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Prophetic Subjectivity in Later Levinas: Sobering up from One's Own Identity

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Received: 29 November 2018; Accepted: 7 January 2019; Published: 14 January 2019

Abstract: This paper explores how Levinas redefines the traditional notion of prophecy, shifting the emphasis from the content of prophecy to the figure of the prophet, thus making prophetic inspiration a key feature of ethical subjectivity. The principal aim of the paper is to analyse the resulting triangular structure involving God and the Other. This structure is inherently unstable because God is incessantly stepping back in kenotic withdrawal. I show how this fundamental instability is reflected in the structure of the phenomenalisation of God's glory, the structure of obedience to God's order, and the structure of the authorship of prophecy. The prophetic experience is marked by heterogeneity; it can never be completely appropriated. Responsibility for the Other brings the subject to light as a witness of the glory of the Infinite, but not as the subject of self-identification.

Keywords: Levinas; prophecy; kenosis; identity; Rosenzweig; Kafka

1. Introduction

Prophecy is a phenomenon of religion; the philosophical analysis of such phenomena can be unfolded following a number of different strategies. For example, one can raise epistemological questions regarding the possibility of predicting the future, or investigating social, political, and ethical issues linked to the figure of prophet as a divinely inspired teacher of human law. Alternatively, one can seek to reconceptualise the notion of prophecy, to transfer it from the proper domain of religion to the universal domain of philosophy and use it as *an operative notion* to describe aspects of human life without necessarily linking them to any institutional religion.[1] Such an attempt can be found in the works of Levinas.[2] The notion of prophecy is substantially redefined by Levinas, in much the same way as the notion of messianism *stricto sensu* was extended and reinvented by Moses Hess, Mickiewicz, Benjamin, or Derrida to encompass not just the messianic expectations of Abrahamic religions but also the secular dream of final justice, the longing for the unknown God, or even the redemptive sufferings of a person or a nation.

Levinas suggests a reading of prophecy which shifts the emphasis from prophecy as transmission of a divine message to the prophet herself and her relation to God and to other humans. Prophecy thus belongs to the *conditio humana*: 'Man as such is potentially a prophet!' (Lévinas [1982] 1994, p. 144).

[1] There is no doubt that Levinas' innovative interpretation of prophecy is heavily influenced by the Jewish religious thought where it legitimately belongs; in the case of prophecy, as in many other cases, Levinas' philosophical insights are grounded in his reading of Biblical, Rabbinic, and modern Jewish sources. The significance of Levinas' interpretation of prophecy, however, should not be limited to Jewish studies or to religious thought in general; the scope of his philosophical work surpasses the domain of the religious and provides an access to treasures of a religious tradition even to those who do not belong to it. There is a vast literature on Levinas and the Jewish tradition as well as on Levinas and the religious thought in general; this paper does not aim to contribute to this matter.

[2] Long before Levinas, Maimonides gave a philosophical interpretation of the Biblical prophecy. For a comparison of the interpretations of Maimonides and Levinas, see Cohen (2016).

Prophetic inspiration is no longer seen as a particular phenomenon of religious life, but as a way to discover and express responsibility. Prophecy is essentially a response. Through this response, God becomes involved in human speech. Responding to the other and for the other, I reveal God as God who loves the stranger. This "weak" form of revelation, a phenomenalisation which is permanently "undone" by God's kenotic withdrawal, brings forth a structure of subjectivity which serves as a medium for this phenomenalisation. This weak form of revelation corresponds to a heteronomy that turns into autonomy but never quite attains pure autonomy. The subject lacks homogeneity; my experience is never entirely my own, and as such it is not experience properly speaking. It includes foreign elements that cannot be assimilated or appropriated, and yet they are not enclosures that could be separated from me. Prophecy is a name for this (non)appropriation of God's commandment in my speech.

In this situation, my identity becomes problematic because I speak for myself and yet not for myself; as Levinas puts it, I become the author of what I hear. Thus, the relocation of the notion of prophecy from religious experience to philosophical investigation requires a reconceptualisation of selfhood and self-identity. I am not primarily for myself and only then responsible for the other, I am first and foremost a part of a triangular structure involving God and the Other, two radically different kinds of alterity. This paper focuses on the side of this triangle which links the prophet to God, with the figure of the Other in the background. The reader of Levinas will notice that instead of describing prophecy as a phenomenon, he uses it as an operative notion (cf. Fink [1976] 2004, pp. 180–204); my task in this paper is to clarify the meaning of this Levinasian concept.

Firstly, I shall briefly outline the structure of this paper. In Section 2, I give a short survey of prophecy as it appears in later writings of Levinas. In Section 3, prophecy is studied as a mode of theophany in which God is not made manifest, but appears indirectly. Comparison with Rosenzweig helps to clarify the triangular structure alluded to above. In Section 4, I approach the interplay of autonomy and heteronomy through the metaphor of "the law written on the heart" employed by Levinas and compare its use by Levinas with Kafka's literal interpretation of this metaphor in his short story '*In the Penal Colony*' (*In der Strafkolonie*). Finally, I investigate how prophecy dismantles the traditional notion of identity and authorship in Section 5.

