

THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ETHICAL TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN
LEVINAS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
PHILOSOPHY

NOVEMBER 2005

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ETHICAL TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN LEVINAS

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November 2005, 144 pages

This study aims to accomplish two tasks: First, it is argued that an 'ethical transcendental philosophy' is possible with Levinas. Second, the concepts that bear this possibility to a philosophically acceptable level of cogency can be clarified.

Philosopher's position in history of philosophy suggests a kind of 'externality' in the sense that he is not within the realm of very tradition. Levinas' predisposition is rather to employ what he calls 'peri-phrases' that hinder the philosopher to settle in the existing structure of concepts (read as Greek language). This position can also be read as a resistance to dominating forms of knowledge. Levinas takes this attitude as an important point of resistance against Western metaphysics that puts the ontology at the center. Against this tradition, he celebrates both the 'encounter with the Other' as a pilot point in ethics, one that all rest of which follows from, and the priority of 'the Good'.

In such a way, 'I' has been put into question in its gay independence without any reference to self contained totality, of the kind which is 'self intelligible'. This attachment that is *infinition*, of *infinity* helps us experience not a totality, but 'otherwise than being'. This attitude might resonate with the Kantian attempt displacing knowledge in order to make room for morality. However, a closer reading would notice that there is another agenda here, one that attempts to go to a status of pre-rationality, beyond rationality, so to speak an agenda that radicalizes the Kantian attempt.

Derrida, a philosopher who showed that this attempt was just impossible, impossible in the sense that it was *contaminated* at the very beginning, skillfully benefits from the very inspiration Levinas has provided with. All these attempts and conceptual suggestions have been examined and analyzed, and the Levinasian inspiration has been tried to be elucidated.

Keywords: Other, infinity, transcendence, face.

ÖZ

LEVİNAS'TA AŞKINSAL ETİK BİR FELSEFENİN OLANAĞI

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Kasım 2005, 144 sayfa

Bu çalışma iki görev gerçekleştirme amacındadır: İlkin, Levinas'ta aşkînsal etik bir felsefenin olanaklı olduđu tartışılmakta; sonra da bu olanağı felsefi bir kabul edilebilirlik düzeyine taşıyan kavramların aydınlatılabileceğı gösterilmektedir.

Filozofun felsefe tarihindeki tutumu, 'geleneksel Batı metafiziğı içinde olmamak' türünde bir 'dışsallık' önermeye yöneliktir. Levinas, felsefesinin 'varolan kavramsal yapıya' (Yunan dili anlamında) yerleşmesini engelleyen ve yine kendisinin "çeper ifadeler" diye adlandırdığı türden şeyleri kullanma eğilimindedir. Bu konum, hükmedici bilgi formlarına bir direnç olarak da okunabilir. Levinas bu konumu ontolojiyi merkeze koyan Batı metafiziğine karşı bir direnç noktası olarak görür. Bu geleneğe karşı, geri kalan herşeyin

kendisinden türediđi, etikte adeta bir pilot nokta olan 'Başkası'yla karşılaşma' yı ve 'İyi'nin öncelliđini koyar. Böylece, kendi başına anlaşılabilir olmak anlamında 'kendi kendine yeterli bir bütünlüđe' gönderme yapmaksızın, 'Ben' kendi neşeli bağımsızlığında şüpheye düşürölür. Bu ilişkileniş, sonsuzluđun sonsuzlamasının gerçekleşmesinde bir bütünlüđün deđil, belki tam da tersine 'olmaktan başka türlü'nün deneyimlenişine fırsat verir. Bu tutum Kant'ın ahlāđa yer açmak için bilgiyi ortadan kaldıran tavrını çağrıştıırabilir. Buna karşın, daha derin bir okuma bizi buradaki başka bir vurguyu farketmeye çağırır: Rasyonalitenin öncesine, ötesine, bir bakıma Kantçı girişimi radikalleştiren konuma yönelik bir vurguyu farketmeye.

Derrida, bu girişimin olanaksız olduđunu, bu girişimin en başında *kirlenmiş* olmak bakımından olanaksız olduđunu gösteren bir filozof olarak Levinas'ın verdiđi ilhamdan yine de ustaca yararlanmasını bilmiştir. Tüm bu girişimler ve kavramsal öneriler ele alınmış, incelenmiş, Levinas'ın ilhamı aydınlatılmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Başkası, aşkınlık, bütünlük, sonsuz, yüz.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Dr. Yasin Ceylan, my supervisor, for his invaluable comments, criticism and contributions leading this dissertation to a better level of quality.

Some inspiring parts of this study originated at Nanterre University in Paris, and my presence at this location was fully sponsored by TÜBA (Turkish Academy of Sciences). My special thanks therefore go to this academy for the award it has provided. I also like to thank Professor Catherine Chali er, who has allowed me to attend her most helpful courses helping me to clarify my ideas, for her warm hospitality she showed me during my visit.

I should remember here first Ceylan Gedikođlu and Cihan Camcı, my best friends, for the productive climate they have created during my study.

Let me express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to  etin Balanuye and Cem Kam oz ut. Their help was quite vital in figuring out both the technical details and the academic clarification this study has needed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What does *ethics as first philosophy* mean? How is it possible to defend a claim of ethics' being as first philosophy? Do we have to necessarily blur the lines of philosophy and religion in order to defend this thesis? Is it possible to do philosophy *on the borderline* of philosophy or is philosophy transcendental already? In this thesis we would like to explain the possibility *or* the necessity of *an ethical transcendental philosophy* in Levinas. We will deal with the new concepts introduced by Levinas, such as face, saying, substitution and the Other¹, and indicate their mostly disturbing and shocking implications for Western philosophy.

Could Levinas' philosophy be considered 'transcendental' when we use the concept with reference to a priori principles of knowledge? Certainly, it is not concerned with any a priori forms and it does not import to any conditions of knowledge. Moreover, why do we need to qualify and precede the word transcendental with *ethical*? Levinas always maintained that his method was 'intentional' rather than 'transcendental'. He sees transcendental method as always seeking the foundation that supports something, aiming to show the conditions of possibility, an effort to find the

¹ Levinas uses *autrui* and *autre* for other. In French, *autrui* means the personal other, and *autre* means otherness in general, alterity. Despite this difference, Levinas is not consistent in using them, we will therefore use the word Other with capital O for *autrui*.

foundation by which our world, the same (*le Même, to auton*) *par excellence*, is supported. He asserts that he begins from the human that *ages* in the world rather than *inhabits* it.² This human does not need to seek a sound epistemological base for his survival from the beginning. Nonetheless, he adds that he might accept the title 'An Ethical Transcendentalism' for his philosophy.

[P]rovided that 'transcendental' signifies a certain priority: except that ethics is before ontology. It is more ontological than ontology; more *sublime* than ontology. It is from there that a certain equivocation comes—whereby ethics seems laid on top ontology, whereas it is before ontology. It is thus a transcendentalism that begins with ethics.³

Ethics and ontology are not on the same level. De Boer reminds us that Levinas uses a transcendental method in the form of intentional analysis:

This analysis does not proceed from experience or the self-evident; rather, it is an indirect search moving from intuition or reason to an ethical condition which cannot itself be thematized. This condition reveals itself when thought 'breaks' in theory and practice, when the call of the Other disturbs the self-sufficient existence of the I. This method of 'backtracking' is akin to Kant's method. This is probably why Levinas does not use the phenomenological term *reduction* and prefers the Kantian term *deduction*.⁴

In addition to this, Levinas notes that in the preface of *Totality and Infinity* his method has a similarity with the transcendental method. "For the way we are describing to work back and remain this side of objective certitude resembles what has come to be called the transcendental method (in which

² Levinas, 1988, p. 88; in French original, Levinas, 1998, p. 141. Hereafter, original passages will be indicated in corner-brackets.

³ *ibid.*, p. 90 [*ibid.*, p. 143.]

⁴ De Boer, T., 1997, p. 29.

the technical procedures of transcendental idealism need not necessarily be comprised).”⁵ In *Totality and Infinity*, while dealing with the concept of dwelling, he adds;

The method practiced here does indeed consist in seeking the condition of empirical situations, but it leaves to the developments called empirical, in which the conditioning possibility is accomplished—it leaves to the *concretization*— an ontological role that specifies the meaning of the fundamental possibility, a meaning invisible in that condition.⁶

Instead of starting from principles, we find ourselves in a *mood*, or a *state* in which we are not the agent. Since Heidegger, we do not propose that being conscious is the main state in the world and we cannot underestimate this pre-domain in order to start to think. A modern subject is only an abstraction from the concrete reality of ‘being-in-the-world’. Regardless of the fact that Levinas appreciates this premise, his investigation does not end with the *plenitude* of being. A metaphysical dimension is required to rescue us from this *nightmare*. In this thesis, we will try to make explicit Levinas’ way of escape from this neutral totality.

Should this thesis have been entitled the rationality, as opposed to the possibility, of *an ethical transcendental philosophy* in Levinas? It is clear that this thesis asks a Kantian question that begins with how is it possible....? Certainly, Levinas does not describe his ethical theory as rational or irrational, but in our view every effort or aim to explain, is to make something *in a sense* rational, even if the philosophy were constructed from concepts. Philosophy is used in order to explain reality even if the aim is to *destroy* these concepts once they have been used. This determination does not lead us to accept Derridan ironic attitude

⁵ Levinas, 1991, p. 25 [Levinas, 1971, p. 10].

⁶ *ibid.*, p.173 [*ibid.*, pp. 188-9].

necessarily. And, certainly, Levinas is aware of this brutal fact, too. Is this effort then futile or impossible? If to *shock* philosophy as a rational conceptual activity by means of the *Other* is meaningful, Levinas' effort is precious and it might not be reduced to one of the sides of this struggle easily. This thesis will try to elucidate this value especially by following the trace of Levinas' specific concepts.

We know that Kant holds that only rationalism of judgement is suitable to the use of moral laws. He opposes rationalism as that of the faculty of judgement suitable to the use of moral law to empiricism, as that substitutes for duty something completely different, i.e. an empirical interest.⁷ It follows that rationality as a positive thing might be used in the ethical realm. However, ethical theories did not always claim that they were rational. Sometimes they claimed that the ethics was based on a special sense ethical (Hutcheson, Shaftesbury), sometimes they claimed that it was another name for the increasing or decreasing of power (Spinoza), sometimes that it is shaped in the struggle of individuals in social relationships (Hegel). We know that the ethics was not claimed as an *independent* ethical theory all the time. Thus, it should be remembered again that we follow the trace of the Kantian ethics which gives us the special domain in *Critical of Practical Reason* in this thesis. In addition, it should not be forgotten that this dimension does not have to start with, or need to be supported by God (even if it leads to it!). It is also possible to regard Levinas' Biblical quotations as a tradition of thought, rather than as proof of his philosophy.

All Levinas' philosophy could be summarized in a phrase of 'After you, sir!' (*Après vous, Messieurs!*).

⁷ Kant, 1993, p. 87.

That is, by everyday and quite banal acts of civility, hospitality, kindness and politeness that have perhaps received too little attention from philosophers. It is such acts that Levinas qualifies with the adjective 'ethical'. Now, it is to be hoped that it goes without saying that the achievement of such an ethical relation with the other person is not *just* a task for philosophy, but it *is* a philosophical task, namely to understand what we might call the moral grammar of everyday life and to try and teach that grammar. The other person is not simply a step on the philosopher's ladder to metaphysical truth. And perhaps the true source of wonder with which, as Aristotle claimed, philosophy begins, is not to be found by staring into the starry heavens, but by looking into another's eyes, for here is a more palpable infinity that can never exhaust one's curiosity...⁸

Therefore, philosophy is in need of a new *sense* (in French *sense* also means direction) that leads it to the transcendence of the Other. In this dissertation, we will seek to illuminate this otherness, regardless of its inexhaustible disclosing, that makes possible our ethical experience in social life in order to *justify* the possibility of this philosophy.

⁸ Critchley, 2002, p.27.

CHAPTER 2

THE BASES OF NEW PHILOSOPHY

What would Levinas like to make us believe? Is he in reality a religious thinker seeking to insert his religious presuppositions (beliefs) into philosophy in the guise of the primacy of ethics? Are the concepts that he introduces into philosophy and his critiques of Western philosophy really *new*? Is it possible to undertake philosophy with his concepts (which do not seem as concepts, in fact!), such as face, fecundity, or the Other?⁹ This dissertation tries to answer the last question in particular and to elucidate the implications of these concepts by illuminating the other questions.

The project of Western philosophy has been one of reduction to the same because it has always insisted on understanding everything in relation to some self-intelligible whole, whether it be Platonic forms, Aristotelian substance, the divine pure act of the medievals, or Hegel's absolute.¹⁰

What is forgotten here is the transcendence of the Other and its being anterior to the problems of ontology. This claim determines Levinas' search throughout.

⁹ The verb form of the concept of *Begriff* (that means concept in German) is *begreifen* coming from *greifen* ('to grasp, to seize) that means 'understand, conceive, conceptualize' (Inwood, 1992, p. 58). This explains the reason for Levinas' abstention from using concepts in a Hegelian way.

¹⁰ Gutting, 2001, p.355.

From where do we start to do philosophy? From a unity (or a totality) or a difference? Is it possible to envisage a non-dialectical difference? The reason for turning back to empiricism is the need for the concept of difference instead of dialectics. Nevertheless, Levinas does not suggest that we go back to empiricism absolutely; rather, that empiricism is radicalized, and overcome by ethical experience. An encounter with the Other is realized in social life, but the meaning of this event leads us to *the hither side* of the being which is *absent*.¹¹

Having condemned reason as *raison d'être* as a derivative construct, Heidegger's call to hear the voice of a forgotten Being (*Sein*) gives us a difference which is absolute (*ontological difference*). Levinas' research differs from this attitude in that it seeks this radical difference not in ontology itself but between ethics and ontology. There is only the call of the Other helping me to experience the otherness without falling into the same. My going out from myself towards the Other is experiencing not the Other being but *otherwise than being*. Levinas notes that this transcendence could not be dealt with by the clarity of knowing.

[W]e believe that the phenomena of light and clarity, and of freedom which is at one with them, dominate will and feeling ... and we think that the will in movement from the inside to the outside already presupposes the world and light. Feelings and will come after the *cogito*. It is in the perspective of the *cogito* that will and feeling have been considered from Descartes to Heidegger. One always looked for their object, the *cogitatum*; they were analyzed as acts of apprehension.¹²

¹¹ This insufficiency also leads Derrida to leave empiricism. "No experience will ever enable us to think outside the privilege of the present, for experience is always the proof, lived out in the present, of a presence (even if it be the presence of an absence, as when one speaks of the experience of exile or death). This, incidentally, is why Derrida ultimately rejects the 'philosophical empiricism' which on occasion he evokes." (Descombes, 1980, pp. 149-50)

¹² Levinas, 1995a, p.100 [Levinas, 1998a, p. 172].

The Other, as an interlocutor, could not be approached in apprehension, or grasped within the light. It cannot be *taken*¹³ and put into a unity like 'we'.

It is obvious that Levinas does not find his absolute otherness in Greek thought. There is not a solution that could be taken directly from Judaism, either. Religious themes could not be used as a proof for philosophical problems (this is much more true at least for his early writings), nor is the philosopher a thinker nourishing from a *source* purified from a spirituality resistant to knowledge. Husserl's seeing the existence of the world as having a rich structure which is also constructed by will, desire, etc...¹⁴ enables him to deal with meaning as something more than representation. The Other is not the object to be represented for consciousness, but my interlocutor. We do not only seek to know him, but also *desire* him. Moreover, Levinas' intentionality cannot fulfill its movement. Ethics appears in *rupture* of this movement, that would not have been thought by Husserl.

Totality is the impossibility of ethics due to the death of individual singularity within it. In addition, ethics requires a singularity in order to judge every singular event. There could be no excuse (excuse and justification are synonyms!) in the name of any great reality. Therefore, Hegel's absolute, which does not know otherness, must be rejected. Levinas uses Rosenzweig's critique of Hegel at this point. His condemnation of philosophies (especially Hegelian philosophy) that are based on the fear of death¹⁵ inspires Levinas to escape from Hegel's 'beautiful totality'.

¹³ The verb of *prendre* in *com-prendre* (*comprendre*) or in *ap-prehend* (*apprendre*) means 'to take' in French.

¹⁴ Levinas, 1995b, p. 45 [Levinas, 1994, p. 76].

¹⁵ Rosenzweig, 1985, p. 3.

2.1. Philosophy, Religion and Being First Philosophy

Is an effort to reconcile philosophy and religion futile? Is it still relevant in these times? Has this quarrel not been resolved already?¹⁶ We know that there were a lot of attempts to succeed in resolving this difficult problem in different traditions throughout the history of philosophy.

One of them appertains to an Islamic philosopher, Farabi (872-950). In his view, the difference between religion and philosophy appears in how people regard the manner of knowing. The things that people (of 'the excellent city') should know are known 'either by being impressed on their souls as they really are or by being impressed on them through affinity and symbolic representation.'¹⁷ This is a very common attitude that we encounter in these discussions. Reality is *one*, but the ways of knowing it differ.

The philosophers in the city are those who know these things through strict demonstrations and their own insight; those who are close to the philosophers know them as they really are through the insight of the philosophers, following them, assenting to their views and trusting them. But others know them through symbols which reproduce them by imitation, because neither nature nor habit has provided their minds with the gift to understand them as they are. Both are kinds of knowledge, but the knowledge of the philosophers is undoubtedly more excellent.¹⁸

¹⁶ M. Horkheimer indicates that discussion between Theology and Philosophy was in the name of being the real owner of the ultimate truth, but the battle ended in an negotiation that destroyed in fact the claims of both sides. Religion was condemned to be a cultural good amongst others, by giving up its total claim. On the other hand, although the philosophers of the Enlightenment attacked religion in the name of reason, they killed not the Church but metaphysics and the objective concept of reason itself (Horkheimer, 1992, pp. 16-8). The result was a neutralization, arising from the idea of tolerance.

¹⁷ Farabi, 1985, p. 279.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 279.

It is clear that the philosopher's knowledge is higher as a notion demonstrated by means of reason than the other which is based on imitation despite coming from the same reality.

Likewise, another Islamic philosopher, Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) accords philosophical knowledge the ultimate place in knowledge, as a definite knowing of the 'purpose of things', and sees meaning as a concept appertaining to philosophy. This reality manifests itself in the world and it is necessary to use illustrations under proper conditions due to the difficulty of ordinary men to see the harmony between philosophy and religion.¹⁹

While these efforts are not convincing, is there a necessity to subjugate knowledge, *in order to make room for faith*? Kant discusses the relationship between the reality of God as a concept of religion with philosophy from a different aspect in *Critique of Practical Reason* under the title 'How is it possible to conceive of extending pure reason in a practical respect without thereby extending its knowledge as speculative?' According to him, the problem of relation can be solved by making lucid the difference between the two usages of Reason, as theoretical and practical. The Ideas of reason (God, immortality, soul) appertain to the second usage of reason, that is, practical.

Now through an apodictic practical law, as necessary conditions of the possibility of that which this law requires to be made an object, they acquire objective reality. That is to say, they show by this that they have objects, but we cannot indicate how their concept refers to an object...²⁰

¹⁹ Ibn-Rushd, www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1190averroes.html, downloaded on 29/05/05.

²⁰ Kant, 1993, p.142.

The problem is resolved by means of putting the concept of God as a regulative idea in morals which is *rational* in a sense.

[T]he moral law, by the concept of the highest good as the object of pure practical reason, defines the concept of the First Being as that of a Supreme Being. This can not be accomplished by the physical (and its higher development, the metaphysical) or, consequently, by any speculative procedure of reason. Therefore, the concept of God is one which belongs originally not to physics, i.e., to speculative reason, but to morals.²¹

Regardless of the fact that morality leads inevitably to religion, it does not need to be based on a supreme being for its justification. However, for Hegel, religion is more than morality in contrast to Kant's view. For Hegel, religion (Christianity is absolute religion in his view) and philosophy differ from each other not in their contents, but in their forms, 'philosophy involves conceptual thought, it can reflect upon and interpret religion, while religion cannot reflect on or interpret philosophy'.²²

As an interesting figure in these discussions, Christian theologian Tillich's attempt differs from these efforts in terms of perceiving these two realms as different realities that do not partake from the same basis. They are, in fact, neither contradictory nor synthesizable in his view.²³ What can we then understand about the sources of these two realms? For the philosopher the medium is pure reason and there is a harmony, identity or analogy between the objective and subjective Logos. Whereas for the theologian:

The source of his knowledge is not universal *logos* but the Logos 'who became flesh,' that is, the *logos* manifesting itself in a particular historical event. And the medium through which he receives the manifestation of

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 147.

²² Inwood, 1992, p. 255.

²³ Tillich, 1967, pp. 26-7.

the *logos* is not common rationality but the church, its tradition and its present reality.²⁴

How the philosopher and the theologian deal with their 'objects' is completely different. According to Tillich, the theologian '...looks at his object (which transcends the character of being an object) with passion, fear, and love' and this cannot be regarded as 'the *erōs* of the philosopher or his passion for objective truth; it is the love which accepts saving and therefore personal, truth.'²⁵ Therefore, his reality is not excluded from these subjective feelings. In addition to this, a good philosopher is, in fact, a theologian at the same time.

He is a theologian in the degree to which his existential situation and his ultimate concern shape his philosophical vision. He is a theologian in the degree to which his intuition of the universal *logos* of the structure of reality as a whole is formed by a particular *logos* which appears to him on his particular place and reveals to him the meaning of the whole ... He wants to serve the universal *logos*. He tries to turn away from his existential situation, including his ultimate concern, toward a place above all particular places, toward pure reality. The conflict between the intention of becoming universal and the destiny of remaining particular characterizes every philosophical existence. Its burden and its greatness.²⁶

2.1.1 Levinas' Position

After the Enlightenment, when we rejected the restrictions of religion into a faith, were we delivered up again to myths or beliefs?²⁷ "I do not want to

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 86.

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 85.

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 25.

²⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno draw our attention to the complex structure of the Enlightenment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. "False clarity is only another name for myth; and myth has always been obscure and enlightening at one and the same time: always using the devices of familiarity and straightforward dismissal to avoid

define anything through God because it is the human that I know. It is God that I can define through human relations and not the inverse.”²⁸ These sentences might be read as a rejection of mystical, futile attempts to conceive the truth out of human sociality.

Though Levinas’ view concerning the independence of ethics is common with Kant, his position cannot be reduced to Kant’s easily. He does not think that it is strictly impossible to reconcile the concepts of God and Philosophy. How then is it possible to do this without giving up the use of philosophical Logos?

Levinas tries to shock modern thought that originates from the independent premise ‘I think, therefore I am’ with an ethical answer ‘Here, I am’ and to give ethics primacy over ontology. Responsibility is incumbent upon us before the appearance of reason and the moral subject appears in *responding* to the Other and opens to freedom and reason. Ethics could not be a moment of being, and if it is *otherwise* than being and *better* than being, it is better than reason, too.

Levinas’ views are clearly in opposition to the embodiment of the Deity; his explanations start from the material world and progress to the divinity *à-Dieu*, and this is the very life of the moral subject. Nonetheless, his writings

the labor of conceptualization.”(Horkheimer, and Adorno, 1994, p. xiv) The Enlightenment never gives up the myths. “From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities. For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect. So long as it can develop undisturbed by any outward repression, there is no holding it. In the process, it treats its own ideas of human rights exactly as it does the older universals. Every spiritual resistance it encounters serves merely to increase its strength. Which means that enlightenment still recognizes itself even in myths.”(Horkheimer, and Adorno, 1994, p. 6) Making lucid its object and concealing it at the same time are characteristics of myth. This is the reason of mathematics being best representative of modern reason, as a perfect reality in the world.

²⁸ Levinas, 1962, in Peperzak, et.al. (ed.), 1996, p. 29.

could not be regarded as theology since all theology assumes the primacy of ontology.

The relationship between God and man 'is not emotional communication that takes place within the love of a God incarnate, but a spiritual or intellectual relationship which takes place through an education in the Torah.'²⁹ His God is not real 'through incarnation but through Law'.³⁰ Does Levinas seek 'to use the philosophical medium, the *logos*, in order to help us understand the significance of ideas that come from the Torah, and above all the significance of election' as Chalier argues?³¹ Is this a philosophy in the service of God due to God's demand for justice?³² Levinas does not solve the theoretical discussion in favour of philosophy or religion definitely (even if there is an increasing propensity to introduce theological language into his philosophical writings in later works); instead he tries to focus on the *limitations* by actualizing the morality (*Here I am and I am in the service of you!*). There is no argumentational solution that would satisfy both sides. He always tries to be a philosopher and he is aware of that his philosophy is based on a pre-philosophical experience, and 'a ground that does not pertain solely to philosophy'.³³ The 'horizon of meaning' does not only consist of our epistemological experience in the world.

2.1.2. Ethics as First Philosophy

How being *justifies* itself is the first question, so ethics is first philosophy.

²⁹ Levinas, 1990, p. 144. [Levinas, 1963 and 1976, p. 221].

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 145 [*ibid.*, p. 222].

³¹ Chalier, 1995, in Peperzak (ed.), 1995, p. 11.

³² Cohen, 1994, pp. 194-5.

³³ Levinas, 1984, in Robins, (ed.), 2001, p. 159.

[C]ritique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same. A calling into question of the same- which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same- is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge. And as critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology.³⁴

This *calling into question* is the moment of ethics in which the subject is awakened to *responsibility*. Freedom appears in my *response* to the Other's demand.³⁵ Otherwise, the subject would have remained as an I that pursues merely having more and more power in order to survive or to domain.

It is clear that Levinas aims to render problematic the primacy of ontology which is 'the philosophy of injustice' and to draw our attention to the Other, outside of its being the subject of epistemological problems. Certainly, to reject ontology would have been nonsense; instead, he emphasizes the

³⁴ Levinas, 1991, p. 43. [Levinas, 1971, p. 33].

