

The Grammar of the other, the Other, *autrui*, *Autrui*

Addressing Translation Conventions and Interpretation in
English-Language Levinas Studies, and a Response.

Dino Galetti

University of Johannesburg

dgaletti@uj.ac.za

Abstract

I will in this article aim to highlight an issue in interpretation of Levinas: that his address to his central concern for the 'other' has been deemed inconsistent, yet might well have been approached unfairly. The issue arises in English scholarship, in that translation of Levinas' four terms for otherness was adapted into 'conventions' that changed over time. By closely tracking that difficulty of conventions over four decades, I will follow their consequences for reading of Levinas and some of their impact upon the Levinasian culture. In so doing I suggest a need to re-orientate approach to Levinas' central terms, to facilitate a harmonious study of Levinas.

I have noted a difficulty in reading of Levinas, which in good conscience I should explain. In my opinion, it has led to some problems in approach to Levinas, both in terms of fairness in interpreting his work, and needless divisions in the culture that reads it. Still, I will need to justify those broad claims. I believe the difficulty is this: it is accepted that one of Levinas' core concerns is an ethics of responsibility to the 'other' in some fashion.¹ However, since *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas employed four terms for otherness – *l'autre*, *l'Autre*, *autrui* and *Autrui*. No scholar has yet addressed all four terms in detail in English. Furthermore, Levinas groups his terms into partial opposites by using capitals (*l'autre/l'Autre*, *autrui/Autrui*), but these have not yet mapped to Levinas' choices in capitalisation. The reason for that is understandable, as *autrui* and *Autrui* are difficult to translate, so readers adopted conventions

¹ Cf. Peperzak 1993: 19.

in English. Yet because of the obscurity of the translations, several translators and commentators also decided that Levinas' application of his four terms is 'unsystematic' and 'not consistent'.² Without address to the four terms, that was never demonstrated in Levinas in English; so Levinas might have been approached unfairly, and might be a better thinker than many suppose. It seems also to me that situation contributed to increasing schisms in the culture of reading Levinas – which a change in address to the four terms could help to heal in some measure. I will dramatise that difficulty, explain its ubiquity, and then make a case for how changing it would benefit Levinas and those who read him.

1. The four terms as distinct

First, a basic situation: The sign *autrui* refers only to a human other or others, has no plural but refers to a plural referent, and can also be employed as a reverential or intimate mode of address, as 'you'. Moreover, it permits no definite or indefinite article, and cannot be made an epithet. Derrida first noted these issues in considering Levinas, and explained that *autrui* is 'in its sense, indeclinable and outside genre', and 'does not designate a species of the genre *autre*' (1964: 350 n1; 1967: 155). However, *l'autre* can refer to *any* sort of other, human or thing, and can be singular or plural, so diverges from *autrui* on *each* issue above.

So *l'autre* and *autrui* are different words, have different grammatical rules, and thus might have different implications in philosophical application. As to upper and lower case terms, these might turn out to be irrelevant, and my paper will not yet consider that in Levinas' works. However, Derrida thought capitalisation is very important (as do many whom I consider below).³ In 'Violence et Métaphysique' (1964: 445 ff.), he deemed it 'difficult to see' how to critique Levinas without 'prior eidetic-transcendental analysis' of the terms, so first by phenomenology. He considered Levinas' terms initially by treating upper case terms as Ideas.⁴ One might dismiss Derrida's emphases, although I do note Levinas' 1975 comment, referring

² Peperzak 1996: xiv; Critchley 2002: 16; Katz 2003: 157; 2005: 5 n. 4, Beals 2011: 135: 13; also Hand 2008: 40.

³ In this paper, I only consider 'I' and 'our' in natural senses – as the author of this paper and community of Levinas scholars translating to or writing in English respectively. I will not yet address the genesis of these terms in Levinas' own work.

⁴ That convention had gained impetus in the 1950's in Levinas' work. His 1953 co-translation (with Pfeiffer) of Husserl's *Cartesianische Meditationen* employed only the lower case for any essence (Husserl 1953: cf. 106 ff. esp. 110-111). However, in Levinas' 1959 'La ruine de la représentation' he employs *l'autre* and *l'Autre* to refer to Husserl's *das Andere*, without translation to the German and without mentioning *autrui* or *Autrui*.

to what stayed ‘true to the end’ in his work since *Totalité et Infini*: ‘I think that, in spite of everything, what I do is phenomenology’ (Levinas 1998: 87).

One appreciates why those relevancies might have been missed even in Derrida. In ‘Violence et Métaphysique’ of 1967 (cf. Derrida 1964: 444; 1967:184; Saghafi 2005: 43) he often de-capitalised instances of *l’Autre*, rendering what has been called ‘Derrida’s other’. Consequently, Derrida scholars often focused on Derrida’s approach to otherness, and in turn Bass’s usually-excellent 1978 translation of the terms was inconsistent and de-emphasised their grammatical distinctions.⁵ However, the issue was not translation of Derrida, but that from the first a difficulty of translation applied to reading of Levinas.

Indeed, it seems to me that even if the distinctions amongst the four matter only a *tiny* bit, to discount them is to set aside an opportunity for fairer reading of Levinas. It might turn out that Levinas is indeed unsystematic, but before we could ‘agree’ upon that, it seems to me that all four terms should be considered in a mutually understandable fashion. Consequently, I will not in this paper consider how *Levinas* treated the terms, but how they have been interpreted by readers who followed the conventions. That brings me to the corollary of the difficulty – the multiple conventions also impeded a shareable understanding.