In this paper, besides the classical works by Cohen (2001); Chalier (2002); Handelman (1991); Llewelyn (1995); and Ben-Bassat (1997), I rely on more recent books by Franck (2008); Katz (2012); Basterra (2015); and Frangeskou Adonis (2017). A very clear and concise introduction to the question of prophecy in Levinas is provided by Cohen (2016, pp. 64–83), whereas a more extensive analysis can be found in Waldenfels (1995); Bergo (1999, pp. 169–206); and Calin (2005, pp. 291–33). In my phenomenological analysis of Levinas's work, I am drawing upon Bernet (2000); Marion (2007); and Tengelyi (2009). I also would like to single out an important paper by the late Richir (1998).

2. Non-Thematic Prophecy in Later Levinas: Preliminary Remarks

In this section, I give a short overview of the Levinasian approach to prophecy and introduce the main themes that will be developed later in the paper. The very notion of "prophecy" is almost absent in Levinas' thought until late on; in the main text of *Totality and Infinity*, his first *opus magnum* (1961), he mentions "prophetic word" only once (Lévinas [1961] 1969, p. 213). A prophetic word is described there as 'an irreducible moment of discourse' which 'attests the presence of the third party'; as such, it belongs to the 'public order' (Lévinas [1961] 1969, p. 212) and thus indicates the exigencies of justice and of eschatological peace. Yet in *Otherwise than being* (1974), Levinas explores the notion of prophecy from a different angle: in the subsection called *Witness and Prophecy* (Lévinas [1974] 1981, pp. 149–53) he identifies the ethical dimension of language with prophecy, and claims that 'all of man's spirituality' is 'prophetic' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 149). The meaning of the word "prophecy" is displaced from the eschatological perspective to which it was exposed in *Totality and Infinity*; it is not a 'miraculous prediction of the future' (Cohen 2016, p. 68), but a simple "here I am" (*me voici*, *hineini*), my non-thematic and non-thetic answer to my fellow human being

in need. These words neither describe a future state of affairs nor prescribe anything to the other. With these words I am *presenting* myself to the Other, I am 'making myself available to another', says Hilary Putnam (2002, p. 74). Instead of passing the Other a piece of information or an order, I give her a sign—a sign of my unreserved responsibility for her and before her.

There is a subtle difference from the biblical context in which the words "here I am" originally appeared. The prophets—Samuel and Isaiah—respond 'here I am' to God (1 Sam. 3:4, Isa. 6:8, see also Gen. 22:1, Ex. 3:4), and Levinas renders the meaning of this answer as 'send me' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 199). Yet the ethical subject responds "here I am" not to God, but to another human being 'in the name of God'. My prophetic response is primarily my response to the other, although the commandment which I encounter in the other's defenceless face is God's commandment (Lévinas [1982] 1998, pp. 162, 166). This is how 'God is for the first time involved in words' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 149): prophecy is 'the passing itself of the Infinite' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 150, italics by author) as this answer 'bears witness' to God's glory.

The structure of prophecy is intertwined with that of prescription (Calin 2005, p. 299). The emergence of prophecy in *Otherwise than Being* (1974) is accompanied by moving away from the ethics of pure heteronomy of the commandment "Thou shall not kill" emanating from the face of the Other. Already in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Levinas' interpretation of the prescription becomes more sophisticated. An important point in this transformation is exemplified in Levinas' reflections on obedience in connection with his interpretation of Ex. 24:7 in a commentary on a passage from the Talmudic tractate *Shabbat* (Lévinas 1990, pp. 30–50). The meaning of Israel's answer to God in Ex. 24:7 is far from unequivocal. While the King James Bible translates this verse as "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient", Levinas[3] following the Jewish tradition proposes to translate it as "We will do and we will hear" stressing the reversal of the usual chronological order. The obedience of Israel to God's law is expressed as an obligation that is prior to any commitment; it cannot be stated in terms of the linear, representable, recoverable time of consciousness. The *doing* that precedes the *hearing* reveals 'the deep structure of subjectivity' (Lévinas 1990, p. 42), so that the temporal structure of subjectivity is revealed as anachronic. The similar reversal of call and answer permeates Levinas' view of prophecy. In *Otherwise than Being* he makes an allusion to Isa. 65:24: 'before they call, I will answer', but reads this verse the other way round: it is not God who answers before humans calls for Him, it is the human subject who responds without having already heard the call (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 150). The responsibility of the subject is manifested in the prophetic response itself; there is no commitment or oath that precedes it.

