

Speaking from the Bedrock of Ethics

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Article:

In a moment familiar to many of us, one of the authors of this piece attended a philosophical meeting on the topic of Emmanuel Levinas. "So, you are in communication studies," said a philosopher during a break. "Why would a speech person be interested in Levinas?"

This paper probes the place of speech in Levinasian ethics. We hope to show that when philosopher Emmanuel Levinas rested his compelling life project on ethics, he said something new about the act of speaking itself. First, for Levinas, speaking begins with the imperative issued by the presence or face of the other. He calls that issuance the saying. Antecedent to words, the saying is the commitment of an approach to the other, the move to response, the signifying of signification. Second, the saying moves into language where it is subordinated to the said. It is in the coordination of the saying and the said that ethics shows itself or is betrayed. Although the saying is perhaps overwhelmed by the said, it remains present even in absence. Third, for Levinas we can sense the ineffable, yet present, call to responsibility in the trace. The trace, and here Levinas brings God to mind, reveals the saying, and is communicated in the face.((1)) The face, the saying, and the trace are where the Levinasian responsibility of the one for the other takes form. They are the home of ethics.((2))

By paying close attention to the responsibility invoked by the face, heeded in the saying, and reminisced in the trace, Levinas defines ethics as the condition of dialogue. Later, he says that ethics allows us to pursue peace even if, or after, dialogue fails. It is in ethics that we learn that we can stand by unsolvable problems—attentive and vigilant, in dialogue (Levinas 1999a).

Taken together, these ideas of the face of the other, the saying, and the trace provide the basis of ethics that is constituted in and constitutes communication.

Our effort here is to explore the bedrock of ethics in speech. We will do so by drawing on examples of care, rescue, and sacrifice that surfaced during the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and the days that followed. Within the context of that terrible attack, scores of eyewitnesses gave accounts of the ways that people responded to the needs of others. We argue that the ethical imperative to respond conditions every rhetorical situation and that is no more clearly seen than in times of crisis. Recognizing this ethical imperative demands that scholars examine more than words and gestures. The act of speaking itself is for Levinas at the heart of human ethics. Through this philosophical lens communication ethics not only applies to rhetorical situations but also goes forth, or does not go forth, as communicative action itself. So ethics is at the bedrock of communication and communication is at the heart of ethics. In the end we will ask, "Why would a philosopher not be interested in speech?"

ETHICS IN COMMUNICATION

For Levinas, ethics is metaphysical.((3)) Ethics does not emanate from the self as an ontological dimension, or from some predetermined epistemological principles. Levinas instead claims that the other is the basis of ethics. In sociality, we find ourselves responsible to respond to the call of the other, not as an ontological choice but rather as the recognition that ethics is otherwise than being.((4)) The demand issued by the other is felt corporeally. It is, if you will, an ethical impulse or compulsion that disrupts, calling the self into a dialogical encounter.

Levinas asks us to concentrate not on what we can know or contain of the "Other—the move toward totality, but to contemplate that which always exceeds our grasp—the move toward infinity. . . . Ethics is a relationship of responsibility for the Other. But this relationship is initiated by the Other, by the 'face' (or 'call') of the Other" (Murray 2002, 174-75). In the presence of another, before the face, we feel a proximity that jars us into a commitment to the other.

The face

The face is the first content of expression (Levinas 1969, 51). The face "speaks to me before and beyond speaking about something" (Waldenfels 2002, 68). Prior to considering the words that are spoken, Levinas reminds us of this ethical summons. "The first obvious thing in the other's face is the directness of exposure and that defenselessness. The human being in his face is the most naked; nakedness itself" (Levinas 1999b, 163). The face, then, is the injunction issued by the other to the self, insisting and inviting response. This presentation conditions the possibility of discourse.

The other obligates a relationship by virtue of his or her presence. That is to say, responsibility lies in the encounter; the self is held hostage, to use Levinas's term, to the other. The other so considered is the priority, for the other is home to a shared humanity.((5)) The self and other are thus morally connected. This unavoidable alliance bursts forth as the other disrupts the complacency of the self. The other both commands through presence and lays forth a vulnerability to which the self cannot help but respond (Levinas 1985).