2. Preparing for the difficulty by demonstration

I demonstrate the seriousness of that lack by analogy, in plain language. Let me preface the analogy by noting that what follows is by no means satirical, frivolous, nor intended to be disrespectful. It is a demonstration in a fashion I mean to be accessible to all. So: imagine a sunny day in Paris, as four players walk onto a tennis court, in two teams. They are Andy and Bernie, and Charlie and Davy, whose names stand for *l’autre* and *l’Autre*, and *autrui* and *Autrui* respectively. The actual match is analogous to Levinas’ *actual* relations – or lacks thereof – amongst his four terms. Those terms are discernible in his actual French works in the empirical world, howsoever the empirical is construed. The teams are watched by radio commentators in

⁵ Bass translates *Autrui* in some instances as ‘other’ (Derrida 1978: 125; cf. 1967: 180; 1964: 441;), and in some as Other. But he also writes ‘*l’autrui* [the Other]’, then translates ‘*l’autre* comme *Autrui*’ as ‘other as Other [*autrui*]’ (Derrida 1978: 105; cf. 1967: 155; 1964: 350). Thereafter, he translates *autrui* as ‘Others’ but also ‘other’ (Derrida 1978: 124; 1967: 183; 1964: 127), and a quotation by Derrida of Levinas’ *Autrui* as ‘other’, but just thereafter, Bass translates Derrida’s use of *Autrui* as ‘the other as Other’ (Derrida 1978: 125; cf. 1967: 184; 1964: 441).

a box, analogous to Levinas interpreters (translators, academics and teachers). Next, to account for capitalisation, I add gender. As males are usually taller, I relay Levinas' upper-case terms as masculine. Andy is female, Bernie male, Charlie female and Davy male – a match of mixed doubles. However, the window of the commentary box is hazy (analogous to a difficulty of translation, because two of the names are untranslatable). Some had visited the actual courtside (translators working from Levinas' actual book) to discern that game is one of mixed doubles. Yet they set that evidence aside in commentary and in speaking to colleagues in the box, for reasons I assess below. No commentators discern or mention four players on court. So I distinguish the match that commentators *describe to their fellows* and *audience* from the *actual* match. The match begins, and a commentator who sees two players describes a match of singles or mixed singles. Two players and at least one of their genders would be omitted. Any of the omitted or included players could be of either gender – a match between Andy (a male) and Bernie (male), Andy (a male) and Charlie (a female) etc. – twenty-four options, none of which describe the actual match. No described point will then fairly relay any actual point (a point is analogous to an interaction – or lack thereof – in a sentence). If the genders are assigned accurately, a description might seem to relay the actual game in one point – where those two are actually involved – but would diverge in a point soon afterward.

A commentator who notes three players would describe a match of 'Canadian doubles' (between a single player and doubles team), in which genders could in turn vary. That would render ninety-six incompatible descriptions that might seem consistent in one point, but inevitably diverge with the next service, and none yet describe the actual match. A commentator who discerns only one player (male or female) would deem a single player is warming up alone. That description would accord with the actual game at no point.

The audience would follow the commentators, so the complications would deepen. Insofar as each commentator follows a unique combination, not only do none relay the actual game, no combination *agrees with its fellows*. A commentator describing one player could diverge in four hundred and eighty ways from the singles and Canadian singles match in any point. So, as commentators understandably would like to arrive at agreement, they would be dismayed at hearing the commentary of nearby fellows. Some would hear a name called when a particular player strikes a ball, and begin taking cues from that commentator. Except for those who keep to their own interpretation, so are still inconsistent from the actual game at some point, soon

that area of the commentary box might begin to sound quite consistent amongst fellows. Commentators would develop a ‘convention’.

Yet were the conventions compared, each would be incompatible with those who trusted their vision or a different convention. From the above options I count one hundred and twenty two definite conventions by which to describe the actual game, each *incompatible with its fellows*. Unless all four are considered, none agree with their fellows on any point except those who share a convention. More seriously, each convention would fail to describe the *actual* game except by chance, with more divergence than exactness.

At issue is that hazy glass, and I hope the tennis analogy adds some clarity. Suppose ‘Bernie’ is a nickname allotted due to his attributes besides gender (a characteristic, in Levinas the upper or lower case terms). Those attributes are Bernie’s dark hair and muscular style (for instance, *autrui*’s relation only to a human other and his intimacy), so the French affectionately name Bernie after the Parisian bodybuilder Bernard Villet, which fails to translate. Some commentators treat the nuance as unimportant, and some add an adjective (to describe a characteristic). By agreement, that becomes ‘muscular Bernie’ (in Levinas, *autrui* has often been made ‘personal other’). Yet Bernie still needs to be mentioned and treated as male in a game of mixed doubles. Moreover, a single adjective fails to capture every characteristic of Bernie (*autrui* also has attributes such as singularity/plurality, precluding definite article etc.). So I hope it is obvious – primarily – that untranslatability of an attribute in no way precludes *the imperative to relay all four*, nor their characteristics (capitalisation), nor all attributes. Nor should seeming agreement amongst commentators set aside the obligation to relay actual points and the match to the audience (the interrelations in Levinas’ actual works).

3. The seriousness of the difficulty

I wrote ‘seeming agreement’, as I believe the extent of the difficulty in Levinas scholarship might be surprising. To be convincing in what follows, I will need to mention established scholars, whom less established commentators follow. So I will need to mention even colleagues whose work I respect immensely; even my own earlier work will be affected (*infra*). Thus I am not pointing to errors, but to how readers, with good intent, tried to deal with difficult issues. I begin with Lingis’ – generous and indispensable – 1969 translation of *Totalité et Infini*.

