

Establishing the Husserl Archives: Dialogic Ethics' Revelatory Ethics

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Abstract: At the time of his death in 1938, the unpublished papers of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, were at risk of destruction by the Nazi regime. Father Herman Leo van Breda, a graduate student at the Catholic University of Leuven, worked to smuggle this collection from Germany to Belgium where he eventually established the Husserl Archives. This essay considers this account as an enactment of Emmanuel Levinas's dialogic ethics attentive to the interplay of the saying, the said, and the trace. Furthermore, the essay considers interhuman and interfaith implications as well as connections to dialogic ethics within public commemoration.

Keywords: Husserl Archives Leuven, Herman Leo van Breda, Emmanuel Levinas, dialogic ethics

At the time of Edmund Husserl's death in 1938, his approximately 40,000 pages of unpublished materials were left in a precarious position under the threat of Nazi destruction (Arnett 2017; Baring 2019; Levinas [1975] 1996; van Breda [1959] 2007). This essay turns to the extraordinary circumstances of the founding of the Husserl Archives by Father Herman Leo van Breda, who smuggled Husserl's unpublished papers out of Germany to Belgium where he established the Husserl Archives at the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie (ISP) at the Catholic University of Leuven. Van Breda, as a 27-year-old graduate student, successfully negotiated the transfer of Husserl's estate (*Nachlass*)¹ with his widow, Malvine Husserl, in the midst of heightened international tensions and growing anti-Semitism. Van Breda organized assistance from the Belgian embassy to transport the materials, secured funding for the institution, and managed to ensure safety for the collection throughout the war, including the Nazi occupation of Belgium. The Archives are van Breda's life's work and legacy as he built an institutional home for research and publication on Husserl, the founder of phenomenology.

¹ Husserl's *Nachlass* included his unpublished manuscripts, his 2,700-volume philosophical library, his correspondence, and various other documents and possessions (Husserl Archives Leuven, n.d.).

Turning to the founding of the Husserl Archives, this essay seeks insights relevant to dialogic ethics within interhuman and interfaith perspectives. The essay proceeds in four sections. The first section, "Establishing the Husserl Archives," reviews the founding and ongoing contributions of this institutional research center. The second section, "Commemorative Tributes: Religious Influences and Interpersonal Implications," turns to secondary accounts on the importance of van Breda's work with attentiveness to Catholic influences in the development of phenomenology (Baring 2019) and implications for interpersonal encounters (Levinas [1975] 1996). The third section, "Levinas's Dialogic Ethics: The Saying, the Said, and the Trace," offers an exploration of the relevance of Emmanuel Levinas's concepts of the saying, the said, and the trace to dialogic ethics. The essay then concludes with "Implications for Dialogic Ethics," which understands the legacy of van Breda and the Husserl Archives as an exemplar of Levinas's dialogic ethics within the scope of public commemoration.

Levinas's perspective of dialogic ethics relies upon a nonreciprocal, disinterested, and impersonal encounter enacted in the interplay of the saying, the said, and the trace. The said materializes in temporally tangible and solidified insights—what has been written, recorded, manufactured, and circulated—while the trace of the saying emerges in the face, the immemorial ethical echo, and the demands of a historical moment. The trace acts as the mediating force that preserves an immemorial saying in the temporalized said. These concepts are mutually interdependent and simultaneously in constant interruption, demonstrating key components central to dialogue and dialogic ethics.

Ronald C. Arnett (2004, 2017) distinguishes this view from Martin Buber's emphasis on reciprocal dialogue, yet simultaneously describes the saying and said as exemplifying Buber's understanding of a unity of contraries. Following Arnett's distinction, Lisbeth Lipari² (2004) aligns Buber's I-Thou/I-It and Levinas's saying/said as central themes to understanding their respective positions on dialogic ethics, arguing that Buber stresses "the intersubjective relation between persons in everyday life" while Levinas considers "the transcendence of being through the ethical relation with the 'face' of the other" (126). Levinas's ethical philosophy, unlike Buber's, extends beyond dialogic exchanges in temporalized encounters while maintaining revelatory insights for the study of dialogic ethics. This essay contends that van Breda exemplifies Levinas's dialogic ethics enacted by the dynamic interplay of the saying, the said, and the trace.

² Informed by the work of Buber and Levinas, Lipari (2004) contends that dialogic ethics and communication ethics occur via listening rather than speaking (137). Specifically, she describes discursive exchanges between Buber and Levinas as a "failure of communication," marked by "insufficient dialogic engagement with the alterity of the other—a failure, in short, to listen for the other" (122). Without denying both scholars' contributions to dialogic ethics, she reviews controversies within interpretations of their work and places her own perspective on listening as central to this conversation. Later, she describes this perspective as "listening otherwise" and emphasizes its attentiveness to Otherness and alterity (Lipari 2009, 45) and connects it to Levinas's notion of "beyond dialogue," which seeks to articulate encounters that lie within the realm of the saying (Lipari 2010, 359).

Establishing the Husserl Archives

Leo van Breda was born on February 28, 1911, in Lier, Belgium (a small town outside of Antwerp). He joined the Franciscan order and was ordained as a priest on August 19, 1934, when he took on the name Herman. Entering the ISP at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1936, van Breda earned his bachelor's degree in 1937 and his licentiate in 1938. Léon Noël,³ who was the first to write about Husserl outside of the German language in 1910, introduced van Breda to phenomenology (Baring 2019, 280). Van Breda's thesis focused on Husserl's early writings and reflected Noël's influence (Baring 2019, 290). Intending to continue this line of inquiry in his doctoral studies, van Breda, hoping to access Husserl's unpublished papers, travelled to Freiburg, Germany in 1938, four months after Husserl's death.