For Michael Hyde (2001), the call that emanates from the face of the other is a rhetorical interruption that puts into question our own conscience as we agonize over the right thing to do and the right thing to say. The very act of speech is the expression of "Here I am" in response to the call, "Where art thou?" Hyde claims that Levinas gives us a way to view life that distinguishes the rhetorical interruption (the call) and the subsequent rhetorical competence (the response) as uniquely communicative matters within the realm of ethics. We agree that ethics is realized then in language and conversation where meaning is produced by talk, as recognized in the call and response, and by proximity (Levinas 1969).

The saying

Levinas thus recognizes that the face and language are interdependent and revealed in the saying, which he defines as expression prior to discourse.

I think that the beginning of language is in the face. In a certain way, in its silence, it calls you. Your reaction to the face is a response. . . . Language does not begin with the signs that one gives, with words. Language is above all the fact of being addressed . . . which means the saying much more than the said. (Wright, Hughes, and Ainley 1998, 169-70)

The saying, then, is a greeting made before the utterance of any content, the said. The first move in communication for Levinas is in the approach to and contact with another, before themes are established, identities confirmed, and ideologies discovered.

The trace

The encounter of the other is defined and defended by Levinas as a rupture to the self's thought of being. In the face, in the saying, there is the trace of infinity that we cannot see, but that nevertheless enters into language (Levinas 1985). Unlike a sign that seeks to inscribe the order of the world, the trace operates in quite a different

fashion; it accomplishes an interruption of order that begs our attention. The face then, carries the trace into language and brings with it what cannot be represented. In the trace we feel the indescribable depth of the difference between the self and the other. The experience of that expanse and the desire to respond is spiritual, visceral, and compelling.

It is argued that the significance of the trace consists in its alterity, its registering and inscribing in the very matter of the flesh an imperative spiritual assignment: the morally binding hold of the other person on my capacity to be responsible to the other's needs and bear responsibility for the other's welfare. (Levin 1998, 345)

Evocative and affective, these terms Levinas uses—the face, the saying, and the trace—operate rhetorically to inspire a sense of wonder, discovery, and questioning in our encounters with the other.

The ethical obligation of communication

To consider these opening "facts" of communication is to conceive of language or discourse in a wholly different realm from intentional, predetermined, strategic enterprise where the other is but an object in the self's plans for mastery. Levinas accentuates this by unveiling the properties of communication as ethical encounter, or saying. "One can, to be sure, conceive of language as an act, as a gesture of behavior. But then one omits the essential of language: the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed in the face" (1969, 67). For Levinas, ethics precedes discourse in disclosure. That is, before we even conceive of a freedom that would enable us to choose ethics, there is already the imperative Yes! that signals our submission and sacrifice to the other (Levinas 1996c).

Why are we pulled toward the other as Levinas suggests? Under what conditions can it be, and matter, that ethics precedes discourse? For Levinas, being for the other provides an important insight into how our moral obligation is grounded not in specific altruistic activity, thorough understanding, or adherence to universal laws. Alphonso Lingis, a translator of many of Levinas's works, describes the ethical nature of communication succinctly: "What is said is inessential; what is essential is that I be there and speak" (1994, xi). Speech is first and foremost the acknowledgment of sociality that signifies the importance of the encounter with the other. Speech for Levinas is not, as we have been conditioned to think, the link to participation that seeks comprehension of the other (1996a). This limited reading of speech represents for Levinas totality and closure rather than infinity and alterity.

Richard Cohen, another of Levinas's translators, questions in his introduction to *Ethics and Infinity* the role of speech altogether. "Ethics occurs . . . across the hiatus of dialogue, not in the content of discourse, in the continuities or discontinuities of what is said, but in the demand for response" (Levinas 1985, 12). Actually, Cohen points to the force of communication without naming it as such. Transcending dialogue there is ethics, but to instantiate ethics requires communication, whether in the hiatus, the response, or the approach.