He notes that he renders '*l'autre*' as 'the other', and *autrui* as 'the Other'. He thus 'regrettably sacrifices' Levinas' use of 'capital or small letters' (1969: 24-25n.). By doing so, Lingis omits *Autre* and *Autrui*. Moreover, he never does let go of capital or small letters, but capitalises 'other' and 'Other' in a way that no longer fits Levinas'. Lingis describes a match of mixed singles, omitting Bernie but leaving Andy (a woman), and omitting Charlie but leaving Davy (a man). Moreover, his genders in each point no longer pertain to the actual genders (a male and female omitted on his female and male sides).

By 1987, Lingis rendered only one English term: 'the other' (Levinas 1987: xxix ff.). That no longer fits his previous description on any point, as one player is matched against herself. Of course, as Lingis was, more translators were aware of the difficulties, and by 1989 'conventions' arose to manage them. In a compilation of nineteen of Levinas' essays by six translators, Hand begins that

[c]ertain conventions concerning the translation of the term 'other' have been observed: *autrui*, *autre* and *Autre* have been rendered as 'Other', 'other' and 'Other (*l'Autre*)' respectively (Hand et. al. 1989: vi).

That convention omits *Autrui*. It also allows isolation of the blind spot – commentators took the difficulty to be one of translation – thus as permission to avoid describing the actual points and match in favour of conventions.⁶

Consequently, while some translators thereafter did not note all four terms (cf. Smith, in Levinas 1996: 6), some *did* so fastidiously and accurately (cf. Bergo in Levinas 1998). However, by that stage most critics were seeking conventions. It is conventions amongst critics that I henceforth address, rather than contributions by individual translators and critics who referred to the French closely.

Indeed, the fourth difficulty arose as English terms were left undefined relative to the French (i.e. French terms and attributes were omitted): *ambiguities* began to arise between and within conventions.⁷ In a 1991 compilation that convention was still 'the other' and 'the Other'. The

⁶ Veling summarised that '[t]ranslators of Levinas ponder the distinction [...] between '*Autrui*' [...] and '*autre*' (1989: 275). So he omits *autrui* and *Autre*, then dismisses the importance of capitalisation, 'as if it really matters', and proceeds by 'other' and 'Other' (Veling 1989: 275).

⁷ I am not maintaining the primacy of English. Rather, as I cannot survey all languages I consider English as I write in it, and *autrui* and *Autrui* are untranslatable to English. One does find the 'difficulty' in some cases in further languages. In Dutch, for instance, Keij (2006) – in an impressive work – employs 'die ander' and 'de discrete ander',

editors employ only ‘the other’ and ‘the Other’ (Critchley and Bernasconi, xi ff.), and mention *autrui* at the first use of ‘the Other’. That might map to the convention of 1969 – yet without surety, as no mention of *Autrui*, *l’autre* and *l’Autre* occurs. At best, three terms are employed: a game of Canadian doubles between players and genders undefined except for Charlie, omitting Davy. So where mappings were uncertain, it was indeed unclear whether sentences could be compared, and even whether they shared a convention. In turn, it would be uncertain whether they agreed at any point in their description, and, just so, about the *actual* interactions in Levinas’ works.

Indeed, Bernasconi (p. 149 ff.), Berezdevin (p. 192), Critchley (p. 164), and Chanter (p. 130 ff.) seek to mention only ‘the other’ and ‘the Other’ – a game of singles with players uncertain.⁸ So too does Chiaramelli, but he also translates *autrui* as ‘others’ (pp. 86, 92), a novel formation. Chanter employs only ‘the Other’ (p. 132) but a quotation from Derrida in English employs ‘the other’, omitting at least two French terms, without English explanation. That change was symptomatic of a fifth unexpected difficulty: choices were undone by quotations, yet transposed without comment.

Thus clues from French philosophers went unheeded: Davies sought to convey Blanchot’s preference that

this other (*l’autre*) not be ‘honored with a capital letter’ [...] ‘as though it had some substantial, even unique, presence’. It is inconceivable that [...] ‘*l’Autre*’, or ‘*l’Autrui*’ [*sic*] could ever be Blanchot’s word (Davies 1991: 204).⁹

Davies omits *autrui*. Even so, that a major French philosopher rejected Levinas’ capitalisation due to its philosophical *implications* (rather than irrelevance) went unnoticed in general.

In turn, Peperzak in 1993 clearly mentioned only *autre*, *Autre* and *autrui* (pp. 19-20). *Autrui* is employed once at the beginning of a sentence, which could have been *autrui*. Peperzak did so without defining the terms in French, and then rendered ‘other’ for *both* of *autrui* and *autre*. The difficulty began to be hidden rather than confronted. In a 1995 compilation, Waldenfels

without the French, making it unclear which of the four terms the two pertain to (v. 130-131, in which ‘de discrete ander’ seems to pertain to *Autrui* in its intimacy, but without quotations or explanation, and 601, the glossary). How these issues pertain to other languages and cultures of reading Levinas (or not) has yet to be addressed.

⁸ Peperzak here mentions only ‘the other’ (1991: 62).