The order, or the call, does not precede my prophetic answer but is found 'in my response itself' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 150). The answer coincides with the perception of the call; the call is somehow internalised without losing its external character: 'I make myself the author of what I hear' (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 76). Levinas refers here to Amos 3:6: 'The lion hath roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken! Who can but prophesy?', emphasising both the essential receptivity of the prophet as well as her 'participation' in 'the work of Revelation' (Lévinas [1982] 1994, p. xiii). This receptivity is not only affective, it is also rational as it is manifested in listening and learning. In his Talmudic commentaries Levinas goes beyond a purely non-thematic concept of prophecy by also including in it the work of interpretation: 'The reading of the prophetic text is still to a certain extent prophetic' (Lévinas [1982] 1994, p. xvi). This understanding of prophecy covers not just a non-thematic answer to the Other, but equally well a thematic extension and amplification of meaning. Prophecy 'renews' and reactivates the Revelation (Lévinas [1988] 1994, p. 20). In this paper, we cannot consider this important aspect of prophecy in any detail, neither shall we treat social and political aspects of prophecy.

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[3] Levinas here follows as well as innovates traditional Jewish exegesis of this passage; for more details see (Katz 2012, pp. 92–97).

3. Prophecy as (Non)Phenomenalisation of God's Glory

In this section, I view prophecy as a form of theophany that in some particular way reveals God and at the same time hides Him: the prophecy reveals God in His commandment and hides Him in His glory. God is manifested and glorified in the very structure of the subjectivity of the subject, but this manifestation of glory is not accessible to the subject herself and is lived through as a non-manifestation. The task is to elucidate the specificity of this phenomenalisation which is also a 'dephenomenalisation' of God.

Prophetic inspiration as it is depicted in *Otherwise than Being* (1974), *God, Death and Time* (1992), and *Of God who Comes to Mind* (1982) apparently lacks the key features of prophecy: the prophesying subject neither foretells the future nor enters into direct contact with God, nor transmits the word of God to the others. However, Levinasian prophecy satisfies another crucial condition of prophecy: prophecy *reveals God*, although in a rather enigmatic manner. The notion of the 'glory of the Infinite' that plays a crucial role in Levinas's account of prophecy expands and intensifies some of Franz Rosenzweig's intuitions regarding prophecy and miracles. Indeed, prophecy and miracles are primarily 'signs' (*Zeichen*), the signs of God's law. The prophetic predicament is more than a statement about future events that eventually proves correct; prophecy binds the future, or rather discloses the future, as conforming to 'the dominion of providence' (Rosenzweig [1921] 1971, p. 95). One can say that, in Rosenzweig, God is indicated in prophecy; in other words, prophecy is a kind of theophany: in prophecy, God makes himself manifest in an indirect way. This idea of prophecy as an indirect manifestation of God resonates in Levinas's idea of revelation 'without appearing' (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 197). However, Levinas's phenomenological training enables him to articulate this form of phenomenalisation by means of more elaborate constructions. This mode of (non)manifestation of God in prophecy Levinas calls 'glory'; to prophesise is to 'bear witness' to this glory of the Infinite.

The metaphor of 'glory' refers to the theophany to Moses in Ex. 33:18–23 (cf. Lévinas 1967, p. 211, see also Robbins 1995, p. 197). God shows His glory to Moses in the mode of absence, or, as Levinas puts it in 1963, 'in his trace only' (Lévinas 1967, p. 202). Trace is a non-representable residue left by the Other in the domain of the Same. It is not a sign which could at some point be incorporated in synchronic thematisation, but rather a disturbance of the Same that interrupts its course. Glory is the trace of the Infinite on the subject that confirms her responsibility for her fellow human being in the prophetic saying "here I am". This glory 'could not appear', 'could not become a phenomenon' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 144) without the subject who 'bears witness' to this glory. This particular type of bearing witness is not a testimony to a certain event that took place in the subject's past; it does not describe here and now what happened to the subject then and there; it is not a constative as it 'does not thematise what it bears witness of' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 146). Hilary Putnam classified this saying as a 'speech act' (Putnam 2002, pp. 74–75), but such an interpretation is somewhat misleading: the notion of 'act' presupposes that the subject actively commits herself to the responsibility of the subject: then 'the very notion of prophecy' would be 'postulated upon power to respond' (as stated by Ben-Bassat 1997, p. 409). On the contrary, the subject of "here I am" is devoid of agency, be it even the agency to respond: 'under the glory of the Infinite, an ash is necessary in which activity could not be reborn' (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 191, see also Habib 2005, pp. 112–38). The prophetic subjectivity is completely passive: 'glory is but the other face of the passivity of the subject' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 144). So, "here I am" neither describes nor presents a state of affairs (as a thematic statement would do), nor does it change social conventions (as a speech act would do); however, this saying does something: indeed, it makes the subject herself appear, makes her leave her clandestine inner life where she hides from responsibility (Lévinas [1974] 1981, pp. 147, 150). The glory does not appear, but it is 'glorified' by the subject; the Infinite does not appear *as* the Infinite (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 197), but the witness of the glory appears, and such is indeed the mode of the manifestation of the glory.

