



The Question of Freedom
in the Early Writings of Emmanuel Levinas

by

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*To the memory of my Father, David Meade (1950-2009), who instilled in me
a love of wisdom and justice, and Colin Bradshaw (1950-2013) who
nurtured that love*

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INTRODUCTION

The fundamental experience which objective experience itself presupposes is the experience of the Other.¹

Despite the growth and depth of Levinasian scholarship towards the end of the last century, many crucial issues centring on the important topic of freedom in the work of Levinas are yet to be fully raised and addressed. This is surprising given the undisputed prominence of ‘freedom’ as a value and a concept not only in the history of modern intellectual thought, including philosophy, but also in the history of human culture, social and political movements.² A recent exception to this is the collection of articles edited by Benda Hofmeyr, *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*. In her introduction to this collection Hofmeyr remarks:

The question concerning the ‘radical passivity’ of the ethical agent undoubtedly constitutes the proverbial 64,000 dollar question in Levinas scholarship and reception. In other words, the question concerning the radically passive ethical agent as opposed to the active autonomous agent, with the freedom to act independently without an inherent imperative or inner directive steering its actions, is the decisive issue separating supporters of Levinas from his critics.³

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Signature’, in Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, trans. by Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 291-95 (p. 293). Throughout this dissertation we will follow what has become general practice among commentators and translators of Levinas work, generally, ‘Other’ will be used for the French ‘*autrui*’, which designates a personal form of address used for a human being, and ‘other’ for the French ‘*autre*’ which is a more general term for ‘other’. In some places Levinas capitalises *l’Autre* and generally translations maintain the capitalisation in the English, when this occurs it is identified in the passage.

² An exception to this oversight is Pierre Hayat’s recent study, combining some of his old and new work, *La liberté investie. Levinas* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2014). This author emphasises the centrality of freedom in the thought of Levinas, writing in his introduction that the point of departure for his reading of Levinas is that for Levinas freedom is more than a right, freedom is a requirement that makes humanity human: ‘Plus qu’un droit, la liberté se présente alors comme une exigence d’où procède l’humanité de l’homme. Tel est précisément le point de départ de la *philosophie de la liberté investie* que nous lisons chez Levinas.’ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11. Hayat’s focus and methodology is different from our own, as we present a chronological reading of the place of freedom in Levinas’s thought up to and including *Totality and Infinity*, with the aim of clarifying Levinas’s position. Hayat presents a reading of Levinas whereby freedom comes from the inability to hide from one’s responsibility to the Other. Hayat’s argument is similar in places to our own analysis, as he stresses the importance of rationality in Levinas’s understanding of freedom, and he also states that the exercise of freedom is caused (*provoqué*) by consideration of the outside world. ‘Elle [freedom] apparaît d’abord comme une injonction d’agir pour d’autres que soi. Avec Levinas, l’exercice de la liberté est provoqué par la considération du monde extérieur.’ *Ibid.*, p. 11. The French term ‘*provoqué*’ can also, however, be translated as ‘bring about’, ‘give rise to’, or ‘elicit’, each of which capture how the Other can be thought of as a condition for the possibility of freedom. For Levinas, this condition is not to be understood as foundational.

³ Benda Hofmeyr, ‘Editor’s Introduction: Passivity as Necessary Condition for Ethical Agency’, in *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*, ed. by B. Hofmeyr (New York: Springer, 2009), p. 1.

Hofmeyr goes on to identify, correctly, that '[t]he central problem underlying radical passivity is undoubtedly the problem of freedom'.⁴ Yet this key issue is not explored further in the secondary scholarship, and Levinas's position is 'more often than not, uncritically assimilated or taken as a matter of fact'.⁵ Although this recent volume is a welcome addition that goes some way towards exploring key questions around the passivity of the subject in Levinas's work, there is still much further study and reflection needed on this specific problem of freedom in Levinas's thought.⁶

Levinas's notable description of the self as a being that is responsible in front of (*devant*), for (*pour*) and to the (a) Other, before the actual exercise of individual freedom, calls into question the very foundation of ethical theories that find the justification of morality in the origins of the freedom of the subject. This, therefore, is a radical critique because within the history of modern moral philosophy, by and large, moral responsibility is viewed as correlating with freedom.⁷ One is responsible for an act proportionate to which one can be said to have acted freely. One, therefore, is

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Another recent and worthwhile exception to this is the study by Rachid Boutayeb, *Kritik der Freiheit: Zur »ethischen Wende« von Emmanuel Levinas* (Freiburg/München: Alber-Reihe Thesen, 2013). Boutayeb reads Levinas's work as a critique of freedom understood in both the German Idealist tradition and the existential phenomenological understanding of freedom, that can be said, in part, to have continued that tradition, 'Levinas' Ethik oder eher a-Ethik ist als Kritik der Freiheit zu verstehen' (ibid., p. 10). In place of such a view of freedom Levinas argues for a responsible freedom. As Boutayeb says; 'Die Beziehung zum Anderen ist ursprünglicher als meine Freiheit und als mein Wissen' (ibid., p. 9). In presenting his argument Boutayeb situates Levinas's critique in relation to the understanding of freedom in the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre. The methodology followed again differs from our own, as the development of Levinas's position in relation to freedom is not explored in detail.

⁷ The philosopher most often associated with viewing morality as autonomy and self-governance was Immanuel Kant. For more on the historical development of the concept of morality as self-governance, and the importance that such a view had in shaping the Western liberal vision of the relationship between individual and society, see, J.B Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy. A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The relationship between Levinas's understanding of freedom in contrast to that of Kant's is one area of Levinas's thinking on freedom that has been explored among commentators, most notably, by Catherine Chalièr, *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002). See, also, C. Chalièr, 'Kant and Levinas: On the Question of Autonomy and Heteronomy', in *In Proximity. Emmanuel Levinas and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Melvyn New with Robert Bernasconi and Richard A. Cohen (Texas, USA: Texas Tech University Press, 2001), pp. 261-83; Diane Perpich, 'Freedom Called into Question: Levinas's Defense of Heteronomy', in *In Proximity. Emmanuel Levinas and the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 303-25; Peter Atterton, 'From Transcendental Freedom to the Other: Levinas and Kant', in *In Proximity. Emmanuel Levinas and the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 327-54. Research has also been done on freedom in Levinas's work in relation to other thinkers such as, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida and Friedrich Nietzsche. See, for example, Holger Zaborowski, 'On Freedom and Responsibility: Remarks on Sartre, Levinas and Derrida', *The Heythrop Journal*, 41(2000), 47-65; Christina Howell, 'Sartre and Levinas', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 91-99; Arne Johan Vetlesen, 'Relations with Others in Sartre and Levinas: Assessing Some Implications for an Ethics of Proximity', *Constellations*, 1, no. 3 (1995), 358-382; *Nietzsche and Levinas. "After the Death of A Certain God"*, ed. by Jill Stauffer and Bettina Bergo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

responsible for that which one has initiated, or failed to initiate, by choice. If an individual did not act freely, then, generally speaking, they are not held responsible for that action and the consequences thereof. For Levinas, however, autonomy cannot be the condition for ethics precisely because it is through the ethical encounter with the Other that the self becomes free. This position, therefore, overturns the traditional approach, by claiming that the subject is responsible for the Other prior to being free, and therein raises a number of important philosophical questions along the way.⁸ Before answers to these questions can be adequately addressed from a Levinasian perspective, it is essential to understand, in a straightforward sense, Levinas's position on freedom and his understanding of the concept of freedom. In order to do this, we propose, in this study, to trace the place of freedom in the early work of Levinas, from his earliest writings in the 1930s up to and including his first major work, *Totality and Infinity*.

When Levinas's thinking on freedom is presented in the secondary literature, most often the focus is on what could be termed his negative view of freedom wherein freedom is described as egoism and spontaneity, the latter understood as the absence of external restraint and the free reign of the ego unimpeded from the outside.⁹ Levinas

⁸ Such questions as, 'what is the moral significance of responsible action if it is not freely chosen but passively imposed?' are raised in Hofmeyr's edited collection *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*, (p. 1).

⁹ Levinas does not use the term freedom in an univocal sense, which is unsurprising given that the term itself has so many varied meanings and uses. The meaning of the word freedom can range from a word used to mean nothing, 'the paper is free today', to designate emptiness and vacancy, 'is this seat free?', to a word that means everything to people to the point of death, typified by the slogans of many revolutions, 'Freedom or Death', and famously by Emmeline Pankhurst's speech of the same name. As is evident in Levinas's writings, the meaning of the term freedom can greatly depend on the context of use, be that rational agency, self-governance, representation, self-sufficiency, political and social freedom, or the very limited sense of the possibility of commencement and the freedom from exterior control. The term itself has even been used within the history of philosophy in a directly contradictory manner. See, Maurice Cranston, *Freedom. A New Analysis* (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953). Cranston illustrates this point well by referring to two main groups of thinkers within the tradition of political philosophy, using the example of Rousseau and Lord Acton. The latter believing that freedom is the freedom from the restraints of nature, brought about through the development of the State, and the former believing freedom to be freedom from the constraints of such political institutions and a return to nature. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8. In this study we will be focusing on Levinas's thinking in relation to 'freedom' when it is used to describe a metaphysical property of the subject, in the sense of the spontaneous self-sufficient egoism of the subject, and the freedom of consciousness understood as intentional meaning-giving thought. Levinas also has a lot to contribute to the many discussions on freedom in relation to politics, culture and society, but that will not be our main focus here. Some very interesting work has already been done on politics in Levinas's thought and freedom in relation to politics is discussed in some of these studies. See, the collection of articles in, *Levinas, Law, Politics*, ed. by Marinos Diamantides (Oxon, Uk: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007). See, also, Michael F. Bernard-Donals, "'Difficult Freedom': Levinas, Language, and Politics', *Diacritics*, 35, no. 3 (2005), 62-77; Eric S. Nelson, 'Against Liberty: Adorno, Levinas and the Pathologies of Freedom', *Theoria*, 59, no. 131 (2012), 64-83; C. Fred Alford, 'Levinas and Political Theory', *Political Theory*, 32 (2004), 146-171. The work by Howard Caygill is of

illustrates this point by referring to moments in the tradition that for him typify this understanding, such as Hobbes's description of man in the state of nature, Victor Hugo's 'a force on the move', and later Spinoza's 'the right to existence' or *conatus essendi*.¹⁰ This view of freedom is aligned with the view of autonomy as the absence of external restraint in the sense of the ability to self-govern with the absence of external control. It is also described by Levinas as having a complete lack of consideration for alterity because exteriority is perceived as a possible threat to one's own self-determination, if it is perceived at all. An equally important notion of freedom as autonomy which Levinas also places into question is the primacy of the thinking subject, wherein the understanding of freedom as self-governance is linked with rationality, objectivity, and representation, otherwise described as intentional meaning-giving thought.

In her article 'Freedom Called into Question: Levinas's Defense of Heteronomy', Diane Perpich sets out these two different, yet linked aspects of freedom understood as self-sufficiency and as an 'imperialism of knowledge', and also 'in terms of self-preservation and self-valorization' of the subject.¹¹ Despite pointing out this distinction, the focus of Perpich's approach is to question whether or not Kant's conception of morality can be said to fall prey to Levinas's criticisms of freedom as the basis of ethics, or if Kant is exempt from such a criticism given that for Kant freedom is self-limiting and the autonomy of the individual's will, for Kant, is based on the self's ability to formulate laws in line with the categorical imperative that the self must follow. While there is much of merit in Perpich's analysis, this line of reasoning seems to undermine the importance of her earlier identified point that not only is Levinas

particular note in this area, and we will be drawing on this work throughout this study. See, Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁰ See, Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' trans. by Alphonso Lingis, in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1998), pp. 47-59, where Levinas refers to Hobbes's work to demonstrate the pride of place which freedom, viewed as an 'incontestable right' of the subject, holds. Within this same 1957 article Levinas borrows a term from Viktor Hugo's *Hernani*, which he will use time and time again, to describe the spontaneous freedom of the self, a 'force on the move'. In his later work Levinas introduces a new term to characterise self justified spontaneous freedom, borrowed from Spinoza's *Ethica* III, prop 6, '*conatus essendi*', the tendency in being to persist in its own being. In an interview Levinas described his philosophy as putting the *conatus essendi* into question, '[t]he effort to exist, the aspiration to persevere in being, the *conatus essendi* according to philosophers like Spinoza, is the beginning of every right. This precisely is what I attempt to put into question — starting from the encounter with the morality, or the face, of the other — when I insist upon the radical difference between the others and me.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Philosopher and Death', trans. by Bettina Bergo, in *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 121-29 (p. 128).

¹¹ See, Perpich, 'Freedom Called into Question: Levinas's Defense of Heteronomy', p. 306.

challenging freedom as self-preservation but also the freedom of consciousness to represent the world and to be the foundation of all meaning. In Kant's approach, although freedom may be self-limiting, Kant never questions the primacy of consciousness. For Levinas, however, the freedom of representation and rationality calls for justification. It is not self-justifying. Thus, for Levinas, the unnatural ability of the self to place itself into question — objective rational thought — needs an explanation.¹² As Levinas argues, '[k]nowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin — in an unnatural movement to seek higher than one's own origin, a movement which evinces or describes a created freedom'.¹³ Perpich, then, is right to question whether Kant's understanding of freedom as self-limiting avoids Levinas's charges of egoism and imperialism, but Kant does not avoid Levinas's criticisms of freedom of representation.

Criticism raised against Levinas also often focus on aspects of his thought that stem from his negative view of freedom understood as egoism and spontaneity, overlooking the vital importance of the freedom of self-reflective critical thought in his philosophy. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, Levinas argues that our ability to call egoist freedom into question, and hence the possibility of a moral life, rests on the investiture of freedom understood as critical self-reflective thought. Levinasian scholarship would benefit from a clearer understanding of the place of freedom in Levinas's work, most specifically, from a greater understanding of the integral place in his thinking for his less appreciated understanding of freedom. We would then be better placed to accurately address important critical questions and to assess the extent to which other critical questions would still hold given the more nuanced appreciation of his wider position.

¹² A very recent article by James Mensch is a welcome exception to this trend. In 'Freedom and the Theoretical Attitude', Mensch presents a reading of Levinas very similar to our own. Mensch argues that for Levinas the theoretical attitude, and the freedom from a more immediate self-referential practical engagement with the world which it brings, is prefaced by the ethical interruption of the Other. Arguing, '[s]uch freedom, when liberated from its arbitrariness by the Other, grounds the possibility of the theoretical standpoint. Given that our freedom is not ultimate, but rather grounded by our relation to the Other, we have to say that what ultimately "lines" the world that is accessible to theory is not freedom but rather the Other whose alterity makes our freedom possible.' James Mensch, 'Freedom and the Theoretical Attitude', <https://www.academia.edu/10504379/Freedom_and_The_Theoretical_Attitude> [accessed Feb 2015], (p. 16). The research presented in this study provides further support for positions such as Mensch's as it grounds this position in Levinas's work and traces the development of this crucial, yet often overlooked, aspect of Levinas's thought.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 82-83.

Take, for example, the critical readings of Levinas offered by David Wood and François Raffoul in *Addressing Levinas*.¹⁴ Although both Wood and Raffoul address a number of important questions, nevertheless their analysis would both benefit from a greater appreciation of the place of freedom understood as critical self-reflective thought in Levinas's work. Raffoul accurately describes Levinas's view of ontology and then goes on to question whether ethics should be understood as having a primacy over ontology, as Levinas argues, or if a more accurate portrayal of Heidegger's work, than that which Levinas provides, can accommodate an ontological ethics.¹⁵ Raffoul argues that there is a greater depth to Heidegger's thought than Levinas allows for, and that it is inaccurate of Levinas to maintain that Heidegger fits the description whereby 'the thinking of Being is a solipsistic thinking which negates the other'.¹⁶ What Raffoul is challenging is the characterisation of Heidegger's thinking of Being 'as solipsistic', and by refuting this point he hopes to raise the possibility of opening a space for the consideration of developing an ontological sense of ethics, using ontological here in a specific Heideggerian fashion. Even if Raffoul's argument can be said to achieve this goal by showing that Levinas was incorrect to label all thinking of Being as solipsistic, it does not address Levinas's lesser appreciated premise that the very freedom involved in the event of 'thinking', be that solipsistic or otherwise, must in itself be justified. For Levinas, this is equally true of a non-theoretical Heideggerian broad meaning of understanding.¹⁷ One could say that for Levinas, even if Heidegger's *Mitsein* can be said to show that thinking of Being is not solipsistic, as *Mitsein* is from the very start a fundamental characteristic of *Dasein*, being with others for Levinas is not radical

¹⁴ Both Woods and Raffoul raise a number of important questions such as issues relating to Levinas's reading of the tradition and the accuracy of Levinas's reading of Heidegger, which Woods sees as 'a somewhat one-dimensional view', and for Raffoul, '[w]e must indeed admit that a number of the analyses [of Heidegger's work] offered by Levinas are not devoid of a certain interpretative violence, and perhaps don't do complete justice to the philosophical advances that one can find in Heidegger [...]'. François Raffoul, 'Being and the Other: Ethics and Ontology in Levinas and Heidegger', in *Addressing Levinas*, ed. by Antje Kapust, Eric Sean Nelson and Kent Still (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), pp. 138-51, (p. 144); David Wood, 'Some Questions for My Levinasian Friends', in *Addressing Levinas*, pp. 152-69, (p. 164).

¹⁵ Raffoul describes Levinas's main thesis as, '[o]ntology, the thinking of Being, as it has defined the entirety of Western philosophy from Parmenides to Heidegger, is a thinking of the *Same*, a thinking which reduces otherness to the Same by the very power of its theoretical comprehensiveness', and goes on to argue that Levinas incorrectly identified Heidegger's work as belonging to the classical understanding of ontology. Raffoul, 'Being and the Other: Ethics and Ontology in Levinas and Heidegger', (p. 139).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁷ See, Ch. III, § 3.1.1

enough a disturbance to prompt the self to place itself into question.¹⁸ Hence, this is also why for Levinas ethics precedes ontology, because without the ethical interruption of the face of the Other one would lack the distance necessary for any thinking at all. By tracing Levinas's thinking on freedom from his earliest work, it will be shown that this less appreciated understanding of freedom is vital in an attempt to understand, and then only consequently, critically analyse Levinas's philosophy.

In his well-known interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas remarks that his description of ethical subjectivity 'dispenses with the idealising subjectivity of ontology', which he further characterises as a 'mastering centre of meaning, an idealist, self-sufficient *cogito* [...] autonomous freedom'.¹⁹ This leaves unaddressed the question of the justification of freedom of thought, critical consciousness and the exercise of freedom. And it is this very issue that renders Levinas's reflections on freedom to be much more profound and linked to his critique of the modern defence of the free subject as a rational agent capable of autonomous self-governance, sense-bestowing and centre of a meaningful world (Husserl) as well as one who can question the meaning of being itself (Heidegger). As Levinas puts it, at the end of *Totality and Infinity*:

One is not against freedom if one seeks for it a justification. Reason and freedom seem to us to be founded on prior structures of being whose first articulations are delineated by the metaphysical movement, or respect, or justice — identical to truth. The terms of the conception making truth rest on freedom must be inverted.²⁰

Freedom, in other words, must rest on truth, where truth rests in justice. Far from being a side issue or an issue that Levinas sets aside in his thinking, the question of freedom and its justification is a central concern of Levinas's thought.

The aim of this study is to trace Levinas's thinking on freedom up to and including *Totality and Infinity*. We will proceed by way of a chronological study of the most important works in terms of the idea of freedom in the first half of his oeuvre. The

¹⁸ For more on this point see Mensch's excellent analysis and defence of why for Levinas Heidegger's account in *Being and Time* of how *Dasein* can shift from a primordial pragmatic engagement with the world to a theoretical contemplation remains insufficient. See, Mensch, 'Freedom and the Theoretical Attitude'. See, also, Vetlesen, 'Relations with Others in Sartre and Levinas: Assessing Some Implications for an Ethics of Proximity', in which he draws upon the work of Sartre who made a similar criticism, 'that in Heidegger my being-in-the-world *von Haus aus* entails being-with-others as one of its fundamental structures. This being so, the empirical event of a particular Other's appearance, of my encountering him, is unable to make any difference to the kind of being that I am'. (p. 360). The research presented in our current study contributes to this lesser appreciated, yet nevertheless crucial, aspect of Levinas's thinking.

¹⁹ Richard Kearney and Emmanuel Levinas, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. by Richard A. Cohen (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 13-33 (p. 27).

²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 302-03.

study is divided into four chapters. This division reflects significant philosophical and historical divisions both in the life of Levinas and in the development of his thought.

Chapter one deals with Levinas's earliest writings before World War II, from 1930 to 1940, noting that the question of the freedom of the subject was an issue that concerned Levinas from his early student days, in particular with reference to his encounter with Henri Bergson's philosophy. Although Levinas found aspects of Bergson's work to be highly commendable, including his work on the metaphysical justification of freedom, he also, however, found Bergson's strict separation between reason and intuition to be problematic. In Husserl's descriptions of intentionality Levinas found an account that preserved intuition and duration but did away with the dichotomy between the intellect and intuition. This features in Levinas's 1930 doctoral thesis *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*.²¹ Yet Levinas was not entirely happy with Husserl's perceived intellectualism at that time, which proved to also be unsatisfactory, as can be seen from the final chapter of his doctoral study. Here the influence of Heidegger's philosophy, however, is noticeable. Indeed it was Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* and Heidegger's attempt to call the primacy of intentional consciousness into question as the main issue in phenomenology and phenomenological research that cleared a path for Levinas to place the modern view of the autonomous free subject into question. We will see, however, that although Heidegger's approach opens up the non-theoretical concrete life to philosophical reflection, Levinas finds Heidegger's account of freedom to be the most deficient and fatalistic. This chapter will end with Levinas's re-reading of Husserl's phenomenology in his 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', published in 1940. Levinas's return to the work of Husserl results in the discovery of latent possibilities (of active and passive dimensions of intentionality) in Husserl's description of the intentionality of human consciousness, which paves the way for Levinas's own departure after the war.

Chapter two examines Levinas's writings after the War. The division between chapter one and chapter two mirrors the division between these two periods of writing, which were separated by Levinas's five year incarceration as a prisoner of war during World War II from 1940 to 1945. The chapter will focus on Levinas's first two

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. by André Orianne, 2nd edn (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

extended works, *Existence and Existents* (1947)²² and *Time and the Other* (1947).²³ In these works Levinas begins to describe the passivity of the self, and he also introduces an idea that will prove pivotal to his later thought, the split within subjectivity between the affective self and the active ego. Even at this early stage of his work, when Levinas is just beginning to introduce his idea of the other, we can begin to make sense of his position that responsibility precedes freedom. In a manner reminiscent of many modern philosophers, such as Kant, Levinas views freedom as aligned with reason and the conscious cognitive subject. As the affective self, however, is described as prior to intentional consciousness, objectivity and critical thinking, this leads Levinas to the view that the self is responsible prior to being free. It is the interruption of the Other that breaches the closed totality of the instant, introduces time, and frees the self from an infinite present in which the self continuously returns to its self with no remainder and nothing new. Without the possibility of novelty, which is introduced by the Other, the self would be trapped within a totality and destined to a determined fate. Even at this early stage of his thinking, it is the Other that brings freedom to the self.

Chapter three addresses Levinas's reflections on freedom in writings prior to his magnum opus *Totality and Infinity* (1961). In his work of the 1950's Levinas continues to question the primacy of objectifying intentionality, and returns to Husserl to unearth the dormant possibilities that lay hidden in his description of intentionality. In doing so, Levinas opens a way to philosophically describe aspects of human existence that resist representation and objectification, and escape the totalizing gaze of objectifying intentionality, yet remain meaningful. The excessive character of exteriority is a crucial aspect of what it means to be human, which is not only confined to the encounter with the infinite Other.

Throughout his work in the 1950's Levinas continues to stress the alignment of freedom and the cognitive conceptual powers of the subject, believing 'knowledge' to be a violent assimilation of the world whereby the object of knowledge is consumed by the subject without remainder. Levinas argues that in order for critical consciousness to have arisen in the subject in the first place, the subject must have been placed into question from the outside, as he does not believe that critical consciousness would have

²² Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2001).

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1987). This is a collection of essays which Levinas delivered in December 1946 and January 1947 in the Philosophical College in Paris, and was first published in this format in 1948. In 1979 it was published as a book with a new Preface.

spontaneously arisen in the individual free subject. Thus freedom needs to be accounted for. Freedom in philosophy is generally discussed in terms of an already constituted ego. Subjectivity and agency is not presupposed by Levinas, who in his analysis pushes back behind the constituting subject, and hence back behind freedom. Levinas will come to argue that only the face of the human Other is profoundly different enough, and other enough, to disturb the self, and to shock the self into the realisation that there is an outside that will remain outside. This inaugurates the intentionality of consciousness at its most fundamental and transcendental levels. It is this encounter that brings about objectivity and invests freedom. This moment will be described as a moment of sensibility that brings meaning from the outside, a meaning not fully containable and consumable by consciousness. There is a discourse prior to a rational discourse, the facing of the Other.

Chapter four brings our study to a close with an examination of Levinas's argument for the justification of freedom (understood as representation and intentional meaning-giving thought) to our reading of *Totality and Infinity*. The important distinction between the passive affective self and the active ego, first introduced in *Existence and Existents*, is pivotal for Levinas's developed thinking on subjectivity and freedom presented in *Totality and Infinity*. There is among commentators of this work a tension between two somewhat conflicting readings of *Totality and Infinity*, both of which premised on two different accounts of freedom in Levinas's description of subjectivity. The first, which is the most prevalent reading, views the encounter with the Other as an empirical or linear event, whereby the radically free self is given prior to the encounter with the Other, lives a self-sufficient egotistical 'free' life that through the encounter with the Other is re-orientated, made good and becomes ethically free.²⁴ By bringing our reading of Levinas's earlier work to bear on *Totality and Infinity* in this chapter it is argued that the empirical reading is not consistent with Levinas's earlier works, nor does it explain many other crucial aspects of Levinas's description of subjectivity given in the text. A straight-forward empirical reading leads to a circular argument, as Peter Atterton remarks, as it presupposes that which the Other is said to

²⁴ Rudi Visker, for example, goes along with this reading of the text, 'the Good liberates, institutes a new freedom, and gives people a fixed point or point of orientation around which they can gravitate'. Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition. Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2008), p. 165.

invest, such as rationality, objectivity, language and sociality.²⁵ By comparison, other commentators, most notably Theodore de Boer,²⁶ argue that for Levinas the encounter with the Other is better understood as a transcendental condition that makes possible and accounts for indispensable aspects of human life, such as, for instance, sociality, labour, and the freedom of representation. For these commentators the encounter with the Other is a peculiar kind of transcendental event that invests freedom understood as both freedom aligned with reason and also free from fate, as the Other breaks the totality of the Same and brings new possibilities that would otherwise not be possible for the self alone. This metaphysical transcendental event which invests freedom, nevertheless, is concretely encountered in the empirical world. The self can ‘forget’ the responsibility towards the Other and live an egotistical existence, and this is why it takes the infinite Other to shock the self and to ‘remind’ it of its responsibility.

Levinas, then, does not want to rest the encounter with the Other, or the constitution of the world, on a free activity of the subject, because this would then mean that the Other would also be a moment in the life of the subject that is reducible to the power and freedom of the I. For Levinas, freedom must be given from the outside, or else how can the freedom of the subject be justified without avoiding solipsism, the social contract tradition, a Hegelian master-slave dialectic, or reducing morality to a mere social evolutionary adaptation that ensures the survival of the fittest individual and the species. As Levinas famously opens *Totality and Infinity*, ‘[e]veryone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality’.²⁷ The stakes are high. By describing morality as the basis of subjectivity, and as prior to freedom, Levinas not only provides a justification of morality but also a justification of freedom.

Contra to the traditional modern view of man as a free spontaneous subject who ventures out into the world to come to know and possess it, Levinas provides a metaphysical description of the ethical subject who is disrupted by the face of the Other, in an encounter not of his choosing or making. I do not turn my gaze freely to the Other in order to grasp it in a theoretical manner; it is, rather, the Other who faces me, disturbs me, places my freedom to be and my right to exist in question and arouses my goodness

²⁵ See, Atterton, ‘From Transcendental Freedom to the Other: Levinas and Kant’. Atterton is one of the few scholars who emphasises that for Levinas reason presupposes the relation with the Other, and that ‘the priority cannot be straightforwardly chronological or logical’, (ibid., p. 344).

²⁶ See, Theodore de Boer, ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’, in *The Rationality of Transcendence. Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1997), pp. 1-32.

²⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.

whilst founding critical consciousness. Responsibility, in other words, precedes freedom. Ethical meaning is built into the very constitution of self-hood. A different way of looking at freedom is given in Levinas's account of responsibility, and it is a way that re-opens a philosophical meditation on the meaning of freedom *and* responsibility in the human condition as experienced; or, at least, so shall we argue in this study.

CHAPTER I

PRE-WORLD WAR II WRITINGS (1930–1940)

The question of freedom was a question that Levinas had long reflected upon before he began to see and highlight the ethical significance of the Other and its claim on the exercise of individual freedom. In fact, in this chapter we shall remark that his earliest reflections on the concept of freedom as he encountered it in the writings of Henri Bergson (1859–1941) was one of the major factors that lead him ultimately to investigate the importance of the alterity of the Other in ethical experience as well as noting the absence of this consideration in both Husserlian and Heideggerian respective phenomenological philosophies and their accounts of freedom in consciousness (Husserl) and in *Dasein* (Heidegger).¹ From both a historical and a philosophical point of view, therefore, it is of importance to deal first with the influence of Bergson on Levinas's earliest thinking on the concept of freedom.

§1.1 BERGSON'S INFLUENCE AND THE FEAR OF FATE OVER FREEDOM

Levinas was a student of philosophy at Strasbourg University from 1923–1928. During this time Bergson was seen as a hugely influential and important thinker in France, and whose work philosophy students at that time in France could not have avoided. Levinas was no exception.² In an interview with Philippe Nemo in 1981, Nemo asks Levinas

¹ The methodology followed in this study is to retrace the development of Levinas's thinking on freedom in his early work; particularly the place in his thinking of freedom understood as critical self-reflective thought, in distinction to his more widely discussed relationship to freedom understood as spontaneity and self-interest. In following the development of his thinking it is important to consider Levinas's reading of his influences in this area, as it is this reading that guides Levinas's own thinking and early development. Although questions pertaining to the validity or accuracy of such readings warrant sustained reflection and research, and indeed much work has already been done on addressing such questions, due to our focus such questions will be mainly set aside. Even if Levinas's reading of such influences can be shown to be inaccurate, the direction and development of his thought cannot be retrospectively undone, and it is his development that we wish to trace here. It should be kept in mind therefore, that it is Levinas's reading of Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger that will be presented in this dissertation.

² Reflecting on the classes he took in philosophy while at Strasbourg University from 1923 to 1928, Levinas, in an interview with Philippe Nemo in 1981, remarks that he was initiated into philosophy at eighteen by four highly respected professors, Charles Blondel (who taught psychology and introduced Levinas to Bergson), Maurice Halbwachs (who taught sociology), Maurice Pradines (who taught philosophy) and Henri Carteron (who taught classical philosophy). Although not noted by Levinas in that interview, his introduction to phenomenology at Strasbourg came from Jean Hering, who was a professor of Protestant theology. Hering studied under Husserl and had been a member of the early Göttingen Circle. See, Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (New

about his earliest personal motivations in his study of philosophy, ‘[b]ut to what more personal question or anxiety has reading Bergson corresponded in you?’, and Levinas replies,

[c]ertainly to the fear of being in a world without novel possibilities, without a future of hope, a world where everything is regulated in advance; to the ancient fear before fate, be it that of a universal mechanism, absurd fate, since what is going to pass has in a sense already passed!³

Given that this interview occurred in 1981, some 58 years after Levinas commenced his studies at Strasbourg University, one would need to exercise a degree of caution before accepting this self appraisal of his concerns unreflectively. Yet a close reading of Levinas’s earliest writings reveals that there is indeed a tension between fate and freedom as an underlying topic of philosophical concern.⁴ What is of significance in this later assessment, however, is that it reveals to us that in his early student days Levinas had already been concerned in safeguarding the concept of freedom from a mechanistic, deterministic view of man, and that he brought this concern with him to his reading of phenomenology.

The presence of Bergson in Levinas’s work is evident from the very first article which he wrote and published ‘On ‘*Ideas*’ of M. E, Husserl’ (*‘Sur les ‘Ideen’ de M.E. Husserl’*). Indeed many commentators and critics acknowledge that Bergson was somewhat influential at an early stage on Levinas’s thinking, but then proceed to prioritise the phenomenological context of his work, directing attention to the influences of Husserl and Heidegger.⁵ What is of importance for our present purposes is to shed

York: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 38. In his response to Nemo, Levinas emphasised the importance of both Bergson and Durkheim, within university education, in France at that time. ‘Initiation into the great philosophers Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and the Cartesians, Kant. Not yet Hegel, in those twenties, at the Faculty of Arts of Strasbourg! But it was Durkheim and Bergson who seemed to me especially alive in the instruction and attention of the students. It was they whom one cited, and they whom one opposed. They had incontestably been the professors of our masters.’ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 26. At the age of twenty two Levinas attended University in Freiburg, during the 1928–29 school year, to study under Husserl. In Freiburg University Levinas was also then a student of Heidegger.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴ This topic is explicitly central to one of Levinas’s earliest articles, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, which we will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

⁵ For example, one commentator, when discussing Levinas’s years in Strasbourg remarks, ‘[a]lthough he [Levinas] briefly followed Henri Bergson’s process philosophy, which was the intellectual fashion of the time, he soon devoted himself to the burgeoning school of phenomenology’. B. C. Hutchens, *Levinas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 9. Hutchens, therefore, suggests that Levinas’s interest in Bergson was a passing fad, in line with the fashion of the day, and soon to be forgotten. There are of course notable exceptions to this understatement of the influence of Bergson, such as John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), in which Bergson appears right at the beginning and throughout. See, also, Leonard Lawlor, *The*

some light on the kind of philosophical concerns that Levinas brought with him to his initial readings of Husserl and Heidegger's philosophies, and in particular, to show that one of those concerns was freedom, as influenced by his reading of Bergson's work.⁶

Throughout his career in philosophy Levinas makes references to the work of Bergson and stresses both the influence that Bergson has on his own thinking and also on the history of philosophy in general. In several interviews, for example, Levinas notes with sadness that to the detriment of philosophy Bergson was very rarely cited or studied after the Second World War.⁷ Levinas held Bergson's thought in such high esteem that he listed him among the five philosophers that he believed to be indispensable for the way in which the history of philosophy developed, alongside Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger.⁸ One commentator who does not overlook the theme of freedom in the work of Levinas and who links this theme to the philosophy of Bergson in an explicit, however cursory a manner, is Howard Caygill. In chapter one of *Levinas and the Political* we find a fifteen page section devoted to the topic of 'Phenomenology and Freedom' in Levinas's earliest pre-War work. At the beginning of this section Caygill remarks that,

[t]he role of Bergson and the problem of freedom in Levinas's reception of phenomenology is almost wholly unappreciated. Nevertheless it is the key, not only to Levinas's understanding and critique of Husserl and Heidegger and his concept of the political, but also to the centrality of the issue of freedom in the work of French phenomenologists such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In reflecting on his debt to Husserl, Levinas was explicit about finding in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* a way of reconciling the demands of methodological rigour with the radical impetus of Bergson's concept of freedom.⁹

Challenge of Bergsonism (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 60-63. This commentator reads Bergson as posing a possible challenge 'to ethics in the Levinasian sense' (ibid.). Richard Cohen also agrees with Levinas that Bergson was crucial in shaping and influencing the development of the themes of contemporary philosophy, and he features prominently alongside Levinas in Richard Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Simon Critchley does not underestimate the influence of Bergson either, in his, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

⁶ Bergson's presence in *Time and the Other (Le temps et l'autre)* is undeniable as he is often referenced by Levinas. The impact of how Bergson understands the themes of time, *élan vital*, duration, and also the image in relation to Levinas's writings on aesthetics, has been explored by scholars, but work remains to be done on the influence of Bergson in the area of freedom.

⁷ See, *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 30, 86, 154, and 200-201.

⁸ Ibid., 'Intention, Event, and the Other', p. 154.

⁹ Caygill, *Levinas and The Political*, p. 15. As Caygill's study into freedom in the early work of Levinas is the only one of its kind, and is also highly creditable, we will be referring to his reading throughout this chapter. For the most part we will agree with his reading, although we will explore further works that Caygill does not mention and also part ways on a few points, outlined below in the relevant sections.

Husserl's phenomenology was appealing to Levinas partly because he seen in Husserl's approach the methodological tools and intellectual thoroughness that went beyond that of Bergsonian intuition.¹⁰ In Caygill's estimation Levinas was reluctant to abandon the concept of freedom, yet he was not entirely satisfied with Bergson's intuition since it lacked the theoretical foundation that could protect it from fascist appropriation.¹¹ Caygill maintains that Levinas's consistent addressing of the theme of the relationship between intentionality and intuition in his early work reveals an aspiration to find an alternative 'to the opposition of rationalism and irrational intuition' which he found in Bergson's work.¹² Indeed Levinas's first two studies on Husserl, his 'On 'Ideas' of M. E. Husserl' (1929) and his doctoral thesis *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (1930) are slightly coloured by this opposition between Bergson and Husserl. In his article 'On 'Ideas' of M. E. Husserl' we can detect Levinas's argument, however implicit, that Husserl's understanding of intentionality is an answer that overcomes the strict separation between reason and intuition, simultaneity and succession, in Bergson's thought, and as such, potentially offers a more secure foundation for freedom than Bergson can offer. Throughout this chapter, the exact nature of Bergson's influence on Levinas's early thinking on freedom will be indicated as it arises in the particular text under consideration. The first evidence of his influence can be detected in Levinas's first published article, which we shall turn to next.

§1.2 THE INITIAL APPEAL OF HUSSERL

Levinas's 'On 'Ideas' of M. E. Husserl' (*Sur les 'Ideen' de M.E. Husserl*) was first published in 1929 in *Revue Philosophique*. This was Levinas's first published article, and the purpose of this article, as he writes, is 'to present the essential ideas of this book'.¹³ For the most part, therefore, this article is an expositional piece on the First Book of Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a*

¹⁰ This is reflected in Levinas's interview with François Poirié from 1986, in which Levinas explains that one of things that drew him to Husserl's phenomenology was the possibility of thinking 'a new way of unfolding "concepts" beyond the Bergsonian appeal to the inspiration in intuition'. *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 31.

¹¹ Caygill here cites Georges Sorel as an example. Sorel, who was a student of Bergson, appropriated his thought, particularly the concept of *élan vital*, for the purposes of defending the use of violence in the class struggle, in his work *Reflections on Violence. The Classic Essay on Syndicalist Revolution*.

¹² Caygill, *Levinas and The Political*, p. 15.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, 'On Ideas', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 3-31 (p. 3).

Phenomenological Philosophy, following the same general plan as Husserl, dividing his exposition into four sections as Husserl does. At the beginning of the article, however, Levinas notes that as Husserl's terminology is so uncommon in France he will avoid using the specific terminology unless it is necessary for clarity's sake to do so. In place of some of the less well-known phenomenological terminology Levinas uses the better known language in France of Bergson, such as 'animation' and 'life'. It is made clear from the start that Husserl's *Ideas* does not present a system of philosophy, it rather demonstrates that philosophical problems can be posed in a new way and provides the possibility of 'positive work' in philosophy, 'the work of generations'.¹⁴ Here Levinas first mentions one of the main appeals of phenomenology, and one which he will often repeat, that phenomenology presents us with a totally new way of both posing and solving problems in philosophy.

Some of the most interesting elements of this article, in the sense of containing an original contribution by Levinas, come in the form of footnotes, which is unsurprising in a work that purports to be primarily expository.¹⁵ In the footnotes of this article, nonetheless, Levinas presents Husserl's descriptions of intentionality as an indirect critique of Bergson's views on consciousness as spatializing duration.¹⁶ Bergson's contention was that reality is constantly changing and can only be apprehended through intuition. On this account reality is not to be reached through concepts which break up the continuous flow of conscious life, which is duration. Our everyday view of reality rather, in Bergson's view, is mediated through concepts and the mechanical view of time as something that is broken up into consecutive moments in homogenous space, which enables us to do many things such as have a language and to engage with one another.¹⁷ However, when we illegitimately translate the unextended quality of our experiences into extended quantifiable units of time, simultaneity as succession, problems arise. One such problem is that this view of reality, which is a misconception of the duration of lived experience, is consistent with

¹⁴ 'The book of *Ideas* means to be an invitation to work'. Ibid., p. 4. In his interview with Nemo from 1981, Levinas again comments that an element of what he found attractive in phenomenology was the possibility of 'working in philosophy', beyond the activity 'of a purely pedagogical activity or the vanity of fabricating books?' Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 28.

¹⁵ See, Caygill, *Levinas and The Political*, p. 16, n. 26.

¹⁶ See Levinas's footnote in the section 'Consciousness and the perceptual world' which reveals his preference for Husserl's description of intentionality, as it overcomes the dichotomy between reason and intuition in Bergson.

¹⁷ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. by F. L. Pogson (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, INC., 2001), p. 167.

determinism (both physical and psychological) and, as such, makes any defence of free will problematic. Bergson, nevertheless, does not attempt to defend freedom within the parameters of that world-view, he critiques, rather, this approach by presenting an alternative view of consciousness as amenable to measure and constantly becoming.¹⁸ Although we mostly operate within the view of reality mediated through concepts and viewing time as ‘strung on a special line’, and so, as seemingly consistent with causal necessity and determinism, we can get back ‘into pure duration’ and perform a free act, ‘which springs from the self and from the self alone, the act which bears the mark of our personality is truly free, for our self alone will lay claim to its paternity’.¹⁹ As we progress through Levinas’s work we shall see that Levinas was struck by Bergson’s ideas on time and duration, and also his views on freedom as the possibility of ‘novelty’ and alterity. However, on the question of the role and the nature of intuition Levinas finds Husserl’s account superior to Bergson’s description, partly because it offers the possibility of saving freedom from irrationalism.

In the preceding section on intentionality Levinas stresses that Husserl’s great originality lies in his insight into the nature of consciousness as intentionality, that is to say, that consciousness is always a consciousness *of* something. Consciousness, viewed in this light, is not understood as the mediating principle between the perceiver and the world, between a subject and an object. It is not a dormant potentiality that has the possibility of being filled with various intentional (real or mental) knowable objects; consciousness, rather, is *always* relational. Levinas claims that this great insight into the nature of human consciousness does away with the traditional problem of knowledge precisely because here there is no longer a chasm between the subject and an object to be theoretically breached in order to account for the possibility of knowledge. In this section Levinas also turns to another aspect of the traditional approach to the perceptual world of which phenomenology provides an alternative account, and one he notes that does away with the Bergsonian tenet that a permanent object undergoing change whilst maintaining its permanency is a distortion of consciousness.²⁰ In this regard, Husserl’s view of consciousness as intentionality rejects the traditional view of a radical dichotomy between primary qualities belonging to objects in the external world

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

²⁰ ‘To put duration in space is really to contradict oneself and place succession within simultaneity. Hence we must not say that external things *endure*, but rather that there is in them some inexpressible reason in virtue of which we cannot examine them at successive moments of our own duration without observing that they have changed.’ Ibid., p. 227.

while secondary qualities of experiences are viewed as an edifice of subjective consciousness, comparable to the view of consciousness as a container in which certain secondary qualities are stored and then attributed to certain objects in the world when appropriate. From an experiential-phenomenological point of view, there is no evidence for this dichotomy. We do not simply perceive ‘red’, but we perceive many variations of red and still describe each experience as a perception of ‘red’. What belongs to the content of consciousness is not the quality, red, that is attributed to the object, but the sensation of red (the sensed red). In a footnote Levinas notes that this approach makes Bergson’s thesis of viewing the extended permanent object as a distortion of consciousness redundant.²¹ The question of the permanency of substance, or of the subject-object division, then, is overcome. In reference to the transcendental-phenomenological *epoché* put forward by Husserl in *Ideas I*, Levinas explains how *through* the reduction the natural attitude is set aside, including the belief in the absolute existence of external objects — and this also includes belief in the absolute separate existence of one’s own empirical ‘psychological consciousness’ — and what is left over or revealed is ‘absolute consciousness’ (‘pure transcendental consciousness’).²² Hence,

²¹ ‘This apparent antinomy between the multiplicity of sensuous moments which represent the object and the identical unity of the object itself does not, therefore, necessarily imply the Bergsonian thesis that the identical object is a distortion of consciousness: it allows for a resolution through the distinction between the act and the object of consciousness.’ Levinas, ‘On *Ideas*’, p. 182, n.16. Levinas is here referring to the Bergsonian thesis that consciousness continuously flows, and in principle successive states are indistinguishable from one another. In space, however, we must not attribute this same endurance, and the idea of a permanent identical object undergoing change is a distortion of consciousness. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 227.

²² The *epoché* that is methodologically applied in *Ideas I* (1913) is significantly different from, what Husserl will later come to call, the “eidetic reduction” of his earlier *Logical Investigations* (1900-01), and it marks the distinction between the two points to Husserl’s development from descriptive-eidetic psychology to transcendental phenomenology. In *Logical Investigations* the distinction Husserl operates is between empirical fact and essences. In this work, Husserl had conceived of consciousness as part of the empirical person, of the experiencing person, but since the essential features of the experiences of a *normatively valid logical consciousness as such* is the goal of his enquiry, he methodologically sets aside all matters of empirical fact and the question of the external existence of the objects of consciousness, in order to focus on a description of our perception of our own *logical* experiences of consciousness. In *Ideas I* the reduction is a methodological requirement in order to get outside of the natural attitude and to reach the new intended area of study, that of ‘transcendental consciousness’. Thus the distinction is not between ‘*eidōs*’ and ‘fact’, but between mundane consciousness and pure consciousness. Theodore de Boer sets out the distinction between the reduction of *Logical Investigations* and the *epoché* of *Ideas I*, remarking that, ‘It is clear that something more, something different, is at issue here than in *Logical Investigations*. This is immediately apparent from the fact that all of reality, including our consciousness, is disconnected, and that the residue is now called “pure” or “transcendental consciousness” [...] It [the *epoché*] then appears to be an operation that makes a new area accessible to us, an area that can become the field of a new science.’ Th. De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga (The Hague, Boston and London: Nijhoff, 1978), pp. 328-31, (p. 331), see, also, *ibid.*, pp. 454-63. Although Levinas does not explicitly compare the eidetic reduction in the *Logical Investigations* with the *epoché* of the natural attitude in *Ideas I*, he clearly demonstrates an appreciation for Husserl’s new and radical understanding of ‘consciousness’ as ‘pure consciousness’ in *Ideas I*, and how on such an

after the reduction is implemented, what is reflected on in phenomenology is the ‘animation’ of consciousness and its objectivities, that is, the experiencing of, for example, ‘red’.²³

Just as in the section mentioned above, where Levinas presents intentionality as an alternative approach to the opposition between rationalism and irrational intuition and the problem of the relationship between consciousness and an object, Bergson is again eclipsed by Husserl when it comes to Husserl’s view of the concept as necessarily incomplete in our experiences. This indicates that Levinas’s interest in phenomenology was, at least partially, due to the alternative way of thinking it provided, a way that was not limited to the strict opposition between intuition and concepts. One does not have to choose between the two opposing options left open to us by Bergson, where consciousness is either viewed as intuition and, as such, not possible as an object of study, or known through stifling concepts. As Levinas eloquently phrases it in the footnote,

[w]ith Husserl there is a third possibility. Intelligence does not work solely with the help of geometrical concepts — there can be essence without there being immobility and death in it. The spirit of finesse and the spirit of geometry are not the only possible ones: knowledge knows other paths.²⁴

Caygill suggests that what is at stake in this couched discussion, relegated to footnotes, is the concept of freedom. In *Time and Free Will* Bergson aligns freedom with intuition and duration, as well as in opposition to conceptuality and geometrical space.²⁵ When Levinas calls this strict separation of intuition and reason into question, he is also,

understanding, consciousness cannot be the object of study from a natural-scientific empirical-psychological perspective. When discussing the *epoché* of *Ideas I* Levinas points out that one could query if in the transcendental reduction from the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude consciousness is not also bracketed as part of the existing world. He then goes on to explain that this is not the case, pointing out that what resists the *epoché*, and what is therefore the object of study, is one’s own actual consciousness but purified of naturalistic conceptions and ‘considered from a certain point of view’. Levinas, ‘On *Ideas*’, p. 13. He goes on to draw a distinction between ‘absolute consciousness’ (‘pure transcendental consciousness’) and ‘psychological consciousness’, and to point out that although it is true to say that ‘consciousness’ as a psychological object of study is within nature, and is indeed set aside in the transcendental reduction, what remains, for Husserl, is ‘absolute consciousness’ (‘pure transcendental consciousness’) which is independent of nature. Levinas, ‘On *Ideas*’, p. 16.

²³ Caygill notes that Levinas’s use of the phrase ‘sensations are moments of life and not space’ to characterise how intentionality ‘animates’ the content of consciousness, explicitly leaves the Bergsonian view behind. Caygill, *Levinas and The Political*, p. 17.

²⁴ Levinas, ‘On *Ideas*’, p. 183, n. 20. Levinas is referring here to a distinction Pascal made between the ‘*esprit de géométrie*’ (spirit of geometry) and ‘*esprit de finesse*’ (spirit of refinement/delicacy), in his treatise *De l’Esprit géométrique*.

²⁵ ‘It is because, finally, even in the cases where the action is freely performed, we cannot reason about it without setting out its conditions externally to one another, therefore in space no longer in pure duration.’ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 240.

therefore, questioning the understanding of freedom as located solely in intuition. Thus it is his indicated preference for Husserl's third way — the possibility of attaining an inexact (non-mathematical) concept through the description of an individual *Erlebnis*, guided by an eidetic intuition — which leaves open the possibility of a description of freedom that is neither opposed to a concept nor lacking any firm foundation in intuitive experience. We will see that at the end of his *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* Levinas has in no way left Bergson completely behind because in that work Levinas will favour Bergson's approach to freedom as it provides a metaphysical foundation that is lacking in Husserl.

The next section that Levinas mentions Bergson, again in a footnote, is in a section entitled 'Subjectively oriented phenomenology'. In this section Levinas draws his reader's attention to certain issues of concern to Husserl regarding subjectively oriented phenomenology, such as, the constitution of time in consciousness as duration as opposed to cosmic time or measurable objective clock-time, that are similar to concerns in Bergson's thought and that overlap in places, despite Husserl's lack of knowledge of Bergson's work. Caygill believes both this and the two earlier footnotes provide us with further insight into the underlying theme that is directing the entire commentary, which is 'a set of variations on the themes of an intuitive conceptuality and a conceptual intuition'.²⁶ This implicit focus is what Levinas termed 'the third alternative' offered by Husserl, against the strict opposition between intuition and concepts. Both the preceding sections and the sections that follow, and the continued focus on the role of intuition, understood in the broader Husserlian sense of including eidetic intuition, can be seen to support this hypothesis. Intuition is given an extended role in Husserl's description. It has a double function as an intuition of both object and essence. The immediate data of consciousness, through intuition, is intuitable not only as, for example, pure individual sensed objects (e.g., seeing a piece of white paper), but also in categorial form that are expressed in, for example, a synthetic judgement (e.g., 'this paper is white').²⁷ The categorial object is given as immediately or directly to a logical-categorial consciousness as is the individual sensed object given to sensuous intuition. In addition to this, Husserl notes that at the basis of universal *a priori*

²⁶ Caygill, *Levinas and The Political*, p. 19.

²⁷ See, Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Vol. II. trans. by J. N. Findlay, ed. by Dermot Moran (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), Logical Investigation, VI, Ch. 6 Sensuous and Categorial Intuition, § 40. 'The problem of the fulfilment of categorial meaning-forms, with a thought leading towards its solution,' pp. 271-73.

judgements, such as, for instance, colour implies extension, are ‘general objects’ that are also given to intuition; that is to say, one can see immediately that it is of the essence of colour (as a universal object) to be extended. This basis in eidetic intuition provides the experiential basis for the validity of this judgement for not only every actual colour (or coloured thing) that one sees empirically but also for all possible individual colours (or coloured thing) that can be experienced by any rational consciousness. This implies that in experience there is more than individual colours given to sensuous intuition (or sense judgement) because ‘essences’ themselves are given to our experience, albeit to eidetic ideation or eidetic intuition. Thus it follows for Husserl that no longer is the judgement mediated through a concept, such as was in the case of Kant’s descriptions of consciousness, but an *intellectual intuition* ‘grasps them’ [essences] based on the sensuous intuition.²⁸ And it is ‘[i]n this view,’ as Levinas remarks, that ‘rationalism and empiricism are *in a way* reconciled. The source of knowledge is indeed experience, but experience in the broad sense of the term, understood as intuition, which can see essences and categories in addition to sensuous empirical facts’.²⁹

Intuition, then, serves a double function in Husserl’s account, to present individual objects to sense experience whilst, at the same time, to be open to intuiting higher objects of intelligible structures that are necessarily true of our actual experiences embedded in experience itself. That consciousness is always a consciousness of something includes ‘essences’ or intelligible structures that make our sensible experiences possible. It is this phenomenological concept of intentionality, as Levinas correctly comments, that supports the third alternative, ‘conceptual intuition’.

It is not without reason, then, that as Levinas proceeds through his commentary on *Ideas* he stresses that the great originality of Husserl lies in his description of consciousness as intentionality.³⁰ No longer is consciousness viewed as a bridge between the subject and the object, rather consciousness is the relation with an object *itself*. Caygill, however, highlights a problem with this view of intentionality as the

²⁸ Levinas, ‘On *Ideas*’, p. 6. Husserl’s discovery of categorical intuition paves the way for eidetic intuition, in the sense that it widens the basis of intuition from sensuous intuition to directly intended objects of categorical intuition, e.g., seeing a piece of white paper *as white* indicates a higher object of intuition in addition to the sensuous perception of the individual piece of white paper. Categorical intuition (seeing a piece of white paper as ‘white’), nevertheless, is not eidetic intuition, the latter is the intuitive grasp of essential intelligible structures without which the particular experience would not be possible (e.g. seeing colour is extended, i.e., the essence of colour is to be extended), and this ‘intuition’ is what ‘justifies’ the *a priori judgment* ‘colour implies extension’. See, De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*.

²⁹ Levinas, ‘On *Ideas*’, p. 7, my emphasis.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20 and p. 22.

fundamental property of consciousness itself, and not as a bond between consciousness and an object. As a 'fundamental relation' intentionality would need to precede consciousness and its object, and yet consciousness itself is already intentional. If consciousness is viewed as intentionality, which is the fundamental property of consciousness, how can intentionality precede consciousness when consciousness is intentional? A more fundamental relation would need to be posited, which would itself need to overcome the same problem, and theoretically this view of intentionality could dissolve into a 'bad infinity'.³¹ How can consciousness be both the object of reflection and the means of reflecting? This problem is overcome through the transcendence of intentionality. Although consciousness is both the object and the means of study through intuition, this does not result in a bad infinity, as thought always transcends itself. The transcendental nature of consciousness is one of the crucial elements of Husserl's approach that made it so appealing to Levinas, and will become of ever more importance to his own position as his work progresses. Consciousness as the object of inquiry is immediately accessible through inner perception, however, as thought is thought that always transcends itself, consciousness is both directed to itself and yet always beyond itself. The problem that faced Descartes' *cogito*, that of having to justify the belief in the existence of an external world once the existence of the 'I' was deduced from the premise 'I think', is overcome through a similar basis, that of the nature of consciousness. The difference being that for Husserl the essence of consciousness is to be relational. It is in the next section, through a contrast between Descartes' *cogito* 'I think' (*cogito*) with Husserl's 'I think something' (*cogito cogitatum*) that Levinas stresses this originality again. The relation to the object, which is intentionality, can be immediately known to intuition, and it is this that leads Levinas to characterise phenomenology as the 'intuitive study of intentionality'.³² Similarly, Levinas notes that the distinction between a 'mental' and a 'real' object, attributed by him to the scholastic-Aristotelian tradition, is destroyed.³³ As thought transcends itself the relation

³¹ Caygill, *Levinas and The Political*, p. 19.

³² '[T]he "relation to the object", intentionality, in all the wealth of its modifications and forms, becomes accessible to immanent intuition. This intuitive study of intentionality — is phenomenology.' Levinas, 'On *Ideas*', p. 22.

³³ 'Husserl's discovery was that it is the so-called real object itself that in reflection is given as a mental object.' Levinas, 'On *Ideas*', p. 183, n. 23. On this point, Levinas overlooks the importance of Husserl's relation to the work of Husserl's teacher, Franz Brentano. In his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) Brentano already rejected this particular distinction, believed to be a feature of Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy, between a 'mental' and a 'real' object as two objects directly intended in perception. On this point Husserl was in agreement with Brentano. A member of Brentano's school,

to an object is with that of an existing object, and given through intuition. As we will see below, in Levinas's later writings he will be critical of the 'meaning giving' (*Sinngebung*) role of intentionality and also come to view it as more significant than Husserl himself realised, as, for Levinas, in Husserl's account the ego is credited with too much. In his not too distant article 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', written in 1940, Levinas will align this meaning giving role of consciousness with a particular view of freedom, which we shall examine in more detail below.

Although it is not directly related to freedom, it is interesting to take note of the final section of this paper, which Levinas entitles 'The intersubjective reduction'. Levinas remarks that the work he has been commenting on focuses mainly on the solitary ego and, as such, cannot 'exhaust the meaning of the objectivity of this reality', which could only come through the agreement of multiple egos.³⁴ At this very early stage Levinas harbours hope that Husserl's later researches in phenomenology will offer an adequate account of intersubjectivity, through the theory of empathy (*Einfühlung*), in his yet unpublished works (of *Ideas II*), and in doing so do away with the threat of solipsism that hangs in the background, securing a firmer foundation for truth beyond that of the lone ego.³⁵ If phenomenology is to be successful,

it must pass beyond the quasi-solipsistic attitude in which the [transcendental-] phenomenological reduction, which may be called the 'egological reduction,' leaves us [...]. But all the investigations of egological phenomenology must be subordinated to the 'intersubjective phenomenology' which alone will be able to exhaust the meaning of truth and reality.³⁶

Kasimir Twardowski, develops Brentano's doctrine of intentionality in the direction of the Scholastic doctrine, but Husserl was critical of this development. Husserl, nevertheless, was critical of Brentano's belief that the directly intended object (the intentional object of sense), e.g., a colour given to outer sense perception, was an 'immanent' object in consciousness and also a 'sign' for an extra-mentally existing 'real object' that is discovered by natural scientists, i.e., molecular movements (light particles or light waves). From a phenomenological point of view, the intended object of perception is the end term of perception, and not a sign for something else, as Husserl correctly argues. See, De Boer, *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, esp. his section on 'the intentional object and "real" object', pp. 190-95. See, also, Cyril McDonnell, 'Brentano's Revaluation of the Scholastic Concept of Intentionality into a Root-Concept of Descriptive Psychology', in *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society*, (2006), pp. 124-71.

³⁴ Levinas, 'On *Ideas*', p. 30.

³⁵ As this is mostly an expositional piece Levinas rarely diverges from the purpose of presenting a summary of Husserl's *Ideas I*. One can sense, nevertheless, Levinas's own concerns couched within the article, such as the questions he raises at the end of section 13. 'How can one distinguish consciousness from the object toward which it is directed? And in the special case of the world, toward which consciousness is directed as toward an object, and to which it is bound in animate being — is consciousness truly distinct from it [*qua* living being in the world]?' Levinas, 'On *Ideas*', p. 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

At this early stage we can see Levinas's preference for questions relating to intersubjectivity and not to the lone ego's constitution of its self and the world. A preference that is again evident in his choice to select the fifth and sixth meditation for translation, in his joint translation with Gabrielle Peiffer, of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (1931).

Levinas carries over his interest in 'intuition' into his next substantial work *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (*Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*) (1930). The opposition between Husserl and Bergson hinted at in his earlier 'On *Ideas*' article is likewise carried over to this text. Levinas will maintain his position in the article above, where he argued that Husserl's intentionality and 'conceptual intuition' provides an alternative to Bergson's view of intuition, as in Bergson's account there is no rational basis for intuition. Yet despite this position, Levinas has become critical of Husserl's intellectualism and, under the influence of Heidegger, will raise the question whether the primacy of theoretical consciousness and the transcendental reduction leads the phenomenologist away from concrete life as it is actually lived, and from the historicity of man, and hence will result in an inaccurate philosophy of life.³⁷ Although this is not a criticism that could be made of Heidegger's philosophical approach — precisely because Heidegger incorporates central features and tenets of Wilhelm Dilthey's (1833-1911) historical hermeneutics and philosophy of life into his elaboration of hermeneutic phenomenology — when it comes to the question of freedom Heidegger's approach will also be shown to be both inaccurate and insufficient. We will examine this below on Levinas's work from the period that deals with Heidegger more specifically. For now, it suffices to say that Levinas will end his doctoral thesis on the question of freedom, by criticising Husserl's position for lacking the metaphysical foundation of freedom that Bergson provides.

§1.3 THE ALLEGED INTELLECTUALISM OF HUSSERL

Despite the lapse of time, the addition of scholarship on Husserl's phenomenology, and the youthful age of Levinas at the time of its composition, *The Theory of Intuition in*

³⁷ 'It is in life that we must search for the origin of reality, for the origin of the objects of perception as well as of the sciences. This life has a historical character in the sense in which it is said that "all men have a history" [...] this historicity is not a secondary property of man as if man existed first and then became temporal and historical. Historicity and temporality form the very substantiality of man's substance.' Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 156.

Husserl's Phenomenology (1930) still remains to be a great introduction to Husserl's phenomenology. At the time of its writing only a limited number of Husserl's writings were published.³⁸ Levinas, however, was a student at Freiburg from 1928-1929, where Husserl was teaching and had just retired, making way for Heidegger's return to take up the chair of philosophy that Husserl bequeathed in 1928. This gave Levinas direct contact with both Husserl and Heidegger and thus an additional insight into both Husserl's phenomenology and one of its arch-critics (though at that time Husserl still had not seen Heidegger as a radical critic but as a follower of his idea of phenomenology). Indeed Levinas's reading of Husserl is heavily influenced by Heidegger, which is evident throughout the text, though it is also not lacking in originality. Though Levinas will move on later to re-evaluate his positions contained in this text, despite these later nuances and a later return to additional favourable aspects of Husserl's thought, Levinas's critical reading of Husserl from this time will broadly remain the same.³⁹ In his article 'The Work of Edmund Husserl' (*L'Oeuvre d'Edmond Husserl*) (1940), Levinas will delve deeper into the form which his criticism of the absoluteness of consciousness and Husserl's intellectualism took in *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, and come to slightly reevaluate his position. Given that a main focus of that article is the concept of freedom, we will examine that article in more detail in a separate section below. The most crucial section of the current text for our understanding of Levinas's development, in relation to freedom, is the short conclusion.

It becomes increasingly obvious throughout Levinas's thesis that the central point of criticism that he wishes to raise against Husserl is the alleged primacy of theory and Husserl's intellectualism in the elaboration of Husserl's idea of phenomenology. This intellectualism is revealed in and through the role of representation in Husserl's phenomenology.⁴⁰ Levinas characterises Husserl's philosophy as an objectifying

³⁸ The only books by Husserl that were published at the time of writing were *Philosophie der Arithmetik* (1891), *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900-01 and 2nd ed. 1913-1920), *Ideen* (1913), *Vorlesungen der Phänomenologie des inner Zeitbewusstseins* (1920), and lastly *Formale und transzendente Logik* (1929) which was published too late to be used by Levinas.

³⁹ As late as 1984, in 'Ethics as First Philosophy', Levinas describes Husserl's intentionality as 'understood as "consciousness of something", and so is inseparable from its "intentional object". This structure has a noetic-noematic composition in which representation or objectivization is the incontestable model.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics as first philosophy' (1984), trans. by S. Hand and M. Temple, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 75-87 (p. 76).