⁹ Davies is referring to Blanchot, 1981: 143.

employs ‘the Other’, and translates it once as *autrui* (pp. 47, 50n) – at best two terms. Two quotes by Levinas are then rendered as ‘the other’ without translation (Levinas 1974 146; 161). Miller’s reply to Waldenfels usually employs ‘the Other’ (p. 56), but also ‘the other’ (translated as *l’autre*), so it is uncertain whether they communicate at any point. Wyschogrod employs ‘the other’ and ‘the Other’ as translations of *Autre* and *Autrui* (p. 147) – a novel combination without *l’autre* or *autrui*. Robbins translates ‘the other’ as *Autrui* (p. 175), without mention of *l’autre* or *autrui* – another new combination (yet quotes Levinas’ ‘the Other’ only in English). Bernasconi employs only ‘the Other’ without translation (pp. 77-86), as does Richardson (pp. 128-30) – also a new convention. De Vries explains ‘*autrui*’ by the attributive ‘another person’ and refers to ‘the other of the Other’ (pp. 212, 218), omitting or blending at least one. Werhane employs ‘the other’ and ‘the Other’ (p. 62) without translation or explanation (although employing French terms elsewhere in the paper). Peperzak equates ‘the Other’ with *l’Autre*, without mentioning ‘the other’, *l’autre* or *Autrui*.¹⁰ However – the seventh difficulty follows – he refers to *autrui* as the ‘human other’, assigning a first attribute, which soon became a convention that took an issue of translation to be a lack in Levinas.¹¹

Indeed, in 1996 – importantly and honestly – Peperzak notes the ‘difficulty’ (hence my use of the term) *and mentions all four terms*:

[O]ne particular difficulty which any translator of Levinas has to solve is the rendering of *Autre*, *autre*, *Autrui* and *autrui*, Levinas’ use of which is not always consistent (Peperzak 1996: xiv).

He goes on to deem that ‘among Levinas scholars’ it had become a ‘convention’ to employ ‘the other’ in most cases, but ‘the Other’ for *any* reference to a ‘human other’. That is no longer Lingis’ 1969 convention but a new one, which change would have been undetectable to those who employed two terms so far (which ambiguities we noted too). Peperzak grumbles (justly) that the new ‘convention’ has ‘many inconveniences’:

For example, it cannot show the difference between *Autre* when it is used to refer to God and when it refers to the human other. It also blurs the

¹⁰ Scott in 1995 usually refers to ‘the other’ and once to ‘an unreachable Other’ (pp. 27, 28), omitting at least two, adding an attribute to an Other and without mentioning the French. The conventions and their incompatibility in English are evident in this work. Weber refers here only to ‘the other’ (p. 71 ff.), as do Chiaramelli (pp. 88, 91, 92) and Tallon (pp. 110-113). Thus they seem to accord with Lingis from 1987 (as Critchley et. al. will seek to do in 2002). Gibbs (cf. 1995: 15, 17) refers to ‘the other’ and ‘the personal other’ according to the convention noted by Peperzak in 1996, but naming it ‘personal other’, without French terms.

¹¹ In 1994 Aronowicz (xxxiii-iv) noted that the words ‘*autre*’ and ‘*autrui*’ present ‘translation problems’, but that she ‘detected no difference’ in Levinas’ usage in the texts. She usually opts for ‘other’ and ‘other person’ when that reference in *autrui* is obvious. She omits two terms: *l’Autre* and *Autrui*, which capitalisations are differences.

difference between ‘the Other’ as *Autrui* (or *autrui*) and *l’Autre* in the sense of *to heteron* as opposed to ‘the Same’ (*to auton*). Since most translators maintain the capital letter when rendering *le Même*, that convention produces the inconsistent ‘the Same and the other’ (Peperzak 1996: xiv-xv).¹²

I add that this convention deepened the difficulties immensely: licensing the conflation of *any* of Levinas’ four terms into one, setting aside his capitalisations, and then requiring interpretation by every reader as to which of each cases refer to the human other, which could apply to any of the four terms. Yet interpretations might diverge in each case in all three options. Peperzak offers rather ‘*l’autre* (or *L’Autre*)’ as ‘the other’ and ‘*autrui* (or *Autrui*)’ as ‘the Other’ (as per Lingis in 1969), but adds in parentheses whenever ‘*autrui* (or *Autrui*)’ are the words translated by ‘the Other’.¹³ That fails to distinguish *l’autre* and *l’Autre*; none of the above could yet assess whether Levinas was actually inconsistent.

I follow the conventions. By 2000, the editor of a compilation, Bloechl notes that there were ‘no fixed rules’ as to how to translate capitals, but ‘considerable discord’ amongst ‘interpreters’ (ix) (hence my use of the word). Maybe to avoid discord – an eighth and important difficulty – requirement for a precise ‘convention’ began to fade. Bloechl notes a ‘general tendency’ to ‘capitalise all instances of the word “Other” (whether *autre* or *autrui*)’.¹⁴ That novel tendency omits two terms (*Autre* and *Autrui*), swaps the capitalisation and makes it unclear which of the remaining two are intended. It also rendered comparison to all earlier conventions and singular choices undefinable, even those that employed only ‘the Other’ without translation (yet might have appreciated three or four terms). Hence, ten contributors in that work try to employ only the Other;¹⁵ one mention of both *autre* and *autrui* occurs in one essay (Caputo: 307, 308), without *Autre* or *Autrui*. Yet nor was that ‘general tendency’ followed in that work; Newman translates *autre* as ‘other’ (pp. 105, 108), then employs ‘the Other’ for *autrui* and omits *Autrui*. Visker usually employs ‘the Other’ but also translates *l’autre* as ‘the other’ (p. 275 n.32), leaving out at least two. Bernasconi employs ‘the Other’ (pp. 65, 66) yet quotes Derrida’s use of *Autrui* and *Autre* without explanation (p. 86; Derrida 1967: 161-2).¹⁶

¹² I note that Levinas’ reference to ‘the Other who is God/*l’Autre qui est Dieu*’ in 1961 is made in reference to Descartes, rather than supposing an easy encapsulation of God (cf. Levinas 1969: 86).

¹³ Eight translators of that work then adhere to Peperzak’s convention across ten of Levinas’ essays.

¹⁴ Bloechl goes on that the ‘tendency’ holds, ‘except, of course, in secondary literature – wherever it seems necessary to clarify that it is indeed Levinas’ particular definition at stake’ (2000: x). But why should anyone but Levinas’ definition ever be at stake?