³⁵ A. Renaut criticizes Levinas for failing to see that the idea of autonomy already implies openness to the Other. "For just as autonomy is not independence (*the proof being that Kant criticizes the morality of happiness in the name of the principle of autonomy*), it presupposes that I am the 'source of myself' only by raising myself, as the practical subject, above the immediacy of the empirical subject and integrating the presence of the other into my ipseity: *the subject that gives itself its own law must, in order to rise to the level of this auto-nomy; have transcended the self-identity of the desiring subject (individuality) and opened itself up to the otherness of the human species. Transcendence-in-immanence is by definition what autonomy means.*"(Renaut, 1999, pp. 164-5) According to Renaut, the subject's autonomy is not his source as a particular subject, but it is identified with the intersubjective community of a humanity in agreement with the law governing it. This breaks the logic of the same (Renaut, 1999, pp.165-6).

insufficiency of the language of ontology in describing our primordial experience. It is necessary to describe the Other's privileged place in the universe with a new language:

Thematization and conceptualization, which moreover are inseparable, are not at peace with the other but in suppression or possession of the other. For possession affirms the other, but within a negation of its independence. 'I think' is reduced to 'I can' – to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality. Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power.³⁶

Concepts or categories are not as innocent as ontological thought.³⁷ Philosophy, as ontology, carries a violence in its core from the beginning by merging every difference into one. Levinas decodes this violence as being hidden throughout the history of philosophy in the guise of wisdom. Ontology is not false but unjust.

...Greek is a language of impartial thought, of the universality of pure knowledge. All meaning, all intelligibility, all spirit is not knowledge, but all can be translated into Greek. With periphrases it is possible to give an account of a spirituality resistant to the forms of knowledge.³⁸

This impediment requires a language not divine or human but *angelic*³⁹ against ontology, oppressing the voice of the Other who *calls into question* the identity of the same in every legal speech.

³⁶ Levinas, 1991, p. 46 [Levinas, 1971, p. 37].

³⁷ "The classical Greek term *kategorein* meant 'to accuse', 'to say of' or 'to judge' was adopted by Aristotle to describe the ways in which it was possible to speak of being." (Caygill, 1995, p. 102)

³⁸ Levinas, 1999, p. 178.

³⁹ Peperzak, 1997, p. 93.

The relation with the Other cannot be thought of within the limits of ontology since “The other is not an object of comprehension first and an interlocutor second. These two relations are intertwined. In other words, the comprehension of the other is inseparable from his invocation.”⁴⁰ We speak with the Other and we name it by calling, i.e. calling does not happen later.⁴¹ To comprehend cannot be prior to speak. Thereafter, his aim is not to comprehend but to speak with the Other. That is the only way to approach the Other.

Levinas condemns Western philosophy as an *egology* and asserts his view that the ‘relation with the other is here accomplished only through a third term which I find in myself. The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism.’⁴² The reason knows only itself.

This primacy of the same was Socrates’s teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside- to receive nothing, or to be free. Freedom does not resemble the capricious spontaneity of free will; its ultimate meaning lies in this permanence in the same, which is reason. Cognition is the deployment of this identity; it is freedom.⁴³

Self-sufficiency of the same does not allow for a realization of a real relation, a conversation with the Other. In the movement of Odysseus, in which the adventure pursued in the world is only an ‘accident of a return’.⁴⁴ We are always within the same. In contrast to this, Levinas is in the pursuit of an adventure in which the subject leaves the home without thinking of coming back, as that of Abraham who sets out without thought of returning

⁴⁰ Levinas, 1951, in Peperzak, et.al. (eds.), 1996, p. 6.

⁴¹ Levinas, 1951, in Peperzak, et.al. (eds.), 1996, p. 8.

⁴² Levinas, 1991, p. 44 [Levinas, 1971, p. 35].

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 43. [*ibid.*, p. 34].

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 176-7. [*ibid.*, p. 192].

home. My exposure to the Other without reserve goes beyond every economy, i.e. reciprocity (like loving without worrying about being loved).

But would all these efforts prove futile *at last*? It is certain that the betrayal is inescapable in showing the element of *saying (le dire)* in a theme. Nevertheless, Levinas might repeat his claims again and again in every challenge of the language of ontology. According to him, we could think of this repetition as skepticism's return as philosophy's illegitimate child.

[I]t is because in the contradiction which logic sees in it the 'at the same time' of the contradictories is missing, because a sector diachrony commands this ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking, and because in general signification signifies beyond synchrony, beyond essence.⁴⁵

Levinas is an *extreme* humanist who tries to overcome humanism by humanism of the Other. If the subject was the human *being*, the problem would not be *being*. We are not concerned with knowing or grasping the man but *responding* to him (to respond is to be responsible). Nevertheless, he is not in the pursuit of explaining the rules of ethics, but describing the ethics of ethics. He would not like to give us any ethical theory without rejecting the possibility of deriving an ethics from his writings. How then should we read his work? All we should do is, perhaps, be aware of this *pre-original* situation⁴⁶ and to *open* ourselves to the effects of this ethical poetic performance in his writings.

⁴⁵ Levinas, 1998b, p. 7 [Levinas, 1978, p. 20].

⁴⁶ "[T]he pre-originary means the opening of origin to a radical alterity that is irreducible to the circle of origin. The radical alterity disturbing the immanence of origin is the very complication of human plurality, its paradox, a paradox, that breaks the originary identity of totality." (Ciaramelli, 1995, in Peperzak, (ed.)1995, p. 89) The origin cannot be identical to itself, and has an alterity with itself with regard to itself. This otherness cannot be put under an encompassing unity, this would have required the primacy of the identity.

2.2. After Phenomenology

Why does Levinas always insist that he is using an intentional analysis? What remains from Husserlian phenomenology in Levinas? The concept of intentionality gained a new meaning in Husserl's phenomenology of which the motto is that consciousness is always 'consciousness of something'. The meaning of consciousness is its *intention* toward something outside of itself. It is always present to itself, therefore it exists in a different way. This absolute existence of consciousness, which is a temporal flow, is against the Kantian separation of reality. Neither is it reminiscent of Berkeley's subjective idealism. Levinas defines intentionality in *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* as follows:

*Intentionality is, for Husserl, a genuine act of transcendence and the very prototype of any transcendence ... Intentionality in Husserl cannot be taken as a property of consciousness, i.e., as a character which is unrelated to the mode of existing of consciousness, as simply a modality of the contents of consciousness. It is precisely the very mode of existence of consciousness that the notion of intentionality tries to characterize.*⁴⁷

Therefore, Husserl does not start from the separation of subject and object (these are abstractions in his view) and intentionality should not be thought of as a bridge between consciousness (as an ego) and the world. There are many kinds of acts, so there are different kinds of intentionalities. The objects of these acts are objects of practical use and values.

Will, desire, etc., are intentions which, along with representations, constitute the existence of the world. They are not elements of consciousness void of all relation to objects. Because of this, the existence of the

⁴⁷ Levinas, 1995b, pp. 40-1. [Levinas, 1994, p.69].

world has a rich structure which differs in each different domain.⁴⁸

Hence, meaning cannot be reduced to representation. Feeling gives rise to a new kind of *relation* with the world and phenomenology enables us to analyse the complicated structure that constitutes the objective world.

If all reality is *given* in phenomenon, what then is the difference of phenomenology from empiricism? “Phenomenology is an empiricism in the sense that it returns philosophy to experience. But it is not just any experience to which we are returned. Phenomenology returns to experience as it is *lived*.”⁴⁹

While empiricism imagines to return to a heterogeneous source, phenomenology gives consent to the reality of *the given in* consciousness. That’s why, phenomenology has no problem in being concerned with getting beyond our ideas and reaching out into the world.⁵⁰

Levinas notes that for Husserl the act of intentionality cannot be separated from giving meaning.

That which is thought is ideally present in thought. Intentionality is the way for thought to *contain ideally something other than itself*. It is not an exterior object entering into relation with consciousness, nor, within consciousness, the establishing of a relation between two psychic contents, mutually interlocked. The relation of intentionality is nothing like the relations between real objects. *It is essentially the act of bestowing a meaning. (the Sinngebung)*⁵¹

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 45 [*ibid.*, p. 76].

⁴⁹ Drabinski, 2001, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 9-10.

⁵¹ Levinas, 1998a, p. 59 [Levinas, 2001a, p. 32].

In what sense does Husserl's attitude to phenomenon overcome the duality of subject and object and the representational approach? Levinas thinks that feeling's becoming a feeling of something felt, and desire's becoming desire for a desired, etc. do not let the felt and the desired become the objects of contemplation. This claim has an important role in Scheler's and Heidegger's thought. Nevertheless, for Husserl representation is 'at the basis intention, every nontheoretical intention.'⁵² The whatness of the object or the justification of our judgements about an object are not real problems in phenomenology. Husserl relies on the reality of our experience that takes place in the flow of consciousness. In his theory the comprehension of the object by the subject, intellection is identified with light. Active mind, is also the origin of what it receives.⁵³

Levinas continues to comment on Husserl's works in his later writings, too. In *Intentionality and Metaphysics* he argues that the concrete life in Husserl, that is also intentional, behind objectifying activity, does not allow the movement of consciousness to result in objects.⁵⁴ In his view, the Other is like *a guide* in this structure.

Transcendental operations constitute an outside, but they do not constitute that outside (or that *other than me*) by a movement that is like that of the eye that perceives its object: the Other guides the transcendental movement without presenting itself to vision, which would precisely always be left behind by the very transcendental movement it was supposed to define. The transcendental movement henceforth receives a structure entirely different from the subject-object polarization, which characterizes intuition. The great contribution of Husserlian phenomenology lies in this idea that intentionality, or the relation with alterity, does not congeal in polarizing as a subject-object relationship.⁵⁵

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 60. [*ibid.*, p. 33].

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 61. [*ibid.*, p. 35].

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 122. [*ibid.*, p. 190].

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 123-4. [*ibid.*, p. 191].

Levinas defines the idea of intentionality as a liberation in *Intentionality and Sensation* and maintains that 'the new idea going out from the self' to the object is its contribution.⁵⁶ His different usage of intentionality could be seen in his explanations about insomnia in *From Consciousness to Wakefulness*. For Husserl, consciousness aims to attain the adequation in which being and representation are equalized.

The awakening still responds to an alterity that is to be assimilated by the ego. It is this assimilation that is expressed by the optical metaphor of the *ray*, which, coming from the awakened ego, directs itself toward the object that awakened it—directs itself toward it in the guise of knowledge, the mind assimilating what strikes it. This is all true.⁵⁷

Whereas, this attitude cannot respond to the Other that awakens and calls me. In contrast to this, I cannot fix my Other that disturbs my being at rest and my awakening cannot be seen into a unity (that of sleeping and sobering). Reason cannot claim its fulfillment in its return to itself since its return is not realized.

If phenomenology means discovering forgotten horizons in which we understand the real, these horizons carrying a constitutive force must be accepted as unforeseen, not in an economy of vision in Levinas' view. Drabinski draws our attention to this in *Totality and Infinity* where he states that Levinas identifies the function of the idea of the horizon with that of the concept in classical idealism. In his view, Levinas abstains from this concept under the pretext of its connection with mediation and the mediation of truth. In contrast to this, the concrete relation (in which the projection cannot determine what appears) with other is the lack of

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135. [*ibid.*, pp. 201-2].

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 161.

mediations. The singularity and immediacy are primordial.⁵⁸ As De Boer emphasizes, transcendental conditions are not phenomena in Levinas.

No phenomenological unveiling (*dévoilement*) reveals to us the face of the Other. That would bring it within the grasp of the totality again. The face of the Other reveals itself. The condition for experience is not itself experienced. In this respect Levinas's transcendental method is closer to Kant than to Husserl. Husserl held that nothing in the world could escape the grasp of intuiting clarity.⁵⁹

In summary, even if Levinas does not give up intentional analysis without aiming for an adequation, his explanations lead us to *the hither side of* the origin that Husserl seeks to attain.

2.3. Rosenzweig and the Critique of Totality

In the preface of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas says that he was greatly influenced by Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* and his critique of the idea of totality.⁶⁰ On the other hand, he adds that his method is an intentional search for the concrete, revealing the horizons in which we perceive objects.

Why is it that Hegel is the main target of Rosenzweig's and Levinas' critiques? Is it possible to critique Hegel without leading to an irrationalism? Is it possible to win the quarrel with a great philosopher in a philosophical discourse?

'The truth is whole' is the motto of the philosophical attitude of Hegel. Philosophy is about the Absolute and we can know it only through this

⁵⁸ Drabinsky, 2001, p. 22.

⁵⁹ De Boer, 1997, p. 26.

⁶⁰ Levinas, 1991, p. 28. [ibid., 1971, p. 14].

Concept. The Absolute is the unified, comprehensible whole. The aim of philosophy is to attain the all-encompassing viewpoint where we can know the Absolute absolutely. In this process, Hegel rejects knowing reality by means of an 'instrument' (consciousness or knowledge) or through a 'medium' in which it appears. In his view epistemology risks scepticism in trying to solve a *pseudo-problem*. He summarizes his attitude to knowledge, method and philosophy in the preface of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as follows:

The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be *actual* knowing—that is what I have set myself to do. The inner necessity that knowing should be Science lies in its nature, and only the systematic exposition of philosophy itself provides it. But the *external* necessity, so far as it is grasped in a general way, setting aside accidental matters of person and motivation, is the same as the inner, or in other words it lies in the shape in which time sets forth the sequential existence of its moments. To show that now is the time for philosophy to be raised to the status of a Science would therefore be the only true justification of any effort that has this aim, for to do so would demonstrate the necessity of the aim, would indeed at the same time be the accomplishing of it.⁶¹

Hegel's philosophy seeks to go back to the origin in which there is no separation or absolute difference. Consciousness is never at rest in its adventure of being absolute. Hegel is critical of philosophies that are unsuccessful in overcoming every kind of separation. Separation, as a negative concept, belongs to an *unhappy consciousness*.

The unhappy consciousness sees itself torn between two forms of existence—a 'natural' existence, in which relationships with other people and the desires of the

⁶¹ Hegel, 1977, pp. 3-4.

body play an essential part, and a divine, other-worldly, eternal existence, which presupposes the rejection of the first. Nietzsche, years later, would extend the concepts of the unhappy consciousness all the way back to Plato. But Hegel sees clearly that, in the early Greeks, 'otherworldly' metaphysics never led to a withdrawal from or denial of the world of everyday life.⁶²

However, it should be added that Christianity has a privileged status in Hegel even if it was put under this category.

What is wrong with this Absolute? This absolute in which there is no room for the *secret* does not know the *otherness*. It is a reconciliation (between internal and external, infinite and finite, soul and body, etc.). The aim of philosophy is this *fusion*. Totality is 'a beautiful totality' which is positive. The finite universe of Greek (*cosmos* meant order in Greek) is the model of this reconciliation. Hegel appreciates Greek art in terms of its being the representation of the Absolute.

[E]ven in its gods the Greek people has brought its spirit into its conscious perception, vision, and representation, and has given them by art an existent embodiment which is perfectly adequate to the true content. On account of this correspondence which lies in the essence of Greek art and of Greek mythology too, art in Greece has become the supreme expression of the Absolute, and Greek religion is the religion of art itself, while the later romantic art, although it is art, yet points already to a higher form of consciousness than art can provide.⁶³

Nevertheless, Greeks could not give up the priority of vision in their art. In Christianity there is a possibility to overcome of this separation by Jesus (in fact, in his death). By means of death of Jesus the sensibility disappears and God becomes the subject of remembering.

⁶² Solomon, 1983, p. 467.

⁶³ Hegel, 1975, pp. 437-8.

That Jesus' historical ministry is not the full actualization of absolute Spirit in history is proved by the event and nature of his death, which is at once the evidence and the transcendence of his finite human nature and the fate of all finitude.⁶⁴

Totality of the system, as in Aristotle does not have exteriority. Reality is a concept and this concept represents or refers itself. It is Spirit (*Geist*) that *manifests* itself in this world and in history. If there is separation, there is always a risk of scepticism and this cannot be thought for absolute knowledge. Pre-concept, pre-language, and pre-reason are all identical and cannot be accepted by Hegel under the pretext of their coming out of philosophy. However, man wants to take a breath in this totality!

2.3.1. Rosenzweig's Rejection

Why do we have to always accept the perfection of the finite as by the Greeks instead of that of the infinite in Descartes? Why is there a single principle, identifying all things with one thing in philosophy? Rosenzweig starts with the affirmation of the infinite essence of God in *The Star of Redemption*. He indicates that Hegel's philosophy promised to resolve the duality that reigns in philosophy.

It asserted neither dichotomy nor mere congruity, but rather an innermost interconnection. The cognitive world becomes cognitive through the same law of reasoning which recurs as the supreme law of existence at the apex of the system. And this law, one and the same in thinking and being, was first annunciated, on the scale of world history, in revelation. Thus philosophy is in a sense no more than fulfilling what was promised in revelation. And again, philosophy carries out this function not merely occasionally or only at the zenith of its orbit; in every moment, so to speak with every breath that it draws, it

⁶⁴ Harris, 1993, p. 216.

involuntarily confirms the truth of what revelation has declared. Thus the old quarrel seems settled, heaven and earth reconciled.⁶⁵

Philosophy appears to be the main essence of religion (i.e., Christianity), this being demonstrated in the manifestation of the *Spirit* in history in Hegel. Nevertheless, the problem of death, especially that of my death does not seem as much a problem in Hegel. Rosenzweig does not accept this reconciliation on account of there always being a *secret*. In his view separation does not signify unhappiness necessarily. Moreover he regards separation as the source of life.

Logic is not the unique source of meaning. However, mysticism is not the alternative of it; rather it is immoral. We can read the *The Star of Redemption* as a *cry* in this totalitarian rationality. The reality of philosophy has to be examined by life. Philosophy has to take into account this cry. Only the cry of the individual can *tear* the self from being enclosed by itself and open it to the soul. A cry of anxiety is the cry of the individual in the face of his death.

Rosenzweig contends that philosophy is a strategy in the face of death, seeking to get rid of the fear of death. *The Star of Redemption* begins with this claim

All cognition of the All originates in death, in the fear of death ... All that is mortal lives in this fear of death; every new birth augments the fear by one new reason, for it augments what is mortal. Without ceasing, the womb of the indefatigable earth gives birth to what is new, each bound to die, each awaiting the day of its journey into

⁶⁵ Rosenzweig, 1985, pp. 6-7.

darkness with fear and trembling. But philosophy denies these fears of the earth.⁶⁶

We might see that the knowledge of the totality is like a precaution against the *Other* that threatens life, or meaning. Philosophy is concerned with the plenitude, i.e. being, and only *the concept* can deal with this reality out of the fear of the earthly. In contrast to this, man is always to persist with the fear of death in Rosenzweig's view.⁶⁷ (In Levinas this theme appears as the death of the Other.)

Philosophy, especially in Hegel, becomes a lie in order to forget death. The cry in the face of death destroys the consistency of Hegel's 'beautiful totality'.

In the history of philosophy we are certain to hear this cry of fragile and mortal singularity. The rejection of the Hegelian unification of revelation into the all from an Archimedean point (Kierkegaard), questioning not the essence but the value of the world (Schopenhauer), and dealing with his life his own soul like a poet and being a philosopher at the same time (Nietzsche) are their moments in the approach to the *I* not an *I* in general.⁶⁸

According to Rosenzweig, we do not have to start with the totality and we have right to reject the unity of reasoning. This plurality is not a failure necessarily.

There is, to put it very crudely, a nonidentity of being and reasoning which has to show itself in being and reasoning themselves. It cannot be harmonized by a third party, will, stepping in as a *deus ex machina* which is neither being nor reasoning. And if the basis for the unity of being and

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.7.

reasoning is sought in reasoning, then the basis for their non-identity should in the first instance be uncovered in reasoning.⁶⁹

God has to leave the world in favour of the freedom and singularity of individuals and we have to trust in the words and we have to *listen to* the words. The word should not be confused with concept. The word is creative, not the concept. The word is the relation between God and man and gives the being its reality. It is not the concept but the word that makes possible the singularity that cannot be grasped. The word is something that *comes* and that cannot be reduced to the concept. There is an affirmation (of language) at the beginning.

Idealism lacked straightforward confidence in language. It was not of a mind to listen and respond to this voice, which resounds in man without apparent reason but the more realistically for that. Idealism demanded reasons, accountability, calculability-everything that language was unable to offer it- and invented for itself logic, which offered all this. It offered all this, only not what language possessed its self-evidentness: though language is rooted in the subterranean foundations of being with its arch-words, it already shoots upward into the light of terrestrial life in these root-words, and in this light it blossoms forth into colorful multiplicity. It is thus a growth amidst all growing life; it nourishes itself on life as life nourishes itself on language.⁷⁰

Rosenzweig tries to rescue the self from remaining in itself. He speaks of the Greek tragic hero who is immortal, i.e., unable to die as a silent figure.

The self can only keep silent. At the very most, it can still seek to express itself in lyric monologue, although even this expression, *qua* expression, is no longer altogether suited to it; the self does not express itself, it is buried

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 145-6.

within itself. As soon as it enters into conversation, however, it ceases to be self. It is self only as long as it is alone. In dialogue it thus forfeits even the small headstart on speech which it had made in monologue. Dialogue does not create any relation between two wills because each of these wills can only will its isolation.⁷¹

In his view the philosopher is like a tragic hero of the Greeks.

Rosenzweig regards the concept of the miracle as a 'sign'. When we say that 'everything happens naturally, nothing is said about what exactly it is that 'happens naturally'.⁷² This critique might be read as an answer to *Theological-Political Treatise*. In this book, Spinoza argues that there are two powers (the power of God, and the power of Nature) quite different from each other for common people. The miracle is generally to common people profit or advantage. The identity of God's intellect with God's will makes impossible to imagine a hierarchical order. Any event can interrupt the working of the order of eternal necessity and truth, otherwise we would have to accept an element external to nature. These events in Scripture have an effect on imagination in order to excite wonder in the minds of the masses and encourage the belief in God. God, absolutely infinite with its perfections is not understood by means of imagination affected by senses (God cannot be corporeal as the masses thought) but of the perception of pure intellect.⁷³

Nevertheless, the miracle is not to fascinate in Rosenzweig. There is another dimension in reality. Death is the 'surplus' *in* life and nourished by it. However, it is alien to it.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 96.

⁷³ Spinoza, 2001, pp. 71-85.

2.3.2. The Effect of Rosenzweig

Rosenzweig's thought is firstly a defense of singularity. Totality must be rejected in favor of the man which 'is not a simple singularization of man in general'⁷⁴ This is essential inspiration for Levinas. He maintains that Rosenzweig affirms a link 'between the living instant of human life and a living Eternity', in contrast to the man condemned to the dominance of totality and the state.⁷⁵ This link (the relation with Eternity) is realized by man responding to the love of God by loving his neighbour. For Levinas, too, not approaching the Other 'with empty hands' is indispensable for an ethical relationship.

Levinas indicates that Rosenzweig reintroduces the theological concept into philosophy as ontological concepts in *Difficult Freedom*.

The conjunction 'and' is not a formal and empty category. God 'and' Man, for example, is not a union of two terms which we can perceive from outside. God 'and' Man is God for Man, or Man for God. The essential point is played out in this 'for', in which both God and Man live, not in this 'and', which is visible to the philosophers. Or, more exactly, the conjunction 'and' designates an attitude of junction, which is experienced in diverse ways, not the conjuncture that is statable by a third party.⁷⁶

This 'and' reminds us of the 'for' in 'the one for the other' in Levinas.

Life and time precede the concept in Rosenzweig. He relates God, the World and Man not by a theory that totalizes all of them but by life and time. None of them is irreducible to each other. The relation of God and the World in creation belongs to a past that cannot be re-presented. The

⁷⁴ Levinas, 1990, p. 188. [Levinas, 1963 and 1976, p. 283].

⁷⁵ Levinas, 1994, p. 54. [Levinas, 1987, p. 75].

⁷⁶ Levinas, 1990, p. 190. [Levinas, 1963 and 1976, p. 285].

relation of God and Man is Revelation in present (i.e., love) and the final relation is in the future, Redemption.

Levinas says that in Rosenzweig man responds to God's love for him (as ipseity) by loving his neighbour and this is the truth. Thereby, the Revelation is the Revelation of Redemption. In this Revelation, which is the work of man, there is the future of Redemption which is 'directed towards the future of the Kingdom of God'. Relation with Redemption is the relation with Eternity. And this relation is the possibility to say 'we'.⁷⁷

Totality in fact gives no meaning to death, which each person experiences for himself. Death is irreducible. We must therefore turn back from philosophy which reduces things to experience - that is to say, to irreducibility; an empiricism that contains nothing positive.⁷⁸

This indicates that the path of Rosenzweig goes from totality to singular man, from theory which is closed upon itself to the truth of experience. In spite of his 'bringing philosophy closer to the theological experience and attitude'⁷⁹, Rosenzweig does not appreciate the mystical experience (like Levinas). Separation is a positive term and there is always a secret.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 191. [*ibid.*, pp. 286-7].

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 188. [*ibid.*, p. 282].

⁷⁹ Levinas, 1994b, p. 53. [Levinas, 1987, p. 74].

CHAPTER 3

EARLY THEMES

Even if his first essay, *On Escape*, and his first book, *Existence and Existents*, then his lectures, *Time and Other*, are written under the influence of Heidegger, Levinas always tries to find an *exit* from the analyses of Heidegger who brings into question 'being in the world'. He thinks that Western philosophy has never suspected the identity as a property of being⁸⁰ and always presupposed the sufficiency of being in its ideal state, in peace and equilibrium. Every experience reminds us of the priority of presence. Levinas is concerned with the identity of the self (alleged peace-with-self) from the beginning of *On Escape*. The problem is not to overcome the limited being as existentialism wished to be. "[E]scape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, *to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I is oneself.*"⁸¹

3.1. There is (*Il y a*)

Levinas defines the *there is* as the anonymous consummation of being that murmurs or buzzes in the depths of nothingness itself, being in general (not

⁸⁰ Levinas, 2003, p. 51. [Levinas, 1982a, p. 93].