⁴⁰ Although it is accurate to say that Husserl always stressed the role of objectifying reflection in his description of phenomenology, it should be noted that in his later work Husserl saw that life is in fact prior to reflection. This can be seen most notably in his *The Crisis of European Sciences and*

(*Gegenständlichkeit*) thought that gives priority to representation (*Vorstellung*), a view which Levinas will maintain throughout his work. Intentional analysis takes place through the act of consciousness reflecting on itself. It is when consciousness turns on itself to reflect on what was already present to consciousness. As Levinas says, '[t]he whole philosophical value of reflection consists in allowing us to grasp our life, and the world in our life, such as they are prior to reflection'.⁴¹ What you grasp in reflection is identical to the representation of the original lived experience. Levinas, however, wonders whether the form of representation exhausts the structure of intentionality. Are all intentions reducible to a purely theoretical representation? Although Levinas does not refrain from criticism throughout his presentation of the Husserl's position, his criticism should be seen as criticism from the inside of phenomenology because Levinas is not trying to undermine the phenomenological approach. He is, rather, criticising Husserl's limited application of his own method, and seeking to broaden this method to include the forgotten aspects of pre-reflective life, experiences that have a sense other than those that are reducible to representation.⁴² As Levinas puts it himself,

[i]t is precisely the very wide extension of the Husserlian notion of intentionality that makes it interesting. It expresses only the very general fact that consciousness transcends itself, that it directs itself toward something other than itself, that it has a sense. But 'to have a sense' does not mean the same as 'to represent'.⁴³

Levinas uses love as an example of an intention that has a sense, yet is not reducible to representation. 'The characteristic of the loved object is precisely to be given in a love intention, an intention which is irreducible to a purely theoretical representation.'⁴⁴ Affectivity will play a crucial role in Levinas's own later philosophy. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, through affectivity the power and the freedom of the transcendental ego is put into question. Here, however, Levinas uses affective life as an

Transcendental Phenomenology (1936), in particular his discussions of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), 'the life-world, for us who wakenly live in it, is always already there, existing in advance for us, the "ground" of all praxis whether theoretical or extratheoretical', Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an introduction to phenomenological philosophy*, trans. by David Carr (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 142. For further discussion on Husserl's understanding of the *Lebenswelt*, and differing views on the extent to which it can be said to indicate a shift in his thinking from *Ideas*, see, *Science and the Life-World: essays on Husserl's Crisis of European Sciences*, ed. by David Hyder and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 136.

⁴² For more on this topic of Levinas's reading of Husserl, see, John E. Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

⁴³ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

example of an intention that is not reducible to theoretical representation. ‘Value or affective predicates therefore belong to the existence of the world, which is not an “indifferent” medium of pure representations.’⁴⁵ Just as in his ‘On *Ideas*’ commentary above, in his thesis Levinas once again points out that Husserl’s work up to that point is mostly concerned with the solitary ego. Here Levinas stresses how this is another example of how the reduction as interpreted will not reveal concrete life (of human intersubjectivity). Descriptions limited to the lone ego’s constitution of objects will give us a distorted view of the world, and concrete being will remain unexamined. Only when Husserl includes the study of the intersubjective experience will a more adequate picture of reality emerge. ‘If we limit ourselves to describing the constitution of objects in an individual consciousness, in an *ego*, we will never reach objects as they are in concrete life but will reach only an abstraction.’⁴⁶ Levinas states that Husserl’s phenomenological reduction can only be a first step towards phenomenology, as we must also discover ‘others’ and ‘the intersubjective world’.⁴⁷ Levinas references Husserl’s work on *Einfühlung* (empathy) to date, and also his influential unpublished works (of *Ideas II*, which comprises Edith Stein’s editorial and contributions to this debate) that further describe how empathy gives us a phenomenological intuition of the life of others. In a later chapter Levinas again asks if the intellectualism of Husserl is an accurate portrayal of our ‘attitude towards reality’, placing Heidegger’s ‘field of activity or of *care*’ in contrast to this.⁴⁸ Moving away from the modern idealist conception of the subject, and following Heidegger’s approach, Levinas asks, does theoretical contemplation really characterise our main attitude towards the world? This crucial criticism of the intellectualism of Husserl is the main focus of his conclusion, only in his conclusion Levinas explicitly looks at this criticism in relation to freedom.

In the final chapter of his doctoral study, and then again in his conclusion, Levinas criticises Husserl for not questioning the impetus behind the *epoché* nor the subsequent transcendental reduction itself. Husserl himself describes the *epoché* as an act of our ‘perfect freedom’.⁴⁹ Levinas notes that Husserl offers no explanation for

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁹ ‘The attempt to doubt universally belongs to the realm of our *perfect freedom*: we can *attempt to doubt* anything whatever, no matter how firmly convinced of it, even assured of it in an adequate evidence, we may be.’ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book*, trans. by F. Kersten (The Hague/Boston/Lancaster: Nijhoff, 1982), p. 58. As Levinas noted in his dissertation of 1930, Husserl does not question what gives rise to the possibility of

where the desire to perform such a highly theoretical-intellectual operation comes from. ‘How does man in the naïve attitude, immersed in the world, the “born dogmatic”, suddenly become aware of his naïveté?’⁵⁰ Levinas wonders what gives rise to the situation of the *Homo philosophus*. It would appear that Husserl’s reflections began too late, taking the critical attitude of the philosopher for granted. The foundation of the freedom that is needed both to firstly question one’s position and then to subsequently perform the reduction is not sought. The freedom of theory is taken as a given and the metaphysical foundation of the freedom of critical thinking is not questioned.

Although he [Husserl] solves this problem by talking of our freedom to neutralize the ‘existential thesis’ of the naïve attitude in order to begin looking at it, the freedom in question here, analogous to doubt, is the freedom of theory. We are led to effectuate the reduction because we can, and because it opens a new field of knowledge. The freedom and the impulse which lead us to reduction and philosophical intuition present by themselves nothing new with respect to the freedom and stimulation of theory. The latter is taken as primary, so that Husserl gives himself the freedom of theory just as he gives himself theory.⁵¹

In his foreword to his translation of this text André Orianne focuses on this problem of the metaphysical foundation of the reduction, and he reminds the reader that Husserl does raise this question in § 31 of *Ideas*. Husserl rests the possibility of the reduction on the Cartesian *methodical* doubt, which is itself based on our freedom to suspend theoretical judgments.⁵² Levinas refers to Husserl’s explanation in the first line of the quotation above. Levinas, nonetheless, is dissatisfied with this explanation as he argues that this freedom is restricted to the level of theory, and is detached from the historicity and temporality of man. Also, crucially, Husserl takes this theoretical freedom as a given, and does not seek to find its basis.

Adrian Peperzak claims that in order to raise such a criticism, the critic, in this case Levinas, must at least suspect the possibility of a fundamental attitude different

such a free act, nor does he explain how a subject in the natural attitude can come to doubt such an attitude. ‘The natural attitude is not purely contemplative; the world is not purely an object of scientific investigation. Yet it seems that man *suddenly* accomplishes the phenomenological reduction by a purely theoretical act of reflection on life. Husserl offers no explanation for this change of attitude and does not even consider it a problem. Husserl does not raise the metaphysical problem of the situation of the *Homo philosophus*.’ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 157.

⁵¹ Ibid. In his introduction to the second chapter of this work contained in *The Levinas Reader*, Hand notes ‘we can see the beginnings of the ‘difficult freedom’ of Levinas’s mature ethics’. *The Levinas Reader*, p. 11.

⁵² Orianne also notes that on this point Paul Ricoeur, in his French translation of *Ideen*, comes to a similar conclusion to that of Levinas, ‘The freedom in question here cannot yet be understood’. Edmund Husserl, *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie*, trans. by P. Ricoeur (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 99, n. I.

from the one he criticises. Peperzak then wonders what alternative position could have possibly influenced Levinas in such a way so as to enable him to raise such a criticism. Who could have inspired him to put into question the universality and fundamental importance of ‘the theoretical ideal and the realm of representation’?⁵³ What influence led him to ask from where does the ‘freedom of theory’ as critical consciousness come from? Peperzak entertains two possible sources only, the religious tradition of Levinas or the writings of Heidegger. Ruling out the religious tradition of Levinas, as Levinas himself makes no reference to his religious tradition in the early works, Peperzak concludes that the influence must be Heidegger.⁵⁴ One should not downplay the crucial influence of the thought of Heidegger on Levinas’s thinking at this time, and it is clearly evident throughout this work.⁵⁵ With regard to the question of needing a firm foundation for the theory of freedom, however, Bergson is a more likely candidate. Heidegger may have influenced the formation of such a question, but Levinas does not go along with Heidegger’s answer. At this stage Levinas was well aware of the Heideggerian answer to the question of what shakes man out of his naïve attitude and brings about the desire to confront it; it is the awareness of one’s own Being-towards-death in the affective disposition of anxiety. This will bring *Dasein* back to an understanding of its *own* finite condition, taking *Dasein* out of its inauthentic fallen state that assumes, naively, the meaning of being to be unquestionable. From an early stage, however, Levinas did not believe that this experience was sufficiently other to generate such a critical reversal, or to found freedom. On the question of the foundation of freedom Levinas turns to Bergson, believing him to still have something important to offer, even if, on his final assessment, Levinas finds Bergson’s account of freedom to also be insufficient.

But it is another aspect which shows the deeply intellectualist character of Husserl’s intuitionism. Bergson’s philosophical intuition tightly bound to man’s concrete life and destiny, reaches to its highest point, namely, the act of freedom. This metaphysical foundation of intuition is lacking in Husserl’s phenomenology, and the ties which relate intuition to all the vital forces which define concrete existence are foreign to his thought. Philosophy begins with the

⁵³ Adrian Peperzak, ‘Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics: Levinas’ Perspective on Husserl and Heidegger’, *Man and World*, 16 (1983), 113-27 (p. 118).

⁵⁴ ‘If we set aside the religious tradition to which Levinas belongs — as do his own first works — the answer is clearly: the thought of Martin Heidegger.’ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵⁵ The passage from *Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s phenomenology* which Peperzak quotes clearly demonstrates this. ‘Is our main attitude toward reality that of theoretical contemplation? Is not the world presented in its very being as a centre of action, as a field of activity or of care — to speak the language of Martin Heidegger?’ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 119.

reduction. This is an act in which we consider life in all its concreteness but *no longer live it*.⁵⁶

Levinas goes on to criticise Bergson's position on the division between the intellect and intuition, and on this point again favours Husserl. Although Levinas finds Husserl's approach to be intellectual and theoretical, Bergson's account of freedom has the opposite problem. He argues that there is a strict division between intuition and reason, and thus places freedom firmly on the side of intuition rendering freedom to be understood as spontaneous, sporadic and irrational. Husserl's understanding of the intentionality of consciousness, one's consciousness as always a consciousness *of* something, as self-surpassing of itself, is an alternative answer to this strict separation between reason and intuition in Bergson. Yet concrete life will be left aside by Husserl in his implementation of the transcendental reduction to 'pure [disembodied] consciousness'. Or, as Levinas succinctly puts it in the quote above, '[t]his is an act in which we consider life in all its concreteness but no longer live it'. Bergson's division, nonetheless, between intuition and reason, placing freedom on the side of intuition, and so, spontaneous, sporadic and irrational is *unphenomenological*. Undoubtedly Heidegger was hugely influential in opening up the concrete world and man's lived experience, prior to theoretical contemplation of 'pure consciousness', as a field for phenomenological reflection, yet Levinas will become increasingly dissatisfied with Heidegger's view on freedom.

Caygill maintains that *already*, at this stage, Levinas views Heidegger's philosophy as presenting a view of man as wholly conditioned by the past and his finitude, and hence fatalistic and determined. He references Levinas's conclusion in support of this view. 'It is through this *sui generis* phenomenon in the constitution of a personality that man has a specific manner of being his past [...]. Historicity and temporality form the very substantiality of man's substance.'⁵⁷ Caygill's conclusion may not be so clearly evident from this passage alone, but it is significant that in relation to the particular question of the foundation of freedom, Levinas turned to Bergson's position and not to Heidegger's. If, at this stage of his work, it remains to be shown without doubt that Levinas was already assessing Heidegger's understanding of freedom as fatalist and determined, then the seeds of the criticism to come can be identified here. Levinas will very shortly begin to associate more explicitly Heidegger's

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 155, my emphasis.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

view on freedom with fatalism and determinism, and as transcendence towards nothing, as we shall argue below.

Levinas believes that underlying Husserl's view of the primacy of theory, as Levinas interprets it, is a particular concept of freedom and autonomy. The primacy of theory is caught up with a particular understanding of being, and one that is ahistorical.⁵⁸ After the reduction consciousness is looked at from an ahistorical transcendental standpoint.

The historicity of consciousness does not appear as an original phenomenon, because the suprahistorical attitude of theory supports, according to Husserl, all our conscious life. The admission of representation as the basis of all acts of consciousness undermines the historicity of consciousness and gives intuition an intellectualist character.⁵⁹

The experience of conscious theoretical-cognitive reflection is not reducible to reflection on (human) experience. Human experience contains more than the ability of consciousness to reflect ahistorically on itself. This particular point of criticism not only indicates the influence of Heidegger, but also, indirectly, the influence of Dilthey, who was very influential on Heidegger's own thinking, in particular in relation to the importance that Dilthey had placed on the historicity (facticity) of man and the necessity for a historical-hermeneutical approach to any philosophy of man in the human sciences. Dilthey stressed the point that human life, as lived, is historical and that experiences of human life (*Erlebnis*) implicitly contain understanding (*Verstehen*), which individuals attempt to further understand through articulating that understanding in expression (*Ausdruck*) in poetry, plays, works of art and all 'objects' of culture. Cyril McDonnell has decisively argued that this particular historical-hermeneutic emphasis in phenomenology, which comes to Levinas through Heidegger, can be traced to the work of Dilthey, who argued against such ahistorical methods of reflection for the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) in their attempts to understand the human person.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ On this point we are in agreement with Peperzak. See, his, 'Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics', p. 117.

⁵⁹ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, pp. 156-57.

⁶⁰ See, Cyril McDonnell, 'Heidegger, Dilthey, and "the Being-Question": Towards a Critical Appraisal of Heidegger's Use of Hermeneutical Phenomenology', in *Transcendence and Phenomenology*, ed. by Conor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr (London: SCM Press, 2007), pp. 370-403. See, also, Cyril McDonnell, 'Understanding and Assessing Heidegger's Topic in Phenomenology in Light of His Appropriation of Dilthey's Hermeneutic Manner of Thinking', in *Maynooth Philosophical Papers*, 4 (2007), 31-54. Dilthey's influence on Heidegger is evident in the texts of Heidegger's lectures from 1925 and 1927, and so, one can infer that Dilthey was indirectly an influence on Levinas through not only Heidegger's work, but Heidegger's seminars that Levinas attended. In a 1925 lecture-course Heidegger explains to his students that 'Dilthey's scientific work sought to secure that way of regarding man which,

This critique of ahistorical transcendental consciousness will be returned to in Levinas's 1940 article 'The Work of Edmund Husserl'. On Levinas's reading of Husserl, the subject gives meaning to Being without any limitations placed on it from the outside, such as by history or by others. In his commentary on Levinas's interpretation of Husserl's work during this period, Peperzak remarks, '[t]he inner secret of Husserl's preference for the contemplative attitude is a desire for sovereignty'.⁶¹ This evaluation is perhaps a little too harsh. Though Levinas identified an ethical problem in Husserl's approach — that the subject is unquestionably held as the source of all meaning — the failure on Husserl's part to identify this particular problem does not mean that Husserl gave no consideration to ethics. Husserl was aware of, and perhaps driven by, his own personal responsibility, and that of other 'scientists' engaged in research in both the natural (*Naturwissenschaften*) and human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), and in this sense he could be said to have a desire for sovereignty, but such sovereignty does not rule out consideration for fellow human beings. Even though Husserl would not go as far as to say that responsibility precedes freedom, he was aware of the responsibility that comes with freedom.⁶²

It is interesting to note that Levinas ends his doctoral thesis reflecting on the foundations of freedom. Levinas will continue to question this view of freedom, where

contrary to [natural-] scientific psychology, does not take him for its object as a thing of nature, explaining and construing him by means of other universal laws of "events", but instead *understands* him as a *living person actively involved in history* and *describes* and *analyzes* him in this understanding.' Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. by Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 117.

⁶¹ Peperzak, 'Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics', pp. 117-18.

⁶² In his, *Ethics Exegesis and Philosophy* Cohen points out that Husserl was not blind to the question of the ethical dimension to his thought, though his thinking on the topic was far from the understanding of ethics that Levinas would come to develop. 'Was Husserl unaware of the ethical dimensions of his thought? Who can believe it? Husserl, whose voice rang like a clarion cry in the dark days of the 1930s, certainly grasped the centrality of ethics, even if for him it was still the ethics of science, hence an ethics instrumental for a scientific humanity.' Cohen, *Ethics Exegesis and Philosophy*, p. 118. Cohen draws our attention to a conversation between Husserl and Eugen Fink, which took place on 22nd September 1931 where Husserl reportedly told Fink that the *telos* of the whole of life was directed towards a harmony and consistency, and that the unethical is that which is contrary to such *telos*. The achievement of such harmony was dependent upon honesty. In speaking with Fink, using a particular reference, which prefigures Levinas's repeated use of this very same passage in his own work, Husserl referred to a quotation from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky, 'I must be able to affirm the acts of others as well as my own acts. Husserl quoted Dostoyevsky as saying each is guilty for the guilt of all.' Husserl went on to explain that the achievement of this universal harmony depended on individuals acknowledging their own responsibility, what Husserl termed a 'special calling', and being true to this difficult task. 'The universal harmony reckons on me and my freedom. It is easy to say, be *ehrlich* [honest], but it is a frightening task to carry out the injunction. Even in the scientific field, in phenomenological description one finds in spite of the best will in the world that there creep in little things that one cannot back completely, that are *unehrlich* [dishonest]'. Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 35-36.

the subject alone is seen and deposited as primary and as the giver of meaning to Being. Not only will Levinas refuse to simply accept this view of freedom as a given, questioning where does it come from, but, he will also later ask, what is it for? For whom is my freedom a good?

§1.4 THE INFLUENCE OF HEIDEGGER AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCRETE LIFE

In Levinas's 'Ideas' article discussed above, we noted why Levinas favoured Husserl's stress on the intentionality of consciousness because, in some sense, it can be viewed as a middle way between the strict opposition involving concepts and intuition in Bergson's philosophy. A short early article by Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology' (1931) ('*Fribourg, Husserl et la phénoménologie*'), helps us to appreciate what drew Levinas to Freiburg and the status of his relationship with phenomenology at that time.⁶³ It also gives us an insight into the direction that Levinas took in his early reading of Husserl, and the influence of Heidegger in this regard is once again evident. The implicit presence of Heidegger is hard to ignore in this short text, with Levinas's numerous references to 'concrete existence' and 'concrete situation'. It is, in other words, Heidegger's approach to phenomenology, and the possibility of examining concrete life, that impressed Levinas (as it did on many others at that time)⁶⁴ at this early stage, beyond that of Husserl's phenomenology.⁶⁵ In one of the most telling passages, which reveal to us Levinas's interest in phenomenology, one cannot help but read the references to Heidegger.

⁶³ For more on Levinas's reflections on his time in Freiburg and his impressions of Husserl and Heidegger, see his interview with François Poirié in, *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 23 and ff. It is in this interview that Levinas remarks that he went to Freiburg to see Husserl and he found Heidegger.

⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt famously compared Heidegger's lectures delivered at Marburg University to a 'gale' that blows through philosophy 'not of our century,' but 'from the ancient'. Quoted by Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. by Ewald Osers (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. xi. See, also, Ted Sadler, *Heidegger and Aristotle* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), pp. 12–13, where Arendt and fellow students express excitement about whether Heidegger was giving a very new interpretation of the ancient Greeks in his lecture-courses or expounding entirely new ideas in philosophy (phenomenology).

⁶⁵ In a footnote to his description of phenomenology, and how it is a turn towards the conscious life, and what is indivisible in our concrete existence, Levinas again displays an early preference for this turn in phenomenology inaugurated by Heidegger. 'Let us point out that Husserl did not blindly accept the privileged role of the individual and the concrete, and that Martin Heidegger was able to show masterfully how the analysis of "actual human existence" leads us into the philosophical dimension par excellence that Aristotle had glimpsed when formulating the problem of "being as being." There is no mysticism of the concrete in Freiburg.' Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 32–38 (p. 183, n. 2).

The world overflows nature, recapturing all the contours and richness that it has in our concrete life; it is a world of things interesting and boring, useful and useless, beautiful and ugly, loved and hated, ridiculous and anguishing. The phenomenological method wants to destroy the world falsified and impoverished by the naturalist tendencies of our time — which certainly have their rights, but also their limits. It wants to rebuild; it wants to recover the lost world of our concrete life.⁶⁶

Implicit in this passage are two distinct understandings of the term ‘world’. ‘World’ understood purely in the sense of physical and biological objects (and the collection of those objects), which is the object of study for all of the natural sciences, and the ‘world’ understood, from a human perspective, as a context of significance, meaning and value that transcends the ‘world’ understood as a physical place or as a mere collection of objects.⁶⁷ Levinas claims that it is the human world of meaning and value, which is ‘interesting and boring, useful and useless, beautiful and ugly, loved and hated’, which ‘overflows nature’, that is of interest to the phenomenologist. The human world of culture and value is inhabited by subjects for whom it has a meaning and worth.⁶⁸ Levinas describes the understanding of the ‘world’ that is the object of study for the natural sciences as an abstraction, as it is removed from the more basic ‘world of our concrete life’, and is ‘equivalent to a leap into nothingness’.⁶⁹

The influence of Heidegger is again apparent in this short article in relation to how Levinas approaches this question of space. Levinas critiques Bergson’s understanding of geometrical space and in place of this understanding sets out an

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁷ Heidegger makes it clear that an understanding of the ‘world’ whereby it is interpreted as the collection of things ‘in’ the world, such as houses, trees and mountains, is not a phenomenological way of looking at the world as it reduces the world to entities. See, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (USA, UK, and Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), p. 63. Heidegger distinguishes between four senses of the term ‘world’: (1) The totality of entities that are present at hand. (2) The being of those entities. Any realm that encompasses a related significance given to the multiplicity of those entities by *Dasein*, e.g. when we say, the world of the scientist, the mathematician, or the ‘world’ of sport. (3) The wherein *Dasein* is said to live, such as the public ‘we-world’ or the domestic home of *Dasein*. (4) Worldhood, the worldliness (*Weltlichkeit*) of the world (*Welt*). Ibid., p. 93, (SZ 64-65). See, Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World. A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 88-107.

⁶⁸ On this point, we once again see the indirect influence of Dilthey via Heidegger’s work and lectures on Levinas. For Heidegger the world and *Dasein* are bound together and there is no strict separation. To understand *Dasein* one must begin with the fundamental constitution of *Dasein* understood as being-in-the-world. In his 1927 Summer Semester lecture-course at Freiburg, Heidegger explains his position, remarking, ‘[s]elf and world belong together in the single entity, the *Dasein*. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of the *Dasein* itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world [...]. Self and world belong together in the unity of the basic constitution of the *Dasein*, the unity of being-in-the-world.’ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter, revised edn (Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 297-98.

⁶⁹ Levinas, ‘Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology’, p. 33.

argument that sees the natural-scientific understanding of geometrical space as a derivative of the concrete human experience of space as relational to one's situatedness.⁷⁰ When space is taken as an example Levinas points out that human space *as experienced* is not a homogenous space, but an intentional space, that is to say, as something that is always relative to someone's 'presence in space', thus the experience of a left and a right, top and bottom and the significance of that space. Heidegger discussed a similar idea in his lectures in Freiburg during the summer of 1923, wherein he gives an example of the table upon which he wrote his dissertation or had meals with his wife and children.⁷¹

Levinas defines the purpose of phenomenology as 'the determination of the true nature of the human, the proper essence of consciousness'.⁷² He moves on then to define consciousness for phenomenologists as intentionality. Consciousness is always in relation with that which is beyond consciousness itself, consciousness always tends toward the world, and as such is transcendence. Heidegger's influence is again displayed in Levinas's nuanced definition of intentionality, as not only a theoretical relation but as grounded in and shaded by our human feelings such as fear and love.⁷³

⁷⁰ 'Geometrical space is indeed an abstraction. The *concrete* situation which reveals extension to us is our *presence in space*.' Ibid., p. 35.

⁷¹ See, Martin Heidegger, *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. by John van Buren (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999). This is the text of a lecture-course that Heidegger gave at the University of Freiburg during the summer of 1923. In §§19-26 Heidegger goes into a lengthy discussion during which he refers to many examples of everyday household objects, such as a table or old worn out skis, to illustrate that the meaning of such objects extends far beyond the material composition of those objects. Human beings do not experience objects purely as extended material spatial objects, but meaningful objects that accommodate particular practices and that have a history, a story, and as a result the object has meaning beyond immediate sense perception. The vast meaning that is contained within the table depends on the particularity of a situation, and what the table is used for — what Heidegger refers to as the 'There-in-order-to-do-this' —, such as the celebration of a meal at the table during a significant holiday, the place at which his children play, where his wife stays up late to read, or the table that is used by Heidegger to write upon. Ibid., pp. 67-80.

⁷² Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology', p. 34.

⁷³ 'Phenomenologists consequently maintain that the world itself, the objective world, is not produced on the model of a theoretical object, but is constituted by means of far richer structures which only these intentional feelings are able to grasp.' Ibid., p. 35. On this point we can again detect Heidegger's influence on Levinas. Heidegger has a very different understanding of intentionality from that of Husserl. Heidegger introduces the term *Verhalten* 'comportment' to capture *Dasein*'s directing oneself towards the world, which *Dasein* has been 'thrown' (*geworfen*) into and has pre-given structures of meaning, within which it is always already with other beings. In a lecture-course given in the summer of 1927 at the University of Marburg Heidegger explains his understanding of intentionality, maintaining that, '[t]he statement that the comportments of the *Dasein* are intentional means that the mode of being of our own self, the *Dasein*, is essentially such that this being, so far as it *is*, is always already dwelling with the extant. The idea of a subject which has intentional experiences merely inside its own sphere and is not yet outside it but encapsulated within itself is an absurdity which misconstrues the basic ontological structure of the being that we ourselves are [...] in opposition to the erroneous *subjectivizing* of intentionality, we must hold that the intentional structure of comportments is not something which is immanent to the so-called subject and which would first of all be in need of transcendence; rather, the

The world is constituted through a ‘rich’ intentional relation, one that is always coloured by feelings. These feelings also aid us in grasping the structures that our world is constituted by. In an implicit reference to Heidegger, Levinas cites ‘anxiety’ as an example of a ‘privileged intention’ that reveals to us ‘the mark of nothingness in the world’.⁷⁴ Such an insight could never be attained through the methods of the natural sciences (which rely upon observation, hypotheses and experiment) as contemplation is blind to nothingness. Caygill maintains that the emphasis on transcendence in terms of nothingness again reflects the influence on Levinas of his reading of Heidegger.⁷⁵

Within this article, nevertheless, we cannot yet detect any dissatisfaction on Levinas’s part with this aspect of Heidegger’s thought, or any other aspect for that matter. The article, rather, is highly praising of Heidegger.⁷⁶ However, in the not-too distant future, in his next article ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, Levinas’s presentation of Heidegger’s philosophical approach not only clearly reveals the influence of Heidegger’s work on Levinas, but it will also indicate that Levinas was beginning to rethink how transcendence as elaborated by Heidegger in *Being and Time* is a transcendence towards nothingness. When we come to examine ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, we will see that by 1934 Levinas identifies fatal consequences of Heidegger’s view of transcendence towards nothingness, precisely in relation to the question of a justification for freedom. Far from finding a basis for justifying freedom within Heidegger’s thought, then, Levinas will come to identify freedom in *Being and Time* as ‘fatalism’.

intentional constitution of the *Dasein*’s comportments is precisely the *ontological condition of the possibility of every and any transcendence*. Transcendence, transcending, belongs to the essential nature of the being that exists (on the basis of transcendence) as intentional, that is exists in the manner of dwelling among the extant.’ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, pp. 64-65. Heidegger emphasises the ‘openness’ that permits the directedness of consciousness towards its objects, hence his understanding of intentionality deviates away from Husserl’s focus on intentionality as the link between the intended objects of consciousness and the acts that present them. Whereas Husserl can have a science of the correlation of acts and their intended objects, in aiming to discern the essential and therefore universal features of those acts, Heidegger can have no ‘science’ of the ‘openness’ of *Dasein*. This is why the ‘scientific’ character, so essential to Husserl’s idea of phenomenology, is absent in Heidegger’s elaboration of a phenomenology (of *Dasein*).

⁷⁴ Levinas, ‘Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology’, p. 35.

⁷⁵ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 21.

⁷⁶ The last paragraph of the article is particularly extolling of Heidegger. ‘His [Husserl’s] chair was passed on to Martin Heidegger, his most original disciple, whose name is now the glory of Germany. A man of exceptional intellectual power, his teaching and his works are the best proof of the fecundity of the phenomenological method.’ Levinas, ‘Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology’, p. 38.

§1.5 ‘MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND ONTOLOGY’ (1932)

‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’ (*Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie*) was written by Levinas in 1932, two years after his dissertation. Although Levinas will later distance himself both personally and philosophically from the work of Heidegger, at this stage the influence of the philosophy of Heidegger and the new direction that he brought to phenomenology is of pivotal importance for Levinas.⁷⁷ Levinas follows Heidegger in his critique of the metaphysical conception of subjectivity, and will continue to be indebted to his prioritising of concrete existence over intellectual abstraction. While Levinas was very much taken by Husserl’s phenomenology, and believed that it contained the possibility for some ‘work’ in the area of philosophy more than other methodologies, he still held some reservations about the intellectualism of Husserl’s approach in phenomenology, as is evident from Levinas’s comments towards the end of his doctoral thesis. As was also evident in this study, this gap was partly filled for Levinas by Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) (1927) as Heidegger opened up a new approach that moved beyond the transcendental Ego and reflected on concrete life and everyday existence. The criticism of Husserl’s intellectualism, and the understanding of consciousness as ‘objectifying’ or ‘representationist’, that was outlined in Levinas’s thesis, is also subtly present in this article. As Peperzak notes, ‘[t]he world of the ready-at-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) and of care (*Sorge*) is firmly opposed to the objectivity of representationism’.⁷⁸ This early article further highlights for us the elements of the early Heideggerian approach that Levinas found so attractive, and sheds some additional light on Levinas’s own thinking at that time. Certain themes that will be explored in more detail in Levinas’s later works are evident in this early paper, such as the putting into question the primacy of the subject and knowledge in the history of Western Philosophy, and the importance of reflecting on the pre-theoretical everyday

⁷⁷ Even though Levinas will later become thoroughly disappointed with Heidegger, he always retained his belief that *Sein und Zeit* was an outstanding philosophical work. In his 1984 interview with Salomon Malka, when asked about his debt with respect to Heidegger, Levinas remarks: ‘What is important for me is the excellence of his phenomenology. I especially admire his early book, *Being and Time*. It is actually a series of marvellous analyses testifying to what phenomenology is capable of. It is always with a feeling of shame that I admit my admiration for the philosopher.’ ‘Interview with Salomon Malka’, in *Is It Righteous To Be?*, pp. 93-102 (p. 94). Also, in his interview with Nemo in 1981, when asked about Heidegger’s phenomenological method, Levinas answered, ‘*Sein und Zeit* has remained the very model of ontology. The Heideggerian notions of finitude, being-there, being-toward-death, etc., remain fundamental. Even if one freed oneself from the systematic rigors of this thought, one remains marked by the very style of *Sein und Zeit*’s analyses, by the “cardinal points” to which the “existential analytic” refers.’ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 41.

⁷⁸ Peperzak, ‘Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics’, p. 121.

life of the subject. For our current purposes, this article provides us with an insight into the aspects of Heidegger's philosophy that Levinas found helpful in inspiring and contributing to his later thinking on subjectivity. Given that Heidegger was an important influence on Levinas and how he develops his own thinking, in order to better understand Levinas's later position it will be helpful to briefly highlight some of distinctive characteristics of Heidegger's approach. It also provides us with an opportunity to reflect further on how the Heideggerian understanding of freedom can be said to be ultimately transcendence towards nothing. Just as Levinas's found problems with the explanation of freedom in Bergson's account, and the lack of an explanation in Husserl's thought, Heidegger's account of the foundation of freedom will be also be deemed deficient.

For the most part the article can be read as an exposition of Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time*, but, as is the case with Levinas's earliest expositional pieces, there is more to it than that.⁷⁹ In her work *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*, Elisabeth Thomas notes about this paper that:

A cursory reading of Levinas's paper *Martin Heidegger and Ontology* reveals Levinas' starting point and subsequent focus to the question of being and the critique of the metaphysical subject by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. According to Levinas, Heidegger not only reveals the presuppositions regarding the concept of the subject as thinking substance but also uncovers the latent intellectualism of the idealist position.⁸⁰

Thomas's reading of this paper supports the claim that one of the most crucial elements of Heidegger's thinking that Levinas found appealing was the putting into question the metaphysical conception of the subject in modern philosophy, and the opening up of the concrete lived life of *Dasein* as a field of phenomenological reflection.⁸¹ In order to

⁷⁹ Levinas outlines the goal of the article in the opening paragraph: 'In this study, it is important for us to understand, above all, the true intentions of our author, to illuminate what he thinks really needs to be said, and to surmise what is most critical for him.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology' (1932), trans. by Committee of Public Safety, *Diacritics*, 26, (1996) 1, 11-32 (p. 11). This does not mean that the 'true intentions of the author' are actually known by the author himself, as there are factors determining that author's thought that are of critical importance to any expressed meaning. Hence Schleiermacher's bold injunction that the interpreter must understand the author better than the author himself. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism. And Other Writings*, trans. by Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 33.

⁸⁰ Elisabeth Louise Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice, and the Human beyond Being* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 14-15. Thomas also claims that, '[t]here is little doubt that Heidegger's fundamental ontology provides the point of departure for Levinas'. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸¹ Moving away from any earlier understanding of the subject within the history of philosophy, Heidegger gives *Dasein* a particular and unique meaning. *Dasein* (from the German *da* 'there' and *sein* 'being') is a term that Heidegger gives unique significance to, meaning the awareness of the 'there' (*Da*) of 'Being' (*Sein*). *Dasein* is a being for whom being is a 'mineness' (*Jemeinigkeit*) and as such being is an issue for

shed some light on Heidegger's original approach, in place of a straight forward exposition, Levinas chose to frame his exposition within the context of the problem of knowledge. The selection of this particular problem at such an early stage is interesting as 'knowledge' will feature time and again in Levinas' writings, as he brings the priority that is placed on knowledge in the Western tradition into question. Levinas will also align 'knowledge' with the primacy of the individual autonomous meaning-giving subject, which epitomises 'freedom' in the modern philosophical tradition. In this article Levinas argues that the modern problem of knowledge is as a result of a particular view of subjectivity, selecting the Cartesian understanding of the subject to illustrate his point. The problem, that of reflecting on whether or not objects correspond to thought, he claims, boils down to a more fundamental question: "How does the subject take leave of itself to attain the object?"⁸² On Levinas's reading, as the subject, in his view of the modern tradition, is held as having a unique and privileged place in being, contained within its own 'immanent sphere', and in some sense removed from the world, how then is this gap between subject and object bridged?⁸³ He goes on to argue that one of the consequences of the Cartesian view of subjectivity is Idealism precisely because as the content of thought is already within the subject, the subject itself becomes its own object. Idealism then leads to a further problem. As idealism views 'substance' as that which is, and existence is linked to time as the subject as temporal unfolds in time, how then can the subject be called a substance, and have being, except in a purely nominal sense? Levinas then describes how Idealism overcame this problem, by overcoming time itself.⁸⁴

Levinas goes on to outline how Heidegger's approach reveals to us that this problem is only a problem for subjectivity understood within the dominate tradition of modern philosophy. The strict subject/object distinction, and the problem that this approach gives rise to, that of accounting for how this distance is bridged, is no longer a

it. *Dasein* is a being who has a pre-reflective implicit 'understanding of Being' (*Seinverständnis*). See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 67-77, (SZ 42-52).

⁸² Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 12.

⁸³ Such a question, of course, belongs to the modern philosophical tradition from Descartes on. Such a question does not and cannot arise for Aristotle or the Medieval Aristotelians as one has to have senses and sensation activated before any (intellectual) reflection on them by higher powers of the soul. Aquinas, for example, would never have posed the problem of the 'gap' between the subject and the object, just as he would never have worried if the object as we perceive it corresponds with the world independent of a human knower, which was addressed by Kant.

⁸⁴ 'It is fundamentally here that the true passage into subjectivity- in all its opposition to being, that is to say, in its opposition to temporal substance- is accomplished. This step is taken by means of an evasion of time.' Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', pp. 12-13.

problem when man is seen as embedded in the everyday history of concrete existence.⁸⁵ Levinas then moves on to sketch Heidegger's revolutionary philosophical approach in *Being and Time*. We shall summarise Levinas's reading of Heidegger's position below, not only because this work had a huge influence on the development of Levinas's own later work, but also because this reading will begin to reveal to us what Levinas found to be deficient in the understanding of freedom in Heidegger's work.

For Heidegger, knowledge is a founded mode of access to the world, founded on the basic state of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world, which itself is underpinned by the more primordial state of Being as care (*Sorge*). In this understanding the very posing of the question of the existence of an external world, and how the subject can be said to have access to this world, makes little sense.⁸⁶ *Dasein* finds itself always already thrown (*Geworfenheit*) into an established definite world, filled with definite entities.⁸⁷ 'Being-in-the-world' is a question of the dynamics of possibility, yet unlike other entities that that is equally true of, this is crucially different for *Dasein*, for whom the being of one's possibilities is *to understand them*.⁸⁸ This 'understanding' is not an understanding in a

⁸⁵ 'It is *concrete man* who appears at the centre of philosophy, and in comparison with him, the concept of consciousness is only an abstraction, arbitrarily separating consciousness — i.e. illumination as illumination — from history and existence.' Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁶ As Heidegger himself puts it, 'But the world is disclosed essentially *along with the Being of Dasein*; with the disclosedness of the world, the "world" has in each case been discovered too.' *Being and Time*, p. 247, (SZ 203).

⁸⁷ Levinas chooses to translate the German *Geworfenheit* (which stems from the verb *werfen*), which is generally translated into English as thrownness in English translations of Heidegger's work, into the French *déreliction*, which is then translated into the English dereliction. This choice of translation captures the stark abandonment of *Dasein* to imposed possibilities. Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 24. In a much later work, 'Transcendence and Height' (1962), Levinas will contrast the ineluctable responsibility that the self has for the Other, prior to being free, with Heidegger's idea of the pre-given structures of meaning which *Dasein* finds itself thrown into (*geworfen*). Though in both cases the self finds itself in a situation not of its making or choosing, the crucial difference between them, for Levinas, is the ethical significance of the event. For Levinas, the subject comes to feel ashamed of its self-centred living, and comes to realise their responsibility for the Other precedes their freedom. The freedom of the self is given an ethical significance. Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*, in contrast, fatally compromises freedom and provides guilt with no ethical significance, 'it results from the alienation of liberty and not from the unscrupulousness of its very exercise. Such a guilt has tragic and not ethical overtones. It is finitude.' (p. 18). In Heidegger's description freedom is shown to be limited and constrained *but it is not called into question*. Rather, for Levinas, it is reduced to fate. Implicitly referencing the work of Hobbes and Heidegger, Levinas goes to say that the encounter with the face of the Other is 'a movement that is more fundamental than freedom but that returns us to neither violence nor fatality.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', trans. by Tina Chanter, Simon Critchley, and Nicholas Walker and revised by Adriaan Peperzak in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 11-31 (p. 20). 'Transcendence et hauteur' was first published in *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 56 (1962).

⁸⁸ 'The relation of man to his possibilities is not the same as the indifference a thing manifests with respect to the accidents that could occur to it'. Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 23. 'Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it [...] there is some way in which Dasein understands

conceptual way, nor is it a cognitive faculty. This understanding goes beyond the subject-object distinction, and so, overcomes that epistemological problem; or, perhaps, it is more accurate to say that in this approach the problem would not even arise.

For the understanding is not a cognitive faculty that is imposed on existence in order to allow it to become aware of its possibilities. The distinction between the knowing subject and the object known — an inescapable distinction in the phenomenon of knowledge — no longer has purchase here. Human existence *knows itself* prior to all introspective reflection and, indeed renders the latter possible. But to say that does not imply a return to the concept of self-consciousness [...]. The originality of the Heideggerian conception of existence, in contrast to the traditional idea of ‘self-consciousness’ (*conscience interne*), is that this self-knowledge, this inner illumination, this *understanding* not only refuses the subject/object structure, but also has nothing to do with *theory*.⁸⁹

A crucial point in this summation by Levinas is that this ‘understanding’ has nothing to do with theory, as it is not an intellectual registering of what one is. Rather, it is how *Dasein* in the world *is*, ‘this understanding is the very dynamism of this existence’.⁹⁰ The mode of understanding is the manner of existing for *Dasein*, who is being in such a way that it has an understanding of being, as is displayed in our every day being-in-the-world, and our interaction with it, revealed by such statements as ‘the sky *is* blue’. *Dasein*’s manner of Being-in-the-world, the way in which *Dasein* understands itself, is always in and through a certain affective disposition (*Befindlichkeit*). In *Dasein*’s everyday interaction with the world it loses sight of the reality of its being, and is lost in the ‘they-self’ (*das Man*), and engrossed in the world understood as a totality of things. The crucial affective disposition which can return *Dasein* to the understanding of the world, and *Dasein*’s being in it, as possibility of being, is *Angst*. Anxiety reveals *Dasein*’s most basic possibility, that of being authentically or inauthentically.⁹¹ It also, critically, for Heidegger, reveals freedom to *Dasein*, as *Dasein* is brought back to its Being-in-the-world as possibilities.⁹²

itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32, (SZ 12).

⁸⁹ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 23.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ ‘This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the “they”, which brings tranquilized self-assurance- ‘Being-at-home’, with all its obviousness- into the average everydayness of *Dasein*. On the other hand, as *Dasein* falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the ‘world’. Everyday familiarity collapses.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233, (SZ 188-89).

⁹² In his article ‘Primordial Freedom: The Authentic Truth of *Dasein* in Heidegger’s ‘Being and Time’’, Craig M. Nichols argues that the fundamental concern of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is the problem of freedom. He argues that Heidegger presents a positive conception of freedom, a ‘towards which’, in opposition to the more common negative conception of freedom that sees freedom as a freedom ‘from’

In the final section of the article, section nine, Levinas briefly hints at how the foundations of the theory of freedom are accounted for in Heidegger's approach and how it fits into his description of *Dasein*, although he unfortunately does not explore this theme in great detail. At the time of writing this article Levinas intended to write a book on Heidegger's thought.⁹³ This article is the first section of the then planned longer study Levinas subsequently abandoned. When Levinas briefly raises the issue of the theory of freedom in Heidegger's work, he mentions that this is 'a theory which we will be occupied later', referring to the yet unfinished further sections of the planned work.⁹⁴ In the concluding paragraph, after a brief summary of the article, Levinas further indicates what the next section of the then intended book long study would be, '[f]rom there, the interpretation will be pursued to the unique sources of solicitude. We will find there the root of personality and of freedom. We will deduce from it finally the phenomenon of theoretical knowledge'.⁹⁵ This passage also supports our reading of Levinas that from an early stage he was interested in the question of the foundation of critical thinking, or as he says at the end of his thesis discussed above, an explanation for the phenomenon of *Homo philosophus*. Levinas did not take the freedom of critical consciousness as a given.

Although brief, the comments that Levinas does make in relation to the theory of freedom in 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology' are enough for us to know which aspects of Heidegger's description of *Dasein* Levinas has in mind. Freedom is revealed in the affective disposition (*Befindlichkeit*) of anguish/anxiety. Anguish saves existence from inauthentic being, as it brings it back to its possibilities. As was said above, *Dasein*'s primordial relation with the world is one of 'care' (*Sorge*), but in everyday existence this is manifested for *Dasein* in how *Dasein* is caught up with objects in and of the world, such as involvement with a project, waiting on something, intrigued by

restraints. 'Freedom is thus thought by Heidegger as *Dasein*'s authentic potentiality for being'. The authentic mode of being-towards-death is resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). 'Resoluteness consists in the freedom from the they attained in becoming free for one's own death (SZ 264)'. Craig M. Nichols, 'Primordial Freedom: The Authentic Truth of *Dasein* in Heidegger's 'Being and Time'', *Thinking Fundamental, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conference*, Vol. 9: Vienne 2000.

⁹³ This is indicated in the second footnote in which Levinas thanks the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* for 'publishing the first sections of the first part of the work in preparation'. Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 11.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

something, anticipating something etc.⁹⁶ However, in anguished solicitude *Dasein* is brought back to *Dasein*'s own isolation and understands itself in its own terms, and not in relation to objects of the world. In the affective disposition of anxiety *Dasein* understands the most fundamental possibility of *Dasein*, as it understands that one is being-in-the-world in a particular fashion. It is anxiety that returns *Dasein* to the own-most possibility of being authentically or inauthentically. This, fundamentally, comes down to the resoluteness to accept one's fundamental finitude and fate, to be what one is, a Being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). As Heidegger puts it,

We may now summarise our characterization of authentic Being-towards-death as we have projected it existentially: anticipation reveals to *Dasein* its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death** — a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the 'they', and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.⁹⁷

In the mood of *Angst* *Dasein* is brought back to what *Dasein* is. Back to the understanding that *Dasein*'s being in the world is to find itself open to possibilities, with the most fundamental possibility being a possibility that cannot be seized. Death is the impossibility of possibility. In the affective disposition of anguish, *Dasein* understands the possibility of existing authentically. With the own most possibility is to be a Being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*).⁹⁸ 'Existing authentically means to accept this condition and to submit to this fate.'⁹⁹ What is interesting about the above long passage from Heidegger is that it clearly shows why one might begin to think of freedom in Heidegger's account as transcendence, ultimately, towards nothingness. *Dasein* is free, essentially, to die; or, perhaps more accurately stated, free to understand the significance of the being of its own finitude.¹⁰⁰ Levinas's 'Martin Heidegger and

⁹⁶ In this version of the article Levinas uses the term *sollicitude* for both *Sorge* and *Besorgte*. In the abridged version he renders *Sorge* as *souci*, in order to maintain the distinction between both terms. However, in this version he uses *solicitude* for both.

⁹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 311, (SZ 266).

⁹⁸ Death is *Dasein*'s own most possibility as it cannot belong to the they-self, as one can only die one's own death. One must become free from the they if they are to face death authentically and become free for death. 'When, by anticipation, one becomes free for one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped.' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 308, (SZ 264).

⁹⁹ Peperzak, 'Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics', p. 122. Peperzak is here paraphrasing Levinas in *L'ontologie dans le temporel*.

¹⁰⁰ In *Being and Time* Heidegger goes as far as to say that this brooding over one's death, in the existential mood of *Angst*, should be cultivated. '[I]n such Being-towards-death this possibility must not be

Ontology' essay alone is insufficient to support Caygill's assessment that Levinas increasingly found Heidegger's thinking on freedom to be fatalistic, as transcendence in Heidegger's *Being and Time* is transcendence towards nothingness. However, even though Levinas did not complete the then intended book long study, we do have another article that came out of the preparation for the unfinished book to consider, in which Levinas more clearly presents his position.¹⁰¹

§1.6 FREEDOM AS FATE IN *BEING AND TIME*

Though Levinas never completed the proposed book on 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', which he intended to publish after 1940, he used notes he had earlier compiled for this study to formulate a lecture on Heidegger for the students of Jean Wahl, later published as '*L'ontologie dans le temporal*'.¹⁰² That article also concentrated on exposition for the most part, but unlike 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', Levinas briefly raises some criticisms of Heidegger's position towards the end of the article. As this article was a lecture that he gave to students studying Heidegger, Levinas mostly concentrates on a summary of the crucial points, which he also outlined in the article above. Again Levinas outlines how, through the affective disposition (*dispositions affectives*) of anxiety (*l'angoisse*), *Dasein* is brought to its understanding of itself and 'the bare possibility of its existence, left to itself'.¹⁰³ The understanding revealed to *Dasein* in *Angst* is the condition for *Dasein* existing authentically, and so as the basis for freedom. Such a freedom, however, is a strictly predestined freedom, it is 'a freedom for death'.¹⁰⁴ In this article Levinas draws attention more explicitly to how *Dasein*'s existence is already fated, destined, and

weakened: it must be understood *as a possibility*, it must be cultivated *as a possibility*, and we must *put up with it as a possibility*, in the way we comport ourselves towards it'. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 306, (SZ 261).

¹⁰¹ Caygill does not reference either *Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie* or *L'ontologie dans le temporal* in support of his position, but both texts lend further credibility to his hypothesis.

¹⁰² This lecture was subsequently published first in 1948 in Spanish in *Sur* no. 167, and then in French in 1949 as *L'ontologie dans le temporal*. At the time of writing this article is not yet available in English translation, and so the original French text is given in footnotes.

¹⁰³ 'L'inquiétude de l'angoisse tient précisément au néant de toute chose qui ramène le *Dasein* à lui-même, à exister en vue de soi dans ce néant, à la possibilité nue de son existence, livrée à elle-même.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'L'ontologie dans le temporal', in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2010), pp. 111-28 (p. 122).

¹⁰⁴ 'En elle le *Dasein* se comprend à partir de lui-même et par conséquent est libre. Mais sa liberté est une liberté *pour la mort*. La mort seule rend possible sa liberté ou son authenticité.' Levinas, 'L'ontologie dans le temporal', p. 124, my emphasis.

‘doomed’.¹⁰⁵ From the beginning *Dasein* is determined by this final cause, existing towards nothing. It is the future that marks out and determines *Dasein*’s present. *Dasein* is already his future, it is a future that has already, in a sense, arrived. Thanks to the future *Dasein* can be authentically in the present (but only as a being for its own death).¹⁰⁶ As Peperzak succinctly summarises Levinas argument, ‘such a possibility does not have a real future, because its predestination prevents all newness. The future is already contained in the essence of its past’.¹⁰⁷

The importance of openness to the possibility of radical newness, in order for freedom to be possible, is a theme that Levinas will later return to, and his thinking on the subject as influenced by Bergson will be outlined below. It is a criticism of Heidegger that Levinas first raises in ‘*L’ontologie dans le temporal*’. Levinas places Heidegger within a broad description of the Western Philosophical tradition, which he will further expand on in his work to come. Levinas characterises the Western tradition’s interest with the question of being as an extension of its desire to control their destiny, a desire for freedom, control, and sovereignty. The distinction between the Western tradition and Heidegger’s thought is that within the tradition the ‘sovereignty of self has never been separable’ from the prestige of transcendence.¹⁰⁸ On Levinas’s reading, there is little room for (genuine) transcendence in Heidegger’s account. In Heidegger’s philosophy the person is the place of the accomplishment of the understanding of Being, based on nothing other than itself. *Dasein*’s existence is to be a being whose own being is to have a relation to Being. There is no room for alterity, no room for exteriority, in the relation between a being with its understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*), which the being *is* in its essence and through which it comes to understand itself.¹⁰⁹ As Peperzak remarks, ‘Other beings cannot enter into the self-identity of a being in which the understanding of Being realizes itself without any appeal to otherness’.¹¹⁰ As there is no space for alterity, except in the form of time — which Heidegger acknowledges in his analysis of the inability to represent the meaning

¹⁰⁵ ‘[S]a possibilité d’exister est une possibilité à laquelle elle est d’ores et déjà vouée.’ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Enfin en accomplissant le retour en arrière grâce à l’avenir, le *Dasein* existe le plus authentiquement son *Da*.’ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁰⁷ Peperzak, ‘Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics’, p. 122.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Mais dans l’idéalisme occidental la souveraineté du moi n’a jamais été séparable du prestige du Transcendant’. Levinas, ‘*L’ontologie dans le temporal*’, p. 128.

¹⁰⁹ ‘En posant le problème de l’ontologie où à juste titre Heidegger voit l’essentiel de son œuvre il a subordonné la vérité ontique, celle qui se dirige sur l’autre, à la question ontologique qui se pose au sein du Même, de ce soi-même qui, par son existence a une relation avec l’être qui est son être.’ Ibid., p. 128

¹¹⁰ Peperzak, ‘Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics’, p. 123.

of one's own death — Heidegger's analysis, alas, results in defence of a tragic form of liberty. Levinas ends the article by stating that though Heidegger's ontology has tragic overtones, it bears witness to a time and a world that perhaps will be possible to overcome tomorrow.¹¹¹

§1.7 'MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND ONTOLOGY': REVISITED

In the remaining paragraphs of 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', Levinas writes of how Heidegger's approach goes beyond the empiricist/rationalist distinction, as it reveals the effectivity of human existence, and man's understanding of being in the world prior to any theoretical reflection or concept of man. This point will prove to be crucial for Levinas's own thinking yet to come on subjectivity.

All intellectualistic philosophy — empiricist or rationalist — seeks to know man, but it means to do so through the *concept* of man, leaving aside the *effectivity* of human existence and the sense of this effectivity. The empiricists, whilst beginning from real men, did nothing else. The sense of the individuality of the person had to escape them, for the very level in which this individuality is could not appear to them, in view of the intellectualism of their attitude, which consists in *objectifying* (*se trouver devant*) the fact. They lacked the Heideggerian notion of existence and of understanding, that is, of an inner knowledge in the most specific sense of the term, *of a knowledge that comes about throughout its very existence*.¹¹²

Heidegger, then, revealed to Levinas the possibility of a path within phenomenology that moves away from the transcendental Ego and towards concrete life, and so, aided him to move through phenomenology and yet away from the intellectualism he associated with Husserl's path. Despite this, Levinas was very aware that Heidegger's main concern was the question of the meaning of Being as such, and not the question of the meaning of the human being, which will become a main concern for Levinas. *Dasein* as ontological facticity is central for Heidegger's analysis, not because he is interested in the being of the human being, but because *Dasein* is a being for whom its being is an issue for it, and as such reveals an understanding of the meaning of being.¹¹³

¹¹¹ 'Par là, l'ontologie de Heidegger rend ses accents les plus tragiques et devient le témoignage d'une époque et d'un monde qu'il sera peut-être possible de dépasser demain.' Levinas, 'L'ontologie dans le temporal', p. 128.

¹¹² Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 31. This emphasis of course comes, in turn, from Heidegger's appropriation of Kierkegaard's starting-point that I can only argue from existence — in the strong existentialist sense of concrete individual existence — and not towards existence or about possible existence or about how everybody exists.

¹¹³ This very different direction that Heidegger introduced to phenomenology again shows the influence of Dilthey on Heidegger's manner of thinking. Although Heidegger did not follow Dilthey completely,

Heidegger's hostility toward epistemology in the specific and distinctive sense which we have given it — namely, of being opposed to ontological inquiry — his attempt to grasp the subject ontologically is a logically subsequent move to make (*Sein und Zeit* 2, 15, and *passim*). But, as we will see, the *ontological* analysis of the subject is alone capable of yielding a solution and even a sphere of investigation to ontology in the general sense that Heidegger seeks.¹¹⁴

Unlike Heidegger, who fundamentally was concerned with the question of the meaning of Being, Levinas will become more concerned with the question of the meaning of the human being, and formulate his question in an ethical context. 'Not "Why being rather than nothing?"', but how being justifies itself.'¹¹⁵ Levinas will much later phrase this question, in explicit reference to Heidegger, in 'Ethics as First Philosophy' (1984):

The ego is the very crisis of the being of a being (*de l'être de l'étant*) in the human domain. A crisis of being, not because the sense of this verb might still need to be understood in its semantic secret and might call on the powers of ontology, but because I begin to ask myself if my being is justified, if the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of somebody else's place.¹¹⁶

The subject's freedom to be is put into question, with specific reference to 'usurping' somebody else's 'thereness' of being. This gives rise to the subject asking what justifies my right to be above someone else's, questioning 'my place in the sun', and not the question of what is the meaning of being.¹¹⁷ Levinas will not only question the foundation of freedom but, more importantly, the point of freedom. Not only where does it come from, but, what is it for?

Critchley notes that in order for Levinas to sketch such a picture of subjectivity, a view in which the subject is responsible for the other prior to questioning, this entails the deconstruction of a particularly modern idea of the subject as portrayed in the philosophy of such thinkers as Descartes, Kant and Husserl. He maintains that Levinas

the influence of Dilthey's triad (*Erleben, Verstehen, Ausdruck*), can be seen in Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*, especially in Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein* as a being for whom its own being is an issue for it. *Dasein* expresses its own understanding of Being in the experience of its own being, as a Being-towards-death. As McDonnell notes, 'Heidegger, however, seems to apply this general triadic-hermeneutic model of understanding to his own *methodological* use of the very term *Dasein* itself [...] for, in Heidegger's interpretation of that term, *Dasein* expresses the meaning of its own experience and its own (pre-) understanding of Being.' McDonnell, 'Heidegger, Dilthey, and "the Being-Question"', p. 375.

¹¹⁴ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', p. 86.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹⁷ As Levinas remarks in the same article: 'My being-in-the-world or "my place in the sun", my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? Pascal's "my place in the sun" marks the beginning of the image of the usurpation of the whole earth.' *Ibid.*, p. 82.

does this via Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*, citing 'Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie' as demonstrating this move.¹¹⁸ One could also argue, however, that Bergson was another significant influence on Levinas in this regard because Bergson likewise places the view of the subject in modern philosophy into question.¹¹⁹ One of the original contributions contained in Bergson's philosophy, which brings about a major shift from the Cartesian view of the subject to the contemporary anti-humanist position, is the overcoming of the duality of mind and body. Showing that the dualistic approach of maintaining two distinct and unrelated substances can only ever end up in problems, in its place Bergson presents a view of a unified and integrated whole from the beginning.¹²⁰ Although both Heidegger and Bergson can be said to have influenced Levinas's thinking with regard to unity of human subjectivity, one striking difference between the two approaches remains in relation to freedom, which Levinas subtly highlights in the article discussed above, is the safeguarding of the openness to novelty just as Bergson had argued in his philosophy, and in opposition to the fatalism of Heidegger's thought. This is of importance as it maintains the importance of genuine transcendence, which Levinas believes to be lacking in Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*. Along with this openness to transcendence comes the introduction of 'new' possibilities that would otherwise be absent from the life of the subject, without such possibilities the subject would be condemned to fate. Such new

¹¹⁸ 'As is clear from the 1932 essay 'Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie', the move from Husserl to Heidegger entails the deconstruction of the subject and the turn to *Dasein*.' Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity. Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 76.

¹¹⁹ In his *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy* Cohen argues that the philosophy of Bergson played a pivotal role in shaping the development of contemporary philosophy. Cohen believes that Bergson's philosophy can be viewed as inaugurating a major shift in the history of philosophy and that Bergson's thought epitomises both the epoch that is to follow and the concerns that characterise the postmodern age. The three fundamental terms that Cohen identifies as the founding 'principle' of contemporary thought are 'incarnation', 'duration' and 'novelty', all of which are crucial to Bergson's thought. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-52.

¹²⁰ Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (originally published as *Matiere et memoire: Essai sur la relation du corps avec l'esprit* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1896)), demonstrates how Bergson's thinking posed a challenge to this modern view of the subject. Although Bergson could still be said to be within the dualist tradition, as he accepts the reality of both spirit and matter and consequently the distinction between them, his work seeks to move beyond any strict division. In the introduction Bergson acknowledges this and states that he hopes to overcome some of the difficulties that have arisen from the traditional modern divide, 'it [*Matter and Memory*] deals with body and mind in such a way as, we hope, to lessen greatly, if not to overcome, the theoretical difficulties which have always beset dualism, and which cause it, though suggested by the immediate verdict of consciousness and adopted by common sense, to be held in small honor among philosophers'. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York : Zone Books, 1991), p. 9. The philosophical consideration that Bergson gives to both nontheoretical and embodied phenomenon, for example affective sensations, conscious states involving physical symptoms, anger, fear and disgust, in his *Time and Free Will* is also testament to how his work can be understood as prefiguring certain postmodern concerns. See, Bergson, *Time and Free Will*.

possibilities preserve an idea of freedom as the genuine possibility of moving beyond the immanence of the subject and of a future not wholly contained in the present.

§1.8 OPENNESS TO NOVELTY

Levinas's article 'The Old and The New', written as late as 1980, is testament to the claim that the openness to radical 'novelty' in Bergson's interpretation of psychological time as duration and creativity as *élan vital* was an important influence on Levinas's own thought in regards to freedom, and so, we will momentarily break away from our chronological approach in order to turn to an examination of this article. In 'The Old and The New' Levinas outlines how the notion of the 'new' is possible only if there is an openness to novelty which, as 'new', is linked to radical alterity, and so, seen as an openness to transcendence outside of the totality of Being. For Levinas, the disturbance to the 'same' (*même*) by exteriority accounts for this possibility of novelty. If this were not a possibility, then there would be no accounting for difference and creativity, rendering it increasingly difficult to avoid fatalism and determinism, and hence no possibility of justifying freedom.¹²¹

Levinas begins the article by stating that one possible way of defining the human is 'the desire for the new' or 'the capacity for renewal', which fundamentally comes down to a desire for the other, that is, transcendence, the desire for what is beyond.¹²² Within our common sense view we constitutes the present as 'new'. This novelty, however, is brief, for it is new only while it is present. Once time passes the present slips into the past, making room for a 'new' present. When viewed along this linear time model nothing remains new, as all things age, becoming old. True to his

¹²¹ As our study progresses we will encounter this unique Levinasian term some more. Commenting on Levinas's use of the term the 'same' (*même*), one commentator remarks that 'the term [is] used in *Totality and Infinity* to characterize the mode of being of the ego in the world'. Diane Perpich, 'Freedom Called into Question: Levinas's Defense of Heteronomy', in *In Proximity. Emmanuel Levinas and the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 303-25 (p. 306). This broad definition is helpful as it captures Levinas's wide and varied use of the 'same' (*même*), to refer to many aspects of egoistic life, such as, knowledge, autonomy, power, and freedom understood as spontaneity and self-sufficiency. Each of these structures are regarded by Levinas as totalizing systems that eradicate all alterity, be that through a thought structure, such as representation and *Sinngebung*, or by viewing the other human person as an object that can be taken under ones control and manipulated, and in doing so miss the radical alterity of the Other. Hence, Levinas will come to define ethics as the calling into question of the same by the Other. 'A calling into question of the same — which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same — is brought about by the other (*l'Autre*). We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other (*d'Autrui*) ethics.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 43. Levinas also characterises the Western philosophical tradition as prioritising structures belonging to the same over and against the Other.

¹²² Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Old and The New', in *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1987) p. 121.

phenomenological heritage, Levinas asks whether this linear description is an accurate portrayal of how we experience the old and the new, or not. The human ordering of experience is not limited by this strict chronological outlook. Simple phrases, such as, for instance, ‘we have seen it all before’, or ‘history repeats itself’, serve to illustrate this point, and of how we superimpose a different conception of novelty both on top of and not restricted by the chronological succession of time wherein every individual moment is strictly speaking a ‘new’ moment and any chance of repetition is impossible.

Levinas then moves on to specifically address the ‘modern’ because the ‘modern’, as in the world of human value and cultural history, is seen as inherently ‘new’. Not only is the modern viewed as ‘new’ by virtue of the fact that it is the present, but the novelty also stems from the attribute that seems to characterise the ‘modern’ the most, that of an unrelenting ‘freedom’ that is unfettered by any memories of the past. It pays no heed to the weight of the past. The past is viewed as a ‘preparatory stage’ leading up to the present. The sovereign modern subject can master the world through knowledge, leaving no room for alterity. Thus,

[t]his situation makes possible the fact — for freedom — of keeping to the element of knowledge, thereby comprehending the world and the past in terms of *being* which knowledge assimilates, thus mastering the alterity which is manifest in being.¹²³

Freedom is seen as a power over alterity in being, in the form of the assimilation of all alterity into the domain of knowledge, not only in philosophy but also in the natural sciences.¹²⁴ The whole world is seen as subsumed by consciousness, as man moves towards the pinnacle of history. Levinas here refers to Hegelian philosophy and how it represents this idea of the modern as the culmination of history, with totality as an aim. Truth is seen as synonymous with totality, and goes beyond the distinction between the old and the new. Time itself seems to lose the feature that has always characterised it, that of bringing the ‘new’ with every present. In the modern age novelty does not pass into the past, making room for the present. Once the new of the modern becomes the true which is grasped by consciousness, time does not eradicate it.