¹⁵ They are also Burgraave (v. 169 ff.), Peperzak (v. 184), Moyaert (v. 30 ff.), Westphal (v. 203) and Bernet (v. 43 ff.).

¹⁶ Bernasconi then deems that Waldenfels only considers ‘the French *autre*, *autrui* and *alterité*, corresponding to the English notions of Other and alterity’ (Bernasconi 2000: 86). So Bernasconi’s critique that the French has been

By this juncture and understandably, many might have wanted resolution. However, instead of getting closer to the French, some dismissed its importance in philosophy. In a 2002 compilation, Critchley's 'Introduction' aligns *autre* to other and *autrui* to Other as human, but also deems their French capitalisation or not is irrelevant because Levinas' writing is 'unsystematic' (p. 16). Yet the difficulty occurs in English, even in essays that were immensely respectful and diligent. Thereafter, Putnam employs only 'the other' and 'the Other' (p. 33 ff.). Llewellyn's excellent essay mentions only 'the other' (p. 130), as does Bernasconi's (p. 239). Bernet employs only 'the other', yet includes a footnote mentioning 'the Other' twice (p. 99 n2). Waldenfels seeks to address only 'the other', but quotations from Levinas employ 'the Other' which is transposed back to 'the other' (pp. 66, 67, 71, 79). Sandford aligns 'the other' to *autrui* rather than *autre*, yet quotations from Levinas employ only 'the Other' (*Autrui*), which are transposed to 'the other' (pp. 140, 146; cf. Levinas 1961: 47)). However, she then criticises the androcentrism in Levinas' work.

That androcentrism might well be true – I will make no judgments about such issues in this article. However, that change led to the ninth difficulty: interpreters began to turn against Levinas' work instead of critiquing their changes in convention. Sandford in 2001 had detailed all four terms (p. 25), then noted it was 'conventional' to render '*autrui* as 'Other' (capitalised) and *autre* as 'other'' (p. 146: n78). She omits two but swaps the capitalisation on *l'Autre* (p. 26), then employs that second convention to also criticise Levinas' androcentrism. In 2003 and 2005, Katz mentions all four terms, but – echoing Peperzak – deems that 'unfortunately' Levinas' use is 'not always consistent' (p. 5: n3; cf. 2003: 157).¹⁷ Confident in that consensus as settling the issue, she sets aside usage of four terms and 'in most cases' leaves 'other' in the lower case, 'regardless of its referent'. With respect: she insists one player is usually warming up because she worries the umpire (Levinas) is employing inconsistent rules.

Dismissal of Levinas then gained steam with a disturbing tenth difficulty – Levinas himself, and his supporters became the object of critique. Critchley, in 2004, sought to 'sharpen

overlooked still omits two terms, and of the two he mentions, he makes both the decapitalised *autre* and *autrui* correspond to one English term with a capital (i.e. 'Other').

¹⁷ Katz (2003: 157) made that comment also in a footnote in. Beals (p. 135 n. 13) in 2007 deems there is 'no wide agreement' on how to translate *autre* or *autrui*, 'since Levinas was not entirely consistent in using these himself'; Beals also omits two.

significantly the critical debate' by considering, for instance, Levinas' politics, androcentrism, and monotheism. Yet, to 'show what underpins Levinas' work', Critchley translates *Autrui* as 'the other' (Critchley 2004: 173; Levinas 1974: 201). He then translates *autrui* from Levinas as 'the other' (Ibid; Levinas 1961: 190). By that, he omits *l'Autre* (or *l'autre*), conflating at least three into 'the other', mixing capitalisations, and diverging from prior conventions. He did not sharpen what underpins the debate. However, even supporters of Levinas who suspected the difficulty still did not discern its extent. In 2004, Fryer noted that *autre* is 'conventionally' translated as 'other' and *autrui* as 'Other', but that this causes 'problems' because Levinas capitalises *Autre* in relation to *Même* (p. 11) (and Fryer is quite right); that measure of consistency was overlooked by some thereafter. Even so, Fryer omits *Autrui*, and thereafter capitalises 'the Other' only in relation to 'the Same' (Levinas also employs *l'Autre* without 'the Same' (*le Même*)). So, instead of noting opportunities for defense, many treated the four terms as an old difficulty, requiring even less concern. Glendinning notes that 'translators of Levinas' typically render *autrui* in the upper case (i.e. 'the Other'), as it is 'the other person', and *autre* in the lower case. Yet, he explains, Levinas capitalises both on occasion so the terms 'cannot survive the translation convention' (p. 244n 53). Glendinning thinks that loss of little import, as *Autrui* is capitalised merely for 'impressive effect'. And he still omits *Autre*.¹⁸

Indeed, applications became more disparate still. In a 2009 compilation, Marder employs only 'the other' (p. 94 ff.), as does Nelson (p. 186). Tallon refers only to 'the other', but also a 'generalised other (in Mead's sense)' (pp. 49, 48), a commentator's term alone. Vessey seeks to employ 'the other', but quotes 'the Other' from Lingis – in French, *autrui* (Levinas 1961: 47; 1969: 47) – and transposes that back to 'the other' (pp. 77, 79). Steinbock employs only 'the Other', yet quotes Levinas' 'the other' without explanation (pp. 135 ff., 146). Tengelyi employs 'the other' and 'the Other' (pp. 122-3), as does Smith (pp. 160-161), without explaining which conventions they follow. None mention Levinas' terms or their mappings. A tacit agreement had been instilled to keep silent about the difficulty. Moreover, attempts to establish a convention were diminishing, even amongst those who discerned distinctions in the terms.