This phenomenalisation of the subject in prophetic witnessing to the glory of the Infinite does not expose the interiority of the subject, her "inner life"; it shows forth the very structure of the subjectivity instead:

> Glory is glorified by the subject's coming out of the dark corners of the "as-for-me," which, like the thickets of Paradise in which Adam hid himself upon hearing the voice of the eternal God traversing the garden from the side from which the day comes, offered a hiding-place from the assignation. (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 144)

One can say that for Levinas, the prophetic response "here I am" serves as an antidote to Adam's inability to answer God's question "where art thou". Adam hides himself instead of assuming responsibility, but the prophet finds herself 'torn up from the secrecy of Gyges' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 149) and 'taken by the hair' into the 'sincerity' of "here I am". The allusion to the violent events of Ez. 8:3–5 emphasizes a new aspect of radical passivity in the subject's exposure: in the same way as Ezekiel was lifted by the lock of his hair and brought into the vision of men's iniquities and God's glory, the Levinasian prophetic subjectivity is 'exposed' to the Other 'despite oneself' (Lévinas [1982] 1994, p. 9). In prophecy, there is no pathological fusion with the Master's will, were God Himself the Master; the obedience of the prophet is not that of a Hegelian Slave who cannot distinguish herself from the Master (Lévinas [1953] 1994, pp. 37–38). The radical passivity of the prophetic subject does not lead to her complete destruction as a separate being. The prophet is brought into light, although despite herself.

Levinas's exegesis of Gen. 3:9–10 echoes that of Rosenzweig in *Star of Redemption*, where Adam's failure to respond to God's call was also juxtaposed to Abraham's and Samuel's "here I am":

> To God's "where art Thou?" the man had still kept silence as a defiant and blocked Self. Now, called by his name, twice, in a supreme definiteness that could not but be heard, now he answers, all unlocked, all spread apart, all ready, all-soul: "Here I am." Here is the I, the individual human I, as yet wholly receptive, as yet only unlocked, only empty, without content, without nature, pure readiness, pure obedience, all ears. (Rosenzweig [1921] 1971, p. 176)

For Rosenzweig this obedience comes from hearing, it is obedience to the command "love God with all your heart" that originates from the 'discoursing divine mouth' (Rosenzweig [1921] 1971, pp. 176–77, see also Handelman 1991, p. 267); the relation between God and I is described in this passage as a relation between the lovers.[4] For Levinas, though, the obedience of the prophet is obedience to the command "thou shall not kill", which is encountered in the face of the Other; both God and the other human being are involved in the structure of prescription. This command commands me with my own voice to prophesise, that is, to 'give sign' to the Other and thus to 'signify me in the name of God, at the service of men' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 149). Prophecy is not my dialogue with God or even the prophetic answer to the preceding God's call (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 203): it is an answer to my fellow human being "in the name of God". This answer not only makes me manifest as a sign of my own responsibility, it reveals my own being as unjustified and thus "justifies" Being (Lévinas [1988] 1994, p. 126).

There is a close relation between the redemptive manifestation of the subject in prophecy and the (non)appearance of God's glory. On the one hand, the glory is glorified or witnessed in the very structure of subjectivity; the prophecy attests it and thus functions as a revelation of God's glory. On the other hand, this very attestation occurs as a "progressive dephenomenalisation" of the Infinite (Robbins 1995, p. 34). The prophet is not even able to say "I believe in God" as these words would posit God as a theme or as a thesis (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 149; Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 200); even such form of thematisation is not prophetic properly speaking. In other words, prophetic subjectivity

[4] The structure of triangulation in Rosenzweig is different from that of Levinas; for more details, see Gibbs (1992, pp. 70–72, 99–100).

is neither the dative nor the agent of this phenomenalisation, that is, the 'who' '*to whom and by which*' (Hart 2009, p. 98; cf. also Richir 1998, p. 155) God's glory is revealed. The subject of "here I am" is neither the *agent*, that is, the master, the *arche* of the phenomenalisation of the glory, nor is this subject the *dative*, the receptor of the phenomenalisation of the glory: 'the glory does not appear to the subject who bears witness of it' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 146; see also Marion 2007, p. 64). On the contrary, I *am* this glory, this trace of the Infinite (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 75). The glory cannot become phenomenon without a witness of the glory, outside the prophetic subject (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 193), but the prophet is not able to behold this glory. Nor is the prophetic subject able to get hold of herself *qua* prophetic subject. In prophecy the subject 'makes herself visible before making herself a seer' (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 75). Thus understood, the function of prophetic subjectivity is a messianic function of the *medium of phenomenalisation* for the glory [cf. Marion 2001, p. 111].

