace of the saying.

But what does the Talmud say about the translation of Hebrew spirituality into Greek? (Lévinas, 1988, p. 63sqq). Lévinas refers to the legend of the Septuagint, the first Greek translation of the Pentateuch, saying that the anecdotal value of this writing contains a truth independent from the historical reality, or even that this truth should be of interest to us. The Talmud registers opinions that, on the one

hand, maintain a universalistic attitude that recommends to us a translatable Judaism, open to the language of the peoples, without losing its sacred, that is, ethical character in the opinion of Lévinas, and, on the other hand, opinions that claim that there is no universal significance of Judaism which could be separable from the traditional forms, so Judaism is untranslatable. In addition, Lévinas distinguishes between cult and culture, that is, between the books and the universal teaching of Judaism and the "unaltered Judaism of the synagogue", with its ceremonies and rituals. The latter is untranslatable and internal, while the first is a Judaism open to modernity. The ceremonies and rituals reminding of the covenant are accompanied by the voice of the shofar. The voice, however, resonates not in a spatial void, but in a void which is the void of the Other as such, properly an ex nihilo. It's to the structure of the Other to form a certain void, the void of its lack of guarantee (Lacan, 2004, p. 318). But, as I said above, at Lévinas there is an Other of the Other to offer it a guarantee, it is the one for which the subject is hostage in the infinite responsibility.

There is, however, something unique in the exceptional relation existing between the Jewish wisdom and the Greek language: the Torah retains its sacred character when it is translated into Greek. The rabbinic Judaism that "wants to be a part of Europe" raises the issue of a covenant between the Hebrew Bible and the Greek one, which assumes an assimilation in Europe in relation to the "miracle of the agreement among the seventy-two translators." But this covenant or translation is limited, it is only up to a certain point. There are a number of cases where the Septuagint, the Greek, "corrects" and does not strictly translate the Hebrew. But these corrections, says Lévinas, are present precisely to show that "there is an untranslatable field at the very heart of the Pentateuch". If, on the one hand, some corrections are made for historical or political reasons, being deliberate alterations in order to avoid confusion or misunderstanding, on the other hand, some corrections reveal more subtle reflections: in certain situations, literal meaning requires an interpretation that is elaborated In a reading tradition. Thus, the translation of the Torah into Greek can be an attempt that brings with it moments in which the written text cannot and must not be understood without the Talmudic tradition. The translation implies communicating this old teaching to the modern culture without, however, altering its integrity, that is, knowing when it is possible or impossible to make a correction.

Finally, for Lévinas (Morgan, 2011, pp. 215-216) it is essential that the Bible must be translated into Greek because the latter brings method, deciphers, demitologizes and depoetizes, being the center of the academic, conceptual and prosaic discourse. All these functions are necessary because, without them, the ethical message would remain hidden and obscure, which means that, although translation is a risk, it is worthwhile assuming because, otherwise, it cannot be learned what the message itself is teaching. The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek is a face-to-face relation because the face, as trace, as epiphany of what is beyond

being, of the absolute absence, pertains to the translation as trace of the untranslatable.

Following Lévinas, we can legitimately ask whether "the Greek intelligibility suffices to the human" (Lévinas, 1988, p. 83), but we cannot disregard the Greek speech, this "school of patient speech" (Lévinas, 1988, p. 65). The translation of Hebrew – language of both Torah and Talmud – into Greek is none other but a translation of the untranslatable. (Morgan, 2011, pp. 215-216) "For us, this reading of the Talmud could not be made without recourse to a modern language" (Lévinas, 1982b, p. 126). This does not mean the dismissal of the Hebrew or Aramaic letter, but the care of a translation that knows that it only "makes what was, until now, a patrimony reserved for oral education to pass, perhaps too quickly, into the foreign languages, without losing its unusual figure in the new forms "(Lévinas, 1982b, p. 95).

The fifth book of the Pentateuch repeats, in fact, the teachings from the first four, but it is not just a matter of saying again, as an additional dimension, that of prophecy, is integrated (Bernheim, 1991, pp. 355-362): that means that this book does not content itself to say the word of the revelation as a globalizing word that would come to restore the order, to enforce the Law, but it accomplishes this word in the vocative. The Deuteronomy interpellates each person in their uniqueness in order to find their own way to the Law. It is precisely this patient word that must be incorporated into the statement of the law, while only this book can be translated into Greek because it carries the dimension of patience that is proper to the Greek language. For, before he died, Moses repeated the teachings said in the previous books, but he accomplished this word of the Law by instituting the word in the vocative, by questioning each one in their uniqueness, because only so can they find their own way to the Law. This book calls each one to make the Law come to them, in a specific approach that takes into account the particularity of each subject.