¹⁸ Beals in 2007 still used only 'the other', and deemed Levinas 'unsystematic'.

Hence in a 2010 collation, the editor's introduction mentioned all four French terms without drawing attention to them (Hofmeyr 15 ff.). Thereafter, Peperzak equates *autrui* with 'you' without mentioning *Autrui* (p. 15 ff.). Anckaert quotes *autrui* once without definition (p. 151). Duyndam, Lingis, Hand and Topolski refer to 'the other' and 'the Other' in English only.

So – eleventh difficulty – the consensus had become one of respect for any choice or mapping amongst colleagues, or even any divergences from Levinas, *without convention or comment*. In the 2012 conspectus *Totality and Infinity at 50*, that tolerance was revealed as current. Bertram employs only 'the other' (pp. 105-26). Bautista and Peperzak refer mostly to 'the other', but also 'the human other' and 'the other who is God' without translation, then to *autrui* as 'the personal other', and at last to 'the Other' (pp. 31, 37) – without explanation of divergences or mentioning at least *Autrui*. Katz refers to 'the other' and 'the Other' (pp. 209-226). Bernasconi continues to refer only to 'the Other' (p. 253 ff.), as does Drabinski (pp. 243, 262). Benso refers to the 'human other', 'the other' once, and 'the Other' (pp. 68, 67, 74-5), without translation or explanation of divergences, omitting at least one without mapping. Morgan refers to 'the 'other'', and 'other person', then treats 'the Other' as 'the Other [person]' (pp. 92-100), all without translation, omitting at least one. Manderson translates *autre* as 'other', but quotes 'the Other' twice and also refers to it as 'the other' – conflating two and ablating at least two (pp. 156-157). Davidson usually employs 'the other' (pp. 173-187), referring also to 'the other person' twice (p. 179), omitting at least two. However, *Hansel* and Davidson employ 'the other' and 'the Other', equate 'the Other' with 'the Same' (so with *l'Autre*), yet transpose a quotation of Levinas' 'the Other' to 'the other' (cf. p. 192).

Thereafter, the situation worsened. Zeillinger mentions three French terms, opposes 'the other' to 'the Other', yet deems that 'the other' refers to 'both senses implied by the French terms *l'autre* and *autrui*'. The twelfth difficulty was conflation of distinctions between *French* terms. Just so, Hand – an accomplished translator – deemed that

Other or other [...] denote the French terms *autre*, *Autre* and *Autrui* (Hand 2009: 39).

Hand omitted *autrui*, but also obscured which of the four possible ways those two English words could be mapped even to the *three* French. With respect, Hand would describe a point where:

Andy or Bernie or Davy serves to Andy or Bernie or Davy, he or she drives
a hard forehead down the line. Point to Andy or Bernie or Davy...

So, maybe unsurprisingly, after that passage over half a decade, the plangent result is not only that none mention the difficulty, but that many lifelong commentators are ready to give up on Levinas' actual works. Hand concludes that the relations, including those of Levinas' adjectival terms such as 'infinite' and 'absolute' other and Other, will never 'add up' because Levinas does not want them to (p. 40).

I need to defend Levinas in the service of greater benefit. For, after the initial difficulties of translation, no group conventions proceeded in a way that could let the terms 'add up'. Instead, the options so far total at least thirty. Only those that admit one term alone – 'the other' or 'the Other' – could justifiably believe they agree amongst themselves, at the cost of conflating every actual distinction (or lack thereof) in Levinas. As none implement all four, no interpreters yet relay Levinas' actual work. There are many more examples, and the difficulties are spreading to many fields;¹⁹ I will stop here. To consider the importance of these divergences, I address an example even amongst those who *assume they agree*, even before application to Levinas' actual works.

4. A single example

Consider the phrase 'the other refuses relation to the Other by the Same', which follows a convention of 'the other' and 'the Other'. Depending upon which terms they *leave out*, and which they map to each, Commentator A (i.e. Ca) might mean '*autre* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same', Cb could mean '*autre* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same', or, for Cc, '*autre*

¹⁹ As to other fields, and their influence by the process from convention since the 1980's to tolerance, v. Egéan-Kuehne's editor's introduction to a 2011 application of Levinas in education. Egéan-Kuehne explains she follows the 'accepted convention' of Cohen to translate '*autrui* as the 'Other', with an uppercase 'O', and *autre* as 'other' with a lower case 'o' (p. 11 n.1, quoting Cohen in Levinas 1987: 30 n3 v. viii). That convention omits two, of course, and was never accepted by all. Egéan-Kuehne goes on: 'However, I respected the spelling of each author in capitalizing or not the 'other' in the contributed chapters' (Ib. Id.).

Yet the difficulty is becoming urgent, as it is confronting those who apply Levinas: for instance, Coetsier notes that the 'overall difficulty one may have with Levinas' writings' is how to treat all four terms, then refers to Peperzak in 1996. Coetsier then recounts three conventions as options, and quotes Lingis to introduce a fourth. In turn, to compare Levinas to the Dutchman Hillesum, Coetsier employs 'the other' and 'the Other (*Autre, Autrui*)', omitting mention of *autre* or *autrui*, but then aligns 'Other' to the Dutch 'ander' (v. the difficulty with Keij, above) (Coetsier 2014: 335, n2; 337, 340). One appreciates why Coetsier perceives the difficulty as central. Unfortunately, he accepts Peperzak's claim that 'Levinas is not always consistent' (p. 335 n2), which reaction is also permeating into cultural studies.

refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same'. Cd might have it that '*autre* refuses relation to *Autrui* by the Same', or (as the relation may not be reversible *salva veritate*), for Ce, '*Autre* refuses relation to *autre* by the Same'. Cf might mean that '*Autre* refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same', and Cg that '*Autre* refuses relation to *Autrui* by the Same'. For Ch, '*autrui* refuses relation to *autre* by the Same', for Ci '*autrui* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same', and for Cj, '*autrui* refuses relation to *Autrui* by the Same'. Ck might intend '*Autrui* refuses relation to *autre* by the Same', Cl '*Autrui* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same', and Cm '*Autrui* refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same'.