In the next section, ‘Duration and Change’, once again Levinas asks of this modern conception of novelty, which he sees as promoted through Hegelian philosophy,

¹²³ Ibid., p. 124.

¹²⁴ ‘Freedom is the *positive* power of modern man, exerted upon nature and human events; consequently freedom is lived essentially in correlation with the development of science and the techniques that civilization brings.’ Ibid., p. 125.

if it can account for the human experience of ‘novelty’. He turns to Bergson to aid him in contesting the view presented.¹²⁵ Invoking the definition of the human given at the start of the article, Levinas asks if the Hegelian analysis presented can answer for the human being’s desire for the new and for renewal.¹²⁶ Bergson’s distinction between linear geometrical time and the time of the inner life of consciousness, duration, offers us a better way of beginning to think through the human desire for novelty. Duration as pure change is the ultimate safeguard of novelty as there is no permanent substance beneath this ceaseless change. Although this may jar with our common sense everyday interaction with the world, which is needed in order for one to navigate the world and one’s daily life, this insight is accessible to intuition.¹²⁷ When reality is understood as constant novelty and continuous change, freedom, for Bergson, is safeguarded. The threat of determinism and fate is done away with as life is constant renewal.¹²⁸ Levinas praises Bergson for prioritising, in his philosophical reflections, the experiences that philosophers have traditionally seen as ‘secondary’ and ‘subordinate’, and in doing so he is a forerunner to the whole problematic of contemporary philosophy. Bergson’s approach does not have the totalising intellectualism of which Levinas was so wary. There is a space for alterity and transcendence, as in reality seen as duration, reality consists of constant change that is beyond the totalising assimilating powers of self-consciousness and its self-determination.

It no longer returns to the assimilating act of consciousness, to the reduction of all novelty — of all alterity — to what in one way or another thought already supported, to the reduction of every other (*Autre*) to the Same (*Même*).¹²⁹

¹²⁵ In his interview with Nemo Levinas again remarks that one of the crucial contributions of Bergson’s philosophy was the safeguarding of ‘the spirituality of the new’, and of novel possibilities. He gave philosophy a description of an undetermined world. ‘But it is Bergson who taught us the spirituality of the new, “being” disengaged from the phenomenon in an “otherwise than being”’. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 28.

¹²⁶ Levinas, ‘The Old and The New’, p. 128.

¹²⁷ ‘Intuition is a return to oneself and to the autonomous upsurge of unceasing novelty before its reduction to like instants, which are the fruits of the abstraction necessary for action.’ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹²⁸ Levinas cites two sizable passages from Bergson’s *The Creative Mind* to further elaborate on the importance of intuition for Bergson’s philosophy, and also to sharply distinguish intuition from intelligence. Intuition perceives reality as movement, as duration, and substance as an intellectual abstraction, and engages with a world that is never permanent and is constantly changing. The radically new is grasped immediately. Intelligence, on the other hand, seeks to understand ‘things’, and so assess each encounter against that which it already knows, seeking to rearrange existing information to fit the new idea. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

In Bergson's philosophy, the priority of duration over permanence opens up a space for novelty independent of the Same. Thus freedom can be defended without running up against fate and determinism.

The human would be the original place of rupture and would have a metaphysical bearing: it would be the very advent of mind (*esprit*). Mind is no longer absolute knowledge as consciousness of self and equality to self, but the emergence of the new as duration.¹³⁰

This new approach to understanding time opens up new horizons of meaning that are older than our scientific time engagement with the world. Heidegger, too, is accredited with similarly opening up an understanding of a horizon of meaning and an understanding of time that comes before logic, and this originary way of being in the world is the understanding from which the scientific approach is derived.

In the final section of the article Levinas turns to critically reflect on Bergson's position, and he asks himself whether Bergson's description goes far enough. Does Bergson's description of intuition as consciousness really preserve absolute novelty as alterity, or does it stay within the confines of the self?¹³¹ It seems that, in Levinas's view, even though intuition, for Bergson, is pre-reflective, spontaneous and immediate, in the end the object of thought is still seen as correlative with thought. There is no room for surplus and hence no alterity. Levinas then asks whether there is another way to think through this problem, avoiding the complete identification of mind with being and also avoiding an unbridgeable chasm between the I and alterity. Can thought break the relation of correspondence between *noesis* and *noema*, and think a thought that is greater than what can be contained by thought? In answer to this question Levinas proceeds to set out, at this stage of his writing, a well thought-through and familiar argument that rests, to a great extent, on the appropriation of a famous philosophical concept that he deploys in a very new and radical way. This concept is the Cartesian concept of the infinite, which Levinas makes use of in order to try to describe how thought can think more than can be contained by thought. We shall encounter this important argument in more detail again in chapter three, wherein we will deal with how it is deployed to describe our encounter with the Other. In this article, however, it

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ 'Is not Bergsonian intuition as consciousness - be it pre-reflexive, as the spontaneous and immediate "actually lived life"- confusion and coincidence and, thus, an experience still rediscovering its standards in a worked over alterity? The aging of the new!' Ibid., p. 133.

is deployed by Levinas to aid him articulate how the idea of true novelty can only be preserved by preserving alterity, even when it is encountered by thought.

Levinas argues that the thought of the infinite must be regarded as beyond, and as something that is older than the confines of consciousness. Whereas a knowing consciousness seeks to possess its object, without remainder, the more ancient thought of the infinite is marked by a 'dis-interestedness' and 'patience'. This passivity resists the relation that characterizes impatient consciousness, which strives to know and grasp the object without remainder, therein destroying any alterity and novelty.¹³² Patience, as the most profound thought of the new, is experienced as time, in the sense that tomorrow never arrives, as it is always today. Passivity, understood as time, is a letting being be, and in this letting be there is a space for alterity that is not and cannot be fully grasped by consciousness. As does Bergson, Levinas also links novelty with a different understanding of time than that of scientific-objectifiable time. Time can be understood as the thought of the infinite, as it always evades coincidence with, and possession by thought. The past is never present and likewise the future will always remain beyond our grasp, as the present is inescapable.

It is not in the finality of an intentional aim that I think the infinite. My profoundest thought, which bears all thought, my thought of the infinite older than the thought of the finite, is the very diachrony of time, non-coincidence, dispossession itself: a way of 'being avowed' prior to every act of consciousness and more profoundly than consciousness, through the gratuitousness of time.¹³³

¹³² It is significant to note that in a fashion somewhat similar to Levinas's description of the thought of the infinite, as one characterised by 'dis-interestedness' and 'patience', Husserl, in his *Cartesian Meditations*, characterises the shift from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude via the *epoché* as a shift from an ego 'interested in the world' to an attitude whereby the subject looks on 'disinterestedly'. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Press, 1999), p. 35. By this stage of his work Levinas's characterisation of Husserl's phenomenology as a philosophy of freedom (whereby consciousness as intentionality is the giver of sense) is well established. However, on this point we can see that perhaps Levinas was closer to aspects of Husserl's thinking than can be conveyed by this general characterisation. Following on from Husserl, in his descriptions of what characterises the philosophical/phenomenological attitude, Max Scheler argues that the phenomenologist must cultivate a disposition of love and adopt 'humility' 'which abolishes the taken-for-granted, self-evident character of being as a fundamental fact and even undermines it as an obvious fact'. Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. by Bernard Noble (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2010), p. 99. Scheler's choice of the term 'humility' to describe the desired philosophical disposition is also interesting when we consider that Levinas describes the Other as 'higher' than the self. Humble derives from the Latin *humilis*, meaning on the ground, which stems from *humus* meaning 'earth' or 'ground'. One could say that phenomenology begins from a kind of humble patience, whereby one relinquishes one's natural disposition, understood by Husserl to mean the 'natural attitude' and by Levinas as an ontological concern for one's being and the drive to possess exteriority.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 137. 'Diachrony' is a term that Levinas introduces in his later work in relation to his philosophy of time. Levinas has a complex and developed philosophy of time, which we merely touch upon throughout this dissertation. Loosely speaking, Levinas uses the term 'synchrony' to refer to the abstract derived sense of linear time, and 'diachrony' to capture the immemorial dispersed time that cannot be reduced to such a unified order, wherein the Other disturbs the time of the self. In *Otherwise*

When the subject is depicted as self-sufficient and the whole world can potentially be taken in and grasped by consciousness, there is no space for mystery and novelty. The desire for the ‘new’, which is one way of defining the human, is fundamentally the desire for difference, which can only come from ‘alterity’. Fundamentally, the desire for the new in us is the desire for the other, and it is this, Levinas argues, which sets our being apart from self-sufficient existing.

Although Bergson’s position accounts for the intuition of radical newness, when time is understood as duration, Levinas argues that his description does not go far enough as it still accepts the freedom of the self as a given, even though this concept of ‘freedom’ is not intellectualist nor linked with ‘fate’ as is the case with Heidegger. Levinas asks, what is the foundation of this freedom as spontaneous creation in Bergson’s thought? If freedom is the possibility for novelty, then the foundation of the ‘new’ must first be discovered. This, for Levinas, comes from alterity, which introduces difference, in turn, the possibility of free spontaneous creative action. For Levinas, freedom will still be linked with novelty, as it is with Bergson, but true novelty can only come from outside and not grounded in the self.

Although this essay was written quite late in Levinas’s career, one can see the presence of these themes in his very early work, specifically ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, examined shortly.

§1.9 *DASEIN* AS DOOMED TO DEATH

In his 1934 article ‘Phenomenology’ (*Phénoménologie*), Levinas presents the reader with a review of the *Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 11. Levinas begins the article by briefly outlining what he terms ‘phases in the phenomenological current’, firstly, what he terms Husserl’s realism associated with his

than Being diachrony and synchrony correlate to Levinas’s discussion on the two orders of discourse, the Saying and the Said. See, Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, pp. 156-69. Critchley also draws our attention to the parallels between Levinas’s understanding of ‘diachrony’ and the ‘the saying’, to Bergson’s insight into duration (*la durée*). ‘In a Bergsonian sense, diachrony is the *real* time of subjectivity: unique, unrepeatable, and mobile. It is the time of *la durée* as opposed to the simultaneous time of *res extensa* [...]. Diachrony is the primordial, or authentic, time from which the vulgar, inauthentic conception of time as synchrony is derived.’ Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, pp. 165-66.

earliest works (*Logical Investigations*, 1900-01),¹³⁴ secondly Husserl's transcendental idealism (the First Book of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* 1913), and the third period being that of Heidegger's *existential phenomenology* (*Being and Time* 1926).¹³⁵ The subsequent reviews of five articles contained within this addition of the *Yearbook* is done in reference to these three 'phases', and Levinas notes which of these tendencies the articles can be said to belong to. The article contains little of what could be read as explicit originality, yet it does reveal to us implicitly some aspects of Levinas's thinking at the time. One aspect that is of interest for our current purposes is that this early article provides us with another insight into how Levinas regarded Heidegger's contribution to phenomenology, specifically in relation to how this new direction came to be so indispensable for Levinas's own thinking. As is the case with some of Levinas's other early works, such as those commented on above, we can see the element of Heidegger's thinking that Levinas gave preference to, specifically the opening up of concrete existence as a field of phenomenological reflection and study. Although this preference is not always overtly stated, in retrospect we can, to some extent, make this judgement given the direction that his thought took later. When describing the third stage of phenomenology, *existential phenomenology*, Levinas describes Heidegger as 'faithful to the method of phenomenology' and yet wholly original, explaining that he,

reforms the very idea of the subject and conceives the goal of philosophy in an unexpected and original way. For him the subject is no longer the transcendental and purely contemplative consciousness of Kant or Husserl, but a concrete *existence* doomed to death and caring about the very fact of its being.¹³⁶

Although it is very subtly stated, keeping in mind Levinas's reading of freedom in Heidegger as ultimately tragic and fated to die, this description of the subject for Heidegger as 'doomed to death' conveys this sense of destiny and fate that we will more clearly see in the Hitlerism article examined below.

In discussing the second article in the yearbook, 'Representation and Image' (*Vergegenwärtigung und Bild*) by Eugen Fink, Levinas reflects on the nature of consciousness that Fink, identified by Levinas as belonging to the second phase of phenomenology (transcendental Idealism), has in mind. Levinas suggests that Fink is

¹³⁴ The 'realism' of the *Logical Investigations* is the realism of 'essences' that are necessary structures of logical experience *as such*.

¹³⁵ Levinas, 'Phenomenology', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 39- 46 (p. 39).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

closer to Husserl than to Heidegger when it comes to consciousness. Contained within this reflection is Levinas's view on one of the most important differences between Husserl and Heidegger on the nature of consciousness,

[i]s it the concrete consciousness of our daily existence, which is familiar with itself prior to any reflection, dispersed in everyday occupations, capable of pulling itself together in the anxiety of death before the injunctions of an inner voice? Is it concrete, finite, and mortal? Is it not, on the contrary, the transcendental consciousness, which is independent of the world and which, before being part of the world, constitutes it? Here lies the whole opposition between Heidegger and Husserl: finite existence is already a product of transcendental consciousness, which humanizes itself and perceives itself in the world.¹³⁷

Levinas identifies the main divergence in the thought of both Husserl and Heidegger as centring on the question of whether transcendental consciousness is independent of and prior to the world, and the concrete self a derivative of it, or, is concrete consciousness always in and of the world, occupied with everyday existence, and on some pre-reflective level familiar to its self. As we shall see, the pre-reflective level of activity and pre-reflective awareness of embodied concrete experience in the world will become all the more important for Levinas as he develops his own thought further, although he will move away from the Heideggerian priority given to care for the fact of one's own being. Levinas's growing discomfort with the 'fatalism' of Heidegger's philosophy in relation to freedom becomes even more apparent in the next article.

§1.10 PAGAN FATE AND MONOTHEISTIC FREEDOM

Levinas's 1934 article 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' appeared in the journal *Esprit*.¹³⁸ On the occasion of the translation into English, by Seán Hand in 1990, Levinas provided a brief prefatory note. In addressing the 'bloody barbarism of National Socialism' Levinas remarked:

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³⁸ The journal *Esprit* was founded by Emmanuel Mounier in 1932 in an attempt to philosophise for the wider public. Levinas wrote for the journal many times up until the 1980's. In the prefatory note to the English publication of 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', Levinas described the journal as 'representing a progressive, avant-garde Catholicism'. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', trans. by Seán Hand, *Critical Inquiry*, 17, (1990) 1, 62-71 (p. 63). Caygill notes that Levinas's essay 'is one of the first philosophical reflections on racism and National Socialism', and of the journal he states, 'Esprit in the 1930s was by no means solely a theoretical journal, but was engaged in a critique of anti-Semitism and totalitarianism. It was silenced by the censor of the Vichy regime after 1940.' Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, pp. 29-30.

Such a possibility still threatens the subject correlative with being as gathering together and as dominating (*l'être-à-reassembler et à-dominer*), that famous subject of transcendental idealism that before all else wishes to be free and thinks itself free. We must ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve an authentic dignity for the human subject.¹³⁹

Even at this very early stage Levinas was beginning to call into question the primary role that freedom held in the history of Western Philosophy. Levinas is well aware that the rise of National Socialism did not happen in a vacuum, and in some respects the trajectory of Western Philosophical thought brought us to that point, or at the very least did little to counter the possibility of such a threat.¹⁴⁰ In his letter dated 28th March 1990 Levinas points out that the highest value of the 'transcendental subject' is to be free, 'before all else'.¹⁴¹ This very question, of the primary place of freedom in the dominant view of the subject in the tradition, will continue to be a major question for Levinas in relation to freedom and the honoured place it has been given in the European cultural tradition.

In the opening paragraph of the article Levinas states that the typical approach of 'certain journalists' in trying to understand the phenomenon of Hitlerism, at the time of writing in 1934, was to frame the phenomenon as a 'racist particularism' in contrast to a 'Christian universalism'. Levinas wishes to go beyond this simple distinction by examining where this distinction stems from, by taking a step back behind this idea in an attempt to get to the source. What is the meaning behind this logical opposition? Caygill outlines that this methodological approach, of wishing to get to the 'source' of the two opposing ideas, comes from a combination of both philosophical and sociological influences,

¹³⁹ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', p. 63.

¹⁴⁰ 'The article stems from the conviction that the source of the bloody barbarism of National Socialism lies not in some contingent anomaly within human reasoning, nor in some accidental ideological misunderstanding. This article expresses the conviction that this source stems from the essential possibility of *elemental Evil* into which we can be led by logic and against which Western philosophy had not sufficiently insured itself.' Ibid. The characterisation of the Western Philosophical tradition as one that prioritises Ontology over Metaphysics, the Same (*le Même*) over the Other, potentially leading to such things as the horror of the Shoah, is a common theme that will continue to raise its head throughout the writings of Levinas. In places Levinas also equates the Same with Freedom. For example see the much later work 'Transcendence and Height' (1962), 'The ontological event accomplished by philosophy consists in suppressing or transmuting the alterity of all that is Other, in universalizing the immanence of the Same (*le Même*) or of Freedom, in effacing the boundaries, and in expelling the violence of Being (*Être*)'. Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', p. 11.

¹⁴¹ See, Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 58. As Levinas noted in his dissertation of 1930, Husserl does not question what gives rise to the possibility of such a free act, nor does he explain how a subject in the natural attitude can come to doubt such an attitude. See, above, n. 49.

Levinas tries to bring the anthropological and phenomenological methods together by showing the elementary forms of experience — their constitution of past, present and future — that inform [both] Nazism and its Christian and liberal opponents.¹⁴²

Levinas brings together aspects of the phenomenological method with that of the approach taken by Sociologists in the Durkheimian school. Terms such as ‘source’ and ‘intuition’ will be familiar to readers of phenomenology, and likewise, readers familiar with the work of Durkheim and Levy-Bruhl will recognise the method of striving to find the ‘elementary feelings’ and ‘elementary force’ behind a phenomenon.¹⁴³

In the next section Levinas moves on to outline the elemental source of the difference between the two approaches, and in the subsequent sections he will elaborate on this difference and to some extent loosely trace the intellectual and historical development of this idea. The underlying metaphysical difference that separates the two approaches and the ‘source’ of this ‘logical opposition’ (which Levinas distinguishes as Monotheistic and Pagan) stems from the difference in their understanding of freedom and time. Levinas does not state this distinction in such clear terms at the beginning of the article, but his position becomes more apparent the further one reads. On the one hand is the monotheistic tradition that views man as ‘free’ and unbounded by history, and in opposition to this is the pagan idea of man as bound by time and history, and in some sense predetermined by history and fate.¹⁴⁴ When Levinas introduces the term ‘freedom’ he aligns it with terms such as ‘action’ and a ‘true beginning’, and so, ‘[t]his conception is a feeling that man is absolutely free in his

¹⁴² Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 32.

¹⁴³ *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* was published by Émile Durkheim in 1912 and studied religion as a social phenomenon. Durkheim believed that we could better understand religion if we could understand the origins and the ‘elemental forms’ of religion. Durkheim examined aboriginal religion in an attempt to trace the modern practice of religion back to these elemental forms. The approach taken by Levinas in this article, to get to the source of the opposition between Nazi particularism and Christian universalism, bears similarities to this method. On Caygill’s reading of the text, ‘[f]or Levinas, Hitlerism is the elaboration of an ‘elementary form’ of pagan religiosity that stands opposed to an entire monotheistic civilisation. It is this opposition that forms the horizon of the distinction between particularism and universalism.’ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁴ An article published one year later, in 1935, ‘The Living Relevance of Maïmonides’ (*L’actualité de Maïmonides*), sheds further light on Levinas’s thinking on Paganism contained in his ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’. ‘Paganism is a radical powerlessness to get out of the world. It consists not in denying spirits and gods but in situating them in the world [...] Pagan morality is only the consequence of this basic incapacity to transcend the limits of the world. The pagan is shut up in this world, sufficient unto himself and closed upon himself [...]. He orders his actions and his destiny according to the world.’ The transcendence of monotheism is absent, there is no beyond being. Levinas makes explicit reference to Aristotle’s Prime Mover, which ‘was able to carry to the heights only the poor perfection of created things’. Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Living Relevance of Maïmonides’, quoted in *On Escape*, trans. by Bettina Bergo (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1982), pp. 90-91.

relations with the world and the possibilities that solicit action from him'.¹⁴⁵ Levinas depicts the Monotheistic tradition as viewing man as free to act, unrestrained by time and history. This view is contrasted with the pagan view of man as fated, and restricted by destiny and the past. Time and history are viewed as a 'profound limitation' and as a 'condition of human existence' that is 'irreparable'.¹⁴⁶ An action that would signify a true beginning, and as such true freedom, is not possible within this understanding as man is tied too tightly to the past. Levinas makes a reference to the Atrides of Greek mythology to illustrate how within that tradition man is cursed by destiny and chained by fate. In contrast to this view Levinas presents Judaic and Christian Monotheism. What they have in common is the possibility of 'remorse' that leads to 'repentance' and eventual pardon and redemption. One can be freed of the chains of the past, thus '[t]ime loses its very irreversibility'.¹⁴⁷ Judaism and Christianity somehow transcend time and offer the possibility of a 'new order', 'an order that triumphs by tearing up the bedrock of natural existence'.¹⁴⁸ This opening to transcendence offers the soul the potential for true freedom, as it can free man from the past and from the world, and in doing so render one free to truly act, to begin again. In this view man is not determinately tied to the world and to its material conditions.

We must remember the context in which Levinas is writing this article and what the main subject matter is. Levinas wishes to understand the origin of the conflicting ideas of Christian universalism and racist particularism. Levinas paints a picture of true freedom, in contrast to the notion of 'destiny' and 'fate', and doing so criticizes the view of man as determined by race and religion, and inadvertently reveals to the reader how dangerous such a view of man can be.¹⁴⁹ In light of Levinas's reading of Heidegger presented above, it would seem that Heidegger's understanding of freedom is firmly situated in the pagan tradition that lacks any opening to transcendence beyond

¹⁴⁵ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', p. 64.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Caygill believes that at this pre-war stage, 'Levinas's concern to steer freedom in the direction of the ethical was subordinate to the project of deriving equality from freedom and thus defending it from National Socialist notions of racial inequality'. *Levinas and the Political*, p. 34. In his more overtly religious writings to come, Levinas often contrasts the pagan connection to place with the Judaic nomadic spirit. In one such short reflection Levinas connects pagan enrootedness to place with racism. 'One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to *Place*, without which the universe would become insignificant and would scarcely exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'Heidegger, Gagarin and Us', in *Difficult Freedom. Essays in Judaism*, trans. by Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 231-34 (p. 232).

being.¹⁵⁰ This reading will again be hinted at in *On Escape (De l'évasion)*, written in the following year.

Levinas then takes a leap through time and equates the foundation of modern liberalism with the monotheistic tradition and grounds the liberal view of equality in the notion of freedom from that tradition, as he has presented above. Levinas notes that Liberalism has moved away from many aspects of the religious tradition, such as the supernatural dimensions, but he believes it has retained an important element, the autonomy of reason. 'If the liberalism of these last few centuries evades the dramatic aspects of such a liberalism, it does retain one of its essential elements in the form of the sovereign freedom of reason.'¹⁵¹ Freedom through grace is replaced by freedom through reason.¹⁵² The modern understanding of man as autonomous reason is in line with the depictions of the monotheistic tradition and its view of man as being free to make choices that impact on man's future, irrespective of the past and history. Just as the religious transcendental dimension placed man in a certain sense apart from the physical world, through the power of grace, so too with the Liberal tradition is man 'outside the brutal world and the implacable history of concrete existence'.¹⁵³ The autonomy of reason places man above his circumstances and above the world. The spirituality of reason becomes somewhat detached from the physical world. Perhaps most importantly for the context of this essay, this understanding of man also preserves the dignity and equality of each individual, irrespective of any racial or religious affiliation.

The equal dignity of each and every soul, which is independent of the material or social conditions of people, does not flow from a theory that affirms, beneath individual differences, an analogy based on a 'psychological constitution'. It is due to the power given to the soul to free itself from *what has been*, from

¹⁵⁰ In his later work Levinas will more explicitly link Heidegger's philosophy to Paganism, which he associates with being enrooted to the earth and a destiny linked with place and biology, in contrast to the monotheist tradition which views saving grace as coming from elsewhere. One such example can be found in his 1957 article, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', in which Levinas states, 'it is not sure that National Socialism arises from the mechanist reification of men, and that it does not rest on peasant enrootedness [...]. This is an existence which takes itself to be natural, for whom its place in the sun, its ground, its site, orient all signification – a pagan *existing*.' Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 52. See, Ch. III, § 3.3.

¹⁵¹ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', p. 66.

¹⁵² 'In place of liberation through grace there is autonomy, but the Judeo-Christian leitmotif of freedom pervades this autonomy.' Ibid.

¹⁵³ 'The whole philosophical and political thought of modern times tends to place the human spirit on a plane that is superior to reality, and so creates a gulf between man and the world. It makes it impossible to apply the categories of the physical world to the spirituality of reason, and so locates the ultimate foundation of the spirit outside the brutal world and the implacable history of concrete existence.' Ibid.

everything that linked it to something or engaged it with something (*engagée*), so it can regain its first virginity.¹⁵⁴

The picture of man that we are left with at the end of the first section is of an autonomous individual, who is free to choose between various possibilities, but who seems to do so in a somewhat detached and cold way. 'For him, they [possibilities] are only logical possibilities that present themselves to a dispassionate reason that makes choices while forever keeping its distance.'¹⁵⁵

Section two is the shortest section of the article and it continues to trace the development of this idea, by briefly looking at 'the first doctrine in Western history to contest this view of man', Marxism. Marxism contests the view of man as pure spiritual reason and contests the liberal view of freedom, as the concrete world and material needs play an important, even a determinate role in the life of man.¹⁵⁶ Man is born into a place in the world that in many ways determines man's fate. Levinas characterises Marx's contribution as reversing the liberal idea of man, summarising his contribution as 'Being determines consciousness' in contrast to the 'whole of idealist philosophy' wherein "being does not determine consciousness," but consciousness or reason determines being'.¹⁵⁷ The idea of absolute freedom, as the power of the spirit to break from ties and freely act, is placed into question by pointing out how the concrete material situation cannot be overlooked.¹⁵⁸

Although the end of the second section seemed to close on a negative note for the tradition of absolute freedom, the third section opens with a slightly more positive note. If Marxism calls this concept of liberal freedom into question, does that mean this philosophy comes down on the side of fate? Levinas places Marxism within the tradition of the 1798 revolution and in equating Marxism with the fight for equality,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ 'But as it is at the mercy of a matter and a society that no longer obey the magic wand of reason, its concrete and servile existence has more weight and importance than does impotent reason.' Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ricoeur will make a similar point in his important work from 1965, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, wherein he includes Freud and Nietzsche, along with Marx, as a group of three thinkers he calls 'masters of suspicion'. After these thinkers the concepts of 'self-consciousness' and 'self-determination' become ambiguous concepts, for it is no longer quite clear what self and the determination of the self means. 'Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud [...]. If we go back to the intention they had in common, we find in it the decision to look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as "false" consciousness [...]. Since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, this [the view that meaning and consciousness of meaning coincide] too has become doubtful. After the doubt about things, we have started to doubt consciousness'. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Paul Ricoeur (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 32-33.

points out how fate does not have the last word in Marxism. It would seem that not all is lost for freedom and equality within the philosophy of Marx. Although deterministic ties that our material situation face us with may well be stifling and potentially crippling, they do not have to be necessarily so. One can become conscientised and then communally act to change their situation. 'To become conscious of one's social situation is, even for Marx, to free oneself of the fatalism entailed by that situation.'¹⁵⁹ Levinas then wonders just what view would be able to shake the 'European' view of man and goes on to reflect on a possible candidate:

A view that was truly opposed to the European notion of man would be possible only if the situation to which he was bound was not added to him but formed the very foundation of his being. This paradoxical requirement is one that the experience of our bodies seems to fulfil.¹⁶⁰

Does the experience of having a body fit the requirement of being bound to an inescapable situation, and as such function as a limitation to this 'European notion of man' as unbounded by time and free?

Levinas now moves on to a phenomenological description of what it is to have a body, and this will lead him to an analysis of the 'Germanic ideal of man' and the importance it places on 'blood' and race.¹⁶¹ Levinas begins with a brief reflection on how philosophers have treated the experience of body and selfhood. Straight away we are reminded of just how long the idea of a separation between the self and the body has been with us in philosophy. Levinas introduces Socrates and reminds us of how he experienced his body as 'like the chains that weigh him down in the prison at Athens; it encases him like the very tomb that awaits him'.¹⁶² His body was like a heavy burden that he was forced to carry, and an obstacle that needed to be overcome. This feeling of the 'strangeness' and foreign nature of the body did not end with Socrates. In keeping with the earlier trajectory of the essay Levinas next points out how this understanding of body and spirit also formed a hugely important part of the monotheistic traditions and the 'modern liberalism' that followed. After having outlined the broad thrust of the dualistic understanding of the body-self distinction that has pervaded much of philosophy since the very beginning, Levinas then uses a phenomenological approach to question whether or not this classical distinction between body and spirit is really how

¹⁵⁹ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', p. 67.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Referring here to the 'Germanic ideal of man' in 1930's Germany.

¹⁶² Ibid.

we experience ourselves as embodied. Levinas wonders if this distinction is accurate to experience in explaining our relationship with our body as ‘something eternally foreign’. Reflecting briefly, yet astutely, on ‘a feeling of identity between our bodies and ourselves, which certain circumstances render particularly acute’, Levinas reminds us that this experience of the body as ‘foreign’ is not always the case.¹⁶³ Among these certain circumstances that Levinas examines are the intense feeling of oneness with our body that comes from the satisfaction when one is released from the experience of physical pain, or in the experience of an extreme sport or a physically dangerous situation, when every slight movement of your body may bring about safety or injury, again ‘all dualism between the self and the body must disappear’.¹⁶⁴ Focusing more on the experience of physical pain, Levinas wonders if the feeling of a unity between body and spirit is the only insight into how we experience our bodies that pain offers us. Does our attempt to go beyond physical pain not reveal a feeling of duality between the spirit and the body? Almost in answer to this question he goes on to ask if the futility of this desire, and the impossibility of escaping our bodies and the pain, does not reveal the absolute character of the unity between body and spirit.

The body is not only a happy or unhappy accident that relates us to the implacable world of matter. *Its adherence to the Self is of value in itself.* It is an adherence that *one does not escape* and that no metaphor can confuse with the presence of an external object; it is a union that does not in any way alter the tragic character of finality.¹⁶⁵

The way in which Levinas discusses the spirit and the body, then, implies a duality, even if it is a very close union between the self and the body. In the Western tradition that Levinas focuses on, the experience seems to be one of having a body, as opposed to

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. In his soon to follow 1935 extended essay *On Escape* Levinas will return to this idea of the adherence to the body being an adherence that ‘one does not escape’, specifically examining the experience of nausea and the feeling of being tied to ‘being’ that it brings about. Levinas’s reflections on the body are a departure from the phenomenology of Husserl. In his discussion on *Ideen I* De Boer sets out two assumptions made by Husserl in that work. ‘The first of these assumptions is that the relation to one’s own body is identical with the relation to the perceived object. The second is that one’s own body is also a thing like any other physical thing, although it is likewise more than a thing.’ De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, p. 384. Husserl’s main focus is on the ‘perception’ of things, and the body for Husserl is likewise a perception. The quote above, in which Levinas remarks ‘no metaphor can confuse with the presence of an external object’, could be read as an allusion by Levinas to Husserl’s view on incarnate consciousness, and Levinas’s dissatisfaction with Husserl’s subordination of incarnation to perception. De Boer references Levinas’s *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, as a source of criticism of this point. He also notes that this view of Husserl is likewise criticised by Ricoeur. The centrality of embodiment and the passivity of the affective sensible self will become increasingly important for the development of Levinas’s own work, and contrast with the modern view of the free unhindered subject, as we shall see in the forthcoming chapters.

being a body.¹⁶⁶ In this view the body is seen as a limitation to the otherwise unhindered freedom of man.

One year later Levinas will return to a deeper analysis of our experience of our bodies which he believes the tradition has overlooked, but in this paper he highlights a benefit of this understanding of man. The identity of the self is not exclusively tied to the physical attributes and the biological aspects of the person, and so, it is an universalisable conception of man. Levinas maintains that the Western conception of man has never felt at home with a strong feeling of identity between self and body.¹⁶⁷ He argues that the strong ideological separation that the Western tradition has made between the body and the spirit run counterintuitive to some of our most basic experiences, and in doing so this idea has left a void in which an alternative conception of man as more firmly rooted in their body can creep in.¹⁶⁸ It is precisely this close

¹⁶⁶ This point brings to mind the work of the existentialist phenomenologist Gabriel Marcel, and his notion of 'incarnate existence'. In a footnote by Cohen, added to Levinas's 1979 preface to *Time and the Other*, Cohen tells the reader that Levinas attended the 'Saturday evening gatherings of the philosophical avant-garde at [Gabriel] Marcel's house in the 1930s' (p. 34). Paul Ricoeur also attended these evenings and was likewise influenced by Marcel. Ricoeur even wrote his first book, published in 1947, on the philosophy of Marcel and Karl Jaspers. Ricoeur's first major work, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* was not published until 1950. One can imagine that these conversations had an influence on Levinas's thinking at the time. There are many similarities between the philosophy of Marcel and Levinas, such as the challenge to the primacy of ontology, the importance of intersubjectivity, the religious dimension of the thinking of both and interpersonal ethics as the foundation of the self and of meaning. In a paper given in 1978, addressing the philosophy of both Buber and Marcel, Levinas remarked, 'I would like to examine chiefly to what extent the thought expressed through their work, contrasting sharply with the style of the philosophy handed down to them [Buber and Marcel], responds to the vocation of philosophy, how it renews it, and more specifically how the traditional privilege of ontology is affected by this new approach, in which the source and the model for the meaningful are sought in interhuman relations.' See, Levinas, 'Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Philosophy', in Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 14-29 (p. 14). For more on the relationship between the philosophy of Levinas and Gabriel Marcel, see, Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), chapter nine, 'Substitution: Marcel and Levinas', pp. 192-228. Gibbs points out that freedom as autonomy is called into question by both Levinas and Marcel, who both claim a radical and ethical heteronomy. 'Both Levinas and Marcel claim that there is a radical and ethical heteronomy. They explore the de-centered self, who is capable of substitution, as locus of responsibility — in opposition to an interpretation of the dispersion of the self, where there is no longer any responsibility.' Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, p. 193. Gibbs examines how speech in particular de-centers the subject for Marcel. What is most interesting about Gibbs's chapter is that he bases his reading of Marcel on two papers written in 1939, and so it is likely that Marcel was thinking along these lines in the 1930's. Also, see, Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity. Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁷ Symptomatic of his philosophical writing style, which will become more prevalent as his work progresses, Levinas does not consider certain moments in this long tradition that could be considered as contrary to this broad characterisation. Instead, he makes this general comment in order to support his point and to focus on the argument being presented in this article.

¹⁶⁸ Caygill, commenting on this section of the article states that 'Levinas's insistence upon the intentional analysis of the relation of body and soul is politically as well as philosophically motivated. The idealist rejection of the elementary sentiment of the identity of self and body results in an abstract concept of freedom that is vulnerable to the claims of biology.' *Levinas and the Political*, p. 39.

‘feeling for the body’ that will lead Levinas into the next section of the paper, and his discussion on how such a ‘biological’ concept of man forms the basis for the new ‘Germanic’ (Nazi) understanding of man, and very briefly looks at how this conception emerged.

The mysterious urgings of the blood, the appeals of heredity and the past for which the body serves as an enigmatic vehicle, lose the character of being problems that are subject to a solution put forward by a sovereignly free Self. Not only does the Self bring in the unknown elements of these problems in order to resolve them; the Self is also constituted by these elements. Man’s essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage (*enchaînement*).¹⁶⁹

This new concept of man is one based on race and heredity, and along with this new conception of man comes a new base for society.¹⁷⁰ Alluding to the social contract tradition Levinas argues that a society founded on a mutual agreement between free wills will no longer suffice, and in its place will come a nation based on blood and race ties, fictional or otherwise. ‘A society based on consanguinity immediately ensues from this concretization of the spirit. And then, if race does not exist, one has to invent it!’¹⁷¹ As if sensing the reader’s wonder as to how such a society, based on an exclusively ‘biological’ conception of man, can rise up in the centre of Europe in a country that was deeply steeped in the contrasting philosophical Western tradition that Levinas depicts in the first half of the essay, Levinas presents a possible answer to this very question.¹⁷² It would seem that latent in the very tradition of man as ‘free’ to choose man’s own truth, lies the potential for the destruction of this concept of man, the possibility of extreme

¹⁶⁹ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 69.

¹⁷⁰ ‘The forms of a modern society founded on the harmony established between free wills will seem not only fragile and inconsistent but false and deceitful’. Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² ‘This freedom constitutes the whole of thought’s dignity, but it also harbours its danger. In the gap that separates man from the world of ideas, deceit insinuates itself.’ Ibid. On a separate but related note, within the article Levinas refers to the work of Nietzsche. He explicitly aligns the universalization of war with Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’, and he also makes a reference to Zarathustra, aligning Nietzsche’s fictional character with the desire to universalise one’s own truth. The association between Nietzsche’s philosophy and Nazism go unsubstantiated and are not verified through argumentation. Caygill describes this reading of Nietzsche as ‘questionable’. *Levinas and the Political*, p. 39. In his interview with François Poirié, conducted as late as 1986, Levinas comments on how difficult it is to communicate that Nazism came from the country that gave the world Leibniz, Kant, Goethe and Hegel. Even at such a late stage of his thinking as 1986, Levinas once again loosely connects the work of Nietzsche with Hitlerism. ‘I myself link what Nietzsche wrote to the presentiment of a time in which all the values would dishonour themselves; he denounces the values which will become confused and contradict themselves some decades later. And still, today, I tell myself that Auschwitz was committed by the civilization of transcendental idealism. And Hitler himself will be found again in Nietzsche.’ Levinas, *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 40.

scepticism as the disowning of any and all truth.¹⁷³ As the spirit is in a sense ‘detached’ from the body, this space allows for the space for free thought; however, this space also opens up a gap that makes scepticism possible and ‘deceit’ can creep in. The view of man as free to choose truth for oneself, and as free from the chains of time and history, brings with it the possibility of choosing no truth at all. As one is not born rigidly tied to spiritual values, or unescapably aligned to the commitments and past of the spiritual culture one is born into, the possibility of not committing oneself to any values becomes a real possibility.¹⁷⁴ This loss of truth and commitment, and the vacuum that it creates, brings with it the susceptibility to being duped by counterfeit versions of the ‘true ideal of freedom’.

It is to a society in such a condition that the Germanic ideal of man seems to promise sincerity and authenticity. Man no longer finds himself confronted by a world of ideas in which he can choose his own truth on the basis of a sovereign decision made by his free reason. He is already linked to a certain number of these ideas, just as he is linked by birth to all those who are of his blood.¹⁷⁵

The bonds that tie this society together are the bonds of blood and heredity.

When one reminds oneself that this article was written in 1934 it is striking just how accurate Levinas’s attempt at a philosophical understanding of what lies behind the ideology of Hitlerism. As is characteristic of the work of Levinas in places his argument consists of some very broad strokes, that are not fully argued out or supported, but one cannot deny, with hindsight, the unnerving portrait of the threat that Hitlerism presented. Even before the full atrocities of the Hitlerism regime revealed themselves Levinas proclaimed that the very humanity of man was in jeopardy.

It is not a particular dogma concerning democracy, parliamentary government, dictatorial regime, or religious politics that is in question. It is the very humanity of man.¹⁷⁶

§1.11 THE POWERLESSNESS OF THE PASSIVE AFFECTIVE SELF

Written one year after ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, *On Escape (De l’évasion)* (1935) carries over many of the themes from Levinas’s earlier work, such as

¹⁷³ ‘Thought becomes a game. Man revels in his freedom and does not definitively compromise himself with any truth. He transforms his power to doubt into a lack of conviction.’ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 69.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Not to chain himself to a truth becomes for him not wishing to commit his own self to the creation of spiritual values. Sincerity becomes impossible and puts an end to all heroism. Civilization is invaded by everything that is not authentic, by a substitute that is put at the service of fashion and of various interests.’ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

the inescapability of the body. It is in this article that an independent Levinas starts to emerge more clearly and more decisively than has been the case in the work to date. The importance of affective intentionality, briefly mentioned in his *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, crucial to Levinas's subsequent development, will be central to his thinking in this essay. In distinction to the Heideggerian analysis of *Dasein*, which was necessary in order to open up the question of the meaning of being, Levinas shows an interest in exploring the subject's relation to being. This article marks an important step in the direction of describing the self as affective sensibility, calling into question the primacy of representation, and the view of an autonomous free, self-sufficient subject. We begin to see the emergence of themes that will still be evident even in his most mature works.

In his work *Emmanuel Levinas* Hand characterises *On Escape* as 'the place where he [Levinas] first tries to reverse his involvement with Heidegger's ontology'.¹⁷⁷ In this article Levinas begins to explicitly critique Heideggerian ontology, and begins to take the first steps towards his philosophical description of a subject who is beyond being. It should be kept in mind, however, that Heidegger has a very particular understanding of ontology, which was very different from any understanding of ontology that came before Kant. 'Ontology', as Heidegger understands it, is the post-Kantian Diltheyan-hermeneutic study of the way the meaning of the living word of 'Being' is implicitly understood and expressed, however incompletely, in our human everyday experiences and expressions. For Heidegger, then, approaching the issue of the meaning of Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being that the human being harbours. It is this question, of the meaning of Being in relation to the (finite) experiences of the human being, that interests Heidegger, and to which he brought to bear an existential-hermeneutic methodology under the influences of Dilthey and Kierkegaard. With Heidegger, then, hermeneutics can be applied to an understanding of being and its meaning, by gaining access to *Dasein*'s implicit understanding of the meaning of being, revealed in *Dasein*'s everyday comportment to being-in-the-world. As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*:

Entities *are*, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their

¹⁷⁷ Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 27.

nature is ascertained. But Being 'is' only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs.¹⁷⁸

Hand, therefore, is correct to say that Levinas distances his philosophical approach from that of Heidegger's 'ontology', however, as was shown above, the first steps out of Heidegger's 'ontology' can be seen in Levinas's previous work.¹⁷⁹ Also, his analysis leaves more than just Heidegger behind, as will be shown below.¹⁸⁰ In a key sentence describing the text Hand stresses: 'Escape now symptomatically replaces freedom'.¹⁸¹ Hand says of the text that it effectively dismantles what Levinas had confidently erected philosophically up to this point. Hand believes that the shock Levinas would have felt due to the political changes taking place, both on an international and personal level, led Levinas to think about his understanding of freedom. Although the historical context and the unfolding events at the time of writing this essay were undoubtedly influential on Levinas's thinking, and must not be understated, the development of his thought in relation to freedom is consistent with his previous work, even if in this essay it takes a

¹⁷⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time* p. 228, (SZ 183). Levinas understood Heidegger's specific sense of the term Ontology very well. 'Not only is ontology [for Heidegger] not identified with realism (as contemporary use of the term would have it), but it is also quite different from the study of the essence of *being* [*être*] in the sense of a *that-which-is* [*objet étant*]. Ontology is opposed to that-which-is in the very sense of *the fact it is* and in its specific mode of being.' Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 13. Later in the same article Levinas remarks, 'the *ontological* analysis of the subject is alone capable of yielding a solution and even a sphere of investigation to ontology in the general sense that Heidegger seeks.' *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁹ In 1934 Levinas published a review of Louis Lavelle's *La présence totale* (Paris: Fernand Aubier, 1934), in *Recherches Philosophiques*, IV, (1934-35), pp. 392-95. Samuel Moyn convincingly argues that the work of Lavelle was influential for Levinas's thinking around this period, first indicated in *On Escape*. Jacques Rolland also notes Lavelle's influence on Levinas in a note in *On Escape*, p. 86. Drawing from Levinas's review of Lavelle's *La présence totale*, Moyn points out that, by Levinas's own admission, he found in the work of Lavelle a way between the outdated 'serene optimism' of idealism and the 'tragic despair' of existence as portrayed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Lavelle's rehabilitation of the present, in contrast to Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* as constantly projecting itself into a future, wherein it is fated to die, influenced Levinas's own turn to the present, which is first explored in *On Escape*, and then more fully in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*. Moyn provides a quote from Levinas's review article, 'Seen from within the present always *is*. [...] *Our fate is determined and decided in the present*. The force of this point is that we are masters and not slaves. An unexpected solution. The tragic despair of the German philosophers is vanquished not by a return to idealism but by an affirmation of being'. Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics*, p. 112. We agree with Moyn that a much closer study of the impact of Lavelle's thought on Levinas is needed, especially given that his work appears to have been influential at a very early stage, particularly for Levinas's move away from Heidegger and the beginnings of his own distinct philosophy.

¹⁸⁰ Levinas begins to go beyond not only Heidegger's account of freedom but also an account of freedom that he believes has dominated the whole history of western philosophy. In the not-so-distant future, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will present a critical analysis of the 'whole of Western philosophy' wherein philosophy is seen as having always prioritised the 'same' over the other, freedom over justice. Ontology is equated with power and is condemned as a philosophy of injustice. 'Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of an I.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 46.

¹⁸¹ Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 27.

more solemn direction.¹⁸² Levinas himself will come to describe his intellectual biography as ‘dominated by [both] the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror’.¹⁸³ When reading the article one cannot help *now* but to be aware of the future yet to come and this lends a particular sombre note to the picture of the human being as powerless and impotent to escape from being and its alleged *destined* meaning.¹⁸⁴

Interestingly, Levinas opens the article on the issue of freedom, stating that, ‘[t]he revolt of traditional philosophy against the idea of being originates in the discord between human freedom and the brutal fact of being that assaults this freedom’.¹⁸⁵ On this reading, traditional philosophy does not question the freedom of man, and any limitations to this freedom are seen as coming from the outside.¹⁸⁶ The struggle is seen as a struggle between ‘the I’ (*le moi*) and ‘the non-I’ (*le non-moi*), and not a struggle within the self. Levinas terms this view of the ‘I’ (*moi*) as ‘self-sufficient’, this term will become synonymous with freedom understood in this way in his later work. Here Levinas aligns this view of freedom as ‘self-sufficient’ with ‘restless and enterprising capitalism’ and the bourgeois spirit. Through the ever greater accumulation of possessions and capital the bourgeois asserts its hold over the present, and even takes steps to guarantee their power over the future, and safeguard their security through insurance. The drive for control and their wish to overcome the imposition of the world and things even dominates any desire for enjoyment, ‘he prefers the certainty of tomorrow to today’s enjoyment’.¹⁸⁷ Underlying this relationship with the world is a particular understanding of being. Being is sufficient unto itself and offers itself to us. The lack in the human being is attributed to a limitation of being in the case of the

¹⁸² Not only was there disturbing changes taking place within the political scene in Germany at that time, but also on a level closer to home. Two years previous to the publication of *On Escape*, Heidegger was elected rector of the University of Freiburg on April 21st, 1933, and at the beginning of May 1933 he joined the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP).

¹⁸³ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Signature’, in *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, pp. 291-95 (p. 291).

¹⁸⁴ In his 1986 interview with François Poirié Levinas remarked: ‘During those years before the war I wrote philosophical texts which had no especially Jewish thematic to them but which probably stemmed from that which the Judaic classifies or suggests as the human. One of the texts, *De l’évasion* [...] written in 1935, one can distinguish the anxieties of the war to come. And the whole fatigue of being, the condition of that period. Distrust in relation to being (which, in another form, continued in what I was able to do after this date) arose at a time in which the presentiment of the imminent Hitlerism was everywhere.’ Levinas, *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁵ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁶ As becomes increasingly characteristic of Levinas’s style, he does not explicitly reference which philosophers within the tradition fit this description, and if there are any who can be spared this portrayal. Levinas will make this point many times in his work to come, and one such philosopher that he explicitly refers to as fitting this description is Hobbes. For example, see, Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, pp. 47-59.

¹⁸⁷ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 50.

human, and Levinas describes philosophy's sole preoccupation as the drive to transcend these limits. Western philosophy has attempted to overcome these limits by trying to secure a harmony between us and the world, or by attempting to perfect our own being.

Levinas then notes that the modern sensibility, perhaps for the first time in the history of philosophy, no longer turns toward transcendence. It is at this point that Levinas introduces the term in the title, 'escape' (*l'évasion*). The modern sensibility is one of world-weariness. It is the 'disorder of our time' (*mal du siècle*).¹⁸⁸ Being in all its weight, brutality and seriousness, weighs heavily on the modern subject. Levinas uses the analogy of a game to describe life. Life becomes very real and is no longer seen as a game once one realises that they are impotent to say stop, or halt the game when it becomes distressing, and no longer plays by our rules. For it is not suffering that reveals the stark reality of being, but our inability to pause the suffering, and consequently results in 'an acute feeling of being held fast (*rivé*)'.¹⁸⁹ Such an insight does not bring with it a new image of our existence, but affirms the inescapability of our existence and the permanent quality of our presence. The recent events of World War I, and perhaps even the impending war to come, has stripped life of its innocent youthful game-like status, and unlike the history of philosophy and the various attempts to overcome the limits placed on man, the need of modern man becomes the need to escape.¹⁹⁰

The escape that Levinas wishes to depict is not an escape from a particular mode of being, nor is it an aspiration to flee this reality and enter into another domain, nor to overcome the restrictions that come with a body. Each of these escapes seek to modify being but do not entail the need to escape being as such. Levinas also includes Bergson and his understanding of freedom within this group, as his philosophy does not adequately capture this fundamental need to escape and thus stays within the confines of ontology. Bergson's life force or creative evolution (*devenir créateur*) may break with the mechanical view of time, but being is replaced with becoming, and fundamentally there is still no attempt to escape the weight of being.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ 'The being of the I [*moi*], which war and war's aftermath have allowed us to know, leaves us with no further games [*plus aucun jeu*]. The need to be right, or justified, in the game can only be a need for escape'. Ibid., p. 53.

While it breaks with the rigidity of classical being, the philosophy of the vital urge does not free itself from the mystique (*prestige*) of being, for beyond the real it glimpses only the activity that creates it.¹⁹¹

In this section we also find a veiled criticism of the spontaneity that is distinctive of Bergson's depiction of freedom. The vital urge may be spontaneous and unpredictable, and so, in Bergson's estimation, undetermined and free, but Levinas maintains that the image of the being it depicts is one of a being that is almost wild and irrational, a being 'destined for a race-course (*voué à une course*). The urge is creative but irresistible'.¹⁹² Although the reference to Bergson is not explicitly stated, in this section Levinas also attributes the 'fatalism', up until now associated with Heidegger's freedom, to that of Bergson's. As Bergson's philosophy does not manage to leave the confines of ontology behind, despite all attempts to avoid determinism, without any recourse to beyond being, the journey may be unpredictable but the end remains the same.

The fulfilment of a destiny is the stigma of being: the destination is not wholly traced out, but its fulfilment is fatal, inevitable [...]. With the vital urge we are going toward the unknown, but we are going somewhere, whereas with escape we aspire only to get out (*sortir*).¹⁹³

The escape that Levinas wishes to describe is not equivalent to creation, or to a renewal of being. Levinas argues that this need to escape (*besoin de l'évasion*) from being, which is impossible to achieve, is fundamental to the human beings relation to being, and yet one that philosophy has overlooked. Despite the apparent identity within the existent, there is an integral duality and tension fundamental to the subject. This duality, however, is not in the traditional sense of the distinction between the material and the immaterial; it is, rather, in the dramatic form of the subject's relation to its self.¹⁹⁴ The need to escape is not motivated by a want to reform the self, or to overcome some lack, but to be rid of the self altogether. The very identity of the self incorporates

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ This idea of a split self will prove crucial to Levinas's later development. In the next chapter we will see Levinas develop the idea by explaining that the self is inescapably bound its own self, and responsible for its self, even though the self did not choose such responsibility. As Levinas develops this idea further he will situate the encounter with the Other at the level of affective sensibility and not at the level of the intentional ego. See, Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas. The Genealogy of Ethics*. See, also, Theodore de Boer, 'Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Rationality of Transcendence. Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1997), pp. 33-55 (p. 54).

the need of being rid of oneself.¹⁹⁵ The 'I' (*moi*) is chained to its self, and powerless to ever undo the bind.¹⁹⁶ At the end of this section Levinas states that central to philosophy is the problem of being *qua* being, but for Levinas the need for escape is what leads us towards it.

Having differentiated the 'escape' in question from any other reflections on escape, in the successive sections Levinas moves on to give a detailed phenomenological reading of need, pleasure, shame and nausea in order to capture this fundamental need to escape that will always elude the subject. The powerlessness of the subject is explored in greater detail. Levinas does this by turning to examine the importance of affective experiences and the crucial significance of sensation and sensibility in the life of the embodied self. The move towards reflecting on affectivity will prove crucial for Levinas's future work, as it will call into question the primacy of intentional consciousness, as it reveals a passivity that comes with being an affective sensible self, which is prior to, or beneath the freedom of reflective consciousness.¹⁹⁷

First Levinas turns to 'need', in order to clarify just what this need to escape is. The need to escape is not as a result of any privation, 'there is in need something other than a lack'.¹⁹⁸ The being of that which is does not admit of degrees, it either is or it is not. It is the very fact of existing that escape wishes to evade, and it is not to be confused with any need to change the nature or quality of the existent. The need to escape has no object, similar to the contrast between anxiety and fear in Heidegger, which Heidegger himself borrowed from Kierkegaard.¹⁹⁹ Need here is simply the need to get out, irrespective of any subsequent destination. As John Llewelyn describes it, '[i]t is an inner restlessness that will not be put to rest, unlike needs for which satisfaction brings an at least temporary peace'.²⁰⁰ Need is generally interpreted as

¹⁹⁵ Here we go along with Llewelyn's reading of this section, 'the second *de* of the phrase *le besoin de sortir de soi-même* admits translation both as 'from' and as 'of'. One's self is from the start the need to leave oneself. The unity of the self labours in the pain of a need to be outside itself. Its unity is a disunity. Oneself is a twoself'. Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas. The Genealogy of Ethics*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹⁶ 'Thus, escape 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 [moi] is oneself [soi-même]*.' Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 55.

¹⁹⁷ Both linear and spatial language fails to capture the relationship between the immediate sensate life of the self and reflective consciousness. Finding a way to express such ideas within the limitation of language is something that Levinas will struggle with throughout his work.

¹⁹⁸ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁹ In the later works Levinas will introduce the term 'desire' to differentiate between an ontic need that has an object and therefore in at least a limited sense can be satisfied, and a 'desire' that can never be satisfied. In the text of a lecture course delivered by Heidegger at Marburg University in 1925 Heidegger refers to Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread (Der Begriff der Angst)*. See, Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, p. 292.

²⁰⁰ Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas. The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 16.

resulting from some kind of lack, as need turns us toward something other than ourselves, and when the need is met we are returned to a ‘natural plenitude’. Levinas, however, maintains that this description is too hasty. Levinas asks what of malaise, or discontent, wherein the individual has uneasiness within themselves and they have no idea what it is that could release them from this inner disquiet.

There are needs for which the consciousness of a well-determined object — susceptible of satisfying those needs — is lacking. The needs that we do not lightly call ‘intimate’ remain at the stage of a malaise, which is surmounted in a state closer to deliverance than to satisfaction.²⁰¹

The use of the term ‘deliverance’ to describe the experience of becoming free from a state of malaise captures the passivity of the subject. As we associate the fulfilment of needs as coming from outside the self, this further demonstrates our passivity, ‘it places our being under the tutelage of what is outside of us’.²⁰² The suffering of need in the form of malaise affirms that need is not to be understood in terms of a lack. Similarly that the satisfaction of a need does not eradicate it also further supports this analysis. Needs are never fully satisfied, as they are replaced by another, or the anticipated satisfaction does not come, or if perceived as being satisfied disappointment shortly follows the satisfaction. A fundamental aspect of the human condition is this inability to satisfy this deepest need. In order to further elaborate on how this need refers to the presence of our being, and not some deficiency, Levinas turns to an on analysis of pleasure.

If need was the desire to fill a lack in being and return to a state of plenitude, then in pleasure, which is the satisfaction of a need, one should feel most attached to being. Levinas describes how in fact the opposite is the case. Rather than rooting us firmly in being, pleasure offers us a glimpse of escape and a momentary forgetfulness of the weight of being.²⁰³ Like floating in zero gravity, we can feel weightless, ‘[t]he [human] being feels its substance somehow draining from it; it grows lighter, as if drunk, and disperses’.²⁰⁴ However, the weightlessness cannot last and when one returns to earth the heavy weight of their being is all the more apparent due to the momentary release. In pleasure, time seems to split and one is held fast in a continuous present. When the pleasure breaks and ceases one is returned to the instant. Although pleasure

²⁰¹ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 59.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ ‘Therefore, need is not a nostalgia for being; it is the liberation from being, since the movement of pleasure is precisely the loosening of the malaise.’ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

can provide release from malaise, it should not be seen as the goal of need, as pleasure is not an end point at which to aim. It is not a state but a movement, a process of departing from being, but not aimed at any specific destination. A vital element in Levinas's description of pleasure is that pleasure is an affective event. This line of thinking will be crucial for his later description of subjectivity as affectivity, as it captures the passivity of the self. As pleasure promises momentary release from the malaise that comes from the acute feeling of being held fast (*rivé*) to being, it cannot be a state of being. If pleasure was an act, then it would fall under the categories of being.²⁰⁵

Affectivity, on the contrary, is foreign to notions that apply to that which is, and has never been reducible to categories of thought and activity.²⁰⁶

Cognition is also an attribute of being. If pleasure was cognitive it would likewise be understood as a property of being. Pleasure is not an act of being as it is the process that attempts to escape from this heavy burden of being.²⁰⁷ Try as we might to forget this basic relation to being and to transcend our self through the immersion in pleasure, which although may bring us momentary self forgetting, it is always doomed to failure. Pleasure cannot last, and our attempt to flee will never be accomplished, as we will always be returned once again to our self.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ For more on this see, Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas. The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 17.

²⁰⁶ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 62.

²⁰⁷ 'Pleasure is affectivity, precisely because it does not take on the forms of being, but rather attempts to break these up.' Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Levinas's reflection on the futile attempt by the individual to escape the self through pleasure brings to mind Kierkegaard's writings on the aesthetic sphere of existence. For Kierkegaard, human life is seen as divided into three possible stages (aesthetic, ethical and religious), each of which is characterised by a different relationship between the two elements within the self, the temporal and eternal. As Kierkegaard explain himself: 'There are three stages: an aesthetic, an ethical, and a religious. But these are not distinguished abstractly, as the immediate, the mediate and the synthesis of the two, but rather concretely, in existential determinations, as enjoyment-perdition; action-victory; suffering.' Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press: Princeton USA, 1941), p. 261. The aesthetic stage is related to the senses and in this stage the temporal element is prioritised, and the eternal element is completely neglected. The individual sees life in wholly material terms and concentrates on the here and now, prioritising personal satisfaction and personal fulfilment over all else. A review written by Levinas of Leon Chestov's *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy* was published in 1937. In the article Levinas writes, 'The substance of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy [...] makes naked the richness of an individual soul thirsting for salvation, and through this, the existential categories of religious psychology.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'Review of Leon Chestov's *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*', *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 101: 1-2 (1937), pp. 139-41 (p. 139), trans. by James McLachlan, retrieved from, <http://www.angelfire.com/nb/shestov/sk/levinas.html>. Throughout his many writings Levinas refers to the work of Kierkegaard. What is strikingly different about Levinas point in this text, in contrast to Kierkegaard, is that whereas Kierkegaard held out hope that it was possible, although exceptionally rare, for the movement of faith to lift someone above such suffering, Levinas is emphasising that there is no such escape. If Levinas also believed that religious faith can offer solace to the self, there is no sign of such a belief in *On Escape*.

Not only is pleasure insufficient in its primary purpose but in some ways we are left the worst for this momentary forgetting, as when we return we are left ashamed of our being and our basic nakedness that we cannot conceal, not even to ourselves. Nakedness does not refer to the physical condition of being unclothed, but to the need to excuse one's existence. Shame captures the drama that is the duality of the self. For in shame the self clearly wishes that it could eradicate the self that acted in the manner that brought about the shame. The I can no longer understand its own actions, and is sickened by the fact that it cannot hide from what it did, and cannot escape the self that did it, as they are one and the same.²⁰⁹ However, shame here is not to be thought of as a result of acting in an immoral way. Shame is not as a result of any limitation, or as a result of a particular shameful act, but the self's incapacity to break with its own self. Shame has an ontological significance, as it turns us towards the inescapable fact of being there. It is our presence to ourselves that is shameful. As revealing as shame is in exposing our inability to be free of being, there is one more phenomena that is more revealing still, that of nausea.

More than any other phenomenon, the debilitating feeling of needing to vomit reveals the inescapable presence of our self to our self more than any other. 'We are revolted from the inside; our depths smother beneath ourselves; our innards "heave" (*nous avons "mal au coeur"*).'²¹⁰ Nausea has a similar role to that of anxiety in

²⁰⁹ In the not-so-distant future Jean-Paul Sartre will publish *Being and Nothingness* (1943), in which he also notably discusses shame. Shame, for Sartre, indicates our basic relatedness to others. The self feels ashamed because the other is watching and has witnessed a shameful act. For Sartre, the primary structure of shame is shame *before somebody*. Sartre wrote, shame 'is a shameful apprehension of something and this something is me. I am ashamed of what I am [...] the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other.' Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (USA: Washington Square Press, 1956) p. 301. In distinction, in *On Escape* Levinas's account of shame is shame felt for one's own inescapable nakedness to oneself. In *Time and the Other* Levinas stresses, in contrast to Sartre, that what he wishes to capture is the fact that the I is inescapably bound to the self: 'In Sartre's philosophy there is some sort of angelical present [...]. In recognizing the whole weight of matter in the present itself and in its emerging freedom, we want both to recognize material life and its triumph over the anonymity of existing, and the tragic finality to which it is bound by its very freedom.' Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 62. In 1957 in his article 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' Levinas reintroduces 'shame' only at that stage of his work 'shame' begins to take on an ethical significance. Through the encounter with the face of the Other the self comes to feel ashamed for its arbitrary freedom. 'It is a shame freedom has of itself, discovering itself to be murderous and usurpatory in its very exercise'. Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 58. Although this understanding of shame is closer to Sartre, as it comes from an intersubjective encounter, they are fundamentally different. For Levinas the self does not feel ashamed for a particular 'vulgar act', as Sartre puts it, but for its very own existence. This feeling of shame brings with it the possibility of a moral life. See, Hayat, *La liberté investie*, especially the third portion of this study where the author compares the philosophy of Sartre and Levinas in relation to their respective views on freedom.

²¹⁰ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 66.

Heidegger's work, but it is notably different.²¹¹ It is not the facticity of *Dasein*'s being that is revealed in nausea, but the pure weight of being, and our absolute inability to do anything about it. '[T]his', as Levinas stresses, 'is the very experience of pure being'.²¹² It is nausea, therefore, that awakens us, as it were, to the pure brute fact that 'there is being' (*il y a l'être*). Nausea is powerlessness, an 'impower' (*impuissance*) beyond the power of the self.²¹³ The imposed fatality of finite subjectivity seems even more powerless than Heidegger's *Dasein* who is doomed to death. Anxiety, in Heidegger, can be read as redeeming, as it pulls *Dasein* back from its fallen state and reveals freedom, bringing with it the potential for authentic living, through the embracing of one's inevitable death.²¹⁴ In *On Escape* it is not the end of being that strikes fear into the subject, but the very weight and imposition of being, chained to the subject who is powerless to change it.