Ethics evokes then, rather than defines, and in so doing defies our propensity to codify, compare, and commit to a certain course of action prior to engagement. For Levinas, the face of the other (the other we recognize and the others we do not) is an interruption that arouses a desire to move toward the other, not knowing what may come. The desire and its accompanying responsibility are indicative of a turn outward toward a communal life.

To explore the place of speech in a philosophy of ethics in the context of the attack on September 11, we start with a story of when Harry met Victor.

VIOLENCE UNLEASHED AND STAIRWELL ETHICS

On September 11, 2001, terrorism touched down in the United States. While millions of us were immobilized and left speechless by what we witnessed live on television, thousands of others in the World Trade Center towers, at the Pentagon, and on three airplanes had no such luxury. They were confronted with a reality few could have ever imagined. One man inside World Trade Center One demonstrates that ethics is a lived response

of the type Levinas describes. He was not alone, however. Without advance preparation or rules of conduct to follow, the men and women trapped by evil deeds remind us that ethics is a response to the call of the other.

Harry Ramos, forty-six, had just returned to work at his office on the eighty-seventh floor after a week's absence. Within minutes, the building was shaking violently; he braced himself in a doorway for stability. As light fixtures plummeted to the floor and smoke filled the office, Harry had no idea that a jetliner had just crashed into his building, floors above him. However, he knew enough to know that the survival of his office staff was at stake.

Harry, the head trader for a small investment bank, the May Davis Group, was in the throes of pandemonium. Yet, he had to act. With the company's chief financial officer, Harry marshaled the twelve employees in the office to the stairwell to begin the descent down eighty-seven floors, one step at a time. Harry stationed himself at the end of the line, making sure no one was left behind. "Nine floors down, the stairwell ended. Emerging into a hallway to look for the next flight of stairs, the group saw wires dangling from the cracked ceilings. Sparks popped. Small fires burned everywhere. Office workers were milling in confusion. The smoke was thickening" (Walsh 2001, 1). The scene was not promising. As the group continued down, Harry convinced the stragglers to keep moving. Along the way, Harry also stopped to help strangers make their way into the stairwell.

At the fifty-third floor, Harry found Victor who, because of his large size or perhaps his profound fear, found it difficult to move. Together with another May Davis employee, they made it to the thirty-ninth floor by way of stairs and a short elevator ride. At one point, Harry let go of Victor, to walk ahead and survey the situation. "Victor cried out in fear. 'Harry, please help,' he begged. 'Don't worry, we're not leaving you,' Mr. Ramos said" (Walsh 2001, 1).

Stopping to rest, the building sadistically shook again, and so the trio picked themselves up and walked down further, to the thirty-sixth floor. There, an exhausted Victor proclaimed his energy was spent, that his legs could not carry his frame another step. A firefighter rushing by yelled at Harry to leave Victor behind and run. But Harry did not move, assuring the large stranger, "Victor, don't worry. I'm with you."

Moments later, on television sets tuned in to the scene from all over the world, we saw the avalanche of cement and glass crush to the ground as the World Trade Center towers came tumbling down. As the buildings collapsed, so did thousands of lives. What the ordinary men and women like Harry Ramos left behind was not only a memory of good deeds, but also a glimpse into ethics and communication that compels us to answer the call of the other.

Harry Ramos demonstrates for us the detectable evidence of the saying in everyday discourse. In Harry's response, we begin to recognize something compelling that makes possible the saying, what Levinas refers to as "the trace." The trace signifies presence in absence, like how we feel someone's company even after they have left the room or when the amputee continues to experience the ache of a phantom limb. And, there is the trace of God who has "walked the earth" though is no longer directly visible.