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.55. [*ibid.*, p. 98].

being attached to any object)⁸².⁸³ This existing without existents reminds us of Heideggerian *es gibt* (that which gives itself), but the *there is* does not signify a gift given to the comprehension of *Dasein*. This is the neutral presence of the absence of every determinate being. We are held by *il y a*.

When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. In the night, where we are riven to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not “something.” But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there.⁸⁴

The ‘I’ is absorbed by the night. Consciousness is not embedded in *il y a*.

... Levinas considers that consciousness is constituted by one’s ability to sleep. He proposes that consciousness might be better defined by this ability to escape vigilance than by vigilance itself. This would at least prevent our supposing that consciousness is implicit in the *il y a* of existence. If Levinas supposed that consciousness was implicit in the *there is* he would have taken a step back from Heidegger and rejoined idealist and other philosophers of consciousness.⁸⁵

In this presence of absence, in this plenitude of the void we do not have any distinctive quality in this ambiguity that serves us to exit from this state in an impersonal form (like ‘it rains’). Then, how does the subject appear in this impersonality?

⁸² Levinas, 1995a, p. 57. [Levinas, 1998a, pp. 93-4].

⁸³ Manning notes that this relation was discovered by Heidegger. The event of being gives itself over to the comprehension of *Dasein* (Manning, 1993, p. 41). In contrast to this, *there is* ‘invades’ human being in Levinas.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 58. [*ibid.*, pp. 94-5].

⁸⁵ Llewelyn, 1995, p. 52.

Levinas separates this horrific experience from the Heideggerian approach radically in *Existence and Existents*. Nothingness is not a matter concerning this experience. In *there is* 'the fear of Being is just as originary as the fear for Being.'⁸⁶ It can also explain the fear for Being.

The horror of the night, as an experience of the *there is*, does not then reveal to us a danger of death, nor even a danger of pain. That is what is essential in this analysis. The pure nothingness revealed by anxiety in Heidegger's analysis does not constitute the *there is*.⁸⁷

3.2. Hypostasis

Being torn away from the *there is* is the event from which arises consciousness. We do not know how we are rescued and become conscious; there is no start or end point in this process.

'The upsurge of an existent into existence' is called *hypostasis*.⁸⁸ It is the rupture of the anonymous vigilance of the *there is*. In *Time and Other* Levinas describes it as the event by which the existent acquires its existing.⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ Levinas deals with some concepts like fatigue, indolence, weariness and insomnia as the moments of the rupture in the homogeneity of the subject.

⁸⁶ Levinas, 1995a, p. 20. [Levinas, 1998a, p. 20].

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 62. [*ibid.*, p. 102].

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 36. [*ibid.*, p. 52].

⁸⁹ Levinas, 1987a, pp. 43-4. [Levinas, 2001b, pp. 22-3].

⁹⁰ "...by the impersonality of the *there is*, Levinas makes the first manifestation of Being an event not of revelation and givenness, but one of separation. The dawning of consciousness is the dawning of the realization of the separation and distance between the being that the self is and the being outside the self. For Levinas, the self is constituted in and by this fact of separation from the *there is*, Being itself. The formation of a being occurs within Being itself, as the rupture of Being itself as it breaks up into beings. This rupture is the very fact that consciousness becomes aware of its separation from Being itself." (Manning, 1993, p. 44)

The numbness of fatigue is a telling characteristic. It is an impossibility of following through, a constant and increasing lag between being and what it remains attached to, like a hand little by little letting slip what it is trying to hold on to, letting go even while it tightens its grip. Fatigue as resistance to existence is not just the cause of this letting go, it is the slackening itself. It is so inasmuch as it does not occur simply in a hand that is letting slip the weight it finds tiring to lift, but in one that is holding on to what it is letting slip, even when it has let it drop but remains taut with the effort. For there is fatigue only in effort and labour.⁹¹

If fatigue was solely insufficiency of power, it would be a 'lack' again. 'The slackening itself' tells us of being both attached to the world, and of being separated from its struggles. This lag between being and itself defines consciousness, not vice versa.

Effort is not a cognition; it is an event. In the midst of the advance over oneself and over the present, in the ecstasy of the leap which anticipates and bypasses the present, fatigue marks a delay with respect to oneself and with respect to the present.⁹²

Fatigue is resistance to be, as a delay to the present, to the plenum; it is the leak within the plenum.

Indolence, in the same way, might be thought as an escape from the burden of the present which is painful for the effort that undertakes it. Or in weariness, the subject's desire to escape from existence is 'without an itinerary and without an end, it is not trying to come ashore somewhere'⁹³

⁹¹ Levinas, 1995a, p. 30. [Levinas, 1998a, p. 42].

⁹² Levinas, 1995a, p. 31. [Levinas, 1998a, p. 44].

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 25. [*ibid.*, p. 32].

3.3. Insomnia

One watches on when there is nothing to watch and despite the absence of any reason for remaining watchful. The bare fact of presence is oppressive; one is held by being, held to be. One is detached from any object, any content, yet there is presence. This presence which arises behind nothingness is neither a *being*, nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *there is*, which encompasses things and consciousness.⁹⁴

In insomnia, there is no intention in our act of seeing; it is vigilance without end. This is the wakefulness of the *there is*. In this anonymous state, the *night itself* watches itself and I lose my privileged place in the action; I become the object of this thought.⁹⁵ Hence in this 'between' situation the dominancy of consciousness disappears and the evanescence of it constitutes its very presence, like an instant. Consciousness is defined by its ability to sleep.

The *cogito* is not a meditation on the essence of thought, but the inward relationship between the ego and its act, the unique relationship of the "I" with a verb in the first person form. In the end it is the act of doubting, that is, the negative act, the exclusion of any position outside of the instant, that is privileged situation in which the existence of the present and of the "I" is irresistibly accomplished. The "present," the "I" and an "instant" are moments of one and the same event.⁹⁶

Lweleyn draws our attention to this being without beginning or end.

Insomnia is sleeplessness but not consciousness. A person who is conscious is a person who is capable of

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 65. [*ibid.*, p. 109].

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 66. [*ibid.*, p. 109].

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 80. [*ibid.*, p. 137].

sleep. In insomnia I am not asleep, yet I can be awakened from it. I cannot awake myself from it, not least because in this waking state, the first waking state before I am awakened. I am not present as an I. There is presence, *il y en a*, but it is a pseudo-presence because it is without beginning. It is without beginning because it is indistinguishable and inseparable from a past to which it is, in Levinas's metaphors, soldered, riveted, enchained. The enchainment to this eternally present past would be broken if only it were a past that could be remembered. But this is an immemorial past. This is the first immemorial past we encounter in Levinas's exposition.⁹⁷

Therefore, the tragedy originates from being in the world itself. The *cogito* does not know of losing subjectivity and of becoming the object of anonymous thought. To have a clear consciousness, in the present, and to exist continuously is not grace but a gravity.

3.4. Passage to the Other

Levinas separates being with another and *facing* another even in his early writings.

It is the fearful face-to-face situation of a relationship without intermediary, without mediations. Here the interpersonal situation is not the of itself indifferent and reciprocal relationship of two interchangeable terms. The other as other is not only an *alter ego*. He is what I am not: he is the weak one whereas I am the strong one; he is the poor one, 'the widow and the orphan.'⁹⁸

This encountering without intermediary could not be grasped in a collectivity or in a reciprocal relationship of *I and Thou*.

⁹⁷ Llewelyn, 1995, p. 48.

⁹⁸ Levinas, 1995a, p. 95. [ibid., 1998a, p. 162].

Even if Levinas does not use some early concepts like *there is*, and *hypostasis* in his later writings, his desire for escape from the weight of ontology exists from the beginning. He does not accept Heidegger's giving priority to the readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), or *Dasein's* fallenness in inauthenticity. *Dasein's* being hungry is more essential than his using tools.

It seems that Levinas makes a material phenomenology of life in contrast to intellectualism in his early writings.

Of course we do not live in order to eat, but it is not really true to say that we eat in order to live; we eat because we are hungry. Desire has no further intentions behind it, which would be like thoughts; it is a good will; all the rest belongs to the level of biology.⁹⁹

He emphasizes the priority of basic human facts. To be hungry is more essential than 'to desire to survive'. We do not breathe for the sake of living, but for breathing. We do not eat and drink 'for the sake of living; it is living. Life is sincerity.'¹⁰⁰ To be based in material life is also important in his later writings. The ethical meaning does not come from the most spiritual to the material; on the contrary, the particular ethical relations in material life¹⁰¹ are attributed to the absolutely Other (even if he identifies this Other with the *feminine* in the early period, he leaves this position later).

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 37. [*ibid.*, p. 56].

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 44. [*ibid.*, p. 67].

¹⁰¹ In one of his early writings, Levinas contends that the great power of Marxism originates from its starting from the economic man. This point of departure enables it 'to avoid completely the hypocrisy of sermons' (Levinas, 1995a, p. 45. [Levinas, 1998a, p. 69]).

CHAPTER 4

TOTALITY *and* INFINITY

Totality and Infinity might be seen as a detailed and ordered exposition of Levinas' philosophy. Regardless of the fact that his attempt to transform all epistemological problems into ethical ones, this book incessantly turns to ontological language 'in order to keep its analyses, which challenge the conatus essendi of being, from being considered as dependent upon the empiricism of a psychology.'¹⁰² He starts with an analysis of the same and the Other, and then proceeds from interiority to beyond (the titles of sections after the same and the Other are as follows):

- 1) Interiority and Economy
- 2) Exteriority and the Face
- 3) Beyond the Face

It is obvious that the direction of the research is towards the Other. Wild summarizes this well in the translation of *Totalité et Infini* in *Introduction*.

This other-oriented mode of speaking and thinking will pay less attention to things as they appear to the separated self, and more attention to the search for what they are in themselves, in their radical otherness, even though this is less certain and always more difficult to find. This will mean less interest in conceptual constructions and greater readiness to listen and learn from experience. It will not think of knowing, in the sense

¹⁰² Levinas, 1998c, pp. 197-8. [Levinas, 1991, pp. 231-2].

of gathering, as the primary aim of man from which action will follow as a matter of course, but rather of action and of the achievement of justice and peace as prior to speaking and thinking.¹⁰³

This research for radical otherness requires living a radical experience which takes place in the face of the Other. *I* could transform all the otherness into the same in its joyous, happy life before this encounter. For the first time, it cannot digest this otherness and put it under its categories as an object of knowledge. The only way to contend with it is to desire without satisfaction. *I* desires the Other by responding to its *call* and is charged with its responsibilities. This *limit* experience could not be reduced to the ontological realm in which there remains nothing unknown. In this *welcoming of the Other*, there is an *infinition* of the infinite. *Totality and Infinity* is defence of this new 'subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated'.¹⁰⁴

4.1. Transcendence versus Immanence

Levinas sees Western thought as escaping from the transcendence of the One to the unity of the system and immanence of transcendental unity.¹⁰⁵ He indicates that, in *Transcendence and Evil*, it was the first time that the concept and the idea, the reason and understanding are distinguished by Kant, and by means of the radical separation of thought from knowledge, meaning is rescued from participation with the being necessarily.¹⁰⁶ In his view, the history of Western metaphysics is under the hegemony of immanence; there is no separation between intelligibility and meaning in the manifestation of being.

¹⁰³ Wild, in Levinas, 1991, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, 1991, p. 27. [Levinas, 1971, p. 12].

¹⁰⁵ Levinas, 1999, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, 1988, p. 123. [Levinas, 1998b, p. 190].

The process of the subjective does not come from the outside. It is the presence of the present that involves consciousness; and this in such a way that philosophy, in search of the transcendental operations of the apperception of the *I think*, is not some unhealthy and accidental curiosity. Philosophy is representation, the reactualization of representation; that is, the emphasis of presence, the remaining-the-same of being in its simultaneity of presence, in its forever and its immanence. Philosophy is not only knowledge of immanence, it is immanence itself.¹⁰⁷

The intelligibility of transcendence cannot be ontological for Levinas:

The negativity of the *In-* of the Infinite—otherwise than being, divine comedy—hollows out a desire that could not be filled, one nourished from its own increase, exalted as Desire—one that withdraws from its satisfaction as it draws near to the Desirable. This is a Desire for what is beyond satisfaction, and which does not identify, as need does, a term or an end. A desire without end, from beyond Being: *dis-interested-ness*, transcendence—desire for the Good.¹⁰⁸

Transcendence appears as a desire for the Good and it could not be included in a Kantian subjectivity. It is not a principle of unity that serves to justify all possible knowledge. It is ethics and could not be thought in the unity of transcendental apperception. The I is the melting pot in which the Other is changed into the same.

How is transcendence possible as a relationship in Levinas? Why do we have to think of desire as a *dis-interestedness*, transcendence—desire for the Good? The exposition of the meaning of this relation might be fulfilled

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 60-1. [*ibid.*, p. 101].

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 67. [*ibid.*, p. 111].

‘starting from the proximity of the neighbor and from my responsibility for the other.’¹⁰⁹ According to Levinas, the idea of the Good enables us to rescue the significance of meaning from the manifestation of the presence of being.¹¹⁰

Levinas points out that in *The Prohibition against Representation* ‘This transcendence is alive in the relation to the other man, i.e. in the proximity of one’s fellow man, whose *uniqueness* and consequently whose irreducible *alterity* would be- still or already- unrecognized in the perception that stares at the other.’¹¹¹ The infinite responsibility arising in this relationship with the Other is ‘the radical impossibility of immanence’.¹¹²

Levinas argues that the thought of being separated from the One and being in a state of nostalgia for the One remains in philosophy hitherto from Greek thought. It is an activity which is always dissatisfied, unhappy in striving to ‘return’ to the One.¹¹³ It is clear that this attitude never deals with this being dissatisfied as a valuable mode in itself. For Levinas, this state can never be forgotten or underestimated as a moment of passage to my main or real state.

“The equality of the One with itself—a supposedly prototypical equality—in knowing thus becomes adequacy, and hence, satisfaction, and as such, as the significance of the meaningful itself, the secret of a civilization.”¹¹⁴ The secret is not a deprivation or a lack but a fullness, a happiness of being only with itself. Time is never thought as something ‘that ages me without me’ in Western philosophy.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 70. [*ibid.*, pp. 115-6].

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 76. [*ibid.*, p. 124].

¹¹¹ Levinas, 1999, p.126.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 127.

¹¹³ Levinas, 1998c, pp. 134-5. [Levinas, 1991, p. 144].

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 139. [*ibid.*, p. 149].

Levinas speaks of consciousness in *From the One to the Other* as 'a self-effacement or discretion of presence' rather than knowledge of self.¹¹⁵ Hence, consciousness is thought of as a condemnation to be ruined. It is not something to be destroyed by the effect of time which is external to it. It is the name of consumption itself. In his article, *The Philosophical Determination of the Idea of Culture*, he deals with knowledge as culture of immanence. He claims that knowledge is a relation of man to exteriority, in which 'transcendence makes itself immanence', that is to say, it is the culture of immanence.¹¹⁶ Levinas claims that:

Culture is neither a going beyond nor a neutralization of transcendence; it is, in ethical responsibility and obligation toward the other, a relation to transcendence *qua* transcendence. It can be called love. It is commanded by the face of the other man, which is not a datum of experience and does not come from the world.¹¹⁷

What does this adjective *qua* do to the noun which it precedes? It refers to a mode which is not *contaminated* by the being. It is a belief, for a truth cannot be consumed by a historical interpretation.

In *Transcendence and Height* Levinas holds that freedom

[S]eeks itself in the relation with the *wholly other*, which is not convertible into the *already known*. It does not suffice for freedom that the Transcendent reveals its meaning after the fact, in the perspective of a history congealed into destiny, in which freedom is integrated despite its novelty. Freedom, reduced to the identity of the Same, cannot repress the Desire for the *absolutely Other*.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 142. [*ibid.*, p. 153].

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 180. [*ibid.*, p. 186].

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 187. [*ibid.*, pp. 193-4].

¹¹⁸ Levinas, 1987b, p. 12.

Levinas explains the condition of possibility of transcendence and its importance for him as follows:

In my opinion, transcendence is only possible when the Other is not initially the fellow human being or the neighbour; but when it is very distant, when it is Other, when it is the one with whom initially I have nothing in common, when it is an abstraction ... Transcendence seemed to me to be the point of departure for our concrete relations with the Other; all the rest is grafted on top of it. That's why the transcendent is a notion which seems to me primary.¹¹⁹

The source of Levinas' humanism is not the evident 'self love' but the Other. The Other remains absolute and absolves itself from the relation which it enters into; and only in this asymmetrical intersubjectivity, is transcendence possible.

4.2. Transcendence as the Idea of Infinity

Infinity is the sole positive determination of God in Levinas. The relation that binds me to the Other is the *idea of the infinite*. It is possible to break the closed circle of totality merely in the presence of this idea that *overflows* its concept. We know that in Kant infinity stops to be a quality of the cosmos and changes into a postulate of pure practical reason. This *regulative idea* does not help us to conceive any more of the finite in Kant.¹²⁰ In contrast to

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹²⁰ Boer indicates that Kant's critique, (that the idea of infinity cannot refer to an existence), would be rejected by saying that it is 'not a concept but a way of being of the Infinite itself'. (De Boer, 1997, p. 14).

this, Levinas gives a great importance to the idea of infinity and rescues it from being a 'negative' or a 'bad' quality.¹²¹

Our analyses are guided by a formal structure: the idea of Infinity in us. To have the idea Infinity it is necessary to exist as separated. This separation cannot be produced as only echoing the transcendence of Infinity, for then the separation would be maintained within a correlation that would restore totality and render transcendence illusory. But the idea of Infinity is transcendence itself, the overflowing of an adequate idea. If totality can not be constituted it is because Infinity does not permit itself to be integrated. It is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other.¹²²

That the subject who thinks more than it thinks means that the subject has an idea that could not be created by him because of the ideatum, the content of this idea overcomes the concept of it. Whenever Levinas uses the concept of Other, face, or exteriority, this idea of infinity has to come to mind immediately. Its *coming* to mind is its production in its being overcome by its content on account of that it is not equal with its ideatum. To decide to start with this idea is to attempt to find another realm for ethics *otherwise* than being.

"The idea of infinity is the mode of being, the *infinition*, of infinity. Infinity does not first exist, and *then* reveal itself. Its infinition is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in *me*."¹²³ Levinas starts with the priority of the idea of infinity to the idea of totality. "Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution"¹²⁴. Our relation with the infinite might be understood by Levinas' usage of the

¹²¹ Wyschogrod draws to our attention that Levinas' infinite might not be seen as Hegel's bad infinite either. (Wyschogrod, 2000, p. 239)

¹²² Levinas, 1991, pp. 79-80. [Levinas, 1971, p. 78].

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 26. [*ibid.*, p. 12].

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 199-200. [*ibid.*, p. 218].

Cartesian argumentation. The subject is in a paradoxical state for Descartes and because of that we cannot reach to conceptualise the whole content of the idea.¹²⁵

I start from the Cartesian idea of the Infinite, where the *ideatum* of this idea, that is, what this idea aims at, is infinitely greater than the very act through which one thinks it. There is a disproportion between the act and that to which the act gives access¹²⁶.

Levinas adds that for Descartes this was one of the proofs of the existence of God because of the impossibility of the subject to create this idea. Therefore, if this 'concept' could not be thought by me; it had to be put in us by God. Nevertheless, Levinas is not interested in the proof of God. Instead, he emphasizes the disproportion between 'objective reality' and 'formal reality' in this argument. Moreover, it is his view, that the idea overflowing itself is not discovered by myself by means of reflection alone, but (in contrast to Descartes) in an encounter with the face, the absolutely Other.

The distance that separates *ideatum* and idea here constitutes the content of the *ideatum* itself. Infinity is

¹²⁵ Wyschogrod contends that for Descartes the puzzle of the position of the idea infinity originates from his attaining the existence of the infinite without beginning from *cogito* (Wyschogrod, 2000, p. 236). In her view, " For Levinas the *discovery* of the relation to the infinite is possible only by a separated self; discovery follows rather than precedes the self-certainty of the *cogito*...". For Descartes '...it is perfectly consistent and appropriate to speak of a thought which cannot be contained, but Levinas (if he is consistent in his approach to language) cannot imagine a thought for which language is inadequate, an idea which is not in its very upsurge, language. Levinas could certainly object that the face is not intended by an objectivating act, that it is rather intended by an affective intentionality, by desire, so that plenary presence of the intended is out of the question. But in that case he would be compelled to jettison the Cartesian scheme based on the model of cognition, of clear and distinct ideas."(Wyschogrod, 2000, p. 238).

¹²⁶ Levinas, 1985, p. 91. [Levinas, 1982b, pp. 85-6].

characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole *ideatum* of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior, because it is infinite.¹²⁷

In order to keep the distance between me and God, Levinas gives dual emphasis to the *in* of infinite as both *non* and *within*.¹²⁸ That is to say, this exteriority is absolute and ‘absolves itself from the relation in which it presents itself’ at the same time. The infinite does not only signal itself, but speaks; it is a face¹²⁹. Infinity and face should be thought of together; there is no chronological hierarchy between them. Levinas speaks of this idea, in the preface of *Totality and Infinity*, not as a representation of infinity, but as ‘the common source of activity and passivity’.¹³⁰ The necessity of this idea for opening to the Good beyond being might be seen as a deviation from the phenomenological research. Chalier answers this kind of critique trying to find ‘impure’ elements in Levinas by reminding that all perception is illuminated by spirit and all philosophical systems depend on strange elements to the pure reason.¹³¹ We do not start any more from an Archimedean point that justifies itself by itself and constructs all external reality on this certainty. We do not have to fall into an irrational domain while following the trace of this alien element.

The infinite in the finite, the more in the less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire-not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but the Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies. A Desire perfectly disinterested- goodness.¹³²

¹²⁷ Levinas, 1991, p. 49. [Levinas, 1971, p. 41].

¹²⁸ Levinas, 1988, p. 63. [Levinas, 1998b, 105-6].

¹²⁹ Levinas, 1991, p. 99. [Levinas, 1971, p. 101].

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 27. [*ibid.*, p. 13].

¹³¹ Chalier, 1993, p. 97.

¹³² Levinas, 1991, p. 50. [Levinas, 1971, p. 42].

This desire cannot be satisfied, in contrast to *want* and the idea of infinity cannot coincide with its concept because of its externality.

In Levinas' view the concept of the infinite has two different sources; one of them is contemplation of the exercise of knowledge, and the other is religious experience or tradition.¹³³ Do we have to conceive the infinite positively or negatively? Like Aristotle, Hegel, or Spinoza as something that has to be actualized or accomplished in reality, or as something that in Kant cannot be actualized or completed but remains a regulative idea out of experience. According to Levinas, for Descartes the notion of infinite is close to the idea of transcendence. He holds that Descartes' notion of the infinite is also present 'in the idea of power itself', in the *will* that power assumes, in the spontaneity¹³⁴. Thus, Descartes enables us to relate the infinite and man's will. Human being obtains a capacity to be infinite in a sense.

Levinas thinks that the thought of the Renaissance acknowledged an infinite desire in the soul, that is not a simple lack, and that the infinite as spontaneity dominates the Western conception of the infinite. Thus, freedom and the indetermination of the world let man see himself and the universe in resemblance with God¹³⁵.

The presence of a being not entering into, but overflowing, the sphere of the same determines its 'status' as infinite. This overflowing is to be distinguished from the image of liquid overflowing a vessel, because this overflowing presence is effectuated as a position *in face of* the same. The facing position, opposition par excellence, can be only as a moral summons. This movement proceeds from the other.¹³⁶

¹³³ Levinas, 1999, p. 53.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 54.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

¹³⁶ Levinas, 1991, pp. 195-6. [Levinas, 1971, p. 213].

The appearance of infinity is not present at the beginning but it emerges in ethical relationship. Levinas contends that the description of Kantian finitude as sensibility is the 'most anti-Cartesian point of Kantian philosophy as, later, of Heideggerian philosophy'. Although Hegel retains the 'positivity of the infinite' in Descartes, he rules out all multiplicity from it.¹³⁷ As it were, the price of becoming infinite is paid by leaving the singularity.

The idea of infinity, the overflowing of finite thought by its content, effectuates the relation of thought with what exceeds its capacity, with what at each moment it learns without suffering shock. This is the situation we call welcome of the face.¹³⁸

The appearance of the idea of infinity is unique in every ethical relationship for Levinas.

Levinas thinks an atheist separation involving the idea of infinity is obligatory in order to have a truth. If we do not have this 'distance' we fall into the reign of immanence again.¹³⁹ In the movement of the same toward the Other in my desire not originating from a lack, the idea of infinity is revealed in the face of the Other, in its exteriority. The idea of infinity arises in my desire, in separation.

In separation-which is produced in the psychism of enjoyment, in egoism, in happiness, where the I identifies itself-the I is ignorant of the Other. But the Desire for the other, above happiness, requires this happiness, this autonomy of the sensible in the world, even though this separation is deducible neither analytically nor dialectically from the other. The I endowed with personal

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 196. [*ibid.*, p. 214].

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 197. [*ibid.*, p. 215].

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 60. [*ibid.*, p. 54].

life, the atheist I whose atheism is without wants and is integrated in no destiny, surpasses itself in the Desire that comes to it from the presence of the other. This Desire is a desire in a being already happy: desire is the misfortune of the happy, a luxurious need.¹⁴⁰

This overcoming itself in desire, leaving the realm of being, is to run the risk of being lost in the adventure of the I towards the Other.