Although the thinking through of these young ideas, and the metaphors used in an attempt to describe them, will undergo further change, Levinas's depiction of the world at this early stage will fundamentally remain the same. It is in this article that we first grasp the sense of urgency in Levinas's attempt to think beyond being, but the path out of being is yet to be paved. To do so, Levinas will need to 'overturn' certain 'common sense' notions, one of which will be our understanding of freedom and responsibility.

²¹¹ In contrast to Heidegger's moods (*Stimmungen*), such as boredom and *Angst*, which already imply a kind of comprehension, Levinas's analysis of nausea, and of insomnia and fatigue in his work after the war (*Existence and Existents* 1947), are prior to even this level of comprehension. As Bettina Bergo notes: 'To deformalise Heidegger's moods, which are already a kind of comprehension, Levinas has to show that at the depths of living embodiment lies a gap, between *what* we feel and the way we *become aware* of actively feeling anything. This also meant contesting the primacy Husserl attributed to transcendental consciousness as passive temporal synthesis.' Bettina Bergo, 'The Flesh Made Word; Or, The Two Origins', in *Nietzsche and Levinas. "After the Death of A Certain God"*, pp. 99-115 (pp. 99-100).

²¹² Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 67.

²¹³ *Impuissance*, can be translated as 'impotence' or 'powerlessness'. The noun 'power' can be translated as '*puissance*' or '*pouvoir*', and the verb '*pouvoir*' can be translated as 'can' or 'to be able'. Levinas's focus on the powerlessness of the self is in contrast to Husserl's 'I can' and Heidegger's 'potentiality-for-being', or 'to be able to' (*Seinkönnen*), both of which capture the virility of the self to exercise mastery over their own life, in contrast to the powerlessness of the self emphasised here by Levinas. See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §54-60. See, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), § 60.

²¹⁴ The phenomenon of nausea is also not as isolated as that of anxiety, as in nausea there is the 'hope' offered by the presence of the other person (*autrui*) who objectifies nausea through the diagnoses of an illness. 'The presence of another (*autrui*) is even desired, to a certain degree, for it allows the scandal of nausea to be brought down to the level of an "illness" (*maladie*), of a fact that is socially normal and can be treated, and in regard to which one can consequently adopt an objective attitude.' Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 67.

It is a matter of getting out of being by a new path, at the risk of overturning certain notions that to common sense and the wisdom of the nations seemed the most evident.²¹⁵

Being is not described in any favourable terms in this early article and our fundamental relation to being is the impatient urgent and incessant need to escape, irrespective of where we might go or how we might get there. What is of importance is that we leave being behind. In contrast to the picture of the free Western subject presented by Idealism, the human being is depicted as utterly powerless to fulfil this incessant need. Given the political climate at the time perhaps it is unsurprising that being is depicted in suffocating terms.

Every civilization that accepts being — with the tragic despair it contains and the crimes it justifies — merits the name ‘barbarian’.²¹⁶

Future works will pay much more attention to the importance of the love of life and the enjoyment in living, which bring a momentary release from the burden of life, in contrast to Heidegger’s *Dasein* who Levinas goes on to describe in *Totality and Infinity* as ‘never hungry’.²¹⁷ However, pure undifferentiated neutral being will continue to be described in such a negative manner. Fortunately, for Levinas there is a way out, the subject is not left alone and forsaken to being. Although pleasure as a primarily selfish act is on the final assessment insufficient, Levinas will go on in the post-war work to describe a transcendent encounter that is never fully consumed by the free subject and breaks the totalising structure of being. The descriptions of the subject as affectivity begun here will lead Levinas to alterity.²¹⁸

§1.12 RE-READING HUSSERL

‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’ (*L’Oeuvre d’Edmond Husserl*) was published in 1940, ten years after Levinas’s dissertation and not long after Husserl’s death. It is a significant article on which to end this chapter as in this article Levinas returns to his

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ ‘*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 134.

²¹⁸ Heidegger’s later turn (*Kehre*) away from the existential phenomenological understanding of *Dasein* as a Being-for-death, and towards the historical epochal sendings of the meaning of Being to *Dasein*, and to which *Dasein* responds, is further removed from Levinas’s concerns on freedom and his criticisms of the deterministic and fatalistic position of Heidegger adopted in *Being and Time*. Thus, Levinas does not follow up the later and controversial development of Heidegger’s thought in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s.

reading of Husserl and discovers latent possibilities in Husserl's understanding of intentionality not exploited by Husserl himself, and in light of this re-examines freedom in Husserl's thought. Levinas is once again preoccupied with the question of freedom and it is a central focus of his reading and presentation of Husserl's phenomenology. This re-reading of Husserl provides Levinas with the methodological tools to later develop his own philosophy further, and to build on this potential that lay somewhat dormant in Husserl's own work, as the ethical significance was unrecognised by Husserl himself, by describing how sense can come from the outside.²¹⁹ Levinas now presents a re-evaluation of his earlier reading on the very issue of freedom and intellectualism, both topics on which he had earlier based his criticism of Husserl. This revised reading reveals how, despite the subject being viewed as the origin of sense, the subject is both active and passive in relation to sense.²²⁰ Levinas finds the possibility of a more favourable account of freedom in Husserl's description of intentionality, which he believes Husserl himself overlooked. Despite this, Levinas is also subtly critical of Husserl's own emphasis on consciousness as the sole origin of meaning. Although Levinas's re-reading of Husserl will pave the way for Levinas to give a new description of freedom, and explore further the question of the origin and justification of freedom, this article hints at what Levinas later came to find deficient in the understanding of freedom contained in Husserl's work.

The purpose of this long article is to present an overview of the phenomenology of Husserl, and to offer an exposition of the main components thereof, 'to bring out the unity of the phenomenological inspiration, its physiognomy, its message'.²²¹ Given that we have summarised Levinas's understanding of phenomenology in his first article outlined above, we do not need to repeat that summary, rather we will turn our attention to those aspects that have undergone a slight revision, and more particularly the

²¹⁹ In his interview with Nemo, Levinas reflects on how he further developed Husserl's understanding of non-theoretical intentionality, beyond what Husserl would have recognised as his own view of intentionality. It is in this present article that Levinas first articulates this aspect of Husserl's intentionality, however, at this early stage the ethical dimension of Levinas's future development is not yet present. 'The character of value [axiological intentionality] does not attach to beings consequent to the modification by *knowledge*, but comes from a specific attitude of consciousness, of a non-theoretical intentionality, straight off irreducible to knowledge. There is here a Husserlian possibility which can be developed beyond what Husserl himself said on the ethical problem and on the relationship with the Other, which according to him remains representative (even though Merleau-Ponty tried to interpret otherwise). The relationship with the Other can be sought as an irreducible intentionality, even if one must end by seeing that *it ruptures* intentionality.' Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 32, my emphasis.

²²⁰ For a full account of the role of sense in the work of Levinas in relation to Husserl, see, Drabinski's, *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*.

²²¹ Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 47-87 (p. 49).

importance of this description of phenomenology for freedom. Were as in his thesis Levinas questioned the intellectualism of Husserl here we find that Levinas has discovered a way around this earlier criticism, and no longer holds it to be the case. In his thesis, Levinas attributed the intellectualism of Husserl to the privileged position of representation in his description of intentionality, claiming that ‘to have a sense’ does not mean the same as ‘to represent’.²²² He has since come to reconsider this position motivated by a change in his understanding of the meaning of ‘representation’. The role of the sense-bestowing function of consciousness (*Sinngebung*) and self-evidence take on a new significance. With this modified reading of Husserl Levinas has found a possible way of describing freedom that does not fall prey to Heidegger’s determinism, nor Bergson’s irrationalism, and brings Husserl’s own thought in a direction overlooked by Husserl himself. It provides a way for Levinas to begin to develop an understanding of freedom as grounded in a passivity that is prior to meaning giving intentional consciousness, and by arguing that the subject is not the sole origin of meaning, freedom can be saved from a totalizing unethical description.

Although Levinas’s description of phenomenology does not alter that given in his very first article on Husserl’s book of *Ideas I*, the description given in this article pays particular attention to an important dimension that was not stressed before. He describes the purpose of phenomenology as ‘an investigation of their [objects] meaning [sense (*sens*)] based on the self-evidence that constitutes them’.²²³ Phenomenology is the clarification of sense and does not concern itself with any questions pertaining to the existence of the object, but only the sense of the object for consciousness. Phenomenology’s method is to reflect on consciousness, and to examine the self-evidence awakened by reflection in order to clarify this sense.²²⁴ This definition of phenomenology opens up the question of sense, and in the section ‘Intentionality’ Levinas goes on to outline what intentionality is and how thought should be understood as always having a ‘sense’.

Levinas’s description of intentionality begins in the familiar fashion, by describing what was novel in Husserl’s approach and how consciousness is always consciousness of something. Levinas reminds us that intentionality is transcendent as it

²²² Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 44.

²²³ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 55. Throughout this article Cohen and Smith choose to translate ‘*sens*’ as meaning. It should be noted that ‘*sens*’ can also be translated as ‘sense’, which in my view is a more appropriate translation, and closer to Husserl’s *Sinn*.

²²⁴ The appeal to self-evidence illustrates the phenomenological method, as after the reduction there is nothing else to appeal to for the verification of ‘truth’.

is a way for thought to contain something other than itself. He also points out that it is not to be understood as a relation between two objects, but unlike his previous description in which Levinas stressed that consciousness itself is not an object, here we find an emphasis on a dimension of intentionality previously unexplored. Levinas stresses that intentionality is essentially the act of bestowing a sense, *Sinngebung*. ‘The relation of intentionality is nothing like the relations between real objects. *It is essentially the act of bestowing a meaning [sense] (the Sinngebung).*’²²⁵ As such the object, every object, constitutes a moment of sense. To think is to think in terms of meaning. One of the important latent possibilities in Husserl’s phenomenology that Levinas seems to have previously overlooked is the notion of ‘sense’ as broader than simply applying to a theoretically contemplated representational or objectified content. The turn to the concrete life of the subject, earlier attributed to Heidegger, is now found to be already present in the work of Husserl. Representation is contained within the idea of sense, not just in our theoretical engagement with the world, as Levinas suspected in his thesis, but all mental life participates in representation.

To Husserl, the fact of meaning [sense] is characterised by the phenomenon of identification, a process in which the object is constituted. The identity of a unity across multiplicity represents the fundamental event of all thought. For Husserl, to think is to identify.²²⁶

This ‘identify’ is the same thing as to have a ‘sense’, for the identification is that which the subject gives the object, and the way through which the object is understood simultaneously. Intentionality seen as *Sinngebung* is a bestowing of sense, as it is the act of synthesising the manifold of experience into a unity, and hence is a representation, an objectifying act. This objectification is a function of intentionality and is not confined to theoretical contemplation, ‘for Husserl, representation, in the sense we have just specified, is found necessarily at the basis of intention, even non-theoretical intention’.²²⁷ This is also true of affective intentions. Representation is a corner stone of intentionality, as in synthesising the manifold of experience into a unity a sense is given to the object. This is the case whether or not one takes the step to critically reflect on the content of consciousness in a theoretical fashion. This leads Levinas to reconsider his earlier judgement in his thesis were he found Husserl’s

²²⁵ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 59. ‘Le rapport de l’intentionnalité n’a rien des rapports entre objets réels. *Il est essentiellement l’acte de prêter un sens (la Sinngebung).*’ Levinas, ‘L’œuvre d’Edmond Husserl’, p. 32.

²²⁶ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 59.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

phenomenology to be intellectualist.²²⁸ The object has a meaning even when there is nothing intellectual about it, when the object is immediate, unreflected upon, or ‘even when this something is absolutely undetermined, a quasi-absence of object’.²²⁹

The notion of self-evidence has a crucial role in this revised reading of Husserl, and Levinas consistently mentions it throughout the various sections. It is self-evidence that saves intentionality from both the threat of solipsism and the descent into a bad infinity in which consciousness reflects on consciousness which reflects on consciousness *ad infinitum*.²³⁰ With self-evidence this exercise comes to an end. ‘The process of identification can be infinite. But it is concluded in self-evidence — in the presence of the object in person before consciousness.’²³¹ Before the object becomes an object for theoretical reflection it is present ‘in person’. What Levinas stresses here is the real givenness of alterity, which is in contrast to Husserl, wherein the object ‘in person’ is the real intended object of the *act that intends*.²³² This ‘in person’ for Levinas is a presence to consciousness that is not understood as evidence, and opens the way for an understanding of consciousness that is not the sole origin of meaning.²³³ In his revised understanding of the meaning of intentionality for Husserl, Levinas crucially finds a passivity within consciousness, the significance of which he believes to have been overlooked by Husserl himself.

This ambiguity within intentionality, at the origin of sense, provides the philosophical tools that will later enable Levinas to describe an encounter that can have

²²⁸ ‘Perhaps it would be unjust to qualify it [Husserl’s philosophy] as intellectualism, since the primacy accorded to the notion of meaning (*sens*) [sense] over the notion of object to characterise thought prevents this.’ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 61. Levinas notes that this idea plays an important role in the phenomenology of both Heidegger and Max Scheler.

²³⁰ This is an important point as it reveals a way around self-reflexivity that does not lead to a reduction *ad absurdum* but to a genuine way through self-thinking-thought to a radical alterity.

²³¹ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 61.

²³² This reading of Husserl is very similar to that of the followers of Husserl’s early phenomenology, who were representatives of the Munich-Göttingen group. See, for instance, Edith Stein’s ‘Excursus on transcendental idealism’, in her *Potency and Act*. Stein believed, following on from her understanding of the early thought of Husserl, that a transcendental constitutive inquiry was possible, without it leading to idealism, which the later Husserl, regrettably for Stein, seemed to move towards. For Stein, this ‘in person’ is also interpreted as an ‘alterity’ (although she does not use that term) that comes from outside, from what is not belonging to the subject. Stein explains the in breaking of sensual data as a moment of passivity that comes ‘unbidden’ and is outside of my freedom. ‘It [datum of sensation] comes unbidden, enters into the context of my life, perhaps breaking a train of thought wherein I was living. I lack the freedom to evoke or expel it by means of my purely spiritual activity. [...] the sensation occurs as something besetting me, coming to me from outside’. Edith Stein, *Potency and Act*, trans. by Walter Redmond (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2009), p. 361-62. For more on how Levinas will develop this reading of Husserl, see, Ch. III, § 3.4.

²³³ Both Richard Cohen and Caygill see this ‘in person’ as the very early origins of what will later become the ‘face’. See, Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 27, and Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy*, p. 116.

a significance ‘in person’, which he will come to understand as prior to representational consciousness, and as infinite, escapes the theoretical totalising gaze. It is the foreign within us that remains foreign. Consciousness is paradoxically both active and passive. The world is both ‘given’ to the mind and the mind is the origin of what it receives.²³⁴

[S]elf-evidence is a unique situation: in the case of self-evidence the mind, while receiving something foreign, is also the origin of what it receives. It is always active. The fact that in self-evidence the world is a given, that there is always a given for the mind, is not only found to be in agreement with the idea of activity, but is presupposed by that activity. A given world is a world where we can be free without this freedom being purely negative (*nous pouvons être libre sans que cette liberté soit purement négative*). The self-evidence of a given world, more than the nonengagement of the mind in things, is the positive accomplishment of freedom (*est l’accomplissement positif de la liberté*).²³⁵

Importantly for Levinas’s development, not only is the subject an origin of meaning, and in this sense is free, but this paradoxical description of the mind as both passive and active opens up a way for Levinas to challenge the description of the subject as the sole origin of meaning. Meaning is passively received, as well as actively given. This safeguards the possibility of novelty, along with opening a space for an alterity that remains foreign, whilst avoiding the determinism that could be unavoidable if the

²³⁴ In her doctoral dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy*, that was directed by Husserl and defended in 1916, a very similar reading of Husserl’s early phenomenology was presented by Stein. Interestingly, it was precisely the question as to how we can account for the fact that part of our experience is the experience (*Erfahrung*) of foreign experience (*Erlebnis*) that Stein set out to answer. Believing herself to be continuing on the work of Husserl, Stein argues that we experience, and can comprehend, the phenomenon of foreign psychic life through the act of *Einfühlung* (empathy, literal translation is ‘in-feeling’). The motivation behind Stein’s investigation could be said to have been an interest in this crucial aspect of human life, intersubjectivity, or to phrase it differently, the human other. It could also be said that Stein’s formulation of Husserl’s conception of transcendental constitution, and the problem that she choose to explore, was in order to avoid any idealism or the threat of solipsism. Stein would not agree with this particular formulation, that the mind whilst receiving sense data from the outside is the ‘origin’ of what it receives, as in the constitution of the object one is said to have correctly (or incorrectly) identified the essence for Stein, and not to have originated the meaning. However, in Stein’s own work, which is based upon her reading of Husserl’s early work, there is also an important sense of meaning being passively received from the outside. For Stein, sensual data breaks in from the outside. In discovering meaning the subject also relies on something that is not its self. For Husserl, the ‘passive’ reception of meaning is itself part of consciousness, as consciousness treats hyletic elements by grasping them. Levinas will come to understand passive in a crucially different way. Stein believed her work to be consistent with Husserl’s own early work, and so this reveals a contrary reading of Husserl’s work that accommodated development in the direction of understanding intersubjectivity, albeit in a very different way from how Levinas’s thought will develop. See, Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. by Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989). See, also, Stein, *Potency and Act*, pp. 360-411, which also shows that for Stein sensual data ‘falls upon the senses’. ‘The words “it falls upon the senses” imply that the thing *was* present outside before it fell upon my senses and it will go on existing [*fortbestehen*] when I turn away from it or move so far away that it can no longer reach my senses.’ (p. 365).

²³⁵ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 61.

subject did not also freely partake in the constitution of the world and of history.²³⁶ There is a positive account of freedom to be found in the work of Husserl that is no longer viewed as purely intellectual. The subject is concretely immersed in the world and yet not overwhelmed by it, because it is also the origin of meaning that whilst coming from the subject is also rooted in self-evidence.²³⁷ This move overcomes the determinism of Heidegger's thought in which *Dasein* finds itself always already thrown into a world of pre-constituted meaning, finding itself always too late. As Levinas says of Heidegger's philosophy, '[t]he subject is neither free nor absolute; it is no longer entirely answerable for itself. It is dominated and overwhelmed by history, by its origin, about which it can do nothing, since it is thrown into the world and this abandonment marks all its projects and powers'.²³⁸

On Levinas's reading of Husserl, the constitution of the world by the Ego is not a description of solipsism as the world also partakes in this activity, the world is 'given' as well as constituted. Intentionality is always a relation with a transcendent object and yet the action is not reducible to the correct identification of an external object, crucially consciousness as intentionality is also the giver of sense. Self-evidence secures consciousness in its relation with the world as both active and passive. Levinas also now sees self-evidence as overcoming the problem of the centrality of theory in Husserl's approach, as self-evidence is directly accessible to intuitive intention. 'The very contact with things is their intellection.'²³⁹ Levinas equates self-evidence with freedom.²⁴⁰ Through self-evidence we are posited as an 'origin of being'.²⁴¹ It is through self-evidence that the subject constitutes the world. This implies that there is a world to be constituted. The act of synthesis by thought, which is a representation, is also to be understood as a process of identification of being and crucially an event of sense. Hence Levinas claims: 'Consciousness, to Husserl, is the very phenomenon of

²³⁶ As Cohen remarks: 'That history does not overwhelm consciousness, that historical time is both constituting and constituted, does this not mean that consciousness understood as real freedom, as the zero point and unity of activity and passivity, *is at once made by history and makes the history it is made by?*' Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy*, p. 114. Cohen goes on to remark that this move enables Levinas to argue in the future that human persons can therefore *judge* history.

²³⁷ '[I]n the case of self-evidence the mind, while receiving something foreign, is also the origin of what it receives... The fact that in self-evidence the world is a given... A given world is a world where we can be free without this freedom being purely negative... The self-evidence of a given world is the positive accomplishment of freedom. Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', p. 61.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁴⁰ 'Self-evidence and reason are above all the manifestation of freedom itself.' *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁴¹ 'The light of self-evidence is the sole tie with being that posits us as an origin of being, that is, as freedom.' *Ibid.*, p. 61.

meaning [sense]’.²⁴² One way in which Levinas identifies freedom in Husserl’s work is with the sense bestowing function of the Ego. Husserl himself in describing the effectuation of the syntheses says,

[t]he positing, the positing thereupon, positing antecedently and consequently, etc., is its *free spontaneity and activity*; the Ego does not live in the positings as passively dwelling in them; <the positings> are instead radiations from the <pure Ego> as from a primal source of generations. Every positings begins with a *point of initiation*, with a *positional point of origin*; so it is with the first positing, as with every further one in the concatenation pertaining to the synthesis.²⁴³

Levinas’s reading of the *Urimpression* (primary impression), and its relation to time, in Husserl’s phenomenology, elaborates further this understanding of intentionality as paradoxically both passive and active.

The origin of all consciousness is a primary impression, an ‘*Urimpression*’. But this original passivity is at the same time an initial spontaneity. The primary intentionality in which it is constituted is the present. The present is the outflow of mind itself, its presence to itself.²⁴⁴

With an *Urimpression* the world is given in a now point that will pass and be replaced by a new present, hence it is an ‘original passivity’, however, as intentionality is to bestow sense, the world is also understood and has meaning, ‘at the same time an initial spontaneity’. *Urimpression* as the primary impression reveals to us how the concrete is pure immediacy. For Levinas the concrete as immediate lacks intellectual content, despite it having a sense and as such being understood.²⁴⁵ The immediate ‘now’ of time, the present, is always tied up with retention and protention and retention of retention. The future and the past in some sense converge on the present, in time seen as duration when time flows together and is not simply a successive chain of separate moments, one is always caught up with what has past and what is about to be, the remembered and the anticipated. Levinas stresses that Husserl’s understanding of phenomenological time captures favourably the freedom of the subject, in an additional sense from freedom understood as sense bestowing, in this context it is the freedom of

²⁴² Ibid., p. 68.

²⁴³ Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 291. For more on a reading of Husserl that confirms the priority of the self, see, Ian Leask, ‘Husserl, Givenness, and the Priority of the Self’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11 (2) (2003), 141-56.

²⁴⁴ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 77.

²⁴⁵ There is no second step in Husserl as consciousness is to be conscious of something, it is intentionality. This differs from Kant and Aquinas, for whom the mind orders our sensory experience in a certain way through the faculty of understanding for Kant, and the agent intellect in Aquinas. In Husserl this is immediate, as intentionality and sense are so tightly bound together.

the subject to retain the past through retention and stretch into the future through protention. This is how self-consciousness and thought is possible and allows for what Levinas calls a ‘deep subjectivity’ that is contrasted with a mere stream of consciousness. ‘It [time] is truly the secret of subjectivity itself, the condition for a free mind. [...] [T]ime expresses freedom itself.’²⁴⁶ Continuity in the form of inwardness of mind is safeguarded through this understanding of time and with it the ‘freedom’ to explain history and the freedom of bestowing meaning. Levinas contrasts this ‘freedom’, granted through Husserl’s understanding of time, with an understanding of history that can overwhelm, which is perhaps an implicit reference to *Dasein* as fated by time in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.

Caygill suggests that the article could be subtitled ‘anti-Heidegger’, as for Caygill it clearly demonstrates that Levinas has re-examined his earlier preference for Heidegger, and on reading Husserl anew Levinas has found a strong account of the metaphysical essence of freedom.²⁴⁷ It is undeniably the case that Levinas often points out how some of the originality found in Heidegger has its roots in Husserl, and Levinas’s re-examination of Husserl’s account of intentionality is more favourable than his previous analysis. However, although this reading of Husserl presents Levinas with a way to develop an account of subjectivity that can describe the metaphysical essence of freedom, Husserl’s own account is still deficient in certain respects. Husserl himself does not offer an explanation for the origins of freedom, nor seek to question where critical consciousness comes from. Caygill’s reading leaves the reader with the overall impression that Levinas’s final analysis of the account of freedom in Husserl is positive.²⁴⁸ This, I believe, does not account for the other elements of Levinas’s reading

²⁴⁶ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 77.

²⁴⁷ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 25.

²⁴⁸ Richard Cohen also concentrates his reading of the article solely on this new found positive reading Levinas gives of Husserl in relation to the passivity and activity of consciousness, and although he rightly highlights the elements of Husserl’s position that Levinas develops further, he overlooks the criticisms Levinas raises of Husserl’s account of freedom. Cohen correctly notes that Levinas seen in Husserl’s account of the passive dimensions of consciousness consequences that Husserl himself overlooked. Pointing to how Levinas will later develop these latent possibilities in relation to his own work, Cohen points out: ‘He [Levinas] is the first to have seen that the surplus of consciousness is not an epistemological anomaly, but an ethical surplus.’ Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy*, pp. 117-18. As Cohen correctly notes, Levinas will radically develop this idea of the passivity of consciousness beyond Husserl’s reflective and prereflective consciousness. For Levinas, it is not an epistemological surplus, such that it can be rectified under different circumstances, rather Levinas will develop this passivity beyond, or should we say, prior to, all knowing. It will become, for Levinas, a moral sensibility prior to intentional meaning giving thought, that places the powers of the ‘I’ into question, not by pointing to the limitations of the ‘I’, but by putting into question the ‘I’s right to be. What Cohen fails to emphasise, and which we shall argue for in the coming chapters, is that for Levinas this very ethical event

of freedom in Husserl, once we set aside the positive reading given to the description of subjectivity as both passive and active at the origin of meaning. The way in which Levinas characterises the further consequences for freedom in Husserl's thought is consistent with the later development of Levinas's thought, and the criticisms of this account of freedom that he will come to develop more explicitly. Although it cannot be denied that Levinas's re-reading of Husserl uncovers a way to begin to describe freedom that avoids the limitations of both Heidegger and Bergson's position, Husserl's approach, detailed in this article, will not escape future criticism, even though it is not overtly criticised here.

Levinas's view of freedom in the Western tradition as aligned with the power of the ego, unaffected by the outside, is unmistakably present in this early article.²⁴⁹ In the very first line of the article Levinas places Husserl's philosophy firmly within the confines of 'European civilization', and goes on to remark on the next page, 'Husserl rejoins the great currents of Western idealism'.²⁵⁰ Consciousness on Husserl's assessment cannot be shocked by anything alien or foreign to its own being. 'That everything is reducible to the subject is not for Husserl, as it is for Berkeley, the simple fact that the mind knows only its own state; it is that nothing [knowable] in the world could be absolutely foreign to the subject.'²⁵¹ As all thinking is to think in terms of sense, which is to understand, hence there is nothing foreign to thought. For Husserl consciousness comes first and is primary.

In its inner recesses, the subject can account for the universe. Every relation with another thing is established in self-evidence, and consequently has its origin in the subject.²⁵²

As Peperzak puts it, 'intellection is the realization of sovereignty'.²⁵³ In Husserl's account, the ego is the origin of meaning, through *Sinngebung*, and through self-reflection after the reduction consciousness seeks to clarify this original sense. Levinas outlines that this total possession of oneself in the reflection is the other side of

not only places the freedom of I into question, but this ethical event makes possible the freedom of representation.

²⁴⁹ This indictment of the tradition in relation to freedom was first hinted at in *L'ontologie dans le temporel* in reference to Heidegger, as shown above. It is first attributed to Husserl in this article. This reading of the article is supported by Peperzak who asserts that '[t]he new perspective of "*L'oeuvre d'Edmond Husserl*" is the idea of freedom in the typically Western sense of *autonomy*.' Peperzak, 'Phenomenology- Ontology- Metaphysics: Levinas' Perspective on Husserl and Heidegger', p. 119.

²⁵⁰ Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', pp. 47-48.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁵³ Peperzak, 'Phenomenology—Ontology—Metaphysics', p. 119.

freedom. The reduction is a matter for the mind to be free. The world revealed after the reduction is a world constituted by thought. Even on this revised reading, Levinas still maintains that consciousness remains absolute for Husserl because of Husserl's apodictic arguments for the relativity of the world that form a critical note of Husserl's transcendental reduction.²⁵⁴

It is relative to nothing, for it is free. Its freedom is defined precisely by the situation of self-evidence which is positive, which is more and better than simple non-involvement. It is free *qua* consciousness. The adequation of inner perception, which is the source of its absolute 'certainty', is in reality founded on this absoluteness of consciousness. The total possession of self in reflection is but the other side of freedom.²⁵⁵

As the initial act of engagement with the world is one of bestowing a meaning, even if it is unreflected upon, when consciousness turns back on itself it is examining this experience that was originally freely given a sense by consciousness, hence the other side of freedom. In this section devoted to the phenomenological reduction Levinas comments further on the privileged position of the transcendental ego in Husserl's phenomenology. Even history presents no limitation to the transcendental ego, leaving Levinas to characterise Husserl's phenomenology as ahistorical.²⁵⁶ Despite Husserl's attempts in the genetic phenomenology to discover the 'sedimentary' history of thought, Levinas argues that Husserl never frees his approach from the privileged position of the transcendental ego, 'the mind, in Husserl, ultimately appears as foreign to history'.²⁵⁷ The consciousness that the reduction brings us back to explore is a consciousness disengaged from reality, things and history.

²⁵⁴ For a further explanation of what Husserl means by the absoluteness of consciousness, see, De Boer, *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, pp. 341-50.

²⁵⁵ Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', p. 74.

²⁵⁶ This was Heidegger's early criticism of Husserl from Heidegger's very first lecture course as Husserl's assistant in Freiburg in 1919, but it is one that Heidegger found in Dilthey. Both Brentano and Husserl are similar in their approach in the sense that the object for their study is the abstract ahistorical study of the content of consciousness, be that through the methodology of factual-inner perception [Brentano] or eidetic-intuitive inspection of intentional consciousness and its contents in inner reflection [Husserl]. Dilthey differs significantly, and it is his approach that explains to us how Heidegger is significantly different from Husserl, in his appreciation for the historicity and facticity of the human person. As Charles R. Bambach phrases it, 'Heidegger found in Dilthey a way of historicizing the lifeless, worldless sphere of transcendental subjectivity and making historicity itself the transcendental condition for the possibility of human understanding.' Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and The Crisis of Historicism* (United States of America: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 232. See, also, McDonnell, 'Heidegger, Dilthey, and "the Being-Question"'.
²⁵⁷ Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', p. 71. Whilst acknowledging that in his later work Husserl takes greater account of history, by coming to argue that the transcendental ego and history are not mutually exclusive, Levinas nonetheless still believes that Husserl does not 'surmount his antihistoricism'. Levinas attributes Husserl's 'distrust of history as the condition of philosophy' to his deeply anchored need for 'scientific' certainty and to the privileged position of transcendental constitution. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

Whereas Caygill believes the essay could be renamed ‘anti-Heidegger’, Peperzak is almost opposite in his reading of the text, claiming that Levinas’s criticism of Husserl contained therein is ‘wholly Heideggerian’.²⁵⁸ Peperzak ends his reading of the article by stating that in the end Levinas chooses Heidegger’s appropriation of phenomenology and not that of Husserl, believing Levinas to find Husserl’s approach naïve and not transcendental enough. This attributes too much to Heidegger, given the veiled criticism of Heidegger throughout the article, and also overlooks the revised and more positive reading of Husserl since his doctoral thesis. However, Peperzak is correct to point out that contained in the article is a reading of Husserl precisely on the question of freedom, that Levinas will be openly critical of in his future work if not markedly here. This is again evident in the section ‘Phenomenology and Knowledge’. Knowledge is primary in Husserl’s phenomenology and it was the very impetus behind his pursuit of this new method. In a move that will become more and more familiar as Levinas’s work progresses, in section twelve ‘Phenomenology and Knowledge’, Levinas equates knowledge with freedom, ‘knowledge was a way of being free, of accepting only the reasonable for rule, that is, of accepting nothing foreign to oneself’.²⁵⁹ In Levinas’s later work knowledge and freedom will also come to be associated with the domination of the Same at the expense of the other, and echoes of this voice yet to come can be heard resounding not only in the short passage above but throughout this section. Knowledge is seen as an instrument of liberation, as through knowledge man can grant his existence a meaning and value. Yet at this stage Levinas is not yet as disparaging as he will come to be. He holds out hope that freedom understood as self-evidence as meaning can ground knowledge by bringing it back to the subjective world, back to the things themselves, and prevent science from becoming a force through which man can brutishly declare ‘I am’. ‘Phenomenology is the manifestation of the dignity of mind, which is freedom’.²⁶⁰

Levinas attributes Husserl’s phenomenology, and his understanding of consciousness, to providing the foundation for Heidegger’s philosophy. In a subtle change from his dissertation, Levinas now argues that Husserl’s work was always interested in ‘concrete humans’ and ‘concrete reality’.²⁶¹ This leads Levinas to claim that Heidegger’s philosophy remains a tributary to Husserlian phenomenology, even

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 48. See, also, p. 56.

though the new direction that Heidegger went in was profoundly different from that of Husserl. A major difference between the two is that of the importance of historicity for Heidegger, as opposed to Husserl for whom the phenomenon of meaning has never been determined by history. ‘For Heidegger, on the contrary, meaning is conditioned by something that already was.’²⁶² In this article we are again confronted by Levinas’s reading of *Dasein* as determined by the past and by the future, and as such never really free. With Husserl’s description of intentionality, on the other hand, man maintains in some respect a distance from the world, and hence is not overwhelmed by the weight of the world, while all the while being part of it.²⁶³ There is a relationship of intellection between man and the world, which does not have to be purely theoretical. Intentionality as *Sinngebung* is always a bestowing of meaning and as such is free.²⁶⁴ However, the transcendent nature of consciousness and self-evidence rescues this approach from solipsistic interpretations, the subject does not inhabit a world closed in on itself but is constantly directed outside. Levinas believes that this description of *Sinngebung* as freedom reveals a freedom that is free from the determinism of Heidegger, as the subject is not suffocated by an established world but is also the origin of the world. The opposition between irrational intuition linked with spontaneous freedom and rationality as opposed to freedom in Bergson is also overcome. Immediate intuition is both spontaneous and at the same time always has a rational sense. This description of freedom paves the way towards an understanding of freedom that does not view the subject as a lone ego who constitutes the world undisturbed, and as such is unethical, and yet also not entirely at the mercy of the structures of the world. A middle path between the two is possible.

Drabinski argues that in this article we see the beginnings of Levinas’s break with Idealism, and the movement towards what will become in *Totality and Infinity* an articulation of relationality in terms of a sense-bestowal set out from absolute difference.²⁶⁵ This will involve the movement from idealism to transcendence, to materiality, eventually leading to an understanding of sense bestowal from the outside,

²⁶² Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶³ ‘Husserl’s philosophy is radically opposed to that of Heidegger, where man is submerged by existence from the start’. Ibid., p. 61.

²⁶⁴ ‘Heidegger’s *In-der-Welt-sein* affirms in the first instance that man, because of his existence, is always already overwhelmed. Intentionality, on the contrary, characterizes a monad; man retains the power to keep himself in reserve before the world, and thus remain free to accomplish the phenomenological reduction. In a certain sense intentionality is an *Außer-der-Welt-sein* rather than the *In-der-Welt-sein* of consciousness.’ Ibid., p. 85.

²⁶⁵ See, Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*, pp. 43-60.

which precedes and founds the freedom of representation. Levinas begins to open up the potential in Husserl's philosophy to the unexplored consequences of the passivity in consciousness. These first steps toward a description of subjectivity as affectivity will also place Levinas in a stronger position to put into question the freedom and spontaneity of the ego, and show why this understanding of freedom is insufficient and unable to account not only for the origins of freedom but for certain elements of human life. This questioning of freedom will not lead Levinas to abandon freedom, far from it, Levinas will seek to justify freedom and raise it to worthier heights.

Levinas concludes by saying that, 'Husserl's phenomenology is, on the final analysis, a philosophy of freedom, a freedom that is accomplished as, and defined by, consciousness'.²⁶⁶ Even if on this reading Husserl's phenomenology is no longer regarded as intellectualist, the freedom of the ego is prioritised and there is no room for anything 'foreign' or 'alien', as consciousness is absolute. Husserl's thought still harbours idealist tendencies, as consciousness alone constitutes the world. Even though the world beyond the subject is evident through self-evidence, consciousness for Husserl is the ultimate source of this self-evidence. The undeveloped consequences of the passivity within intentionality in Husserl's work is something that Levinas will develop further in line with his own thought, and he will question further the view of freedom as an unquestioned total autonomy. As freedom is here equated with intentionality, which is regarded as sense-bestowing, by questioning this view of freedom Levinas is questioning the directionality of sense and not the freedom of the will. Precisely because this understanding of intentionality sees intentionality essentially as bestowing a sense and the total constitution of a transcendent object by the ego, Levinas will later move away from this terminology as it is aligned with a view of the subject as a self-sufficient freedom who is the origin of the world and is closed off to any true alterity. He will further develop the description of the self as affectivity materiality and sensibility, which captures a dimension of the powerlessness of the self, began in *On Escape*. In this article we have seen the beginnings of the steps that Levinas will take to describe the origins of freedom, and how there is a passivity central to subjectivity, which is prior to free activity. An essential openness to an alterity that cannot be fully constituted or known without remainder, a sense from outside that places freedom understood as autonomy into question.

²⁶⁶ Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', p. 85

§1.13 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Central to Levinas's first works in philosophy, even before he began to clearly articulate his own unique voice, was the question of freedom. Levinas brought this interest in freedom to his reading of the work of some of the main early influences on his thought, namely, Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger. Although he finds fruitful aspects in all three approaches, ultimately, on the question of freedom Levinas found the three different approaches to be insufficient. Bergson's approach may well have presented Levinas with a way to safeguard novelty and transcendence, but his account of freedom takes us beyond the realm of rational reflection and aligns freedom with irrationalism and presents us with a picture of a being fit for the 'racecourse'. Husserl's phenomenology is found to eliminate this opposition between irrational intuition and the rational intellect, and hence offers a firmer foundation for freedom. Levinas, nevertheless, initially finds that in Husserl's utilization of his own method he prioritises theoretical intentionality over the concrete, and does not adequately account for freedom, but takes it as a given. This led Levinas to Heidegger's stress in *Being and Time* wherein the pre-reflective world of concrete experience is opened up to phenomenological significance, calling the primacy of reflective consciousness into question. Yet despite his consistent praise for Heidegger Levinas is perhaps most disappointed with Heidegger's description of freedom. Levinas finds that within Heidegger's account of *Dasein* there is no room for transcendence, alterity, or novelty. On Levinas's reading, in place of freedom we find a being whose future is already fated and determined, destined to die, and free only to embrace this inevitable end. In *On Escape* we briefly glimpse the direction that Levinas will take his own philosophy after the war, where he will further describe the important role of sense and materiality, and continue to question not only the how of the origins of freedom but also, the why. We ended this chapter with Levinas's 1940 essay which saw Levinas return to a reading of Husserl and to a re-evaluation of his earlier criticisms made in his doctoral study. This article prepares the way for Levinas's departure after 1945. The discovery of latent possibilities in Husserl's phenomenology, although not exploited by Husserl himself, open the way for Levinas to present a description of subjectivity that is actively present in the generation of meaning but also passively engaged *as a recipient* of meaning and sense from the outside. This, in turn, enables Levinas to challenge the modern conception of the subject as the sole and primary origin of meaning, and as one who possesses an unrestricted and hence

unethical freedom, whilst also avoiding the view of the human being as a fated subject who is at the mercy of a history into which one is thrown. This final article ends on the questioning of freedom, and we see the beginnings of the path that Levinas will take to reevaluate the meaning of freedom, and seek its justification.

We leave Levinas just a few short months before his internment as a prisoner of war for four years (1940-1945). The classic image that is often used as the antithesis of freedom is that of the prisoner, who has his everyday actions dictated by another, and is physically bound and restrained. How could one not reflect on the meaning and value of freedom in such a situation? We will meet Levinas again at the start of our next chapter in 1947 with the publication of *Existence and Existents*. Levinas will begin to describe a non-ontological experience of being and strengthen his critical reading of freedom as he sees it as portrayed in the Western Philosophical tradition, bringing him ever closer to not only an account of the origins of freedom but also to a justification of that freedom.

CHAPTER II

A WAY THROUGH HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGY TO THE OTHER (1940s)

Continuing on from his analysis presented in *On Escape*, in the 1940s Levinas resumes his examination of the experience of the present instant as removed from any relationship with the past or with the future, and in doing so reveals a fundamental passivity within the self. The description of the subject that first began in *On Escape*, and which revealed the powerlessness (*impuissance*) of the subject, is further explored and developed. One key idea that carries over into his work of this decade is the enchainment of the subject to its self. Not only does this idea continue to play a pivotal role in the work of this period, but it also takes on a new significance in his analysis of the subject as a split subjectivity. This will prove crucial for Levinas's later position, particularly in relation to understanding the argument that responsibility precedes freedom. The 'I' (*le moi*) is inescapably chained to its self (*le soi*), and is therefore responsible for a condition that was never chosen and yet can never be rescinded. One is irrevocably tied to Being, so much so that even suicide offers no way out. Levinas turns to a description of certain existential phenomena that acutely reveal the weight of the present, such as, for instance; fatigue, effort, indolence and insomnia. An examination of these phenomena discloses the subject's fundamental inescapable enchainment both to Being and to one's self. These descriptions form the basis of Levinas's challenge to the understanding of freedom whereby the subject, in its self-sufficiency, is seen as the sole origin of meaning, whether in Husserl's version of transcendental idealism or in Heidegger's version of existentialism and 'fundamental ontology'. Levinas returns to and uncovers a level of existence, that of the sensate embodied self, that is prior to and which underlies the intentionality of representational consciousness that occupied Husserl's attention and the awareness of one's own death in the mood of *Angst* that Heidegger cultivated in his existential reduction.¹

In many respects, then, Levinas's post-war writings of the 1940s documents his way *through* Heidegger to another path in philosophy and phenomenology that overturns the primacy of freedom in the phenomenological philosophies with which he

¹ For Heidegger, 'inner brooding' over one's own death (as opposed to 'idle chatter' (*Gerede*) about the death of the other, is to be cultivated in the existential analytic. See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 306, (SZ 261).

was fully acquainted and yet explains the justification of freedom characteristic of human consciousness and the individual human being itself. Thus in this period of his work, the question of the origins of freedom is once again of importance to Levinas, as he begins to develop his argument that it is the encounter with the Other that frees the self from the present instant, institutes time, novelty, the freedom of representation and critical consciousness. As he informs his reader in the Preface to *Existence and Existents* (1947), this work is a preparatory study and one that is part of a wider research project ‘concerning the problem of the Good, time, and the relationship with the Other as a movement toward the Good’.² The same themes will be further explored in the lecture series *Time and the Other* (1948). As is evident from his remarks in the Preface to *Existence and Existents*, the ethical dimension to Levinas’s thought that was all but absent from the pre-war work is now beginning to emerge albeit in embryonic fashion³

§ 2.1 *EXISTENCE AND EXISTENTS* (1947)

During the time that has elapsed between his last publication and *Existence and Existents*, stands what is undoubtedly the event that had the biggest impact on Levinas both personally and philosophically, the devastation of World War II and the horror that was the Shoah. Levinas was naturalized as a French citizen in 1930, and with the outbreak of World War II he was drafted into military service in 1939. He served as an interpreter of Russian and German and was taken prisoner with the French 10th Army at Rennes on 16th June 1940. Though Levinas lost many members of his extended family during the war, his own life was spared by virtue of the fact that he was in a French uniform, and hence was captured as a military Prisoner of War.⁴ Levinas was kept in a forest labour camp, where he and other Jewish soldiers were kept separately from the others. Due to the position of the camp he was protected under the terms of the Geneva

² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. xxvii (first translated into English by Lingis in 1978). Lingis translates the title of this work as ‘Existence and Existents’, however, it should be noted that *De l’existence à l’existant* could also be translated as ‘From Existence to Existents’ which captures the movement of the analysis in the text, from existence to the existent. Whereas Heidegger wishes to move from the existent (*das Seiende*) to the being of the existent (*das Sein des Seienden*), Levinas, therefore, wishes to go in the opposite direction from generalizing existence to the existence of the particularity of the existent and existents.

³ I say here ‘beginning to emerge’ because although the other appears in *Existence and Existents* as a way in which the existent can escape this suffocating relationship with existence, the other does not yet have the radical ethical significance that it will be given in the work of the 1950’s.

⁴ Levinas’s wife (Raïssa Levi) and daughter (Simone, born 1935), narrowly evaded death by hiding in a religious order in Orléans, organised through the intervention of their friends, one of whom was Maurice Blanchot.

Conventions.⁵ While in captivity Levinas wrote a portion of what was to become *Existents and Existence*. Unsurprisingly the section written while in captivity is the section that deals with the ‘*il y a*’, ‘there is’. This ominous description of pure existence, empty of all existents, seems fitting to the setting in which it was brought to light. In his foreword to a late English edition of the text, Robert Bernasconi remarked that:

When Levinas described the distance between the ego and the self as less like liberation than slackening the rope that still binds a prisoner, the metaphor must have had a personal resonance for him. It is unlikely that a book like *Existence and Existents* could have been written in tranquillity.⁶

That the events of the Second World War had a profound effect on Levinas is undeniable, however, continuity stills exists between his analysis in *On Escape* and his work written during and after the war.⁷

In the final sentence of *On Escape* Levinas remarks, ‘[i]t is a matter of getting out of being by a new path, at the risk of overturning certain notions that to common sense and the wisdom of the nations seemed the most evident’.⁸ The work of establishing a ‘new path’, which will lead out of being, is continued in *Existence and Existents*. This remark also reveals that Levinas will have to wrestle with ‘common sense’ language, in a way that is not unfamiliar from the work of Heidegger, to do ‘violence’ to language in order to retrieve and engender new meanings.⁹ His work after the war could also be viewed as an attempt to address the rhetorical question he himself posed at the end of his lecture to the students of Wahl in 1940, that although Heidegger’s ontology has tragic overtones, it is witness to a time and to a world that

⁵ See, ‘Interview with François Poirié’, p. 40. Levinas spent the first part of his captivity at Frontstalags in Rennes and Laval, then at Vesoul, and from June 1942 until May 1945 at Stalag 11B at Fallingbostal near Hannover in Germany.

⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. xi.

⁷ As Levinas says himself in the Preface, ‘These studies begun before the war were continued and written down for the most part in captivity.’ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

⁸ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 73.

⁹ Levinas’s wrestle with language is something that will increasingly mark his work as it develops. As Levinas’s philosophy becomes more interested in metaphysics, understood in the uniquely Levinas sense as ethical, it becomes increasingly difficult for Levinas to express his position confined by ontological language. Hence, the need to do violence to language will become more and more necessary. This struggle with language is not unlike that of Heidegger’s, who in *Being and Time* tells the reader that existential analysis has the character of ‘*doing violence*’ (*Gewaltsamkeit*) to common sense, ‘whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquillized obviousness’. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 359, (SZ 311). Levinas’s attempt to grapple with this problem will mark a shift from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. See, Ch. IV, § 4.4.5

perhaps will be possible to overcome tomorrow.¹⁰ This necessary ‘overcoming’ of Heidegger’s ontology, announced at the end of that lecture, is reiterated in the introduction to *Existence and Existents*. Levinas states that although his reflections are inspired by Heidegger, ‘they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian’.¹¹ Thus Levinas cannot avoid Heidegger’s thinking but must go *through* Heidegger’s thought to a different place and to a different climate of thinking.

§ 2.1.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INSTANT

One of the most important themes that first emerged in *On Escape*, and that forms the central focus of this work, is the idea of the burden of being, expressed in this work as the *il y a*, the ‘there is’.¹² In the Preface to the second edition, written in 1978, Levinas refers to the notion of the *il y a* as the ‘*le morceau de résistance*’ of the work.¹³ The desire to escape being, as a result of the experience of being as a burden, is now linked with the Good. In the Preface Levinas points out to the reader that the movement towards the Good should not be understood as a movement to a higher existence but as ‘a departure from Being’ an *ex-cendence*, that does not leave Being behind. Once he has stated the wider goal of his philosophy he points out that the present work is mainly concerned with the position in Being, the act through which the existent must take up existence in each instant, hence arising in impersonal Being. The notion of the present, the instant, is central and is revealed through a phenomenological reflection on certain subjective states in which this predicament is acutely felt, such as fatigue, indolence and insomnia.¹⁴ These states acutely reveal our unavoidable situation, that one is inescapably tied to being, and also, inescapably tied to oneself. As the analysis reveals

¹⁰ ‘Par là, l’ontologie de Heidegger rend ses accents les plus tragiques et devient le témoignage d’une époque et d’un monde qu’il sera peut-être possible de *dépasser demain*.’ Levinas, ‘L’ontologie dans le temporal’, p. 128.

¹¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 4.

¹² The section ‘Existence without Existents’, which focuses on the *il y a* was written while in captivity (c.f., p. 92, n. 5) and first published as a separate essay in 1946 in *Deucalion (Cahiers de Philosophie)*, I, 141-54, and was later incorporated into the Introduction and chapter 3 of *De l’existence à l’existant*. An English translation of the original article is in *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 29-36.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), p. 9. This Preface is not contained in the English edition.

¹⁴ Levinas’s prioritising of the ‘present’ throughout this work confirms the influence of Lavelle, particularly his work *La présence totale (Total Presence)*. See, Ch. I, n. 179.

an essential passivity of the self, one could say that all of the themes described and discussed in this work implicitly touch upon the question of freedom, as they reveal further limitations to the view of man as an autonomous, sovereign, and free. As this is the case, in order to understand how Levinas's description of the subject develops, and to understand how it can be situated prior to the distinction between freedom and non-freedom, it is essential that we give consideration to the analysis presented in this work even if the relevance for freedom is not directly evident *per se* in certain sections of this work. Towards the end of the work Levinas discusses freedom explicitly. A crucial element of Levinas's descriptions of subjectivity first made and emphasized in *On Escape*, which will become particularly significant for Levinas's later work, and for his descriptions of freedom, is that the 'I' (*le moi*) is chained to its self (*le soi*).¹⁵

From the outset it is clear that Levinas still has Heidegger's philosophy in mind. The very first line of the introduction draws on Heidegger's ontological difference, the distinction between the being of that which is (*Sein des Seienden*) and that which is (*Seiende*). Levinas outlines how Being (*Sein*) is the empty verb that 'we seem not to be able to say anything about', and that as a result our access to Being seems to only come through reflection on the existent, 'that which exists'.¹⁶ Whereas Heidegger attempted to gain access to the question of the meaning of Being by beginning with a particular unique being in Being (*Dasein*), Levinas wishes to begin with Being in general (*il y a*), before addressing how the existent takes up a particular position in being.¹⁷ Levinas

¹⁵ 'Thus, escape 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 (moi) is oneself (soi-même)*.' Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 55.

¹⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 1.

¹⁷ This is not a simple reversal of Heidegger's approach, as will become clearer below. Heidegger's own thinking on, and methodology in relation to, the ontological difference, is more complex and nuanced than the straight-forward rendering of the ontological difference conveys. There has been some criticism in relation to Levinas's apparent reversal of Heidegger's ontological difference, most notably from Derrida in his *Violence and Metaphysics*. Derrida argues that a reversal of Heidegger's approach, beginning with an analysis of *Dasein* in order to open up the question of the meaning of Being, reveals a misunderstanding of Heidegger's position, as Being can in no way precede the existent. As Derrida put it, '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.' Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by A Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 170. In *Time and the Other* Levinas further discusses his particular appropriation of Heidegger's ontological difference by stressing the difference between distinction and separation, whilst acknowledging that to Heidegger his approach would seem 'absurd'. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 44-45. Against Derrida's criticism, one could say that Levinas brings another dimension to the understanding of Being to be found in Heidegger, and in doing so deepens this approach, rather than a misunderstanding of Heidegger's distinction. Although it is true to say, as noted by Derrida, that for Heidegger Being is always Being as appearing in the understanding of Being, Derrida seems to have overlooked what it is that Levinas was trying to explore in his analysis, just as Levinas's analysis reveals what was overlooked by Heidegger, by beginning with *Dasein's* understanding of Being. De Boer convincingly argues that what Levinas uncovers through his

states that the principle theme of the text is the present, the instant in which a being takes up a position in being, and in order to analyze the notion of present one must begin with the idea of Being in general.¹⁸

The burden of being, the fact that I am myself, inescapably so, becomes acutely apparent in the instant of certain subjective states, such as fatigue (*la fatigue*) and indolence (*la paresse*). Lingis translates *la paresse* as indolence, more generally translated from French into English as laziness or sloth.¹⁹ In the context of *Existence and Existents* it is a difficult word to translate. Llewelyn believes that indolence is a ‘risky’ choice of translation, as it does not capture the force of the French word which is a derivative of *parare*, to prepare.²⁰ Llewelyn prefers to translate *la paresse* as dilatoriness, believing it to better capture how the instant is postponed, or delayed. The important point, which Llewelyn notes, is that contained in Levinas’s descriptions of the *la paresse* is a critique of both the Bergsonian and Heideggerian accounts of temporality. Levinas wishes to capture a sense of the instant, the present, which can reveal to us the existents relationship with existence that does not gain its significance from the continuity with the unceasing flow of time that is duration, nor from the impending future yet to come in Heidegger’s ecstatic account of temporality.²¹

analysis of indolence, fatigue, insomnia etc. is that ‘existence’ (or Being for Heidegger), has the meaning of a dimension that precedes the understanding of Being that Heidegger begins with. In arguing that *Dasein* has an understanding of Being, this does not rule out the possibility that there is a level of engagement with Being which precedes such an understanding. ‘This, it seems to me, presupposes a ‘being’ which precedes the Being of the understanding of Being; ‘being’ here in quotation marks (and without the capital B), just like the ‘being’ to which Levinas refers by the term *il y a* — an existence or being of which it cannot be said that it is or is not, incomprehensible, beyond grasp and yet necessarily presupposed.’ De Boer, ‘Ontological Difference (Heidegger) and Ontological Separation (Levinas)’, in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 115-32 (p. 119). William Large argues that the *il y a* should be understood as a ‘mood’, and therefore, in no way should it be interpreted as a description of the anonymous Being devoid of all beings. It is similar to Heidegger’s analysis of ‘moods’ but it is significantly different. As Large says, ‘[w]hat is at issue in these descriptions [boredom and anxiety] is Heidegger’s commitment to a personal expression of being. It is this personal expression that drops out in Blanchot and Levinas’ conception of the “there is”, even though it is still an existential and not a categorical analysis’. William Large, ‘Impersonal Existence: a conceptual genealogy of the “there is” from Heidegger to Blanchot and Levinas’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 7:3 (2002), 131-42 (p. 132).

¹⁸ Elisabeth Louise Thomas has rightly noted that despite Levinas initially arguing for why we must begin with being in general, Levinas still proceeds to begin his reflections with the existent and certain subjective states such as indolence and fatigue, in order to describe the *il y a*. See, Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*, pp. 34-39.

¹⁹ From *dolere* and *douleur*, originating from the Latin *indolentia*, ‘freedom from pain’.

²⁰ Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 37.

²¹ On this point Sheldon Hanlon notes, ‘Levinas’s phenomenology of existence is original in that he is concerned with the way that the burden of existence is revealed in the very instant without any reference whatsoever to the past or the future.’ Sheldon Hanlon, ‘From Existence to Responsibility. Restlessness and Subjectivity in the Early and Late Levinas’, *Philosophy Today*, 55, 3 (2011), 282-97 (p. 284).

In *Being and Time* Heidegger tells us, '[w]e therefore call the phenomena of the future, the character of having been, and the Present, the 'ecstases' of temporality'.²² Heidegger goes on to note that the ordinary understanding of time is to view time as an ongoing sequence of 'nows', but this understanding is a derived form of understanding that rests on the more primordial existential meaning of temporality as ecstases. Levinas, whilst also providing an existential understanding of time, shows how certain primordial experiences do not conform to the Heideggerian understanding of time, nor does it match the 'ordinary' derived understanding that Heidegger refers to. In weariness time is indeed felt as an instant, but it is an instant that lags behind the present, a weariness to embrace the present, a weariness to embrace being and embrace oneself. In Levinas's descriptions of *la paresse* time is experienced as lagging, the instant is experienced as a holding back from beginning, the effort of being is acutely felt and one wishes to hold back from being.²³ The introduction confirms that this is a key element of the arguments presented in *Existence and Existent*, when Levinas once again turns to Heidegger and states that a key element to Heidegger's understanding of human existence is existence conceived as ecstasy. What is significant about this point and how Levinas differentiates his analysis presented in this text from his reading of *Being and Time*, is that for Heidegger 'ecstasy' stretches out towards the future. As *Dasein* is ultimately a Being-towards-death then what it is ultimately moving towards is the end, towards nothingness. Levinas attributes the tragic element of existence in the analysis of *Being and Time* to finitude. In contrast, Levinas asks if the only negative in Being, the 'evil' (*le mal*) in Being, comes from a deficiency in Being, as Heidegger would argue, or, is the brute fact that one exists, that one cannot escape being in the instant, irrespective of the future, not enough to bring about a 'horror of Being' (*l'horreur de l'être*) that is just as primal, if not more so, than anxiety over [one's own] death? Levinas will propose that Being in pure generality, and not as a result of some defect or negation, is evil and produces horror in the existent.²⁴ 'Existence of itself harbours something tragic which is not only there because of its finitude. Something that death cannot resolve.'²⁵

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 377, (SZ 329).

²³ 'The essential laziness and lethargy with which Levinas is here concerned is a precedence essential to the accedence to a start.' Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 37.

²⁴ 'Nous allons essayer de mettre en question l'idée que le mal est défaut. L'être ne comporte-t-il pas d'autre vice que sa limitation et que le néant? N'a-t-il pas dans sa positivité même quelque mal foncier?' Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 19.

²⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 5.

§ 2.1.2 EXISTENCE IN THE INSTANT

When our world is ruptured in one sense or another, ‘turned upside down’, torn ‘in pieces’, what we come up against is the anonymous state of being.²⁶ Existence is not reliant on a relationship with a world, and comes before such a relationship. When our world is torn apart, due to one event or another, this primordial relationship with being prior to a world becomes clear. Levinas stresses that the term ‘relationship’ can only be used here analogously. Relationship implies two distinct independent terms. The anonymous state of being that we become aware of at world’s end is not a substance, rather it is the bare fact ‘that *there is*’ (le fait qu’il y a).²⁷ The existent and existence are not two independent but related terms. The existent was never prior to existing. At each moment the event of taking up existence, by virtue of existing, takes place. ‘The conquest of Being continually recommences’.²⁸ One is right to think that this event implies a contradiction, as how can an existent take over its existence if it does not exist prior to existing? Levinas admits that logically this appears to be the case, however, as paradoxical as it may seem, he tells us we should not be ‘duped by the verbal repetition’.²⁹ This point relates to Levinas’s idea of the split subject, and that in each instant the existent must continuously take up existence. He then moves towards a phenomenological description of certain experiences that he maintains attest to this paradoxical event.

Levinas notes that the development of biological science in the 19th century brought with it a new way of understanding the relationship between what exists and its existence, placing particular emphasis on the struggle for life.³⁰ Just simply being in and of itself is overwhelming and suffocating, ‘[t]here is a pain in Being’.³¹ In place of the belief that existence was bestowed on an existent by a Deity, or exists as a result of its essence, is the view that to be is the very struggle for life. This approach, however, does not go far enough in capturing a fundamental aspect of the relationship between existence and an existent that Levinas wishes to describe. For Levinas, this description

²⁶ See, Ch. I, § 1.4, for the particular understanding of ‘world’ in Heidegger that Levinas was influenced by. ‘World’ for Levinas, just as for Heidegger, does not mean the collection of objects.

²⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Presumably Levinas has the dominant interpretation of the work of Charles Darwin and his contemporaries in mind. Levinas could also be read as alluding to Nietzsche’s ‘will-to-power’.

³¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 9.

of the existence of an existent as 'the struggle for life' is closer to the Heideggerian understanding, that care (*Sorge*) is *Dasein's* most basic state of being as a being *whose own being is at issue for it*. As Levinas says, 'it appears as a struggle for a future, as the care that a being takes for its endurance and conservation'.³² For Heidegger, *Dasein's* most basic state of being is care, and temporality is the meaning of authentic care. As care is a concern for one's own being, and *Dasein's* own being is to be a Being-towards-death, care is always directed towards the future. Thus it is a care for one's own being in the light of one's own most possibility, one's own death. *Dasein's* present is always tied up with the past and the future. Your past is contained in the present you, just as you are always ahead of yourself already in being, in relation to your future possibilities.

Only in so far as *Dasein is* as an 'I-am-as-having-been', can *Dasein* come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes *back*. As authentically futural, *Dasein is* authentically as 'having been'.³³

Far from a care for being that brings about a fundamental experience of time as ecstasis, Levinas describes a horror of being, and the existential moments that reveal the existents reluctance to be, and yet, its powerlessness to undo its own existing.

In contrast to temporality understood as ecstases, Levinas asks if the relationship between existence and an existent can be understood on an even more fundamental level. Not as a concern for its own being, and as such a projection into the future, but if we limit our analysis purely to the instant, and to existential phenomena in which the instant is most acutely felt, we gain a more fundamental insight into an existent's relationship with existence. Levinas points out that such insight into the relationship an existent has with existence can only take place by examining aspects of life that occur prior to reflection, and which are not mediated by any reflection on consciousness. Thus both Husserlian 'reflection' of consciousness on itself and Heideggerian 'reflection' on *Angst* and its significance to *Dasein* are both ruled out as possible avenues to approach this issue.

³² Ibid., p. 10. Robert Bernasconi questions Levinas's interpretation of Heidegger's description of *Dasein*, as a being who's being is an issue for it, as meaning that one takes care of one's own being, or that the preservation of one's own being is important. In doing so, Bernasconi argues, Levinas seeks to conflate Heidegger's work with social Darwinism. Perhaps this interpretation on Levinas's part was due to mainly basing his interpretation on *Being and Time*. Bernasconi argues that Heidegger himself criticises the Darwinian 'struggle for existence' in some of his other work that was unavailable to Levinas at that time. See, Robert Bernasconi, 'Levinas and the Struggle for Existence', in *Addressing Levinas*, pp. 170-84. Nevertheless, from the analysis of care (*Sorge*) to follow, one can see why Levinas makes this connection.

³³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 373, (SZ 326).

To see the truth of this operation, let us ignore all attitudes toward existence which arise from reflection, attitudes by which an already constituted existence turns back over itself.³⁴

In order to do this, Levinas next turns to phenomena which are ‘prior to reflection’, choosing to focus on fatigue (*la fatigue*) and indolence (*la paresse*).³⁵ Ordinarily subjective states such as fatigue and indolence are seen as mental contents, or are reflected upon for the moral significance they may have, traditionally viewed as character vices. Apart from this traditional approach, Levinas claims that these experiences have a special phenomenological significance, as through phenomenological reflection on these ‘dramatic events’ we can gain an insight into the existents relationship with existence.³⁶ Revealed through both of these prereflective phenomena is a refusal, a weariness (*lassitude*), an ‘important nonacceptance’.³⁷ This weariness is not in relation to a particular empirical state but with regard to being, to existence itself, ‘the recoil before existence which makes up their existence’.³⁸ In weariness, as experienced through fatigue and indolence, the existent is forcefully reminded of its existence, and how existence was never chosen and cannot be escaped, ‘in weariness (*lassitude*) existence is like the reminder of a commitment to exist, with all the seriousness and harshness of an unrevokable contract’.³⁹ Here we see the continuity between this work and *On Escape*. Just as in *On Escape* the desire to escape is not the desire to be free of a particular predicament in life, nor is there any destination to escape to in mind. Evasion is desired for evasion sake. In *On Escape* although the

³⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 10.

³⁵ ‘We must then try to grasp that event of birth in phenomena which are prior to reflection (*antérieurs à la réflexion*)’. Ibid., p. 11.