The excess of an anxiety irreducible to the forgetfulness of the being, anxiety which the prophets never ceased to remember, sometimes without their will, calls for the renewal of the depth of a relation with the inspired Book. This does not mean the will to add an inner experience to the outside experience. One must ascend from the world of the life already betrayed by knowledge, which revels in its theme and absorbs itself in the object to the point of losing its soul and its name, becoming mute and anonymous. By a movement against nature – for it is against the world – we must rise to another psychism than that of the world. (Lévinas, 1991, p. 99)

It must be seen here what the depth of a relationship with the Book means for Lévinas.

The word resonating in this Book was primordially entrusted to the genius of the Hebrew language, and its traditional hermeneutics still presupposes the knowledge of this language today, so that the legitimacy and pertinence of a translation of this Word into Greek – the Septuagint – was addressed very early in the circles of

Jewish scholars. A foreign language always carries meanings that are inherent to it, and thus seems to introduce them, by translation, into the biblical message:

> The resonance proper to the biblical text often disappears in translation. And it is not just the literary nuances, but also the fact that the abysses of significance disappear in any reading made in a language other than the original Hebrew of the Bible. (Hansel, 2008, p. 176)

Lévinas adheres to the interpretations of the Talmud scholars, for whom the infinite light of God does not reveal itself as infinite, but as finite and limited, and when we grasp the finite light, the infinite is the one that presents to us, but it always presents itself as a trace, and this trace is contracted in the letters of the Torah, it is the text itself, each letter revealing the infinity it carries in it.

Shem had to open the tents in which he studied the Torah before the speech of Japheth, and the tradition says that the Greeks were descendants of the latter. Translation is therefore necessary out of concern for universality because Lévinas believes that Greek is the language of clarity, of method, the "school of patient speech", the language of demystification and demythologization (Lévinas, 1988, p. 64, p. 65). But is the translation of the Septuagint irreversible in the sense that from now on any return to the original language would no longer be necessary or advisable? Hebrew is to be translated into Greek "for the Greek to go to its end, and for its project to pass into act" (Chrétien, as cited in Lévinas, 2000, p. 325). Worked from the inside by the Hebrew word, the Greek language ends by forgetting – which the history of Christian theology and philosophy shows – that the Hebrew language continues to watch over the potentialities of the meanings necessarily ignored by the Septuagint and its commentators, being tributaries to a spiritual interrogation of the Hebrew letter.

CONCLUSIONS

Lévinas (1993, p. 145) argues that despite the beauty and clarity of the Greek language (Kavka, 2012, p. 198) – the clarity of Japeth –, it retains the untranslatable. Thus, referring to Esther's book, he states that "the pain of antisemitic persecution is only mentioned in the language of the victim" (Lévinas, 1988, p. 56, as well as the untranslated dedication on Autrement qu'être), which means that one must return to Hebrew in order to speak of it – an essential point for a thought like that of Lévinas, who uses the term "persecution" insistently. Moreover, can "the extraordinary trace which the Revelation leaves in a thought that, beyond the sight of being, listens to the word of God" (Lévinas, 1988, p. 62) be said in Greek, that is, in the language of philosophy, if it is true that the grammatical categories of the Greek language "are thought by the Greek thought as categories of the being and as its intelligibility itself" (Lévinas, 1993, p. 145)? Does Lévinas claim that we must continue to translate Hebrew into Greek in an irreversible manner, as if, despite its failure, the orientation towards the clarity of Japheth would remain the condition of

a possibly universal thought? Or is the still untranslatable trace less unspeakable by the ontological conceptuality only at the expense of a betrayal, a term so frequently used in the work of the philosopher?

Lévinas never separates the written Torah from the oral Torah, that is, from the great commentators, from the wisdom of the Talmud masters, saying that first of all "Judaism is rabbinic" (Lévinas, 1976a, avant propos snd p. 28), being faithful to the principles of rabbinic hermeneutics: The written Torah is for the eyes, and the oral Torah is for the ears. Listening to a new meaning in the old words of the written Torah requires the round through the oral Torah. Therefore, if the Face is gaze and voice, the Book addresses itself to the sight and the listening, and the text is veil.

The Lévinasian text offers rich resources for the interpretation of the primordial experience of the subject prior to entering the historical time, an experience which, being failed, inscribes itself into language. So, if the first moment of subjectivation is a pre-language experience, if it is an experience of the amazement that aims for the indeterminate and reveals the assumption by the human being of the possibility of speaking, then, according to the position which the subject that is in the course of constituting itself takes in relation to this original opening, the psychic structures are configured. This original experience reveals a donation. Saying without said, but at Lévinas we believe that the opening of the opening and the answer that comes to the subject exposed to the face from elsewhere is linked, as we have indicated above, to the Other who bears a guarantee. Which means that the philosopher went further into his intuitions than, perhaps, some of his contemporaries did.

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