As to commentators who explicitly blend four terms into 'the other' and 'the Other', according to Lingis first: Cn could mean '*autre* refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same', or '*Autre* refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same', or '*autre* refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same', or '*Autre* refuses relation to *Autrui* by the Same' – but the first and second, and third and fourth would seem to be equivalent, i.e. the 'convention' of 1969. Yet fellow scholars need not accord with that equivalence, by allowing for exclusion of terms. For Co, that could mean '*autre* refuses relation to *Autrui* by the Same', which matches up *by chance* with one option in 1969, yet as Co excludes *autrui* in the next case that sentence might not match up. Just so, for the convention of 1991 for Cp, '*autre* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same' or '*autre* refuses relation to *autrui* by the Same', but whether '*autre* refuses relation to *Autrui* by the Same' is admissible would be unclear. By the convention of 1996, for Cp, that could mean '*autre* refuses relation to the personal other (in this case, *autre*) by the Same', or '*autre* refuses relation to the personal other (in this case, *Autre*) by the Same', or '*autre* refuses relation to the personal other (in this case, *autrui*) by the Same', or '*autre* refuses relation to the personal other (in this case, *Autrui*) by the Same', or '*autre* refuses relation to the personal other (*autre*, *Autre*, *autrui* and *Autrui*) by the Same'. Or, following a convention since 1987, that sentence would be acceptable only as 'the other refuses relation to the other by the Same', which (were its oddity accepted) could mean '*autre* refuses relation to *autre* by the Same', or '*autre* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same'... and so on through every option.

Thereafter, when one seeks to compare any of those interpretations to their fellows, the ambiguities multiply. For instance, should one seek to assess whether Ca and Cp have compatible notions in mind, one would have to use the context of the discussion to exclude three sorts of relations – *autre* to *autre*, *autre* to *autrui*, and *autre* to *Autrui*, or that comparison

would be inconclusive in that sentence (just so for the next sentence those interpreters might compare). Hence in some cases interpreters might *agree* (e.g. that *autre* refuses relation to *Autre* by the Same), but disagree in the next case, when one deems *Autre* can be a personal other, and the second thinks only *autrui* can be, and a third only *Autrui*. In many cases there is no possibility of comparison, as some interpreters include terms that fellow interpreters omit, and, in very many cases, the equation would be undecidable, or render a large range of possible options (as when two terms are mapped to three, leaving out one), even before those options are compared. For those who do not specify in the English which they mean, the sentence could mean any of the above, in every case, or that none of the distinctions are important.

So, allowing for possible mappings of *indefinite* options, I stopped counting at four hundred ways to diverge in interpreting terms and their characteristics in just one sentence. That applies before yet supposing that one *disagrees*, and before one considers the four actual terms, attributes and characteristics (or lacks thereof) in Levinas. Such issues would be frequent. Aside even from secondary literature, in *Totality and Infinity* alone *l'autre* occurs at least 174, *l'Autre* 234, *autrui* 114, and *Autrui* 232 times.²⁰

5. Why these issues should be considered

Still, one appreciates – and lauds – why so many conventions have come to be accepted, as many Levinas scholars learned from him to value generosity. Next, I need to support why it is important to amend approach to Levinas in the service of generosity. First, we have behind us decades of students who invested time in Levinas. Obviously, they trust us to face challenges on their behalf, in the service of academic ideals. Should somebody only broadcast this issue three decades from now, we will not have done our best for them, nor for ourselves as scholars. To the extent that students are unimpressed by Levinas' supposed lack of rigour, to that extent there will be no next generation of Levinas scholars in philosophy.

²⁰ That number could increase. I have not counted 'un *autre*', '*autres*', or adjectival uses of '*autre*' into the tally for *l'autre*, and discounted common usages ('*d'autre part*' etc.). However I have counted terms such as '*absolument autre*', in which '*autre*' is used as a noun.

That brings me to the immediate issue for scholars. Interest in Levinas has been growing in separate or ancillary fields,²¹ but has dwindled appreciably in philosophy since the late 1990's. Evidence suggests to me that Levinas study is nowadays stable in the US in smaller groups, but is close to vanishing in some international sectors.²² It seems to me that many reasons intertwine to cause that decline. First, Levinas' work is under threat from without. As noted above, some treat Levinas as a soft target. The most critical readers have displayed little interest in close reading, or in their method. I will take Critchley as example, despite his fine work in general. Since 2004 Critchley severely critiques Levinas – the man – for his supposed political, androcentric and religious views. He offers a preferred response from Derrida's philosophy to counteract Levinas, so entwines philosophical analysis with ad hominem attack. Whether or not such critique is accurate, it would be sounder if based on reading of the terms in philosophy. *Autrui*, for instance, refuses a singular or plural, 'he and I do not form a number' (Levinas 1961 9; 1969: 39), so *Autrui* expressly rejects the 'mono' in critique of monotheism. It seems to me that applies irrespective of Levinas' own commitment to his religion.