For Levinas, the trace is the vestige of the infinite. The Levinasian trace is nonphenomenological, signifying without manifesting anything (Peperzak 1997). As such, it resists our attempts to analyze it or identify it conclusively. Yet we continue to search for it in the saying, in the human face, and in responsibility. This quest, says Levinas, is a worthy one, indicative of an ethical life. The trace itself challenges logic and rationality; the trace resists comprehension as it "disturbs the order of the world" (1996b, 62). The difficulty of talking about the trace arises from its "enigmatic, equivocal" features that elude our attempts to name it. Levinas explains, "The infinite then cannot be tracked down like game by a hunter. The trace left by the infinite is not the residue of a presence; its very glow is ambiguous" (1998, 12).

The trace, then, is not a sign or a concrete feature but a paradoxical function of sociality (Bergo 1999). The trace is palpable yet not tangible, within our reach yet out of our grasp. David Michael Levin describes Levinas's phenomenology as tracework, an obsession-sustained meditation on an admittedly hopeless search for the traces "of primordial responsiveness." The project is hopeless, but not futile; Levin offers, "since the effort, the attempt itself, carries enormous moral merit" (1998, 349).

These are powerful ideas—an ethical subject whose ethics are lodged in a place otherwise than being; an ethic that can be conceived as the condition for dialogue in the saying to another; and the possibility of that saying, overwritten in ontology by the said, coming through still as a trace in discourse "like an unheard question" (Bergo 1999, 155).

"Harry, please help me," is surely the call of conscience from one terrified and helpless man to a stranger who befriended him. "Don't worry, we're not leaving you," is just as surely the "here I am." But the repeat at the end, "Don't worry, I'm with you," turns the "here I am" into a deeply exposed and singular commitment. It is no longer "we" but "I" who will be with the man who is not going anywhere in the heart of an inferno.

RECOGNIZING A NEW CONTEXT: ETHICS BEFORE VIOLENCE

People persist in focusing on manifestations of war and conflict as the defining features of human activity. As such, our history is an explanation of what causes and perpetuates violence. We understand human behavior in a Darwinian context, as a struggle for limited resources where there are winners and losers. We identify losers and stay away from them so that our future success is secured and measured according to the accumulation of material possessions, power, and knowledge. The other in this view is the abject one. This view of humanity promises the continuation of social practices meant to isolate the self from all the others who could threaten the self's control.

Stories like the one about Harry Ramos suggest a different narrative, one wherein ethics provides the context in which the rest of human achievement resides. It would be a grave mistake at this point to read the story of Harry Ramos as simply how one man encountered a disaster. Instead, Levinas offers an alternative contextual view. Ethics as first philosophy creates a different structure for making sense of communication. The ways in which we appreciate or deny that is a practical human endeavor. The measure of life for Levinas is not determined according to what one gains at the expense of another. Instead, life's value is ascertained in considering to what degree ethics takes us toward response to the other and eventually to responsibility for all others, in what Levinas defines as justice, all the while recognizing there is no end point to this process (Manning 2001). Violence in this view is a force with which to reckon, and one that because of its immense spread and impact around the world, mandates that we face it squarely. But rather than meeting violence with violence, Levinas asks us to recognize the munificent, unlimited capacities of ethics to set a context that counters the turbulent dictates of our recent past.

We offer our argument focused on ethics as the ground for speech communication, as one poised to join with other arguments made across the disciplines, in philosophy, education, psychology, anthropology, and religion, on the value of Levinas today in light of the violence that resists our attempts to quell its dominance. Reducing the flow of violence is at the heart of Levinas's work. He holds out for us the possibility that communication can resist violence through the "face" of the other who calls the self into question. Recognizing this, giving voice to this phenomenon, has the potential to change the way we view the human condition.

ETHICS ACCORDING TO EMMANUEL LEVINAS

Against the grain of most philosophizing, Emmanuel Levinas places the other, not the self, at the bedrock of human sociality. It is the face of the other that interrupts the interiority of the self's consciousness, pulling us into the relationality of the world and to the imperative to speak. The other "inspires" the self. "The Other is not foundational by himself or herself, but only in his or her social relationship with the I" (Benso 2000, 22). The

ethical relation with the face of the other commands response not with force but with invitation and hands wide open.