³⁶ This method of analysis by Levinas brings to mind Heidegger’s reflections on moods (*Stimmungen*), such as anxiety as an affective disposition (*Befindlichkeit*) that reveals to us *Dasein*’s understanding of being-in-the-world, or his analysis of boredom. In both instances it is the non-objectifiable experiences that are being explicated, in contrast to Husserl’s approach, wherein such non-objectifiable experiences are set outside of ‘phenomenology’, as he defines it and defends it, as retracing the meaning of all experiences back to perceptually-founded acts and their objects. However, although similar, Levinas’s analysis here is significantly different from Heidegger’s moods, as Levinas is attempting to describe an aspect of existing that precedes such moods, which for Heidegger already imply a level of understanding. Analysis of indolence, fatigue and insomnia capture the effort made by the existent, in each moment, to rise above undifferentiated being and exist. Heidegger overlooks this aspect of existing, beginning with *Dasein* who is aware of the burden of existence. As De Boer phrases it, ‘[f]or Heidegger facticity is a burden which we have always already taken up, an “a priori past”.’ See, De Boer, ‘Ontological Difference (Heidegger) and Ontological Separation (Levinas)’, in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp.115-32, (p. 122-25).

³⁷ Lingis translates *lassitude* as weariness, Llewelyn uses both *lassitude* and weariness when discussing *lassitude*.

³⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 11. ‘There exists a weariness which is a weariness of everything and everyone, and above all a weariness of oneself (*de soi*).’ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

duality of the subject is touched upon, the emphasis is placed on the self's inability to escape from Being. In *Existence and Existents*, however, this duality of the subject becomes more central to the argument. Not only can one not escape Being but the 'I' (*moi*) can also not escape the self (*soi*).

Levinas does not want the reader to confuse indolence with indecisiveness, for although it is a refusal, it is not the refusal to make up one's mind or the wish to avoid the exertion of effort. It is the beginning of action, any action, which is avoided, as it reveals the very refusal to be that nonetheless cannot be undone. Each instant is like a birth, a new beginning, and in indolence each instant is heavily felt. Indolence is like a protest in the face of existence, a lagging behind the instant, an unwillingness to take up one's existence which is affected in each instant. Like the slow trudge of a physically and mentally exhausted person, for whom the effort it takes to execute each little movement is intensely apparent. Using an analogy from *On Escape* Levinas remarks that reality is unlike a game, which can cease at any moment, leaving no trace of the game behind. The freedom of play, the freedom to invent the rules, to begin and end when one so wishes, is absent from the reality of existence.

But beginning is unlike the freedom, simplicity and gratuitousness which these images suggest, and which are imitated in play. In the instant of a beginning, there is already something to lose, for something is already possessed, if only the instant itself.⁴⁰

Far from being a 'game' the analogy that Levinas uses is that the beginning in every instant of existence is more like a job (*besogne*); however, it is a job that the existent never applied for and now cannot leave. The task cannot be erased, the beginning cannot be undone. To end the process once started will not undo the beginning, rather it will bring the process to a halt, terminate it. Even if the existent wishes to forfeit, unlike a game that vanishes without remainder, the remnants of existence will remain. The powerlessness of the subject is once again apparent in Levinas's descriptions. The existent lacks the freedom to do anything about the predicament they are in, this is 'the tragedy of being' that indolence reveals.⁴¹ In indolence the existent is weary of its own self.

Subjectivity is a relationship. As Levinas says, one is oneself. The ego (*moi*) has a self (*soi*) that lags behind it like a shadow that cannot be out run.⁴² Trapped in a

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴² 'The ego has a self'. Ibid., p. 16. 'Le moi possède un soi'. Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 33.

relationship with its self and with existence, even the future offers no respite for the solitary subject, for alone each instant will bring more of the same. Without alterity the next instant will not bring with it a new, joyful, ‘virginal instant’, but will condemn the existent to a perpetual present. As Levinas will argue, *contra* Heidegger, and yet in agreement with Heidegger as Heidegger admits the alterity of one’s own death that cannot be an objectifiable presence for that being, without alterity there is no future and hence no freedom.⁴³

§ 2.1.3 FREEDOM, FATIGUE AND THE EFFORT OF LABOUR IN THE PRESENT

In the next section, ‘Fatigue and the Instant’, Levinas turns to an analysis of labour and the effort and fatigue which accompanies labour, to further explore the existents’ relation to being.⁴⁴ Once again it is difficult to separate Levinas’s phenomenological descriptions of fatigue and the effort of labour from the circumstances in which these reflections took place. While a POW Levinas was forced to undertake hard labour in a Forestry Commando Unit. This experience of hard forced labour in the surrounding forest inevitably contributed to Levinas’s analysis of labour that is far removed from the tradition of the Marxist-Hegelian’s view of the connection between work and freedom, and also that of Heidegger’s view of work as connected to the creation of a world in which *Dasein* can realise its freedom.⁴⁵ When Levinas describes the numbness (*un engourdissement*) that characterises fatigue (*la fatigue*), and how this numbness is

⁴³ In *Being and Time* Heidegger describes death as *Dasein*’s ownmost possibility which will forever remain “not-yet”, and in this sense, even though *Dasein*’s death can only ever belong to *Dasein*, as it will never be present for *Dasein* it can be said to remain an alterity. Death is indefinite as not only does *Dasein* not know when death is going to occur, also nor is death ever going to be an objectifiable presence for *Dasein*. For whilst *Dasein* is, death is still a “not-yet”, and once death has come *Dasein* is no more. As Heidegger says, ‘there belongs to *Dasein*, as long as it is, a “not-yet” which it will be—that which is constantly still outstanding [...] the coming-to-its-end of what-is-not-yet-at-an-end [...] has the character of no-longer-*Dasein*. [...] That *Dasein* should *be* together only when its “not-yet” has been filled up is so far from the case that it is precisely then that *Dasein* is no longer. Any *Dasein* always exists in just such a manner that its “not-yet” *belongs* to it.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 286-87 (SZ 242-243).

⁴⁴ Levinas’s analysis of fatigue and effort can be seen as indebted to Bergson, who conducted a similar analysis in Chapter I of *Time and Free Will*.

⁴⁵ As Caygill notes: ‘Although not in an SS-administered camp — Levinas was imprisoned by the *Wehrmacht* — the conditions of forced labour, while not murderous, were sufficient to make Levinas reject the historically deferred equation of work and freedom assumed in the Marxist interpretation of Hegel.’ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 59. Also in his article, ‘Levinas’s Prison Notebooks’, Caygill similarly notes: ‘Indeed, the experience of forced labour in the Stalag, accompanied by a critical reading of Hegel’s phenomenology of Spirit in the prison camp reading room, led Levinas to an extreme degree of scepticism about the liberatory potential of work’. Howard Caygill, ‘Levinas’s Prison Notebooks’, in *Radical Philosophy*, 160 (March/April 2010), 27- 35 (p. 28).

experienced as a lag in being, a distance between being and a current preoccupation that seems to slip from your grasp despite your best efforts to hold fast to it, one cannot help but think of just how familiar this experience would have been to Levinas in captivity.⁴⁶

Levinas's reflections on effort lead him to ask whether effort is merely the ability to freely take up a task, like one would their luggage, and hence the ability to suspend the effort at will, or a constraint in effort that is more deeply rooted to our self, 'the instant of the effort contains something more; it reveals a subjection which compromises our freedom'.⁴⁷ Levinas critiques the dominant view of labour as being directed towards a future goal, and hence linked to freedom. In such a view labour is freely chosen, and one is willing to suspend their freedom momentarily in order to achieve the desired future aim. Levinas, however, questions this view by presenting a closer analysis of work in the instant, and reveals the endurance in work that brings about fatigue. Levinas describes how effort also reveals that we are tied to the past, and tied to being, tied to a commitment that we never made. Responsible before we are free.

In the humility of the man who toils bent over his work there is surrender, forsakenness. Despite all its freedom, effort reveals a condemnation; it is fatigue and suffering.⁴⁸

And in a further blow against the tradition that deems effort meaningful due to its future orientation, Levinas describes how fatigue reveals that for effort the instant is inescapable. 'Effort is an effort of the present that lags behind the present.'⁴⁹ We do not have to look beyond the instant of effort in order to gain an insight into its significance. Independent of the fact that one must toil in order to live, effort or fatigue reveals to us that one is condemned to the present. 'There is in the labour most freely consented to, in the most spontaneous effort, an irrevocable, unredeemable commitment.'⁵⁰

Levinas moves on to further elaborate on this condemnation, and to show how effort reveals an irremediable commitment even when the particular task that involves our effort is freely chosen. He contests the view that sees effort as a struggle with matter, the view that the free subject has to struggle with its surroundings in order to

⁴⁶ On this point Caygill remarked, 'Forced labour does not create a world, but only a fatigue that ruins what world there is'. Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 59.

⁴⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

fashion the world to its will, and believes that philosophers have wrongly taken this position as a given. Such a view attests to Levinas's belief that traditionally limitations to freedom have been reflected upon, but freedom itself is never placed into question. This position came about from reflections on effort from the outside, whereas Levinas wishes to describe the instant of effort and 'its internal dialectics'.⁵¹ Levinas goes on to reflect on human work in order to reveal a phenomenological account of the instant. In contrast with a melody, that when played well forms a single whole, in the effort of labour each single moment is minutely felt step by step.⁵² The pain of effort does not arise from the physical exertion or from the necessity of labour in order to live, but from the fact that labour ties one to the instant, or as Levinas says the pain from being condemned to the present. Against the more optimistic accounts that view labour as freeing and joyful, arriving at their position through a retrospective account of labour, or perhaps from the position of a spectator and not that of the labourer, Levinas maintains that if we restrict our analysis to the instant we can find no such rewards.

And every labour mystique, which appeals to themes of joy or freedom through labour, can appear only above and beyond effort properly so-called, in a reflective attitude to effort. It is never the labour itself that joy resides. It is fed with other considerations — the pleasure of duty fulfilled, the heroism of the sacrifice and difficulty involved.⁵³

The effort of labour offers insight into the instant because from the perspective of the labourer time seems to lag, and drag behind the present, struggling to keep up with the moment, 'it is like the lag of an existent that is tarrying behind its existing. And this lag constitutes the present'.⁵⁴ The significance of this analysis is that in the instant of the effort of labour the existent's inescapable bond to existence is revealed. In action one is bound to the instant.

In place of the view of action as affording man the ability to fashion the world to man's will, and hence as aligned with freedom, by focusing on the event of effort and not the result Levinas paints a very different picture. 'Action is then by essence subjection and servitude, but also the first manifestation, or the very constitution, of an existent, a *someone* that is.'⁵⁵ This break in the instant, this lag in which the existent struggles to keep up with the present, opens a distance between the existent and

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵² Levinas here references Bergson and reminds the reader that Bergson conceived the idea of pure duration from a melody.

⁵³ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

existence in which the relation can form. A distance is also opened up between an existent and its own self, leading Levinas to describe existence as the relationship between an existent and itself. In fatigue this taking up of the instant is visible. Levinas's description of the instant is paradoxically both active and passive. The instant is defined by this taking up of existence by the existent, and yet the existent is irrevocably and inescapably tied to the present. This leads Levinas to claim that the existence of an existent is an act, a movement, even when the existent is said to be inactive. This activity that is the existent, this taking up of the present, 'the upsurge of an existent into existence', is what Levinas terms hypostasis.⁵⁶ As the taking up of a position in existence takes place in a 'world', in the next chapter Levinas turns to explore what the world can mean in the context of his descriptions of the existence of the existent.

§ 2.1.4 DESIRE AND LIFE IN THE WORLD

Levinas begins by defining being-in-the-world (*être-dans-le-monde*) as 'to be attached to things'.⁵⁷ This attachment to things is distinct from taking up the present through effort as effort does not have to be related to objects. In order to further describe this attachment to things that characterises being in the world, Levinas goes on to describe intentionality, as intentionality best captures this engagement with objects. In his description of intentionality Levinas distances himself from both the Husserlian 'neutralized and disincarnate' and Heideggerian ecstatic 'care' accounts of intentionality and in place of these accounts puts forward an argument for intention understood as desire (*le désir*).⁵⁸ Desire is distinct from care as the desirable is desired as an end in itself. In desire I am absorbed with the desirable, with no further thought to the potential outcome or any consequences extended into the future. In opposition to the Heideggerian position, that the fundamental horizon of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world is that of 'care' (*Sorge*), Levinas asks if we eat primarily to nurture our bodies in order to maintain our existence, or, do we eat because we are hungry, for the pleasure and enjoyment of eating?⁵⁹ In line with his argument Levinas also contests the Platonic

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁹ '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'. Ibid.

theory that the need for pleasure arises from some lack or deficiency. In contrast to the dark descriptions of the being in its generality contained in the rest of this work, in this section on the world Levinas outlines how there is an inherent joy in the givenness of the world.⁶⁰ Irrespective of any purpose one may attribute to the fulfilment of a particular desire, the satisfaction of a desire is in itself joyful. The view that sees desire as the counterpart to a lack overlooks both the inherent possibility of pleasure in the world, and that even in abundance desire is present for desire sake. In proposing the view that our fundamental relation to the world is desire, Levinas opens up a space that will lead to an account of an excessive intentionality, a desire that goes beyond being.⁶¹ As we shall see in chapter four, this will prove to be crucial for the analysis in *Totality and Infinity*.

At this point in the discussion Levinas introduces ‘the Other’ (*l’autrui*). This term may not yet have the radical ethical significance that it will later come to have, but it is significant that on its first appearance it is described as an example of an event ‘that break[s] with the world’.⁶² The encounter with the Other *is different* from our interaction with objects, even though the Other is associated with things, and in certain situations the Other can appear like an object. The Other has a social situation, is clothed in a particular fashion, and to some degree is conscious about their physical appearance to the world and has formed and shaped their appearance through bathing and grooming. Levinas draws a distinction between the public and the private sphere. In the former the other takes on a social role and is to a greater and lesser extent objectified, whereas in the latter the alterity of the Other comes to the fore.

Levinas outlines how the paradigmatic experience in which the alterity of the Other is most striking is in the relationship with nudity. By this relationship with nudity Levinas has a particular relationship in mind. Nudity alone is not a sufficient condition

⁶⁰ In his work to come, Levinas will contest Heidegger’s view of ‘care’ by simply asking if all acts are done for some exterior end. Is eating more often than not for the enjoyment of eating, and not in order to preserve one’s own being in being? See, subsection B ‘Enjoyment and Representation’ of Section II ‘Interiority and Economy’ in *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 122-42. In contrast to Heidegger’s *Sorge* Levinas argues, ‘[t]o enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure — this is the human. [...] But the care for nutriments is not bound to a care for existence. The inversion of the instincts of nutrition, which has lost their biological finality, marks the very disinterestedness of man. The suspension or absence of the ultimate finality has a positive face — the disinterested joy of play. [...] It is carefreeness (*Insouciance*) with regard to existence’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 133-34. See, Ch. IV, § 4.3.1.

⁶¹ First in his 1957 article ‘Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinity’, and continuing throughout his work, Levinas will further explore this idea of excessive intentionality through a reading of the idea of infinity in Descartes’ *Meditation III*.

⁶² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 30.

to encounter alterity, as the naked body of a patient to a doctor for example, or to use Levinas's own example of the recruiting examiner, is somewhat objectified and viewed as 'human material'.⁶³ Levinas takes the relationship with nudity in the context of an erotic relationship to epitomise 'the true experience of the otherness of the Other', as it is a 'relationship that goes beyond the world', in contrast to social life which is not disturbing in this way.⁶⁴ Although Levinas himself does not consider it, nudity in an erotic context similarly does not guarantee an encounter with alterity. If in the public sphere it is the objectification of the Other that prohibits their alterity from being encountered, as it is not an encounter with excess, similarly in the context of an erotic encounter with nudity, if the Other was to be treated as an object for one's sexual gratification and pleasure their alterity would likewise stay hidden.⁶⁵ This private-public sphere distinction is a problematic distinction to make, as it runs the risk of confining ethics, as Levinas will come to define it, to the intimacy of the private sphere. Levinas will come to reconsider this distinction in his later works.⁶⁶ Also, as Levinas will come to argue that the freedom of the subject is grounded in the encounter with the alterity of the Other, relegating this excessive intentionality to a private erotic relation would raise difficulties for this later position.

Levinas applauds Heidegger for his descriptions on what Being-in-the-world means, and for going beyond the idea that the world is the sum of objects; however, Levinas takes his own analysis further. Levinas criticises Heidegger's appeal to an ontological finality in his description of the world. Levinas asks if our relationship with things in the world must always be interpreted in relation to a teleological utility, that of the care for existing by one's own being for that being's existence. Is a house shelter from the harsh elements, or is it not primarily a home? Levinas believes that by centring his analysis on 'tools', and interpreting *Dasein's* relationships with things as ends, Heidegger overlooks the lived reality of the 'secular' nature of being-in-the-world and has not accepted the sincerity of intentions.⁶⁷ By looking behind the intentions [*qua*

⁶³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Perhaps such an erotic sexual encounter would not be classified as *Eros*, which although he does not say so here, Levinas will later name as the specific erotic encounter he has in mind. See, Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁶ We agree with Caygill that this distinction is problematic, 'there is a danger of confining excess to an allegedly authentic intimacy and consigning public life to the administration of thing-like others'. Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 65.

⁶⁷ This is not to be understood in being sincere in one's intentions to do something, but more the phenomenological starting point that one must take. Levinas is arguing that Heidegger's reflections,

directly intended object of the act] to find an end outside of the immediacy of the act, the truthfulness (and givenness) of that very intention is undermined. Although food provides sustenance, the experience of eating is one of pleasure and satisfaction, and is an end in itself, 'food makes possible the full realization of its intention. At some moment everything is consummated'.⁶⁸ In order to further clarify the way in which our intentional relationship with things can be played out in the immediate, with no consideration for a beyond that very immediacy, Levinas again turns to desire.⁶⁹ Through a brief analysis of the desire that is felt between two lovers, Levinas outlines how this desire can never be fulfilled as the lover can never possess the beloved.⁷⁰ In the immediacy of the desire for the beloved there is no goal beyond that intimate moment, and when the embrace ends in satisfaction one finds that they are returned to oneself.

Food serves as a contrast to the example of the lovers as it is a more simple pleasure in which one fully consumes the food. In both examples, however, Levinas articulates how the pleasure in and desire for the act of loving and eating is confined to the act itself. Levinas further separates his descriptions of being in the world from Heidegger's with a simple reflection on the mundane, yet sincere, moments of everydayness.

Nowhere in the phenomenal order does the object of an action refer to the concern for existing; it itself makes up our existence. We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk. All that is not for the sake of living; it is living. Life is a sincerity.⁷¹

The place in which our life is lived, for the pure sake of living, is the world. Although this section of the text was not written in captivity, in reading these passages one cannot help but imagine Levinas locked in the prison camp, alienated from the world in which he wished to live his life, and kept from these very simple pleasures of drinking and

similarly to Husserl, miss obvious aspects of the 'secular' nature of being-in-the-world, due to their respective starting points. Levinas, in distinction, wishes to consider the way in which the object is presented to consciousness without theoretical imposition or aprioristic construction.

⁶⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 35.

⁶⁹ At this stage of his writing Levinas has not yet fully made the distinction between desire and need. In this section one can see the very beginning of this distinction when he briefly states that needs belong to economic categories. He also terms 'a permanent desire', a desire that will remain unfulfilled, and in later writings this distinction will become obsolete when all desires will be seen as essentially unfulfillable and beyond ontological categories.

⁷⁰ This description of erotic love presupposes that what the lover desires is to 'possess' the beloved, which Levinas rightly says is impossible. This presupposition requires further analysis.

⁷¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 36.

eating good food simply for pleasure's sake. When food is reduced to a biological necessity, and rationed as such, when the joy and satisfaction of the simple pleasures of life are denied, one must gain a different perspective on, and appreciation of, such simple pleasures. As Levinas himself says, to be in the world is to be freed from the instinct to exist. Being in the world consists of simple pleasures for pleasure sake such as tending a flower bed for the joy of growing flowers.⁷² Life in the world provides a respite from the anonymity of being, a space is created where life can be lived in all its simple sincerity.

§ 2.1.5 FREEDOM AS EXCESS AND THE LIGHT OF INTENTIONALITY

In his discussion of the world in terms of intentionality, the correlation between intentionality and freedom that was addressed before the war is once again evident. Although Levinas criticises some of the nuances involved in Heidegger's descriptions of being-in-the-world he accepts the basic premise that the ego is embedded in the world and not outside of it. However, there is still an important distance between the ego and the world, which affords the ego the opportunity to relate to the world and to take up a position with regard to it, through intentionality. Adding to his description of intentionality as desire, Levinas explains intentionality as a movement to take hold of something, to grasp it.⁷³ This relationship with objects in the world reveals the ego's distance from the world, despite being in the world. This crucial distance opens up a space for freedom.⁷⁴ 'The world as given to intentions leaves the I a freedom with

⁷² Underlying this point by Levinas is the 'existentialist' critique of scientific naturalism, which brings to mind 'existential phenomenology'. De Boer makes the point that French 'reflexive philosophy', namely that of Lavelle and Marcel, influenced Levinas's turn to an analysis of 'existential' phenomena in his early work, such as fatigue, indolence and effort. De Boer, 'Difference and Separation', in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 115-32 (p. 120).

⁷³ 'This possession at a distance, keeping one's hands free, is what constitutes the intentionality of intentions.' Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 38-39.

⁷⁴ Levinas's point here brings to mind the philosophy of J. G. Fichte, who maintained that your freedom is your consciousness and your consciousness is your freedom. Although Levinas rarely refers to Fichte by name, and when he does it is in criticism of his philosophy as belonging to the tradition of German Idealism (See, Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being: Or, Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 101, 125, and 123-24), more recently some interesting work has been done on the relationship between the two. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* Morgan points out that in a certain sense Fichte was a forerunner of some of Levinas's ideas. See, Michael L Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 69, n. 33. Morgan point out that Fichte, through the idea of recognition as put forward in *Foundations of Natural Right*, argues that in order to have self-consciousness, and consequently reflective consciousness, I must firstly have the concept of the other. For Fichte, I become a self because I am summoned to free action by another. See, J. G. Fichte,

regard to it.⁷⁵ The exteriority of objects in the world further guarantees this distance which the ego is free to traverse. On the other side of this intentional relation with the world, through which the ego can move toward the world, is the possibility to withdraw, to the inwardness of the I.

Similar to his position in the ‘Work of Edmund Husserl’ Levinas argues that intentionality is the very origin of sense, and his description captures the active sense-bestowing (*Sinngebung*) freedom of the I. ‘Sense is that by which what is exterior is already *adjusted to* and refers to what is interior.’⁷⁶ Levinas disputes the position that sense (*sens/sinn*- meaning) is reducible to a concept and here links sense with sensation. Even at this level that is preconceptual, intentionality is seen as bestowing a sense on the object. Levinas turns to the age old philosophical metaphor of ‘light’. The exterior world is revealed to us through the medium of light, it is how the world is given and hence made known. Levinas reaffirms his position that intentionality, as meaning bestowing, seeks to possess and grasp the object. ‘Light makes possible, then, this *enveloping of the exterior* by the inward, which is the very structure of the cogito and of sense.’⁷⁷ Once again we see how intentionality is not a way through which the I passively receives the external world, intentionality, rather, as the giver of sense, apprehends the object *as though* it came from the I.⁷⁸

[D]ue to the light an object, while coming from without, *is already ours* in the horizon which precedes it; it comes from an exterior *already apprehended and comes into being as though it came from us, as though commanded by our freedom.*⁷⁹

Foundations of Natural Right, trans. by Michael Baur, ed. by Frederick Neuhouser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 35-37. Drew Dalton further explores this similarity between the work of the two, making the point that Levinas’s relationship to Fichte may well be more complicated than Levinas himself lets on. Dalton points out that often when Levinas is critical of the work of other philosophers, he was greatly influenced by that work, such as is the case with Heidegger and Plato, for example. Dalton argues that for Fichte self-consciousness, and freedom, comes to the self from the external world in general and the other human person in particular. Dalton presents a persuasive argument that could be developed even further, as he overlooks just how similar Fichte’s account of the origins of reflective consciousness is to Levinas’s account. In his summary of Levinas’s position, Dalton, like many others, emphasises the ethical reversal that the other brings to the freedom of the subject, overlooking the freedom of self-consciousness and reflective consciousness which the Other also brings. See, Drew M. Dalton, ‘Strange Bedfellows: A Re-examination of the Work of J. G. Fichte in Light of the Levinasian Critique’, *Idealistic Studies*, 36 (1) (2006), 13-26. This relationship between the work of Levinas and Fichte is worthy of further exploration.

⁷⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 39.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40, my emphasis

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷⁸ As Merold Westphal writes, ‘Intentionality is not innocent awareness. It is the will to power, to freedom in the sense of mastery and possession. It is the reduction of the other to the same.’ Merold Westphal, ‘The welcome wound: emerging from the *il y a* otherwise’, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2007), 211-30 (p. 217).

⁷⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 41, my emphasis.

In his work to come Levinas will develop this strange idea of how an object, which precedes the subject, and is exterior, appears as though it came from the subject, *as though commanded by our freedom*.⁸⁰ This freedom, understood as the freedom of representation, will be given an explanation and justification.

Levinas continues the analogy of light to draw a familiar comparison between light and comprehension. Quite distinct from the natural-scientific explanation of light, Levinas points out that understood phenomenologically light is what enables meaning (*sens*). The discussion on light and intentionality leads to knowledge, and Levinas returns to further explain how a subject, whilst being-in-the-world, is at a distance to the world which enables inwardness and a freedom in relation to the world.

It is a way of relating to events while still being able to not be caught up in them. To be a subject is to be a power of unending withdrawal, an ability always to find oneself behind what happens to one.⁸¹

The power of the subject here captures an understanding of freedom as excess. As the subject is at a distance from the world, this separation from being opens a space for the subject to take up a position with regard to the world. This ability to maintain a distance from the world, through consciousness and knowledge, is seen as a freedom. This freedom is only possible due to representational consciousness, objectifying thought. As Levinas phrases it, ‘it is already a freedom with regard to all objects, a drawing back, an “as for me ...”’.⁸²

This ‘power of the agent to remain free’, to maintain a distance from the world, is extended beyond the ability to maintain a distance from present bonds, and also includes the ability to free oneself from the bond of its history.⁸³ Levinas goes even further, stating that this distance, granted by the light of knowledge and intentionality, affords the I the opportunity to not be ‘compromised’ by that history, and to ‘suspend’ that history. Put otherwise, favourably, this means that the I does not have to be determined by history, however, this freedom also presents the I with the possibility of

⁸⁰ Through intentional consciousness the ego represents objects to its self, and constitutes the world, *as though* it were the source of the meaning of that object. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas will explain this strange logic as the posterior of the anterior, and it is integral to the argument contained therein. ‘Even its cause, older than itself, is still to come. The cause of being is thought or known by its effect *as though* it were posterior to its effect [...]. But this illusion is not unfounded; it constitutes a positive event. The posteriority of the anterior — an inversion logically absurd — is produced, one would say, only by memory or by thought’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 54. See, Ch. IV, § 4.2.8.

⁸¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 42.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

forgetting its responsibility, and to be as if it was the origin of the meaningful world. This power to withdraw infinitely, to take up a position in relation to being, is what defines the I. The I is both constantly engaged with being, through intentionality, and yet at a distance from it, likewise afforded by intentionality. ‘The I is a being that is always outside of being and even outside of itself’.⁸⁴

This separation, and the illumination of the world through light, also makes desire possible. This excess gives the subject the sense of being beyond the mechanical determinism of the natural world, as the subject can stand back from being. This detachment from being is a necessary pre-condition for the appearing of a meaningful world.

In this world where everything seems to affirm our solidarity with the totality of existence, where we are caught up in the gears of a universal mechanism, our first feeling, our ineradicable illusion, is a feeling or illusion of freedom (*illusion de liberté*).⁸⁵

What is it about this feeling of freedom that makes it illusionary? At this point of the text Levinas does not linger on this point but he will turn explicitly to the question of freedom in the final chapter of this text. Readers familiar with Levinas’s later work will undoubtedly hear the beginnings of what Levinas will later come to characterise as the ‘Same’ in the reference above to the ‘totality of existence’. The self, without the interruption of the Other, is closed within a totality whereby everything relates back to the self, without remainder. Keeping in mind Levinas’s argument, presented in our previous chapter, that without alterity there can be no ‘novelty’, no genuine possibility of difference, and hence no freedom, one can begin to make sense of this claim that alone in the world the self has only the ‘illusion’ of freedom.

In direct opposition to Heidegger Levinas maintains that our everyday existence in the world, consisting of our everyday activities, motivated by desire, is not an inauthentic fraud, or a fallen state, but a getting out of the anonymity of being. Through living in the world, consisting of the simplest joys of life, the subject creates an ‘interval’ in being, a pause from the horror of being in its pure generality, but not an escape from being.⁸⁶ The subject concerned only with its self is not yet free, and hence

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸⁶ In *Time and the Other* Levinas will further describe how desire and enjoyment offer a respite from the anonymity of being, see, § 2.2.2.

has only the illusion of freedom. Everyday life is a resistance to being, a beyond the ‘elemental’. It is to this ‘elemental’ that Levinas turns to next.

§ 2.1.6 ART AS ACCESS TO THE *IL Y A*

The reflection on aesthetics, in particular the nature of art work, which is the focus of the first section of chapter III ‘Exoticism’, leads the reader into the second section which was written while in captivity ‘Existence without Existents’. Beginning with the view of aesthetics that deems the ‘elementary function’ of art to be mimesis, Levinas describes how through art we encounter an alterity that remains exterior and resists assimilation and possession, even in works of art that focus on representation. Through representation in art objects stand out from the world, they are removed from any horizon and any context in which we have grown familiar with is disturbed. ‘The painting, the statue, the book are objects of *our* world, but through them the things represented are extracted from our world.’⁸⁷ When art breaks up our world it confronts us with the ‘impersonality of elements’. In its nakedness the work of art almost floats above the world, in a state of limbo, belonging to a worldless reality. Taken out of any context belonging to our world, the pure materiality of the object strikes us, and turns us to the *il y a*, to the pure fact of being, that there is.

§ 2.1.7 THE ‘THERE IS’

We now turn to the portion of the work that Levinas wrote while in captivity and which he later came to regard as the most important part of the work.

As to *Existence and Existents*, what is important in that book is the description of being in its anonymity, a description very close to the themes of Blanchot. A convergence, a parallelism, what I call the *il y a* (there is). Whatever be my projects, my movements, my rest, *there is* being. *Il y a* is anonymous, “*il y a*” like “*il pleut*” (“it” is raining). *There is* not only something that is but *there is*, above and through these somethings, an anonymous process of being. Without a bearer, without a subject. As in insomnia, it doesn’t stop being — *there is*.⁸⁸

In the Preface to the second edition of the work Levinas points out that the *il y a* was never meant to convey the generosity and abundance that the German term *es gibt*

⁸⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. mod., p. 46:74.

⁸⁸ ‘Interview with François Poirié’, (1986) in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 45. On the influence on Maurice Blanchot, see, n. 97 below.

conjures up.⁸⁹ When reading the suffocating way in which being is described, it is hard to imagine that these reflections, written whilst in captivity, could have been written in jovial times.

In Levinas's attempt to describe being in general he begins with a customary philosophical method of asking the reader to accompany him in conducting a thought experiment, in which we try to imagine 'all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness'.⁹⁰ In contrast to the imagery of 'light' used to describe the world and knowledge in the preceding chapter, in order to describe the *il y a* Levinas now turns to the 'night'.⁹¹ If the world is an illuminated space in which the existent can escape from the anonymity of being, when the world and all beings are removed the undifferentiated being that remains is dark, ominous, and harrowing in its silence.⁹² The nothingness that remains is still a something, a happening, if only the happening of a dark and empty silent night.⁹³ As Leask phrases it, 'this *il y a* is nothing exact and yet it is not exactly

⁸⁹ The Preface to the second edition was written in 1978 and is not included in the English edition. 'Terme foncièrement distinct du «es gibt» heideggerien. Il n'a jamais été ni la traduction, ni la démarque de l'expression allemande et de ses connotations d'abondance et de générosité.' Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 9. In his 1986 interview with Poirié, when asked if the *il y a* was close to the Heideggerian *es gibt*, Levinas once again strongly undermines such an interpretation. 'On the contrary, the *there is* is unbearable in its indifference. Not anguish but horror, the horror of the unceasing, of a monotony deprived of meaning. Horrible insomnia [...]. My effort in *Existence and Existents* consists in investigating the experience of the exit from this anonymous "nonsense"'. 'Interview with François Poirié', (1986) in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 45. The German *there 'es gibt'* literally translates as 'it gives', and so does not capture the horror of the indifference of being. Reflecting on the contrast between his description of Being as '*il y a*' and Heidegger's '*es gibt*', in a late autobiographical article, Levinas notes, '[n]one of the generosity which the German term "*es gibt*" is said to contain revealed itself between 1933 and 1945. This must be said! Enlightenment and meaning dawn only with the existents rising up and establishing themselves in this horrible neutrality of the *there is*.' Levinas, 'Signature', in *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, p. 292. This reflection is particularly poignant given the circumstances under which Levinas wrote the section of the text that describes the '*il y a*'.

⁹⁰ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 51.

⁹¹ One could also see this movement away from the 'light' and towards the 'night' as a movement away from a fulfilled intention, in which the object given is fully taken in by the subject and known, in contrast to the description Levinas will later offer of a signification that will always remain hidden and obscure. For a deeper exploration into the use of the metaphor of light and night, see, Tom Sparrow, 'Darkest Hours', in *Levinas Unhinged* (Winchester, UK and Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2013), pp. 9-21.

⁹² Levinas references Bergson, and his description of the concept of nothingness as equivalent to the crossing out of being, as being close to the idea of the *il y a* that he has in mind, as it captures the sense that total negation is impossible.

⁹³ Levinas does not want the reader to think that nothing is the negation of something, we are not dealing with a Hegelian dialectic, there is no counterpart to the *il y a*, there is no escape from the event of nothingness, 'the *there is* is beyond contradiction; it embraces and dominates its contradictory'. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 60. Although throughout his entire *oeuvre* Levinas rarely cites Hegel directly, there are many veiled references to his philosophical system, which, perhaps more than any other is opposed to Levinas's own philosophical approach. During the 1930's Levinas irregularly attended Alexandre Kojève's lessons on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*. William Desmond believes that Kojève's Marxist reading of Hegel had a big impact on French philosophy from this period, including Levinas, arguing that Kojève read Hegel through the eyes of the master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. See, William Desmond, 'Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, ed. by Claire

nothing.⁹⁴ Levinas uses the impersonal third person pronoun to capture a sense of the there is. ‘*There is* is an impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential.’⁹⁵ The absence is itself felt like a presence. ‘But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence.’⁹⁶ The *il y a* transcends all distinctions between the interior and exterior, between subject and object, as it invades all and leaves no space between, in order to distinguish between them. Like the night that envelopes everything in its darkness, leaving no reference point from which to obtain one’s bearings. In the sheer blackness, in the absence of all light, even the boundaries of the self become blurred and the distinction between the self and the surroundings dissolve.⁹⁷

What we call the I is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalised, stifled by it. The disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear, the sheer fact of being in which *one* participates, whether one wants to or not, without having taken the initiative, anonymously.⁹⁸

Elise Katz and Lara Trout (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 80-120 (p. 104). Hegel was also one of the many authors that Levinas read while in captivity. See, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 41. For more on a reading of this section that deals with the underlying references to Hegelian thought, see, Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, pp. 50-69. For a wider reading on the presence of Hegel in the work of Levinas, see, Silvia Benso, ‘Gestures of work: Levinas and Hegel’, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2007), 307-30.

⁹⁴ Ian Leask, *Being Reconfigured* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), p 49.

⁹⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 53.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹⁷ Levinas references the writings of Maurice Blanchot as having been an important catalyst to his reflections on the *il y a*, specifically mentioning *Thomas the Obscure* in a footnote. The ‘night’ is an important theme in *Thomas the Obscure*, as is the fact of being riveted to existence without an exit. This passage from *Thomas the Obscure* goes some way towards capturing the influence that this novel had on *Existence and Existents*, and the *il y a* in particular: ‘The darkness immersed everything; there was no hope of passing through its shadows, but one penetrated its reality in a relationship of overwhelming intimacy. [Thomas’s] first observation was that he could still use his body, and particularly his eyes; it was not that he saw nothing, but what he looked at eventually placed him in contact with a nocturnal mass which he vaguely perceived to be himself and in which he was bathed’. Maurice Blanchot, ‘Thomas the Obscure’, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, ed. by George Quasha (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1999), p. 60. This passage is quoted by Tom Sparrow in his article ‘Darkest Hours’, in Sparrow, *Levinas Unhinged*, p. 14. For Levinas’s own reflections on the concept of the ‘Neuter’ in the work of Blanchot, which is very close to his own *il y a*, see, Emmanuel Levinas and Garth Gillan, ‘About Blanchot: An Interview’, *SubStance*, 5 (14) (1976), 54-57. For more on the writings of Blanchot and the work of Levinas, see, Simon Critchley, *Very Little- Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 31-83; Paul Davies, ‘A Fine Risk. Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas’, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: The Athlone Press, 1991), pp. 201-26, and Paul Davies, ‘A Linear Narrative? Blanchot with Heidegger in the Work of Levinas’, in *Philosophers’ Poets*, ed. by David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 37-69. See, also, William Large, ‘Impersonal Existence: a conceptual genealogy of the “there is” from Heidegger to Blanchot and Levinas’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 7:3 (2002), 131-42.

⁹⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 53.

The one thing that cannot be hidden, even in the darkest night, is the sheer fact that there is. The emptiness is filled with ‘the nothingness of everything.’⁹⁹ In complete darkness there is no need to hide as one is already cloaked in darkness, and yet despite the absence of any light one feels most exposed, insecure and vulnerable. ‘Before this obscure invasion it is impossible to take shelter in oneself, to withdraw into one’s shell. One is exposed.’¹⁰⁰ The very horror of the *il y a*, felt in the night when the darkness seems to intrude on the self, penetrating its interiority, is the horror of the depersonalization that accompanies it. Consciousness offers us a way to rise above the *il y a* and to appear to momentarily escape the horror, as through consciousness an individual subject separates its self from the generality and ambiguity of being. Before the *il y a* it is not death that causes anxiety, but the horror of the condemnation to exist with ‘no exit’ (*sans issue*) from being, for even death is impossible before the *il y a*.¹⁰¹ Levinas draws on Shakespeare, as just one of his many literary references, to help him to depict this eerie experience after a murder the world is as it appeared to be before. ‘Horror is the event of being which returns in the heart of this negation, as though nothing had happened. “And that,” says Macbeth, “is more strange than the crime itself”.’¹⁰² Despite your world having been turned upside down the fabric of the world remains the same. There is no silhouette shaped hole of the person who is gone. Existence is as it was before.

§ 2.1.8 INSOMNIA AND THE PASSIVITY OF THE SELF

By sketching a materialist account of subjectivity, understood as the ego’s inescapable bond to the self, Levinas places the view of the free autonomous sovereign subject into question, by simply describing situations that lead us to reflect on autonomy.¹⁰³ Levinas’s description of insomnia demonstrates both the passivity of the existent, and

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰² Ibid. Despite writing the central chapter of this work in imprisonment Levinas references an impressive array of both literary and philosophical works, from Heidegger, Bergson and Hegel, to Proust, Shakespeare, and Blanchot among many others.

¹⁰³ This ‘materialist’ account is not a materialistic account of subjectivity. ‘Materiality’ is not reducible to material existence, as Levinas does not simply mean a biological/physical condition. Rather, the self’s relationship with existence, the fact that the existent cannot detach itself from itself. As Levinas writes, ‘[t]his manner of being occupied with itself is the subject’s materiality. Identity is not an inoffensive relationship with itself, but an enchainment to itself; it is the necessity of being occupied with itself’. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 55.

also, in reflecting on insomnia the weight of the *il y a* is revealed. We are once again confronted with a different take on an ordinary event that leads us to reevaluate our previous thoughts on the matter, if any, and the consequences thereof. In insomnia, the subject cannot even choose to go asleep, ‘one is held by being, held to be’.¹⁰⁴ To ‘fall asleep’, the term used in English to describe the event of passing from wakefulness into sleep, captures the passivity and powerlessness of this event. One does not will sleep, sleep comes, or as is the case with insomnia, it does not. As Levinas says, with insomnia ‘sleep evades our appeal’.¹⁰⁵ Sleep is described as the possibility of suspending consciousness, ‘to withdraw from being’.¹⁰⁶

In contrast to attention, Levinas describes the wakefulness (*la veille*) that accompanies insomnia as vigilance.¹⁰⁷ Attention is directed towards an object whereas with vigilance there is no object, just a heavy presence. In fact, in the night, it is as though the night itself is watching.¹⁰⁸ Even the subject begins to fade away.¹⁰⁹ In the vigilance of insomnia the I is not awake and attentive, rather ‘it’ watches. This experience of the dissolution of the subject is one of horror and oppression. It is as though the subject is absorbed by the night, as the boundary between the interior and the exterior seem to dissolve.¹¹⁰ Levinas tells us that the anonymous vigilance revealed through an analysis of insomnia, strictly speaking, cannot be termed phenomena as this would presuppose an ego. Almost like a state of limbo, insomnia is in between consciousness as attention and sleep as the suspension of consciousness. Levinas returns to his phenomenological analysis of insomnia in *Time and the Other* where it has a more prominent place in the discussion.¹¹¹ As insomnia is the extinction of the subject, this leads Levinas to ask what then accounts for the advent of the subject. In the next section Levinas discusses the opposition of consciousness and unconsciousness, which leads to a discussion on hypostasis, and the advent of a subject in the instant.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁰⁷ Critchley points out that ‘*la veille*’ is difficult to translate as it denotes both wakefulness and watchfulness, for which there is no corresponding single English term. Critchley, *Very Little- Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁸ ‘I am, one might say, the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought.’ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Attention presupposes the freedom of the ego which directs it; the vigilance of insomnia which keeps our eyes open has no subject.’ Ibid., p. 62.

¹¹⁰ ‘There is no longer any outside or any inside’. Ibid., p. 61.

¹¹¹ See, Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 48.

§ 2.1.9 CONSCIOUSNESS, THE BODY, AND POSITION

Consciousness is marked by its ability to retreat, to sleep. The continuous flow of consciousness does not come to an end in sleep, and nor does one begin anew when one wakes. Rather it is a ‘participation in life by non-participation’, a switching off, a pause, a rest.¹¹² A condition that is necessary in order for one to sleep is that of a ‘place’. To sleep one must find a place in which to take refuge, lie down, and take up a position, ‘to abandon ourselves to a place’ and ‘summon sleep’.¹¹³ Again the passivity of the existent is captured by the way in which Levinas describes sleep. Sleep is not described as an activity that one can master and command, rather the existent must give him/her self over to sleep and to a place. There is vulnerability in sleep, as one is abandoned to sleep and to the place of rest. Not only is a place a condition for rest and sleep, but consciousness itself comes out of a position. ‘Position is not added to consciousness like an act that it decides on; it is out of position, out of an immobility, that consciousness comes *to itself*.’¹¹⁴ The advent of consciousness is within a position, and one that consciousness could not will or control. Consciousness has a place and in order to have a place it must first be posited. Levinas claims that if one was to imagine consciousness without a position it would not be a consciousness that is free of all restraints, but the very annihilation of consciousness. Consciousness can only arise in a position in being.

Against the Bergsonian view of place as geometric space, and the Heideggerian concrete world, Levinas puts forward the idea of place as fundamentally a base, as a taking up of a position. This is inextricably linked to an understanding of the body as ‘the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself’.¹¹⁵ The body is not an object belonging to the existent, however, nor is it completely correct to say that ‘I am my body’, such as I am my pain, or I am organs, as in this description the body is still described as a being, a substance.¹¹⁶ Through his phenomenological analysis Levinas

¹¹² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 66.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-66.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67, my emphasis.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69. The importance of the body in Levinas’s philosophy is another point of difference between his work and that of Husserl and Heidegger, neither of whom elaborated on the experience of one’s own body in their respective phenomenological enterprises

¹¹⁶ Levinas’s description of the body brings to mind the work of Marcel. For more on Marcel’s influence on Levinas, see, Ch. I, n. 166.

wants to claim that the body is the event of the positing of the existent in being, ‘the way a man engages in existence’.¹¹⁷ In an attempt to convey further to the reader how the body is this event, Levinas refers to Rodin’s sculptures. With Rodin’s sculptures the figures are not positioned on top of a pedestal, rather the base forms part of the structure. The base is an integral part of the structure, as it appears as though the figures are emerging out of the base. With some of Rodin’s pieces one finds it hard to tell where the base ends and the figure begins, they are almost amalgamated into one. This image captures how consciousness presupposes a position in being, and the body as a necessary condition for the possibility of any inwardness. Consciousness is not free floating and detached. The body is integral to this positioning. Consciousness, just like Rodin’s sculptures, cannot choose this position as this would require pre-existing the position.

§ 2.1.10 HYPOSTASIS

In order to further describe what he means by hypostasis Levinas goes on to discuss hypostasis in relation to time, and returns to the earlier discussed theme of the instant. The understanding of position as the taking up of a place leads Levinas to reflect on the instant as a present. Levinas claims that the present has generally gained its significance in philosophy due to its relationship with time, with the future and the past. Although, Levinas claims, that this has been the case since the time of ancient philosophy, he believes it to be particularly evident in modern philosophy.¹¹⁸ Despite their differences,

¹¹⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 70.

¹¹⁸ An obvious example of an ancient thinker whose reflections on time were very influential not only in the development of philosophy but also on philosophy within Levinas’s lifetime, most notably influencing Heidegger’s thinking on time, was Augustine (354-430). Augustine’s reflections on time can be said to fit this description as, in Book XI of his *Confessions*, he explains time as the stretching (*distentio*) of the soul (in anticipation of the future now, memory of the past now, and the perception of the present now all held in the soul of the human being). Despite this, Levinas does not mention Augustine. Although Levinas rarely ever mentions Augustine throughout his work, we know that he did read the *Confessions*, or least sections of it. Significantly, in his 1981 interview with Richard Kearney, when asked about the coexistence of the ontological and the ethical as inspirations within Western philosophy, Levinas mentions four places within the tradition that demonstrate the ethical breaking through the ontological. Unsurprisingly Levinas mentions Plato’s idea of ‘the good existing beyond being’ (*agathon epekeina tes ousias*) and Descartes’ discovery of the ‘idea of the infinite’. He then goes on to mention two philosophers that he is not as often associated with, ‘supra-ontological notions are to be found in the Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine of the *via eminentiae*, with its surplus of the divine over being, or in the Augustinian distinction in the *Confessions* between the truth that challenges (*veritas redarguens*) and the ontological truth which shines (*veritas lucens*), and so on.’ Levinas and Kearney, ‘Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 25. This is not the only time that Levinas favourably mentions what he regards as an important distinction made by Augustine. In his article, ‘The Truth that Accuses: Conscience, Shame

Levinas places both the Bergsonian and Heideggerian understandings of time firmly in this tradition, as both see the instant as caught up with the remembered past and the anticipated future, as duration and ecstasis.¹¹⁹ Levinas separates himself from both by reflecting on the significance of the instant understood as the present, irrespective of its relationship with time past and yet to come. On this classical conception of time the instant is viewed as evanescence, a fading away in order to make room for the next instant, and as such it loses its significance. This view also has consequences for the view of existence, which is seen as persistence through time. By focusing on the instance Levinas shows how each instant ‘imitates eternity’.¹²⁰

Levinas cites Malebranche as an exception to this tradition, as Malebranche ‘catches sight of the drama inherent in an instant itself’, by focusing on the instant removed from its relationship with the past and the future the event of the instant comes to the fore, as does the relationship with existence that it reveals.¹²¹ For Levinas each instant is the accomplishment of existence, ‘a beginning, a birth’.¹²² Hypostasis is a continuous event whereby existence is taken up by the existent in the present.¹²³ It is a paradoxical relationship whereby what previously did not exist somehow gives birth to its own self, in each instant. Each instant is understood as a beginning, as it is removed from time, and so, there was no before and there will be no future.¹²⁴ The advent of the existent is understood as a constant folding back on itself, a *repli en soi*.¹²⁵

§ 2.1.11 FREEDOM AND THE PRESENT

In this section Levinas turns explicitly to how this description of existence, as revealed through an analysis of the instant, relates to freedom. Though Levinas argued above

and Guilt in Levinas and Augustine’, Bernasconi presents an analysis of Levinas’s thought in relation to this distinction found in Augustine’s *Confessions*. See, Robert Bernasconi, ‘The Truth that Accuses: Conscience, Shame and Guilt in Levinas and Augustine’, in *The Ethics of Postmodernity. Current Trends in Continental Thought*, ed. by Gary B. Madison and Marty Fairbairn (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. 24-34.

¹¹⁹ ‘[T]he instant in all modern philosophy gets its significance from the dialectic of time; it does not have a dialectic of its own’. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 72.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 75. As De Boer writes: ‘Existing as human being means starting anew every moment. The now [...] is truly new’. See, De Boer, ‘Difference and Separation’, p. 121.

¹²³ ‘to be means to take up being (*assumer l’être*), the existence of an existent is by essence an activity. An existent must be in act, even when it is inactive [...] the upsurge of an existent into existence, a hypostasis’. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 25.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

that the instant is to be understood as absolute, he does not want the reader to infer from this that the instant should therefore be regarded as a complete freedom.

The description of this absolute can then not be put in terms of sovereignty (*souveraineté*) and blissful freedom (*liberté bienheureuse*), with which the notion of the absolute is characterized in the philosophical tradition.¹²⁶

This passage does not rule out the possibility that hypostasis brings a degree of freedom, just that the instant as absolute is not to be understood as ‘sovereignty and blissful freedom’, as it is not free of all restraints. In *Time and the Other* it will become clear that this freedom gained through hypostasis is a minimal freedom understood as a beginning, and a mastery over being, that comes with simply taking up being in the present. It is not to be thought of as freedom of the will, the freedom of representation, or as freedom from the basic materiality of the self. The event that Levinas is seeking to describe rests on the materiality of the self and is an event prior to reflective consciousness and intentional engagement with the world.

Hypostasis reveals the paradoxical relationship between existence and the existent. On the one hand, the existent gains mastery over existence by rising up from the anonymity of the *il y a* and taking up a position, and in that sense is said to be free, and yet, on the other hand, the existent is chained to itself, chained to existence, and cannot escape the present.

What is absolute in the relationship between existence and an existent, in an instant, consists in the mastery the existent exercises on existence, but also in the weight of existence on the existent.¹²⁷

We are left with two different sides to this understanding of freedom. Merely by existing the existent is said to have mastery over being, and yet alone it cannot escape the present instant, nor escape the immediate weight of enchainment of the ego to the self. In *Time and the Other* Levinas will develop this idea of freedom understood as a mastery over being, gained purely by existing, in more detail. Below, we will see that this distinction between two slightly different meanings of freedom becomes more apparent in *Time and the Other*. In *Existence and Existents* this distinction is not so clearly stated and as such can be easily overlooked. This ‘mastery’ over being is not yet clearly described as a freedom. In *Existence and Existents* the focus is primarily on the weight of existence on the existent and how alone the subject cannot escape the present

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

and cannot escape the enchainment of the ego to the self, and so in that sense is not yet free.

The present does not gain its significance from being a moment in a linear time sequence, preceded by the past and giving way to the future, but from its absolute engagement with being. The instant is always present. Even when one reflects on time past, or harbours hope for time to come, the instant can never be escaped, 'the present in its inevitable return upon itself does not allow for its annihilation'.¹²⁸ Even the evanescence of the present cannot destroy the infinity that is the presence of the present.

The present is subjected to being, bonded to it. The ego (*le moi*) returns ineluctably to itself (*à soi*); it can forget itself in sleep, but there will be a reawakening. In the tension and fatigue of beginning one feels the cold sweat of the irremissibility of existence. The being that is taken up is a burden.¹²⁹

Although the present refers only to itself, which should imply freedom from restraints, it cannot escape the restraint that comes from this self identification. Despite the fact that the instant is not weighed down by the events of the past, the unremitting beginning in the instant is itself a weight and a burden. The commitment to exist, which is taken up simply by existing, entails a responsibility to existence that one did not choose, and yet one cannot choose to undo it.

The freedom of the present finds a limit in the responsibility for which it is the condition. This is the most profound paradox in the concept of freedom: its synthetic bond with its own negation. *A free being alone is responsible, that is, already not free (déjà non libre)*. A being capable of beginning in the present is alone encumbered with itself.¹³⁰

When one thinks of freedom in the work of Levinas the predominate correlation that is made is between the *paradoxical* freedom of the I and the infinite responsibility one has for the Other. It is interesting to note that at this early stage when Levinas first connects freedom and responsibility it is in relation to the existent alone. The responsibility that the existent has for its own existing cannot be separated from its freedom; rather, it is the very *condition of that freedom*.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 77-78. See Husserl's remarks on the apodicticity of reflective immanent perception of the existence of a current experience which cannot be annihilated in any thought-experiment in comparison to the way in which a thing, because it is spatial, that is given to outer perceptual-sense experience can, as Husserl shows through his famous transcendental reduction, to be in principle incomplete and capable of not existing as it actually does (from a transcendental-phenomenological point of view). See Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 51-66.

¹²⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 78.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 78-79, my emphasis.

With hypostasis the existent finds itself singularized in existence before being free. The singularization of the existent was never willed nor chosen by the subject, it is prior to any cognitive initiative or intention, and nevertheless, it is an event that the existent cannot undo. The weight of responsibility for the existent's own existence holds it back. The passage above indicates that the responsibility that comes with existing is simultaneous with the advent of freedom, '[a] free being alone is responsible, that is, already not free (*déjà non libre*)'. The existent is simultaneously free and limited by the responsibility that encumbers that freedom.¹³¹ Consequently, one is not free and therefore responsible, one is, rather, responsible and therefore free. It is important to remember that freedom is here used in a minimal sense, and is not the freedom of the will. Responsibility, therefore, precedes freedom understood as freedom of the will, and the freedom associated with 'light', theoretical consciousness and knowledge, as through hypostasis the existent is responsible for existing prior to this level of engagement with the world.

We are again reminded that what Levinas is seeking to describe is an event that precedes theoretical and reflective thought.¹³² The use of the term 'existent', in place of subject, further demonstrates that Levinas wishes to reveal a relationship with existence that prefigures the intentional relationship with the world, and therefore prefigures representational consciousness. This is also affirmed by his unwillingness to describe the event as an experience.¹³³ Levinas turns to Descartes and points out how Descartes' *cogito* rests on this prior event of hypostasis. Far from needing to rest his argument, ultimately, on an ontological argument for the existence of God, Levinas argues that the certainty of the *cogito* rests on the certainty of the present.¹³⁴

In the next section 'The Present and Position', Levinas goes on to further argue that the event that he is describing is prior to reflective consciousness, and not to be

¹³¹ The Greek term *horízō* (ὁρίζω) meaning to designate limits or mark out a boundary, also what pulls together and unites all within, captures this sense of individual freedom as united in all of its activity by responsibility. Consequently, one is not free and therefore responsible, one is, rather, responsible and therefore free.

¹³² In the section 'The Meaning of Hypostasis' Levinas does describes hypostasis as consciousness, however, consciousness is described as 'taking a position', and at this stage, 'without transcendence'. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 83.

¹³³ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 54.

¹³⁴ 'The Cartesian *cogito*, with its certainty of existence for the "I", rests on the absolute effectuation of being by the present.' Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 79.

thought of as an act of the will.¹³⁵ The effort by which the existent perpetually takes up a position in the instant is distinct from effort understood as effort arising from an act taken up a subject. The effort to be is not a free initiative of a subject, but the very being of an existent.

A subject does not exist before the event of its position. The act of taking a position does not unfold in some dimension from which it could take its origin; it arises at the very point at which it acts. Its action does not consist in willing, but in being.¹³⁶

Levinas points out that action taken by the subject transcends itself, as it is directed at the world, whereas the taking up of a position in being does not transcend the existent. The hypostasis of an existent is a ‘folding back on itself’ (*repli en soi*), and so, is a complete self contained event that has no opening unto alterity.¹³⁷ In contrast to Heidegger’s position, for whom, Levinas claims, temporality understood as ‘ecstasy’ is already a being outside of oneself and always already embedded in the world, Levinas questions whether the original relationship between an existent and being involves an opening to the outside. Levinas does not take time, or a relationship with a beyond the existent, as a given.

In starting with *position*, we question whether ecstasy is in fact the original mode of existence, whether the relationship currently called a relationship between the ego and being is a movement toward an outside, whether the *ex* is the principle root of the verb to exist.¹³⁸

Levinas is here playing on the etymological root of the prefix *ex*, in ‘ecstasy’ and ‘existence’, meaning out (of), from, beyond.¹³⁹ On Levinas’s analysis the existent is alone in being and trapped in a self-contained relationship that can only be breached from the outside, through an event that is not initiated by the subject, and so, not reducible to the freedom and the power of the I. Only through an encounter with alterity can the existent be freed from this perpetual present and given the possibility of freedom, and not just fate.

The return of the present to itself is the affirmation of the *I* already riveted to itself, already doubled up with a *self*. The tragic does not come from a conflict

¹³⁵ In the section ‘The Meaning of Hypostasis’, Levinas further affirms this point when he states: ‘We have not sought, in the subject that pulls itself up from the anonymous vigilance of the *there is*, a thought, a consciousness, or a mind.’ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹³⁹ ‘Ecstasy’ stems from *ex-stasis*, meaning to stand outside of oneself.

between freedom and destiny, but from the turning of freedom into destiny, from responsibility.¹⁴⁰

§ 2.1.12 FREEDOM AND HYPOSTASIS

In this section Levinas clearly states that hypostasis is not yet freedom. ‘If an existent arises through consciousness, subjectivity, which is a preeminence of the subject over being, is not yet freedom’.¹⁴¹ Given that in *Time and the Other* Levinas will come to deploy the word freedom in a different sense, it is of importance, therefore, to be clear on the meaning of freedom in this section. As with the majority of this text, freedom is here used as the freedom from the immediate materiality of the subject, a freedom that eludes the solitary existent. Even though the intentional ego can seem to escape the *il y a* through an intentional relationship of desire with the world, a relationship of ‘mastery, power or virility’, the *il y a* is never far away. ‘It is forever bound to the existence which it has taken up’.¹⁴² Even the freedom that seems to come with consciousness and cognition, cannot free the self completely. Consciousness may separate the self from the world, placing the world at a distance (through reflection), but the definitive mark of existence of the existent, that of solitude, is not ruptured. Drawing on his interpretation of intentionality in Husserl’s phenomenology, presented in the ‘Work of Edmund Husserl’, in which it was argued that intentionality bestows a sense, and hence nothing in the world could be absolutely foreign to the subject, Levinas here continues that line of thought by arguing that intentionality keeps the self locked in its own solitude.

Illuminated by light, they [given objects] have meaning [sense (*sens*)], and thus are as though they came from me. In the understood universe I am alone, that is, closed up in an existence that is definitively *one* (*définitivement une*).¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 79.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 85:122. ‘[D]éfinitivement *une*’ could perhaps also be translated as ‘definitively *single*’ or ‘definitively *singular*’ as this captures Levinas play on the definite article ‘*une*’ as what ‘defines’ the singularity of one’s own existence, hence a being (or an entity) in existence. Since the understanding of the understood universe in its being is definitively singular and belonging, as it were, to one’s self in one’s being, the self is ‘alone’ and the understanding is ‘mine’. Although Levinas is referring directly to Husserl here, one can see how such an interpretation could also apply to Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*, as Heidegger argued that the *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*) of *Dasein* is what makes possible both authentic and inauthentic understandings of the meaning of being. See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ¶ 9 pp. 67-71, (SZ 42-46). In a question and answer session that took place in the University of Leyden in 1975 Levinas spoke about *Jemeinigkeit* in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, ‘*Dasein* signifies that the *Da-sein* has to be. [...] It is the emphasis of this rectitude that is expressed by a notion of *first property*, which is *Jemeinigkeit*. [...] The *Dasein* is so delivered over to being that being is its own. [...] Being is that which becomes my-own, and it is for this that a man is necessary to being.’ In contrast to this position Levinas goes on to say, in keeping with his later position, that what distinguishes the subject as singular, as an ‘I’, is the ineluctable responsibility it has for the Other. ‘As long as there is no other, one cannot speak of freedom

Levinas is again using light here as an analogy for knowledge and understanding. In the passage above it is important to note that Levinas states that in the universe as ‘understood’ I am alone. Thus, at the level of the intentional ego (*le moi*) the ‘I’ is condemned to a solitary existence.

It is at this point of the argument that Levinas again introduces the Other (*autrui*), as the Other breaks up the categories of the ego, and hence can free the ego from this solitary existence in which all of the given objects of the world are subsumed by the ego, given a sense, and hence as ‘mine’ are part of that solitude.

It is [reaching the other (*autrui*)], on the ontological level, the event of the most radical breakup of the very categories of the ego (*du moi*), for it is for me to be somewhere else than my self; it is to be pardoned, to not be a definitive existence.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, ‘my understanding of the meaning of being’ can be, and is, called into question through the existence of the Other. Without the existence of the Other there can be no critical distance in self-understanding. In his work to come Levinas will stress this point further, arguing that without the Other the self would never call its self into question, and consequently without the Other critical consciousness would never arise. Within this work, the Other is described as pardoning the self from a life condemned to solitary confinement, by breaking up the categories of the ego and introducing an alterity that cannot be assimilated by the ego. A danger with the way in which the Other is discussed in *Existence and Existents* is that the Other could be seen to be reduced to the functionary role of ‘pardoning’ the self from a life that would be otherwise condemned to solitude.¹⁴⁵ This is something that Levinas himself becomes aware of and in his later work he will further develop his thinking on subjectivity in relation to the Other, and in doing so move towards avoiding this criticism.

or of nonfreedom; there is not yet even identity of the person, which is an identity of the “undiscernable,” internal to what is unique by dint of not being able to evade the other.’ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Questions and Answers’, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. by Bettina Bergo ed. by Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 79-99 (p. 92).

¹⁴⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 85-86:122.

¹⁴⁵ On this point we are in agreement with Thomas. ‘The encounter with the other person appears to release the subject from the “responsibility” and freedom to bear the full weight of existence. Thus it might seem that Levinas has focused too much on the salvation of subjectivity and, in the process, has given it back a power over its being, making the other person merely the condition of the possibility of self-transcendence. There is a sense in which the relation to the other person, described in *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents* in terms of *eros*, could be interpreted as describing the conditions of possibility for “power” and “violence.” The question of how to think subjectivity in relation to the other, without reducing the other to a functionary of an otherwise powerless subject, underlies Levinas’ later thought.’ Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*, p. 49.

Levinas continues the light analogy and explains that it is not possible to ‘grasp the alterity of the other’ through any relationship characterised by light.¹⁴⁶ Phenomenology, on Levinas’s interpretation, is limited when it comes to philosophising about the other as it represents a philosophy of light *par excellence*. Phenomenology proceeds through a reflection on conscious experience, and as such Levinas maintains ‘cannot leave the sphere of light’.¹⁴⁷ Every object that is reflected on is an object that is known and constituted by the ego, and more importantly for Levinas, intentionality is essentially the act of bestowing a sense (*Sinngebung*). As such, on his reading of phenomenology, following Husserl (and Heidegger), there is no room for an encounter that resists and shatters those categories, an encounter that occurs prior to the subject’s intentional engagement with the world understood as ‘light’.

Qua phenomenology it remains within the world of light, the world of the solitary ego which has no relationship with the other *qua* other, for whom the other is another me, an *alter ego* known by sympathy, that is, by a return to oneself.¹⁴⁸

For Levinas, the understanding of intentional presented in the work of both Husserl and Heidegger are not significantly different. For Husserl, objects cannot be encountered (*begegnen*) in their meaning and existence precisely because their meaningful existence is *constituted* by the activity of human intentional consciousness. Heidegger’s argument that the meaningful existence of the ‘hammer’ is not constituted through the harmony of intentional-perceptual experiences but constituted through the activity of *Dasein* in using the hammer, therefore, is not a rejection but a modification of Husserl’s transcendental-phenomenological approach and position. Rather than consciousness being named and acknowledged as the bestower of meaning of things in the world, the individual human being in *Dasein* as actor in the world is. Though Heidegger says that

¹⁴⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 86.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. For Levinas, this is as true of Husserl’s attempt to determine the meaning of ‘being as (conscious) experience’ (*Sein als Erlebnis*) in the transcendental reduction of *Ideas I* as it is of Heidegger’s attempt to make sense of oneself as a Being-towards-death in the mood of *Angst* in *Being and Time*.