The outcome is that the prophetic subject is not able to grasp herself as the subject of responsibility. Her capacity for self-reflection is called into question; her sovereign control of her own self is shattered. Her subjectivity contains germs of something totally alien: the structure of prophecy is described by Levinas as the other-in-me. Nevertheless, I am still separated from the Other; I do not coincide with the Other: the 'immemorial irruption of alterity in the selfhood' (Tengelyi 2009, p. 409) should not result in my complete destruction as an autonomous being. However, it requires a totally different notion of autonomy. Levinas seeks to overcome the Kantian juxtaposition of autonomy and heteronomy; his solution is grounded in his phenomenology of hetero-affection. In the next section, I analyse one of the key moments in his construction, that is, his reading of the biblical allegory of the law written in consciousness.

4. The Heteronomy of God's Command: Kafka and Levinas

It is difficult to distinguish between prophecy and adjacent phenomena such as witnessing, inspiration, and glory (Ajzenstat 2001, p. 123) as there is no clear-cut distinction between them in Levinasian thought. However, if one had to point out a distinctive feature of prophecy as a particular phenomenon, it would be the 'intrigue' in which the prophetic subject makes herself the author of what she hears (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 76), that is, makes herself the author of God's order which she herself obeys:

> Prophetism could be the name of this reversal in which the perception of the order coincides with the fact that he who obeys it also signifies it . . . It is the singular obedience to the order to surrender prior to hearing an order. (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 200)

Before one is ready to discuss this enigma of authorship that constitutes the very heart of subjectivity as prophetic, one needs to examine what is meant here by the concept of 'obedience' to the order that is issued and signed by the subject herself. One needs to distinguish this anachronic obedience from the pure and simple obedience to the previously unknown order.

As indicated in the preliminary remarks, the prophetic answer "here I am" bears significant semblance to Israel's paradigmatic response "we will do and we will hear" of Ex. 24:7. The temporal structure of prophecy is analogous to the temporal structure of receiving the gift of Torah on Mount Sinai. The 'secret 'of this response, which Levinas calls 'the secret of angels' (Lévinas 1990, p. 46), cannot be reduced to simple trust or even to the primacy of praxis over theory (Lévinas 1990, p. 43). This secret is twofold: on the one hand, it is the secret of the anachronic reversal of a temporal sequence and, on the other hand, it is the paradox of an action that does not originate in the possibility of this action (Ibid) and thus does not depend on the conditions of this possibility. The answer "we will do and we will hear" shares both these features with the prophetic "here I am".

However, there is also a noteworthy difference between these two confirmations of obedience. In prophecy, God's command is not just obeyed before it is heard: the very words of God are somehow transformed in the subject's own response; as a result, the subject apparently receives this order out of herself (cf. Basterra 2015, p. 127). The nature of this transformation is also rooted in the 'ambiguity'

of the transformation of heteronomy into autonomy. The structure of prophecy is triangular: I meet God's order when I find myself in the proximity of the other. This proximity anachronously affects me in a way that *apparently* makes me appropriate, if not assimilate, this very order. This ambiguous transition from what was alien to what is mine is described by Levinas in terms of the "metaphor":

> Obedience precedes any hearing of the command. The possibility of finding, anachronously, the order in the obedience itself, and of receiving the order out of oneself, this reverting of heteronomy into autonomy, is the very way the Infinite passes itself. The metaphor of the inscription of the law in consciousness expresses this in a remarkable way, reconciling autonomy and heteronomy. It does so in an ambivalence, whose diachrony is the signification itself, an ambivalence which, in the present, is an ambiguity. (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 148)

The 'metaphor' of the *law written in one's heart* refers to the famous passage from Jeremiah quoted by St. Paul (Rom. 2:14):

> "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days," saith the Lord, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be My people". (Jer. 31:33)

Such a law is not to be offered and then accepted, or, we can even say, is not to be obeyed and then heard, as it was on Sinai; such a law is to be *inserted within* the subject and thus become an inherent part of the subject herself. An external law of God is converted into an internal law of the subject by means of the *inscription*.

Levinas uses the word 'metaphor' but, taken as a metaphor, this particular image of the *appropriation* of the law is far from being innocent or inoffensive. Understood literally, as it was done by Kafka, it represents the horrible image of the sadistic God: the law is to be literally carved into the skin of the condemned prisoner by means of an ingeniously designed torture machine. The commandment (*das Gebot*) is unknown to the subject and originally foreign to him, but the torture is to impose the law on the lawless subject: once the law has been cut on the flesh, it will lose its exterior character, it will be assimilated by the subject's living body and thus appropriated by the self. The law of the sadistic God is inflicted on the affected subject by means of wounds and injuries; it is to be made manifest in the subject's living body. The subject's flesh plays the role of the dative as well as of the 'instrument' of phenomenalisation for the law which is to appear to the subject. This phenomenalisation of the law in the physical suffering coincides with its assimilation by the subject: the subject is no longer able to distinguish herself from the suffering and thus from the law. The law would eventually replace the subject's previous identity, but this unity of the subject and the law is expressed in the subject's destruction: once the climax is reached, it gives place to the annihilation of the subject, that is, her death.