In the first of Levinas's two most important works, *Totality and Infinity* (1969), he lays out this ethical imperative with a relentlessness that has been described as wave after wave, lapping against the shore. Levinas's style of writing, such a difficulty for us readers, is performative of the relentless movement in life back and forth between alterity and infinity.

Levinas describes sociality of the kind we are discussing as a "moral summons" (1969, 196). We are called by the other to speak not to establish common ground but instead to recognize the infinite alterity of the other who resists our attempts to thematize him or her. Thus, we cannot know in advance what we will say, only that we will speak. Levinas claims that speech proceeds from radical alterity or absolute difference (the other), beseeching us to oblige with responsibility, with communication. Speaking is contact (Horowitz 2000). The relationship with the other is thus in the absence of foundations, thriving on the metaphysical desire to reach for the other, "accomplished as service and as hospitality" (Levinas 1969, 300).

So it is that we are destined to communicate in the presence of another, a directive arising from an ethical imperative. But we have choices and we are not always ethical. Levinas knows this and fears that our rejection of ethics, of our relationship to the other, will perpetuate the very worst that humankind has to offer. *Totality and Infinity* begins with this warning: "The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives. In advance its shadow falls over the actions of men" (Levinas 1969, 21). Levinas experienced the dark shadow in the Nazi camps of World War II. His life project points to how we are commanded to responsibility in the face of living, against the more commonly accepted premise that to save ourselves we must murder the other. That we are haunted by misgivings or guilt or profound questions as we anticipate or reflect on an act of violence points out that our redemption is to be found in this responsibility (Bailie 2001).

The waves of signification continue to crash into our long-held beliefs of subjectivity in Levinas's second opus, *Otherwise Than Being: Beyond Essence*. There, he becomes more specific yet about ethics, about being with the other, and about saying as the bridge between the two. "Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure" (1998, 48). He advances the "saying" as the heart of life and ethics.

The sayings in accounts of the World Trade Center were often about movement. There was only one sensible place to move—out! But many people chose otherwise. Harry Ramos chose not to continue down the stairwell but to be with Victor. Eric Jones was driving safely past the Pentagon just when it was hit, but instead of driving on he left his car to run to the Pentagon to rescue a rescuer whose clothes had caught on fire (Crowley 2002). Tyree Bacon, an employee of the New York Supreme Court on the fourteenth floor, was one of four men from the office who ran up the stairs to help people. Tyree's third trip was to the seventy-eighth floor where he retrieved a woman who was burned on forty-eight percent of her body. Tyree's three friends died. He lived (Ward 2002). Mike Kehoe became the symbol of firefighters' sacrifice when a survivor snapped his picture running up the stairs in full gear (Morse 2001). And another kind of ethical movement is signified in Todd Beamer's exhortation to his fellow passengers to roll to the front of Flight 93 in an apparent move to scuttle the plane before it could be crashed in Washington, D.C.

Each of these moves is a graphic example of the approach, the move to the other that is underscored by the trace. For Levinas, there is a call from a place other than being that demands response. When Eric Jones was asked why he had done what he did, he said, "I think everybody was afraid a little bit, but when you hear people yelling out to you for help, you . . . put that on the back burner" (Crowley 2002). The move to the other is not calculated; it happens because it must, because of the trace.

Still, the saying is enveloped in language or a linguistic system, what Levinas terms the "said." Thus the saying is at the mercy of the said at the same time that it transcends that grasp and overflows its boundaries. The saying for Levinas takes priority over the said, because it is the saying that makes possible the said.

The relevance of the saying and the said can be most vividly seen in the creation of community when we reach out to the destitute, unfortunate, alien, even dying other. There, as the other is dying, we are reminded of our obligation even when we have nothing in common.