Van Breda ([1959] 2007) recounts his journey in a firsthand account that details the events surrounding the founding of the Husserl Archives. He begins with the historical context that brought danger to Husserl and threatened the safety of his *Nachlass*. Although he converted to the Lutheran faith in 1887, Husserl was born to a Jewish family in 1859 and was thus subjected to anti-Semitic laws. Despite the considerable prestige that Husserl brought to the University of Freiburg, he was barred from university facilities (such as the library) and denied attendance at the international philosophical congresses as a German delegate (40–42). This political climate motivated the University of Southern California to offer him a position as chair of the philosophy department in hopes of removing him from the threats of Nazi Germany; Husserl, however, denied the invitation. According to van Breda, Husserl was not willing to accept a position “aimed more at removing him . . . from Germany, than at making him part of the academic staff”; despite additional efforts from his children who had already immigrated to the United States, Husserl “insist[ed] that he would die in the country in which he had lived and worked” (47). Husserl and his wife lived in increasing isolation. By the time of his death on April 27, 1938, few friends and colleagues remained connected to them.

At this time, van Breda ([1959] 2007) expanded his goal from access to Husserl's unpublished work to the publication and preservation of these materials. Repeatedly referring to these works, Husserl acknowledged their importance in “clarify[ing] problems that their commentators had been unable to solve” (39). Upon his death, Husserl left these unpublished works legally entrusted to his son in the United States and physically entrusted to the estate managed by his widow, Malvine Husserl, in Germany. Van Breda feared that the Nazis would prohibit publishers from printing any further copies of Husserl's

³ Léon Noël (1878–1953) was successor to Cardinal Désirée-Félicien-François-Joseph Mercier, who was the founding president of the ISP at the Catholic University of Leuven; both scholars shared an interest in Thomist philosophy. Noël explored the possible connections between neo-scholasticism and phenomenology. His research is consistent with van Breda's work. Baring (2019) likens the contributions of Noël and van Breda, writing: “In 1910 Léon Noël had brought Husserl's ideas into new lands through his writing and teaching. Thirty years later, his student Herman Leo Van Breda accomplished the same task, but this time with trains and traveling cases” (280).

work and most likely destroy his *Nachlass* (40). Given these threats, van Breda hoped to transport the materials to Belgium where they could be published outside of the arenas of Nazi control.

Van Breda ([1959] 2007) turned to the Catholic University of Leuven for institutional support. He met with his doctoral advisor, Joseph Dopp, and another trusted professor, Louis de Raeymaeker, who sought the support of Noël and the ISP. Sharing strong interest in Husserl's phenomenological project, Noël gave his highest support and clarified that van Breda would need an estimate of the scope and importance of the *Nachlass*, judgment on what was publishable, information on the material's legal status, and permission from the legal inheritor (41). This information provided a clear scope for the goals of van Breda's visit.

When van Breda ([1959] 2007) arrived in Freiburg, he met with Malvine Husserl and Eugen Fink, one of Husserl's final and most loyal assistants. Malvine Husserl made her commitment to her husband's philosophical project clear, recognizing its protection as her "strict duty" (43). During their initial encounter, Fink immediately confirmed the significance of Husserl's unpublished papers and revealed the 40,000 pages of stenographic material written by Husserl as well as an additional 10,000 pages transcribed by his research assistants, including Fink, Ludwig Landgrebe, and Edith Stein (43). Additionally, they introduced van Breda to Husserl's extensive philosophical library, which contained over 2,700 volumes collected between 1880 and 1938.⁴ The significance of the unpublished papers as well as the annotated philosophical library was undeniable and the urgent need to remove the Husserl materials from Germany was explicitly apparent to all.

Van Breda ([1959] 2007) recognized the logistical and physical challenges facing his plan to transport the materials to Belgium. Particular difficulties included maintaining the physical safety of the collection during its transfer from Freiburg to Leuven, arranging specialized collaborations with Husserl's research assistants, and securing resources, funding, staff, and training (46–47). Despite these challenges, Malvine Husserl confirmed her support for the proposal. By the end of their first meeting, she had made plans to correspond with her son Gerhart in the United States, who maintained legal control of the documents, while van Breda facilitated arrangements and negotiations with the ISP and university administrators (47). Within three days, Malvine Husserl informed van Breda that he should move forward, contingent upon university approval (48). Unfortunately, although the ISP remained supportive of the effort and was willing to edit a portion of the collection, the university feared that they could not guarantee ongoing safety and funding for a collection so large or secure the resources needed for hosting Husserl's research assistants (51). However, the urgency to move the collection became increasingly clear with the Munich Crisis, which made international conflict inevitable as Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy agreed to allow German annexation of Sudetenland in western

⁴ Van Breda ([1959] 2007) saw beyond the library's "intrinsic value" to its "bibliophilic interest" (44); these volumes contained dedications to Husserl from the works' original authors as well as Husserl's "finely printed" notes (44).

Czechoslovakia. Malvine Husserl “pragmatically” chose to entrust the materials to van Breda without clearly outlined institutional support from the university (52).