As well as in Kafka, the subject in Levinas is *affected* by the commandment rather than accepting it consciously and freely; God's word is somehow absorbed by the subject due to the subject's own vulnerability. One cannot write on a heart of stone, only on a heart of flesh (Levinas refers indirectly to Ez. 36:26 in Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 71). In Levinas, however, despite a deceptive similarity, this metaphor of the "inscription" brings forth a very different structure of relation between God and humans, and a very different structure of the phenomenalisation of God's order.

Kafka's subject is affected in his flesh, that is, in his *own* ability to suffer. But for Levinas "to be prone to physical suffering" does not exhaust the meaning of "to have a heart of flesh"; it reveals a much more complex structure of affection. To be vulnerable means to be wounded by something that does not happen to me: God's law is written on my heart not by my own sufferings but by the sufferings of my fellow human being. To be inspired is to feel the pain of the other: not just to empathise or to sympathise with the Other but to feel the pain of the Other within my own non-metaphorical flesh, my own skin:

> I exist through the other and for the other but without this being alienation: I am inspired. This inspiration is the psyche. The psyche can signify this alterity in the same without

> alienation in the form of incarnation, as being-in-one's-skin, having-the-other-in-one's-skin. (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 115)

As Rudolf Bernet puts it, I am traumatised not by my own trauma, but rather by the trauma of the other (Bernet 2000, p. 176). However, neither the sufferings of my fellow human being nor God's command is just a 'cause' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 150) or even an 'origin' (Basterra 2015, p. 121) of my response: to have a heart of flesh means to be affected beyond all forms of causality. This constitutes a key feature of the incarnated subjectivity. I am affected not just by the sheer fact of the Other's suffering and death, but I am affected also by the Other's mortality, by her potential exposure to suffering which turns into the (inter)facticity of my own exposure to the wounds and thus into my responsibility. Levinas introduces 'recurrence', using the metaphor of *echo*: the subject is 'like a sound that would resound it in its own echo' or even 'precede' this resonance (Lévinas [1974] 1981, pp. 103, 111). This autoreferential recurrence is a specific mode of repeated auto-affection that is paradoxically rooted in the diachronic past of my assignation to the Other: the life of oneself as an incarnated being cannot be linearised as it is always already offered to the Other.

Using a slightly different conceptual language, one can say that to be affected by the sufferings of the Other is to undergo (or rather to have anachronously undergone) a trauma that wounded me beyond my own passibility, beyond my very ability to be affected. To use a term coined by Henri Maldiney, it means to be transpassible (Maldiney 1991, pp. 419–25; cf. also Murakami 2002, p. 142), that is, to transcend the domain of one's own—one's own thoughts, words, deeds and even one's own possibilities. The unity of experience is no longer interpreted in terms of "belonging" to a self; the self that was understood as a kind of a mission control centre, by whom all experiences are owned and governed, is shattered and undone. To the 'recurrent' structure of affection corresponds the 'recurrent' and 'ambiguous' structure of phenomenalisation of the law: I am affected by the sufferings of the other, but I am also 'affected by non-phenomenon' of God's order (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 75). I am affected by this order beyond all forms of phenomenality. God's 'non-phenomenal' and immemorial order does not appear in the sufferings of the other or even through the sufferings of the other: it 'reveals' itself to me only *in* my response and *qua* mine own response (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 150).

The presence of the other in me, this 'seed of folly'[5] that constitutes the very psyche of the soul (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 91), prevents the subject from grasping herself *qua* stable, 'instituted' self (in this matter, I disagree with Richir who claims the exact opposite in Richir 1998, p. 178). In the next section, I will analyse how this instability of the authorship of prophecy leads to the problematisation of self-identity.