4.3. Truth

Truth is in effect not separable from intelligibility; to know is not simply to record, but always to comprehend. We also say that to know is to justify, making intervene, by analogy with the moral order, the notion of justice.¹⁴¹

Is seeking of the truth not the desire of pure objectivity? If knowing is *justification*, could truth not be dealt with from an ethical perspective?

In *Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony* Levinas claims that the dominant understanding of truth coming from Greece is the disappearance of the subject 'before that which manifests itself'. Thus, the concept of truth is under the reign of representation, and thereby ontology.¹⁴²

Levinas regards the truth and its relation with atheism as a mode of separation. Atheism is necessary to break with 'participation by which the I posits itself as the same and as I'. It is 'prior to both the negation and affirmation of the divine'¹⁴³.¹⁴⁴ The subject, outside of God, happy to be at home with itself, can will to know in this separation.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 62. [*ibid.*, p. 57].

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 82. [*ibid.*, p. 80].

¹⁴² Levinas, 1987b, p. 99.

¹⁴³ Levinas, 1991, p.58. [Levinas, 1971, p. 52].

¹⁴⁴ This I is embodied in Fichte's *absolute I* that *posits* itself freely.

The atheist separation is *required* by the idea of Infinity, but is not dialectically brought about by it. The idea of Infinity, the relation between the same and the other, does not undo the separation attested in transcendence. Indeed the same can rejoin the other only in the hazards and risks of the quest for truth; it does not rest on the other in complete security. Without separation there would not have been truth; there would have been only being. Truth, a lesser contact than tangency, in the risk of ignorance, illusion, and error, does not undo 'distance,' does not result in the union of the knower and the known, does not issue in totality.¹⁴⁵

It seems that Levinas accepts the empiricist separation as a model of knowledge. He does not accept the existentialist attitude that holds that this relation is sprung from or 'nourished from a prior enrootedness in being', nor Heidegger's attitude which aims for truth to be regarded as a new kind of ontology, i.e. a fundamental ontology.¹⁴⁶

In order to search for a truth, there has to be 'a being autonomous in separation'. The one seeking truth is not in need of something and cannot be 'defined by something other than oneself'. The source of this quest is not a lack. The knowing subject does not look for itself in truth. If the truth is in the Other, the subject needs a relation with the absolute exteriority, i.e., the idea of infinity. However, such a relation cannot be conceived in a theory.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 60. [*ibid.*, p. 54].

¹⁴⁶ Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, evaluates the traditional concept of truth in terms of 'agreement' (the agreement of the judgment with its object) and points out that every agreement is a relation, not *vice versa*. This relation does not tell us of an equality since *intellectus* and *res* are not of same species. If we expect to attain the matter 'just as it is' in knowledge, we do not accept the similarity between these two. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 199) According to Heidegger, when we say that a statement is true, this signifies 'it lets beings 'be seen' (*apophansis*) in their discoveredness'. The concept of discovering, unconcealing, ought to be thought instead of agreement. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 201) He identifies truth, in *On the Essence of Truth*, with freedom: This freedom needs to be understood not as an ability to choose but as 'the fulfilment and consummation of the essence of truth in the sense of the disclosure of beings'. (Heidegger, in Krell, (ed.), 2002, p. 127)

Being unaware of the Other, in separation, is overcome by means of an insatiable desire for the Other. This movement of desire cannot be reduced to the movement of consciousness in intentionality. This positivity of the desire precedes the knowing act.¹⁴⁷

The subject which desires also rejects the battle of recognition. It sacrifices the happiness of the ego in the Other's favour. Ethics becomes the basis for truth.

4.3.1. Before Justice

For Levinas, speech is inserted into a silence that destroys the primary position of the sign. The sign is always accompanied by the Other who is absent in the sign. Disguising is not the opposite of apparition in language.

[I]n the ordinary lie the speaker dissimulates himself, to be sure, but in the dissimulating word does not evade speech, and hence can be refuted. The inverse of language is like a laughter that seeks to destroy language, a laughter infinitely reverberated where mystification interlocks in mystification without ever resting on a real speech, without ever commencing. The spectacle of the silent world of facts is bewitched: every phenomenon masks, mystifies ad infinitum, making actuality impossible.¹⁴⁸

Phenomenon is not the veil of the truth.

Levinas also rejects the deductive method under the pretext that the Other is a 'principle of phenomena'. Any kind of theory of meaning cannot be acceptable because of its going back to be signified from the sign. The

¹⁴⁷ Levinas, 1991, p.61. [Levinas, 1971, p. 55-6].

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 91-2. [*ibid.*, p. 92].

Other, the interlocutor, cannot be like an essence hidden behind the sign, or phenomena, but the principle.

Can Cartesian cogito be the source of truth 'as the first certitude'? Levinas contends that there is an arbitrary stop 'not justified of itself'. The Cogito's evidence of negation is based on itself, that is to say, there is no real affirmation achieved at the end of this process in reality. The I cannot find a stopping place in the Cogito, for that reason it is not the I that can say yes, but the Other. Nevertheless, in Levinas' view, Descartes could imagine the idea of infinity in this closed rationality and escape from the solitude of Cogito by means of it.¹⁴⁹

According to Levinas, the reference system might be eliminated only in enjoyment in which the differences are made to disappear.

The reference that signification implies would terminate where the reference is made from self to self-in-enjoyment. The process from which beings would derive their meaning would not only in fact be finite, but as a finality it would *by essence* consist in proceeding to a term, in coming to an end. But the outcome is the point at which every signification is precisely lost. Enjoyment, the satisfaction and egoism of the I, is an outcome in function of which beings take on or lose their signification as means according as they are situated on the way that leads to it or away from it. But the means themselves lose their signification in the outcome.¹⁵⁰

Levinas contends that the objects lost their objectness when they offered themselves to enjoyment of our organs. If every proposition is a theme and 'the signified is never a complete presence' this means that the Other, the signifier, does not propose itself as a theme.¹⁵¹ Every proposition is an

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 92-3. [*ibid.*, pp. 93-4].

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 94-5. [*ibid.*, pp. 95-6].

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 95-6. [*ibid.*, p. 97-8].

interpretation. Every proposition is accompanied by a surplus of attention, attention to someone.

Levinas holds that the speech *gives* by proposing sentences, by thematizing. This fixation of the apparition in sentence is losing the equivocacy of the word. Therefore, the truth gains a new meaning.

The very objectification of truth refers to language. The infinite, against which every definition stands out, is not defined, does not offer itself to the gaze, but signals itself, not as a theme but as thematizing, as him starting from *whom* everything can be fixed in its identity. But also he signals himself by attending the work that signals him; he does not only signal himself, but speaks, is a face.¹⁵²

He adds that by making speech the basis of truth we are required to put the theory of disclosure aside.

Hence, I am not defined by my freedom anymore, but called to infinite responsibility in the face of the Other. Moreover, conscience and desire are not ordinary modalities of consciousness. They are a 'welcoming of the Other', a condition of consciousness. Truth is social, i.e. in society¹⁵³ and could be grasped through the relationship with the Other judging me. And truth of my will is my being responsible infinitely for the Other in this society. 'The idea of persecuted truth allows to put an end to the game of unveiling in which immanence always wins out over transcendence; for, once being is unveiled even partially, even in mystery, it becomes immanent'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 99. [*ibid.*, p. 101].

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 101. [*ibid.*, p. 104].

¹⁵⁴ Levinas, 1998c, p. 56. [Levinas, 1991, p. 67].

4.4. Enjoyment

If we do not want to accept the Greek thought that tells us of ‘the return to and the fusion with Unity’, we need to imagine a separation between the same and the Other, not as a privation or temporary rupture of the totality. Levinas does not accept the reduction of infinite to the finite, or its being understood in the finite. He sees Plato’s the Good as an order that helps us to understand infinity as ‘*thought* concretely starting with the separated being turned toward it’.¹⁵⁵

Levinas needs the concept of enjoyment (*juissance*) as the ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being, the world, in order to explain this separation. He contends that the things we live from cannot be seen as only tools or implements, our living from them tells us of the independence of enjoyment and of its happiness. And this is the original model of all independence.¹⁵⁶ In our independence, we nourish not to live but due to the fact that we are hungry.¹⁵⁷

The nature of enjoyment might be understood in nourishment ‘as transmutation of the other into the same’¹⁵⁸. Therefore, enjoyment could not be seen, for instance, as a representation of bread. Moreover, Levinas adds that it is the final consciousness of all the contents that fill our life. This moment precedes the separation of theory and practice. Therefore, these analyses would not be understood as a materialistic reductionism.

What I do and what I am is at the same time that *from which* I live. We relate ourselves to it with a relation that is neither theoretical nor practical. Behind theory and

¹⁵⁵ Levinas, 1991, pp. 102-3. [Levinas, 1971, pp. 104-6].

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 110. [*ibid.*, p. 113].

¹⁵⁷ In opposition to *Dasein*, Levinas’ subject gets hungry! (*ibid.*, p. 111. [*ibid.*, p. 113]).

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 111. [*ibid.*, p. 113].

practice there is enjoyment of theory and of practice: the egoism of life. The final relation is enjoyment, *happiness*.¹⁵⁹

Enjoyment enables us to think without categories of activity and passivity. Levinas does not fall into a naturalistic justification of desire.

Throughout this book we are opposing the full analogy drawn between truth and nourishment, because metaphysical Desire is above life, and with regard to it one cannot speak of satiety. But the Platonic image describes, with regard to thought, the very relationship that will be accomplished by life, where the attachment to the contents that fill it provides it with a supreme content. The consumption of foods is the food of life ... What we live from does not enslave us; we enjoy it. Need cannot be interpreted as a simple lack, despite the psychology of need given by Plato, nor as pure passivity, despite Kantian ethics. The human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs.¹⁶⁰

This predominant movement of the same, need, in the distance between man and the world is in my power.

Need and enjoyment can not be covered by the notion of activity and passivity, though they be merged in the notion of finite freedom, Enjoyment, in relation with nourishment, which is the *other* of life, is an independence *sui generis*, the independence of happiness. The life that is life *from* something is happiness. Life is affectivity and sentiment; to live is to enjoy life.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 113. [*ibid.*, p. 116].

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 114. [*ibid.*, pp. 117-8].

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 115. [*ibid.*, p. 118].

This dependency should be thought of as an independence, i.e. atheist separation, at the same time.

Levinas starts with enjoyment but does not rest at it.¹⁶² 'To be uneasy' becomes the main mood that defines ethical situations in his later philosophical essays.

Need seems to be a pre-ethical state before encountering the absolutely Other. In transforming the Other into the same, in overcoming the resistance of the Other, need is satisfied by means of labor.

Only having satisfied its material needs, the I opens itself to Desire.

[R]efusal of the concept is not only one of the aspects of its being, but its whole content; it is interiority. This refusal of the concept drives the being that refuses it into the dimension of interiority. It is at home with itself. The I is thus the mode in which the break-up of totality, which leads to the presence of the absolutely other, is concretely accomplished. It is solitude par excellence¹⁶³

The Other is not intelligible, because it is not representable and the I's opening to the Other is the end of 'withdrawal into oneself'.

¹⁶² "Levinas's point is that in happiness the human being, while still dependent on the world for the good thanks to which it may survive, is independent and autonomous. Although the human being remains a being, it can be said that in enjoying itself within the precinct of its abode it breaks with the categories of being. It breaks too with the Heideggerian existentials, namely, understanding, disposition, discursive articulation, and so on, for these, no less than the Kantian categories, and the Heideggerian categories of readiness to hand and presence to hand subsumed by *Dasein's* existentials, are ways of anticipatively assuming being, predigesting it. Both anticipation of and participation in being are interrupted by enjoyment." (Llewelyn, 1995, p. 82). Happiness or joy is more authentic.

¹⁶³ Levinas, 1991, p. 118. [Levinas, 1971, p. 122].

Levinas defines the I by an ability to enjoy something. Namely, in order to be a subject, firstly it is necessary to enjoy in happiness, and to go beyond being in a sense.¹⁶⁴

If 'total adequation of the thinker with what is thought' is intelligibility¹⁶⁵, it is necessary to think intelligibility as representation, a privileged event in the work of intentionality, a pure present, and a pure spontaneity. Levinas underlines the difference of his understanding of intentionality as follows:

Representation is *bound* to a very different 'intentionality,' which we are endeavouring to approach throughout this analysis. And its marvelous work of constitution is especially possible in reflection. It is the 'uprooted' representation that we have analyzed. The way representation is bound to a 'wholly other' intentionality is different from the way the object is bound to the subject or the subject to history.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, he does not look for a non-conditioned condition serving as a base. This kind of intentional act does not tell us about fulfilling the act of going to the object and coming back from it, but a breakdown.

This intentionality of enjoyment consists of positing oneself in the world corporeally. To posit itself is to bath in the elements.¹⁶⁷ The human is 'to enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure'¹⁶⁸.

In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not 'as for me...'- but entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 120. [*ibid.*, p. 124].

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 123. [*ibid.*, p. 129].

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 126. [*ibid.*, p. 131].

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 127. [*ibid.*, p. 133].

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 133. [*ibid.*, p. 141].

communication and all refusal to communicate- without ears, like a hungry stomach.¹⁶⁹

This basic human mood might be seen as neutral in terms of ethics in Levinas. It happens to us naturally and thus it is necessary.

Could enjoyment be seen as the other name of sensibility? Sensibility, the finite of satisfaction, is the *mode* of enjoyment, and insufficient for thought.¹⁷⁰

The sensibility is therefore to be described not as a moment of representation, but as the instance of enjoyment ... Sensibility is not inferior theoretical knowledge bound however intimately to affective states: in its *gnosis* sensibility is enjoyment; it is satisfied with the given, it is contented.¹⁷¹

In sensibility we do not 'experience' from outside but *meet* the world in which we live without thinking.

I am myself, I am here, at home with myself, inhabitation, immanence in the world. My sensibility is here. In my position there is not the sentiment of localization, but the localization of my sensibility. Position, absolutely without transcendence, does not resemble the comprehension of the world by the Heideggerian *Da*. It is not a care for Being, nor a relation with existents, nor even a negation of the world, but it its accessibility in enjoyment. Sensibility is the very narrowness of life, the *naviété* of the unreflected I, beyond instinct, beneath reason.¹⁷²

Before representation and perception there is no thought in this tranquillity. Sensibility is prior to reason. The I preserves itself at home with itself in

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 134. [*ibid.*, p. 142].

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 135. [*ibid.*, p. 143].

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 136. [*ibid.*, p. 144].

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p. 138. [*ibid.*, p. 146].

sensibility as being satisfied with what is sensed.¹⁷³ If the separation accomplished is seen as enjoyment as *interiority*, it is easy to understand why the subtitle of *Totality and Infinity* is 'an essay on exteriority'. Ethics is able to become possible merely by overcoming this natural, joyful state. Representation, perception or thought might be merely derivations of this passing beyond.

In enjoyment, quality is as if not a quality of something; it comes from nowhere.¹⁷⁴ The objects have no identity at this stage. In this flux, in this directness of enjoyment, there cannot be seen any substance that supports these qualities. That's why this relation cannot yet open itself to radical alterity.

The resistance of matter does not block like the absolute. As a resistance already overcome, open to labor, it opens up an abyss within enjoyment itself. Enjoyment does not refer to an infinity beyond what nourishes it, but to the virtual vanishing of what presents itself, to the instability of happiness. Nourishment comes as a happy chance. This ambivalence of nourishment, which on the one hand offers itself and contents, but which already withdraws, losing itself in the *nowhere*, is to be distinguished from the presence of the infinite in the finite and from the structure of the thing.¹⁷⁵

According to Levinas, the risk of paganism must be taken.¹⁷⁶ This atheism¹⁷⁷ is not simply the negation of God; it implies the impossibility of 'participation' in the Being. Wyschogrod explains this as follows:

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, pp. 138-9. [*ibid.*, p. 147].

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 141. [*ibid.*, p. 150].

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 141. [*ibid.*, pp. 150-1].

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 142. [*ibid.*, p. 151].

¹⁷⁷ Cohen notes that man 'without the capacity to refuse G-d could not enter into relationship with G-d and remain in relationship with G-d'(Cohen, 1994, p. 180).

Atheism is a state *prior* to revelation, that is, prior to the break with totality. It is the ground against which revelation becomes possible and is thus inherently innocent. It cannot fall under judgement since it is a prerequisite for the upsurge of the very conditions which will make judgement possible ... Atheist man is natural man before the advent of the other.¹⁷⁸

Regardless of the fact that the I at home with itself, separated and happy, is the necessary mode of being of this analysis, the subject cannot remain at this level eternally. The opportunity of being human originates from the challenge of the Other to my egoism.

4.5. The Dwelling

Being the condition of human activity, home has a privileged position in Levinas. He frequently uses the phrase 'being at home' in order to describe the egoism of the I. Levinas explains its relation with contemplation as follows:

Contemplation, with its pretension to constitute, after the event, the dwelling itself, assuredly evinces separation, or, better yet, is an indispensable moment of its production. But the dwelling cannot be forgotten among the conditions for representation, even if representation is a privileged conditioned, absorbing its condition. For it absorbs it only after the event, a posteriori. Hence the subject contemplating a world presupposes the event of dwelling, the withdrawal from the elements (that is, from immediate enjoyment, already uneasy about the morrow), recollection in the intimacy of the home.¹⁷⁹

The objective world is posited 'by relation to my dwelling', not vice versa.

¹⁷⁸ Wyschogrod, 2000, p. 79.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 153. [*ibid.*, p. 163-4].

We transform the elements by means of labor into the world in which we habit. In this process of transformation, the world is discovered.

This primordial grasp, this emprise of labor, which *arouses* things and transforms nature into a world, presupposes, just as does the contemplation of the gaze, the recollection of the I in its dwelling. The movement by which a being builds its home, opens and ensures interiority to itself, is constituted in a movement by which the separated being recollects itself. With the dwelling the latent birth of the world is produced.¹⁸⁰

Home is related to the concept of possession in which the independence of being is suspended. In this relationship with matter the idea of infinity does not yet appear. By means of labor, conditioned by dwelling, we overcome the pure enjoyment in possession. In *comprehension* of the thing, the hand does not conceive the thing due to its touching it throughout or its being a sense-organ. It is domination.¹⁸¹

What kind of freedom does the I have while it is in itself in this independent position?

Freedom as a relation of life with an *other* that lodges it, and by which life is *at home with itself*, is not a finite freedom; it is virtually a null freedom. Freedom is as it were the by-product of life. Its adhesion to the world in which it risks being lost is precisely, and at the same time, that by which it defends itself and is at home with itself.¹⁸²

The only possibility to break this 'closed circle of totality' is to *welcome the Other* by opening my home to the Other, in the presence of infinity, in

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 157. [*ibid.*, p. 168].

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 161. [*ibid.*, pp. 173-4].

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p. 165. [*ibid.*, pp. 178-9].

transcendence. To *welcome* the Other, whom I do not live from, is to desire for the Other in the face of the Other.

4.6. Face of the Other

The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power. The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.¹⁸³

Levinas uses this concept (in fact it should be noticed that it is not a concept!) especially in his early writings. He gives us some definitions to help us to feel the implications of this mysterious concept. Is it just an ordinary metaphor? Might Levinas have used another part of our body in order to continue his investigation concerning ethics? What does the face (*le visage*) say to us? (To which concepts does it lead us to think?)

4.6.1. Definitions of the Face

Face is named as 'the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*'¹⁸⁴. This definition is the most explicit one given in *Totality and Infinity*. The Other presents itself by *overflowing* the concept of it. Therefore, it is not a modality of quiddity. Levinas uses some adjectives in *Totality and Infinity* like *nudity*, or the *nakedness* of the face "The nakedness of the face is destituteness."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 198. [*ibid.*, pp. 215-6].

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 50. [*ibid.*, p. 43].

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 74-5. [*ibid.*, pp. 72-3].

It 'resists possession, resists my power' and its epiphany demands a new dimension; this resistance is ethical.¹⁸⁶ Therefore one needs the concept of face to explain the ethical resistance. It signifies itself and it is not a mediator.¹⁸⁷ Why does Levinas use the concept of face? Might it have been our hands instead? It seems that there are many reasons to choose this concept. Cohen finds some of them in the literature on face to explain the preeminence of it. We can summarize these as follows¹⁸⁸:

- 1) The face is at the top of the body.
- 2) The body is nowhere more open; all senses are at play there.
- 3) It is alive, irreversible 'indelibly oriented and marked by a past, present, and future.'

There is a meaning in the face. We always look at the face and it also looks at us. Moreover, the face *speaks*. It says 'you shall not kill!'. I make contact with the face by speaking. There is a negativity, a resistance to me, to my force, in the first sentence. I hear the sentence while it absolves from the relation.

The impossibility of killing does not have a simply negative and formal signification; the relation with infinity, the idea of infinity in us, conditions it positively. Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyses my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution. The comprehension of this destitution and this hunger establishes the very proximity of the other.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 197. [*ibid.*, p. 215].

¹⁸⁷ Levinas emphasizes that it is not a philosophical mediation in an interview in *Entre Nous, Thinking- of- the- Other*. "Q: It is a mediator between God and us? E.L.: Oh, no, no, not at all, it is not mediation- it is the way the word of God reverberates" (Levinas, 1998c, p.110. [Levinas, 1991, p. 120]). I hear the word of God in it.

¹⁸⁸ Cohen, 1994, pp. 242-4.

¹⁸⁹ Levinas, 1991, pp. 199-200. [Levinas, 1971, p. 218].

To be sure, I am able to kill the Other; I have a capacity to carry out this activity, but Levinas brings us to see that this is an *ethical impossibility*.

4.6.2. Face to Face as Beginning of Meaning

How does Levinas' attitude to relation differ from Buber's formulation 'I and Thou'. Why is Buber's approach to human relationship not enough to overcome ontological attitude? Despite a formal resemblance between these two philosophers (like Buber's moving toward the sacred from dialogue and not the opposite and Levinas' proceeding to God from 'face to face'), Levinas separates himself from him (and from Gabriel Marcel) definitively. Levinas appreciates Buber's contribution (beginning is the relation, and dialogue is revelation of it) to manifesting the originality of human relation.

If you speak with me I can convince you, but how to oblige you to enter into dialogue? Buber seeks the dialogue that brings one into dialogue. The 'I' appealing to the 'Thou,' instead of considering him or her as an object or an enemy, is the primal fact.¹⁹⁰

This address without mediation by any principle is at the beginning.

It is certainly the irreducibility of the 'I-Thou' relation of the Meeting, the irreducibility of the Meeting to any relation with the *determinable* and the objective, that remains Buber's principle contribution to Western thought.¹⁹¹

It is pure act, transcendence without content, ineffable. Levinas accepts the possibility to break the immanency in directness of meeting in Buber, but he does not think that this attitude has appreciated the Other correctly in this fiction. Moreover, Levinas points out that Buber (and also Marcel)

¹⁹⁰ Levinas, 1994, p. 16. [Levinas, 1987, p. 28].

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 17. [*ibid.*, p. 29].

'characterize the I-Thou relation in terms of *being*.'¹⁹² In his view, there is no way out except for using an ethical language in order to difficulty. "In my own analyses, the approach to others is not originally in my speaking out to the other, but in my responsibility for him or her. That is the original ethical relation."¹⁹³ This cannot be seen as a modulation of intentionality, and in this concrete modality the same opens to the Other. On the other hand, Buber's dialogue organically and primordially cannot rescue the Other from being as an element of consciousness. Moreover, Levinas does not accept the initial equality, i.e. synchrony, in contrast to Buber. There is a *height* in Other's face.

If the immediate is the face to face¹⁹⁴ the beginning of meaning is in the face to face. Kant never thought that a real encounter with the Other is necessary in order to be a conscious subject. We have learnt with Hegel that we need to face the Other and launch into a struggle with him in order to be recognized and to become a self conscious subject. This encounter is the base both for Levinas and Hegel. Nevertheless, in contrast to Hegel, Levinas sees this process not as a struggle but a *peace*. "The welcoming of the face is peaceable from the first, for it answers to the unquenchable Desire for Infinity. War itself is but a possibility and nowise a condition for it."¹⁹⁵ To desire *the desire of the other* is the main necessity to be human in Hegel. "For my part, I think that the relation to the Infinite is not a knowledge, but a Desire"¹⁹⁶. In contrast to Hegel, Levinas sees in metaphysical desire something toward the *absolutely other*, beyond any satisfaction. In *Totality and Infinity*, as we have already seen, Levinas tells us a story about a subject who is firstly in a state of enjoyment (*jouissance*). This state is a *real* fiction that enables us to think *before* the separation of

¹⁹² *ibid.*, p. 23. [*ibid.*, p. 36].

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, pp. 43-4. [*ibid.*, p. 61].

¹⁹⁴ Levinas, 1991, p. 52. [Levinas, 1971, p. 44].

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 150. [*ibid.*, p. 161].

¹⁹⁶ Levinas, 1985, p. 92. [Levinas, 1982b, p. 86].

subject and object '...sensation recovers a 'reality' when we see in it not the subjective counterpart of objective qualities, but an enjoyment 'anterior' to the crystallization of consciousness, I and non-I, into subject and object'¹⁹⁷. In enjoyment there is no separation, there is no self-conscious, rational, responsible subject; he eats and digests everything. When he encounters the Other *face to face* he becomes aware that he could not digest the Other, the face with an ethical resistance. He is, as it were, not in this world, although I can see and touch him. I cannot not digest, grasp or conceive him. Nevertheless, there is nothing hidden *in* the face of the Other that invites us to *decipher* or to comment.

Levinas indicates that a phenomenology of sensation as enjoyment differs from the interpretation of experience on the basis of vision and touch. In this phenomenology we do not necessarily arrive at the object.¹⁹⁸

But how do we rescue ourselves from the privilege of vision?