You have to say something—something that language cannot say, something that is not in the resources of common discourse to be able to say, and something that is, in the end inessential. It is the saying that is imperative: your hand extended to the one who is departing, the light of your eyes meeting the eyes of the other that are turned to where there is nothing to see, and the warmth of your voice brought to her as her own breath gives way. (Lingis 1994, 113)

The saying exists in the gasp or the suspended word, clinging to the lips, unable to be voiced. The saying, as ethics, is always subject to the threat of betrayal by the said, which operates as a system of nouns to name and constitute things. Nevertheless, Levinas suggests that the saying is powerful enough to remain as a trace even if the deeds of the said point in another direction.

THE TRACE POINTS TO ETHICS

Like a wet footprint on the beach that remains as it fades when we walk away, the saying is in speech at the same time it is not—that is the trace. We feel its residual force in all of the elements of tone that constitute the act of speaking; we know there is some feeling we cannot adequately describe with our limited options in discourse, and yet we know far more than we can oftentimes articulate. The saying is a passivity that reveals itself in vulnerability, frankness, and exposure rather than through intentionality and commitment. There is a quality about the saying that is rather like a sacrifice freely chosen without the benefit of protection or claim to altruism as the self leans toward the other "without holding back" (Levinas 1998, 15).

Again the reports of September 11 underline that in this crisis, the massive call of conscience was answered over and over again. David Frank worked his way down forty flights with a blind salesperson, Michael Hingson. "The people in the stairwell were incredibly gracious," said Frank (Murphy and Levy 2001, B10). The days that followed were filled with stories of people's rush to rescue whoever they could from the burning, smoldering rubble.

Dr. James J. Moore, a professor of anthropology at the University of California at San Diego, said he had studied many species, including many different primates. "We are the nicest species I know," he said, "To see those guys risking their lives, climbing over rubble on the chance of finding one person alive, well you wouldn't see a baboon doing that." The horrors of last week notwithstanding, he said, "The overall picture to come out about human nature is wonderful." (Angier 2001, F1)

Or, more to the point of what goes through people's minds in the moment of the actual crisis, it seems clear that people acted without "thinking" or they set aside "thought" to do what they must.

The trace is a representation, albeit only a shadow, of something former. The saying as it exists in the trace occupies an amorphous position, pulling us out of our own self-focus, immersing us unguarded into a relation with the other, and that is the beginning of dialogue (Simmons 1999).

THE TRACE, THE SAYING, AND THE SAID

The saying and the said define much more than terms of expression, subtending to matters of sense and sensibility, ethics and justice, separation and proximity, and totality and infinity. Levinas establishes these dualities not as oppositional forces but instead as necessary, complementary features. These dualities or ambiguities are the processes by which we encounter the other and everyday life. Levinas beseeches us to

cherish the ambiguity of love, the ambiguity of alterity, and the ambiguity of self as important resources that point toward infinity or transcendence. To do otherwise, he argues, is to undermine the strength and possibility of alterity by conceiving the duality of these structures as subversive threats to order. Put differently, according to this philosophy, there is no attempt to resolve the tensions; instead, we should aim to acknowledge and negotiate among them.

Communication is not, according to this view, only a mechanism for uncertainty reduction. Speech is far from sophistry. Communication is instead the sacrifice of moving from the safety of the self toward the unknowing possibilities that the other presents. Speech has its roots at the bedrock of ethics, always aimed outward toward another. For Levinas, ethics is that obsession, desire, and movement toward the other, rooted in the experience of sociality and at the boundaries of dialogue. Ethics begins right there at the point of response to another. It exists on both sides of the still point. It is why we respond and, after the moment of response, it is the demonstration in life itself that we are ethically answerable in the presence of the other.

So, we wonder, is this trace of the saying recognizable in the present? Let's turn back to some of the moments of sacrifice on September 11. These moments of crisis exist in the world of life, not in the world of talk about life. Whatever a person might have hypothesized about what he or she would do in a situation like this, the situation happened and the person acted. The crisis interrupted the world of the said and the person acted. Eric Jones moved his foot from the accelerator to the brake, opened the door, and put his foot out to begin to run toward a burning firefighter. Tyree Bacon reached the lobby twenty-seven floors below his office, stopped, turned, and moved back to climb to the seventy-eighth floor to rescue a woman who until that moment was a complete stranger to him. And Harry Ramos simply stopped and opened his mouth to say to Victor, in a tone we can only imagine, that he would wait there with him.