The question then became how to transport the massive collection.⁵ Van Breda ([1959] 2007) sought assistance from the Belgian embassy in Berlin, which agreed to transport the collection via diplomatic mail (53).⁶ With arrangements finalized, van Breda returned to Leuven tasked with securing institutional and financial support for the collection. He found short-term funding from the Francqui Foundation with an annual sum of 70,000 Belgian Francs provided consecutively for two years (61).⁷ After the materials arrived in November 1938, van Breda shifted his attention to logistical matters. On December 25, 1938, van Breda coordinated a formal contract signed by Gerhart Husserl (as executor of Husserl’s will) and by Noël (as representative of the ISP) that granted the Archives permission to edit and publish its collection (63).⁸ In April 1939, the Archives hosted its first researcher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who became a central figure in the French phenomenological tradition.⁹ By spring 1939, van Breda arranged for the arrival of Fink and Landgrebe, who provided essential expertise for editing and transcribing the collection (65).¹⁰ On June 21, 1939, van Breda arranged for a Belgian visa for Malvine Husserl, who remained hidden in a convent in the nearby

5 Early plans involved the assistance of a Benedictine nun and former Husserl student, Adelgundis Jägerschmidt, who would smuggle the papers across the border to the Swiss Alps alongside other members of her order (Baring 2019, 279). When the proposal was deemed too dangerous, van Breda worked alongside Malvine Husserl and Fink for new arrangements that would rescue the Nachlass.

6 In order to secure assistance from the embassy, van Breda ([1959] 2007) needed legal documentation that he held power of attorney over the collection. Seeking counsel from a Jewish lawyer, Malvine Husserl signed the paper alongside a disclaimer unknown to the Belgian embassy, indicating that all property be returned to the Husserl family upon its arrival in Leuven (56–57).

7 Émile Francqui, who was a Belgian government official, founded the Francqui Foundation with the support of American President Herbert Hoover in 1932. Baring (2019) explains that Francqui viewed the success of Belgian universities as “crucial” to national reconstruction after the First World War (283). Van Breda found support in one of the Foundation’s programs that provided funds for renowned international scholars to visit and teach at one of the four Belgian universities. Van Breda secured funding from the Francqui Foundation from 1941 until 1944 (284).

8 While the agreement housed the collection at the University of Leuven and granted the institution permission to publish the works, the original documents remained the property of the Husserl family; the only portion of the collection owned by the ISP is Husserl’s library, which it purchased for \$2,500 (Baring 2019). In 1962, the Husserl Archives (n.d.) received nonprofit status and thus became the “legal body that acts as custodian and manager of Husserl’s manuscripts and all related documents.”

9 A number of prominent twentieth-century scholars visited the Husserl Archives, including Tran-Duc-Thao, Paul Ricœur, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Emmanuel Levinas, and Charles Taylor. For more information on who visited the archives, along with dates and commentary on how the archives influenced their work, visit <https://hiw.kuleuven.be/hua/about/history>.

10 From the onset, van Breda ([1959] 2007) was aware that collaboration with highly qualified scholars and researchers was essential. These researchers would need a “high degree of specialization” that would allow for the organization, transcription, and contextualization of the collection; specifically, the Archives needed to situate its holdings in their historical “setting” and to articulate their relationship to his published texts (45).

town of Herent as she waited for a U.S. visa, which finally arrived in 1946 after the conclusion of the war (65–66).

Van Breda ([1959] 2007) explains that by July 1939, all efforts to establish the archives were complete and that “the real work” of editing, transcribing, and publishing the *Nachlass* could begin (67). Husserl’s more than forty years of research utilized an adapted form of German stenography, which could be read by only three of his former students—Fink, Landgrebe, and Stein. While Fink and Landgrebe were interested in the project, Stein had entered a nunnery and was therefore unavailable to assist. Fink and Landgrebe engaged in the transcription of the manuscripts until May 1940 when the German military attacked Belgium and all activities related to the Archives ceased. The war required a new strategy for protecting the Archives’ collection that this time meant secrecy.

With the German occupation of Belgium from May 1940 until February 1945, the Archives were under constant threat and necessarily had to be hidden from the public.¹¹ In a letter to Martin Farber, who founded the *Journal of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, van Breda urged the necessity to “camouflage everything, hide everything, and remain silent” (Baring 2019, 284). Likewise, Noël urged Farber to remove any reference to the Archives and to maintain strict confidence regarding Fink and Landgrebe’s assistance.¹² Beyond the threat of Nazi destruction, the Archives faced threats from Allied warfare as well. In fact, in 1940, a British and American air raid bombed Belgium, destroying an important part of Husserl’s correspondence (66).¹³ The Archives were not considered safe until the end of World War II.¹⁴

Husserl Archives archivist Thomas Vongehr (2007) explains that since its inception the institution allowed “unhindered access” to the *Nachlass*, fueling the publication of *Husserliana*¹⁵ (104–105). Economic difficulties in the early years of

11 From May until August 1940, van Breda ([1959] 2007) was ordered to leave Leuven and the archives he had established. He explains, “Government orders demanded all Belgian citizens between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five to evade capture by the Germans and to be ready to join the army. Since I could not know that such measure would come to nothing, I followed orders” (67). Fearful of their destruction, he was “overjoyed” to find the materials intact upon his return (67).

12 Knowledge of the Archives would have also been particularly dangerous for the three researchers working in the absence of Fink and Landgrebe: Lucy Gelber, Stephan Strasser, and Gertrude Strasser, who were all members of Jewish families and thus particularly precarious in occupied Belgium (Baring 2019, 284–85).

13 Husserl’s correspondence from Heidegger as well as two portraits Husserl made of his teacher, Franz Brentano, were destroyed in this attack (van Breda [1959] 2007, 66).