The eye does not see the light, but the object in the light. Vision is therefore a relation with a "something" established within a relation with what is not a "something." We are in the light inasmuch as we encounter the thing in nothingness. The light makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows; it empties space. It makes space arise specifically as a void. Inasmuch as the movement of the hand that touches traverses the "nothing" of space, touch resembles vision.¹⁹⁹

A being comes from its origin, and this origin is *there is*. "This 'plenitude' is of another order. If the void that light produces in the space from which it drives out darkness is not equivalent to nothingness, even in the absence

¹⁹⁷ Levinas, 1991, p. 188. [Levinas, 1971, p. 204].

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 188. [*ibid.*, p. 204].

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 189. [*ibid.*, p. 206].

of any particular object, *there is* this void itself.”²⁰⁰ However, the *there is* is forgotten in vision owing to the satisfaction with the finite.²⁰¹ Hence, in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas deals with the concept of *stroke* (*caresse*) in contrast to *see* (*voir*).

Signifyingness, the-one-for-the-other, exposedness of self to another, it is immediacy in caresses and in the contact of saying. It is the immediacy of a skin and a face, a skin which is always a modification of a face, a face that is weighted down with a skin.²⁰²

The caress and the contact of saying is thought at the same time as immediate. In caress there is no need for light as a medium; its directness is like the immediateness of the face to face.

In order to make contact with the infinity in the face of the Other we should not just see the face of the Other, but also *desire* the Other. This desire differs from *want*; because it does not spring from a lack; it is *positive*. This attitude transforms us, frees us from the state of enjoyment and opens us to freedom, reason, and the human. “Incapability of approaching the other with empty hands”²⁰³ indicates that the resolution of the problem is *practical*. *Good will* is not enough.²⁰⁴ Consequently, for Levinas, this encounter is a *welcoming* of the Other. Desire of the otherness of the Other is the ethical. Peace precedes war. He wants to ground that which serves us to open the door to the stranger, even if we do not know who is knocking. Levinas does not want to merely explain a possibility that makes

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 190. [*ibid.*, p. 207].

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 191. [*ibid.*, p. 209].

²⁰² Levinas, 1998b, p. 85. [Levinas, 1978, p. 135].

²⁰³ Levinas, 1991, p. 50. [Levinas, 1971, p. 42].

²⁰⁴ Chaliar summarizes the differences of Levinasian ethics from the Kantian as follows. “No one becomes moral out of good will, out of the decision to universalize the maxims behind his actions, but rather as a response to a command emanating from the encounter with the face” (Chaliar, 2002, p. 37). In her view, Levinas does not begin with the *finitude* of the subject; on the contrary, he tries to imagine how the idea of the *infinite* dwells in the subject’s finitude from the beginning.

us good; he is in the pursuit of a 'contract' that was made involuntarily in a time *non-presentable*. Levinasian subject is *firstly* responsible and *then* free.

Because the desire is infinite and positive my responsibility for the Other is also infinite and I cannot say that I have fulfilled it. It gets more and more in every action.

What about the other faces? We know that there are other faces apart from the face of the Other. The third looking at me 'in the eyes of the Other' reminds me that we are not alone with the Other, but that every theory (reciprocity, equality, justice) comes *after* this meeting. Levinas tries to make room for acting without calculation in concrete encounter, without using any general rule.

4.6.3. Proximity and Face

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas deals with the face in connection with a new concept, Proximity, which is not a concept spatial. What does proximity mean and why does he need to use this concept in his later writings? In fact this concept does not indicate a deviation from the early determinations about the face. It is as if Levinas would like to underline his non-dialogical approach to the relationship to the Other.

"Proximity is the subject that approaches and consequently constitutes a relationship in which I participate as a term, but where I am more, or less, than a term."²⁰⁵ He sees proximity as 'a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest'. This becoming subject should be thought of not as a reciprocal process but anarchically. Proximity tells us a non-spatial distance that could not be overcome, even in infinity. Therefore inevitability of

²⁰⁵ Levinas, 1998b, p. 82. [Levinas, 1978, p. 131].

dialogue cannot be an admission to the synchrony. It is the mood in which we experience the face. "In proximity is heard a command come as though from an immemorial past, which was never present, began in no freedom. This way of the neighbor is a face."²⁰⁶ Levinas tries to explain this way by means of analogy with caress. "In a caress, what is there is sought as though it were not there, as though the skin were the trace of its own withdrawal, a languor still seeking, like an absence which, however, could not be more there."²⁰⁷

Sensibility is 'all the passivity of saying' and proximity is enacted in the act of giving.

If giving is proximity itself, it takes on its full meaning only in stripping me of what is more my own than possession. Pain penetrates into the very heart of the for-oneself that beats in enjoyment, in the life that is complacent in itself, that lives of its life. To give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the for-oneself, is to take the bread out of one's own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one's own fasting. The for-another characteristic of sensibility is enacted already in the enjoying and savoring.²⁰⁸

'A proximity of a face' does not take place in a reciprocal relationship, or in the medium of the third term. Hence it is the origin of all putting into question of self.

If 'to be for the other is to be good', then I am called to be good in this relation by the Other. Enjoyment and suffering (and mostly suffering due to the burden of the Other) get their meaning in this relationship. Therefore to be good is not something desirable. The face is given over to my responsibility without asking to me, without being decided by me.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 88. [*ibid.*, p. 141].

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 90. [*ibid.*, pp. 143-4].

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 55-6. [*ibid.*, p. 94].

Proximity, immediacy, is to enjoy and to suffer by the other. But I can enjoy and suffer by the other only because I am-for-the-other, am signification, because the contact with skin is still a proximity of a face, a responsibility, an obsession with the other, being-one-for-the-other, which is the very birth of *signification* beyond *being*.²⁰⁹

4.6.4. The Word of Face

Although we know that the Other has a face, we are not sure that we make contact with it correctly or ethically. This ambiguity, or our awareness of it, is our strict determination in a sense. We can start to put into question our existence from this point. When we become aware of this problem of legality, there is an opportunity to hear the voice of the Other, i.e. to be good.

Why did Levinas give us a sentence (*Thou shalt not kill*) which has a content? To be sure, he might be silent concerning the content of our answer to the call of the Other. It would be enough to say that the call of face is responded in every act of giving gratuitously.

Murder exercises a power over what escapes power ... I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.²¹⁰

Murder, not as a domination but an annihilation, cannot prevent the continuation of the reminiscences of killing in memory. It seems that the

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 90. [*ibid.*, p. 144].

²¹⁰ Levinas, 1991, p. 198. [Levinas, 1971, p. 216].

action of killing is on the one hand a determinate (definite) activity (annihilation, the end of life and responsibility) as the killer wished it to be. On the other hand, this, the most violent violence is a self-destructive activity. It *turns upon* itself and destroys the meaning of the action and the meaning of life for the one left alive as well. It irritates and haunts the *present* that prevails as if nothing has happened. The murderer acts as if the entire meaning of the Other could infinitely be frozen in that time. The one left alive feels himself as the *owner* of time. Every sign gains its meaning by means of him. Every meaning refers to himself.

Whereas, though it is possible to find a *reason* for every massacre, it is impossible to be indifferent to the call of the Other as it is not ontological but ethical. The face reminds us of this ethical necessity in every social relationship, again and again.

4.7. Fecundity and Voluptuousity

Fecundity (*la fécondité*) is one of the concepts that we do not meet after *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas deals with it in the section of *Beyond the Face*. He sees the relation with the child as a new kind of relation not ontological and defines this concept as follows:

Both my own and non-mine, a possibility of myself but also a possibility of the other, of the Beloved, my future does not enter into the logical essence of the possible. The relation with such a future, irreducible to the power over possibles, we shall call fecundity.²¹¹

This future cannot be thought within unity which is ontologically privileged. In fecundity the father goes out from itself and from now on he cannot be

²¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 267. [*ibid.*, p. 300].

closed upon itself. The son is himself and more than himself at the same time. He is the possibility of his being outside of himself.

The son is not only my work, like a poem or an object, nor is he my property. Neither the categories of power nor those of knowledge describe my relation with the child. The fecundity of the I is neither a cause nor a domination. I do not have my child; I am my child.²¹²

Levinas adds that 'being is no longer Eleatic unity' in this I am. There is not a simple cause between the father and the son.

He is unique for himself because he is unique for his father. This is precisely why he can, as a child, not exist 'on his own.' And because the son owes his unicity to the paternal election he can be brought up, be commanded, and can obey, and the strange conjuncture of family is possible. Creation contradicts the freedom of the creature only when creation is confused with causality. Whereas creation as a relation of the transcendence, of union and fecundity, conditions the positing of a unique being, and his ipseity qua elected.²¹³

Whenever Levinas talks about the creation, *ex nihilo* has to come to mind. Only this kind of creation is able to make room for freedom and otherness.

Fecundity is a relationship, in which the plurality could not be put under the 'I think'; the Other could not be captured and it withdraws itself continuously. The centre of the relationship is nowhere, but beyond.

The other concept, voluptuousness (*la volupté*), is a relationship in which the I cannot return to itself and find itself again. This erotic passion 'as the coinciding of the lover and the beloved, is charged by their duality: it is

²¹² *ibid.*, p. 277. [*ibid.*, p. 310].

²¹³ *ibid.*, p. 279. [*ibid.*, p. 312].

simultaneously fusion and distinction'. The subject in this relationship discovers himself as the self of an Other, too. This differs from consciousness (as the self of himself).²¹⁴

In order to think a subject outside knowing and using a power, Levinas needs to think about an erotic relation in which the subject could not be thought within unity.²¹⁵

Neither knowledge nor power. In voluptuosity the Other, the feminine, withdraws into its mystery. The relation with it is a relation with its absence, an absence on the plane of knowledge-the unknown-but a presence in voluptuosity. Nor power: there is no initiative at the birth of love, which arises in the passivity of its pangs. Sexuality is in us neither knowledge nor power, but the very plurality of our existing.²¹⁶

4.8. Enigma

As rational speech, philosophy is taken to move from evidence to evidence, directed to what is seen, to what shows itself, thus directed to the present. The term *present* suggests both the idea of a privileged position in the temporal series and the idea of manifestation. The idea of being connects them. As a presence, being excludes the nonbeing that marks the past and the future but assembles their residues and their germs, which, in structures, are contemporary. Being is a manifestation in which uncertain memory and aleatory anticipation are

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 270. [*ibid.*, pp. 302-3].

²¹⁵ Wyschogrod underlines the pluralistic character of this relationship. "...fecundity is the phenomenon whose upsurge guarantees alterity, for it remains impossible without a self and another. It is in its very foundation antimonic; it undercuts the philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Hegel which understands being as one. For Levinas being is produced as 'multiple' through the scissiparity of the Other. Being is already social for it is not one but many." (Wyschogrod, 2000, p. 135).

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 276-7. [*ibid.*, pp. 309-10].

moored; being is a presence to the gaze and to speech, an appearing, a phenomenon.²¹⁷

Is there already a place for an enigma in philosophy? In *Enigma and Phenomenon*, Levinas holds that the Platonic Good can help us to overcome this 'plenitude of being' without being captured by any kind of manifestation. This excess in the Good might be seen as the reason of enigma. In order to abstain from the totality in which there is nothing unknown, and the present reigns, we need to have a new kind of 'positive' relation with meaning.²¹⁸

Levinas' critique is thereby directed to Hegel's identification of reason with reality in history.

Everything is understood, justified, pardoned. And of what of the surprise of that face behind the door? That surprise will be denied. Attention will be directed to the order that annuls the disturbance, the history in which men, their distress and their despairs, their wars and their sacrifices, the horrible and the sublime, are summed up ... Everything that is real would thus be meaningful and every action would arise in the real as the conclusion of a reasoning, in an advance without shortcuts; a short circuit would, it seems, produce only the night of dreams.²¹⁹

Reason is the *reason*. Every part of it is homogenous and never knows the cry of the individual in the face of its rules as we have already seen in the critique of Rosenzweig. The face disturbs and interrupts the order, without proposing any stable one, by facing me. Its being absolute (Levinas always refers also the meaning of *absolved from*) tells us of its withdrawal before entering into relation. What remains after this relationship? Only that we have 'the very emptiness of a passage' a *trace* like 'a mark on sand'. This

²¹⁷ Levinas, 1996, p. 66.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

'manifesting himself without manifesting himself' is enigma. It appears like a gesture in conversation and then disappears.²²⁰ Levinas uses Kierkegaardian God in order to explain this enigma:

The Kierkegaardian God is revealed only to be persecuted and unrecognized, reveals himself only in the measure that he is hunted-such that subjectivity, despairing in the solitude in which this absolute humility leaves it, becomes the very locus of truth. The Kierkegaardian God is not simply the bearer of certain attributes of humility; he is a way of truth which this time is not determined by a phenomenon, by the present and contemporaneity, and is not measured by certainty. This truth is irreducible to phenomena and is hence essential in a world which can no longer believe that the books about God attest to transcendence as a phenomenon and to the Absolute as an apparition. And without the good reasons atheism brings forth, there would have been no Enigma.²²¹

The trace is 'effaced in its apparition' in this truth. There is an anachronism between the same and the Other. Levinas thinks that 'this anachronism is less paradoxical than it seems.' It might be conceived in the 'meanwhile' that trace as 'a pure passage' appears.

Self-consciousness is kept breathless with tension or relaxation, in the before or the after. In the *meanwhile* the event expected turns into the past without being lived through, without being equalled, in any present. Something takes place between the Dusk in which the most ecstatic intentionality, which, however, never aims far enough, is lost (or is recollected) and the Dawn in which consciousness returns to itself, but already too late for the event which is moving away. The great 'experiences' of our life have properly speaking never been lived.²²²

²²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 70.

²²¹ *ibid.*, p. 71.

²²² *ibid.*, p. 72.

There is not any speaking purified of the ambiguity of enigma. Levinas connects the enigma to the divine, *Illeity* (He-ness) finally. The *Illeity* in its irreversible past shows itself in its trace. In the excessive movement of going beyond being, in supreme goodness, the idea of the infinite transcends the totality.²²³

How therefore can I satisfy the demand of this call that cannot be reduced to knowledge in this passage?

Desire, or the response to an Enigma or morality, is an intrigue with three personages; the I approaches the Infinite by going generously toward the You, who is still my contemporary, but, in the trace of *Illeity*, present himself out of a depth of the past, faces, and approaches me. I approach the infinite insofar as I forget myself for my neighbor who looks at me; I forget myself only in breaking the undephasable simultaneity of representation, in existing beyond my death. I approach the infinite by sacrificing myself. Sacrifice is the norm and the criterion of the approach. And the truth of transcendence consists in the concurring of speech with acts.²²⁴

The limit of my capabilities is the limit of the economy. Sacrifice destroys the concept of limit that orders and defines the meaning of life. Through sacrifice the enigma's word is heart and the face appears. The enigma's way is merely understood in morality.

²²³ *ibid.*, p. 75.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 76.

CHAPTER 5

OTHERWISE THAN TOTALITY and INFINITY

Otherwise than Being, in our opinion belongs to a new period in Levinas' thought, even if it does not refer a radical change concerning with its attitude to ontology. This change shows itself in Levinas' language which does not talk *about* any thing or any event, but itself becomes that event.

Obviously Levinas thinks that he has already explained the adventure of the pre-ethical subject in *Totality and Infinity*. Thus, the phenomenological descriptions about the I does not appear anymore here. The subject, as held *hostage* in the Other, is in a paradoxical state. It is responsible and free in its disclosure to the Other. This new subject seems more troublesome than *Totality and Infinity*'s. It is under accusation from the very beginning.²²⁵ 'The self, a hostage, is already substituted for the others.'²²⁶

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas elucidates a new relation between *said* and *saying*, too. He proposes *saying* as a condition for all communication which is prior to any intention. It could be conceived as a new kind of vulnerable subjectivity that has been 'torn up from oneself'.²²⁷

²²⁵ Levinas, 1998c, p. 112. [Levinas, 1978, p. 177].

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 118. [*ibid.* p. 187].

²²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 49. [*ibid.* p. 83].

*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*²²⁸ is a new subjectivity which is not a modality of essence, showing itself in the said enigmatically.

5.1. Substitution

My substitution-it is as *my own* that substitution for the neighbor is produced. The Mind is a multiplicity of individuals. It is in me- in me and not in another, in me and not in an individuation of the concept Ego- that communication opens. It is I who am integrally or absolutely ego, and the absolute is my business. No one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all.²²⁹

The chapter on 'substitution' has a central importance for *Otherwise than Being*. Levinas improves and goes to the limit of his understanding of new subjectivity by putting the Other in the middle of my very identification.²³⁰ This difference in the identity differentiates it from empathy.²³¹

²²⁸ Levinas underlines the word of essence in the title. "It is necessary to emphasize at the beginning of this book something that will be often repeated within it, and which is necessary if its language, and its very title, are to be understood: the term *essence* here expresses *being* different from *beings*, the German *Sein* distinguished from *Seindes*, the Latin *esse* distinguished from the Scholastic *ens*. (Levinas, 1998b, p. xlii. [Levinas, 1978, p. 9].)

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 126. [*ibid.* p. 200].

²³⁰ Bernasconi points out the change between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* concerning the status of I. There is at first 'a conception of the identity of the I in atheist separation' in order to imagine a real encounter with the Other. Later Levinas 'goes behind the back of consciousness of the I', not to the level of the ego (*le moi*) but to the level of the self (*le soi*) (Bernasconi, in Critchley and Bernasconi, (eds.), 2002, pp. 245-6).

²³¹ "For me, the notion of substitution is tied to the notion of responsibility. To substitute oneself does not amount to putting oneself in the place of the other man in order to feel what he feels; it does not involve becoming the other nor, if he be destitute and desperate, the courage of such a trial. Rather, substitution entails bringing comfort by associating ourselves with the essential weakness and finitude of the other; it is to bear his weight while sacrificing one's interestedness and

If subjectivity is not a modality of essence and is not reducible to history and thematization we need to imagine a new kind of subjectivity rescued from the self-consciousness in relation with the Other, as *proximity* not letting it be fixed, instead of thinking of the one and the Other in communication. The concept of responsibility would help us to better conceive this anarchic relationship.

Levinas holds that 'the-one-for-the-other is not a lack of intuition, but the surplus of responsibility'.²³² The signifyingness of signification is the one-for-the-other, i.e. my responsibility. Levinas emphasizes the fullness of responsibility and its positivity, and reminds us of the *proximity's* being a relation anarchically with a singularity, without the mediation of any rule, and the place of the trace in this relationship.

We have called this relationship irreducible to consciousness obsession. The relationship with exteriority is 'prior' to the act that would effect it. For this relationship is not an act, not a thematizing, not a position in the Fichtean sense. Not everything that is in consciousness would be posited by consciousness- contrary to the proposition that seemed to Fichte to be fundamental.^{233 234}

Levinas adds that anarchy stops 'the ontological play' in which being is lost and found again.

He does not think that this state could be defined in terms of intentionality, either.

complacency-in-being, which then turn into responsibility for the other."(Levinas, 2001, p. 228).

²³² Levinas, 1998b, p. 100. [Levinas, 1978, p. 158].

²³³ Levinas, 1998b, p. 101. [Levinas, 1978, p. 159].

²³⁴For Fichte, 'all consciousness rests on, and is conditioned by, self-consciousness.' (Fichte, 1970, p.37).

What is realized in and by intentional consciousness offers itself to protention and diverges from itself in retention, so as to be, across the divergency, identified and possessed. This play in being is consciousness itself: presence to self through a distance, which is both loss of self and recovery in truth. The *for itself* in consciousness is thus the very power which a being exercises upon itself, its will, its sovereignty. A being is equal to itself to and is in possession of itself in this form; domination is in consciousness as such. Hegel thought that the *I* is but consciousness mastering itself in self-equality, in what he calls 'the freedom of this infinite equality.'²³⁵

In his view, self-equality is a kind of violence that appears as freedom. To be equal to itself is, in fact, an act of equalization. Consciousness is 'wholly equality'. Moreover, this equality is also limited and measured by freedom. Whereas, in responsibility, the consciousness is influenced despite itself and it has no free time to form 'an image of what is coming to it'. Persecution by another prior to questioning is as the ground of solidarity with another.

If knowing of oneself by oneself is consciousness, subject and consciousness refer to the same essence. Subjectivity is reduced to consciousness in Western philosophy. "Consciousness fulfils the being of entities. For Sartre as for Hegel, the oneself is posited on the basis of the for-itself. The identity of the I would thus be reducible to the turning back of essence upon itself."²³⁶

Therefore, philosophy or logos becomes the illumination of being in its closed totality. Nobody could rescue himself from this being among entities. In contrast to this, the Levinasian subject is already formed with absolute passivity, i.e. a passivity that is more than passivity and not merely the

²³⁵ Levinas, 1998b, p. 102. [Levinas, 1978, p. 161].

²³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 103. [*ibid.*, p. 164].

opposite of the activity. It cannot 'posit itself for itself'. This attachment has already been made in an irreversible past, that could not be remembered.²³⁷

The oneself has not issued from its own initiative, as it claims in the plays and figures of consciousness on the way to the unity of an Idea. In that Idea, coinciding with itself, free inasmuch as it is a totality which leaves nothing outside, and thus, fully reasonable, the oneself posits itself as an always convertible term in a relation, a self-consciousness.²³⁸

There could be no *leak* in this coincidence with itself. This subject is not able to know of being detrimental to himself for the sake of the Other. In submission to cruelty, in my devotion to the others, in my passivity from the beginning, there is nothing under my control to be dominated. I am exiled to the outside of being. I am refuge in myself without hope to return.

If the return to self is a game within consciousness and ontology, the ethical subject is 'a withdrawal in-onself which is an exile in oneself, without a foundation in anything else, a non-condition'. The process of essence is inversed and the oneself cannot be equal to itself any more, there is an inequality with itself. The oneself 'is the identity of the singular, modified only in the erosion of ageing, in the permanence of a loss of self. It is unsayable, and thus unjustifiable'.²³⁹

If knowing or mind is 'turning of being back upon itself', the break in the same could tell us of this withdrawal. Moreover, this ipseity is not identified from within the present but from outside. This deficit is original and cannot

²³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 104. [*ibid.*, p. 165].

²³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 105. [*ibid.*, p. 165].

²³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 107. [*ibid.*, p. 169].

be closed due to an inequality in the subject. And it is deepened in time. Nobody could be at rest in himself.

The great paradox of the subject is in the 'responsibility prior to any commitment' being Other in itself. It is the source of the subject's illness.

In its own skin. Not at rest under a form, but tight in its skin, encumbered and as it were stuffed with itself, suffocating under itself, insufficiently open, forced to detach itself from itself, to breathe more deeply, all the way, forced to dispossess itself to the point of losing itself.²⁴⁰

Being ill at ease in one's own skin is not a temporal but a permanent mood.

Otherwise Than Being is as *the Other in the same*. It is the new subjectivity that has been transferred. In this 'self emptying itself of itself', in this passivity of a trauma the subject appears in proximity with the Other. All affirmation for-oneself that supports the egoism is put into question by the Other and the closed subject transformed into a subjectivity responsible 'of being-in-question in the form of the total exposure to offence in the cheek offered to the smiter'.²⁴¹

The limits of my responsibility extends the acts of the Other.

It is in the passivity of obsession, or incarnated passivity, that an identity individuates itself as unique, without recourse to any system of references, in the impossibility of evading the assignation of the other without blame. The re-presentation of self grasps it already in its trace. The absolution of the one is neither an evasion, nor an abstraction; it is a concreteness more concrete than the simply coherent in a totality. For under accusation by everyone, the responsibility for everyone goes to the point

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 110. [*ibid.*, p. 175].

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 111. [*ibid.*, p. 176].

of substitution. A subject is a hostage ... Without persecution the ego raises its head and covers over the self. Everything is from the start in the accusative. Such is the exceptional condition or unconditionality of the self, the signification of the pronoun *self* for which our Latin grammars themselves know no nominative form.²⁴²

Being a hostage is not the opposite of being free. Contrary, only the responsible subject could be free. This mode tells us of a situation in which the I could not return to itself as it happens in self-consciousness. It goes to the 'hither side of its point of departure'. The identity of the I could not be kept in an ethical situation. This impossibility to be in itself means that the I cannot be at rest in its identity. In its obsession the I could not be busy with itself. How can we speak of a subject without defining him as free at the beginning? Does not giving an answer to the call of the Other require an initial freedom?

[T]his taking-upon-oneself is not a specific realization of freedom; it is not an empirical specification or moral quality of freedom; it is not an attribute of the person. It is the converse of this: the acceptance of suffering and guilt is 'freedom's essential mode of being'. The selfhood is *defined* by the impossibility of withdrawal; it is its essence. The selfhood *is* substitution, hostageship, suffering. The *condition humaine* is this non-condition, this non-situation.²⁴³

This might be read as an answer to the critique of using a contradictory concept of subject.

This passivity undergone in proximity by the force of an alterity in me is the passivity of a recurrence to oneself which is not the alienation of an identity betrayed. What can it be but a substitution of me for the others? It is, however not an alienation, because the other in the same is my substitution for the other through responsibility, for

²⁴² *ibid.*, p. 112. [*ibid.*, p. 177].

²⁴³ De Boer, 1997, pp. 99-100.

which, I am summoned as someone irreplaceable. I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired. This inspiration is the psyche. The psyche can signify this alterity in the same without alienation in the form of incarnation, as being-in-one's-skin, having-the-other-in-one's skin.²⁴⁴

Being already under accusation in ipseity, being hostage in the Other, is perishing of the identity. The possibility of every renunciation for the Other appears in the most passive passivity, in an openness. This is the liberation of the self 'from every other and from itself'.

It is obvious that the substitution is not an act, but something that happens to us. Self's being *sub-jectum*, under the weight of the universe, not finding any rest in itself, being responsible for the Other more than the Other's, is an inequality.