¹⁴⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 86. In this passage Levinas is referring to Husserl’s descriptions of how inter-subjectivity is possible, particularly in relation to Husserl’s discussions on empathy (*Einfühlung*), the act through which foreign experience is comprehended. §43- 47 of *Ideas II* deals with ‘The Constitution of Psychic Reality in Empathy’. Also, Husserl’s Fifth Cartesian Meditation contains Husserl’s most mature work on inter-subjectivity. As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, Levinas chose to translate this meditation in his joint translation of the work along with Gabrielle Peiffer. Despite Levinas’s familiarity with Husserl’s work on inter-subjectivity he here uses ‘sympathy’ (*la sympathie*) and not empathy (*la empathie*). When Colin Davis quotes this passage in his *Levinas. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 25 he translates *la sympathie* as empathy, however, it is clear from the original that sympathy is a more accurate translation and interpretation of Husserl’s *philosophical* position on ‘empathy’.

the ‘understanding of Being’ that *I* have of the world (in *Dasein*) extends to and includes not only myself, the world but also the existence of one’s fellow human being, there is scant treatment or acknowledgement of the existence of the otherness of one’s fellow human being in Heidegger’s actual text or philosophical position. Likewise with Husserl’s approach to inter-subjectivity where the other is reduced to the sameness as the self in the *constitution* of the meaning of the ‘other’, the very otherness of the existence of the ‘other’ is not a feature of his phenomenological analyses and investigations.

§ 2.1.13 ALONE AND TRAPPED IN THE INSTANT

Throughout the latter sections of the text, when Levinas explicitly addresses freedom, it is freedom understood as aligned with knowledge and light, and as such is seen as operating on the level of intentional consciousness, the level of the ego (*le moi*) and not that of the self (*le soi*). Earlier in the text when describing events that are prior to reflection such as weariness and fatigue, events that capture the passivity of the self, Levinas uses the term ‘existent’ to capture this sense of passivity. In this section, when Levinas turns to the subject’s conscious engagement with the world, in place of ‘existent’, Levinas uses terms such as ‘subject’, ‘cognition’, ‘ego’, and ‘I’.¹⁴⁹ This reveals that freedom understood in the sense of the freedom of representation, the freedom of bestowing a meaning on the world through intentionality, takes place at this level of conscious engagement with the world.¹⁵⁰ Before consciousness arises the existent has emerged in being, and as such is responsible for its own being, prior to this freedom understood as the freedom of representation and knowledge.¹⁵¹

Knowledge, which is attained through the existent’s intentional relation with the world, is described as ‘the secret of its freedom’.¹⁵² Throughout his work to come this juxtaposition of knowledge and freedom will occur more frequently. In order to grasp

¹⁴⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 88-89.

¹⁵⁰ In *Time and the Other* Levinas continues this line of argument, and uses the term subjectivity when describing engagement with the world at the level of intentional consciousness. ‘Subjectivity is itself the objectivity of light. Every object can be spoken of in terms of consciousness — that is, can be brought to light.’ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 66.

¹⁵¹ The conclusion further affirms that what Levinas is seeking to describe is an event, through which an existent arises in being, which is prior to the world, ‘behind the *cogito*’, ‘arises before the scission of being into an inside and an outside’, and is antecedent/anterior/prior (*antérieur*) to the presupposed world of light. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 105.

¹⁵² ‘Knowledge is the secret of its freedom with respect to all that which happens to it.’ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

why Levinas aligns these two together, and hence why this sense of freedom pertains to the ego, one needs to grasp the duality within the self. Contained in this distinction between the existent and the ego is an important distinction between two different meanings of freedom. In the next section we will discuss this important distinction, but firstly we need to grasp this equally important distinction between the ego and the self. Helpfully, it is in the very next section of the text, ‘The Ego as an Identification and as a Bond with Oneself’, that Levinas articulates further the duality within the self. This distinction between the self and the conscious ego will prove to be a vital distinction to grasp in order for us to come to understand why Levinas claims that responsibility precedes freedom, both in relation to the self in the early work and in relation to the Other in his later work. To borrow an apt summary from Critchley:

The whole Levinasian analysis of the subject proceeds from a rigorous distinction between the subject and consciousness or between the *le Soi* (the self) and *le Moi* (the ego). Levinas’s work, and this is something far too little recognized in much of the unduly edifying or fetishizing secondary literature on Levinas, proceeds from the rigorous distinction between consciousness and subjectivity.¹⁵³

In that particular article Critchley centres his reading of Levinas on the 1968 version of ‘Substitution’, later redrafted by Levinas to form the pivotal chapter IV of *Otherwise than Being*, however, this claim about the importance of the duality of the self in Levinas’s philosophy is just as true for works as early as *On Escape* and *Existence and Existents*. Granted it is not until *Otherwise than Being* that Levinas will give his most detailed account of the moral sensibility of subjectivity, and notwithstanding the changes and development that take place, it is of importance to bear in mind that this fundamental and crucial distinction, albeit not fully argued for, is nonetheless present as early as *On Escape*.¹⁵⁴

Despite the fact that throughout this work the duality of the self is a central element of Levinas’s whole philosophical approach and argument, the significance of it can be easily overlooked. This fundamental element of Levinas’s account of subjectivity is crucial in coming to terms with his description of freedom. The more one understands this important point the less paradoxical and counterintuitive Levinas’s

¹⁵³Simon Critchley, ‘The Original Traumatism. Levinas and psychoanalysis’, in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 230-42 (pp. 232-33).

¹⁵⁴‘Thus, escape 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 (moi) is oneself (soi-même)*.’ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 55.

claim that responsibility precedes freedom will seem, both initially in relation to the self and in his later work in relation to the Other. In this section, which deals specifically with the duality of the subject, Levinas seeks to get across to the reader the originality of this position. He stresses that this duality in the subject is not akin with other dualities within the self that we have previously met in the history of philosophy, such as the distinction between will and passion, and reason or feeling. The crucial distinction that Levinas wishes to stress is that whereas these dualities remain at the level of the ego, Levinas wants to show that there is an older and more primary divide in the subject, the self is before the ego.¹⁵⁵ Even with the ‘freedom’ that the ego appears to bring, through knowledge and an intentional relation with the world understood as desire, the ego cannot be free of the self. The responsibility of being tied to existence precedes the freedom of intentional consciousness. The way in which Levinas describes the bond between the self and the ego, using terms such as ‘weight and a responsibility’ (*une pesanteur et une responsabilité*), ‘fatality’ (*la fatalité*), ‘enchainment’ (*enchaînement*), ‘destiny’ (*destin*), ‘impossibility of getting rid of oneself’ (*l’impossibilité de se défaire de soi-même*), all capture the powerlessness of the subject to escape this condition of existing.¹⁵⁶ This ‘fatality’ precedes and conditions the freedom of the ego.¹⁵⁷

In describing this condition of subjectivity as ‘enchainment’ and a ‘burden’, Levinas is well aware that the reader may suggest that the implication of this description is that the subject must, in at least a minimal sense, be free. For surely only a free being can be enchained and burdened? In answer to this potential rebuttal Levinas argues that it is not freedom that can be derived from this experience, but only the thought or hope of freedom. Levinas uses the example of servitude to support his point. ‘One cannot derive out of the experience of servitude the proof of its contrary, but the *thought* of freedom would suffice to account for it’.¹⁵⁸ Levinas stresses his point that this ‘concept of freedom’ is illusionary,

¹⁵⁵ ‘Each of those faculties contains the ego completely.’ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 89.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ As Thomas succinctly describes this predicament of the subject: ‘The way this freedom is interpreted is crucial to an understanding of subjectivity and is tied up with hope and a new conception of time. However, to introduce a notion of freedom in the midst of enchainment will sound paradoxical unless we recognise from the start that this freedom is not a power of the subject to leave, negate or overcome being but merely to bear it’. Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice, and the Human beyond Being*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 90.

[a]nd this is the concept of freedom, which is only a thought: a recourse to sleep, to unconsciousness, and not an escape, the illusory divorce of the *ego* from its *self* which will end in a resumption of existence in common.¹⁵⁹

Freedom for the solitary ego remains an illusory freedom, as the ego is still chained to the self.¹⁶⁰ The subject condemned to the solitude of the present can only hold onto the hope that the future will bring consolation, and an escape. However, alone the subject will never escape the present, ‘it cannot *endow itself* with this alterity’.¹⁶¹ Freedom and salvation can only come from elsewhere. Our life in the world, described earlier as the sincerity of intentions, may enable us to forget and to numb the pain of the instant, but our engagement with the world is not an escape from this fundamental condition of the inescapable attachment of the ego to the self. Where, then, can the realisation of this hope come from? One can detect the presence of Hegel in the text when Levinas rules out the possibility of any dialectical movement. The opposition of freedom and the thought of freedom will not bring forth time.¹⁶² ‘The impossibility of constituting time dialectically is the impossibility of saving oneself by oneself and of saving oneself alone.’¹⁶³ No activity taken by the subject can bring forth its salvation from its self and from the present instant. This hope can only be realised in the future, but as the subject is trapped in the instant, alone, it can only bring about more of the same, the future can only come from an outside the subject. ‘It can only come from elsewhere, *while everything in the subject is here.*’¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Levinas uses the example of boredom to further describe this duality of the self. This example is particularly appropriate in French as the verb to be bored (*s’ennuyer*) is a reflexive verb. The English ‘I am bored’ (expressed as a state of being) translates into French as ‘*je m’ennuie*’.

¹⁶¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 95, my emphasis.

¹⁶² ‘The distinction we have set up between liberation and the mere thought of liberation excludes any sort of dialectical deduction of time starting with the present [...]. There is no dialectical exorcism contained in the fact that the “I” conceives of a freedom. It is not enough to conceive of hope to unleash a future.’ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 96, my emphasis. Herein lies the origins of Levinas’s ‘immanent critique’ of the respective phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger and their accounts of the origins of time-consciousness. Although both Husserl and Heidegger differ in their respective accounts of the phenomenological origins of time-consciousness, both prioritise the subject’s experience of time, be that the remembered past and the anticipated future in the present, for Husserl, or the radically finite horizon unto which *Dasein* constantly projects itself, for Heidegger. As Joseph Cohen says of Levinas, he shifts ‘once again the entire problematic of temporality to the possibility of thinking *another source* where *another meaning* of temporality reverberates [...] Levinas seeks to open and thus re-conduct the fundamental question of phenomenology [temporality] to another ‘*significance*’ irreducible to the temporality of the internal present [Husserl] or to the finite temporality of being [Heidegger].’ Cohen goes on to state that from as early as *Time and the Other*, ‘Levinas thinks temporality from the pure otherness of a futurity and as the irreconcilable event of a commandment interrupting and suspending the ‘present’, and thus ‘presence’’. Joseph Cohen, ‘Levinas and the Problem of Phenomenology’, in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 20:3 (2012), pp. 363-74 (pp. 371-72).

§ 2.1.14 TWO DISTINCT MEANINGS OF FREEDOM

Within the midst of this argument explicating the enchainment of the ego to the self, and the absence of freedom understood as a freedom from the immediacy of the material condition, Levinas complicates matters slightly by switching between two slightly different understandings of freedom. In order to make sense of what can appear on first reading as, at best, an ambiguity, if not an inconsistency, I suggest that there are two slightly different uses of the term freedom in the text. Whilst maintaining that the enchainment of the ego to the self is a burden that results in the illusion of freedom, and ‘not freedom itself’, the existent is simultaneously described as a freedom. ‘While being a freedom and a beginning, a subject is the bearer of a destiny (*d’un destin*) which already dominates (*domine*) this very freedom (*liberté même*).’¹⁶⁵ The ‘destiny’ of the being is the inescapable now of the materiality of the self, the ‘hope’ of being free of this condition is the closest to the freedom from this burden that alone the subject will achieve. However, merely through existing the existent has a minimal sense of freedom, a freedom understood as a beginning, a freedom to be.¹⁶⁶ For although the self is described as ‘free’, meaning the very minimal sense of having a beginning, the self is responsible for this unchosen existence. This freedom as a beginning is not yet freedom from the present, nor the freedom of light and knowledge, which is aligned with the ego, and nor is it freedom from this perpetual self-referential relationship with its self. It is simply a mastery over being achieved purely through being an existent.

As a self-reference in a present, the identical subject is to be sure free with regard to the past and the future, but remains tributary of itself. The freedom of the present is not light like grace, but is a weight and a responsibility. It is articulated in a positive enchainment to one’s self; the ego is irremissibly itself (*le moi est irrémisiblement soi*).¹⁶⁷

§ 2.1.15 THE FREEDOM OF TIME AND THE OTHER (*L’AUTRE*)

As Levinas has argued that the subject is condemned to the instant, how then can we account for time? Once again the position of both Heidegger and Bergson, alongside classical philosophy, are criticised for positing time in the solitary subject, and

¹⁶⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁶⁶ This distinction between freedom understood as intentional consciousness, which belongs to the ego, and the minimal freedom of merely being a beginning, which is said of the self, will be repeated in *Totality and Infinity*. See, Ch. IV, §4.3.2.

¹⁶⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 89.

underestimating the importance of the Other (*autrui*) who ‘frees us’ (*autrui nous délivre*).¹⁶⁸ The solitary subject as ‘definitively *himself*’ cannot account for the ‘absolute alterity of another instant’.¹⁶⁹ If the future is what comes out of the possibilities contained in the actualities of the present, it cannot be transcendent and foreign, but fated, and as such offers nothing truly new. Only an alterity, not contained within the present or in the subject, can bring forth the future.¹⁷⁰ ‘This alterity (*altérité*) comes to me only from the other (*autrui*).’¹⁷¹ With time comes hope, as who knows what tomorrow may bring. The Other (*autrui*) also brings freedom and redemption for the subject, as one is released from the overbearing weight of the instant in which the subject is tied to being and cannot escape its self. In his 1986 interview, when asked about *Existence and Existents*, Levinas remarked: ‘Nevertheless, at the end of the book, the essential idea that the true bearer of being, the true exit from the *there is* is in obligation, in the “for-the-other”, which introduces a meaning into the nonsense of the *there is*. The I subordinated to the other’.¹⁷² Levinas’s remark here, that the ‘true exit from the *there is*’ comes in the obligation for the Other, affirms his comment above, that the freedom gained through hypostasis is an illusionary freedom, as the ego is still tied to the self.

As time itself comes from the relation with the Other person (*autrui*), what then is this relation?¹⁷³ Levinas goes on to further distinguish his position from that of Heidegger’s, by outlining how the alterity of the Other that he wishes to capture is overlooked in Heidegger’s *Miteinandersein*. Being-with-others in the world is mediated by our engagement with things. Our interaction with one another is mediated through our interaction with a third term. In Heidegger’s approach and analysis, we stand side-by-side facing something, not as partners in a dialogue. Levinas is interested in an earlier disruption that can only come when I am faced by the stark alterity of the Other. Before the side-by-side relation there is the face-to-face encounter. Levinas is insistent

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 97; 136. This can also be translated as ‘delivers’ (*délivre*) us.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁷⁰ ‘If commitment in being thereby escapes the weight of the past (the only weight that was seen in existence), it involves a weight of its own which its evanescence does not lighten, and against which a solitary subject, who is constituted by the instant, is powerless (*est impuissant*). Time and the other are necessary for the liberation from it (*Le temps et Autrui sont nécessaires à sa libération*).’ Ibid., pp. 103-04:143-44.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁷² ‘Interview with François Poirié’ (1986), in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁷³ Although at this early stage Levinas is content to describe the encounter with the other in terms of a ‘social relation’, he will later move away from describing this event in terms such as relation and experience.

that it is an ‘encounter’, not a ‘constitution’ of the other in self-consciousness or in any experience of *mitDasein*. At this very early stage of his work we see the beginnings of terms that have come to be so readily associated with Levinas’s philosophy. Although they will come to have greater ethical significance and will undergo much development, Levinas here describes the Other as ‘the widow and the orphan’ (*la veuve et l’orphelin*), ‘alterity’ (*altérité*), ‘face-to-face situation’ (*le face-à-face*), ‘asymmetrical’ (*asymétrique*), ‘neighbour’ (*le prochain*).¹⁷⁴ Even at this early stage we can glimpse that it is not the plastic face of the other constituted through our intentional perceptual experiences (Husserl) or the other in that being’s aloneness of *Dasein* (Heidegger), nor the empirical other as ‘an example of *genus humanum*’, but, as De Boer notes, the ‘qualified other’, ‘the biblical other’, ‘the orphan and the widow’, the marginalized, the other who has been othered in society about whom the prophets speak.¹⁷⁵ In our everyday interaction with the world *this alterity* of the Other is forgotten. Within this early text, Levinas goes on to argue that it is Eros that brings us back to this unbridgeable distance that separates us from the alterity of the Other.¹⁷⁶ Levinas, however, reserves his descriptions of this phenomenon for his next work.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 98-99. It is well documented that Levinas’s philosophy was influenced by his religious faith and heritage, and that aside from his explicit philosophical texts Levinas also published many works which relate explicitly to Judaism, such as his Talmudic commentaries. Even though Levinas, for the most part, strived to keep these interests separate, even going as far as using separate publishers for the more explicit ‘religious’ writings, the influence of Judaism is implicitly present throughout his writings. The description of the Other as the ‘widow and orphan’ is one such example of the influence of the Hebrew Bible. Cohen, in a note to his translation of *Time and the Other*, lists many joint references to the orphan and the widow in the Hebrew Bible. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 83, n.64.

¹⁷⁵ De Boer, ‘Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 47.

¹⁷⁶ Levinas briefly refers to Plato in relation to *Eros*, and in doing so he also briefly mentions a distinction that will later prove to be pivotal to his own work, the same and the other, ‘where the I is substituted for the *same* and the Other (*autrui*) for the *other* (*autre*).’ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 99. This reference to Plato would seem to be an indirect reference to Plato’s *Sophist* (254b-256b) and the concepts Same (*tauton*) and Other (*to heteron*).

¹⁷⁷ In some of his work preceding *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes ‘alterity’ in terms of the difference between the sexes. (Section IV of *Totality and Infinity*, Beyond the Face, further explores the feminine encountered in dwelling, Eros and fecundity, however, the radical face-to-face encounter that is at the bases of ethics is not reduced to Eros). *Time and the Other* contains a detailed analysis as to why the feminine is regarded as the other *par excellence*. Levinas has received some criticism for his treatment of gendered difference and the feminine, most famously by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Levinas goes some way towards clarifying his position further in the section ‘Love and Filiation’ in *Ethics and Infinity*, (pp. 65-72), in which he suggests that the difference could be read as removed from any biological or ontological difference, and read, rather, as a difference belonging to every human being. As this aspect of his work does not bare directly on the question of the freedom of the subject we will not deal with this topic in any more detail. For more on this topic see *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Tina Chanter (Pennsylvania, U.S.A: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). See, Ch. IV, § 4.2.6.

§ 2.2 TIME AND THE OTHER (1947)

Before we make some concluding remarks on Levinas's position on the freedom of the subject contained in *Existence and Existents* let us firstly turn to another work from 1947, *Time and the Other*.¹⁷⁸ In what will become a common style in Levinas's work, in this next text he retraces the steps covered in the previous text, on this occasion *Existence and Existents*, adding some notable modifications, deepening the analysis, and including some additions. Levinas's approach in *Time and the Other* follows the same overall structure of *Existence and Existents*, beginning with existence without existents, followed by the emergence in the present of the existent in existence, moving on to a description of the materiality of the solitary subject in the world, and culminating with the encounter of the Other in *Eros*. As we have summarised the main movements in this argument above, we will confine our readings to the subtle differences, in relation to the freedom of the subject, contained therein.

§ 2.2.1 HYPOSTASIS AS FREEDOM

Our attempt to understand and present Levinas's thinking through of the freedom of the subject in his work from 1947 is complicated by the ambiguity surrounding the presentation of his position on this matter, even in this very narrow time period. Even though *Existence and Existents*, and the lectures which make up *Time and the Other*, are contemporaneous with one another, and on first reading appear to repeat and deepen his analysis, a closer reading of these two works around the question of freedom reveals certain ambiguities that require closer inspection. In order to clarify the place of freedom in Levinas's thinking and to track the development of that thinking, it is necessary to try to clearly determine just what his position in his early work is. With this in mind we will contrast his position on the freedom of the existent in *Existence and Existent* with *Time and the Other*. We will now turn to the question of whether the existent that emerges through hypostasis, prior to the encounter of the Other, can be said to be free, as not only is this question of central importance for our reading of Levinas's later work, but it is around this central question that the ambiguities lie.

¹⁷⁸ *Time and the Other* is a collection of essays delivered by Levinas in December 1946 and January 1947 in the Philosophical College in Paris, and was first published in this format in 1948. In 1979 it was published as a book with a new Preface.

In both works the present is described as the event of hypostasis, the act of the emergence of the existent in which the existent is continually a folding back on its self (*un repli en soi*).¹⁷⁹ As we have seen above, in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas argues that the freedom obtained through hypostasis is not freedom at all, but ‘only a thought’, ‘recourse to sleep’, the ‘illusion’ of freedom, and a ‘conception of freedom’ that is not freedom itself.¹⁸⁰ When we turn to *Time and the Other*, Levinas, on a number of occasions, argues that the solitary existent in the instant is a freedom, be that in a very minimal sense. Through hypostasis, the emergence of the existent in existence is described as a mastery over being, a beginning. Although the existent is trapped in the present, and enchained to its self, ‘the appearance of an existent is the very constitution of a mastery (*maîtrise*), of a freedom in an existing that by itself would remain fundamentally anonymous’.¹⁸¹ Merely by existing, by having existence as an attribute, the existent is said to be a freedom. The ego’s mastery over the anonymity of the *il y a* is characterised by Levinas as freedom. Throughout the text Levinas interchangeably refers to this freedom as a ‘first freedom’, ‘existent freedom’, and the ‘freedom of beginning’.¹⁸² Levinas stresses that this ‘first freedom’ is the freedom of beginning and not yet that of the freedom of a will.

As present and ‘I,’ *hypostasis is freedom*. The existent is master of existing. It exerts on its existence the virile power of the subject. It has something in its power. It is a first freedom (*Première liberté*) — *not yet the freedom of free will (libre arbitre), but the freedom of beginning (la liberté du commencement)*. It is by starting out from something now that there is existence. Freedom is included in every subject, in the very fact that there is a subject, that there is a being. *It is the freedom of the existent in its very grip on existing*.¹⁸³

In the section ‘Solitude and Hypostasis’ Levinas again tells us:

A solitude is necessary in order for there to be *a freedom of beginning (liberté du commencement)*, the existent’s mastery over existing — that is, in brief, in order for there to be an existent. Solitude is thus not only a despair and an abandonment, but also a virility, a pride and a sovereignty (*une souveraineté*).¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ ‘To the notion of existence, where the emphasis is put on the first syllable, we are opposing the notion of a being whose very advent is a folding back upon itself’. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 81. ‘In order for there to be an existent in this anonymous existing, it is necessary that a departure from self and a return to self (*un départ de soi et un retour à soi*) — that is, that the very work of identity — become possible.’ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 52.

¹⁸⁰ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 90 and p. 44.

¹⁸¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 52.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, see, p. 54, 56, 57, 58, 61-62.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 54, my emphasis. In this regard, such freedom is an ‘absolute’ freedom as it is absolved of any relations outside of itself (hence it is not comparable to an act of the will that intends its object), and it has an ‘absolute’ existence as its existing as an existent is an existing *in* that existent.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55, my emphasis.

Simply by overcoming the bleak anonymous neutrality of the *il y a*, and continually emerging in the present as an existent, the existent is said to be ‘free’, ‘virile’ and sovereign. This is a freedom the existent shares with all beings, simply by virtue of the fact that every being has a position in being. However, this freedom does not yet include the freedom of the will or representational consciousness. The existent is alone in existence and without time.

On first reading these two positions seem to render the possibility of deciphering a unified position on the question of freedom within the works of 1940’s difficult. The lack of clarity on the matter can be partially attributed to the difficulties that accompany all attempts to discuss freedom, as the concept itself is ambiguous and open to different meanings depending on the context. A closer reading of the context, and the particular use of freedom in these two texts, opens up a reading that can further explain what can appear to be an inconsistency. As was argued above, although it is a nuanced difference between the two uses of freedom within both of these texts, it is an important difference to highlight in order to make sense of Levinas’s position within these two texts.

In the passages in *Existence and Existents*, referred to above, whereby the existent is not yet said to be free, but has the illusion of freedom, freedom here is in relation to a particular context, that of the subject’s inability to escape the heavy burden of materiality in the present. By ‘materiality’ Levinas does not simply mean a biological condition, but a relationship with existence, the existent cannot detach itself from itself.¹⁸⁵ The solitude of ‘its being mired in itself’.¹⁸⁶ When Levinas argues in *Existence and Existents* that through hypostasis, and through its engagement with the world, the existent only has the hope and illusion of freedom, but not yet freedom, it is the freedom from the immediacy of the material condition that has not been achieved. This absence of, what we have termed, the ‘freedom from’ the self, and this fundamental condition of being tied to oneself, does not contradict the minimal freedom understood as a beginning, a mastery over being.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ ‘This manner of being occupied with itself is the subject’s materiality. Identity is not an inoffensive relationship with itself, but an enchainment to itself; it is the necessity of being occupied with itself.’ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁸⁷ Our use of the term ‘freedom from’ brings to mind the traditional distinction between freedom understood in a ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ sense, ‘freedom from’, understood as the absence of external restraint, and ‘freedom to do’, understood as the ability to act. This distinction most notably calls to mind the work of Isaiah Berlin. See, Isaiah Berlin, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, in *Liberty*, ed. by Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 166-217. However, in this instance it is important to keep in mind that we are not using ‘freedom from’ in that sense. We do not wish to claim that Levinas is

In *Time and the Other* when the existent is said to be a freedom, it is the freedom of a beginning, a minimal freedom that Levinas believes is an attribute of ‘every subject, in the very fact that there is a subject, that there is a being’.¹⁸⁸ It is freedom understood as what comes simply from being an existent, the ability to exercise mastery and control, even if that is within such limitations. The two positions, that of the lack of the freedom from the self in *Existence and Existents*, and that of the presence of a minimum freedom understood as a beginning in *Time and the Other*, are not mutually exclusive. However, in light of Levinas’s criticisms of freedom in the work of Bergson, Heidegger and Husserl examined in the previous chapter, to be consistent with these criticisms, one could ask if freedom understood purely as a mastery over being should be regarded by Levinas as freedom at all. We need firstly turn to a more detailed account of freedom in *Time and the Other* before turning to this question.

The existent is said to be free in a minimal sense of freedom, simply meaning that by its very existence it exercises a mastery over being, which it shares with all beings. However, as the existent is enchained to its self and alone is trapped in the present, any notion of a freedom beyond that of a freedom understood as beginning is an illusion. Although only on a few occasions in *Existence and Existents* does Levinas refer to hypostasis in terms of this freedom understood as beginning, we can still see the continuity between the two texts. This minimal freedom as a beginning can be read back into his description of hypostasis, even though it is rarely described as *liberté*.

[T]o be means to take up being, the existence of an existent is by essence an activity. An existent must be in act, even when it is inactive [...] the upsurge of an existent into existence, a hypostasis.¹⁸⁹

This reading is also evident in the following passage:

What is absolute in the relationship between existence and an existent, in an instant, consists in *the mastery* the existent exercises on existence, but also in the weight of existence on the existent.¹⁹⁰

Just as in *Time and the Other* what is ‘absolute’ about this relation is that the existent is absolved of any relation outside of itself and hence it has an ‘absolute’ existence.¹⁹¹

describing external barriers to freedom. Rather, this term is used to capture the material condition of the subject, the internal enchainment of the ego to the self.

¹⁸⁸ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 54.

¹⁸⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76, my emphasis.

¹⁹¹ See, n. 183 above.

In the section ‘Solitude and Hypostasis’, in *Time and the Other*, Levinas makes it clear that this freedom as a beginning is prior to any encounter with the Other. Levinas clarifies that the solitude of the existent is not as a result of the absence of the Other, it is not derived from the negation of a social relationship, but is as a result of hypostasis.¹⁹² Alone in existence, and without time, prior to any encounter with the Other, the solitary existent is said to have this minimal freedom of beginning.¹⁹³ Levinas goes to say that despite this sovereignty the existent is still identical to itself, and therefore, alone and absolute, devoid of any relation to alterity and anything new. The position argued in *Existence and Existents* is reiterated, the materiality of the subject means that this absolute beginning is nonetheless not without limitations, existing comes with the responsibility of existing.

Its freedom is immediately limited by its responsibility. This is its great paradox: a free being is already no longer free (*un être libre n’est déjà plus libre*), because it is responsible for itself.¹⁹⁴

Being is felt as a heaviness and a burden. Responsibility accompanies the existent’s freedom from the start. Once again, in *Time and the Other*, the responsibility for being is due to the split subjectivity, the ego must carry around the self. Referencing the writings of Blanchot once again, Levinas tells us:

The relationship with itself is, as in Blanchot’s novel *Aminadab*, the relationship with a double chained to the ego, a viscous, heavy, stupid double, but one the ego (*le moi*) is with precisely because it is me (*moi*).¹⁹⁵

It is not the fact that one has a body that one feels weighed down and held back. Materiality does not consist in being embodied, but in the inescapable bond between the ego and the self, freedom *and* responsibility. Levinas ends this section by reminding us that even at the stage of a first freedom, the existent is a solitary existence, locked in its own identity, and without the Other is also without time.

§ 2.2.2 THE AUTHENTICITY OF WORLDLY EXISTENCE

Consistent with his position in *Existents and Existence*, Levinas goes on to explain how everyday life in the world loosens the bond between the ego and the self by providing

¹⁹² ‘It does not appear as a privation of a previously given relationship with the Other. It results from the work of hypostasis.’ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 54.

¹⁹³ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 55.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

an interval. The existents engagement with the world is an attempt to break the unhappy solitude that comes through hypostasis. Levinas uses the term ‘salvation’ (*‘du salut’*), which has notable theological connotations, to describe the existent’s engagement with the world as an attempt to break its solitary existence.¹⁹⁶ Although the existent’s engagement with the world is seen as an attempt to escape its solitary existence, Levinas does not regard this everyday occupation with things as inauthentic. If one was to remain constantly preoccupied by the predicament of being this would surely lead to madness, and, Levinas remarks, ‘No one would recommend madness as a way of salvation’.¹⁹⁷ Levinas takes seriously the everyday needs of the masses. The genuine need of hunger is not an inauthentic fallen state, and it is an elitist and privileged position to regard the majority who may well be preoccupied with such concerns as ‘fallen’ or inauthentic.¹⁹⁸

There is something other than naivety in the flat denial the masses oppose to the elites when they are worried more about bread than about anxiety. From this comes the accent of greatness that stirs in a humanism springing from the economic problem; from this comes the very power that the demands of the working class possess to be elevated into a humanism.¹⁹⁹

To judge such behaviour as an inauthentic fallen state is to fail to take heed of the sincerity of such needs, and the morality which can arise out of such a collective cry. This approach confirms Levinas’s adherence to the phenomenological starting point, as he aims to accept experience as it is without any aprioristic or constructivistic considerations.²⁰⁰ Once again, behind these reflections, one cannot help but think of Levinas’s experience of hunger and cold in a prison camp, no doubt bringing him to an acute awareness of the authenticity of such basic needs that may well have been occasionally denied him. Perhaps the easiest way to overlook the truth of such needs, and to see them as base or even animalistic, is to have had them always met. Levinas, however, does not want the reader to take from this some kind of advocacy for a metaphysical liberation that firstly finds its roots in an empirical economic liberation. If

¹⁹⁶ ‘Everyday life is a preoccupation with salvation.’ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 58. In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas describes the existents engagement with the world in similarly religious language, redemption and justice. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁹⁸ On this point it is not just Heidegger that Levinas is criticising. He also explicitly names Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. ‘We behave like the frightful bourgeois in the midst of Pascalian, Kierkegaardian, Nietzschean, and Heideggerian anxieties. Or we are crazy.’ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

²⁰⁰ In this respect Levinas can be seen to adhere more closely to this tenet of phenomenology, than either Husserl or Heidegger. See, n. 60 above.

one was to see the struggle for economic liberation as a stepping stone to a deeper liberation, one would be missing his point, that the drive for the satisfaction of the basic needs of life is authentic in and of itself. For Levinas, it rests on the reality of the weight of matter in the present.

Against Heidegger, Levinas once again argues that our primary relation with the world is an 'ensemble of nourishments', rather than a system of tools. 'To stroll is to enjoy the fresh air, not for the health but for the fresh air.'²⁰¹ The subject's relationship with the world is one of enjoyment (*jouissance*). Not only does enjoyment signify the immediacy of our relationship with things in the world, in contrast to Heidegger's ecstatic care for existence, but it also reveals the subject's first respite from materiality. Levinas argues that enjoyment is a sensation and is therefore light and knowledge. The illumination of the object indicates a distance between the subject and the object, and hence an interval in the subject's return to its self. It is the first 'salvation' from materiality, and it brings a forgetfulness of self. 'The morality of "earthly nourishments" is the first morality, the first abnegation. It is not the last, but one must pass through it.'²⁰²

Although the return to the self is postponed through enjoyment, it is not done away with. Not only does light indicate a distance between the subject and the world, but, as knowledge, it is a complete return to the self. Through light the world is constituted by the subject, and as we have seen in the last chapter, this, for Levinas, is an act of bestowing meaning by the subject and is a total assimilation of the known object. 'Light is that through which something is other than myself, but already as if it came from me.'²⁰³ In a footnote to this remark Levinas points out that he believes that Husserl's notion of vision simultaneous implies intelligibility. 'To see is already to render the encountered objects one's own, as drawn from one's own ground.'²⁰⁴ The world and objects known through 'light' lack any fundamental strangeness, and

²⁰¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 63. See, De Boer, 'Enmity, Friendship, Corporeality', in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 133-46 (pp. 133-39), in which he compares Levinas's view of life as *jouissance* with Husserl's objectifying representation and Heidegger's 'existence as the unity of project and thrownness'.

²⁰² Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 64. Levinas's insistence here that 'one must pass through' this first morality, this first engagement with exteriority that results in a complete return to oneself, is perhaps the beginnings of his position that the separated self is a necessary condition for the possibility of the encounter with the Other. It is interesting to note that this first morality is described as the enjoyment of the sensate body, as in his work to come this description of the self as primarily a sensate body that enjoys the world, will become central as an opening to exteriority that enables the encounter with the Other to take place.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., n.39.

therefore, the ego remains chained to the self. Engagement with the world as light and knowledge is not foreign enough, in fact not foreign at all, and so, it cannot shatter the solitary existence of the existent. Therefore, alone the existent may enjoy the world, but it is still not free of its materiality. 'By themselves reason and light consummate the solitude of a being as a being, and accomplish its destiny to be the sole and unique point of reference for everything.'²⁰⁵ There is no space outside of reason's light. The world encounter through reason will never really surprise the existent, nor offer anything truly new.

The intentionality of consciousness allows one to distinguish the ego from things, but it does not make solipsism disappear: its element — light — renders us master of the exterior world but is incapable of discovering a peer for us there.²⁰⁶

Even though the world transcends consciousness, through reason understood as light, consciousness is a complete return to the self without remainder. Nothing foreign is ever encountered, as all objects are assimilated into the self. In order for the subject to be released from this solitary prison it would have to encounter something truly foreign that remained foreign, and did not result in a return to the self.

Life could only become the path of redemption if, in its struggle with matter, it encounters an event that stops its everyday transcendence from falling back upon a point that is always the same.²⁰⁷

If this encounter was initiated by the subject it would not resist the structures of intentional consciousness, and could not, therefore, resist complete assimilation. If the encounter was an act of the free subject how could it be an encounter that was outside of the structures of intentional consciousness? In order for the encounter to remain foreign and new it would have to take the subject by surprise, and be outside of the powers of the free, sovereign and absolute subject.

§ 2.2.3 FREEDOM AND DEATH

Another area of importance to the question of freedom, only touched upon in *Existence and Existents*, that Levinas analyses further in *Time and the Other*, is death and suicide. It is near to the beginning of the text, when trying to emphasise that there is no way out

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

of the *il y a*, that Levinas briefly mentions suicide. In stressing that his descriptions of being in its pure generality does not permit of a nothingness beyond to escape to, Levinas explains that even suicide which ‘appears as the final recourse against the absurd’, does not offer a way out.²⁰⁸ Citing Shakespeare once again, Levinas points out how often in tragedy suicide is depicted as the last great act that the subject can perform to affirm their mastery over being. If one cannot control the circumstances of life, they can at the very least master being through choosing their own death, as Juliette demonstrates in the third act of *Romeo and Juliette*, ‘I keep the power to die’.²⁰⁹ For Levinas, there is no possibility of nothingness beyond being, ‘[a]nd this impossibility of nothingness deprives suicide, which is the final mastery one can have over being, of its function of mastery’.²¹⁰ By choosing death one does not achieve the mastery over being, for one is no longer.²¹¹ Being permits of no exit, there is no way out. One cannot escape being as escape presupposes that one is free of a particular scenario and free to be beyond that reality. Death, however, cannot be thought of as bringing an escape from life, we know nothing of death, as it is a mystery (*le mystère*).²¹² Levinas will once again make this point in *Totality and Infinity*, pointing out, in contrast to Heidegger, that death is a mystery that cannot be understood.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 50. In a note to this section Cohen remarks that ‘Levinas doubtlessly has in mind the issues raised by Albert Camus in his popular 1942 text, *The Myth of Sisyphus*’. Ibid., n. 24. In that text Camus argues that in recognition of the absurdity of existence there is but one truly philosophical problem, and that is suicide, judging whether life is worth living, or not. See, Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. by Justin O’Brien (London: Hamilton, 1955).

²⁰⁹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 50.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ On this question of suicide as a final mastery over being it is interesting to note a passage from Blanchot’s *Thomas the Obscure* that captures, how, in the moment when one is closest to death by their own hands, they feels their attachment to being stronger than ever before. ‘Just as the man who is hanging himself, after kicking away the stool on which he stood, the final shore, rather than feeling the leap which he is making into the void feels only the rope which holds him, held to the end, held more than ever, bound as he had never been before to the existence he would like to leave’. Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, trans. by Robert Lambertson (New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), p. 36.

²¹² Levinas’s thinking on death was most likely influenced by his reading of Blanchot. In an interview from 1982, ‘The Philosopher and Death’, Levinas remarks: ‘In his magnificent and strange work, Maurice Blanchot thinks death starting from this impossibility of breaking off. And there lies — upon the mystery of death — a profound and obsessional view. Ontology as obsession. In the anguish of death, the impossibility of nothingness. An impossibility of “stopping the music” or interrupting the “hustle-bustle” of existence! And yet an impossibility of continuing.’ Levinas goes on to describe death as unknowable. Levinas, ‘The Philosopher and Death’, in *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 123.

²¹³ ‘Death is a menace that approaches me as a mystery; its secrecy determines it — it approaches without being able to be assumed’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 235. For a more thorough analysis of Levinas’s thinking on death in contrast with Heidegger, and its place in his work, see, Richard A. Cohen, ‘Levinas: thinking least about death — contra Heidegger’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 60: 1-3 (2006), 21-39.

Further on in the third section of the text Levinas returns to examine death in more detail. Levinas takes up his analysis of work begun in *Existence and Existents* and introduces an aspect of work previously unexplored, physical suffering and pain. Physical pain is distinct from moral pain as physical pain belongs to the instant, which one is bonded to. Moral pain offers a respite within the distance between the self and the pain, in which one can freely take up an attitude with regards to the moral pain.

While in moral pain one can preserve an attitude of dignity and compunction, and consequently already be free; physical suffering in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence.²¹⁴

Physical pain offers no such respite, as with physical pain the subject deeply feels the bondage to the instant, and the inescapable weight of existence. 'In suffering there is an absence of all refuge'.²¹⁵ There is no hope of retreat as there is nowhere to run to.

Death too is announced in suffering, as in the instant of suffering death draws nearer. One of the main characteristics of death in *Time and the Other* is that it is a mystery. It is not that death is unknown but that it is essentially unknowable. Continuing the light analogy from *Existence and Existents*, Levinas argues that death is 'outside all light', and hence 'an experience of the passivity of the subject', as it is outside of the subject's powers to know and to understand.²¹⁶ Death as other (*autre*) evades assimilation and the power of the subject. Levinas clarifies that the term 'experience' here is 'only a way of speaking', as experience for Levinas implies intentionality, which as we have seen earlier, Levinas interprets as meaning-giving (*Sinngebung*), and hence the complete assimilation of the object by the subject, leaving no space for difference. This is not possible with death, as death is an experience of other (*autre*) that cannot be contained within the subject.²¹⁷

As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, for Heidegger, an awareness of one's own Being-toward-death, in the affective disposition of anxiety, reveals to *Dasein* its most fundamental possibility, and in doing so brings *Dasein* back to its possibilities and the potential for authentic living. For Levinas, death reveals to *Dasein* its

²¹⁴ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 69.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

²¹⁷ This is an early glimpse of what will become a constant struggle for Levinas to seek to express in words subject matter that by its very nature go beyond words and escape thematization. As his work progresses he will move more and more away from 'totalizing' terms which he equates with 'knowledge' and hence power belonging to the Same at the expense of the Other.

freedom.²¹⁸ By contrasting his analysis of death with that of Heidegger's, Levinas argues that far from revealing our freedom, suffering and death reaffirm our inescapable bond to being. Once again his descriptions of suffering, pain and death capture an essential passivity in the subject.

Being toward death, in Heidegger's authentic existence, is a supreme lucidity and hence a supreme virility. [...] it makes possible activity and freedom. Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom, whereas for me the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering. It finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and in some way passive.²¹⁹

In authentically Being-towards-death *Dasein*, on Levinas's reading, is described as 'supreme virility' and 'supreme lucidity', whereas for Levinas, death as the impossibility of dying reveals a subject that is 'overwhelmed', 'enchained' and 'passive'. We are left with a fundamentally different conception of freedom.²²⁰ Death is not a possibility that one can take hold of in the present, as death is eternally in the future, '[d]eath is never now'.²²¹ In suffering, through which we grasp the nearness of our own death, there is a 'reversal of the subject's activity into passivity'.²²² In Heidegger's descriptions of authentically Being-towards-death, *Dasein* resolutely accepts death and almost embraces death.²²³ Levinas describes a different side to suffering and the vulnerability of life, when in the 'purity' of suffering, when one has no choice but to almost surrender and give in to the suffering that takes hold, one is reduced to the helpless state of infancy and overcome by 'infantile shaking of sobbing'.²²⁴

Levinas goes on to argue that death introduces plurality into being and breaks the solitary existence of the existent. As death remains a mystery, beyond the light,

²¹⁸ For more on Levinas's reading of Heidegger see, Ch. I, §1.5. Most importantly for Heidegger, such an awareness also inadvertently opens up the question of the meaning of Being, which is Heidegger's main interest in *Being and Time*.

²¹⁹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 70-71.

²²⁰ Critchley believes this to be the central argument of *Time and the Other*, 'The ungraspable facticity of dying establishes an opening onto a meta-phenomenological alterity, irreducible to the power of the Subject, the will or *Dasein* (as I see it, this is the central argument of *Time and the Other*). Dying is the impossibility of possibility and thus undermines the residual heroism, virility and potency of Being-towards-death. In the infinite time of dying, all possibility becomes impossible, and I am left passive and impotent.' Critchley, *Very Little- Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, pp. 74-75.

²²¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 72.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ See, Ch. I, n. 100.

²²⁴ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 72. The term 'infant' comes from the Latin in-fans, meaning not able to speak, 'in' meaning not (or opposite of) and 'fans', which is the present participle of *fari* meaning 'speak'. Confronted by suffering one cannot even find the words to express the pain, and is rendered speechless, like a child.

hence beyond the powers of the subject to consume and assimilate, death is a relation with something *absolutely other (autre)*.²²⁵ Having established, through his analysis of death, that the subject can have a relation with an event that remains outside and other (*autre*) to the subject, Levinas then turns to social life and the concrete situation of the erotic encounter. Alongside death the erotic relationship is another example that reveals the plurality of existence. However, in this event the personal Other (*autrui*) is encounter and not simply otherness in general (*autre*). In turning to examine this event in which the subject has an encounter with an Other, and yet does not assume it, Levinas asks how can the ego survive such an event and preserve its ‘mastery’ over the *il y a*? Levinas frames his question specifically in terms of freedom, and preserving the minimal freedom that the subject has acquired through hypostasis.

The problem does not consist in rescuing an eternity from the jaws of death, but in allowing it to be welcomed, keeping for the ego — in the midst of an existence where an event happens to it — the freedom acquired by hypostasis.²²⁶

This passage further reveals that in *Time and the Other* Levinas argues that the solitary existent, merely through its hypostasis in the instant, is already free. However, as was shown above, ‘free’ here is used in the minimal sense of a beginning, merely having a position in Being.

§ 2.2.4 TIME AND THE PASSIVITY OF THE SELF

Levinas’s analysis of time further expands on his description of subjectivity as passivity, as he argues that time cannot come about in a solitary subject, but must be given from the outside. Death may open up otherness to the existent, who alone is a universe unto itself, but death cannot account for time, which releases the subject who is trapped in its solitary state. For Levinas, time itself cannot occur in a solitary subject, even in a subject who dies, and as such could be said to have a future, even if merely that of moving towards death. Death as mystery is so far removed from the subject that it cannot enter into a relationship with the present, bringing with it time, it will always remain at an infinite distance. Death is never now. How then can the future become a presence in the present? This is only possible through the face-to-face encounter.

²²⁵ ‘My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it.’ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 74.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

The situation of the face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship.²²⁷

The future brings with it the power of the self to be beyond itself, a power that the self alone does not wield, only a difference that can remain other will bring this possibility, and consequently release the subject from a present in which it is trapped within itself.

Against the vision of time in Plato's *Timaeus*, wherein time is said to be a moving image of eternity, Levinas asserts that the future must be 'absolutely other (*autre*) and new' if it is to break the solitary existence of the self in the present.²²⁸ Levinas cites Bergson as conceiving of a conception of freedom and time that goes some way towards this same end; however, it does not go far enough, as 'it preserves for the present a power over the future'.²²⁹ Levinas argues that duration is creation, and for creation to be properly understood as the possibility of bringing about something new, it must presuppose an opening onto mystery.²³⁰ Creation for a subject who alone is trapped within its self would lead to more of the same, and would be better understood as replication, or perhaps alteration, but not genuine novelty. Time, for Levinas, is a 'new birth', which brings with it the possibility of creation and so must be open to an alterity that remains outside the subject.²³¹ The future as death cannot bring the possibility of initiative to the existent, as in the face of death the ego is without initiative. It is the intersubjective relationship with the human Other that brings the possibility of a future, novelty and time.

§ 2.3 ART

Art also provides another example through which the radical passivity of the self is revealed. Levinas describes an aspect of our existence that is irreducible to the

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 80, my emphasis.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ '[C]reation itself presupposes an opening onto a mystery'. Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 81. De Boer notes how Levinas often uses the term 'creation' rather than being. The use of term 'creation' serves a number of purposes aside from the obvious departure from ontology and the theological implications. De Boer argues that 'creation' captures the paradoxical situation of the interdependence of, on the one hand, the absolute newness and otherness of the existent, and on the other hand, the absolute passivity. 'Creation out of nothing means an election to responsibility without any prior decision of mine [...] Creation out of nothing means that man is absolutely other, absolutely new'. This understanding of the self is in contrast to the subject of idealism, 'which imagines itself at the beginning of everything', whereas the *created* I 'carries the world' and 'always comes too late'. De Boer, 'Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', pp. 38-39.

structures of intentional consciousness, outside of the categories of knowledge and concepts, and cannot be accurately described as conscious free action.²³²

§ 2.3.1 ART AND THE PASSIVITY OF THE SELF

Although Levinas's 1948 article 'Reality and Its Shadow' ('*La réalité et son ombre*') is a reflection on the nature of art, in this short article we can see just how wide the range of reflection on freedom within Levinas's work stretches.²³³ In this article, once again, Levinas associates freedom with knowledge and the cognitive powers of the subject. Art cannot be understood in terms of our freedom precisely because it cannot be reduced to a concept, nor can it be intellectually grasped by the subject, as it is prior to an engagement with the world understood from within such categories.

Levinas begins the article by stating that it is generally understood that art is expression, and as expression it therefore rests on cognition. The artist is viewed as possessing 'knowledge of the absolute' and the hope is that this is transmitted via their work.²³⁴ When art is understood in this way, criticism and the role of the critic appear as 'parasitic', as the critic preys on the work of the artist.²³⁵ Levinas wonders if one can regard the activity of art criticism only in negative terms, or, does the fact that the public feels the need to speak when confronted by art, not point to a different and overlooked understanding of both art and the dialogue that comes about in the form of criticism in response to the work of art.

If art originally were neither language nor knowledge, if it were therefore situated outside of 'being in the world' which is coextensive with truth, criticism would be rehabilitated.²³⁶

Levinas then spends the remainder of the article arguing for this alternative description. If art is to be seen as an activity that detaches the artist from the world, then criticism,

²³² Hofmeyr's article "'Isn't Art an Activity that Gives Things a Face?'" Levinas on the Power of Art', presents an interesting reading of 'Reality and Its Shadow' and 'The Transcendence of Words', in which she assesses the extent to which art can be said to possess a similar power ascribed to the face in the work of Levinas. See, Benda Hofmeyr, "'Isn't Art an Activity that Gives Things a Face?'" Levinas on the Power of Art', *Image [&] Narrative* [e-journal], 18 (2007). We should remember that at this stage of Levinas's work the face has not yet come to have the ethical significance that it will take on in the very near future.

²³³ 'La réalité et son ombre' was first published in *Les Temps Modernes*, 38 (1948), 771-89.

²³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow', trans. by Alphonso Lingis, in *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 129-43 (p. 130).

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

and speaking about the art work, is what brings art back in touch with the world and in touch with others.

Art is described as irreducible to the categories of cognition and cannot be described through the use of concepts. 'Art does not know a particular type of reality; it contrasts with knowledge. It is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow'.²³⁷ For Levinas, in contrast to a concept, art is described as capturing an image of reality, its 'shadow', and as such is always somewhat obscure.²³⁸ Carrying on the 'night' analogy from *Existence and Existents*, art is said to belong to the night, and is another example of an event that is beyond the powers of the subject and their attempt to completely assimilate the object and possess it through knowledge. Art, as belonging to the shadows and to the 'night', is outside of the 'light', and hence refractory to the categories of cognition and knowledge.

Levinas takes issue with the use of the adjective 'disinterestedness' to describe the artist vision, as interestedness implies freedom its counterpart likewise implies freedom, be that the freedom from any interest. He also disregards the description of artistic vision in terms of bondage, for the same reason, bondage implies the restriction of freedom and so freedom is presupposed. The effect that an image has cannot be understood in terms of freedom or enslavement, as it is a fundamental passivity that is prior to freedom and not a suppression or suspension of freedom. Our interaction with an image differs from our interaction with an object as with an object we intellectually 'grasp' and 'conceive' the concept. In the case of an artistic image, it is not a matter of intellectually grasping a concept, or of any Heideggerian 'letting be' (*Sein-lassen*), as it is an event that is not reducible to the freedom and power of the subject.²³⁹ Whether

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

²³⁸ In his reading of 'Reality and Its Shadow', Robin Durie argues that how Levinas understands 'image' and time are more favourably indebted to the work of Bergson than Levinas acknowledges. See, Robin Durie, 'Wandering Among Shadows: The Discordance of Time in Levinas and Bergson', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 48 (2010), 371-92. Bergson's theory of 'image' is discussed in detail in his *Matter and Memory*. See, Bergson, *Matter and Memory*.

²³⁹ In this passage Levinas interprets Heidegger's 'letting be' (*Sein-lassen*) as aligned with freedom. In his 'On the Essence of Truth' (*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*), Heidegger himself very clearly describes letting be (*Sein-lassen*) as freedom. 'Freedom for what is opened up in an open region lets beings be the beings they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be'. Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth', trans by John Sallis, in *Basic Writings: from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), pp. 115-38 (p. 125). However, it should be noted that in the passage above when he references Heidegger Levinas is disputing the view that through their freedom the subject actively grasps an image like they would intellectually grasp a concept, and so one reading could be that the implication is that freedom is here aligned with the cognitive powers of the intellect. The reference to Heidegger should not be interpreted in this fashion, as the freedom of letting beings be as they are, that Heidegger is describing, is not a cognitive deliberation undertaken by consciousness. As Heidegger himself describes it in that article, 'Freedom, understood as

that subject be viewed as the constituting subject of consciousness in Husserl's reduction or the openness of 'Dasein' and that being's understanding of Being, that lets the meaning of the Being of beings appear, art cannot be thematized in this manner. 'An image marks a hold over us rather than our initiative, a fundamental passivity.'²⁴⁰ From the perspective of an artist the passivity is demonstrated through the description of the artistic process, whereby, the artist is described as 'possessed' (*possédé*) and 'inspired' (*inspiré*).²⁴¹ Levinas goes on to describe the affect that art has on the participant, both the artist him/herself and the spectator, in his descriptions the passivity of the subject comes to the fore. The poetic order imposes itself on us. However, it is an imposition that evades assimilation by the participant. '*But they impose themselves on us without our assuming (les assumions) them*'.²⁴² The image is not a concept that can be grasped by the power and the freedom of the subject, there is a more than which cannot be assimilated by the subject.

Levinas goes on to clarify that the artistic event should be seen more as a mutual participation, rather than assimilation. Levinas chooses to focus on the example of music, as the affect of rhythm on the subject is particularly visible and can be

letting beings be, is the fulfilment and consummation of the essence of truth in the sense of the disclosure of beings. "Truth" is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an "object" by a human "subject" and then "are valid" somewhere, in what sphere we know not; rather, truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds. All human comportment and bearing are exposed in its open region. Therefore man *is* in the manner of ek-sistence.' Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth', p. 127. However, notwithstanding this potential objection, the fundamental passivity that Levinas is attempting to describe is prior to any initiative by the subject, be that intellectual or otherwise, and hence Levinas still regards Heidegger's position as aligned with freedom and the power of the subject.

²⁴⁰ Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow', p. 132.

²⁴¹ 'Possessed, inspired, an artist, we say, harkens to a muse.' Ibid. It is interesting to note that Levinas uses the term 'inspired' (*inspiré*) to capture the passivity of the artist, and to indicate that the artist is often described as a passive recipient, or receptacle, whom awaits creative inspiration from the outside. 'Inspiration' stems from '*in-spiro*', meaning 'inhaling' or 'breathing in'. Just as what is necessary for life, must come from the outside, so too does the creativity of the artist. Likewise breathing is neither voluntary nor involuntary. The analogy of breathing, inspiration and exhalation, will come to have a different significance in *Otherwise Than Being*, when it is used to describe the passivity of the self in relation to the Other. Levinas's mature description of subjectivity as 'hostage' and 'persecuted' by their responsibility for the Other from the start, is suitably likened to breathing. Breathing accompanies the self from the very start filling up an openness within the very being of the subject. 'My exposure to another in my responsibility for him takes place without a decision on my part; the least appearance of initiative and subjective act signifies then a more profound emphasis of the passivity of this exposition. [...] A further deep breathing even in the breathe cut short by the wind of alterity. [...] To open oneself as space, to free oneself by breathing from closure in oneself presupposes this beyond: my responsibility for the other and my aspiration by the other, the crushing charge, the beyond, of alterity. [...] In human breathing, in its everyday equality, perhaps we have to already hear the breathlessness of an inspiration that paralyzes essence, that transpierces it with an inspiration by the other, an inspiration that is already expiration, that "rends the soul"! It is the longest breath there is, spirit. Is man not the living being capable of the longest breath in inspiration, without a stopping point, and in expiration, without return?' Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, pp. 180-82.

²⁴² Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow', p. 132.

overpowering. Levinas's descriptions of how rhythm almost takes over a person who succumbs to the melody and the movement, further captures the passivity of the subject. 'Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it.'²⁴³ On reading his reflections the term 'captivate' is given a new sense of significance, which will come to have crucial ethical significance in Levinas's much later work. To say that one is captivated by a particular rhythm, or a work of art, can imply that one is captured and almost held fast against their will. However, in line with Levinas's analysis, it is more correct to say that the subject is swept up in such a manner that occurs prior to an engagement with the world at the level of the will, and so cannot be understood as a restriction to freedom. Even though to be aesthetically captivated is generally understood as a favourable and pleasurable experience it, nevertheless, reveals the passivity of the subject who is captivated. The overtaking of the subject by rhythm cannot be described as a despite oneself as it is not an overtaking of a conscious self that resists, but nor can it be described in terms of consciousness, for in rhythm the self fades away into anonymity. As Levinas argues,

[i]t is a mode of being to which applies neither the form of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume, its power, nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulations are in a dark light, *present*.²⁴⁴

The experience can neither be described as conscious nor unconscious, and instead Levinas describes it as like a waking dream. When the subject is taken in by the rhythm and succumbs to dancing and rhythmic movement, it is as though one's freedom is paralyzed, and the subject's way of being is one of an all-embracing play.

The particular automatic character of a walk or a dance to music is a mode of being where nothing is unconscious, but where consciousness, paralyzed in its freedom, plays, totally absorbed in this playing.²⁴⁵

Our engagement with art is not a conscious cognitive act that is mediated through concepts, but one that comes to us through a sensation that is not reducible to concepts and therefore eludes introspection. This is also a view of 'consciousness' that is neither susceptible to, nor presentable via inner reflection of the self upon the self, and

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. Levinas wonders why phenomenology to date has not given more attention to ideomotor phenomena. This, of course, is no longer the case. The work of Hubert L. Dreyfus and others on involved skilful coping is testament to that.

challenges the view of freedom associated with such a description of consciousness. Levinas shows us that such a view of consciousness does not exhaust the subject's engagement with the world.

What is today called being-in-the-world is an existence with concepts. Sensibility takes place as a distinct ontological event, but is realized only by the imagination.²⁴⁶

§ 2.3.2 ART AS IMMORAL

When Levinas addresses freedom again in this article it is not the loss or absence of freedom, but the abundance of freedom that art can grant both the artist and the participant, which is raised. In the article in one sense art is viewed as 'immoral' because it removes the artist from the world and from his or her responsibilities and duties.²⁴⁷ Art removes the artist from their engagement with the world. In contrast to speaking, which is an unfinished activity that solicits a response from an other, Levinas describes the work of an artist as a completed and closed event. 'It does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue'.²⁴⁸ Understood in this way art is then described by Levinas as freeing, precisely because it brings freedom from responsibility, 'it especially brings the irresponsibility that charms as a lightness and grace. It frees'.²⁴⁹ The release from the everyday world of worries that art can bring, and the peace that can accompany the passive consumption of the work of art, is seen by Levinas in negative terms, as fleeing the world is also fleeing from responsibility. 'This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility'.²⁵⁰ Both the activities of producing and indulging in art can be extremely personal and isolated acts, and as such has little room for an intersubjective relationship, and any responsibility towards the Other. Levinas even goes as far as to say that one can feel ashamed of this self indulgence. 'There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague'.²⁵¹ The way that art can find its way back to the world, and most importantly for Levinas to an engagement with others, is through criticism, as criticism 'integrates the inhuman work

²⁴⁶ Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow', p. 134.

²⁴⁷ '[I]t is immoral inasmuch as it liberates the artist from his duties as a man and assures him of a pretentious and facile nobility'. Ibid., p. 131.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

of the artist into the human world'.²⁵² Criticism releases art from an otherwise egoist existence.

This analysis is carried over to another article that deals with aesthetics that was published just one year later in 1949, 'The Transcendence of Words'. In this article, however, alongside the necessity of critique an emphasis is placed on the necessity and role of speech.²⁵³ Levinas argues that all art creates silence, even those that create sound. The self-sufficient silent world of both the artist and the vision of the spectator are interrupted by the word of the other, through critique. Vision lends itself particularly well to the apparent full assimilation of the object by the subject as form is wedded to content, whereas sound can more often have an incomplete element and hence 'break with the self-complete world of vision and art'.²⁵⁴ As sound surpasses what is given, the experience of hearing a sound contains more than can be assimilated by the subject, and in this sense sound heralds transcendence. However, it is the sound of a human other made through speech that can truly shatter this self-sufficient world. A world that is empty of human others may well be filled with many natural sounds but despite this clatter it is a world of echoing silence.²⁵⁵ 'The sounds and noises of nature are failed words. To really hear a sound, we need to hear a word.'²⁵⁶ Words break the world of self-sufficiency and reveal a beyond that cannot be fully taken in by the subject. Levinas privileges hearing and not vision, as the way through which we encounter the transcendence of the Other.²⁵⁷ It is the event of hearing the Other, and not that of seeing the Other nor of being present with the Other, that points to the depths of the otherness of the Other and the 'transcendent origin' of the word.²⁵⁸

In this early article one can see the beginnings of some important themes yet to be developed by Levinas, such as the crucial importance of language and speech as first and foremost an address from and to the Other and not firstly as a way to verbalise and

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Transcendence of Words', trans. by Seán Hand, in *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 144-149. 'La transcendance des mots. À propos des "Biffures" de Michel, Leiris' was first published in *Les Temps Modernes*, 44 (1949), 1090-095.

²⁵⁴ Levinas, 'The Transcendence of Words', p. 147.

²⁵⁵ Levinas draws on the literary example of Robinson Crusoe who alone on the tropical island is trapped in a silent world that is only broken by the words of Man Friday that 'replaces the inexpressible sadness of echoes'. Levinas describes the encounter with Man Friday as 'the greatest event of his [Robinson Crusoe] insular life.' Ibid., p. 148.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Levinas's stress on hearing could be attributed to influences from the hermeneutical tradition via the work of Heidegger. As was shown in chapter one, Heidegger's stress on 'hearing' follows Dilthey's stress on uncovering a latent understanding deposited in the language of a the written text, and this was consequently picked up by Levinas.

²⁵⁸ Levinas, 'The Transcendence of Words', p. 148.

communicate thought.²⁵⁹ Speech reveals a fundamental element of expression that is overlooked in a tradition that views expression as subordinate to thought. Primarily speech is how we can transcend ourselves and reach toward the Other. It is openness to dialogue and not a vehicle for thought. The very act of speaking further places into question the notion of the free and self-sufficient subject, or as Levinas phrases it,

[t]he act of expression makes it impossible to remain within oneself (*en soi*) or keep one's thought for oneself (*pour soi*) and so reveals the inadequacy of the subject's position in which the ego has a given world at its disposal. To speak is to interrupt my existence as a subject and a master.²⁶⁰

In this article Levinas clearly argues that speech reveals to us that the subject is primarily situated in relation to the Other (*Autre*) and not primarily in relation to its own self or to the world.

This privilege of the Other (*Autre*) ceases to be incomprehensible once we admit that the first fact of existence is neither being in-itself (*en soi*) nor being for-itself (*pour soi*) but being *for the other* (*pour l'autre*).²⁶¹

This article provides us with insight into Levinas's developing description of subjectivity, or, what one might call his view on 'the human condition', even though the precise ethical significance that he will later add to this description is absent. The very phenomenon of language attests to the subject's fundamental openness to alterity. When the subject is viewed primarily as self-sufficient and the origin of meaning, how are we to make sense of language? Levinas argues that speech illustrates that the 'the first fact of existence' is that the self is *being for the other* (*l'autre*). Speaking is not a closed and fulfilled activity but is only the beginning of a dialogue and as such an event that is at least partially beyond one's control. Through speaking one opens one's self up and becomes vulnerable, potentially placing their view of the world into question and opening up the possibility of a meaning from the outside.