14 After the war, van Breda worked to gather additional materials relevant to Husserl and phenomenology. He released a call in the *Journal of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, requesting that correspondence with Husserl and lecture notes be shared with the Archives. Likewise, he made efforts to obtain the papers of other prominent phenomenologists such as Stein and Scheler. Although these attempts were unsuccessful, they demonstrate van Breda’s vision for the Archives (Baring 2019, 286–87).

15 The *Husserliana* contains the complete works of Husserl. Published jointly by the Husserl Archives and the ISP, the *Husserliana* contains four series that feature edited portions of the Archives’ collection as well as translations and research guides. Beginning in March 1948, the Archives published the series with Martinus Nijhoff, which became Kluwer Publishing in the 1980s and then

the Archives emphasized the importance of these publications as a major source of income (106). The first publication, edited by Stephan Strasser and introduced by van Breda, was released on March 10, 1950, with 500 copies printed (112–113).¹⁶ Vongehr credits the *Husserliana* as being among the Archives' most significant contributions as it examines the ongoing interpretation, consideration, and reassessment of Husserl's work. The availability of Husserl's *Nachlass* particularly influenced French phenomenology and resulted in numerous "sister archives."¹⁷ These institutions contain copies of collections housed by the Archives in Leuven, safeguarding Husserl's work and assisting with wide access for the collection. Vongehr describes these collaborations, attending to their shared interests as well as their competition.¹⁸ Nonetheless, Vongehr argues that van Breda resisted taking on the role as "dealer of Husserl archives" and reached agreements that provided copies of the materials for a variety of institutions across Europe and the United States. As the complete publication of Husserl's *Nachlass* became "foreseeable," the institution began to look forward to "new duties and new fields of activity" (Bernet 2007, xii). The third director of the archives,¹⁹ Rudolf Bernet (2007), notes efforts to digitize the *Nachlass*, to facilitate and encourage translations of Husserl's work, and to expand the scope of projects and research supported by the Archives as among the institution's more recent goals (xiii).

Van Breda recognized the significance of Husserl's work and accepted responsibility for preserving his unpublished manuscripts through the tumultuous years of World War II. Showing the merits of this effort, Husserl's writings have carried forth influence over the past eighty years, informing far-reaching philosophical traditions and applied contexts that span language,

Springer in 2004 (Vongehr 2007, 112). *Husserliana* publications have continued since 1950 with the most recent volumes released in 2020. Vongehr (2007) suggests that the massive collection of unpublished materials made the works published by Husserl during his life seem "modest" (100). For a complete list of the series' volumes, see <https://hiw.kuleuven.be/hua/editionspublications>.

¹⁶ *Husserliana*'s first volume featured *Cartesian Meditations* in German, which emerged from Husserl's 1929 lectures in France and was particularly significant in the tradition of French phenomenology (Vongehr 2007, 112–113).

¹⁷ Sister archives include the Husserl Archives in Freiburg, the Husserl Archives in Cologne, the Centre d'Archives Husserl at the Sorbonne in Paris, the New School for Social Research in New York City, the Centre d'Etudes Phénoménologiques à l'Université Catholique de Louvain, and the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. For more information on the sister archives, see Husserl Archives Leuven (n.d.).

¹⁸ Vongehr (2007) describes the relationship between the International Phenomenological Society, founded by Marvin Farber in 1939, and the Husserl Archives; van Breda and Farber remained in regular correspondence and supported joint efforts but also encountered competition, such as Farber's proposal for the *Nachlass* to be transported from Leuven to the United States. Van Breda turned to Malvine Husserl for intervention. She suggested that the transfer was "'impossible,' especially considering 'the countless trials and tribulations that Van Breda went through in rescuing them from all the bombing, and considering the moral obligations towards the University of Leuven, which used its own money and spared no effort to preserve the manuscripts'" (107–109). Baring (2019) also addresses "friction" between the Husserl Archives and the International Phenomenological Society (298).

¹⁹ Following van Breda's death in 1974, Samuel IJsseling became director of the Archives from 1974 until 1997. Rudolf Bernet served as the third director from 1997 until 2007, followed by Ullrich Melle from 2007 until 2017. The director since 2017 is Julia Jansen (Husserl Archives Leuven, n.d.).

semiotics, culture, religion, music, ethics, technology, and more. Hosting some of the most prolific researchers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Archives preserves more than the documents van Breda smuggled from Freiburg in 1938; the Archives carries forth traces of Husserl's scholarship that offer far-reaching implications. The next section explores these implications through commemorative tributes to van Breda that announce insights relevant to Catholic religious identity and interhuman encounters.

Commemorative Tributes: Religious Influences and Interhuman Implications

Numerous accounts have commemorated van Breda's work in securing an institutional home for Husserl's unpublished works (Arnett 2017; Baring 2019; Horsten 2018; Levinas [1984] 1989). For instance, Flemish author Toon Horsten²⁰ (2018) published an acclaimed account of van Breda's contributions. A reviewer in a Dutch daily newspaper (*De Volkskrant*) described Horsten's nonfiction historical account as "a story comparable to a novel by Umberto Eco or Dan Brown except for the fact that it really happened" (Peeters, n.d.). Likewise, French philosopher Bruce Bégout's 2018 novel offers a "literary reflection on Pater van Breda's 'masterpiece'" (Husserl Archives Leuven, n.d.). Van Breda's contributions have garnered significant attention from scholarly, philosophical, religious, and popular audiences.