The representation of the Other is overcome in proximity to the Other, in the face of the Other, in my responsibility. If 'the for itself signifies self-consciousness; the for all, responsibility for the others, support of the universe', the responsible subject means for all the universe. The way of the infinite cannot be grasped in 'being for itself'.²⁴⁵

Freedom might be possible and meaningful only after opening to the Other in proximity by responding to the call of the Other.

It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity—even the little there is, even the simple 'After you, sir.' The unconditionality of being hostage is not the limit case of solidarity, but the condition for all solidarity. Every accusation and persecution, as all interpersonal praise, recompense, and punishment presuppose the subjectivity

²⁴⁴ Levinas, 1998b, pp. 114-5. [Levinas, 1978, p. 181].

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 116. [*ibid.*, p. 184].

of the ego, substitution, the possibility of putting oneself in the place of the other, which refers to the transference from the 'by the other' into a 'for the other,' and in persecution from the outrage inflicted by the other to the expiation for his fault by me. But the absolute accusation, prior to freedom, constitutes freedom which, allied to the Good, situates beyond and outside of all essence.²⁴⁶

Being hostage is the essential modality of freedom.

Levinas does not think that this communication is able to be derived from self-coinciding. He contends that 'to communicate is indeed to open oneself, but the openness is not complete if it is on the watch for recognition'. This openness ought not to be completed by recognition. Being for-the-other in responsibility is disclosing himself to the Other.²⁴⁷

Self-coinciding would have this communication turned to information. In addition, communication as an adventure of a subjectivity is possible in the gratuity of sacrifice by means of which *a fine risk* is to be run.

Levinas argues for the primacy of 'the original goodness of creation' in spite of the domination of cruelty in history. Persecution, in fact, starts with the unification or homogenizing of the logos which justifies tyranny.

The self involved in the *gnawing away at oneself* in the responsibility, which is also incarnation, is not an objectification of the self by the ego. The self, the persecuted one, is accused beyond his fault before freedom, and thus in an unavowable innocence. One must not conceive it to be in the state of original sin; it is, on the contrary, the original goodness of creation. The persecuted one cannot defend himself by language, for the persecution is a disqualification of the apology.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 117-8. [*ibid.*, pp. 186-7].

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 119. [*ibid.*, p. 189].

Persecution is the precise moment in which the subject is reached or touched with the mediation of the logos.²⁴⁸

Like in love, we ought to be ready to take the risk of being disappointed without having made a mistake. The infinite presents itself anarchically.

The time which is irreducible to the present (i.e. the absolute, unrepresentable time) and the antecedence of responsibility to freedom, my pre-originary susceptiveness, passivity prior to all receptivity, and uniqueness, should be thought together to understand transcendent which *reverberates* in the face of the Other²⁴⁹. Responsibility is prior to egoism and altruism.

... the uniqueness of the responsible ego is possible *in* being obsessed by another, in the trauma suffered prior to any auto-identification, in an unrepresentable *before*. The one affected by the other is an anarchic trauma, or an inspiration of the one by the other, and not a causality striking mechanically a matter subject to its energy. In this trauma the Good reabsorbs, or redeems, the violence of non-freedom. Responsibility is what first enables one to catch sight of and conceive of value.²⁵⁰

Being obsessed is not an illness medical, but an opportunity to be good.

Levinas sees the Good as a remedy to rehabilitate the spontaneity of freedom. He does not use the Good as an epistemological or an ontological principle (as in Plato) but just as a guide. This is a finite freedom called into question and under accusation.

In what way does the substitution help us? Levinas contends that it rescues us from boredom (identical ego feels ennui) without originating from a free

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 121. [*ibid.*, p. 193].

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 122. [*ibid.*, p. 194].

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 123. [*ibid.*, pp. 196-7].

decision. The Other is in the middle of my very identification and the ipseity has become at odds with itself in its return to itself.”²⁵¹

In substitution my being that belongs to me and not to another is undone, and it is through this substitution that I am not ‘another,’ but me. The self in a being is exactly the not-being-able-to-slip-away-from an assignation that does not aim at any generality. There is no ipseity common to me and the others; ‘me’ is the exclusion from this possibility of comparison, as soon as comparison is set up. The ipseity is then a privilege or an unjustifiable election that chooses me and not the ego. I am unique and chosen; the election is in the subjection. The conceptualization of this last refusal of conceptualization is not contemporaneous with this refusal; it transcends this conceptualization. This transcendence separating itself from the consideration that conceptualizes it, the diachrony of subjectivity, is my entry into the proximity of the neighbor.²⁵²

The presence of the self to itself in the same is undone by the Other. The totality of being (in synchrony) is broken down and ethics appears in this ‘interval’.

5.2. The Said and The Saying

Peperzak determines that atheism and theology are very close together in terms of killing God in thematization.²⁵³ One of them kills it by rejection as a real theme, the other by speaking of it as a theme. For that reason, Levinas is in need of a language that can resist every thematizing thought as violence. The saying (*le dire*) ‘...is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 124-5. [*ibid.*, pp. 198].

²⁵² *ibid.*, p. 127. [*ibid.*, p. 201].

²⁵³ Peperzak, 1997, p. 91.

of signification”²⁵⁴ Whereas the saying is betrayed in every speech necessarily. The mutual relationship of the saying and the said (*le dit*) , namely ‘...the subordination of the saying to said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands.’²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, we cannot exhaust the *content* of the saying which is on the hither side of the said. This betrayal is not an unlucky deviation, but the *possibility* of speaking.

The entity that appears *identical* in the light of time *is* its essence in the *already said*. The phenomenon itself is a phenomenology. It is not that a discourse, coming from one knows not where, arbitrarily arranges the phases of temporality into a ‘this as that.’ The very exposition of Being, its manifestation, essence qua essence and entities qua entities, are spoken. It is only in the said, in the epos of saying, that the diachrony of time is synchronized into a time that is recallable, and becomes a theme.²⁵⁶

The said is the domain of identity, synchrony, consciousness, logos, all of which do not know any ‘lack’. Nevertheless, this ‘plenitude, this ‘completeness’ cannot be ‘justified’ by itself.

Moreover, Levinas holds that there is an interval of time unrepresentable and immemorial between the said and the saying.

Before the syntheses of apprehension and recognition, the absolutely passive ‘synthesis’ of ageing is effected. Through it time passes. The immemorial is not an effect of a weakness of memory, an incapacity to cross large intervals of time, to resuscitate pasts too deep. It is the impossibility of the dispersion of time to assemble itself in the present, the insurmountable diachrony of time, a beyond the said. It is diachrony that determines the

²⁵⁴ Levinas, 1998b, p. 5. [Levinas, 1978, p. 17].

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6. [*ibid.*, pp. 17-8].

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 37. [*ibid.*, p. 65].

immemorial; a weakness of memory does not constitute diachrony. But then we have this problem: is not diachrony characterizable only negatively? Is it pure loss? Has it no signification?²⁵⁷

He adds that the signifyingness of the saying is not absorbed in the said, there is a possibility to 'find beyond or on the hither side of the saying that tells being the signifyingness of diachrony'.

In order to explain the relation between these two concepts, Levinas speaks of an amphibology of being and entities (*être* and *étant*) in which Logos resides?.

Time and the *essence* it unfolds by manifesting *entities*, identified in the themes of statements or narratives, resound as a silence without becoming themes themselves. They can, to be sure, be named in a theme, but this naming does not reduce to definitive silence the mute resonance, the murmur of silence, in which essence is identified as an entity. Once again for the 'listening eye' a silence resounds about what had been muffled, the silence of the parcelling out of being, by which entities in their identities are illuminated and show themselves.²⁵⁸

'The murmur of silence' reminds us of the concept of the 'there is' (*il y a*) which Levinas uses mostly in his early writings. It disappears in every thematization but, as it were, resounds in the concept. Illumination of entities does not just give us a mode of essence.

Already the tautological predication, A is A, in which an entity is both subject and predicate, does not only signify the inherence of A in itself or the fact that A possesses all the characteristics of A. A is A is to be understood also as 'the sound resounds' or the 'red reddens'- or as 'A As.' In 'the red reddens' the verb does not signify an event, some dynamism of the red opposed to its rest as a

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 38. [*ibid.*, p. 66].

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 38. [*ibid.*, p. 67].

quality, or some activity of the red, for example, turning red, the passage from non-red to red or from less red to more red, an alteration. Nor in the verb to redden is there stated some metaphor of action or alteration, founded on an analogy with the dynamism of action, which would have the preeminent right to be designated by a verb.²⁵⁹

What Levinas is looking for is not the concept of becoming as a way of being that calls into question this identity. There is no essence behind the said. Then, how do we have to understand language except for a system of nouns naming entities? It can be thought 'as the verbalness of the verb that resound in the predicative proposition' in which the silent resonance of the essence is unveiled.²⁶⁰

[I]n the said, the essence that resounds is on the verge of becoming a noun. In the copula *is* scintillates or sparkles an ambiguousness between the essence and the nominalized relation. The said as a verb is essence or temporalization. Or, more exactly, the logos enters into the amphibology in which being and entities can be understood and identified, in which a noun can resound as a verb and a verb of an apophansis can be nominalized.²⁶¹

This resounding instead of designation in amphibology can always be absorbed in the said.

Beyond being and non-being, in responsibility (in being *for* the Other) we are irritated by the Other in our own place. Saying is an indispensable weight in the form of responsibility (on the hither side of amphibology). The

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 38-9. [*ibid.*, pp. 67-8].

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 39. [*ibid.*, p. 69].

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp. 41-2. [*ibid.*, p. 72].

subject is an absolute passivity and in restlessness under this weight or responsibility, on the hither side of ontology.²⁶²

Saying cannot be reduced to the said, like the message cannot be to the content of the message.²⁶³ It is not our aim to give a message without losing any part of it in a perfect medium.

Saying taken strictly is a 'signifyingness dealt the other,' prior to all objectification; it does not consist in giving signs. The 'giving out of signs' objectification; it does not consist in giving signs. The 'giving out of signs' would amount to a prior representation of these signs, as though speaking consisted in translating thoughts into words and consequently in having been first *for-oneself* and *at home with oneself*, like a substantial consistency. The relationship with the other would then extend forth as an intentionality, out of a subject posited in itself and for itself, disposed to play, sheltered from all ills and measuring by thought the being disclosed as the field of this play. Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure.²⁶⁴

Levinas adds that the exposure to traumas, the non-repose in oneself, restlessness, vulnerability could not be grasped in an intentionality in which the agent confirms itself and rests in self-certainty. Saying reveals itself beyond nakedness, and is prior to any intention; 'the subject is not *in itself* any more, at home with itself'.²⁶⁵ Levinas identifies this non-coinciding with *substitution* as we have already seen. Exposure is not a decision of the consciousness that coincides with itself and defends itself from every wounding in relation with the Other. This new kind of subjectivity is

²⁶² *ibid.*, p. 46. [*ibid.*, p. 78].

²⁶³ "[I]f the subject of saying 'ex-presses' itself- in the literal sense-i.e., opens up to the other without reserve, then it no longer possesses inwardness. Its innermost now is outside, since it exists *for the Other*. In other words, the subject of sincere saying does not broadcast any signs, rather it becomes itself a sign for the other." (Spiegelberg, 1982, pp.631-2).

²⁶⁴ Levinas, 1998b, p. 48. [Levinas, 1978, pp. 81-2].

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 49. [*ibid.*, p. 83].

composed of vulnerability in its absolute passivity. Its 'being torn up from oneself', its 'denuding beyond the skin', is its dis-interestedness in its exposure to giving, to saying.

The feelings from which the reason always tries to run away, like pain or distress is felt by the ethical subject most of the time. Obsession by the Other, in disinterestedness is to be exposed to the Other by running the risk of suffering.

Saying, the most passive passivity, is inseparable from patience and pain, even if it can take refuge in the said, finding again in a wound the caress in which pain arises, and then the contact, and beyond it the knowing of a hardness or a softness, a heat or a cold, and then the thematization. Of itself saying is the sense of patience and pain. In saying suffering signifies in the form of *giving*, even if the price of signification is that the subject run the risk of suffering without reason. If the subject did not run the risk, pain would lose its very painfulness. Signification, as the one-for-the-other in passivity, where the other is not assumed by the one, presupposes the possibility of pure non-sense invading and threatening signification.²⁶⁶

If saying is denuding, to be for-the-other then there is not an ego that *posits* itself, situates itself in esse. This free and happy subject that justifies itself in every position cannot run the real risk of losing that which happens to me *despite me*.

This 'despite me' does not tell us of a 'prior will' that would refer to another level of consciousness. Levinas does not regard pain simply as a symptom

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 50. [*ibid.*, p. 85].

of a not satisfied will. The painfulness of pain is assumed by good or bad pleasure.²⁶⁷

The for-oneself of identity is now no longer for itself. The identity of the same in the ego comes to it despite itself from the outside, as an election or an inspiration, in the form of the uniqueness of someone assigned. The subject is for another; its own being turns into for another, its being dies away turning into signification. Subjectivity in ageing is unique, irreplaceable, me and not another; it is despite itself in an obedience where there is no desertion, but where revolt is brewing.²⁶⁸

Levinas then adds that the Good's not entering into the present of consciousness is the anarchy in consciousness. It reigns in its goodness without being present as older than the choice. The subject's traumatic uniqueness, its incapability of escaping from the call of the Other, could be conceived by means of election. Every call is an election for whom one responds. The call and the answer does not belong to the same time. Call *precedes* the answer, that's why the answer is never enough to satisfy the call.

The subject is always under accusation and in the accusative form, in contrast to the subject of *conatus essendi*. My responsibility before any decision is the source of my inquietude.

The passivity of the subject in saying is not the passivity of a 'language that speaks' without a subject (*Die Sprache spricht*). It is an offering oneself which is not even assumed by its own generosity, an offering oneself that is a suffering, a goodness despite oneself. The 'despite' cannot be decomposed into a will contraried by an obstacle. It is life, ageing of life, and unexceptionable

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 51. [*ibid.*, pp. 86-7].

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 52. [*ibid.*, p. 88].

responsibility, saying. The subjectivity of subjection of the self is the suffering of suffering, the ultimate offering oneself, or suffering in the offering of oneself. Subjectivity is vulnerability, is sensibility.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 54. [*ibid.*, pp. 91-2].

CHAPTER 6

BEFORE LEVINAS AFTER LEVINAS

How can we think of the place of Levinas in the history of philosophy? Is his philosophy an overcoming or a renovation of Kantian philosophy? How does he inspire Derrida's deconstructive readings? Is there a hierarchy between Kant and Levinas, as Beavers claimed, in relation to their realm of research?²⁷⁰

After Hegel's critique of Kant it would have been difficult to defend the formalism of Kantian ethics despite its making room for a meaning outside of ontology. Therefore, Levinas does not seek to give us pure forms of moral good. Neither Kant nor Levinas seeks to base their ethics on a definite religion directly (despite the former giving importance to Christianity, the latter Judaism). Their giving humanity an irreducible value over nature, beyond the horizon of ontology is common. What about the acceptance of encounters with the Other? Levinas' seeing it as the primary rescues his theory from becoming a sum of imperatives found at the end of a process of meditation of the subject by itself. Other as a source of ethics cannot be equalized with reason common for everybody. Ethics comes from *nowhere* in this sense.

²⁷⁰ Beavers, in New, Bernasconi and Cohen, (eds.), 2001, p. 288.

How could Derrida's complicated reading of texts be thought together with Levinas' impossible project of aiming to talk about the Other without knowing it? Levinas' seeing a contract with the Other in an immemorial past that could not be remembered, talking about a trace of a trace, or a passage of a trace, is used by Derrida's in trying to see an apoira in the experience of impossibility. Nevertheless the most effective critique of Levinas is carried out by Derrida in favor of Husserl and Heidegger in *Violence and Metaphysics*.

6.1. Kant's Moral Philosophy

In this chapter we will try to make a comparison between Kant and Levinas in terms of their basic concepts, moral law, respect, responsibility, love and law, and to elucidate Levinas' going beyond Kantian humanism.

If one had the right to retain one trait from a philosophical system and neglect all the details of its architecture (even though there are no details in architecture, according to Valery's profound dictum, which is eminently valid for philosophical construction, where the details alone prevent collapse), we would think here of Kantism, which finds a meaning to the human without measuring it by ontology and outside of the question 'What is there here...?' that one would like to take to be preliminary, outside of the immortality and death which ontologies run up against. The fact that immortality and theology could not determine the categorical imperative signifies the novelty of the Copernican revolution: a sense that is not measured by being or not being; but being on the contrary is determined on the basis of sense.²⁷¹

It is obvious from this quotation that there is consensus between these philosophers about ethics' being *on the other side of* ontology despite their

²⁷¹ Levinas, 1998b, p. 129. [Levinas, 1978, p. 205].

many diversities. In Beavers opinion the most notable aspect of their comparison concerns the issue of rationality. In his view, although Kant is working at a level of rationality, Levinas is trying to search 'a level prior to the emergence of the rational order, where the ought first becomes incumbent on the self, thereby transposing it into the institutionalized order of practical reason.'²⁷² We might accept this separation on the condition that Levinas' *pre-rational* investigation would not lead us to Kantian ethics necessarily.

6.1.1. Moral Law and Drive

Everybody bears in himself the responsibility of all humanity. But where does this value come from? Is it possible to isolate a priori elements in our moral knowledge? Can moral will give itself the law to which it consents? Kantian ethics is based on a special kind of law that cannot be approached like a natural one in time and space. This basic concept constructs the morality directly without being effected by any social relationship. It is grounded in practical reason.

What is essential in the moral worth of actions is that the moral law should directly determine the will. If the determination of the will occurs in accordance with the moral law but only by means of a feeling of any kind whatsoever, which must be presupposed in order that the law may become a determining ground of the will, and if the action does not occur for the sake of the law, it has legality but not morality.²⁷³

²⁷² Beavers, in New, Bernasconi and Cohen, (eds.), 2001, p. 288.

²⁷³ Kant, 1993, p. 75.

Moral law is the direct motive of the will which is not able to *justify* its necessity.²⁷⁴ It is in itself positive. Moreover, it is the form of freedom and the object of respect.

Another basic concept, drive, is a subjective determining the ground of a will whose reason does not by its nature necessarily conform to the objective law.

The essential point in all determination of the will through the moral law is this: as a free will, and thus not only without co-operating with sensuous impulses but even rejecting all of them and checking all inclinations so far as they could be antagonistic to the law, it is determined merely by the law. Thus far, the effect of the moral law as a drive is only negative, and as such this drive can be known a priori. For all inclination and every sensuous impulse is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (through the check on the inclinations) is itself feeling. Consequently, we can see a priori that the moral law as a ground of determination of the will, by thwarting all our inclinations, must produce a feeling which can be called pain.²⁷⁵

Although the effect of moral law generally leads to *pain* instead of joy or pleasantness through tension between the inclinations and *good will*, Kant is not an ascetic. Satisfaction of the inclinations forms self regard (*solipsismus*) and this consists either of self-love (selfishness) or of self satisfaction (self-conceit). *Pure Practical Reason* restricts the selfishness and transforms it into *rational* self-love and strikes down self-conceit. However, this restriction does not mean to be an altruism. Every man has responsibility for himself as a representative of humanity. Everybody

²⁷⁴ Kant equalizes our becoming conscious of being free and moral. Beavers notes that the problem of how our becoming aware of the moral law happens is not answered in his ethics. (Beavers, in New, Bernasconi and Cohen, (eds.), 2001, p. 288).

²⁷⁵ Kant, 1993, p. 76.

partakes from the idea of humanity. This equality requires a homogenous rational area in which there is no hierarchy (or an asymmetry in Levinasian sense) between men. Moral law precedes *The Good* and there is not any kind of *feeling* at the basis of this law.

6.1.2. Respect, Love and Duty

Kant deals with the concept of respect²⁷⁶, especially in the drives of pure reason in *Critique of Practical Reason*. He separates this special kind of *feeling* from Shaftesbury's *disinterestedness* of the senses constructed by the senses reflecting upon themselves, and from Hutcheson's moral good that can be apprehended in actions²⁷⁷. Moral law humbles every man when a human compares the sensuous propensity of his nature with it. Kant argues that we perceive this law immediately. "What I recognize immediately as a law for me, I recognize with respect. This merely signifies the consciousness that my will is subordinate to a law, without the intervention of other influences on my senses."²⁷⁸

Kant defines respect in *Metaphysics of Morals* as 'the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty'²⁷⁹ In his view, we do not have an extraordinary sense to discern moral good and bad; rather, we have a sensitivity made by free choice 'to be moved by pure practical reason (and its law), and this is what we call moral feeling'²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Patton (1967, pp. 63-64), prefers the concept of *reverence* instead of *respect*. He accepts that the German word (*Achtung*) does not contain any profound emotion, nevertheless he remarks that Kant translates it from the Latin word *reverentia* and separates it from *respect* that bears in it the *fear*.

²⁷⁷ Beck, 1965, pp. 28-9.

²⁷⁸ Kant, 1949, p. 17.

²⁷⁹ Kant, 1991, p. 201.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 202.

Respect for the law is identical to moral feeling.

[T]he moral law, as formal determining ground of action through practical pure reason, and moreover as a material though purely objective determining ground of the objects of action (under the name of good and evil), is also a subjective motive. That is, it is the drive to this action, since it has an influence on the sensuousness of the subject and effects a feeling which promotes the influence of the law on the will. In the subject there is no *antecedent feeling* tending to morality; that is impossible, because all feeling is sensuous, and the drives of the moral disposition must be free from every sensuous condition. Rather, sensuous feeling, which is the basis of all our inclinations, is the condition of the particular feeling we call respect, but the cause that determines this feeling lies in pure practical reason; because of its origin, therefore, this particular feeling cannot be said to be pathologically effected; rather, it is practically effected... Thus respect for the law is not the drive to morality; it is morality itself...²⁸¹

Respect is not for things, but merely relevant to persons. It might be seen as an *intelligible feeling* owing to it being produced by Reason itself, instead of being a feeling originating from our drives. It is like a *weight* causing the suffering in us. Respect for the moral law is the only moral drive. It is not the drive to morality but morality itself. It is 'the sole and undoubted moral drive' and 'a positive but indirect effect of the law on feeling'. It is 'a pure and nonsensuous interest of practical reason alone'²⁸² Respect does not usually bring any *interest* to agent. It is hardly experienced in enjoyable moments. Most of the time, it is felt in a calmness (serenity) that ceases or checks spontaneous activity. In brief, there is no 'interest', no pragmatism, still less no promise of paradise in the future in Kantian ethics.

²⁸¹ Kant, 1993, pp. 78-9.

²⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 82-3

What is *duty*? What is the meaning of the submission to the law for Kant?

The action which is objectively practical according to this law and excludes inclination from its determining grounds is called *duty*; and, because of this exclusion, in the concept of duty there is that of practical constraint, i.e., determination to actions however reluctantly they may be done. The feeling which arises from the consciousness of this constraint is not pathological, as are those caused by objects of the senses, but practical, i.e., possible through prior (objective) determination of the will and causality of reason.²⁸³

It is the necessity of acting out of respect for the law. Kant draws a distinction between consciousness of having acted *according to duty* and *from duty*.²⁸⁴ The former is called legality; the latter is called morality proper. Only the second originates from respect for the law.

What is the relation between duty, obligation and moral law? Is it possible to have a duty and to be free in the face of moral law at the same time?

Duty and obligation are the only names which we must give to our relation to the moral law. We are indeed legislative members of a moral realm which is possible through freedom and which is presented to us as an object of respect by practical reason; yet we are at the same time subjects in it, not sovereigns, and to mistake our inferior position as creatures and to deny, from self-conceit, respect to the holy law is, in spirit, a defection from it even if its letter be fulfilled.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁸⁴ Derrida points out that this separation shows that Kant sees the insufficiency of this *conformity* for being *just*. (Derrida, in Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, (eds.), 1992, p. 17)

²⁸⁵ Kant, 1993, p. 86.

Our subjection to reason means our promotion to the level of subject by overcoming our blind inclinations which originate from senses which rest on physical senses. Paradoxically, we nevertheless *need* them to *overcome* and in order to be a moral subject.

Kant draws a distinction between love and respect, perhaps, in order to rescue his theory from being a religious sermon. Although, he defines love and respect as 'feelings that accompany the carrying out of duties', he explains them by means of a physical analogy called *attraction* and *repulsion*. "The principle of **mutual love** admonishes men constantly to *come closer* to one another; that of the **respect** they owe one another, to keep themselves *at a distance* from one another..."²⁸⁶ It is probable that Kant sees a danger in becoming one, in love that makes it impossible to judge events from the point of universal moral law. He also condemns the ordering of love, 'Love God above all and your neighbour as yourself', in Christianity as meaningless. 'Love is a matter of *feeling*, not of willing' and my loving does not come from my *will*. Therefore, it cannot be the subject of a duty, that would be an absurdity. Coercion cannot be a thought with love.²⁸⁷ His interpretation of the rule of loving the neighbour is different.

[T]he saying 'you ought to *love* your neighbour as yourself' does not mean that you ought immediately (first) to love him and (afterwards) by means of this love do good to him. It means, rather, *do good* to your fellow man, and your beneficence will produce love of man in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general)²⁸⁸

He tries to submit love as a minor concept, to respect by seeing it as a result of good action, not vice versa.

²⁸⁶ Kant, 1991, pp. 243-4.

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 203.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 203.

6.1.3. Beyond Kant

Why is the respect for moral principles not enough to get rid of egoism for Levinas?

The defeat of egoism does not begin with the subordination of a subject's maxims to the universality of the moral principle but rather in its submission to the appeal of the face. It is experienced in the humility proper to any service, in a humility unaware of itself, since any humility that declares it is so is contradictory.²⁸⁹

There is no room for 'self-interest' in Levinas. While moral law produces the feeling of respect, the face of the Other awakens me to the responsibility of the Other. Could the role of moral law then be seen as that of the face of the Other? Kant holds that freedom and moral law imply each other reciprocally in order to show that there is no contradiction between them.²⁹⁰ We also know that Levinas does not see the rule of the Other as a challenge to the freedom of the subject. Nevertheless, this resemblance should not make us forget the difference of the source of freedom for both.