Does this suggest that we must take great care about the propensity of communication scholarship to emphasize the said over the saying? We have often treated the elements of communication that lie beyond the message as mere meta-communication or bodily action that supports the message. To get to the heart of ethics, the saying, and communication, scholars should look to tone, to voice, to body, and to other unarticulated traces of answerability that signal the responsibility of the self to the other. There we might detect the residue of the saying that carries forward from the place of ethics.

One of our favorite bits of tracework from September 11 is carried to us in an account by biologist Stephen J. Gould. Gould, his wife, and daughter had volunteered to deliver asbestos shoe pads and food to the rescue workers. As they left a restaurant with some meals, the cook gave them a dozen apple brown bettys, his best dessert, fresh from the oven. Gould was moved to write about the reception those brown bettys received. "We gave the last one to a firefighter, an older man in a young crowd, sitting alone in utter exhaustion as he inserted one of our shoe pads. And he said, with a twinkle and a smile restored to his face, 'Thank you. This is the most lovely thing I've seen in four days—and still warm!' " (Gould 2001, A19). Surely that warmth was the living trace of human care from a cook to a firefighter he would never even meet. For Levinas, the face of the other holds the trace but, as the Gould story shows, it extends far beyond that. "And the whole body—a hand or a curve of the shoulder—can express as face" (Levinas 1969, 262).

More than anything else, it may be the voice that extends the body with the trace of the saying. Watts has urged that we explore the power of voice in ethics and rhetoric.

The important point here is that 'voice' is not detachable from a body (singular or collective). Similarly, it is always in excess of the body presumed to contain it. I have proposed a notion of 'voice' that concerns itself with the material or symbolic conditions of 'speaking' or 'hearing.' Constitutive of an ethical or emotional event, 'voice' needs rhetoricians to explore the social commitments that speech entails. (Watts 2001, 193)

Ethics is an efficacious determinant of communication, revealed in the approach and the voice, inspired by the trace that signals our obligation to respond to the other.

If the saying is the initial dialogic move, articulation heralds the said that can overwrite the saying and consequently the dialogic tone. It is the very richness and complexity of meaning that may deflect dialogue or, as Levinas suggests, create very non-dialogic conditions. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center, President Bush visited a mosque in Washington, D.C., and many Americans reached out to their Islamic neighbors. Still, we witnessed diatribes about "towel heads" and worse that showed how hate speech trumps the impulse to approach the other in concern.

That is why Levinas is distrustful of the word alone. Ethics in communication is the safeguard to make sure words do not limit what the other can be or do. Ethics in communication reaffirms the other (Benso 2000). Taken together, the saying and the said are forever in steadfast relation. For the saying cannot achieve all that it reaches for without the said in which it is embedded. Again, we note the incredible alignment between Harry Ramos's move to stay with Victor and the words he chose, "I'm with you."

CONCLUSION

This paper is titled "Speaking from the Bedrock of Ethics." For us, bedrock is the trope that reminds us that just as bedrock is the invisible underpinning of soaring skyscrapers, so too is ethics, the approach to the other in responsibility, the underpinning of speech. We hear the call of conscience, we know we must respond; the issue is whether we act appropriately, or at all. The issue is if we respond to the saying of the other, or if we choose instead to allow the said that we have been conditioned to hear to shape our reactions. The ground of ethics comes in the interface between the approach (the saying) and the action (the said).