This section contains two subsections that summarize commemorative tributes to van Breda. The first turns to Edward Baring²¹ (2019), who emphasizes van Breda's legacy within Catholic contributions to the development and preservation of phenomenology. The second turns to Levinas ([1975] 1996), who pays homage to van Breda in *Proper Names*. The former considers insights relevant to van Breda's Catholic faith commitment, while the latter addresses his enactment of dialogic ethics with interhuman implications.

Baring: Van Breda's Catholic Influence

Baring (2019) traces the role of Catholic thinkers within the historical development of phenomenology and continental philosophy. He argues that Catholic influences

²⁰ Toon Horsten is a Flemish publicist and writer who discovered the story of van Breda and the founding of the Husserl Archives when engaged in family genealogical research. The story inspired Horsten to write *De pater en de filosoof. De redding van het Husserl-archieef* (in English: *The Father and the Philosopher: Saving the Husserl Archives*). Although this work has not been translated into English, it is available in Dutch, German, Spanish, and Japanese. It received international acclaim and a number of prestigious literary recognitions and reached top ten lists for nonfiction works in Germany (Flanders Literature 2021).

²¹ Edward Baring is a historian at Princeton University, specializing in twentieth-century European philosophy and intellectual history. He studied mathematics and history at the University of Cambridge and Harvard University. He is the author of two books: *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968* (2011) and *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of the Continental Philosophy* (2019).

shaped common themes within phenomenological inquiry that exist beyond geographically situated traditions (i.e., German or French phenomenology). In fact, Baring argues that Catholicism was “the single most important explanation for the international success of phenomenology in the twentieth century” (5). He suggests that the structure of the Church provided networks that aided the spread of phenomenological inquiry across countries, continents, and institutions. This subsection reviews and situates van Breda’s legacy within Baring’s argument.

Baring (2019) notes that phenomenology inspired a number of conversions to and from Catholicism²² and claimed the interests of two saints—Karol Wojtyła (Saint John Paul II) and Edith Stein.²³ Furthermore, he traces Catholic scholars and teachers as “the most proximate *common* ancestor of philosophers in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and elsewhere” (344). He explains that while these Catholic influences often lacked “lasting fame,” they maintained influence over some of the most significant philosophers of the post–World War II era, including Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur, Levinas, and Eco (344). For Baring, these examples are significant as they signal important context about the intended audiences of their texts as well as the institutions that the authors participated within (16).

Baring (2019) identifies trends within Catholic philosophical circles during the first half of the twentieth century with particular attention toward their responses to modernity, Thomism, and neo-scholasticism. Baring explains, “Neo-scholastics sought a philosophical conversion of modernity, a movement from modern to medieval metaphysics—idealism to realism—which, they hoped, would be a precursor to a religious conversion back to Catholicism” (14). Baring places this effort as the goal of Noël’s project as well as van Breda’s research. Catholic neo-scholastics, like van Breda, hoped to find an “ally” in Husserl that was unactualized in the content of the *Nachlass* (280). In fact, for van Breda, the Archives’ Catholic connection became “more of a hindrance than a help” (280).²⁴ The Archives’ connection to the Catholic University of Leuven led many to believe that the institution was a “Catholic enterprise” (288–89). Baring explains that van Breda “quickly became convinced that its reputation as a Catholic institution was an obstacle to its future success, undermining the impression that it was governed by the scholarly principles of disinterested research” (296). Consequently, van Breda routinely distanced the Archives’ relationship to the Catholic University of Leuven and the ISP. This impulse for distance guided van Breda’s actions as director of the Archives.²⁵

22 Notably, Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler referenced phenomenological influences guiding their decisions to convert to and from Catholicism (Baring 2019, 18).

23 Wojtyła, who later became Pope John Paul II, wrote his graduate thesis on phenomenological ethics, and Stein, a student of and research assistant for Husserl, considered phenomenology within Thomist philosophy.

24 Importantly, Malvine Husserl appreciated the Archives’ Catholic connection, referencing it in her conversion to Catholicism in March 1942, which was performed by van Breda (Baring 2019, 289).

25 Baring (2019) notes that the first volume of *Husserliana* “distinguished his [Husserl’s] work most clearly from scholasticism” and demonstrated the Archives’ independence from the ISP (300).

Baring (2019) references non-Catholic relationships nourished by van Breda and his efforts to expand the international reach of the institution (298). Throughout the 1950s, van Breda coordinated a series of international colloquia that hosted some of the first meetings between prominent members of the German and French phenomenological traditions (299). He worked to secure the sister archives that directly expanded the reach of the collection and facilitated international collaborations between phenomenological research centers. The international presence of the Archives was perhaps most important in securing funding from UNESCO, which offered longer financial security than the Francqui Foundation could provide. As part of the application, he provided forty letters from scholars representing three continents and twelve countries (304). Van Breda simultaneously was motivated by his dedication to Catholicism and downplayed its connection to the Archives.

In doing so, Baring (2019) contends that van Breda shaped phenomenology in a post-World War II era as an “heir” to Catholic philosophy (20). As an exemplar, Baring references Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty, who “were able to exploit the tensions between different Catholic readings of Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler in the 1930s to craft their own highly influential interpretations of phenomenology—one religious but Protestant, the other avowedly atheistic—a decade later” (20). Baring explains that van Breda never gave up his search for neo-scholastic connections to Husserl’s work in his own research but recognized the need to distance this motivation from the Archives. Baring’s account of van Breda’s neo-scholastic influences demonstrates the growth of phenomenology beyond the bounds of Catholic theology and philosophy. The work of Catholic philosophers and theologians carried forth Husserl’s *Nachlass*; this act preserved and shaped secular and other non-Catholic traditions that inform phenomenology’s post-World War II presence in continental philosophy.