Levinas is concerned with the concept of responsibility instead of respect.²⁹¹ Everything, even love, should be mediated by this concept to be meaningful. In his view, intimate society (I and the beloved) appears as immoral society that does not appreciate the third part, i.e. society. The relation with the third party strikes down this happy unity and *calls into question* our happiness.

²⁸⁹ Chalier, 2002, p. 53.

²⁹⁰ Kant, 1993, 29.

²⁹¹ Atterton indicates that while in Kant what makes our will good is its rationality 'its unconditional determination to act in accordance with the Moral Law', for Levinas responsibility for the other achieves this. (Atterton, in New and Bernasconi, (eds.), 2001, p. 333).

To love is to exist as though the lover and the beloved were alone in the world. The intersubjective relationship of love is not the beginning, but the negation of society. And in that there is, to be sure, an indication of its essence. Love is the ego satisfied by the you, apprehending in the other the justification of its being ... it is hence love of one being to the detriment of another, always privilege even if it is not preference. The morality of respect presupposes the morality of love. Love makes blind the respect which is impossible without blindness toward the third person and is only a pious intention oblivious of the real evil.²⁹²

Even if love appears as a negative concept in comparison with respect, it is, in fact, the basis for an ethical relationship.

The Other, as a beloved, proves unsuitable and always runs away. Therefore, we are required to make our love wiser so that we may defend against this indeterminacy. While in Kant we are all equal, composed as an autonomous subject, for Levinas the Other is *higher* than me and I am *hostage* to the Other from the beginning. However, Levinas' concept of *responsibility* might be thought of as a kind of being fallen into love, as coming from *out* necessarily, unconsciously, pre-rationally or pre-intentionally. "Respect is a relationship between equals. Justice presupposes this original equality. Love by virtue of its essence is established between unequals, and lives from inequality."²⁹³ Nevertheless, love seems as a possibility for touching the 'uniqueness' of the Other. "That which I call responsibility is a love, because love is the only attitude where there is encounter with the unique. What is loved one? He is unique in the world"²⁹⁴

Does the beloved deserve our respect merely because of being loved?
Does moral law give us any measure in our social relationships? Kant could

²⁹² Levinas, 1987b, p.31.

²⁹³ *ibid.*, p.44.

²⁹⁴ Levinas, in Bernasconi and Wood, (eds.), 1988, 174.

explain to us why the moral law would not oblige us to love the law at the same. Love is, in principle, appertained to blind inclinations and this could not be accepted because of heteronomy. It could not belong to pure will that was refined from interest. Kant's law does not need to be loved, but it ought to be respected. The pragmatical evaluations must be excluded in every ethical analyses. Respect for the law must precede it, so that the law is not limited or changed. Even if Kant thinks that love could not be thought in morality, Levinas sees it possible (and necessary) to transform (or promote) the lovely encounter with the Other into an ethical relationship.

6.1.4. What is the Source of Moral Behaviour?

Does the source of moral behavior toward the other lie in a subject's principles, independent of any encounter the subject might have with the sensible and concrete exteriority of individuals, or is it, in fact, produced by that encounter, independent of preexistent principles?²⁹⁵

According to Chalier, the dialogue between these two philosophers begins with that question. Do we have to receive this relation by means of universal principles or human nature, or the singular human, fragile and unique? She underlines that this encounter carries an urgency in Levinas.

The extreme urgency of morality defers speculative labor which, via deduction, would lead back to the universal principles that are supposed to guide action. That urgency does not lend itself to an intellectual receptivity concerned to evaluate behavior in terms of a priori theoretical knowledge in order to be sure of its validity. No original idea of human nature comes to enlighten the subject faced with that urgency.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Chalier, 2002, p. 18.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.18-9.

It is necessary to make a decision immediately in this urgency without waiting to apply the principles.²⁹⁷ There is no time to seek to verify the maxim of my action to satisfy the hunger of the starving in the face of me.

Ethics, in this view, does not begin with the establishment of universal principles but with the consent to let the good take hold of you at that moment, when you are confronted with with an individual who requires it. The urgency of the situation would not allow time to look into yourself and consider whether the action is consistent with one principle or another. Rather, it would reveal a fundamental structure of the human subject, an enigma to which Kant takes exception: the subject's anarchical alliance with the good.²⁹⁸

The voice of the Other that we hear in confrontation is irreducible to any principle. This encounter with the Other reduces the I's privileged position and there is no voluntary yielding to moral law. Kantian agent's thinking about his maxim's harmony with universality of the respect for humanity, his 'comparison' seems a bit 'technical' and severe. But, if 'to be for the other' is to be to the detriment of me most of the time, could this attitude be thought as severe as the Kantian attitude? It is obvious that despite the different source of morality for Kant and Levinas, their insistence on the value of human personality is common. Kant starts with the *human essence* which is common to all, whereas Levinas begins with the primacy of the Other. I become responsible, not naturally, but by giving and *respond* to the Other through experience in Levinas.²⁹⁹ In contrast to Kant, he starts with

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹⁸ Chaliel, 2002, p. 22.

²⁹⁹ Kantian ethics has been criticized harshly especially by Hegel for being too *formal*. Hegel's ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) tries to overcome Kants complete exclusion of natural dispositions. "Hegel feels that the divorce of reason from sense in Kant and Fichte, and insistence on the constraint of the empirical self by the rational self, represents an unhealthy form of self-alienation. The term 'ethical life' is coined to describe a state of the human will in which reason and sense are in harmony. Accordingly, 'ethical life' originally refers to an ethics of character, emphasizing

enjoyment as a positive and necessary moment in his phenomenology in *Totality and Infinity*. It is a condition of our existence.

For Kant, the Other is respected in that he is a rational human being. His approach differs from Levinas' in that it is undertaken within a purely rational, homogeneous medium. Despite his interpretations of dogmas rationalistically, Kant does not take into account any religious or theological source as a base for his ethics. While the religious tone is more apparent in Levinas, he does not use any biblical texts to confirm his philosophical claims.

Respect in contrast to love for Kant and responsibility (especially by means of *the third party*) in Levinas let us evaluate our action in danger of irrationality. While Kant thinks the concept of freedom is indispensable for a moral theory, for Levinas 'a free being is already no longer free, because it is responsible for itself'.³⁰⁰

While practical reason (or rational will) is distinguished in its application (because of that there is only *one* reason) in Kant, morality has not a common point with reason for Levinas. Reason is not always good, and good will (which acts for the sake of duty) is not enough. Nonetheless, Levinas stresses the importance of there being a *hope* (occurring in time and going beyond time) in Kant, that motivates us to think of a harmony between virtue and happiness. This is not a demonstration that guarantess the 'prolongation of life'.³⁰¹

rational dispositions and practical judgment in concrete situations, in contrast to a morality of norms, where the emphasis is on deriving particular actions from general rules."(Wood, in Beiser, (ed.), 1993, p. 225). Ahistorical account of ethical experience leads to a formalism.

³⁰⁰ Levinas, 1987a, p. 55. [Levinas, 2001b, p.36].

³⁰¹ Levinas, 2000, p. 61. [Levinas, 1993, p.71].

6.2. Derrida's Other

What would Derrida like to make us believe? Would he make us believe anything? To be sure, there is nothing that he makes us believe literally.³⁰² Derrida's writings shake our prejudgments concerning philosophy, without putting anything instead, through use of a double strategy. He deals with the text by taking into account its singularity, its otherness without forgetting the universality. No 'essence' could be itself alone. Every concept of source is metaphysical and *contaminated* from the beginning.

It is clear that Derrida is on the Levinasian side in that he posits that the singular cannot be consumed in an imperialist totality. This attention to difference, being alerted to the danger of totalitarianism and dialectics in opposition to Hegel, brings him closer to Levinas.

Derrida is an ironic philosopher who speaks 'in order to say nothing' in contrast to Levinas. All concepts, bases, arguments, i.e., every standpoint defensible are contaminated from the very beginning. He is in the pursuit of a strategy that makes us aware of *aporias*. On the other hand, Levinas might be seen as a classical philosopher defending a situation (pre-phenomenological) that makes our ethical life possible. He tries to describe a mood (even if it is an an-archic one!) in which our ethical experiences are lived.

Deconstruction is not a method, or a strategy invented by Derrida. Rather, it is an attitude that forces us to be aware of *aporias* preventing us from coming to the conclusion programatically in the face of texts, constructions,

³⁰² "I have never 'proposed' anything, and that is perhaps the essential poverty of my work. I never offered anything in terms of 'this is what you have to know' or 'this is what you have to do'. So deconstruction is a poor thing from that point of view"(Derrida, in Kearney and Dooley, (eds.), 1999, p.74)

every kind of identity. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that meaning is not *pluralised* but *disseminated* in this attitude.

Derrida, in *The Force of Law*, reminds us that the English phrase to *enforce the law* makes clear a tacit, embedded force in this concept in comparison with the French *appliquer la loi*.³⁰³ He shows us that there is a strange relationship between law and justice, and that the second exceeds the first.

[I]t is this deconstructible structure of law (*droit*), or if you prefer of justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice. It is perhaps because law (*droit*) (which I will consistently try to distinguish from justice) is constructible, in a sense that goes beyond the opposition between convention and nature. It is perhaps insofar as it goes beyond this opposition that it is constructible and so deconstructible and, what's more, than it makes deconstruction possible, or at least the practice of a deconstruction that, fundamentally, always proceeds to questions of *droit* and to the subject of *droit*.³⁰⁴

This reminds us of the conjuring of the specters of Marx.³⁰⁵ We know that the spirit will never come, and we can only speak with specters that might be material in a sense. While specters might be thought of as law, the spirit might be seen as justice.

Law (*droit*) is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in

³⁰³ Derrida, in Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, (eds.), 1992, p. 5.

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 14-5.

³⁰⁵ Derrida, 1994.

which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule.³⁰⁶

If we do not experience this aporetic process (undecidability), we would simply apply a program determined. If we knew what the decision was, then it would not be a decision. Decision has to go through a process of undecidability in order to be a real decision. Otherwise it would be a 'rational exercise'. But there is no time for justice. We have to give a decision immediately. This reminds us of the urgency of action in the face of demand of the Other in Levinas.

Justice is concerned with singular, unique situations, whereas the law, norm, rule is universal. In fact, this eternal tension between these two concepts pervades in all history of philosophy. Derrida's solution abstains from falling on one of the sides in order to keep the infinite demand of justice.³⁰⁷

One must be *just* with justice, and the first way to do it justice is to hear, read, interpret it, to try to understand where it comes from, what it wants of us ... this justice always addresses itself to singularity, to the singularity of the other, despite or even because it pretends to universality.³⁰⁸

Every case is unique and deconstruction invites us to take on a responsibility increasing.

Derrida defines three steps in this experience of the impossible (épokhè of the rule, the ghost of the undecidable, and the agency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge). I must be free and responsible for my actions, my

³⁰⁶ Derrida, in Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, (eds.), 1992, p. 16.

³⁰⁷ It must be noted that this infinity differs from the Kantian. There is not a transcendental idea that makes possible historical process towards the just state.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 20.

behaviour, my thought, my decision. No exercise of justice as law can be, unless there is a 'fresh judgement'. Each case requires an absolute, unique interpretation. We need an infinite 'idea of justice' irreducible, owed to the Other, before any contract. It is a demand or gift without exchange, without circulation, without economy and rationality.³⁰⁹ This concept of experience reminds us of the Levinasian aporetic in the presence of the third party. For Levinas the third is there from the beginning, too. The third irritates our ethical relationship with the Other. The necessity of comparing the incomparable appears in the relationship as a necessity. Therefore, is there a common point between these two philosophers in terms of their attitude to aporias? No doubt, *face to face* is an ethical, radical experience that happens to us in social life in Levinas. In our view, acceptance of the 'looking of the third in the eyes of the Other' by Levinas is an effort to overcome the possible destructive effects of this gratuitous giving to the Other. However, if this look was there from the beginning, we would have to leave our pre-ontological domain and this would make all Levinas' explanations meaningless. Therefore, the acceptance of the presence of the third from the beginning would be done only by Derrida. This is the rejection of every pure, uncontaminated source. The real aporia appears merely here. The source of ethics is not ethical. Ethics is essentially pervertible.³¹⁰

6.2.1. Against the Rule of Presence

Derrida separates two kinds of future from each other. "It *may* have an *avenir*, a 'to-come,' which I rigorously distinguish from the future that can always reproduce the present. Justice remains, is yet, to come, *à venir*, it

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 22-25.

³¹⁰ Bennington shows the impossibility of a 'deconstructive ethics' and draws to our attention that Derrida's seeing difference as non-absolute does not allow him to accept the primacy of ethics as first philosophy (Bennington, 2000, pp. 34-46).

has an, it is *à-venir*, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come.”³¹¹ He also imagines a ‘here and now without presence’. “This moment of suspense, this *époque*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. However it is also the whole history of law. *This moment always takes place and never takes place in a presence.*”³¹²

Derrida sees the history of philosophy as the dominance of *presence*. The present that makes possible all time by means of its homogeneous source. We know that the past was just as the now, or the future will be just as we live now. Eternity is the formulation of this kind of constitution of time. Whereas ‘time is out of joint’ forever! This paradoxical determination is necessary to make history possible. Present could not be thought as an identity that makes possible the difference (past and future as secondary). A new *here and now* must be inserted in time without presence. Derrida tries to carry out this ‘project’ by means of using the concept of *différance*.

It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called to future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be

³¹¹ Derrida in Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, (eds.), 1992, p.27.

³¹² *ibid.*, p. 36.

called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*).³¹³

The present is in need of the absolutely other to be itself. Then the privilege of presence is the privilege of subject because "...consciousness offers itself to thought only as self-presence, as the perception of self in presence."³¹⁴ Therefore, Derrida notes Freud's concept of *unconsciousness* as an alterity that makes us concerned with a past that has never been present or future, and that never will be present, and Nietzsche's seeing it as the effect of forces never present.³¹⁵ All that we have is the trace of the trace; a sign that does not lead us to the present. Traces erase themselves. The present, like consciousness has blind spots that are not able to be illuminated in principle.

Derrida's future reminds us that Levinas' past has never been present. However, Levinas is generally concerned with the past, as in the example of forgiveness in which my past is determined by the Other in contrast to Derrida's concern with the future. Bernet points out an ethical transformation of the present in Levinas.

[T]he other who interrupts the continuity of my present life also radically transforms the meaning of my *past and future* existence. For instance, the forgiveness that is granted me by the other (and which only the other can grant) modifies my past to the point of transforming it into a past that has never been present as such for me. The same is true of hope which, even when it is still related to my life, can only come to me from the other and not from my anticipation *of* my future life on the basis of my previous life. Riveted to myself, I am neither permitted to re-commence, nor to feel forgiven, nor to hope; nor, for

³¹³ Derrida, 1982, p. 13.

³¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 16.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

that matter, am I permitted to make a promise or to engender a new life.³¹⁶

The source of these *blind points* for Derrida would be seen as the trace of the Other.

In his famous essay on Levinas, Derrida comments that Levinas 'summons us to depart from the Greek site and perhaps from every site in general...to the other of the Greek...'

This thought calls upon the ethical relationship- a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other- as the only one capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics. And does so without supporting ethics and metaphysics by anything other than themselves, and without making them flow into other streams at their source.³¹⁷

'To separate' metaphysics, to make ethics something based on itself in pursuit of finding the pure source in which there is no violence, is the 'project'. Levinas' writings are an appeal to experience itself, an experience of 'the passage and departure toward the other'.³¹⁸ In this passage empiricism helps him to shock intellectualism. Derrida defines empiricism as follows:

It is the *dream* of a purely *heterological* thought at its source. A *pure* thought of *pure* difference. Empiricism is its philosophical name, its metaphysical pretension or modesty. We say the *dream* because it must vanish *at daybreak*, as soon as language awakens.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Bernet, in Critchley and Bernasconi, (eds.), 1991, p. 95.

³¹⁷ Derrida, 1978, p.102.

³¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 103.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 189.

Derrida maintains that Levinas renews empiricism by putting forward a radical experience, *the experience par excellence* irreducible.³²⁰ However, do the empiricists not always forget that they used the verb 'to be'?

But empiricism always has been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl, as *nonphilosophy*: as the philosophical pretention to non-philosophy, the inability to justify oneself, to come to one's own aid as speech. But this incapacitation, when resolutely assumed, contests the resolution and coherence of the logos (philosophy) at its root, instead of letting itself be questioned by the logos. Therefore, nothing can so profoundly *solicit* the Greek logos- philosophy- than this irruption of the totally-other; and nothing can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its origin as to its mortality can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its origin as to its mortality, its other.³²¹

Levinas does not try to derive new concepts from empirical experiences. He accepts life 'as it is lived more than understood'. To be towards death, to have a child, to be alone in the dark could not be seen as merely empirical experiences.

6.2.2. Is It Possible to Speak Against Hegel?

Might *destroying itself after serving to indicate something beyond itself* be a method? Derrida points out the impossibility to speak against Hegel in language.³²² However, the alternative of this language cannot be silence that is the worst violence.

The Greek father who still holds us under his sway must be killed; and this is what a Greek – Plato- could never

³²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 190.

³²¹ *ibid.*, p. 190.

³²² *ibid.*, p. 149.

resolve to do, deferring the act into a hallucinatory murder. A hallucination within the hallucination that is already speech. But will a non-Greek ever succeed in doing what a Greek in this case could not do, except by disguising himself as a Greek, by *speaking* Greek, by feigning to speak Greek in order to get near the king? And since it is a question of killing a speech, will we ever know who is the last victim of this stratagem? Can one feign speaking a language?³²³

Although Levinas is aware that all meaning, all intelligibility, all spirit could be translated into Greek, he believes that it might be given a description of a spirituality resistant to knowledge.³²⁴ This resistance is against the violence of the light in knowing. The power, domination, grasping accompany with this light. Nevertheless, Derrida contends that “If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse.”³²⁵ That is to say, we have to do philosophy in the face of the risk of befalling the worst violence.

Derrida shows that Levinas fails to understand the ontological difference. The status of Being in Heidegger is not too different from that of the Other in Levinas. *To affirm the priority of Being over existent* is the accusation of Levinas against Heidegger. But is it really so in Heidegger?

There can be an order of priority only between two determined things, two existents. Being, since it is *nothing* outside the existent, a theme which Levinas had commented upon so well previously, could in no way *precede* the existent, whether in time, or in dignity, etc ... Being is but the *Being-of* this existent, and does not exist outside it as a foreign power, or as a hostile or neutral impersonal element. The neutrality so often denounced by Levinas can only be the characteristic of an undetermined

³²³ *ibid.*, p. 110.

³²⁴ Levinas, 1999, p. 178.

³²⁵ Derrida, 1978, p. 146.

existent, of an anonymous ontic power, of a conceptual generality, or of a principle. Now, Being is not a principle, is not a principal existent, an *archia* which would permit Levinas to insert the face of a faceless tyrant under the name of Being.³²⁶

It is clear that *Being* is neither a category, nor a totality but that which gives (*es gibt*) the universe its being in Heidegger.

If to understand Being is to be able to let be (that is, to respect Being in essence and existence, and to be responsible for one's respect), then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not. If Being is always to be let be, and if to think is *to let* Being be, then Being is indeed the other of thought. But since it is what it is only by the letting-be of thought, and since the latter is thought only by virtue of the presence of the Being which it lets be, then thought and Being, thought and the other, are the same; which, let us recall, does not mean identical, or one, or equal.³²⁷

The Other must be let be firstly, otherwise he would not be able to give me commands.³²⁸ This pre-understanding of the Other and Being makes ethics possible.

Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? But who, we? Are we (not a chronologically, but a pre-logical question) first Jews or first Greeks? And does the strange dialogue between the

³²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 170.

³²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 176.

³²⁸ Phenomenology is exempt from the charge of not showing respect to the Other for Derrida. Intentionality is hospitality. "An act without activity, reason as receptivity, a sensible *and* rational experience of *receiving*, a gesture of welcoming, a welcome offered to the other as stranger, hospitality opens as intentionality, but it cannot become an object, thing, or theme. Thematization, on the contrary, already presupposes hospitality, welcoming, intentionality, the face. The closing of the door, inhospitality, war, and allergy already imply, as their possibility, a hospitality offered or received: an original or, more precisely, pre-original declaration of peace."(Derrida, 1999, p.48).

Jew and the Greek, peace itself, have the form of the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel, the living logic which *reconciles* formal tautology and empirical heterology after having *thought* prophetic discourse in the preface to the *Phenomenology of the Mind*? Or, on the contrary, does this peace have the form of infinite separation and of the unthinkable, unsayable transcendence of the other? To what horizon of peace does the language which asks this question belong? From whence does it draw the energy of its question? Can it account for the historical *coupling* of Judaism and Hellenism? And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the *copula* in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: 'Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet'? ³²⁹

Violence and Metaphysics ends with these questions. The sameness of the Greek has been already *contaminated* by the otherness of the Jewish wisdom. It is obvious that Levinas' critique, of seeing the deconstructive analysis not as having *the better* of proximity, is not concerned with Derrida's attitude.³³⁰ What we have to do is to return to the *split* in the origin of the logos.

³²⁹ Derrida, 1978, p. 192.

³³⁰ Levinas, in Critchley and Bernasconi, 1991, p. 7.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

We have so far discussed various aspects of Levinas' thought which, left as it is, would be loosely fabricated. Therefore, We would like to summarise certain leading themes and propose a clearer account of 'ethical transcendence'.

First, let me remind you of the initial concerns which the present study has focused upon. Initially, We have tried to make a brief review of the literature on the relationship between 'philosophy' and 'religion' and on the attempts that have been made throughout history to coherently link these two with each other. Here, Levinas' well-known idea of '... all philosophy begins with ontology' appeared as the most relevant theme. Almost a dictum-like proposal of Levinas, i.e., 'ethics as first philosophy' is important here, because We endeavoured to understand, from this idea whether ethics requires a reconciliation between 'religion' and 'philosophy', without taking sides and keeping its place at the edge. Based on this conviction, We have argued that this was exactly what Levinas' project sought in according ethics so important a status. Ethics, in this sense, means a possibility. By means of ethics, the necessity of questioning the 'same' becomes possible which is otherwise impossible. Yet this possibility comes from the Other.

We have then attempted to find out what 'intentionality' means, particularly in Levinas. This attempt is a kind of 'tracing back' of the basic concepts, issues or questions that were addressed by Levinas who, in many respects, followed Husserl yet located himself in much distance. Unlike Husserl, consciousness for Levinas cannot succeed in what it attempts to do on its own.

At the end of second chapter, We extended the discussion to Rosenzweig, who is perhaps the most influential figure on Levinas due to his criticism of Hegel. He is an important figure for Levinas in the sense that a very influential defense of singularity, in contrast to the idea of totality, has been endorsed by him.

In our view, we could follow Levinas' seeking for transcendentalism from the very beginning. In his early period, he thinks of an 'escape' (a wish for getting rid of yourself) or a movement towards beyond being, outside of immanence despite the influence of Heidegger. 'Fear of being' accompanies the 'being in the world'. One of the key notions he used was 'there is' (*il y a*), which means the neutral presence of the absence of every determinate being. This is rather a universal absence, not a pure nothingness. Being torn away from this mood results in the appearance of a consciousness, that he called 'hypostasis'. Levinas tends to see dissolution of the privileged status of subject as a case for insomnia. During this transitional phase the subject is no longer a consciousness. As Levinas himself states, the night watches itself.³³¹ In opposition to Heidegger's emphasis of the importance of the 'readiness-to-hand' Levinas suggests a 'needy subject' that feels hunger, becomes thirsty, or simply likes to enjoy life.

³³¹ Levinas, 1995a, p. 66. [Levinas, 1998a, p. 109].

We then deal with the key concepts of *Totality and Infinity*, one of the most central works of Levinas. The past of the subject aiming to the radical alterity, and the genesis of the subject is firstly described in *Totality and Infinity*. The transformation of this 'raw' subject into an ethical subject is important in that seeing the debt of this new philosophy to phenomenology. The We seeking to escape from itself has been awakened to responsibility in this process. The self withdraws from being in responsibility. Responsibility is the first language preceding thought. Election is not a privilege, but an ethical burden. I become unique as elected interchangeable, irreplaceable by means of being responsible. Not reciprocity, but pure gratitude in passage from the unique to the unique is experienced in an ethical relationship in which I hear the sentence 'you shall not kill' (that means you shall defend the life of the Other.) In transcendence of the Other, I am rescued from remaining attached to myself.

Responsibility is transcendence from the one to the other, the newness of a rapport going from the unique to the unique. Responsibility in effect is inalienable; the responsible self is no longer the self closest to itself, but the first one called. Unique as elected. No one could replace this self nor absolve it from its responsibility. Transcendence from the unique to the unique, before all community: love of the stranger, hence holier, higher than fraternity. This is the original place of the identical.³³²

When the 'I think' accompanies the entire moods of the thinking, Levinas argues, presence is inevitably privileged and the philosophy turns to be a philosophy of immanence.³³³ Then, only a dissatisfied desire for the Good would save us from remaining in immanence. If one takes the commonness between man and the exteriority, then this is not a real disclosure to what is

³³² Levinas, in Robbins, (ed.), 2001, p. 108.

³³³ Levinas, 1988, pp. 60-1. [Levinas, 1998b, p. 101].

external. I both get into a relationship and yet let the Other remain absolutely the Other, and this transcendence makes ethics possible. The will to know is replaced with the desire for the Other. What then lies in this relationship? Levinas tends to benefit formally, from Descartes' argument that reads as being greater than the ideatum (what the idea of infinite in me aims at) than one thinks, it shows this idea's coming from out of me.³³⁴ Infinity, for Levinas, is not infinity in the sense of one and always the same, done, infinity, rather an open-ended becoming, an *infinition*.³³⁵ This idea refrains us from getting lost in totality, and helps us to keep the distance between me and the Other. Infinity, which emerges at the encounter with the Other, is a leaving of the happy-self for concern for the Other, forever.