5. Prophecy as Dismantling of Self-Identity

The notion of prophecy in Levinasian sense is closely related to his critique of self-identity understood as a progressive self-determination. Levinas does not differentiate between reflective and narrative concepts of identity (cf. Romano 2017; Fuchs 2007); his reading of Kant and Husserl is heavily influenced by that of Heidegger. As a result, the implicit notion on selfhood which he criticises has distinctive features of both these concepts. According to Levinas, self-identity is constituted in the process of constant self-identification. The aim of this identification is to delineate the sphere of my 'own' clearly and unambiguously; identification is a two-way process of assimilation and alienation (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 17). The notion of the transcendental unity of apperception leads to the concept of subjectivity as objectivity; the subject of cognition has to be constantly present to herself. Therefore, the vigilance of consciousness would be manifested in the activity of consciousness (Lévinas [1982] 1998,

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[5] Levinas here echoes Merleau-Ponty, who claimed that 'there can be speech (and in the end personality) only for an I which contains the germ of a depersonalisation' (Merleau-Ponty [1969] 1974, p. 19). According to Merleau-Ponty, the boundaries of the I are always somewhat blurred, and the reader of a book or the interlocutor in a dialogue may not be fully aware where ends one's own mental activity and where the voice of the other starts speaking in one's heart or mind. The disembodied *cogito*, which is closed on itself and transparent for itself, is but a construct.

pp. 16–17), its power of re-presentation. The transcendental unity of apperception 'confirms' the primacy of the presence; the synchronic conception of temporality requires the unity of the subject which is guaranteed by the historiography of consciousness (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 102). To put it another way, self-identity is reached as a result of a certain hermeneutics: in the course of life, I incessantly identify myself *qua* this or that; but this multifaceted manifold of meanings has to be somehow harmonised in a more or less coherent image of oneself. Identification is a consolidation of self that occurs as a certain solidification of different meanings of "who I am": I am the one who stays the same under the blows of life, whose accidental vulnerability only highlights her essential invulnerability (Lévinas [1982] 1998, pp. 16–17).

The relative permanence of this 'hermeneutical' identity is secured by the permanence of the authorship of one's words, thoughts, feelings, and deeds, as well as by one's ability to integrate past and future events into a coherent narrative (cf. Fuchs 2007); but in the case of prophecy, it turns out to be a problem. On the one hand, the diachronic structure of prophetic subjectivity resists all attempts to linearise the prophetic experience in a 'story'; on the other hand, the homogeneity and consistence of the authorship of the prophecy are radically disturbed. 'An order slipped into my consciousness like a thief, smuggled itself in' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 13), and so I am not able to ascribe its authorship to God or myself. I do not respond to the other on behalf of myself, neither do I respond to the other on behalf of God. As a result, neither I am a unique source of my response, nor is God or another human being.

As was shown above, the 'reversal' of heteronomy into autonomy depends on the twofold structure of affection: I am recurrently affected by the other and my own life, and I am affected by God's invisible command. The "drama" of prophecy involves three actors: God, my neighbour and I as the subject of responsibility, the one who says "here I am". The prophecy as triangular structure is radically devoid of symmetry because my relation to the Other and my relation to the Infinite as 'the other of this Other' (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 69) are profoundly dissimilar. So, the prophecy is marked by fundamental ambiguity (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 162) which reflects the triangular structure of desire, described by Levinas in his last work, *Of God who Comes to Mind* (1982). My affection by the alterity of the other is irrevocable; I cannot free myself from it. Levinas uses the terms 'obsession' and even 'persecution' to emphasise that the proximity of the Other is neither chosen nor desired. The other is 'undesirable', says Levinas, undesirable as a stranger, refugee, immigrant in the land of the Same. On the contrary, the Infinite is desired, God is *the* Desirable. But God 'loves the stranger' (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 166) and thus the Desirable 'deflects' my desire to the undesirable: from God to another human being (Lévinas [1982] 1998, pp. 68–69). There is no direct relationship between God and the subject: 'God is the third person or *Illeity*' (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 203, italics by Levinas), because the second person, Thou, could only be another human being. Such is a love triangle of desire. However, this triangularity is not stable: God escapes not only phenomenalisation, He also escapes Being. God's transcendence 'turns into' my responsibility for the others up to the very obliteration of God's name (Lévinas [1982] 1994, pp. 122–23): the triangular structure of desire (God, the other and I) is substituted by the new triangularity of prophecy where God is replaced by the trace of His infinite retreat (cf. Richir 1998, p. 179). The Infinite 'withdraws', and it is indeed the face of the other as the trace of this kenotic withdrawal that 'addresses the other to my responsibility' (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 196). The non-thematisable God makes a "step back", disappearing from sight in kenotic self-obliteration; the phenomenalisation of God's order in prophecy constantly "flickers" between phenomenality and non-phenomenality. As Levinas puts it, the Infinite 'enigmatically commands me, commanding and non-commanding'; the authorship of my response to the other flickers accordingly.