Levinas: Interhuman Phenomenological Connections

Levinas’s ([1984] 1989) project argues that “ethics is first philosophy” rather than theology, metaphysics, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, or any other philosophical tradition or approach. His project offers a phenomenologically-grounded understanding of ethics emergent from one’s encounter with another. For Levinas, the face of the Other prompts an ethical call that announces one’s responsibility to and for the Other. This responsibility emerges from a “pre-original saying” before and beyond time that reminds one of their obligation toward another (cf. Levinas [1974] 1991, 43–44, 48, 220, 229). Levinas connects this saying to the story of Cain and Abel, answering Cain’s question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9), with the “yes” of responsibility to and for an Other

Likewise, when working to secure UNESCO funding, van Breda deliberately downplayed any connections implying that the Archives was a Catholic institution. The application was filed under the Comité de Patronage rather than the ISP or any other name that linked the Archives to the Catholic University of Leuven; furthermore, van Breda failed to mention any financial support from the university when outlining the Archives’ funding history (303).

(cf. Levinas [1961] 1969, 232–33; Levinas [1974] 1991, 10, 152, 176). Held hostage to the Other, Levinas's ethical philosophy resists totalization with the rupture of justice; in a nonreciprocal and impersonal exchange prompted by the face of the Other, Levinas describes ethics as interrupted by the unseen, unheard, and absent Other who is also influenced by the implications of my actions (Arnett 2017, 146–56).

Oona Eisenstadt (2005) describes this disruptive and interruptive tension as characteristic of Levinas's project, which lies at the intersections of totality and infinity, politics and ethics, same and Other, Greek and Hebrew, said and saying. Within these tensions, the former terms represent the perspective of a "larger order," while the latter terms serve as a "rupture" and challenge (145–46). Although these tensions may first appear as oppositions, Eisenstadt explains how Levinasian justice requires the rupture and mutual interplay of both terms—each necessary to understand and temper the other (146). She explains that the "rupture is always the rupture of a totality" (146)—even infinity, the Other, and the saying can be totalized without a rupture, a disruption, an interruption, and a dialogic partner that brings forth a new perspective.

This subsection focuses on Levinas's ([1975] 1996) tribute to van Breda in *Proper Names* as an application of his ethical philosophy by demonstrating the interplay of the saying, the said, and the trace. Levinas's task is to identify, in the said of proper names, a trace of the saying that announces our responsibility to speak and act (4–5). In the trace that emerges through the said of proper names, one witnesses the movement from same to Other in the fulfillment of the saying. The trace of the saying serves as an "awakening" in both "relation" and "rupture" that signifies one held hostage by responsibility for another (6). Levinas dedicates chapter fourteen of this volume to the trace of saying in the work and life of van Breda, who died only two years prior to Levinas's commemorative essay.

Levinas ([1975] 1996) begins his tribute with a brief overview of van Breda's quest "to protect the persecuted" in an era when National Socialism aimed to obliterate Jewish people, culture, faith, history, and heritage (106–108). Levinas rejoices in van Breda's response to the saying command of responsibility for the "destiny" and "second life" of phenomenology (108). Levinas notes that often the unfinished works of even the most prolific thinkers "undergo the eclipse called purgatory" when their authors die (108). He suggests that van Breda had the opportunity to "open a window to what is most valid today . . . in a world athirst for rigorous knowledge and justice" (108). Levinas recognizes the saying trace in van Breda and the Husserl Archives as "a well-spring of life, a rallying-point for scholars" (108). In "the form of unfinished words," van Breda and the Husserl Archives have shed light and life on a trace of saying (109). Van Breda rescued "a thinking that was still trying itself out on paper" in the unpublished works as traces of the saying (109). The Husserl Archives opened a place for interhuman connection by demonstrating and upholding the call for responsibility to an Other.

Arnett (2017) summarizes Levinas's tribute, describing van Breda as a witness that "preserved the Said of manuscripts and conferences on phenomenology, which housed traces of Saying" (108). Arnett highlights implications relevant to communication and dialogic ethics, which he finds

“housed in the Said of life, the footprints we leave behind” (65). However, these footprints simultaneously act as the vessel for the trace of the saying, which has the power to bring communicative partners into dialogic engagement as we recognize our responsibility to and for the Other. By establishing the Archives, van Breda enacted Levinas’s dialogic ethics as he preserved traces of the saying in the said of Husserl’s *Nachlass*; in doing so, van Breda offers an institution that continues to house dialogic possibilities for future generations of scholars.

Van Breda’s efforts to found the Archives demonstrate interhuman interaction consistent with Levinas’s perspective of dialogic ethics. In preserving the Husserl Archives, van Breda took responsibility for the trace of saying in Husserl’s work, expanding phenomenology’s reach and influence in a post–World War II philosophy. As Baring acknowledged, phenomenology spread from Catholic roots that have invited opportunities for interfaith applications as both religious and secular thought shapes contemporary phenomenological inquiry. Moreover, van Breda’s work safeguarding the Husserl Archives demonstrates interhuman connections with dialogic potential. Consistent with Levinas’s view of dialogic ethics, these interhuman connections rely less on temporalized interpersonal exchange and more on the interplay of the saying, the said, and the trace. Arnett (2017) and Lipari (2004) point toward the close connection between Levinas’s dialogic ethics and his articulation of the saying, the said, and the trace. The next section explores this connection as articulated in Levinas’s ([1974] 1991) *Otherwise than Being*.

