Influenced in part by the dialogical philosophies of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, Totality and Infinity departs from the ethically neutral tradition of ontology to analyze the face-to-face relation with the Other. First published in English by Duquesne in 1969, this has become one of the classics of modern philosophy. Fully indexed.

Emanuelis Levinas (later adapted to French orthography as Emmanuel Levinas) received a traditional Jewish education in Lithuania. After WWII, he studied the Talmud under the enigmatic "Monsieur Chouchani", whose influence he acknowledged only late in his life. Levinas began his philosophical studies at Strasbourg University in 1924, where he began his lifelong friendship with the French philosopher Emanuelis Levinas (later adapted to French orthography as Emmanuel Levinas) received a traditional Jewish education in Lithuania. After WWII, he studied the Talmud under the enigmatic "Monsieur Chouchani", whose influence he acknowledged only late in his life. Levinas began his philosophical studies at Strasbourg University in 1924, where he began his lifelong friendship with the French philosopher Emanuelis Levinas (later adapted to French orthography as Emmanuel Levinas) received a traditional Jewish education in Lithuania. After WWII, he studied the Talmud under the enigmatic "Monsieur Chouchani", whose influence he acknowledged only late in his life. Levinas began his philosophical studies at Strasbourg University in 1924, where he began his lifelong friendship with the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot. In 1928, he went to Freiburg University to study phenomenology under Edmund Husserl.

At Freiburg he also met Martin Heidegger. Levinas became one of the very first French intellectuals to draw attention to Heidegger and Husserl, by translating Husserl's Cartesian Meditations and by drawing on their ideas in his own philosophy, in works such as his The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, De l'Existence à l'Existant, and En Découvrant l'Existence avec Husserl et Heidegger. According to his obituary in New York Times,[1] Levinas came to regret his enthusiasm for Heidegger, because of the latter's affinity for the Nazis.

During a lecture on forgiveness, Levinas stated "One can forgive many Germans, but there are some Germans it is difficult to forgive. It is difficult to forgive Heidegger".[2] After earning his doctorate Levinas taught at a private Jewish High School in Paris, the École Normale Israélite Orientale, eventually becoming its director. He began teaching at the University of Poitiers in 1961, at the Nanterre campus of the University of Paris in 1967, and at the Sorbonne in 1973, from which he retired in 1979.
He was also a Professor at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. In 1989 he was awarded the Balzan Prize for Philosophy. Among his most famous students is Rabbi Baruch Garzon from Tetouan (Morocco), who learnt Philosophy with Levinas at the Sorbonne and later went on to become one of the most important Rabbis of the Spanish-speaking world.

In the 1950s, Levinas emerged from the circle of intellectuals surrounding Jean Wahl as a leading French thinker. His work is based on the ethics of the Other or, in Levinas's terms, on "ethics as first philosophy". For Levinas, the Other is not knowable and cannot be made into an object of the self, as is done by traditional metaphysics (which Lévinas called "ontology").

Lévinas prefers to think of philosophy as the "wisdom of love" rather than the love of wisdom (the literal Greek meaning of the word "philosophy"). By his lights, ethics becomes an entity independent of subjectivity to the point where ethical responsibility is integral to the subject; hence an ethics of responsibility precedes any "objective searching after truth". Levinas derives the primacy of his ethics from the experience of the encounter with the Other.

For Levinas, the irreducible relation, the epiphany, of the face-to-face, the encounter with another, is a privileged phenomenon in which the other person's proximity and distance are both strongly felt. "The Other precisely reveals himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness".[3]. At the same time, the revelation of the face makes a demand, this demand is before one can express, or know one's freedom, to affirm or deny.[4] One instantly recognizes the transcendence and heteronomy of the Other.

Even murder fails as an attempt to take hold of this otherness. In Levinas's later thought following "Totality and Infinity", he argued that our responsibility for the other was already rooted within our subjective constitution. It should be noted that the first line of the preface of this book is "everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality".[5] This can be seen most clearly in his later account of recurrence (chapter 4 in "Otherwise Than Being"), where Levinas maintai