Consequently, and almost inevitably, such criticism has been targeted at schools of Levinas supporters, which I think is largely unnecessary. Critique of monotheism turns against expositors of Levinas from many faiths, and against alternative arrangements of family values or traditional religion, some of which further the benefit of all. Whatever the merits of Critchley's values, he confused philosophy with imposition of his specific ideals, with long-lasting consequences.²³

Moreover, in some circles the definition of rigour is being diverted from fair assessment of the philosopher. Whether or not some Levinasian readers are sycophantic, our relation to fellow readers must be rigorous too, which is what does not occur in consensus without actual assessment (consider Critchley's (2004: 131 n1) support for Sandford). Moreover, I have

²¹ Atterton and Calarco (2010: ix) noted that in Levinas' centennial celebrations of 2006, thirty-two conferences dedicated to him were held in thirteen countries. A conference primarily – but not exclusively – upon religious studies is now held annually in North America (NALS). Felski in 2001 (p. 41) notes the 'recent impact of Levinas on literary studies', an approach begun in the 1990s but spearheaded by Attridge in direct theory in 2004.

²² At the 1998 SPEP conference, five panels considered Levinas. In 2013 there was one panel and four papers. The shrinkage is more obvious internationally. At a 2012 international conference (*Phenomenology and its Futures*, University of Johannesburg) attended by delegates of 21 countries, only one paper mentioned Levinas (Kourie and Hofmeyr's).

²³ At a 2014 conference (*North American Levinas Society*, May 2014, Ocean City USA) Critchley's argument was mentioned in the opening speech, as a primary opponent in the past several years of Levinas scholarship in their field.

recorded that even major supporters of Levinas dismissed the possibility of rigour from the start – they never were sycophantic, but neither did they demonstrate that.

Yet that critique of Levinas scholarship in general is also becoming consensus. Atterton and Calarco (2010: 10) deem exposition of Levinas a ‘first wave’ of Levinas scholarship, and consideration of Derrida’s commentary on Levinas the ‘second wave’. Their proposed ‘third wave’ is one of application to real-world concerns, which is welcome. The problem is that it is frankly dismissive. They call both earlier waves a process of ‘navel-gazing’, and reprint Critchley’s article with its use of two terms (2010: 43). To the extent that a third wave lacks a strong appreciation of Levinas’ central tenets, it will inevitably need exposition, and even clarification of Derrida’s use of the terms (*supra*).

So Levinasian supporters of all types have not yet spotted the opportunity to defend themselves, nor to enrich their own critique. The injunction to closer examination by considering four terms offers a chance to take up that opportunity. To invigorate and excite new interest in seemingly well-plumbed issues, amongst those who seem to have given up on Levinas. Without such change, we risk final decision being made upon his work by philosophers in general – and a philosopher considered inconsistent will never be considered great, nor kept central to philosophical enquiry. It seems to me that we concurrently risk permanent schisms in Levinas culture and the failure of exposition of Levinas in the long term. Yet in every case, for supporters and critics alike, from every angle above, considering Levinas’ four terms lets critical approach return without requiring hostility just yet.

Obviously, however, there are risks and costs that one has to moderate for the benefit of all. Theory proceeds by revision of a body of work that it should preserve. I expressly do not recommend abandoning any prior work on Levinas. There has obviously been a tremendous body of good-hearted and learned scholarship. Many works might require very little explanation of these issues, such as thematic ones, work upon the later Levinas, etc. *Even many of those mentioned above required little reference to the issues. Thus I could mention many pieces that are sound and often need clarification merely upon a sentence or two* for colleagues. Indeed, readers should make up their minds about the purport of each piece, I have sought to ‘respect’ those contents, maybe to keep them secret, in what I hope is a generous fashion. However, at some junctures the need for clarity is very important indeed to bring aid to all, and

it seems to me that as a whole, sensitivity to such clarification is indispensable, even if only to guide the progress by its invisible gravity. What I recommend, insofar as my single voice is heard, is clarification when necessary in going forward constructively. Should we do so, what is on offer is greater benefit and durability.

6. Conclusion – and a way forward

Indeed, my ‘tracing’ of the difficulty has been positive, as it is easy to find a solution. As many recent philosophers do with Hegel’s *Aufhebung*, let us leave *autrui* and *Autrui*, *untranslated*.²⁴ Only *autrui* and *Autrui* fail in obvious fashion to make the grammatical transition, hence the semantic one. All four might differ in their semantics of course, so if need be we could leave all four untranslated without belabouring yet another combination. That would obviate from the first the struggle for ‘conventions’ that translators and scholars knew from the first would be compromises, and we would avoid the shortfalls of lack of convention. From the first, there will be *four* signs, which could map accurately to Levinas’. Thereafter, one could ensure the characteristics, attributes, or refusals thereof are *well explained*. Thus do new words enter a lexicon.²⁵ We could then consider how *Levinas* employs the terms (and I have not yet addressed his work, nor approaches by critics to otherness).²⁶ Indeed, we could do so augmented by a mutual understanding (I have begun that process elsewhere, as have colleagues). Just so, we could support consideration of philosophical questions in Levinas. Indeed, I am hardly the only one who has observed the extent of the issues above. I am hopeful that readers will agree the time is right to make them known, and to address them, to the benefit of Levinas scholarship.

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²⁴ V. Büttgen’s explanation of *aufhebung* in English and summary that ‘the translator’s debate can probably not come to a conclusion’ (2014, p. 75).

²⁵ However riven Hegel study is nowadays upon even major points (cf. Kreines 2006 for an overview), it proceeds quite comfortably and richly in terms of *Aufhebung* – even in the most refined logical analyses (cf. De Boer 2010, Longuenesse 2007). The difficulty which beset readers for centuries has been solved, and the solution works.

²⁶ We could even be aided in following how Levinas’ address to the four evolved. For instance, in *de l’existence à l’existant* (1947), Levinas had not yet considered four (referring only to AUTRUI in the upper case, in headings).

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