Levinas’s Dialogic Ethics: The Saying, the Said, and the Trace

Levinas studied phenomenology at Freiburg University under Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger from 1928 until 1929.²⁶ Levinas ([1994] 2004) noted that he would arrive seven hours early to lecture halls to ensure his seat in the audience (57, 64). During this time, Husserl, who had recently retired but continued to teach, often referred to his unpublished works in lectures, which Levinas ([1982] 1985) noted may have been lost if not for the efforts of van Breda (33). Levinas’s appreciation of phenomenology and the Husserl Archives inspired his friendship with van Breda. This section moves toward considerations of dialogic ethics through the dynamic interplay between Levinas’s notions of the saying, the said, and the trace.

Although Levinas ([1961] 1969) introduces a brief discussion of the saying, the said, and the trace in his first magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity* (269), these themes become central to his subsequent work, *Otherwise than Being*. For Levinas ([1974] 1991), ethics begins with a pre-originary saying that calls one forth in

²⁶ In an interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas ([1982] 1985) noted that in 1928, Husserl addressed phenomenological psychology, and during the 1928–29 term, he addressed the constitution of intersubjectivity (33). In 1930, a year after concluding his studies at Freiburg, Levinas published his thesis, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*; this work was influential in directing French phenomenology.

responsibility. He associates the saying with signification, which resists the sign game of rhetoric and emerges in the one-being-for-the-other (5). Levinas explains that, unlike being, saying is not a game. While the said relies upon verbal signs, linguistic systems, and language conventions, the saying exists prior to and outside of these constructs, yet, nonetheless, is dependent upon them.

For Levinas ([1974] 1991), the saying exists in “subordination” to the said (6); the saying relies upon the vocabulary of the already said to appear. In his search for *otherwise than being*, Levinas explains that the saying is “betrayed” and “dominate[d]” by the said at the moment it is “conveyed” (7).²⁷ The pre-original saying is primordial, anarchical, and antecedent, always prior to the present moment of a said. However, this temporalization of the saying escapes the ontological perspective of being conceived as essence. For Levinas, the saying contains “the enigma whose secret it keeps” in making possible the transcendence of saying (10). At the same time, the saying relies upon temporalization in the said to allow the call of responsibility to be heard. The mediating and transcending force between the saying and the said is the trace. Within the said, the trace of the saying announces my responsibility for the Other “against my will” and “substitute[es] me for the other as a hostage” so the subject acts “despite-me, for-another” (11). The trace’s transcendent nature carries the saying power of responsibility without materializing as a phenomenon. In its fleeting and ephemeral presence, the trace appears in the revelatory nature of the saying without permission, invitation, or demand (cf. Arnett 2017, 12, 33–34, 88).

For Levinas ([1974] 1991), substitution becomes an expression of self, prior to any said. The substitution prompted by the pre-originary ethical call to responsibility “is not the work of negation and no longer belongs to the order of being” (15). This substitution occurs without consent as one becomes a hostage to the Other, held in ethical responsibility. Levinas aims to introduce the subject in saying; he relies upon the saying to articulate an understanding of subjectivity beyond being and attentive to the pre-originary call to responsibility (19, 26). Through substitution, one acts purposefully attentive to the saying call of responsibility, disregarding a self-centered logic for an other-centered orientation.

Levinas ([1974] 1991) acknowledges language’s ability to move beyond meaning toward naming, reifying, identifying, and temporalizing. As the said names, it prompts the emergence of a *phenomenon* that brings forth the *already said* as a vocabulary of “historically constituted” words (37). The saying is absorbed by and simultaneously extends beyond the said. While the saying transcends temporality, the structure of the said materializes through a system of nouns, a system of signs, and a system of verbs. Despite its reliance, Levinas is careful not to “give priority” to the said over the saying, reiterating that the said carries forth a trace that “awakens” a saying (43). As the saying announces one’s responsibility,

27 Here, Levinas ([1974] 1991) points toward a “methodological problem” (7). The saying must remain unsaid in order to maintain the otherwise than being housed in the saying; however, to mandate the simultaneous presence of the saying and the unsaid “reduce[s] being’s other to being and not being” (7).

it both affirms and retracts the said as it resists being, disrupts essence, and emphasizes disinterestedness. The trace of the saying in the said pragmatically necessitates that one act with disinterestedness as one encounters a particular Other. Levinas describes this encounter as one's "exposure to" another (48). This perspective frames his view of communication as not the circulation or transmission of information but "the risky uncovering of oneself" with "sincerity" and "vulnerability" as one approaches the Other (48). The trace reveals the ambiguity of the face that exposes one to another via the saying.

For Levinas ([1974] 1991), the face of the Other carries forth a trace of the saying call to responsibility within an "empty space of what could not be collected" (91). This trace initiates the call to responsibility that holds one hostage by the Other; Levinas explains that the face "is not the absence of a yet non-revealed, but the anarchy of what has never been present, of an infinite which commands in the face of the other, and which, like an excluded middle, could not be aimed at" (98). The face positions the saying embodied in flesh and located in time and space without denying its immemorial nature. The face preserves the trace that announces the responsibility of the *for* in the substitution of one-for-the-other (100). This *for* emerges in proximity that signifies and commands before showing and betraying itself in the said. The responsibility of the *for* emerges antecedent to dialogue and prior to linguistic exchange.