The ambivalence of the authorship of prophecy reflects the fact that the place of God has to be left vacant. The prophecy as 'receiving the order out of oneself' does not presuppose that I usurp God's place, that I blasphemously substitute myself for God (Richir 1998, p. 168). I am not a mediator between God and the other, the role that is commonly ascribed to the biblical prophets. As Mark Richir beautifully puts it, 'the prophet . . . is not a megaphone of God, even less is he or she His representative

or lieutenant' (Richir 1998, p. 175). However, Levinasian prophecy does not exclude mediation, although of a different sort. As a prophet, I neither substitute myself for God, nor do I serve as a spokesperson for Him; but I have to become a spokesperson for *myself*. According to Levinas, in prophecy I serve as an 'interpreter' (*truchement*) of the words I utter (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 76), as an intermediary for the speech that turned out to be my own (Lévinas [1974] 1981, p. 149). This mediation is needed because, as a prophet, I am no longer equal to myself, I am no longer present to myself, I am no longer "myself" (cf. Tengelyi 2009, p. 406). As Jean-Luc Marion puts it, 'I can no longer even speak by myself since I no longer have any self available to me' (Marion [2008] 2012, p. 25).

The very notion of "myself" as a self-identic entity is thus called into question. In a sense, one puts oneself into God's place when one postulates the identity of the self. Prophecy, on the contrary, is the awakening from the somnambulism of self-identity. As Levinas puts it,

> Ethics—appearing as the prophetic—is not a 'region', a layer or an ornament of being. It is, of itself, actual dis-interestedness, which is possible only under a traumatic experience whereby 'presence', in its imperturbable equality of presence, is disturbed by 'the other'. Disturbed, awoken, transcended. (Lévinas [1982] 1994, p. 211)

Prophecy is a traumatic awakening: the *waking up* of the Same by the Other (Lévinas [1992] 2000, p. 200, italics by author). The other 'sobers me up' from the intoxication with my own self that would deprive me of my vulnerability: it is my responsibility for the other that 'does not let me constitute myself into *I think*, as substantial as a stone or, like a heart of stone, into in- and for-self' (Lévinas [1982] 1998, p. 71). It is due to this responsibility for the other that the subject is no longer able to identify herself with the transcendental unity of apperception or another construction that could serve as a useful or even as an inevitable transcendental illusion.

6. Conclusions

Non-thematic prophecy reveals God not in any particular events, past or future, but in the very structure of subjectivity as that is responsible for the Other and before the Other. Prophecy brings the subject to light as a witness to the glory of the Infinite. Responding "here I am", the Levinasian prophet bears witness to the non-manifested glory of God while making herself appear in a particular mode of appearance. She does not expose her inner life, but makes herself visible while responding to her fellow human being 'in the name of God'. The prophetic response 'here I am' thus "undoes" Adam's hiding from God (Gen. 3:10), making the prophet manifest as a sign of her responsibility. The subject of prophecy is neither an agent of this phenomenalisation of God's glory, nor is she a mere receptor of this phenomenalisation, but her very subjectivity serves as a medium of phenomenalisation for the glory.

The redemptive character of prophecy in Levinas is shared by Rosenzweig. Both thinkers see prophecy as a kind of indirect theophany where God is indicated as a Giver of Law. Levinas inscribes prophecy in a triangular structure which involves the Other. "Here I am" is not just an acknowledgement of responsibility and a confirmation of obedience, it is an expression of a messianic and redemptive role of the prophetic subject responsible for the world.

My next step was to describe the specificity of obedience to God who permanently eludes a relationship, whose order, properly speaking, is not made manifest to the prophet. The Kantian dichotomy of autonomy and heteronomy proves insufficient for this purpose. To resolve this difficulty, Levinas employs the metaphor of the law written on the heart which illustrates the appropriation of God's law by the subject. Our comparison with Kafka shows how problematic this appropriation can be if the relation to God is understood as His immediate impact on the subject. In Levinas, I am not directly affected by God, I am affected by the need of the Other. The structure of this affection reveals how the subject of "here I am" transcends her own experience.

The *metaphor* of the inscription literally *transfers* the subject out of the logic of the Same as opposed to the Other; the logic of self-identity is replaced by the logic of the Other-in-the-Same,

the logic of inspiration. God's law is not imposed on the subject by an external force, it belongs to the very core of subjectivity. God's order is felt like a crack that opens up between my self and my consciousness, between my Saying and my thematic Said. The subject affected by this order fundamentally lacks self-identity.

The triangular structure of prophecy reveals the subject as doubly affected by transcendence: the transcendence of God and the transcendence of the Other. These two kinds of transcendence are radically different. God is the Desired One, although it is not to Him that I answer "Here I am". The Other is not desirable and is not desired, but it is to the Other that I answer "Here I am". The phenomenalisation of God in my prophetic response to the Other can be suspended so that I fully serve the Other. On the other hand, the transcendence of the Other cannot be suspended or obliterated. This double transcendence imposes double heterogeneity, which is the reason why the subject traumatised by the Other is not completely crushed by her subjection to the Other, neither is the subject obedient to God enslaved by God. The double, prophetic heterogeneity opens a way for a new understanding of the subject beyond the illusory identity defined by its opposition to alterity or anonymity.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I am grateful to the anonymous referees for their careful reading of the paper and helpful comments. Support from the Basic Research Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics is gratefully acknowledged.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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