The influence of the dialogical tradition on the work of Levinas is clear within this article. In his article 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy' De Boer identifies the influence of both transcendental philosophy and the dialogical tradition on the work of

²⁵⁹ Levinas's reflections on how the living word become 'disfigured' or 'frozen' in writing could also be read as a precursor to his much later idea of the 'Said' and the 'Saying'. Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

Levinas.²⁶² He identifies one of the key differences between these two approaches as the central question of the most basic nature of man.

The issue at stake in the controversy between the phenomenological (transcendental) and dialogical philosophies of intersubjectivity is none other than the question of the *true* condition of the predicament of man. Is the human being primarily present to himself (*pour soi*) and only secondarily directed toward the other (mediated by the world) or is he face-to-face with the other from the very outset (in discourse, hospitality, desire) and only in the second place a self-consciousness (by abstraction)?²⁶³

De Boer characterises the dialogical approach as viewing the relation with the Other as a face-to-face relation. The relation with the Other is not mediated by an intentional relation with the world. We meet the Other face on, address him, speak to him. Phenomenology, in both Husserl and Heidegger's accounts, on the other hand, sees the relation with the Other as mediated. The Other is directed towards the world alongside me. We are facing the world, not facing each other. 'He is a fellow knower and a fellow worker, but not a *partner*.'²⁶⁴ Although Levinas will take aspects of both of these traditions on board for his own thinking, he also views them both as deficient. Levinas will radicalise this relation with the Other, as De Boer puts it, with Levinas the other becomes the Other. 'The Other is not only someone I meet; he calls me to responsibility and accuses me.'²⁶⁵ Throughout the next chapter to come Levinas's position on what De Boer calls 'the true condition of the predicament of man' will continue to unfold. Levinas will argue that the subject is not primarily free in-itself and for itself but is put into question from the outside and through this event becomes free. Even then, this freedom is a difficult freedom, an ethical freedom, a freedom for the other and not for the self.

²⁶² Which of these fundamental foundations that one begins to think from will undoubtedly shape the trajectory that one's thought will follow. Many consequences will derive from holding either one of these views as your starting point, whether one does so consciously or not. Levinas will show us how the dominant view of politics in the West was partly shaped as a consequence of the dominant view of man as primarily for oneself (*conatus essendi*). When the self is viewed as primarily for the self, concerned solely with its own survival, others are viewed as competitors, and in order to ensure a safe environment the self enters into a contract with others. See, De Boer, 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy', in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 1-32.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 12, my emphasis. One can see how the view of freedom in both of these traditions will be connected to this crucial distinction. Is the self primarily free, the origin of all action and centre of all meaning giving? Or, is the self primarily in relation with others, and through this given meaning by exteriority, and only consequently aware of its freedom in light of this relation?

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

§ 2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

If, as Levinas will say in his later work, freedom is founded through the encounter of the Other, an important question that we could ask of this stage of his work, is, is the subject understood to be ‘free’ prior to the encounter of the Other? The answer to this question can help us to reflect on the development of his thinking in relation to freedom. From our analysis of *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, initially, it would seem that one would have to conclude that in one very minimal sense, yes, the existent can be said to be ‘free’, and yet, also, no, trapped in a solitary present, where everything comes from and returns to the subject, without the possibility of a difference that remains foreign the subject cannot escape its material destiny. In *Existence and Existents* Levinas stresses the inescapable enchainment of the ego to the self, and the burden of Being. The existent cannot escape the responsibility that comes with existing, even though it is a responsibility that was never chosen and is prior to the freedom of the will and intentional consciousness. Without the Other the subject will remain trapped in a perpetual present.

In *Time and the Other*, though the text mainly repeats the analysis from the previous text, there is a new emphasis on the issue of whether the existent can be said to be free, or not, through hypostasis. Although this position is hinted at in *Existence and Existents*, in *Time and the Other* Levinas makes it explicitly clear that prior to the encounter with the Other the existent has a minimal freedom, the freedom of beginning, a first freedom, which comes from simply being. This, however, would seem to be an attribute of any being, simply by existing it is a beginning and can be said to have the freedom of a mastery over Being. Also, if we consider Levinas’s criticisms of the Heideggerian, Bergsonian and Husserlian understandings of freedom examined in our previous chapter, in order for Levinas to be consistent with his own criticisms of these positions, freedom without novelty is no *human* freedom at all. Without the possibility of newness, which to be truly ‘new’ must remain other and beyond the self, a freedom as ‘beginning’ would indeed seem to be an ‘illusion’. At the level of the instant the existent is still trapped in a self referential circle, and so, is not free. Only the Other, who introduces genuine novelty, can rupture this instant and bring the possibility of genuine freedom, not just freedom understood as merely existing.

The analysis presented in the work examined in this chapter reveals that intentional consciousness is not the sole way in which the subject engages with Being,

in fact it is a derived mode that is founded on a more immediate and passive engagement as a sensible embodied self. The subject's freedom to create meaning is not unrestricted or unbound precisely because the subject is bound by responsibility. In his work to come Levinas will not only show that our responsibility to the Other precedes such meaning giving powers, but he will also argue that this event gives rise to such a possibility. Representational consciousness does not exhaust the subject's engagement with Being, nor is it the 'first fact of existence'. We have seen how Levinas's descriptions of the self uncover a latent passivity, which contests the view of subjectivity that begins with the power and the freedom of the conscious subject. When we move to his work of the 1950's, in the next chapter, we will see that not only does Levinas develop this description of subjectivity further, but he also begins to more clearly articulate a question which arises as a consequence of such descriptions. If the self is fundamentally a sensible embodied self who, prior to bestowing meaning, passively receives meaning from the outside, then what gives rise to the unnatural freedom of representation and, further still, to critical reflective consciousness? It takes the specifically Levinasian ethical development of his thinking to lead to his answer that only a radical Other, irreducible to the powers of the self, who places such powers into question, can account for this freedom of the subject.

CHAPTER III

A WAY THROUGH HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY TO THE OTHER (1950s)

In this chapter we turn to an examination of freedom in Levinas's work from the 1950's prior to his magnum opus *Totality and Infinity* (1961). Throughout this period Levinas continues to question the modern view of subjectivity that begins with an already constituted ego, presupposing the freedom of intentional consciousness, the will, and the subject's ability to reflect on its self. In contrast to this description of subjectivity, Levinas moves on to emphasise the importance of the body, kinaesthetics and the overlooked horizon of sensibility that conditions the subject's conscious engagement with Being. In developing these dimensions of human subjectivity, Levinas returns to the work of Husserl, specifically to the dormant possibilities identified by Levinas before the war. In doing so, Levinas opens a way to philosophically describe aspects of human existence that resist representation and objectification, and escape the totalizing gaze of objectifying intentionality, *yet remain meaningful*. Hence a hermeneutical retrieval of their sense is required within Husserlian phenomenology and modern philosophy.

This chapter examines Levinas's writings from this period with particular reference to Levinas's understanding of freedom as it becomes increasingly thematized by him in relation to the cognitive conceptual powers of the subject. Since such powers are operative at the level of the conscious ego and not at the fundamental level of the pre-reflective sensible body, thus, we begin to understand why it is that Levinas maintains that the Other precedes and invests such an understanding of cognitive conscious freedom. Even though these horizons are outside of the subject's conscious engagement with, and constitution of being, Levinas maintains that there still is meaning contained therein, even if consciousness is blind to such meaning, as it arrives too late to see it. As Levinas himself phrases it at the end of this decade, 'The senses make sense' (*Les sens ont un sens*).¹ This meaning does not originate in the self but originates in the other, in exteriority. Levinas continues to push below the freedom of intentional consciousness to reveal elements of human life that are outside of the

¹ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Phenomenological "Technique"' (1959), in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 91-107 (p. 98). This could also be translated as '[t]he senses are meaningful', the senses have meaning.

categories of freedom and non-freedom, and which condition and give rise to the freedom of critical consciousness. We will follow Levinas's way through both Husserl's and Heidegger's prioritizing of 'the understanding of Being' in their philosophies by dealing, firstly, with 'Is Ontology Fundamental' (1951) and 'Ethics and Spirit' (1952) (section one). Then we will address 'Freedom and Command' (1953) and 'The Ego and the Totality' (1954) (section two), his major essay 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' (1957) (section three), and finally 'The Ruin of Representation' and 'Intentionality and Metaphysics', both published in 1959 (section four).

§ 3.1. 'IS ONTOLOGY FUNDAMENTAL?' (1951) AND 'ETHICS AND SPIRIT' (1952)

The very title of Levinas's 1951 article 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' is an obvious allusion to Heidegger, and a question raised *against* Heidegger's prioritising of ontology in philosophy and phenomenology. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this is by no means the beginning of Levinas's critique of Heidegger's work. In this article, however, his criticisms take a notable ethical shift. Levinas explicitly designates Heidegger's philosophy as firmly rooted within the overall framework of the western philosophical tradition. By criticising Heidegger, therefore, Levinas also criticises this tradition.

§ 3.1.1 'IS ONTOLOGY FUNDAMENTAL?'

For Levinas, the tradition has always prioritised ontology over ethics, which, for him, is to prioritise the Same over and against the Other. Levinas views ontology as striving for comprehension and understanding, and as such favours knowledge above all else.² Levinas carries on his association of the freedom of the subject with comprehension and understanding, and so by questioning whether or not comprehension and understanding are fundamental Levinas is also questioning the fundamentality of freedom and the priority of the subject, be that conceived in terms of 'self consciousness' or '*Dasein*'. By asking if there is no higher value than knowledge, Levinas is also asking if freedom should be praised above all else and for its own sake. When philosophy holds the

² In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Critchley makes a similar claim: 'Ontology is Levinas's general term for any relation to otherness that is reducible to comprehension or understanding.' *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 11.

fundamental question to be the meaning of Being in general, and by doing so overlooks the unique significance of the concrete particular event in which another human being addresses me, philosophy has placed ontology before ethics. Freedom is already assumed and posited, and so, the source of freedom goes unquestioned, meaning the very event that brings freedom about is consequently overlooked.

At the opening of the article Levinas declares that ontology holds the primary place among the branches of philosophy. As all other areas of philosophy reflect on knowledge related to a particular aspect of being, it stands to reason that the broader question of the understanding of being in general, that underpins those particularities, is the fundamental question. It is this fundamental position of ontology that Levinas moves on to question. Since the publication of *Sein und Zeit* one could not mention the contemporary place of ontology without at least alluding to Heidegger, and as expected, Heidegger is implicitly present throughout the article. When Levinas clarifies what he means by ‘understand’, as he has defined ontology in terms of an understanding of Being, the reference to Heidegger is apparent. ‘To understand being as being is to exist in this world’.³ Levinas makes it clear that in light of Heidegger’s philosophy to ‘understand’ should not imply theoretical contemplation.⁴ ‘To think is no longer to contemplate, but to be engaged, merged with what we think, launched — the dramatic event of being-in-the-world.’⁵ The fullness of everyday concrete existence is given a new significance.⁶ Our everyday immediate and unreflected-upon activity in the world reveals an implicit forgotten understanding of Being.

Despite Levinas’s praise for this element of Heidegger’s work, that ‘understanding’ cannot be reduced to thoughts and that consciousness does not ‘exhaust our relationship with reality’, ultimately Levinas believes that Heidegger’s philosophy still belongs firmly within this description of the tradition because understanding, albeit understood in a non-theoretical sense, is still seen as *Dasein*’s fundamental way of

³ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, in *Entre Nous. On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (Columbia University Press: New York, 1998), pp. 1-11 (p. 2).

⁴ ‘Henceforth, the understanding of being implies not just a theoretical attitude, but the whole of human behaviour. The whole man is ontology.’ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶ On this point Levinas makes an interesting reflection in relation to freedom. He notes that our every gesture and movement has ripples far beyond those we intended or willed. By simply being in the world we leave traces and residue beyond our control, ‘In doing what I willed to do, I did a thousand and one things I hadn’t willed to do. The act was not pure; I left traces. Wiping away these traces, I left others.’ This is an unavoidable consequence of being. By being we do more than we intend to do. Whatever the inadvertent outcome might be, we are responsible. It is interesting to note that in this passage although Levinas is not yet addressing intersubjective action he points out that ‘we are responsible beyond our intentions’. Responsibility is not directly linked to free conscious action. Ibid.

being-in-the-world.⁷ In one respect Heidegger's philosophy could be said to take the tradition further along the same trajectory, as under this revised definition understanding pervades all levels of activity and life. Drawing on an analogy from *Existence and Existence*, Levinas argues that Heidegger's philosophy is a philosophy of 'light', a philosophy of knowledge. The particular is always understood in relation to the universal, and within the wider backdrop of the horizon of Being.⁸ 'To understand is to relate to the particular, which alone exists, through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal.'⁹ On Levinas's reading, Heidegger's philosophy, therefore, belongs within Levinas's broad characterisation of the wider western philosophical tradition as prioritising the Same over and against the other.¹⁰ Unique particularity is overlooked in favour of knowledge, which is always in relation to the universal.

§ 3.1.2 BEYOND ONTOLOGY

Levinas begins this next section by reflecting on whether or not there is a relation that is irreducible to understanding and comprehension, and would hence break with ontology. For Levinas, there is only one such relation that 'exceeds the confines of

⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸ Levinas's conflating of Heidegger's philosophy with a general all-encompassing reading of the Western philosophical tradition has been questioned by commentators. François Raffoul, for example, questions whether it is correct of Levinas to characterise Heidegger's philosophy as an Ontology of the Same. 'We must indeed admit that a number of the analyses offered by Levinas are not devoid of a certain interpretative violence, and perhaps don't do complete justice to the philosophical advances that one can find in Heidegger, in particular his thinking of the other, of responsibility, and of selfhood'. See, François Raffoul, 'Being and the Other: Ethics and Ontology in Levinas and Heidegger', p. 144. Robert Bernasconi makes a similar point in relation to Levinas's characterisation of Heidegger, '[t]he decisive point is that Levinas ultimately does not treat Heidegger on his own terms, but as the most recent representative of a tradition of thought that extends far beyond Heidegger, back past Hobbes and Spinoza, who are also frequently the targets of Levinas's polemic, to Heraclitus'. Robert Bernasconi, 'Levinas and the Struggle for Existence', p. 176.

⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰ In a further reference to Heidegger's philosophy, Levinas makes a number of references to '*letting be*' and raises similar criticisms to those addressed in 'Reality and Its Shadow'. Letting a being be implies that the active subject has firstly understood the being in question, and has therefore assimilated the being, even if the subject then lets the being be. The power of the subject is posited first and remains unquestioned. Levinas wishes to disturb the paradigms of knowledge and ontology, which overlook the unique particularity of the Other. 'It does not consist in *conceiving* of him as a being, an act in which the *being* is already assimilated — even if that assimilation ends in releasing him as a *being* — in *letting him be*.' Ibid., p. 8. Alongside Heidegger's philosophy, Levinas also broadly views the history of Western philosophical thought in general as guilty of this. This sweeping reading of the tradition is often made by Levinas in order to support his point that the main tendency in the tradition has been towards knowledge and the assimilation of the other at the expense of unique particularity. This reading, however, overlooks moments in the tradition that are an exception to this characterisation, such as, among others, the work of Kierkegaard for example.

understanding’, the relation with the human Other (*autrui*).¹¹ In our interaction with everyday objects our understanding of them is revealed. The object is known, and hence fully assimilated by the subject. To use Levinas’s own terminology, this understanding is a ‘possession’ and ‘consumption’ of the object.¹² The concrete encounter with the Other is a unique relation that is beyond any comparison to the subject’s engagement with objects. The Other is not known but greeted. The unique particularity of the individual in front of me is irreducible to knowledge, as their particularity escapes any universal categories, and the wider horizon of Being. In a very straightforward sense, when I find myself engaged with the Other who is standing in front of me, speaking to me, I am not reflecting on our activity, but I am engrossed in the event. As Critchley phrases it, ‘I am not contemplating, I am conversing’.¹³ In further contrast with the subject’s coming to know an object, in which the subject is in a sense master over the passive object, when I meet the Other I cannot shield the fact that through my every gesture, no matter how subtle, the Other is aware of the meeting.

In every attitude toward the human being there is a greeting — even if it is the refusal of a greeting. Here perception is not projected toward the horizon (the field of my freedom, my power, my property) in order to grasp the individual against this familiar background: it refers to the pure individual, to a being as such.¹⁴

In the encounter with a concrete human Other their particularity strikes me, breaking with any familiar ‘horizon’, and hence they are outside of my freedom and power.

The crucial importance of speech and language, addressed in ‘The Transcendence of Words’, is carried over into this article, wherein Levinas poses the question of whether language can be said to precede reason and understanding. In contrast to the description of ontology as ‘light’ and vision, given above, the interruption of Being that is irreducible to a concept or theme comes to the subject via sound. The interruption of the Other takes place through the concrete situation of speech. In dialogue, both I and the Other are firstly addressed and invoked rather than understood.

Speech delineates an original relation. The point is to see the function of language not as subordinate to the *consciousness* we have of the presence of the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹² Ibid., p. 6.

¹³ Critchley, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 7.

other (*autrui*), or of proximity, or of our community with him, but as a *condition* [emphasis added] of that conscious realization.¹⁵

The very fact that language is shared indicates that we were firstly spoken to before we were given the words to speak back. We were addressed, and likewise strived to communicate with the Other, prior to any conscious realization of their presence. Speaking is interpreted widely by Levinas as expression, for even if I chose not to verbally greet the Other, my expression operates as a kind of speech. This ‘speech’ is prior to understanding, and its primordial function is not to communicate understanding, but to institute sociality. It is at this point of the text that it becomes clear that Levinas is criticising ontology from an ethical perspective. Levinas declares that ‘The relation to the other is therefore not ontology’, and instead describes it as ‘invocation’, ‘sociality’, ‘prayer’, and even ‘*religion*’.¹⁶ Levinas clarifies that his use of the word religion is not intended to invoke images of God or any particular religion, but is used to indicate that the relation to the Other is not reducible to understanding and is therefore ‘distanced from the exercise of power’.¹⁷

Levinas maintains that the bond with a person is in no way comparable to the relation with a thing. When an object is named it is assimilated and possessed by the subject, when another human person is named they are simultaneously called and invoked.¹⁸ Understanding is equated with domination, power over the object, and violence. However, although Levinas contrasts understanding of things with the encounter of the human Other, he does not want to reduce the question to a simple dichotomy between, on the one hand, a static passive object that can be assimilated into the subject and, on the other hand, an encounter with an active free and dynamic Other. This is a similar question to one that Levinas raised at the very end of his 1949 article ‘*De la description à l’existence*’, when he asked if man can only be explained in terms

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7. Levinas’s use of the term ‘religion’ here does not have to be exclusively understood in a theological sense. The Latin root of the term is *re-ligare*, meaning to bind back together, can be read as referring to how language is what binds together prior to any reflective consciousness of one’s self or of the other in dialogue. Also, the French term *prière*, translated as ‘prayer’, is an ambiguous term that is not conveyed in the English translation. From the Latin *precāria*, to obtain by entreaty, or to insistently ask, does not have to be understood in an exclusive religious sense.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁸ On this point Levinas adds that ‘human faces joins the Infinite’. Levinas’s particular appropriation of the term infinite will be explored when we address his 1957 paper ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’ below.

of ‘activity and passivity’, as ‘power over him or slavery’.¹⁹ The question of what it means to encounter another human person, and consequently what it means to be human, is more complex and varied. From Levinas’s perspective, if he was to approach the question by presupposing that two separate and free individuals come face to face, it would then be difficult to avoid a Hegelian clash of freedoms, whereby one of the subjects will inevitably become master.²⁰

The concern of contemporary philosophy to free man from categories adapted solely to things, therefore, must not be content with the opposition between the static, inert, and determined nature of things, on one hand, and dynamism, *durée*, transcendence or freedom as the essence of man on the other. It is not so much a matter of opposing one essence to another, or saying what human nature is. It is primarily a matter of our finding a vantage point from which man ceases to concern us in terms of the horizon of being, i.e., ceases to offer himself to our powers.²¹

The way in which Levinas’s writings reflect on the freedom of the human person cannot be reduced to a simple either/ or, that of either determination or freedom. Levinas’s concern is not to define the nature of man, if one can speak of such a thing, but to move outside of the categories of understanding, knowledge, and ontology and open up a discourse on a primordial event that is beyond those categories, and prior to freedom and non-freedom.²²

¹⁹ ‘L’homme en tant que créature ou en tant qu’être sexué n’entretient-il pas avec l’être une autre relation que celle de la puissance sur lui ou de l’esclavage, d’activité ou de passivité ?’ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘De la description à l’existence’, in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 129-51 (p. 151).

²⁰ One could raise the objection that this is not the only possibility and cite Kant’s moral philosophy as one possible way of supporting this objection. However, as was pointed out in our introduction, although Levinas commends Kant for arguing for morality understood as the self-limitation of one’s autonomous freedom, Kant does not account for why the autonomous subject would place its self into question in the first place. Kant takes the free transcendental ego as a given and does not seek for it a justification. Levinas asks where the impetus for the autonomous subject to place its self into question comes from. For Levinas, in order for Kant’s moral philosophy to even be a possibility the self would have to have been initially placed into question from the outside. For Levinas, only the Other, who disturbs the self at the level of the affective self, which underlies the conscious ego, can place the self into question and in doing so stimulate the subject to question the justification of its own existence. For Levinas, without such a disturbance the self would live a self-referential life seeking to consume the other, be that literally or assimilation through knowledge.

²¹ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, pp. 8-9.

²² It is striking that often, alongside his broad reading of the tradition, Levinas gives sparse to no consideration to the emerging theories of intersubjectivity from that time period, although, given their brief mention in other works, it is reasonable to assume that he would have been familiar with them. This is especially true of thinkers within the phenomenological tradition, for example, Max Scheler, Edith Stein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

§ 3.1.3 THE FACE AND THE ETHICAL MEANING OF THE OTHER

In this section Levinas once again equates understanding with violence and negation, as through understanding a being is constituted without remainder, and as such is taken in by the powers of the subject, becoming a possession. ‘The partial negation which is violence denies the independence of beings: they are mine.’²³ The encounter with the Other eludes such domination and possession. ‘He does not enter entirely into the opening of being in which I already stand as in the field of my freedom.’²⁴ A crucial point to clarify, not only in relation to this text, but also of importance for any understanding of Levinas’s work, is that the encounter with the Other is an ethical, and hence from within his understanding of ethics, a ‘metaphysical’ encounter, not an ontological one. There is always a more than that that escapes the powers of the subject. What is encountered is beyond the realm of appearance and cannot be ‘known’, as it is an excessive exteriority. This passive resistance of the Other to the attempt at assimilation can also produce a violent response in the self. As the Other is the only being that resists the power of the subject, Levinas argues, the Other is the only being that the subject can desire to fully negate, which would be to murder. Paradoxically, however, although this is the case, when one has truly seen the face of the Other their power to kill is stripped away.

At the very moment when my power to kill is realized, the other (*autrui*) has escaped. In killing, I can certainly attain a goal, I can kill the way I hunt, or cut down trees, or slaughter animals — but then I have grasped the other in the opening of being in general, as an element of the world in which I stand. I have seen him on the horizon. I have not looked straight at him. I have not encountered (*rencontré*) his face.²⁵

This point indicates that what Levinas is trying to describe is something that goes beyond the purely empirical physical meeting between two people. Of course it is physically possible to take the life of another being, including a human being, but Levinas maintains that if one truly looks the Other in the face, murder becomes impossible.²⁶ One cannot annihilate the Other, even if they do end their biological life.²⁷

²³ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., trans. mod., pp. 9-10; 21.

²⁶ ‘To be in relation with the other face to face — is to be unable to kill’. Ibid., p. 10. In an interview from 1986 Levinas confirms this reading, when he describes the face, ‘It is also the commandment to take the other upon oneself, not to let him alone; you hear the word of God. If you conceive of the face as the

The precise ethical significance that Levinas gives to a concept that has become synonymous with his work, that of the face [*le visage*], begins here in this article. Despite the implication of using the term face, which automatically conjures up images of physical form, for Levinas the face is not the perception I have when I look at someone's facial appearance or expression, for the face breaks through the physical form. From Levinas's descriptions of the face, therefore, it would be more precise to think of the face-to-face encounter as a linguistic stimulation and not a plastic-visual one.²⁸ In this article Levinas explicitly refers to the face as 'speech', stating that the vision of the face is hearing and speech.²⁹ In the next article, and his work to follow, Levinas will come to describe the face in terms of the command 'Thou shall not kill'. When asked about the face in an interview from 1986 Levinas replied:

The face is not of the order of the seen, it is not an object, but it is he whose appearing preserves an exteriority which is also an appeal or an imperative given to your responsibility: to encounter a face is straightaway to hear a demand and an order. I define the face precisely by these traits beyond vision or confusion with the vision of the face.³⁰

What is of importance in Levinas's descriptions of the face is that the face signifies an otherwise than being and outside of the totality of understanding beings in their being. The face is irreducible to knowledge, interrupts being and gives it an ethical significance.

By his own admission Levinas accepts that as of yet his argument remains to be fully demonstrated, and the events that he has just begun to describe are 'barely suspected'.³¹ The article may raise more questions than it answers, but it marks the beginning of Levinas's work in which ontology is explicitly criticised and, in its place, ethics will be declared as first philosophy. As Levinas says in his preface to *Entre Nous*, '[i]t is as if the emergence of the human in the economy of being upset the

object of a photographer, of course you are dealing with an object like any other object. But if you *encounter* the face, responsibility arises in the strangeness of the other and in his misery.' Levinas, 'Interview with François Poirié', in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 48.

²⁷ In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas repeats the point that even if one ends the life of the Other, encountered in the face is the impossibility to annihilate the Other. Referencing the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel, Levinas writes that even though Cain killed his brother Abel, he will be haunted by Abel's eyes, that 'in the tomb shall look at Cain'. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 233.

²⁸ This is further supported by Levinas's comments in both this article and 'The Transcendence of Words', that vision is a sense which allows more easily for a full assimilation of an object. Sound is more allusive.

²⁹ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', pp. 10-11.

³⁰ Levinas, 'Interview with François Poirié', in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 48.

³¹ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', p. 10.

meaning and plot and philosophical rank of ontology'.³² Not only is the tradition of ontology 'upset' by Levinas's reflections on an everyday overlooked mundane occurrence, when the Other speaks to the Same, but his opening up of the ethical significance of this encounter consequently calls into question the view that prioritises the sovereignty of the free subject in any *ethical* account of human existence.

§ 3.1.4 'ETHICS AND SPIRIT' (1952)³³

Even though Levinas's short article 'Ethics and Spirit' belongs, strictly speaking, to a substantial body of work wherein he concentrates on his Jewish heritage and Judaism, much of his philosophical interests, and development from within this period, are nonetheless evident within his religious writings. The importance of language and speech discussed in 'The Transcendence of Words' and 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' is emphasised further in 'Ethics and Spirit', wherein it is argued that speech prefigures consciousness. The recently introduced ethical significance of the Face is also carried over into this article, and further elaborated on. In relation to our particular interest, freedom does not figure prominently in this article, however, by turning to Levinas's descriptions of knowledge we will be in a position to clarify further why Levinas began to increasingly align freedom with knowledge and violence. We will then be able to understand why, for Levinas, the encounter with the human face is irreducible to, beyond and prior to any such powers of the subject, and hence outside of the categories of freedom.

After a brief reflection on Christian morality, Jewish morality in the nineteenth century, and an undeveloped comparison between Christianity and Judaism, Levinas's next section of the article is titled 'Spirit and Violence'. Having ended the previous section by identifying Judaism as a religion of the spirit, Levinas begins this section by

³² Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p. xiii. Levinas's questioning of the view that ontology holds the highest 'rank', and therefore also questioning the view that the question of the meaning of Being is of the highest importance, is another implicit reference to the work of Heidegger. In his, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (the published version of a lecture course Heidegger gave in the summer of 1935 at the University of Freiburg), Heidegger refers to 'rank' on a number of occasions. One such occasion is in relation to the fundamental importance of ontology, particularly in relation to his view that the question of the meaning of Being is of the highest importance. Stating, at the beginning of his lecture course, 'But it [Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?] is the first question in another sense — namely, in rank. This can be clarified in three ways. The question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" is first in rank for us as the broadest, as the deepest, and finally as the most originary question'. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* trans. by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 2.

³³ 'Ethique et esprit' was first published in the journal *Evidences* 27, (1952).

suggesting that a way in which the spiritual life could be further defined could be to exclude the spiritual life from any relation to violence. This, in turn, raises the further question of what ‘violence’ means precisely. A definition of violence then follows:

Violence is to found in any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act: as if the rest of the universe were there only to *receive* the action; violence is consequently also any action which we endure without at every point collaborating in it.³⁴

We commit violence whenever we act with no regard for the external world, and merely consider our own needs and desires, as if the whole world consisted only of us and was there to administer to our own needs and desires. Likewise, violence is carried out when an action is done to us without our participation, that is to say, without one being a partner in the event whose otherness in that relationship is never reducible to the same, or when we allow someone to speak through us. Levinas is well aware of the breadth of this definition of violence, and in the next sentence adds that when violence is understood in this way almost every causality is therefore deemed violent, along with the ‘satisfaction of a need’, and crucially ‘the desire and even the knowledge of an object’.³⁵

What, then, can be regarded as a cause but which is not within the order of violence? It is in answering this question that Levinas turns once again to language and conversation. ‘The banal fact of conversation, in one sense, quits the order of violence. This banal fact is the marvel of marvels.’³⁶ Through the act of speaking one addresses the Other, greets him/her and opens oneself up to the otherness of the other and hence to the Other.

The Other (*Autrui*) is not only known, he is *greeted* (*salué*). He is not only named, but also invoked. [...]. I not only think of what he is for me, but also and simultaneously, and even before, I *am* for him (*je suis pour lui*).³⁷

Addressing the Other escapes the classification of violence defined above, as it is recognition that one is not alone, it is to enter into a dialogue that one cannot control, and in a sense is the beginning of collaboration. Rather than an attempt to dominate, in speech one must patiently await the response of the Other.

³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, in *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, pp. 3-10 (p. 6).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.* This is later expressed by Levinas as the way in which the Other takes the me (*le moi*) in me hostage. See, Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 59, 123, 126-27, 141.

The agent, at the very moment of its action, has renounced all claims to domination or sovereignty, and is *already exposed* to the action of the Other in the way it waits for a response.³⁸

Prior to being an object of knowledge, and prior to any universal classification you might predicate of the Other, the Other is one who is greeted and invoked, an interlocutor hence I become a subject *for* the other. This exposure in terms of the ethical description of the face introduced in 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' is expanded on in this article. In contrast to a faceless 'thing' which is an object of knowledge, understood within Levinas's description to be violently seized and totalised, the face occupies a 'depth' dimension and an 'opening' that presents itself in a personal way.³⁹

§ 3.1.5 KNOWLEDGE UNDERSTOOD AS VIOLENCE

In the next section speech as a non-violent action is contrasted with knowledge. As knowledge is a naming and a classification, from within the perspective of Levinas's thought knowledge is thus seen as an attempt at possession and totalisation.⁴⁰ The face, however, is irreducible to knowledge. The face offers 'an absolute resistance to possession'.⁴¹ The resistance offered by the face is not to be understood in terms of violence. Levinas's description of the face is paradoxical, for although the face is absolute vulnerability, naked and open without protection, it is simultaneously an absolute resistance to all attempts at possession and domination.⁴² It has a power stemming from its powerlessness. The resistance inscribed in the face is a resistance against the absolute annihilation of the face, which is murder. One may well desire to murder the Other in response to the Other's absolute resistance to all attempts at possession, in fact Levinas tells us that the Other is the only other being that one can be tempted to kill, to see the face is the temptation to murder and to hear the command

³⁸ Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 8, my emphasis.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ 'To know is to perceive, to seize an object'. Ibid., p. 9. Levinas does not fully argue out this point within this article. In chapter two we presented a more detailed account, based on Levinas's earliest works, as to why Levinas aligns consciousness with freedom. Consciousness is perceptually constructive, as it creates and recreates the world. Through the constitution of the object by consciousness, consciousness bestows a sense onto the object, in doing so comes to know and possess the object without remainder, leaving no room for anything foreign, anything beyond the powers of theoretical consciousness.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴² 'The face, for its part, is inviolable; those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation.' Ibid.

‘thou shall not kill’.⁴³ For although the use of term ‘face’ (*visage*) invokes images of physical expression and visual stimuli, as we seen in the preceding section, the face is not of the order of the seen. ‘To see a face is already *to hear (entendre)* ‘You shall not kill’.’⁴⁴

For Levinas, this commandment is not arrived at through theoretical deliberation over how we ought to live together; it is, rather, inscribed at a pre-theoretical level, at the most basic level of human interaction, that of discourse and the face-to-face relation. It is this fundamental opening onto an otherness that is not reducible to knowledge, and cannot be possessed by the same, that Levinas begins to discuss in terms of ‘morality’. As this event occurs prior to theoretical reflection, and escapes the totalising gaze of consciousness. If this is the case, then, Levinas wonders if it is not, therefore, correct to say that the encounter with the Other precedes consciousness.⁴⁵ ‘Speech belongs to the order of morality before belonging to that of theory. Is it not therefore the condition for conscious thought?’⁴⁶ Levinas goes on to answer his question in the affirmative. Speech, understood primarily as a reaching out to the Other and not as a means of verbalising thought, breaches the solipsistic sovereign life of the self and brings with it consciousness (the latter not to be understood in the Cartesian-Lockean sense of consciousness reflecting on *itself*).

This self, viewed face-on, is consciousness, *existing by virtue of the fact* that a sovereign self, invading the world naively — like ‘a moving force’, to use Victor Hugo’s expression — perceives a face and the impossibility of killing. Consciousness is the impossibility of invading reality like a wild vegetation that absorbs or breaks or pushes back everything around it. The turning back on oneself of consciousness is the equivalent not of [Cartesian-Husserlian-Heideggerian] self-contemplation but of the fact of not existing violently and naturally, of speaking to the Other.⁴⁷

The resistance of the face to, what Levinas views as the natural disposition of the subject to mindlessly seek to possess and absorb the environment around them,

⁴³ Levinas’s description of the face as the commandment ‘Thou shall not kill’ has obvious biblical resonance. The Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue, appear in the Hebrew Bible in the books of Exodus (20:13) and Deuteronomy (5:17). Thou shall not kill, often translated as Thou shall not murder, is the sixth commandment.

⁴⁴ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 8, my emphasis.

⁴⁵ Levinas’s argument rests on his understanding of what consciousness is, examined in chapter two, that as sense bestowing (*Sinngebung*) consciousness is a totalising force that seeks to possess the object.

⁴⁶ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 9: 24. ‘pas la condition de la pensée consciente?’

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, my emphasis. This characterisation of the self as ‘a moving force’, or elsewhere in Levinas’s writing, as ‘a joyous force on the move’ (*joyeuse force qui va*), which is taken from Viktor Hugo’s *Hernani*, will figure many times in Levinas’s work. This reference may remind the reader of the view of freedom in the social contract tradition, particularly Hobbes, a position that Levinas will directly critique in his work to follow.

stimulates a turning back on oneself, and hence consciousness.⁴⁸ It is the impossibility of taking the Other into the Same, into the self, that brings about conscious action and self reflection. As, for Levinas, freedom is aligned with consciousness, this stance contributes further to our attempt to understand why Levinas comes to claim that the Other precedes and conditions the freedom of the subject. Before the Other is named, understood, or grasped through the intentional structures of consciousness, he/she affects me. The ability to understand one another, and to understand one's own self, rests on this primordial experience of speech as an address to and from the Other. The resistance of the Other, the 'no, thou shall not kill' that is inscribed in the face, brings an awareness to the self that the world is not there to be mindlessly consumed and devoured. Hence, consciousness exists *by virtue of the fact* that the 'naive' self encounters the face of the Other. Or, as Levinas phrased it above, 'Consciousness is the impossibility of invading reality like a wild vegetation that absorbs or breaks or pushes back everything around it.'

§ 3.1.6 THE BIRTH OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

On a similar point, although not in relation to this particular text, one of the ways in which De Boer looks at freedom in the work of Levinas is in relation to cognition and the founding of the subject's critical consciousness. De Boer argues that for Levinas without the interruption of the Other the self would lack any critical awareness and consequently objectivity. If human freedom is seen as uninhabited and coming to know is exercising one's freedom, what is there to stop the self from seeing the world entirely on the self's own terms, without ever questioning what the self has determined the world to be. Rather than accepting critical consciousness as an *a priori* facet of the human being, Levinas delves deeper, and argues that the birth of critical consciousness comes with the interruption of the world of the self by the gaze of the Other. De Boer argues,

[a]ccording to Levinas, there would be no objectivity if the Other were not watching; it is he who interferes with our spontaneous naiveté and prompts critical awareness. This breach in natural dogmatism would be impossible

⁴⁸ As Levinas's work progresses he will expand on this idea that being is of itself negative, aligning the violence of the Same, and the attempt to dominate and consume, with 'nature'. It is the encounter with the Face of the Other that disturbs this natural tendency, introduces transcendence and the Good Beyond Being. Without this encounter the 'natural' world remains fundamentally evil (*mal*). For a critical reading of Levinas's negative view of Being, see, Leask, *Being Reconfigured*.

without the presence of the Other's face, before whom *arbitrariness* shies back and is ashamed.⁴⁹

By questioning the origin of knowledge as within the self, De Boer points out that Levinas is questioning the entire tradition of autonomy of thought. By way of an example from the tradition, De Boer selects a philosopher that had a central influence on Levinas, Husserl, and shows how for Husserl the self does not need exteriority in order to gain this critical capacity. The freedom of the self is not placed into question. 'In the egological world, where the Other has not yet appeared (Husserl's position *ex hypothesi*), it would never occur to me to criticize my natural understanding of reality.'⁵⁰ 'Ethics and Spirit' lends further support to De Boer's reading of Levinas as questioning the entire tradition of autonomy of thought, as in the article Levinas specifically addresses the entire tradition of Western Philosophy. Levinas implies that all of the tradition is guilty of unquestioningly accepting, and prioritising, the self's ability to come to know the world, which ultimately rests on knowledge of the self.⁵¹ 'If "know thyself" has become the fundamental precept of all Western philosophy, this is because ultimately the West discovers the universe within itself.'⁵² This maxim stretching as far back as the Temple of Apollo at Delphi prioritises both knowledge and the self, and by criticizing this maxim Levinas calls into question a value that he believes is representative of the entire tradition.⁵³

Returning to the final paragraphs of 'Ethics and Spirit', Levinas argues that not only does the encounter with the Other bring about consciousness, and introduce morality into being, but it is also the basis for society. Society is defined as 'the miracle of moving out of oneself' and is contrasted with the violent man who strives only to possess.⁵⁴ Violence is aligned with 'knowledge', 'sovereignty', 'possession', and 'experience'. Experience, for Levinas, implies the self conscious 'I', the ego, which for Levinas cannot be separated from the subject's intentional engagement with the world,

⁴⁹ De Boer, 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy', pp. 15-16, my emphasis.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵¹ Once again Levinas is applying a very wide and sweeping criticism, that overlooks much of the variation within the tradition, with no mention of possible exceptions to this general rule.

⁵² Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 10.

⁵³ To expand on this characterisation of the western philosophical tradition further Levinas argues that the tradition is like Ulysses, of the *Odyssey*, who ventures out into the world only to return back home to Ithaca once again. This reference to Ulysses, as a representation of the tradition, will become common place in Levinas work, and he will contrast this figure with the figure of Abraham from the Hebrew tradition, who abandons his homeland in search of an unknown land. Whereas Ulysses returns to the same, Abraham is willing to leave the familiar and go towards what is other and unknown.

⁵⁴ Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 9.

and *as such* is still within the categories of the Same. Therefore, in an attempt to distance himself from ontological language Levinas uses the terms ‘encounter’ and ‘event’ to describe this contact with the Other.⁵⁵ ‘Experience’ implies that the event is as a result of a free initiation on the part of the subject, fully constituted, and can be fully absorbed by the subject. ‘Every experience of the world is at the same time an experience of self. [...]. Reality’s resistance to our acts itself turns into the *experience* of this resistance; as such, it is already absorbed by knowledge and leaves us alone with ourselves.’⁵⁶ When the subject has an ‘experience’, through the intentional structures of consciousness, the object is absorbed into the same and the subject remains alone, there is no remainder, no alterity irreducible to the same, and so there is no encounter with the Other.

This article attests to the point made in the article discussed above, that the encounter which Levinas is describing is an ethical encounter. Although it is a concrete event with a living human being, it is beyond the categories of perception and the realm of appearance.⁵⁷ For although on a purely empirical level one human person can take the life of another, to truly encounter the face of the Other is to hear the command thou shall not kill, which will render murder impossible.

For in reality, murder is possible, but it is possible only when one has not looked the Other in the face. The impossibility of killing is not real, but moral. The fact that the vision of the face is not an *experience*, but a moving out of oneself, a contact with another being and not simply a sensation of self, is attested to by the ‘purely moral’ character of this impossibility. A moral view (*regard*) measures, in the face, the uncrossable infinite in which all murderous intent is immersed and submerged. This is precisely why it leads us away from any experience or view (*regard*). The infinite is given only to the moral view (*regard*): it is not *known*, but is in *society* with us.⁵⁸

To encounter the face of the Other is to glimpse the infinite, which by definition is beyond any definition, and irreducible to any thought of it, ‘it is not *known*, but is in society with us’. Knowledge understood as an assimilation of the object leaves no room for otherness or novelty, as all otherness is overlooked when the object is constituted and assimilated into the same. Knowledge understood as freedom gives rise to two

⁵⁵ Not to be understood in the sense of ‘encounter’ of the ‘natural attitude’ that Husserl identifies.

⁵⁶ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁷ Hence, what Levinas is seeking to describe is outside of the ‘natural attitude’ identified by Husserl and overcome via the transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Levinas does not need the reduction, for in drawing attention to the encounter of the Other in dialogue, as not reducible to perceptual totalizing, his starting point is outside of the ‘natural attitude’.

⁵⁸ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 10.

separate explanations as to why the encounter with the Other must presuppose freedom, from Levinas's philosophical standpoint. As freedom is aligned with knowledge for Levinas, and as the face is outside of the paradigms of knowledge, and prior to all understanding and naming, the encounter with the face is also outside of the categories of freedom. Secondly, as knowledge leaves the subject alone and within the confines of the same, with no room for novelty or genuine alterity, hence there is no room for a genuine free action that will result in something new.⁵⁹ The face opens the solitary world of the subject to a beyond that they cannot contain, and hence brings the possibility of freedom.

§ 3.2 'FREEDOM AND COMMAND' (1953) AND 'THE EGO AND THE TOTALITY' (1954)

As we have seen in the article above, from 1952 onwards Levinas begins to describe the face as the command 'Thou shall not kill'. The obvious question, for freedom, that arises from such a description is what implications are there for the self who is confronted and hence, commanded by the face. Can a command be enacted by a free subject only, and if this is the case, is the self that is confronted by the face, therefore, understood as free prior to the encounter? Can a command be understood otherwise than as tyranny, violence and domination? In 'Freedom and Command' Levinas explores the meaning of command in relation to freedom and reflects on whether a command can be seen as an imperative to act that is given only to a free subject, or not, or whether we can understand command in a sense that is prior to freedom and outside of those associated categories.⁶⁰ By drawing on his reading of Plato, mainly his *Republic*, Levinas argues that command does not have to imply tyranny and that the face-to-face encounter reveals a passive force that commands by virtue of its vulnerability and pacificity. Most importantly for our study, in this article Levinas contends that the face is 'an opposition prior to my freedom, which puts my freedom into action'.⁶¹ He also explicitly argues that the face-to-face encounter cannot be understood by reference to the philosophical approaches of either Husserl or Heidegger, as it is prior to any meaningful representation that comes from the sense-bestowing

⁵⁹ See, Ch. II, n. 231 on Levinas's use of term 'creation', over and against the term being, to capture the radical separation between the existent and being and the possibility of novelty that creation brings.

⁶⁰ 'Freedom and Command' was first published in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 58 (1953), 264-72.

⁶¹ Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 15-23 (p. 19).

power of the intentional subject (*Sinngebung*), and is also contrary to the Heideggerian notion of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) into ‘existence’ (in Heidegger’s sense) without one’s choosing of such a situation or constitution. The face-to-face encounter, the relationship with exteriority, is said to be prior to the freedom of the commanded self, and ‘makes freedom possible’.⁶²

§ 3.2.1 ACTION AND COMMAND

Levinas begins the article with the declaration that ‘To command is to act on a will’, and as a will offers the greatest resistance, if one can order others to act, then to command must be seen as the highest form of action.⁶³ The term ‘action’ implies that the agent is free. This understanding of command and action, consequently, leads to a contradiction. Only a free agent can be said to act, and only a free agent can therefore be commanded to act, but if one is commanded to act by a foreign will, is the agent then free? The dilemma that Levinas is reflecting upon alludes to Kant’s well-known argument that moral obligation implies freedom, that is to say, to maintain that x ought to do y, x has to be able to do y. The potentiality to do y implies, likewise, that x is free to do or not to do y; and so, moral obligation for one’s self implies individual freedom. Hence Kant’s famous exhortation that the moral law is self-imposed on the free subject by the free subject.⁶⁴ The problem, which Levinas is considering, emerges when one talks about acting on the basis of the will of another. If to command is to act on a

⁶² Ibid., p. 23.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁴ ‘Will is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it [...]. [W]hat, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will’s property of being a law to itself? [...]. Now, one cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from any other quarter with respect to its judgements, since the subject would then attribute the determination of his judgement not to his reason but to an impulse. Reason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences’. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 52-54. Peter Atterton argues that Levinas’s argument in ‘Freedom and Command’ is similar to Kant’s own transcendental approach, as Levinas is seeking the condition that makes both reason and the possibility of political freedom possible. In sharp distinction to Kant, however, Atterton rightly points out that Levinas pushes back further than Kant’s ‘deduction of the conditions of the possibility of rational self-obligation (autonomy)’ and reveals the condition that makes the freedom of reason itself possible. This condition precedes and gives rise to rationality. As Levinas’s argument is outside of the ‘I think’, it is significantly different from Kant’s transcendental approach. See, Atterton, ‘From Transcendental Freedom to the Other: Levinas and Kant’, pp. 327-54 (p. 342).

foreign free will, how is it possible that one can be said to command an agent to act? As Levinas puts it, ‘How can one move an unmoved mover?’⁶⁵

One way that the tradition has dealt with this inconsistency is to argue that the command must coincide with the will of the agent, that is to say, one must be commanded to behave in way that is consistent with how the agent would have acted in anyway.⁶⁶ ‘A will can accept the order of another will only because it finds that order in itself.’⁶⁷ If this was not the case the foreign will would resist, even if resistance, and maintaining one’s freedom, entailed going as far as accepting one’s death as a consequence of refusing the command. Levinas goes on to argue that freedom of thought in itself can be seen as a tyranny, and turns once again to Plato’s *Republic* to further explain his point. Plato was constantly aware of the ‘threat’ that our ‘animality’ posed to reason, and that the appetite and spirited aspects of the person had to be controlled by reason.⁶⁸ Levinas notes that this inner struggle ‘makes a mockery of autonomy’.⁶⁹

§ 3.2.2 TYRANNY

From this Levinas moves on to a more general discussion on tyranny. When reading the article one must be mindful of the historic backdrop, and remember that in 1953 the events of the Second World War were very fresh in people’s psyche, particularly the Jewish community and individuals like Levinas who were so cruelly and personally affected by a very real experience of tyranny. In his more politically minded work of the fifties, such as this present article, Levinas also has Stalinism and the Soviet Union in mind, as well as the ongoing events of the Cold War. Caygill convincingly argues that Levinas expands his general critique of Western metaphysics to the political structures raised upon them.⁷⁰ Levinas was undoubtedly thinking of the Nazi regime,

⁶⁵ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 15.

⁶⁶ In relation to this point Levinas makes the first of many references to Plato’s *Republic*, which figures predominantly throughout the article. Stating that in Plato’s *Republic* the leader will rule for the sake of those ruled over and not for their own sake. Therefore, the commands will be useful for those who obey.

⁶⁷ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16. See, Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 153-54 (442 b).

⁶⁹ ‘The incomprehensible union of reason and animality, a union underlying their distinctness, makes a mockery of autonomy.’ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 16.

⁷⁰ See, Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, pp. 49-93. Also, see, Michael Morgan’s important contribution to the place of Stalinism in Levinas’s overtly political minded work of the fifties, which Morgan discusses throughout his study. Morgan points out that Levinas’s reflections on Nazism cannot be seen as discussed

and such unjust political structures, when he mentions the vast possibilities and unlimited resources that a tyrannical regime can exploit, ‘those of love and wealth, torture and hunger, silence and rhetoric’.⁷¹ Tyranny can be so insidious and cunning that even the servile soul may be unaware that they are in fact under the control of a tyrannical power. Rather than identifying a command as an external command, to the servile soul it is felt as though they were acting upon their own inclination.

The supreme violence is in that supreme gentleness. To have a servile soul is to be incapable of being jarred, incapable of being ordered. The love for the master fills the soul to such an extent that the soul no longer takes its distances. Fear fills the soul to such an extent that one no longer sees it, but sees from its perspective.⁷²

This very real possibility, one that Levinas knew all too well, reveals just how malleable human freedom can be. Levinas also describes command from the perspective of the tyrant, pointing out that the tyrant preys on others as if they were mere physical objects, manipulating and contorting them to suit his/her own will. The alterity of other human beings are overlooked, and therefore, the tyrant is alone in the world in that others are merely there for his/ her own use and manipulation, ‘there is no one in front of him’.⁷³

§ 3.2.3 THE STATE

Due to the vulnerable nature of human freedom, and the real threat of tyranny, Levinas moves on to argue for what he believes to be a political condition for the possibility of freedom, the just State. ‘Freedom, in its fear of tyranny, leads to institutions, to a commitment of freedom in the very name of freedom, to a State.’⁷⁴ In order to safeguard freedom, freedom is externalised into institutions and a ‘written text’ in the form of law and perhaps a constitution. Levinas argues that the formation of a just State, which is ‘armed with force’, is ‘the only way to preserve freedom from tyranny’.⁷⁵ In comparing his approach to that of Kant’s, Levinas remarks that he too believes that we must impose commands on ourselves. However, in contrast to Kant, he

independently of Stalinism. Michael L. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), (p. 10). In an interview conducted in 1986 Levinas himself describes ‘the life of the camps’ under either Hitler or Stalin as ‘the same thing’. ‘The Proximity of the Other’, trans. by Bettina Bergo, in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 216.

⁷¹ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

believes that an internal rational law does not go far enough, as it is no defence against tyranny. Only an exterior command that is armed against the threat of tyranny can preserve freedom.⁷⁶

Even though the formation of a just State is seen as the only protection from freedom, over time a problem arises. The original command made by the will to curtail freedom in order to protect freedom, becomes increasingly distant and alien to the will. Eventually freedom can no longer recognise itself in the institutions of the State, and in turn comes to view the State and the limitations to freedom, as tyranny.⁷⁷ 'The will experiences the guarantees that it has provided against its own degradation as another tyranny.'⁷⁸ Levinas moves on to challenge the position he has just set out, which bears a strong resemblance to the social contract tradition, putting his own position forward in contrast, arguing that meaning is not only derived from the will but can also come from elsewhere. Levinas argues that the face-to-face relation is a command that is not to be understood as tyrannical as it is the 'reason prior to reason' that led the will to sacrifice freedom in the name of freedom.⁷⁹ The will did not form social institutions in order to protect its own freedom, but in order to safeguard the freedom of others. Hence, Levinas offers an explanation for why the will can submit itself to an exterior impersonal will, because it has already encountered a meaningful command prior to action. The State, and the social and political institutions it founds, requires politics, and politics requires discourse. As we have seen earlier, Levinas argues that discourse presupposes the face-to-face encounter.

⁷⁶ Although Levinas argues that an armed State is the only defence against tyranny, he overlooks the fact that it is the State itself that can be tyrannical. Nor does he mention the fact that States commit some of the most horrendous acts against humanity. An armed State is by no means a guaranteed defence of freedom from tyranny.

⁷⁷ This description of the formation of the State by Levinas, whereby individuals forfeit a degree of freedom in order to preserve that freedom, brings to mind the social contract tradition of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Caygill notes that this very problem that Levinas addresses, that the future freedom will not recognise the limitations on freedom as its own and so come to experience it as tyranny, was first raised by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*. Caygill, 'Levinas and the Political', p. 74. In Levinas's later work he will make many explicit references to Hobbes. One of the major differences that Levinas's approach has from that of Hobbes is the motivational force behind the suspension of certain freedoms and the formation of the State. Whereas Hobbes argued that the impetus and *justification* comes from the desire to protect the self, and the need to establish protection from the threat of others, for Levinas, the primordial command in the face of the Other is ultimately the bases and *justification* for the formation of such a State. Levinas's position becomes more complex when he introduces the idea of 'the Third' [*le tiers*], which places an even greater burden of responsibility on the self, who is then faced with not one but many faces whom they must respond to. The ever increasing demand and complexities of human relations give rise to the State and institutions that should maintain justice.

⁷⁸ Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', p. 17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

§ 3.2.4 WAR, WORK AND FREEDOM

Having loosely sketched the political conditions of freedom, Levinas now takes a step further back, to examine what personal event prefigures the impersonal law and gives rise to that possibility. In order to do so, Levinas once again takes up his analysis of violence and contrasts the domination of things with the pacific opposition of the face. Levinas repeats the definition of violence given in 'Ethics and Spirit', and introduces two new examples of violence, that of work and war.⁸⁰

Levinas's reflections on work take on an added dimension not considered in his work of the 1940's, that of violence, however, the contrast between work and freedom is still clear. Work is seen as the drive to dominate things, manipulating and distorting them for one's own end. From the perspective of work the individuality of the object is overlooked and the worker only thinks of how the object can be dominated. 'Work neither finds nor seeks in the object anything strictly individual.'⁸¹ War too overlooks the particularity of the individual in front and never looks the enemy in the face, but seeks to take them by surprise from behind. 'I do not face the freedom with which I struggle, but throw myself against it blindly'.⁸² Both war and work share a common attitude towards that which they seek to control, both view the object and the enemy as 'a mass' to be dominated.⁸³ One can see in Levinas's descriptions of work and war why Caygill maintains that this section of the article serves as not only a critique of the Hegelian-Marxist position on the liberatory power of work but also a critique of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, which views war and work as a mode of recognition.⁸⁴ For Levinas, both war and work are far from modes of recognition, as both are blind to the externality of the object in front of them, and both seek domination and control.

§ 3.2.5 RESISTANCE OF THE FACE

Like the object of war and work, the face is also described as an opposition. However, it is not an opposition that resists the subjects force when a subject's force acts upon it, like stone under a chisel or the barrel of an opposing gun, for it is an opposition that

⁸⁰ 'Violent action does not consist in being in a relationship with the other; it is in fact an action where one is as though one were alone.' Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Caygill, 'Levinas and the Political', p. 74.

takes the subject by surprise. The face does not stand in the way of the subject's freely undertaken action, but confronts the subject prior to action.

It is what resists me by its opposition and not what is opposed to me by its resistance. This means that this opposition is not revealed by its coming up against my freedom; it is an opposition *prior* to my freedom (*antérieure à ma liberté*), which puts my freedom into action. It is not that to which I oppose myself, but what is opposed to me.⁸⁵

The encounter with the Other does not come about through the free initiation of the subject, for the encounter is not a free act under taken by the ego. 'It does not at all follow my intervention; it opposes itself to me insofar as it turns to me.'⁸⁶ While the face is described as an opposition it is not to be understood as a hostile or aggressive force. It is a pacific opposition. The face does not take up an opposing position in opposition to a particular action on the part of the subject, but to be a face is to be a *no* to a violent subject, who would otherwise behave as if they were alone in the world to act.⁸⁷ When one can behave violently towards the other it is precisely because they have not looked the *Other* in the face. 'Violence is a way of acting on every being and every freedom by approaching it from an indirect angle.'⁸⁸ It thus follows for Levinas that to never see the face of an other is to be alone in the world.

In keeping with his position presented in 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', Levinas argues that as knowledge aims to grasp and take hold of a thing through a concept, 'starting with generality, the universal, ideas and law', violence is then committed, as the unique particularity of that concrete thing is missed.⁸⁹ The object has no meaning out of itself, but only in relation to the category to which it belongs, and in relation to the wider whole.⁹⁰ The face, however, breaks through all forms and all categories, and is truly naked. Although in this article the face is described as *expression*, leading the reader to possibly think of the face as a visual stimulation, met through the look, one should not take from this that the face is therefore reducible to the physical form and concrete facial expressions. Levinas describes the face in terms of expression in order to draw out the point that through expression one is invited to speak and converse, and

⁸⁵ Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', p. 19, my emphasis.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Levinas repeats the point made in 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' and 'Ethics and Spirit', that to see the face 'is the impossibility of killing him who presents that face'. Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', p. 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁰ On this point Levinas makes reference to Heideggerian 'disclosure', a translation of *dévoilement*, which is the standard term used by the French phenomenologists to translate Heidegger's *entdecken*.

not to impartially stand back and weigh up the other as an object of the subjects perceptual or usable world. Expression captures the immediacy of the encounter, and it prefigures any theoretical or contemplative attitude. Through expression one is struck by the Other and has a responsibility to respond. Expression ‘does not invoke an attitude in addition to knowledge; expression invites one to speak to someone [about something]’.⁹¹ Towards the end of the article Levinas returns to the description given in earlier articles whereby one is said to enter into a relationship with the Other through speech.⁹²

§ 3.2.6 ASYMMETRY OF THE FACE-TO-FACE

From the perspective of a removed impartial observer, when one person approaches another person and engages them in dialogue, this event can easily appear purely as a meeting of two equal human beings. However, from Levinas’s ethical perspective this event is loaded with a wider meaning that goes beyond a simple multiplicity of beings.

The formal structure of the presence *of one to another* cannot be put as a simple multiplicity; it is subordination, an appeal from one to the other. The being that is present dominates, or breaks through its own apparition; it is an interlocutor.⁹³

The individual who is confronted by the face of the Other is in a sense ‘subordinated’ to the Other, as they are disturbed and called to respond. Beyond the mere appearance from an outside perspective, from the perspective of the one who is interrupted, they cannot escape the summons and cannot undo the interruption. ‘Beings which present themselves to one another subordinate themselves to one another.’⁹⁴ It is in this way that the face can be said by Levinas to be the first command, a command prior to institutions, and a command that is not a tyranny. ‘This subordination constitutes the first occurrence of a transitive relation between freedoms and, in this very formal sense, of command.’⁹⁵ The transitive relation of command by the other in a dialogic experience frees up, as it were, both to freely respond. It is the command, nonetheless, that is prior to the freedom that is ‘between’ the beings in a dialogue and that renders

⁹¹ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 21.

⁹² Ibid., p. 22. Here the dialogic model of understanding underpins Levinas’ account of intentionality as distinct from the model of perceptually-founded acts in Husserl’s account or user-founded acts as in Heidegger’s account of the world of serviceability.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

each of the interlocutors free to respond, hence Levinas's use of the plural 'freedoms' that become hypostatic *after* and *in* the transitive event of (genuine) dialogue and so irreducible to each other as the 'same' freedom/s.

Levinas makes it clear that this fundamental dimension of human life that he wishes to bring to light is a metaphysical, and therefore from his perspective, an ethical relationship. 'The metaphysical relationship, the relationship with the exterior, is only possible as an ethical relationship.'⁹⁶ It is a relationship with exteriority that can never be reduced to the categories of the same. The meaning and rationality of the face does not find its source in the freedom of the subject, but comes from outside. It is a signification that pre-exists the subject.

Expression is just this way of breaking loose, of coming toward us, yet without deriving its meaning from us, *without being a work of our freedom*.⁹⁷

Through the idea of the face Levinas distances himself further from the philosophical approaches of both Heidegger and Husserl, and the account of meaning in their respective approaches, as he argues that the face cannot be accommodated within either of their phenomenological perspectives. The face does not derive its meaning from the intentional structures of the Ego's consciousness or individual actor in the world.⁹⁸ With the face the origin of the directionality of meaning and sense is profoundly different. Meaning comes from outside the subject. Thus in direct reference to Husserl, Levinas argues that this meaning 'is prior to all *Sinngebung*'.⁹⁹

This primordial encounter with the otherness of meaning, Levinas claims, provides a coherent reason for understanding why it is not irrational for the personal will to submit itself to the impersonal will in the form of intuitions and laws, that have a meaning prior to the freedom of the subject. Through the face the subject is already confronted with a meaning prior to the subject's freedom. Levinas believes that this point undermines the Heideggerian approach, stating that it indicates that the world is not waiting on the subject to provide it with rational meaning, as 'intelligibility precedes me'. Levinas maintains that this idea is 'just the contrary of the notion of *Geworfenheit*'.¹⁰⁰ In this article Levinas does not offer a more detailed argument

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 22, my emphasis.

⁹⁸ In an earlier reference to Husserl Levinas argued that expression is more direct and immediate than intuition. Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 22. Two paragraphs later Levinas makes a similar point, 'the infinite resistance to murder in a face is this signification independent of *Sinngebung*', Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. See, Ch. I, n. 87 for more on this Heideggerian term.

against the idea of freedom in the work of both Husserl and Heidegger, however, from our readings of his earlier work we can see that he has maintained a consistent position in aligning the *work of freedom* with the meaning giving powers of the subject. As the face is a meaning that comes to the self from the outside, it is ‘prior to all constitution’ and precedes the meaning giving powers of the intentional ego. Levinas, therefore, describes the encounter as prior to the freedom of the subject. In support of this, Levinas emphasises that the face is a signification that is never actually ‘present’ to consciousness, ‘one has already denied that every exteriority must first have been immanent, that every past must have been present, that every command is an autonomy, and every teaching a reminiscence’.¹⁰¹

In an indirect reference to Hegel, Levinas insists that the face-to-face encounter is not the clash of two freedoms, ‘like forces which affirm one another in negating one another’.¹⁰² Levinas returns to his analysis of tyranny and stresses that the command which comes to the subject through the face is not tyranny, and not violence, but creation. As Levinas views the face-to-face encounter as outside of a totality, the encounter does not have to result in the supremacy of one or the other, something absolutely new is possible. His use of the term ‘creation’ once again captures this possibility of genuine novelty.¹⁰³ Agreeing with the analysis presented by Socrates in Plato’s *Republic* Levinas repeats that the tyrant is neither free, nor happy, and takes this further by asserting that tyranny is neither action nor freedom.¹⁰⁴ The subordination of the will to the impersonal law of the just State is considered justified as it is based on the prior concrete discourse of the face-to-face, ‘as the encounter of man with man’.¹⁰⁵ Levinas explicitly states that this encounter with the face of the Other is prior to freedom and makes freedom possible. ‘We have sought to set forth exteriority, the other, as that which is nowise tyrannical and *makes freedom possible*.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See, Ch. II, n. 231. In discussing Levinas’s use of the term ‘creation’ Critchley points out that this term captures Levinas’s deconstruction of the ‘autarchic humanist subject’, as it signifies that the subject is affected by structures outside of the conscious control of the subject. ‘The creature is the being who is always already in a relation of dependence to and distinction from the alterity of a creator, and it thus introduces a passivity into the heart of subjectivity’. Critchley goes on to note that it also captures the radical separation between the creature and the creator and yet maintains the dependency and the passivity of the creature. ‘Levinas employs this de-theologized concept of creation as a model for thinking a relation between beings who cannot be totalized and who together form a plurality’. Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ See, Plato, *Republic*, pp. 320-43. (Book IX 576c- 592b).