Levinas ([1974] 1991) warns against efforts to reify the trace, which would encourage one to mistake "the monstration of the signified in the signifier" as a trace and move in the direction of politics rather than ethics (121). Levinas emphasizes the trace as a "*Saying of a Said*" but rejects the assumption that the saying can be minimized to nothing more than the said (141). For Levinas, any saying reduced to the said mimics a problematic form of rhetoric that seeks to totalize the Other through eloquence and persuasion. Instead, the everyday language of the said speaks from the *already said* vocabulary of the pre-originary saying that moves one to a recognition of responsibility.

Levinas ([1974] 1991) contends that sincerity keeps the saying open "without excuses, evasions or alibis, delivering itself without saying anything said" (143). The openness of the sincerity of saying occurs through revelatory traces housed in a temporalized said. From his perspective, the saying "is without dialogue" (145); it is our responsibility to the Other rooted in a pre-originary saying prior to and beyond time. The saying resides in "a past that was never present" (161). The ability to house a trace of saying in the said allows dialogic ethics to occur across temporal communities that attend to the no longer living, the contemporaneous, and the not yet born. For example, books and other written and printed materials carry forth a trace of the saying. He describes them as "interrupted discourse" that "belong to a world they do not include" as they call forth interpretation and response (171). This possibility opens up the connections between Levinas's dialogic ethics and his notions of the saying, the said, and the trace.

Levinas announces the intertwined relationship between the dialogic engagement of the saying, the said, and the trace that actualizes the practical enactment of ethical action despite its ambiguity. Levinas's ethical philosophy hinges on interhuman encounters that recognize a trace of the saying in a face that

holds one in responsibility to and for the Other. The story of the Husserl Archives exemplifies the ongoing recognition of the ethical call in the pre-originary saying. This story recounts the preservation of the said in the unpublished works of the founder of phenomenology; these works continue to preserve a trace of the saying that fuels ongoing research enacting Levinas's ethical encounter. The final section considers implications for dialogic ethics emergent from van Breda's founding of the Husserl Archives.

Implications for Dialogic Ethics

This essay reviewed the story of van Breda, who established the Husserl Archives at the Catholic University at Leuven. Husserl's Jewish heritage led to persecution by the Nazi Party and put his unpublished works and philosophical legacy at risk after his death. Van Breda recognized the significant traces housed within these documents and thus worked alongside Husserl's widow, son, and research assistants to ensure their safety during the war. Likewise, he spent the remainder of his life working to secure wide access to these materials for researchers interested in Husserl's phenomenological project. Van Breda established a leading research center that continues to host some of the most influential phenomenologists and philosophers. Due to van Breda's efforts, phenomenological inquiry continues as a dominant trend in contemporary philosophical traditions. Inherent within this story lie implications for religious identity, interhuman possibilities, and dialogic ethics.

Although motivated by his own faith commitment, van Breda worked to build a research center open to interfaith and secular interests. The establishment of the Husserl Archives documents Catholic influences in expanding recognition of phenomenological inquiry as well as providing opportunities for the growth of phenomenology beyond the bounds of Catholicism. Van Breda connected the Archives to global institutions, expanding access to Husserl's *Nachlass*. This effort aided van Breda's commitment to interhuman exchange in the preservation of the Husserl Archives as he built a space for phenomenological inquiry attentive toward his responsibility to Husserl and to a community of scholars interested in his work.

Van Breda's attentiveness to this responsibility enacts the dialogic ethics conceptualized by Levinas's interactive engagement of the saying, the said, and the trace. Husserl's *Nachlass* constituted the said that carried forth a trace of the saying. Prompted by this trace, van Breda accepted responsibility for these documents despite the inevitability of difficulty and the potential for personal harm. His efforts carry forth a trace of the saying still housed within the said of the Archives' collection. As Levinas explained, the saying relies upon the said. Without van Breda's efforts, the said of Husserl's *Nachlass* may have been forever lost along with the traces of Husserl's phenomenology preserved within these documents. For Levinas, dialogic ethics moves from the abstract to the practical as one pragmatically responds to the face of an impersonal Other. Van Breda enacted the interhuman possibilities of Levinas's dialogic ethics, which remain vibrant as

the Archives' collection continues to be available for ongoing research and inquiry. Due to van Breda and those who collaborated with him in founding the Husserl Archives, the trace of the saying held by the collection lingers on for response from current and future generations of scholars.

While this account demonstrates dialogic ethics with interfaith and interhuman implications, it also exemplifies the potential for dialogic ethics within sites of public commemoration. Public memory has always been a context for controversy and contention as it carries forth implications relevant to politics and power (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010). Just as the Nazi regime may have destroyed Husserl's *Nachlass* due to his Jewish heritage, contemporary public memory accounts exercise expressions of power that work to limit the presence of historically marginalized communities from dominant memory narratives. Levinas ([1975] 1996) concludes *Proper Names* with a chapter titled "Nameless"; this conclusion honors the victims of the Holocaust whose names we do not know. Levinas's dialogic ethics pertains to sites of public commemoration as we attend to our responsibility to consider justice obligations that move us beyond dominant memory narratives that form a said void of the saying. The dialogic exchange of the saying, the said, and the trace interact within the disruptive nature of memory and forgetting. Just as his project understands ethics disrupted by justice, van Breda's account points toward what could have been lost in an intentional destruction of the said and what has been gained in the preservation of the saying trace of the Husserl Archives.

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