Ethical communication is to speak and act for the other, considering the other to such an extent that the focus is on not what I want to achieve but what the other needs of me. Ethics is demonstrated everyday in the saying, yet we often miss its force in favor of focusing on other variables. Underlining his embarrassment about being celebrated worldwide as a hero, firefighter Mike Kehoe said that the only life he saved that day was his own. He missed that it was his action, his running up the stairs hauling one hundred pounds of gear, that people celebrated, not an actual count of the lives he saved. When Stephen Jay Gould saw the twelve apple brown bettys, he thought that twelve apple brown bettys into the breach would mean little to thousands of workers. He missed the point of what it meant in an exchange between two persons that the bettys were still warm from the cook's oven in the hands of an exhausted old firefighter. But he surely saw that his op-ed piece would memorialize the trace in those pastries in the minds of millions of people.

Ethics, according to Levinas, is not to be found in what is legal or not, or in following a predetermined set of rules, though of course we are offered guidance in social mores there. Instead, to consider speaking as a manifestation of ethics is to recognize a philosophical position, a way of seeing the world that embraces and loves the other in the ways Harry Ramos demonstrated on September 11, 2001. His life was at stake. More importantly, as he showed us in his words and deeds, the lives of others were at stake. He chose then to heed the call when he promised, "Victor, don't worry. I'm with you." Shortly after, with Victor and Harry still in the World Trade Center, the building collapsed. The chief financial officer, who descended the skyscraper's stairs that day and did make it out safely, explained how the reach of ethics is among the most significant experiences of our lives. "If you had seen what it was like in that stairway, you'd be proud," he said later. "There was no gender, no race, no religion. It was everyone, unequivocally, helping each other" (Walsh 2001). Ethics, communicated in simple gestures, words of encouragement, and displays of care, guarantees that our lives have meaning. The trace we leave behind when we are gone from sight or from life on earth is something not to miss but instead to cherish as a model of human decency.

Now back to the case of Harry and Victor alone together in the stairwell of the World Trade Center. This father of a newborn has been celebrated as a hero because he gave his life just to be with a man who could go no further. There could also be no stronger example of the Levinasian saying than "I am with you." Levinas's "said" is right there in the words that are perfectly aligned with the ethical move that is so represented in the

action of the words. And in that action we see the strongest manifestation of the trace of ordinary ethics wrapped in the saying and manifested in the said. That is speech at the bedrock of ethics. And in the telling of Harry's story—over and over again in the press, at parades, scholarship awards, and even a bowling tournament renamed for him—we see the strongest public recall of the trace of the glory of Harry's simple compassion, because we understand the deep implications of what Harry expressed when he said, "I am with you."

ENDNOTES

We thank Michael J. Hyde for introducing Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy to the communication discipline. His work has inspired a host of scholars, including us, to more fully appreciate the constitutive nature of communication and ethics, and more importantly to acknowledge our responsibility to say, "Yes!" to the others who grace our lives.

1. For Levinas, "The face speaks: 'Where art thou?' Goodness makes it possible to say, 'Here I am!' and thus to speak and to act on behalf of others" (Hyde 2001, 104). This call and response for Hyde is "the life-giving gift of acknowledgment" that is nothing less than miraculous and holy.
2. The home, according to Levinas, is defined as always open to the other. Expansive in nature, the home is the condition for human activity dependent upon the feminine welcome.
3. Levinas provides a commanding, albeit different way, to view ethics. He says, "We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics" (1969, 43). We explore this particular understanding of ethics, recognizing that the more commonly accepted definition of ethics involves deliberative inquiry into what is good and right. For Levinas, to say that ethics is metaphysical is to recognize that it is without a foundation, yet is imperative in its force as a response and responsibility to the other. It is this reading of ethics that we find compelling as a condition for communication.
4. In trying to distinguish ethics from ontology or what is, Levinas claims that ethics exists without an essence but with a definite exigency of responsibility for the other. He defines ethics as what disrupts essence or being, unsettling all that is thought to be certain, comfortable, or natural. Ethics is thus "otherwise than being," moving us not to ascertain answers but to ask relentless questions of ourselves as we encounter others.
5. Associated with familiarity, intimacy, and gentleness, and possessed by the feminine, the home conditions the self to be able to respond to the other who resides out in the world.

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