If the truth is a disappearance of the subject before what is to be known, then this notion means domination of representation. We would remain within the realm of totality if we were to think 'to know' as re-presentation of the present.³³⁶ For Levinas, quite the opposite, seeking truth is not intended to lead to the re-presentation of the object, yet it desires the Other. This is because the Other is not a sign-sender in the sense of being signified, but rather an interlocutor. Our relation to him is not gaze-oriented, but emerges in speaking. Every sign is inevitably accompanied by speaking. (The face speaks.)³³⁷ We become exposed to the truth by virtue of this speaking.

The Levinasian relationship of I and the Other could neither be identified with Buber's *I and Thou*, nor with Hegel's struggle of recognition between master and slave. There is no symmetry but an asymmetry between sides. This is firstly *the welcoming of the Other* (in his later works it becomes rather *a hostageship to the Other*). Before this relationship, he starts his phenomenological research from a basic mood of being that precedes the

³³⁴ Levinas, 1985, p. 91. [Levinas, 1982b, pp. 85-6].

³³⁵ Levinas, 1991, p. 26. [Levinas, 1971, p. 12].

³³⁶ Levinas, 1996, p. 99.

³³⁷ Levinas, 1991, p. 99. [Levinas, 1971, p. 101].

separation of subject-object, i.e. enjoyment. This I sees all reality surrounding it as an object of nutrition. There is no good or bad yet, only a digestion (making the other same). I enjoy the world before using tools and I am not sad for my needs. I enjoy life in my dependence on the world. However, I cannot stay in this state despite my happiness. This tranquility ends with the appearance of the Other. I cannot be silent to the demand of the Other.

Enjoyment is the ultimate relation with the world for Levinas. This relationship, which is in the basic existential form of the subject, realizes itself by means of transmutation of the other into the same as well as by consuming it and also by being nourished by it.³³⁸ This egoism is the happiness of the I. Yet, it cannot maintain this as way of life.

Home, as a condition of human activity, has a privilege. This privilege helps us understand what egoism is. This is because the subject considers itself in the world as if it is at home when it thinks of the object.³³⁹ Home is something which is related to possession, a possession that suspends the independence of beings. Unless it welcomes the Other to inside the home, the labor keeps grasping matter without appealing to the infinity.

The relation with the Other as a relation with his transcendence-the relation with the Other who puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one's immanent destiny-introduces into me what was not in me. But this 'action' upon my freedom precisely puts an end to violence and contingency, and, in this sense also, founds Reason.³⁴⁰

The Other or infinity appears in the event of the *face to face*. Ego's radical experience in the face of the Other is the rupture of intentionality that

³³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 111. [*ibid.*, p. 113].

³³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 153. [*ibid.*, pp. 163-4.]

³⁴⁰ Levinas, 1991, pp. 203-4. [Levinas, 1971, p. 223].

guarantees the adventure of the self. In this experience infinity reveals itself (there is an *infinition* of infinite) and the face is *seen* like a trace. Whereas this trace is not merely a sign, it is the trace of itself, namely trace of trace. The Other is *experienced* as an *invitation* and withdraws from being unveiled in this relationship.

A face as a trace, trace of itself, trace expelled in a trace, does not signify an indeterminate phenomenon; its ambiguity is not an indetermination of a noema, but an invitation to the fine risk of approach qua approach, to the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of exposure, saying.³⁴¹

Face is neither aesthetical nor an epistemological object, but the source of the ethical distress. The consciousness is torn from its centre and cannot be closed upon itself anymore in the face of it. It can neither replace nor absolve itself from its responsibility to the Other.

Levinas suggests in *Totality and Infinity's* fourth section 'Beyond the Face' that having a child is an example of the relationship of I both with the one that is himself and also other than himself. This is a relationship of the kind that never becomes a unity.

In fecundity the I transcends the world of light—not to dissolve into the anonymity of the *there is*, but in order to go further than the light, to go *elsewhere*. To stand in the light, to see—to grasp before grasping—is not yet 'to be infinitely'; it is return to oneself older, that is, encumbered with oneself.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Levinas, 1998b, p. 94. [Levinas, 1978, p. 150].

³⁴² Levinas, 1991, p. 268. [Levinas, 1971, p. 301].

There is also a talk of 'voluptuosity' at the same place, a relationship in which I cannot go back to myself, rather discover myself as the self of the Other.

It can be argued that Levinas wants to open a place for enigma, in the sense that it is possible where reason and being are no longer identified together in the present. Nevertheless, the Platonic good enables us to conceive a new kind of relation with meaning.³⁴³ The anachronism between the same and the Other is the source of enigma. The trace which effaces its trace in its exposition is like a *passage*. Instead of trying to know, I approach *you* by forgetting myself. Nothing is completely illuminated in this experience, but enigma's word is heard, and I become good.³⁴⁴

All what we have been reminded of so far is, in a sense, articulated at the end of a certain kind of Levinasian attempt, that is writing 'about' something. In the fifth chapter and in what follows, we rather tried to discuss a relatively newer Levinasian attempt, that is Levinas hereafter writes no longer about something, rather writing itself turns into an ethical experience.

Levinas radicalizes his understanding of subjectivity's being for Other in *Otherwise than Being* in comparison with *Totality and Infinity*. The ego is 'in itself like one is in one's skin, that is, already tight, ill at ease in one's skin.'³⁴⁵ This trouble might even lead to sacrifice. 'Being torn from oneself for another, in giving to the other the bread from one's mouth, is being able to give up one's soul for another'³⁴⁶ This is a new kind of subjectivity that could not be reduced to self-consciousness. If all Western philosophy could be reduced to self-consciousness, consciousness should be challenged by

³⁴³ Levinas, 1996, pp. 67-8.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁴⁵ Levinas, 1998b, p. 108. [Levinas, 1978, p. 170].

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 79. [*ibid.*, p. 126].

the face. It loses its dominant coincidence with self. It cannot come to itself and be identified in itself. Ego substitutes itself for all the Others, it becomes 'hostage in its very recurrence of an ego endlessly failing to itself.'³⁴⁷ It cannot be self. Then, not the Ego (*le Moi*) but me (*moi*) is subjectivity. According to Lingis, the translator of Levinas, Heidegger also formulizes 'the first contraction of being with others as a substitution' but even if there is a moral tone in it, substitution is conceived by Heidegger 'as an unburdening of oneself, a fleeing of one's own post and one's own being in order to distract oneself with the tasks and fields of operation where the others are stationed'.³⁴⁸

In my answer (*Here I am*) to the Other, in my greeting the Other (my saying Hello!), *said* is accompanied by *saying*. Saying *is* there and withdraws itself from there at the same time. It *is* there with its absence and speaks in every said like Heidegger's Being (*Sein*) does in beings (*Seindes*). Nonetheless, saying can be understood by the self who is 'suffering in the offering of oneself'.³⁴⁹ It is the condition for all meaningful giving out of signs.

The final chapter was an attempt to uncover some partial influences of Levinasian thought particularly on Derrida and also to show Levinas' debt to Kant. Could Levinas' ethics be considered under Kantian ethics without any reservations? Even if they agree with each other in terms of the priority of Good, their 'source' of ethics are completely different.

For Kant, the principle of morality has no ontological import, but it nevertheless reassures the subject about what it has to do, even before it acts. That principle avoids the surprising and disturbing aspect of the encounter with exteriority. Yet, according to Levinas, it is precisely when that surprising aspect affects the subject, in spite of itself and in spite of its

³⁴⁷ Levinas, 2003, p. 67. [Levinas, 1972, p. 124].

³⁴⁸ Lingis, in Levinas, 1991, p. xxiii.

³⁴⁹ Levinas, 1998b, p. 54. [Levinas, 1978, pp. 91-2].

principles, that the subject catches a glimpse of the sense of morality. The encounter with the face stems precisely from that anarchy.³⁵⁰

Due to this anarchy, the Other could not be my alter-ego for Levinas. While the subject, as it were, knows the Other before encountering it in Kant, for Levinas this meeting (face to face) is the rupture of intentionality and rationality.

How does this kind of philosophy having no strict argumentation effect us? We argued that Derrida is the most important philosopher that Levinas seems to inspire. Notwithstanding the fact that Derrida's philosophy could not accept a *pure* or poetical encounter with the Other as in Levinas, Derrida sees, perhaps, a possibility to write about the absolutely Other that could not be reduced to my other self, for his writing about the justice could not be reduced to the law. However, he especially imports Levinas' concept of trace and sees the play of the trace, as *différance*, not belonging to the horizon of Being.³⁵¹ His talking about justice ('deconstruction is justice'), without abandoning the law that could be transformed and rectified continuously, seems to nourish from Levinasian talking about the Other (and Others) in ethical experience. Whereas, their perspectives to *apoiras* could not be identified. Derrida could not let the Other's coming before me. Every ethical discourse has been *contaminated* from the very beginning.

All this is, no doubt, far away from being fair to Levinas' philosophy and his insight to ethics. Perhaps such a detailed representation would require a far large space not only for this study, but for others too. Yet, we cannot and should not conclude this piece of work without a word on the Levinasian understanding of justice.

³⁵⁰ Chalier, 2002, p. 26.

³⁵¹ Derrida, 1982, p. 22.

There is passage from the unique (I) to the unique (the Other) here. What about the Other's of the Other? We are never, I and the Other. We are not alone. Levinas regards justice as a passage from saying to the said. We need to open ourselves to the multiplicity of the faces, the others by going through the proximity of the neighbor, the diachrony, the transcendence of the infinite. There is always a third party (*le tiers*) and without justice charity takes the risk of being wrong. My relation with the Other is effected and transformed by this entrance.

If proximity ordered to me only the other alone, there would have not been any problem, in even the most general sense of the term. A question would not have been born, nor consciousness, nor self-consciousness. The responsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to questions, it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters. The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow. What then are the other and the third party for one another? What have they done to one another? Which passes before the other? The other stands in a relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer, before any question, for my neighbor.³⁵²

By comparing the incomparables, the 'immediacy of the saying' disappears in consciousness. This is the end of the intimacy of the face to face. Levinas does not want to describe this passage in a temporal process by saying that 'the third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other'³⁵³

As we have tried to show, this ethical philosophy aims to transform any epistemological or ontological problems into ethical ones. The place of human (the *Da* of *Dasein*) is put into question by the Others call from the very beginning. Ontology is 'derived' from this questioning. This new ethics

³⁵² Levinas, 1998b, p. 157. [Levinas, 1978, p. 245].

³⁵³ Levinas, 1991, p. 213. [Levinas, 1971, p. 234].

without rules (such as categorical imperatives) appears in encountering with wholly, absolutely Other in social life. We open ourselves to the Other not in knowing him, but in desiring, in speaking with him. Transcendence of the Other invites us a radical experience, in which we become responsible of him. In unfolding and withdrawing truth manifests itself only in this ethical experience. An ethical transcendental philosophy is required if every philosophy was aiming to the truth.

Lastly, we should note that 'the Other' is central in Levinas' thought not only within the context of ethics, but also in politics and law. Levinas, we have tried to show so far, suggests to us other possibilities than a simple concern for others. The Other, perhaps, deserves the closest and the most intimate care in our age. However, Levinas should be read as a source of inspiration, rather than a prescription. This inspiration, which helps us see the elusive touch of the notion of the absolutely Other, promises a very special place in mainstream ethics.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bir 'ilk felsefe' varsa bunun etik olması mümkün müdür? Eğer olanaklıysa hangi kavramlar ya da ifadeler bu felsefeyi yapmaya fırsat verecektir? Bu tezde bu basit Kantçı '...nasıl olanaklıdır?' sorusuna yanıt vermeye çalışılmıştır. Geleneksel Batı metafiziğinin böylesi bir arayışa yer vermediğini düşünen Levinas aslında Yunan diliyle konuşan bir felsefenin temellerini sorguladığını düşünür. Bu felsefe ya da bilgelik sevgisi, esas olarak hep varlığı, olmayı temele koymuş, aynılığı esas almış, başkayı, başkalığı kendisi gibi kılmayı, kendi dilinden konuşurmayı bilerek kendi güvenli dünyasında, ontolojinin ya da şiddetin dilini tartışılmaz kılmıştır. En temel doğru önce varlıktan başlamak değil midir? Olmayan şeylere ilişkin bir konuşma bizi anlamsızlığa sürüklemeyebilir mi? Bu tartışılmaz görünen kabüllerde ona göre tam da ihtiyacımız olan Başkası'nın sesi, ele avuca sığmazlığı, onun yüzünün 'çıplaklığı' elden kaçır. Sıfatlar, genellemeler arasında Başkası ontolojiden türemiş olarak artık olmasa da olabilecek bir konuma mahkum olur.

Aşkınsal etik bir felsefe, kullanmasa da kendi felsefesini tanımlamak için Levinas'ın reddetmediği bir tanımlamadır. Etik bir felsefedir bu çünkü hakikat arayışına oradan başlanmakta etik, ontolojiden türemiş bir

rastlantısallığa mahkum edilmemekte; aşkınsal bir felsefedir çünkü asla tam olarak tüketilemeyen, tam olarak deneyimlenemeyen fakat aynı zamanda deneyimin (etik) olanağını sağlayan bir başkalığa ilişkindir. Heidegger'in kendisini bize asla tam olarak vermeyen, açmayan Olma'sı (*Sein*) gibi ama bambaşka bir düzeyde, Kant'ın etiğe verdiği konumun değeri bilinip onun daha ötesine gidilecektir.

Levinas'a göre asıl başlangıç ontoloji ya da öncelikle ben'in bilgisini esas alan bir bilinç olamaz. Ontoloji tam da Başkası'nın benden yardım dileyen, beni eyleme sevkeden çağrısına yanıt verişimde anlam kazanır. Onun önceliği bir anlama önceliğine feda edilemez. Başkası'yla karşılaşmanın öncesinde Levinas'ın bütünlük karşıtı duruşunu ve yönelimsellik kavramını kullanışını anlamak gerekir. Felsefeyi ölümü düşünmekten kaçış olarak gören ve onun bireyi içinde nefes alınamaz bir karabasana mahkum eden bütünlük arayışına karşı Rosenzweig'in ondan çıkış arayan bir geleneği önemseyişi (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard) ve teolojiyle felsefe arasında bir yerde ilerleme çabası, Yunan dilini esas alan geleneği rahatsız eden yolu açar belki de Levinas için. Özellikle Hegel eleştirisi önemlidir. Çünkü Hegel'in tüm olan biteni bir tek ilkeye indirgeme çabası, ayrımı aşağı görüp birliği öne çıkarması ve anlamın kaynağını mantıkta görmesi, insanın ölüm karşısındaki endişe dolu çığlığını küçümseyen, adeta onu 'güzel bir bütünlük' vaadiyle kandırmaya çalışan bir büyük girişimdir. Oysa ölümlü bir tekillik bu ayrımı bir başarısızlık olarak görmez. Levinas bu tekillik savunusunu hiçbir zaman elden bırakmaz ve bütün yazılarında büyük bir tutarlılıkla korur. Birliğin aksine ayırım pozitifdir ve sahiplenilmelidir.

Levinas'ın *çeper ifadeler*e gereksinim duyması giriştiği projenin olanaksızlığını bilmesindedir. Tüm bilgi, anlam, tinsellik Yunan diline çevrilebilir ama bilgiye indirgenemez demek, bilgi formlarına direnç veren (çoğu zaman şiirsel) bu ifadeler, kabul gören felsefi söylemi rahatsız eden bir sınırdaki ilerlerler. Bu ilerleme bilgide bir artışı getirmeyen, ama edimde iyiye

dođru bir gidişle 'anlaşılabilir'. Açıktır ki Levinas bilgi yerine arzunun peşindedir. Ama bu arzu nesnesini sabitleyememektedir; giderilemez, yoksunlukla tanımlanmaz, olumludur; adeta yokluktan beslenir. 'Başkası için olma'da kendisini gösteren bu arzu etik bir arzudur ve bilgi formlarının alternatifi değildir, ama ondan daha esastır.

Bu tutum Levinas'ın bütün yazılarında deđişen vurgularla da olsa korunur. İlk dönem yazılarında *var (il y a)*, *hipostaz*, *uykusuzluk* gibi günlük yaşamsal deneyimler üzerinden var olmanın karabasanın betimlemeye çalışmaktadır. Bedenime çakılı oluşum, ilksel bir köleliği anlatır ve özgürlükten önce bunu deneyimleriz. Varolanın varoluşunu üstlenmesi olan hipostaz ise bedenden bir öznenin ortaya çıkmasıdır. Anonim bir var oluş olan var'dan ayrılarak özne oluruz. Bu öznenin Heidegger'inkinden daha gerçek bir özne olduğunu düşünür Levinas çünkü o acıkmakta ve karşısına çıkan şeyleri sindirerek ilerlemektedir; yaşamak için deđil acıktığı için yiyen bir öznedir. Önceliđi 'el altındaki' şeyleri kullanmak deđil açlığını gidermek olan özne.

'Bütünlük ve Sonsuz'da bu süreç haz kavramıyla ayrıntılandırılır; haz ile dünyadan ayrı olduğumuzu, dışarısının sadece bir araç kullanımının nesnesine indirgenemeyeceğini deneyimleriz. Başkasılığın aynıya dönüştürülmesini bu ilişkide açıkca görürüz. Ekmeđi yerken onu temsil etmeyip ondaki başkalığı kendi doğama ait kılarım; her karşılaşma bu anlamda bir 'sindirme' olarak görülebilir. Bu Başkası'yla karşılaşmaya dek böyle sürer. Ancak bir insan olarak Başkası'nın yüzü bu ihtiyaç giderme eylemini kesintiye uğratar. Onun yüzüyle karşılaştığımda kullandığım kavramlar yetersiz kalır, isteđimin (giderilemeyen bir istek olarak) arzu olduğu ortaya çıkar. Onu temsil edemem; ona benim gibi bir ben diyemem; onu bir biz içinde düşünemem. Bu karşılaşmada olan nedir? Sonsuzun açığa çıkmasında çok bir sonsuzlamanın gerçekleşmesidir bu. Özne Başkası'na gitmiş ama ondan kendisine geri dönememiştir. Bu kesinti, bu şüpheye düşürülmem etiđin ta kendisidir. Bu çıkarsız, bir karşılıklılık

ekonomisi içerisinde eritemeyecek arzu, Başkası'nı asla tam olarak deneyimleyemez; her yöneliminden eli boş döner. Başkası sürekli olarak hem ilişkidir hem de değildir (kendisini geri çeker). *Infinite*'in *in* öneki hem içinde olmaya hem de *non* anlamında ait olmamayı anlatır. Hem ilişkidir hem de mutlak kalır. Sonsuz ideasının kavramını sürekli olarak aşmasıdır bu. Sonsuz önce var olup sonra kendisini aşmaz, o bir sonsuzlamadır; mutlak dışsallıktır, aşkınlıktır; kendisini yüzde, bir görüngü haline gelmeden sunar. Levinas böylelikle bilme arzusunun, önünde duran nesnesini bilme lüksünün bu ilişkide olmadığını belirtmek ister. Temsilin, ontolojinin egemenliğinde olan hakikat kavramıyla, 'nesnemize' uzaktan bakarak, onu düşünerek 'iyi' olamayız, onu arzulamamız, böylelikle de eyleme geçmemiz gerekir. Levinas'ın öznesi bu bakımdan Kantçı öznenen daha eylemcidir; *iyi niyet* tek başına iyi değildir ve yüz'le karşılaşmadaki aciliyet, edimin yasaya uygunluğuna ilişkin akıl yürütmeye zaman vermeyecek kadar anlaktır. Başkası'nın sorumluluğunu hemen yüklenmem gerekir; ancak böylece gerçekten özne olabilirim. Kendi kendisini belirleme anlamında özgürlük temel olamaz. Başkası'nın çağrısına verdiğim yanıtla ona bağlanırım özne (*sub-ject*) olur, akla da buradan açılırım. Açıktır ki Levinas Kartezyen özne tasarımına tamamen karşı bir yerdedir. Anlamın, özgürlüğün, aklın kaynağını Başkası'yla karşılaşmada ve ondaki barışçıl, etik ilişkide görerek, etkin belirleyen özne yerine sorumluluk yüklenebilmesiyle, Başkası'nın etkisine maruz kalabilmesiyle tanımlanabilen bir özne ileri öne sürülmektedir.

Levinas'ın öznesinin kırılmalılığı, yaralanabilirliği *Varlıktan başka türlü*'de gittikçe derinleşir. Artık ham da olsa bir ben'den başlamak yerine en başından Başkası'nın yerinde olan, onun yerine geçen özne vardır. Başkası'nın yerinde, hatta onun yaptığı hatalardan sorumluluğa dek giden bir sorumluluğu anlatır burada. Başkası'nda rehin kalınmıştır; onun içimdir. Özgürlüğümden önce gelen ve devredemeyeceğim bu sorumluluk ya da tutukluluk hali seçilmişliği de anlatır. Başkası'nın yüzündeki

buyruktan kaçamam; yazgım onun *koruyucusu* olmaktadır. Başkası'na boş ellerle yaklaşmamı engelleyen bu sorumluluğu yüklenişime *söyleme* eşlik eder. Saf bir tanıklık etme olan *söyleme* buyruğun içeriğine önseldir. İçerik *söylenendir*. Merhaba! ünleminin anlamsal çözümlenmesinde tüketilemeyen *söylemedir*; tüketilense *söylenendir*. Söze dökmenin bedeli *söylenende* ödenir; ihanet edilen *söyleme* yine de yok olmaz, tamamen tematize edilemez. O söylenenin arkasındaki hakikat de değildir. İçeriğine indirgenemeyen mesajdır; içinde yazanlarda tüketilemeyen mektubun kendisidir.

Levinas'ın felsefe tarihindeki yerini Kant'ın ikinci kritiği ile düşünmekte yarar vardır. Kant *Pratik Aklın Eleştirisi*'nde ontolojinin tüketemediği bir anlamdan, etikten sözederek insana doğada özel bir yer açtı. Özgürlük ve Yasa'nın birbirine karşılıklı olarak yaklaştığı bu ahlak evreninde insan Ahlak Yasası'nın bilincine vararak özgür bir birey olabiliyor, doğayı aşıyordu. Levinas Kant'ı açtığı bu varlık dışı alan açısından takdir ederken bu girişimi radikalize de eder. Kant'ın homojen evrenindeki özgür bireylerin karşılıklı ahlaki edimleri ona fazla rasyonel görünüyor olacak ki o bu ilişkiyi bakışsız bir karşılıksızlıkta, rasyonalite öncesi bir düzleme ait görür. Ancak böylesi bir ilişkide benim vermem geri dönüşsüz, hesap edilemez bir hakiki edim olur. Ben başkası için olduğumda ahlak anlaşılabilir; diğer türlü o da bir ekonomiye indirgenebilirdi. Levinas Kant'ın duyusallık, (pratik) akıl ayırımındaki gerilimden sözetmese de onun için de ahlak genellikle benim bencilliğine karşıttır, huzursuzluk vericidir. Özne dünyada hep eğreti durur; bir türlü görevini tamamlayamaz. Üstelik onun öznesinin, Başkası'nın çağrısındaki aciliyeti daha çabuk kavradığından, zamanı da azdır. Bu çağrıyı evrensel bir buyruğun dolayımından geçiremeyecek kadar azdır zaman. Elindekinin tümünü bir anda verebilir Levinas'ın öznesi, paylaştırmayı düşünmeyebilir.

Felsefeyi hâlâ önce'lerle kurmaya çalışan bir tavrın Derrida gibi ironik bir filozofla ilişkisi ne olabilir? Derrida hiç bir şey söylememek için konuşurken bizi *aporia*'lardan haberdar eder. *Aporialar* bizi her türlü özdeşlik karşısında uyanık olmaya davet eder. Onlar karşısında yaşanan karar-verilemezlik durumunu bir karar üretme programının sıradan uygulaması olmaktan çıkarmaya çalışırken Derrida'nın, Levinas'ın Kant'ın ahlaki edimindeki katı kural uygulayıcı öznesinden kurtulma çabasından yararlandığını düşünebiliriz. Başkası'nın yardımına koşmak için düşünmeye zaman olmaması gibi adalet için de zaman yoktur. Bu aciliyet kara vermedeki yükü hafifletmediği gibi aksine ağırlaştırır. Her eşsiz durumda Başkası'nın ele avuca gelmez sonsuzluğu adeta deneyimlenir. Derrida, Levinas'taki Başkası'nın konumunu adeta yasanın karşısındaki adalet gibi görür. Onu tüketemeyeceğini bilir ve bu durumu bir eksiklik olarak görmez. Yine de bu deneyimi en başından *kirlenmiş* olarak gördüğünden saf bir ahlaki ilişkiye de inanmaz. Levinas'ın dediği gibi yapısökümde 'eksik' olan yakınlığın *daha iyi* oluşudur. Levinas'ın esini Derrida'da bir iz, yapısökümün adaletin kendisi olduğunun ileri sürülecek kadar da güçlü bir iz olarak görünür.

Bu çalışmada, Batı metafiziğine egemen olduğu düşünülen ontoloji temelli felsefe yapma geleneğini, etiği temel alan bir yaklaşımla sarsmaya çalışan bir felsefe yapma tarzının, aşkınsal etik bir tarzın olanaklılığı tartışıldı. Tüm bir evreni kendisinden yola çıkarak kuran modern öznenin eleştirisinin izinde Levinas'ın anlamın eksenine Başkası'nı yerleştirerek aynılığı, özdeşliği, homojenleştirici bütünlük anlayışını adeta aşındırdığı felsefe yapma tarzının yarattığı kavramlar, ifadeler birbirleriyle ilişki içinde ele alındı, incelendi.

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