¹⁰⁵ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Within this article Levinas may briefly outline why it is that the Other precedes my freedom, but he does not fully argue just how it is that the Other ‘*makes freedom possible*’. It is also somewhat unclear just what this freedom in the quote above refers to. Freedom was used in two different contexts in the article, one to describe the social and political liberties that are seen to rest upon the institutions and laws within, and protected by a just State, and secondly, in relation to consciousness and the meaning giving power of the subject (*Sinngebung*). By concluding that the Other makes freedom possible, within the context of the article, it would seem that this is referring to both freedom in the form of civil liberties, which are claimed to come by living in a just State, and the freedom of consciousness understood as *Sinngebung* and rationality. The former is seen to rest upon the latter, and so, the validity of the argument can be said to come down to the demonstration of the latter. The article demonstrates how it is that the subject can accept the State’s limitations to the personal will, as it rests upon the prior command that is the face of the Other. The limitation to freedom by the State was seen as justified by arguing that it is based on the prior command of the face of the Other which is also prior to the freedom of consciousness. However, in order to fully justify this position Levinas will need to show further how the prior command that is the face of the Other makes freedom of representational consciousness possible. Within this article this important premise is not fully argued, and so it remains to be seen.

§ 3.2.7 ‘THE EGO AND THE TOTALITY’ (1954)¹⁰⁷

In his article from 1954, ‘The Ego and Totality’, Levinas carries over some of the themes addressed in ‘Freedom and Command’, such as society, work and economic relations. The analysis of such phenomena once again reveals limitations to the freedom of the subject. The main focus of this article, however, is the question of how can a being be simultaneously in a position within the totality and also separated from it? In order for exteriority to be present to me, and yet always a more than that if it is to remain exterior, it must overflow the terms of consciousness without destroying consciousness.¹⁰⁸ The article also presents a sustained critique of love, as an exclusive relationship between two, and consequently excluding ‘the third man’ and the

¹⁰⁷ ‘Le moi et la totalité’ was first published in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 59 (1954), 353-73.

¹⁰⁸ Levinas will return to this question of the excessive character of exteriority in ‘Philosophy and The Idea of Infinity’.

possibility of justice. Although freedom figures loosely in every section of the article, it is in establishing the central problem at the beginning of the article that we gain an additional insight into Levinas's view of freedom. It also helps us to understand why it is the qualified Other, the widow, the poor and the orphan, that disturbs the totality of the Same, and why the other we choose to love is not other enough.

§ 3.2.8 THE ORIGINS OF THE FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

The first section of the article centres on the contrast between an unthinking being that lives violently as if it were a totality and a thinking being that is aware of itself as a particularity in relation to a totality. This distinction is not new to Levinas writings so far; what is new, however, is the definite link that Levinas makes between biological consciousness and violent selfish living on the one hand, and thinking self conscious life defined by its openness to exteriority and metaphysical meaning.¹⁰⁹ Biological consciousness is seen as a being that lives purely from and for itself, as a totality, totally unaware of, and therefore not concerned with, exteriority. 'A simply living being is thus in ignorance of the exterior world.'¹¹⁰ As this being considers nothing outside of itself, confusing their particularity with the totality, they are therefore said to live a violent life.¹¹¹ Their experience of the world is of mere sensations, for the senses bring them nothing of the exteriority. This self-centred biological consciousness, described as closer to 'instinct' than consciousness, lives a life trapped in the same. Hence not yet free but determined by its biological drives.

There is nothing mysterious in the identity of a living being throughout its history: it is essentially the same, the same determining every other, without the other ever determining it.¹¹²

The living being exists purely for itself, there are no other options, and as such the living being has two possibilities, freedom or death. Levinas describes the purely biological being as freedom, aligned with the same and violent action. However, the quote above rules out the possibility of genuine choice for the living being trapped in the same, as the living being lacks exteriority it also lacks options. It would seem,

¹⁰⁹ 'A living being as such is then not without consciousness, but it has a consciousness without problems, that is, without exteriority'. Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Ego and the Totality', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 25-45 (p. 26), my emphasis.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

therefore, that despite Levinas describing the living biological being as ‘free’ this freedom is used in a very minimal sense as the ability to perform thoughtless self referential instinctual actions.

Biological thoughtless being is separated from a thinking self-conscious being by an awareness of the exteriority that ‘lies beyond its nature’, and its particularity in relation to it.¹¹³ If a purely biological being is said to have a consciousness free of problems, an awareness of exteriority complicates matters. To be conscious of the exteriority means that the being becomes ‘metaphysical’, it has a relationship with an exteriority that is not assumed.¹¹⁴ For biological consciousness instinct crashes up against the exteriority, it is merely an object in its way. Levinas cites Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* agreeing with the thinker’s description of ‘instinct illuminated by intellect’, which captures how self-consciousness transforms biological consciousness.¹¹⁵ This transformation makes labour, society, and economics possible. Thinking being can relate to the totality without being reducible to it, or absorbed into it. Levinas then introduces the question of how can a being be simultaneously in a position within the totality and also separated from it? Levinas describes this problem as the problem of innocence, stating that it cannot be solved by stating that free beings are separated but coexistent. Levinas believes this breaking up of biological consciousness, and the introduction of metaphysics to the natural living being, to be nothing less than a miracle. Exteriority breaks up the totality of the same, bringing with it not only thought but also possibilities beyond the same. ‘Thought then is not simply reminiscence, but always cognition of the new.’¹¹⁶ As biological consciousness exists within a totality it cannot give itself this required novelty. It must come from outside of the totality, and not be reducible to it.

This in turn raises the question of how we can account for the beginning of thought. The answer to the question will lead Levinas to the now familiar face-to-face encounter. ‘Thought begins with the possibility of conceiving a freedom external to my own’.¹¹⁷ Arguing that conscience is a necessary condition of thought, Levinas claims that we must, therefore, discover the moral conditions for thought. The path that Levinas takes to arrive at that conclusion examines many new themes along the way,

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

such as why love is an inadequate answer to both the question of the origin of thought and the question of justice. Levinas also reflects on society, the third man, labour, the products of work, money, finally coming around to economic justice, which, he argues, is the realisation of the moral condition for thought.

§ 3.2.9 THE LIMITATIONS OF LOVE

Levinas opens his critique of love through a brief discussion on guilt and innocence. Guilt and innocence imply that a free being can both injure another free being and be injured, and as such the being is both a totality unto itself and within a totality.¹¹⁸ Levinas believes that an implication of such a position is that although the being must be thought of as free in order to be guilty, the fact that they can be wronged and injured reveals a vulnerability and limitation to that freedom. Levinas argues that the tradition of the revealed religions have sought to deal with his contradiction, and safeguard the free beings sovereignty, through recourse to a transcendent God. The free being is only deficient in relation to God, whom alone can pardon the free being, and maintain the free being's sovereignty and status as a totality. Man is a totality in relation to a transcendent God who is outside of the totality.¹¹⁹ Levinas goes on to argue that this solution is no longer sufficient for modern man, who feels guilt in a different way, in a way that cannot be pardoned by piety. This, then, opens up the question of pardon. Forgiveness can only come from the one wronged, and consequently, Levinas argues, the very possibility of pardon implies an intimate society. The wronged party can choose to forgive the wrong done. Such an intimate society implies that both parties have chosen one another, and therefore, this intimate society supports the totality of the ego rather than places it into question. 'Such a truly intimate society is in its autarchy quite like the false totality of the ego.'¹²⁰ It is within this context that Levinas formulates his critique of love.

As love is between two it is a closed society of two that is shut off from any third parties. Within this closed society any wrong done is an offence against the lover,

¹¹⁸ Levinas's use of the term 'innocence' captures this possibility that the free being can be the victim of harm perpetrated by another free being, as the Latin root of the term *innocentia* (from *in-nocens*), meaning 'not-harming'.

¹¹⁹ 'Guilt or innocence are taken to be only conceivable with respect to God, who is exterior to this world where man is everything.' Levinas, 'The Ego and the Totality', p. 29.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

and hence, the lover can grant complete absolution. Such a relation allows the ego to recovery 'its solitary sovereignty'.¹²¹

The ego, capable of forgetting its past and renewing itself, but which by its action creates the irreparable, would through the pardon be liberated from this last shackle to freedom, since the only victim of its act would or could consent to forget it. Absolved, the ego would become again absolute.¹²²

As such, an intimate relationship can free the ego of its apparent wrong, removed from our true situation in the world, and maintains the false idea of the ego's sovereignty. In 'true society', as Levinas terms it, which extends beyond such an immediate bond, the consequences of our actions likewise extend beyond the immediate intentions or obvious results. One cannot hide behind the excuses and explanations offered to a beloved. Likewise, as the consequences of our actions escape us and reach far beyond what we can imagine, so too does the right to pardon disperse out into a wider immeasurable context. Only the other, then, who is outside of the loving dual relationship of two, who is exterior to this totality, can alert me to my true wrong doing.

Only the unimpeachable and severe witness inserting himself 'between us', and by his speech making public our private clandestinity, an exacting mediator between man and man, faces, and is you.¹²³

Religious piety cannot undo and pardon my wrong doing in society. It is not a wrong done against God, but a wrong done against *the other man*. Such wrong cannot be commensurate with pardon, as from whom would the pardon come? One is responsible for their action, responsible for their very existence, and every consequence that follows on from that. Regardless of whether or not the consequences stretch beyond those willed, one is guilty. To plead ignorance is no defence. 'The intention cannot accompany the action to its last prolongations, which the ego nonetheless knows that it is responsible for.'¹²⁴

Levinas then introduces the political sphere, and the concept of social justice. Although religion and love are deemed inadequate to deal with such fault and wrong doing, this should not imply that we must, therefore, abandon all hope of pardon and resign ourselves to the fact that our very existence will inevitable bring harm to others. As society is more complex than the intimacy of two lovers, this calls for justice and a universal law. One cannot rely on the subject alone to come to the realisation that they

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 30-31.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 33.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

are guilty, for how can one repent for harm which one is unaware of causing. The accusation must come from the outside. This line of argument, pursued by Levinas, opens up an important implication, namely, that true consciousness of oneself comes from the outside, and does not find its source from within the self. ‘The impasse of liberalism is in this exteriority of my consciousness to itself.’¹²⁵ At this point of his argument Levinas again introduces what he believes to be the primordial function of language, in defence of his position, language ‘links us with the outside’.¹²⁶

§ 3.2.10 ECONOMY, THE VULNERABILITY OF THE BODY, AND THE OTHER

In section four of the article ‘The Status of the Third Party, and Economy’, Levinas addresses the question of injustice in relation to the third party, believing that real injustice, unpardonable injustice, is with respect to a third party only. Levinas defines injustice as the violation of one free being by another. This, however, presents a paradox for this understanding of freedom. Injustice can only be in relation to a free being, and yet, as a free being this being should be impermeable to violence. What then can freedom mean? In one respect freedom implies that a will is impervious to influence. This point raises a similar paradox dealt with in ‘Freedom and Command’, how can a free being be commanded to act against its will. In this article Levinas deals with this issue by arguing that the meaning of the action is not determined by the will that acts, and in this way a free being can suffer an injustice. ‘Though it [the will] be the free subject of this willing, it exists as the plaything of a fate which transcends it’.¹²⁷ Levinas does not want the reader to think that fate implies that the will could not have acted otherwise, as he is not defending a form of determinism, rather, he is outlining that the meaning given to one’s actions does not come from the subject, as that is beyond the subject’s control.¹²⁸ ‘As a will productive of works, freedom, without being limited in its willing, enters into a history of which it is a plaything.’¹²⁹ In acting one submits themselves and their work to the judgment of others. The limitation to the will does not come from within the subject, as the subject can act in an infinite number of ways, but from the situation beyond which the subject has little or no power over. ‘In

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

¹²⁶ Ibid. See, Ch. II, § 2.3.2.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

¹²⁸ ‘Fate does not precede that decision, but is posterior to it; fate is history.’ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

this situation in which a freedom, without in any way abdicating, nonetheless receives a meaning which remains alien to it, we recognize a created being.’¹³⁰ Such a being is not the birth of the universe, meaning precedes and transcends them.

This leads Levinas to reflect on the ways in which a will can be deprived of its work in economic relations. Unlike expression, that immediately presents the subject, work points towards the subject but marks the subject’s absence. In economic relations money, be that in the form of steel or gold or paper, gives individuals who have it power over those who do not. One can acquire the work which is the product of the other’s labour. ‘The will productive of works is a freedom that betrays itself.’¹³¹ In both sense of ‘betrays’, as in shows the freedom of the will and contradicts it. Although work is produced by a free being, it can also be a source of injustice against that free being. Levinas asserts that it is this possibility, that others can take hold of the work of the will, which makes society possible. Levinas goes as far as to claim that this shows that the ego’s relationship with a totality is essentially economic.¹³² The will is both in possession of itself and exterior to itself in the form of its work, and consequently reliant on others. Injustice is possible due to the concrete situation of the human person, not as a reflective consciousness or a pondering mind, but as a flesh and blood individual who can not only accomplish tasks but who hungers and thirsts, ‘the ontological structure of the third party takes shape as a body’.¹³³ Levinas explores this point further by turning to the vulnerability of the body.

Levinas’s comments on the vulnerability of the body once again call into question the complete autonomy of the individual. His simple, yet astute observations bring us to reflect on the extent to which any individual can be said to be truly self-reliant. Sickness serves as an example to illuminate the self’s reliance on things and others outside of the self. When an individual is suffering from an illness they are forced to seek help and treatment from external sources. ‘The physician’s practice, already from the time of the first meditations of the Greek sages, gives lie to the autarchy of the will.’¹³⁴ In line with the stance taken in ‘Freedom and Command’, Levinas concludes this section by stating that it is only through the creation of a world that the will can be freed of some of the threats to its freedom, by establishing

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Although this differs from Levinas’s earlier analysis of labour and fatigue, it adds to his alternative view of work from that of the Hegelian-Marxist view on the alienation of labour. See, Ch. II, § 2.1.3.

¹³³ Levinas, ‘The Ego and the Totality’, p. 39.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

institutions outside of itself. However, society itself is no guarantee against oppression. In fact society can give rise to many more advanced and long-lasting forms of oppression and violence, not open to the world of nature. Whereas in the natural world the domination of a will comes in the form of brute physical violence, the violence of society can take many additional forms made possible by society and social institutions such as money and unjust economic relations. Society must also seek to be just, and not only in words but in the form of a universal law and the implementation of that law. 'Without yet having recourse to justice, the way of peacetime violence, exploitation or slow death is substituted for the passion of war.'¹³⁵

In order to explain where the inclination towards justice and the efforts to achieve a just society stem from, Levinas presents his now familiar argument that rests on the face of the Other and its disturbance of the Same. Injustice is not always aware of its crime. The perpetrator may well be blind to how their actions affect others, blind to the fact that there are others, and merely naively act in the world alone. Although one may acquire and even feed off the free work of others, Levinas argues, that alone is not enough to alert me to my injustice and to 'catch sight of the possibility of justice'.¹³⁶ A more fundamental and concrete encounter is needed, one that shocks me and calls me to account for my very existence. Language is once again affirmed as a necessary element of this encounter, as through language one is addressed, spoken to, and as such one finds one's self in the position of having a responsibility to respond to the one who addresses them, 'the *other* does not weigh on the same, but only places it under an obligation, makes it responsible, that is, makes it speak'.¹³⁷ Language does not link thought with an object, it is not between two concepts, but between two persons. Levinas affirms his belief in the primal function and origin of language, as human sociability, and not founded in propositional discourse or analysis of terms outside of that sociability. When one speaks to another, they are addressed and invoked, not known and totalised. Language, however, does not guarantee the encounter with a face. One can disengage from the unique status of the Other and instead speak to them in an almost objectified manner. If one wishes to manipulate another person, and bend them to their will, they may use language as a tool to do so. In such cases, which are

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

common everyday occurrences, one speaks to a ‘disfigured face’ and the speech is a ‘form of violence’.¹³⁸

When one is encountered by the face of the Other it breaks through such a social totality. In this article Levinas describes the encounter with the face as ‘transcendence’, and the ‘desensibilization’ and ‘dematerialization’ of sense data.¹³⁹ The encounter with the face rises above and beyond the totality. Although in the face of the Other the self is confronted by the command, ‘you shall not murder’, and consequently the power to negate the Other is nullified, this command is not an affront to the self’s freedom. ‘Speech is thus a relationship between freedoms which neither limit nor negate, but affirm, one another. They are transcendent with respect to each other.’¹⁴⁰ Levinas describes the relation between the two as between equals, and returns to his contrast with love, which is an inequality. This face-to-face relation is the primordial encounter that is the condition for ethics, society, and justice. Although the foundation of justice is to be found outside of the totality, justice itself belongs to the totality, and so can only be strived for and maintained within the totality. This, however, should not provide society with a justification for injustice. When society fails to make economic relations just, it is a weak and invalid excuse to hide behind the fact that the multiplicity of society is based on the concrete intimate relation of the face-to-face encounter, and therefore, to hold justice as unachievable outside of that intimate relation.¹⁴¹

Levinas goes on to argue that one’s value as a particular unique person is not reducible to the way in which one can economically contribute to the totality. Yet, despite this, money and economic transactions bring with them the means for one freedom to have a hold over another freedom. Money has the power to ‘corrupt the will’, and yet it also brings with it the ability for individuals to maintain relations in

¹³⁸ Such encounters take place daily, and can be commonplace, such as doctor patient relations or a judge speaking to the accused, and economic transactions between people. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41, 42 and 43.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁴¹ Likewise, in an article from 1960, Levinas makes the point that universal abstract systems of justice should never become blind to the particularity of the human beings that the system is there to serve. Choosing the particular example of liberty, Levinas argues, ‘We were always taught that liberty goes with the disindividualizing of the individual, goes with the will to the universal that, for man, means disappearing into the coherent discourse, like an artist who would enter into his canvas fully alive and live mutely amid the shapes he traced there.’ Such systems should always strive to place faces before principles, remembering that such principles should be in the service of life and not vice versa. Levinas ends this article by writing, ‘[i]t proves the importance, beyond universal structures, of the person-to-person, man-to-man relationship; it proves that man must see behind the anonymous principle the face of the other man.’ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Principles and Faces’, in *Unforeseen History*, trans. by Nidra Poller (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), pp. 104-06 (pp. 105-06). ‘Principes et visages’ was first published in *Esprit* 28, 1960, pp. 863-65.

their absence.¹⁴² It enables people to delay gratification, to postpone needs and desires, and to develop trust and build a society. Mere survival is no longer the immediate concern, and time takes on a different significance. People can live beyond the immediate moment. Money can grant us time. Although money is used to quantify man, and would therefore seem to be an affront to justice, Levinas argues that nonetheless money is an essential condition for justice. Without money human violence could only be repaired through vengeance or pardon, which never brings reparation but extends that violence into the future. Although it is the economy that totalises people, and brings with it injustice, it also brings money, which, Levinas maintains, provides the category for the common measure between men.

§ 3.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REFLECTION ON FREEDOM IN 'PHILOSOPHY AND THE IDEA OF INFINITY' (1957)¹⁴³

In Levinas's 1957 essay 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', the excessive character of exteriority comes to the fore through Levinas's appropriation of the Cartesian idea of infinity.¹⁴⁴ Although this article marks the beginning of some important new developments, there is also continuity with Levinas's earlier thought, shown through a re-emergence of his criticism of paganism, earlier linked with Nationalism Socialism, and now tied directly to Heidegger's philosophy. The sheer ambition of Levinas's philosophy, and the wide range of work spanning the whole of the Western philosophical tradition that is called into question by his approach and criticised by him that was only hinted at by him before, becomes explicitly evident in this article. One such fundamental, almost sacred principle of the tradition, called to justify itself and account for its meaning, is freedom. One could justifiably argue that this pivotal article is as much about philosophy and the idea of freedom as it is about infinity. The central and honoured place that freedom has occupied within the tradition supports Levinas's claim that the dominating tendency within the intellectual history of the West has been to prioritise the same and seek to dominate and possess all otherness. Levinas's investigations ask us to consider if this propensity has provided us with an accurate

¹⁴² Levinas, 'The Ego and the Totality', p. 45.

¹⁴³ 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' was first published in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, CXLVII, 1957-7/9, 241-53.

¹⁴⁴ From the late 1950's on Levinas began to talk about the relation with the Other in terms of infinity. Levinas discussed Descartes idea of infinity in 1949 in 'De la description à l'existence', in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*.

portrayal of what it means to be a human person, and if it captures the full range of our ‘experience’ of being a human.¹⁴⁵ Or, has philosophers reflections begun too late, by taking autonomy and freedom as the starting point, and in doing so overlooked a more primordial fundamental event that not only founds that freedom but justifies it? This article follows an almost identical line of argument to that which is developed and presented in more detail in *Totality and Infinity*.¹⁴⁶

§ 3.3.1 FREEDOM UNDERSTOOD AS AUTONOMY

Levinas opens the article by stating that every philosophy seeks truth, and then goes on to identify and argue for a division within philosophy based on two differing inclinations in relation to the search for truth.¹⁴⁷ On the one hand is the search for truth that is marked by a journey away from what is familiar and towards the ‘absolutely other’, toward a transcendent exteriority.¹⁴⁸ This search for truth through an engagement with difference, and the beyond, Levinas refers to as heteronomy. On the other hand is the spirit of philosophy that Levinas names autonomy and aligns with freedom. In opposition to heteronomy, which seeks truth in difference, autonomy finds truth within the same, and in doing so seeks to know and possess all otherness, reducing it to the primacy of the same.¹⁴⁹

Perceived in this way, philosophy would be engaged in reducing to the same all that is opposed to it as *other*. It would be moving toward *auto-nomy*, a stage in which nothing irreducible would limit thought any longer, in which, consequently, thought, non-limited, would be free. Philosophy would thus be tantamount to the conquest of being by man over the course of history.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ At this stage of his work Levinas is satisfied to describe the encounter with the Other as an ‘experience’. However, he will later move away from this terminology in his constant attempt to avoid totalizing ontological language, and to avoid a term that implies constituting consciousness.

¹⁴⁶ For a detailed reading and commentary on this article, with continual reference to *Totality and Infinity*, see, Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993). The text also includes a copy of the article in the original French and an English translation.

¹⁴⁷ These two opposing conceptions do not have to be limited to Western Philosophy, or indeed the history of Western intellectual thought. Caygill argues that these two conceptions also represent two conceptions of politics.

¹⁴⁸ Levinas tells the reader that he is borrowing the term ‘absolutely other’ from Jankélévitch.

¹⁴⁹ Levinas’s distinction between the Same (*tauton*) (*Même*) and the Other (*heteron*) (*Autre*), taken from Plato’s *Sophist*, takes on a new significance here. (See also Plato’s *Timaeus* 35ab and *Theaetetus* 185cd). The Same characterises philosophy that is dominated by autonomy and freedom, and the other characterises the philosophical spirit that is open to difference and otherness and does not try to reduce all otherness to the knowable same. For more on this see Peperzak, *To the Other*, pp. 38-46.

¹⁵⁰ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 48.

Levinas plays on the etymology of autonomy (*αὐτόνομος*), emphasising that in philosophy understood in this way, the same is only answerable to itself, governed by self law. There is no limitation to the self's freedom and no outside laws restricting the power of the ego.¹⁵¹ In his short, three paragraphs description, of the spirit of philosophy defined as autonomy, Levinas uses the words free (*libre*) and freedom (*liberté*) seven times. In the one paragraph description of philosophy marked by heteronomy freedom is never mentioned. Throughout the article, autonomy and freedom are used almost interchangeably: 'Freedom, autonomy, the *reduction of the other to the same*, lead to this formula: the conquest of being by man over the course of history'.¹⁵² In philosophy understood in this way freedom is seen as the highest value.

Levinas's description presents a strong and striking critique of the Western Philosophical tradition. Although he has distinguished between two general approaches, he goes on to argue that the dominant spirit has been autonomy. 'The choice of Western philosophy has most often been on the side of freedom and the same'.¹⁵³ Even though there have been some notable exceptions to this general rule, they are few are far between.¹⁵⁴ From the Pre-Socratics to the present day the goal of Philosophy has been the acquisition of wisdom. In seeking to know philosophy has sought to contain and to possess. The Western traditions unwillingness to allow room for difference and their inability to think of particulars without any reference to the universal, has led to the privileging of the 'same' over the other.

¹⁵¹ Levinas explicitly connects this impulse with the 'ego', as the ego is the conscious subject, the self reflecting 'I', and not the sensible self who in their passivity is affected from the outside. It is this level of passive affectivity that Levinas is interested in shedding light on, a level prior to the self-reflecting subject.

¹⁵² Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 48.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Throughout his work Levinas will make reference to some of these notable moments of exception, such as Plato's idea of the Good beyond being and Descartes idea of infinity. One can also detect the influence of Franz Rosenzweig's (1921) *The Star of Redemption* on Levinas's interpretation of philosophy. Rosenzweig has a similar interpretation of the history of philosophy, which on his reading, seeks to obtain an all encompassing knowledge and by doing so overlooks and ignores any difference that cannot be accommodated into this overarching system. He uses the terms 'totalizing' and 'The Philosophy of the All' to describe this predisposition towards wholeness and unity, to the detriment of plurality and separation. Rosenzweig is as general in his characterisation of the history of Western philosophical thought as Levinas, believing this dominant propensity to be evident from Thales right up to modern philosophy and beyond. See, Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by Barbara E. Galli (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). In the preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas confirms this influence when he writes, 'We were impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung*, a work too often present in this book to be cited.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 28. See, also, Levinas, 'Franz Rosenzweig: A Modern Jewish Thinker', in *Outside the Subject*, pp. 37-50.

Western thought very often seemed to exclude the transcendent, envelop every other in the same, and proclaim the philosophical birthright of autonomy.¹⁵⁵

§ 3.3.2 PHILOSOPHY AND KNOWLEDGE AS APPROPRIATION AND POWER

Levinas moves on to further explain this previously identified dominant propensity within the history of western philosophical thought by adding ‘narcissism’ to the set of characteristics that best describe this tendency. Just like Narcissus, who was transfixed in his own self adoration, the philosophy of the same takes freedom as ‘a sure right’ and seeks no further justification for this right.¹⁵⁶ When such a freedom encounters anything foreign, instead of questioning this revered freedom in the face of such difference, it regards the foreign being as an obstacle to be overcome and integrated into the life of the Same.¹⁵⁷ One such way of possessing the object is through knowledge. The original difference and foreignness is subdued through understanding. ‘The search for truth becomes the very respiration of a free being, exposed to exterior realities that shelter, but also threaten, its freedom.’¹⁵⁸ Levinas refers to Plato’s description of philosophy as a dialogue that the soul has with itself (*Sophist* 263e4 and 264a9), and his view that knowledge is a recollection (*anamnēsis*), as epitomizing this view of philosophy, ‘every lesson introduced into the soul was already in it’.¹⁵⁹ Hence, philosophy is best described as an egology, the soul discussing with itself is monologue, not dialogue.

When exteriority has been confronted, within the tradition, it is reduced to a concept and a knowable object. The way it is known is in and through its generality. Philosophy is not alone in its endeavor to preserve freedom in this way. The intellectual history of the West gave rise to science, whose very methodology rests on overlooking particular differences in favor of general laws and principles that can be derived from such observations. The drive to know, possess, and contain all foreignness may have begun as an intellectual endeavor, but it did not exhaust or contain its reach. ‘In a civilization which the philosophy of the same reflects, freedom is realized as a wealth.

¹⁵⁵ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 48.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁷ By way of example Levinas refers to wild natural elements beyond our powers to tame, and men ‘who love us and enslave us’. *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Reason, which reduces the other, is appropriation and power.’¹⁶⁰ Levinas’s characterization of philosophy as dominated by freedom and autonomy is not meant as a benign ‘innocent’ reflection on philosophy, nor is it restricted to the intellectual history of the West. Levinas believes that this propensity within the tradition, from the pre-Socratics on, has seeped into the social and political development of the West, and given rise to imperialism and colonization, evident not only in thought but also in deeds.¹⁶¹ This has given rise to war, which may display the clash of freedoms, but the clash of freedoms does not guarantee the putting into question of freedom.

§ 3.3.3 HEIDEGGER AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SAME

Throughout his career, Levinas may have continually praised Heidegger for his intellectual thoroughness and ingenuity, but this does not save him from this particular criticism. Not only is Heidegger included within this negative assessment of philosophy, in some respects Levinas believes him to be the pinnacle of such a tradition, ‘he is not destroying, but summing up a whole current of Western philosophy’.¹⁶² Levinas sees it as no coincidence that the author of *Being and Time* had early sympathies with National Socialism. In an interview that took place in 1992 Levinas was asked if he believed there was a connection between Heidegger’s philosophy and his political engagement, Levinas responded:

The absence of concern for the other in Heidegger and his personal political adventure are bound up together. And despite all my admiration for the grandeur of his thought, I could never share this double aspect of his positions.¹⁶³

Heidegger may be radically different from the tradition in some crucial aspects, however, Levinas believes that within his philosophy the unique particularity and singularity of beings is still overlooked. Though Heidegger’s descriptions of *Dasein* questions the priority of consciousness, and replaces the ego, *Dasein* is still a being for whom its own being is an issue for it, above all else. ‘The *Dasein* Heidegger puts in

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁶¹ As Levinas phrases it in another article written in the same year, ‘Political totalitarianism rests on an ontological totalitarianism’, Levinas, ‘Freedom of Speech’ (1957), in *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 205-07 (p. 205).

¹⁶² Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 51.

¹⁶³ ‘The Awakening of the I’, trans. by Bettina Bergo, in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 186.

place of the soul, consciousness, or the ego, retains the structure of the same.’¹⁶⁴ The question of the meaning of Being takes precedence over the question of the meaning of the human being. *Dasein* remains utterly self-centred. Concerned with its own being and its own death.

As Levinas has described the tradition as prioritising freedom above all else, he wonders whether or not Heidegger’s philosophy could be said to be different from the tradition in that respect, as even *Dasein*’s freedom ultimately depends on the ‘light of Being’.¹⁶⁵ Peperzak believes that Levinas is referring here to Heidegger’s principle of *Entschlossenheit* (resoluteness).¹⁶⁶ Despite *Dasein*’s being as Being-unto-death, *Dasein* can still live as an authentic being by resolutely accepting its own most possibility, and in that sense be free.¹⁶⁷ However, Levinas decides that it is still not that different from the tradition, as within the tradition, especially within modern philosophy, free will is seen as a low form of freedom, whereas true free is often depicted as the aligning of one’s will with a greater universal reason.¹⁶⁸ On this point in this article Peperzak notes,

[b]y will and freedom, neither Descartes nor Kant nor Hegel nor Levinas mean the power to choose freely among different possibilities. Classical philosophy has always insisted on the difference between freedom of choice (or, as Kant puts it, *Willkür*) and the true freedom that obeys reason and reasonable laws.¹⁶⁹

Within this tradition freedom is still within the confines of the Same, as particular differences are subordinated to a greater universal law and universal reason. What is also interesting to note about this point, in addition to Peperzak’s reading, is that within this tradition freedom is even further aligned with reason and knowledge, as the supreme principle. By placing freedom into question, and asking if it is an unquestionable fundamental principle, one is also questioning both the priority of and grounding for reason and critical consciousness. By positing a moment older than and prior to freedom, Levinas is positing a more fundamental and primordial event that is older than the ego and that instigates freedom. Although Heidegger does not prioritise

¹⁶⁴ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 50.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁶ Heidegger describes *Entschlossenheit* as *Dasein*’s primordial truth. ‘In resoluteness we have now arrived at that truth of *Dasein* which is most primordial because it is *authentic*.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 343, (SZ 297).

¹⁶⁷ See, *ibid.*, §62. See, Ch. I, § 1.5 and Ch. II, § 2.2.3.

¹⁶⁸ ‘But that was also the case in classical idealism, where free will was considered the lowest form of freedom, and true freedom obeyed universal reason.’ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, pp. 51-52.

¹⁶⁹ Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 68.

reason, and describes *Dasein*'s more fundamental engagement with the world, in Heidegger too, freedom is obedient to a higher principle, and is never questioned or judged as unethical. Further, Levinas argues that within Heidegger's philosophy there is no transcendent principle such as a Deity, infinity, or the Good. Nothing outside of the Same that can put the Same into question.

In a further blow to Heidegger, Levinas's link between paganism and National Socialism presented in his 1934 article, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', is carried over into this article, only now in 1957 the philosophy of Heidegger is explicitly connected to both. The similarity that is drawn between the three is the emphasis on 'nature' and man's 'enrootedness' to the earth.¹⁷⁰ Although the later Heidegger is very critical of technology, Levinas believes that this does not lead to a criticism of an older unethical power structure that is viewed as natural and hence goes unquestioned.¹⁷¹ The earth is taken as neutral, and any behaviour that can be seen as natural is therefore 'ethically indifferent' and justified, 'foreign to all guilt with regard to the other'.¹⁷² Such an existence, that takes its self and its actions to be natural, could never question its place in the sun and is therefore ethically indifferent, 'a heroic freedom'.¹⁷³ Taking this point further, Levinas argues that this 'earth-maternity' gave rise to further unjust power structures and exploitation, such as 'property, exploitation, political tyranny, and war'.¹⁷⁴ On this reading Heidegger's work is seen to affirm freedom over justice, which to Levinas's mind is both a dangerous and unethical position to maintain. By remaining within this unethical paradigm, unjust social structures can go unchallenged. By

¹⁷⁰ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 52. Levinas will return to this point in an article from 1961, 'Heidegger, Gagarin and Us', wherein he further confirms his view that Heidegger's philosophy is linked to Paganism, the enrootedness to the earth and to place. Levinas stresses the ethical dangers of such a position, as it splits people into natives of a place and strangers, potentially bringing many associated problems. Heidegger's distrust of technology is also overtly criticised. Levinas argues that the 'enrootedness' of Heidegger's thought is far more dangerous than the potential hazards that advances in technology may bring. In fact, Levinas sees in such advances the potential to leave the enrootedness to place behind, believing that with technology we can be rid of the 'superstition' of place, 'perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity.' Levinas, 'Heidegger, Gagarin and Us', in *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 231-34 (p. 233).

¹⁷¹ On this point, in her text, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, Edith Wyschogrod astutely states, '[t]he injunction to heed the voice of being [in Heidegger's thought] opens for Levinas the possibility for human existence to be lived as pagan existence. To heed the voice of being is to leave natural existence unquestioned and unjustified. It is for this reason, according to Levinas, not difficult for Heidegger to be drawn to political conclusions that in the contemporary world are the natural outcome of what Levinas regards as a repriminization of human existence, the call of blood and soil.' Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 2nd edn (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 15.

¹⁷² Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 53.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

privileging the Same over and against the other we privilege strong individualism, domination, totalitarianism and power over rather than power with or power for the 'other'. By taking the free subject as the unquestioned starting point, any threat to that freedom from the outside is seen as an obstacle to be overcome, and not as someone to be welcomed. How, then, is the freedom of the Same put into question?

§ 3.3.4 SURPASSING THE POWERS OF THE SUBJECT

Despite the dominance of the philosophy of the Same within the tradition, it is not the only spirit of philosophy, there are also other sources that Levinas can call upon. Levinas returns now to his first description of philosophy, described as 'heteronomy' in the opening section of the article. Although Levinas wishes to argue from a philosophical perspective, this new approach that Levinas wishes to open up is, to some extent, informed by his religious tradition. Levinas's attempt to take the wisdom of the biblical tradition, and translate it into philosophical argument, is summed up by this now familiar phrase among Levinas commentators, he sought to translate Hebrew into Greek.¹⁷⁵ Despite this influence, on many occasions Levinas emphasizes that one does not need to look beyond the philosophical tradition to find examples of thinkers that did not favor 'right in might', or did not reduce every other to the same.¹⁷⁶ One very important way that he manages to think both within and outside of the tradition, and to strike a balance between speaking to the tradition and forging a new path, is to appropriate a well-known philosophical category, and deploy it in a very new and radical way. This concept is the Cartesian concept of infinity, as presented in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

At first glance one may well be skeptical of Levinas's use of Descartes' thought to move outside of the tradition within which, Levinas claims, the Same dominated. Anyone in anyway familiar with Descartes is well aware of his *cogito*, his famous affirmation and bedrock of certainty of all knowledge-claims, 'I think therefore I am', and so would be justified in their initial unease upon discovering that Levinas was

¹⁷⁵ In an interview from 1985, 'On Jewish Philosophy', Levinas was asked about the relationship between the philosophical and biblical thought in his work. 'I do not commit the error of denying the radical difference in spirit between Scripture and philosophy. But, having emphasized their agreement *in fact* at a certain moment in time — perhaps in the maturity or modernity of Greco-biblical civilization — I am now ready to speak [...] of their *essential* connection in human civilization *tout court*, which is measured or hoped for as peace among men.' 'On Jewish Philosophy', in *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 241.

¹⁷⁶ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 53.

attracted to Cartesian thought. Where is the ‘other’ in the Cartesian *cogito*? Initially the only thing that Descartes can be sure of is the existence of his own mind, he cannot even be sure that his own body exists, let alone entertain the existence of others. It would seem that Cartesian thought fits very well into the dominant characterization of Western Philosophy given by Levinas, a tradition dominated by egoism, emphasizing the individual and the dominance of the Same over and against the other. Levinas paradoxically sees a potential in the concept that Descartes used to ontologically prove the existence of God, only Levinas takes the formal design of the structure of the concept of infinity and uses it for a different purpose.

Descartes reasons, quite rightly according to Levinas, that he himself could not possibly be the source of the concept of infinity. The two crucial points that Levinas takes from this idea, firstly, is that the subject is affected from the outside, and cannot be said to be the origin of the idea, and secondly, the idea is greater than that which the self can contain. The ‘I’ thinking the concept of infinity can in no way contain infinity nor exhaust the content of the thought, as the ideatum surpasses the idea. The ‘I’ *‘thinks more than it thinks’*.¹⁷⁷ This more than in the Same cannot be deduced from the consciousness of the thinking subject, ‘[i]t has been put into us. *It is not reminiscence*’.¹⁷⁸ This is a crucial point for Levinas, and it helps to philosophically support his argument that the encounter with the Other occurs prior to the freedom of the subject, and is not derived from the power and the freedom of the ego. It is a moment of excessive exteriority. ‘The infinite is the radically, absolutely, other’.¹⁷⁹ This structure of thinking, however, can be seen to cause a problem for consciousness and freedom. How can a finite subject encounter infinity, and yet not be consumed through this encounter? Infinity, in order to be infinity, must overflow the terms of consciousness and yet not be fatal to it. Levinas may well question the origins and meaning of freedom, but he does not want to undermine the freedom of the subject. If the encounter with the infinite does not leave the subject intact, and the separation between the subject and infinity is not maintained, the philosophy of the Same will prove to be valid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 54, my emphasis.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

§ 3.3.5 THE IDEA OF INFINITY AND THE OTHER

Levinas moves to explicitly link the idea of infinity to the Other (*Autrui*), a link that he will maintain in his later work. Through the encounter with the face of the Other the self encounters the infinite, an absolute exteriority that can never be contained by the self. It is a moment of ethical meaning that comes to the self from the outside and places the self into question. By linking the notion of infinity to the epiphany of the face, Levinas argues that the absolute exteriority of the Other is guaranteed, as the finite 'I' could not be the source of this idea. To make this point clear Levinas contrasts this encounter with the subject-object relation, wherein through knowledge the object is fully integrated into the Same.¹⁸⁰ In contrast with an object, the Other is beyond the I's power of appropriation. This 'no' that the Other opposes to the subject's attempt to consume and contain the Other is again described by Levinas as the command "You shall not kill".¹⁸¹ Confronted by the defenseless Other, and the realization that the Other escapes the power of the I, the egotistical self-centered life of the subject comes to an end. Only with this encounter is the self truly introduced to exteriority for the first time. If the face of the Other remains unseen the subject continues to live alone in the world, violently consuming every foreign object, be that physically or through conscious cognition.

The solipsist inquietude of consciousness, seeing itself, in all its adventures, a captive of itself, comes to an end here: true exteriority is in the gaze which forbids me my conquest.¹⁸²

Given that the Other is said to precede and give rise to critical consciousness, if we were to read this argument as a linear or logically chronological argument, then the argument would quickly descend into circularity. Levinas would be accused of presupposing that which the Other is said to bring, namely, consciousness. As we shall see in our next chapter, this particular problem arises from such a straight forward linear reading of Levinas's descriptions, which is in fact unhelpful. We must keep in mind that the interruption of the Other occurs at the level of the sensate passive self, which is 'prior'

¹⁸⁰ Levinas reiterates a by now familiar point that in becoming known the object becomes a property of the Same, becoming 'its theme, and then its property, its booty, its prey or its victim.' Ibid.

¹⁸¹ To hear this command is to see the face of the Other, completely uncovered, defenseless and naked. In this article Levinas reiterates his point, made several times in earlier articles discussed above, that the epiphany of the face is not seen but heard. It belongs to the domain of language.

¹⁸² Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 55.

to consciousness, and departs before consciousness arrives. Levinas will describe this strange logic in more detail in *Totality and Infinity*.

Though it is only touched upon, this section of the article seems to imply that the encounter with the face of the Other brings with it an ethical reversal of the self's priorities, 'the structure of my freedom is [...] completely reversed'.¹⁸³ Infinity puts a stop to the imperialism of the Same. The resistance to murder that is inscribed in the face of the Other, and is revealed to the self when the Other speaks, is not real but ethical. Levinas argues that if the resistance was a 'real' resistance it would be encountered as a force opposed to the subject's will, and hence an obstacle to the subject's freedom that could be consumed by the subject. However, as it is an ethical resistance, the self encounters true exteriority, which means that it is beyond any attempt to possess it. In this encounter the freedom of self is judged to be not only arbitrary but also unjust. This position seems to imply that Levinas regards the subject who is confronted by the face as 'free' prior to the encounter, as their freedom is called into question and judged to be arbitrary and unjust.

At the end of this section of the article Levinas describes the Other as closer to God than the subject, as in order to put the subject's egoism into question the Other must be higher than the subject, 'his gaze must come to me from a dimension of the ideal'.¹⁸⁴ It is the subject who is called into question, confronted and judged, and consequently found to be unethical. The subject must respond to the Other and it is in this sense that the subject is understood to be lower than the Other. The Other is privileged above the self, whose self-centeredness is reversed as a result of the encounter. Levinas calls this event 'the first given of moral consciousness', and points out that it is not an invention of a philosopher.¹⁸⁵ Levinas is not setting out a normative ethical approach but describing the conditions that render morality possible at all. The encounter with the Other is not a basis for a universal ethics, as this would overlook the fact that it is 'me' who is confronted and must respond, and not a universalisable subject

¹⁸³ Ibid. In *Ideas I*, Husserl says that 'the meaning of Being' (*Sinn des Seins*) in our everyday 'talk of Being' (*Seinsrede*) in the transcendental reduction is completely turned around and reversed too, from the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological-idealist attitude. In this regard, Levinas's 'transcendental-ethical-phenomenological reduction' is comparable to Husserl's, but it is also, like Husserl's, an act of its own kind (*actus sui generis*), and hence incomparable to Husserl's transcendental reduction to the freedom of one's own actual intentional consciousness.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

or transcendental I.¹⁸⁶ The face does not appeal to reason, nor does it offer the subject arguments which the subject can deliberate over and finally arrive at a choice. The face is prior to such reasoning and affects the self at the level of embodied sensibility.

Levinas moves on to show how the ethical relation is a primary and foundational relation and not ‘grafted on’ to an earlier cognitive engagement with the world, ‘it is a foundation and not a superstructure’.¹⁸⁷ In saying this, however, Levinas does not want the reader to deduce from this the conclusion that this ethical meaning, which comes from outside, is therefore a subjective sentiment or feeling. If this was the case it would be interiority and would not break the confines of the Same. The ethical experience of the face of the Other is an experience with exteriority, that has a structure different from contemplation.¹⁸⁸

§ 3.3.6 FREEDOM OF SPONTANEITY CALLED INTO QUESTION

In the final section of the article Levinas turns to a question that is of most importance for our purposes, it is the question of how the face is outside of the powers of the will, and therefore beyond the freedom of the subject. Levinas asks, ‘[i]s not knowing a face *acquiring* a consciousness of it, and is not to acquire consciousness to adhere *freely*?’¹⁸⁹ If the experience of the Other is not reducible to, nor containable within, the consciousness of the subject, how then are we to make sense of it, and what does it mean for the freedom of the subject? Levinas notes that the view that individual choice and free will is on the final analysis arbitrary is not new to philosophy, and is a position held by many philosophers.¹⁹⁰ However, even within this tradition the ‘elementary stage’ of freedom of choice is seen as subordinate to the power of the subject to submit one’s will to a universal reason.¹⁹¹ Freedom remains as the primary principle, therefore, freedom as such is never placed into question, hence freedom and the Same still dominate.

¹⁸⁶ Critchley makes this point, emphasising that the subject, for Levinas, is *me* and nobody else. ‘Levinas phenomenologically reduces the abstract and universal I to me, to myself as the one who undergoes the demand or the call of the other’. Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p. 66.

¹⁸⁷ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 56.

¹⁸⁸ Levinas is yet to distance himself completely from the use of the term experience to describe the encounter.

¹⁸⁹ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 57.

¹⁹⁰ Levinas does not mention any philosophers in particular, but one could imagine that he is thinking of Classical philosophers such as Kant.

¹⁹¹ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 57.

The very spontaneity of freedom is not put into question — such seems to be the dominant tradition of Western philosophy. Only the limitation of freedom would be tragic or scandalous.¹⁹²

It is not the freedom of choice and freedom of the will, which Levinas seeks a justification for, rather he is questioning the meaning and justification of the existence of the spontaneous free subject, that can either live entirely for itself, which is to live unethically, or, miraculously, can also live for the Other. In this section a subtle question that runs underneath the explicit narrative is the question of how moral conscience is possible at all. The presence of moral conscience in itself calls into question the priority given to freedom and sovereignty as first principles. How do we account for conscience and shame we feel before the face of another in need?

Levinas refers to the social contract tradition, Hobbes in particular, to demonstrate the pride of place freedom is given in modern political theories, as this approach bases the advent of social order on the ‘incontestable right’ and freedom of the subject. In the Hobbesian tradition the individual is viewed as first and foremost free, and concerned primarily with its own survival. As the autonomous individual exists in a world populated with other autonomous individuals, who are caught up in their own struggle for survival, inevitably clashes will occur between these individuals. In order to safeguard survival, and generally improve the quality of life, individuals decide to surrender some of their freedoms in the name of freedom. The limitation of freedom is seen as justified only in as far as it is done in the interest of freedom for self-preservation. What Levinas highlights is that freedom is only limited, but freedom as such is never questioned. In contrast to this, Levinas’s social philosophy ultimately rests on the face-to-face encounter, which is the putting into question the arbitrary and egoist freedom of the self. For Levinas, society did not emerge as an attempt to preserve self-interest and the safety of the self, but to create institutions and conditions that could preserve and safeguard the safety of the multiple Others whom one individual could not attend to all at once. Hence it is a ‘social conscience’ and not a personal self-interested consciousness that is the legitimate basis of a ‘society *as such*’ for Levinas.

¹⁹² Ibid.

§ 3.3.7 SHAME

Through the encounter with the Other the self comes to realise just how arbitrary, unjust and shameful its existence is.¹⁹³ In the face of the Other the self is measured against infinity, and comes up wanting.¹⁹⁴ In this article Levinas introduces ‘shame’ (*honte*) into his description of the response that the self has to the encounter with infinity, the encounter with the Other. ‘Shame’ almost acts as an indicator as to whether or not the face of the Other has been ‘seen’. One knows that they have seen the face of the Other when they are left feeling shameful for their very existence. Simply by living, one is using resources and taking up space that cannot, therefore, be used by another. ‘It is a *shame (honte)* freedom has of itself, discovering itself to be murderous and usurpatory (*usurpatrice*) in its very exercise.’¹⁹⁵ The self’s spontaneous self-centred existence is almost mirrored for them in the face of the Other, and seeing themselves in this light for the first time, they feel ashamed. In this passage Levinas clearly implies that the individual who is confronted by the Other is a ‘freedom’ who becomes ashamed of such freedom because they come to realise that this freedom is ‘murderous and usurpatory’. Given that through the encounter the self comes to be ashamed of its freedom, this would seem to imply that the self was free prior to the encounter. However, the use of term ‘usurpatory’ (*usurpatrice*) implies that this freedom has been wrongfully taken, seized and snatched. There is no justification or value in the self-centred egoistic life that the self has been living. The self has been living as if they were alone in the world, free from any genuine exteriority, as anything foreign is grasped by the self. The fact that this freedom is described as ‘usurpatory’ this still leaves open the question of the justification of this freedom that was wrongfully taken, it also leaves open the question of the origins of this freedom.

Despite stating that through the encounter with the Other freedom comes to know itself as unjust, in the very next passage Levinas moves on to argue that freedom is invested from the outside. Utilising a story about a second century exegete, Levinas argues that spontaneity, synonymous with freedom for Levinas, cannot be justified through recourse to itself. In order for freedom to be justified, the justification must come from the outside. If one was to take freedom as a given, without questioning the

¹⁹³ Levinas borrows a term from Viktor Hugo’s *Hernani* to sum up the existence of the self prior to the encounter with the Other, describing its existence as a “force on the move”. Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁹⁴ ‘For me to feel myself to be unjust I must measure myself against infinity.’ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

origins or meaning of freedom, it could only be murderous and usurpatory, as this freedom could only be for the self and for the fulfilment of the self's needs through consuming the exterior and taking it fully into the self. However, when freedom is understood as given by the Other, and through 'seeing' the Other the self can live for the Other, freedom is justified and can be seen as good. The exterior can remain inconsumable, foreign, and other.

Existence is not condemned to freedom, but judged and invested as a freedom (*mais jugée et investie comme liberté*). Freedom could not present itself all naked. This investiture of freedom (*investiture de la liberté*) constitutes moral life itself, which is through and through a heteronomy.¹⁹⁶

The use of the term 'investiture of freedom' implies that freedom comes to the self through a shameful encounter with exteriority, with the Other. 'Investiture', from the Latin term *investire*, directly translated as to robe or to dress, is formally used to describe the act of bestowing a position. As Levinas uses this term in this context we can take from this that the Other bestows freedom on the self.

As it seems to be the case that Levinas is arguing that freedom is bestowed on the self from the outside, how are we to understand Levinas's simultaneous position that through the encounter the self comes to see its freedom as unjust, a freedom that without the investiture of the other would be arbitrary and egoistical. Although the above passage implies that the self only becomes free when the Other invests the self as a freedom, Levinas describes freedom as becoming good through the encounter and this can seem to complicate any attempt to understand whether or not the self is said to be free prior to the encounter. How can freedom, which is only invested through the encounter, become good in that very encounter, if it did not exist before hand? Helpfully, Levinas moves on to explain that freedom putting itself into question is an 'infinite' movement, which is never complete. It is not a once off occurrence that transforms unethical egoistic freedom into ethical freedom.

The structure of the free will becoming *goodness* is not like the glorious and self-sufficient spontaneity of the I and of happiness, which would be the ultimate movement of being; it is, as it were, its converse. The life of freedom discovering itself to be unjust, the life of freedom in heteronomy, consists in an *infinite* movement of freedom *putting itself ever more into question*. This is how the very depth of inwardness is hollowed out.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., my emphasis.

Moral life is a continual movement whereby the self constantly questions whether or not they are good enough. In Levinas's later writings it becomes clear that for Levinas one's responsibility towards the Other is never fulfilled. The most moral among us will always feel as though they have failed the Other, no matter what they do. They will always know that more could have been done for the Other, and so, they will never measure up against their own judgment. One can never be rid of their shame as they can never fulfil their responsibility. Hence, to sum up this position, Levinas will often reference Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, '[e]ach of us is guilty [responsible] before everyone for everyone, and I more [responsible] than the others'.¹⁹⁸ The seeds of this later position are evident in this article, 'infinite movement of freedom putting itself ever more into question'. The putting into question the naive right of my freedom is never a completed task. This is a continual movement. This passage also helps us to further understand Levinas's claim that the encounter with the Other both invests the self with freedom and places this freedom into question, and by doing so makes the structure of the free will good. Coming to be ashamed of one's freedom does not have to imply that one was free before encountering the Other. One will always be ashamed of their freedom and their failure towards the Other. The self comes to know that their spontaneous existence is arbitrary, if it is not for the Other.

§ 3.3.8 CONSCIENCE PRECEDES FREEDOM

In an attempt to further illustrate how moral conscience can never be satisfied, and one's responsibility towards the Other can never be fulfilled, Levinas returns to his term desire. Although Levinas discussed desire and need in *Existence and Existents*, the developed understanding of desire used in his later work begins to emerge here. Desire is linked with infinity and contrasted with 'need', as the hallmark of a desire is that it can never be satisfied. The relationship with the Other has such a structure. This also further explains one aspect of why Levinas describes the Other as higher than the self. The Other is a desire that will remain beyond the self. The Other opens up a dimension of height, and a goodness that eludes the grasp of the self. A lack that can never be filled is introduced to the self-reliant subject. Not only does desire convey the infinite depths of moral conscience, but it also demonstrates that it is a relationship more

¹⁹⁸ Levinas will come to make this reference numerous times in his later work, for example, see, Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 146.

fundamental than knowledge, and cannot be described through theory and concepts. This ever increasing demand that is placed on the self and can never be fulfilled opens up a space within the self, an inwardness, 'the systole of consciousness as such'.¹⁹⁹ Levinas is not describing a reorientation of consciousness, or a particular variation of consciousness that is produced as a result of the encounter with the Other. Rather, he is describing an event more primal and more fundamental than even consciousness itself. The encounter with the Other occurs prior to freedom and prior to the subject's ability to conceptualise experiences and be reflective and critical.

Ethical consciousness itself is not invoked in this exposition as a 'particularly recommendable' variety of consciousness, but as the concrete form of a movement *more fundamental than freedom*, the idea of infinity. It is the concrete form of what *precedes freedom*, but does not lead us back to violence, the confusion of what is separated, necessity, or fatality.²⁰⁰

This movement more fundamental than freedom, which opens up the self to an excessive exteriority and an excess of meaning that cannot be contained, is ethics. As Peperzak succinctly puts it,

[t]hus ethics cannot be understood as a secondary discipline based on a theoretical philosophy, an ontology, or epistemology that would precede any command or normativity. The ethical relation is not a 'superstructure' but rather the foundation of all knowledge, and the analysis of this relation constitutes a 'first philosophy'.²⁰¹

The solitary free ego is, in some respects, an intellectual abstraction. The very beginning of one's existence occurs inside the other. To a greater or lesser extent one's life is always dependent on others. The intellectual history of the West has perhaps forgotten and overlooked that primal fact.²⁰² It is this fundamental foundational aspect of what it is to be human that Levinas is examining. One is not alone.

This reading is further affirmed in the next paragraph where Levinas argues that what he is describing is outside of the sphere of 'proof' precisely because it is prior to freedom and critical consciousness. '[T]he situation in which the free will is invested precedes proof'.²⁰³ Proof can only be demonstrated to a free will who can understand

¹⁹⁹ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 58.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., my emphasis.

²⁰¹ Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 65.

²⁰² One could make the case that this is linked to patriarchy, and the domination of masculine thinking throughout the intellectual history of the West. Men dominated this sphere and women were predominantly confined to caring work, such as nurturing. Also, biologically women exclusively had the experience of physically bearing another within their body and, after birth, having the other dependent on them. This gives rise to a whole other experience of otherness and interdependency.

²⁰³ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 58.

that proof, and hence takes place at the level of a critical free consciousness. The Other, however, precedes this level of consciousness. The individual does not make a controlled decision to move out of their solipsistic world and toward the Other in an approach of their making and choosing. For this would be an instance of the freedom of the 'I', the dominating ego, striving to control and possess the Other by seeing it as an object that the I can know and possess. It is the Other who shocks the self prior to cognition, which for Levinas is linked to freedom and the subject's ability to know, and hence the Other disturbs the self prior to freedom. Interruption of the same by the Other is outside of the paradigms of both knowledge and proof as it occurs prior to this weighing up, prior to reflective consciousness. It can never be a question of proof, as Levinas phrases it,

proof already presupposes the movement and adherence of a free will, a certainty. Thus the situation in which the free will is invested precedes proof. For every certainty is the work of a solitary freedom.²⁰⁴

If autonomy is deemed to be prior to the encounter with the Other, the Other can only ever be a moment of the life of the Same. If the ego is said to constitute the Other, then the Same can never be taken by surprise and judged by an exteriority that remains exterior. If the autonomous subject is said to come first then freedom could only ever be murderous and usurpatory, freedom could never be justified, never be 'good'. Levinas avoids this problem by making sure to stress that the Other is not a phenomenon that the self encounters, constitutes and bestows a meaning on. The Other is a moment of excessive exteriority that brings meaning from the outside.

No movement of freedom could appropriate a face to itself or seem to 'constitute' it. The face has already been there when it was anticipated or constituted; it collaborated in that work, it spoke.²⁰⁵

The Other is outside of all concepts and beyond comprehension. This, however, does not have to result in a negative analysis, whereby the ego is said to fail in its attempts to comprehend. This deficiency is seen as positive, as the lack creates a space for conscience and desire.²⁰⁶ Conscience precedes freedom and is inaugurated from the

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁰⁶ Returning to his critique of love in 'The Ego and the Totality', Levinas points out that desire for the Other is not sentimental like love, but is morality. He also briefly introduces God into the analysis, stating, 'God commands only through the men for whom one must act.' Implying that God is in some way operative in the encounter, and is met in the face of the Other. Ibid.

outside. It is a primordial mode of the self prior to what has been traditionally considered to be most fundamental, freedom.

Then if the essence of philosophy consists in going back from all certainties toward a principle, if it lives from critique, the face of the other would be the starting point of philosophy.²⁰⁷

Consciousness, as the presence of the self to the self, could be said to be explained without recourse to anything else. The depths of conscience, however, felt as shame for one's existence in the face of the Other, can only stem from the encounter with the Other.

Levinas is not describing a symmetrical meeting of equals, who freely choose to converse with one another. Morality is more rigorous and more demanding than that. One is responsible for the Other and guilty before them, but one has no right to expect the Other to be equally responsible for them. It is an asymmetrical relationship whereby the self's freedom is placed into question and judged by the Other, leaving the self ashamed. In the last sentence of the article Levinas describes the Other as having a position of height in relation to the self. 'Height' is used to convey to the reader that this encounter is a metaphysical ethical encounter, and not an empirical fact whereby two human beings stand in front of one another. The ethical meaning transcends the ontological fact. The Other is said to be higher than the self, for, exposed to the infinite through the face of the Other, the self comes to glimpse 'the ideal' and is judged against it.²⁰⁸ It is the self who is taken by surprise and has no choice in responding to the Other, even if the response is to ignore their gaze. No one can take the place of the 'I', who alone is called to respond.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ The dimension of height further exposes the religious connotations contained in Levinas's descriptions of the encounter, hinted at in this article. The explicit religious dimensions of this important point will become more apparent in the later writings, evident in such themes as the notion of the trace, *diaconate* and *illeity*. 'The God who passed is not the model of which the face would be an image. To be in the image of God does not mean to be an icon of God, but to find oneself in his trace. The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality maintains all the infinity of his absence, which is in the personal order itself. He shows himself only by his trace, as is said in Exodus 33. To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of *illeity*.' See, Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other' (1963), trans. by A. Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 345- 59 (p. 359).

§ 3.3.9 DISSYMMETRY²¹⁰

Despite the significant influence of the dialogical tradition on Levinas, most notably Buber, the lack of symmetry in Levinas's description of the encounter with the Other is an obvious point of departure between them.²¹¹ Levinas emphasizes this very point in his article, 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge', written shortly after 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity'.²¹² After a mostly endorsing description of Buber's philosophy, through which one can see many similarities between the two thinkers, in the final section of the article Levinas raises a few objections. Levinas's main objection rests on this issue of asymmetry. Levinas believes that the reciprocity maintained within Buber's description dilutes the ethical meaning of the interhuman encounter. 'Doesn't the ethical begin when the *I* perceives the *Thou* as higher than itself?'²¹³

Levinas goes to explain why it is that he maintains that the description of the interhuman relation between two should not be described as reciprocal. He argues that Buber's account of the encounter is formalistic and, overlooks the unique responsibility of the 'I' confronted by the 'Thou', and the crucial perspective of that of the 'I' confronted and spoken to. From an observed third person perspective, the two individuals standing face to face are seen as interchangeable, as from the outside each appears to be equal to the other. However, the originality of Buber's position comes from the fact that the 'I-Thou' cannot be known from the outside but must be lived by the particular individuals. When this approach is truly honored, and one describes the phenomena from the perspective of the 'I', Levinas maintains that it is then that this formalism breaks down, and the dissymmetry is revealed. In the very moment when the I is spoken to by the Thou the I is uniquely singular and irreplaceable, and placed in a position of responsibility. Levinas acknowledges that this dimension of 'responsibility' is present in Buber's description, as dialogue rests on this responsibility, 'only a being

²¹⁰ Levinas uses this term in a correspondence with Martin Buber concerning this article, 'the relation is thus *essentially* dissymmetrical'. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Dialogue with Martin Buber', trans. by Michael B. Smith, in *Proper Names*, ed. by Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 36-39 (p. 38).

²¹¹ For a more in depth analysis of the relation between the work of Buber and that of Levinas, see, Robert Bernasconi, 'Failure of Communication' as a Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue between Buber and Levinas', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, pp. 100-35.

²¹² 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge' was written in 1958 and was first published in German in 1963, in English in 1967, and finally in French in 1976.

²¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge', in *Proper Names*, pp. 17-35 (p. 32).

responsible for another can be in dialogue with that other'.²¹⁴ Levinas here refers to the etymological roots of the term, that one is answerable to another and that in dialogue one cannot but respond to the address of the Thou. Responsibility is not as a result of some tragic fate that befalls the I; it is, rather, the simple fact that the I addressed by a Thou must respond.²¹⁵ What Levinas believes to be absent in Buber's account is the dimension of 'height' which, for Levinas, captures the ethical significance of the encounter.

In the ethics in which the other is at once higher and poorer than I, the *I* is distinguished from the *Thou*, not by any sort of 'attributes', but by the dimension of height, which breaks with Buber's formalism. The primacy of the other, and his nakedness and destitution, do not qualify the purely formal relation with its otherness: they already qualify this otherness itself.²¹⁶

For Levinas, the Other is both paradoxically poorer, destitute and in need, and simultaneously higher than the 'I'. This is not an attempt by Levinas to deduce a universal norm for behavior, nor a value statement about individuals. Rather, he sees himself as being true to the description of an encounter from the first person perspective of the one who is disrupted. The 'I' who is disturbed must answer for themselves before the Other who's very otherness puts their right to be into question and asks the 'I' to justify itself. This disruption, for Levinas, occurs in a concrete real world situation that elicits a response of care for the Other, and it is not a description of a closed mutual society of two in the form of friendship. Levinas argues that for Buber the relation culminates in a 'spiritual friendship'.²¹⁷

In the article Levinas calls on Heidegger's notion of *Fürsorge* (care given to others) to support his criticism of what he terms the 'spiritual friendship' that characterises, for Levinas, Buber's description of the *I-Thou* relation. Levinas maintains that *fürsorge* does more justice to the dimension of height in the relation, and to addressing of the real needs of the Other such as food and shelter, than Buber's spiritual friendship.²¹⁸ A separate criticism that Levinas raises against Buber's account has added significance for our current purposes. Levinas is in agreement with Buber that

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25. Thus, in Kantian parlance, this (responsibility to and before and for the other) is the 'transcendental condition' of dialogue.

²¹⁵ 'The impossibility of remaining a spectator does not come from a practical and tragic involvement in a situation not of my choosing: it is not an unhappy fate, but the necessity of responding to the word.' Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²¹⁸ 'We may well ask ourselves whether clothing the naked and feeding the hungry are not the true and concrete access to the otherness of the other person — more authentic than the ether of friendship.' Ibid., p. 33.

the I- Thou relation brings a between (*Zwischen*) that separates the self from the world, and gives rise to intentional consciousness by creating a space for critical reflection and therefore for the ego. However, Levinas questions whether Buber's description is radical enough to account for the separation and independence of the *I*.

Though it is not said here, one can see how this point relates back to Levinas's position that the encounter with the Other precedes the freedom of the 'I'. The encounter ruptures the solipsistic world of the self, introducing a separateness between the ego and the world, and by subjecting the self the Other inaugurates the subjectivity of the 'I'. This is the very birth of philosophy, the beginning of the subject's independence, and the birth of critical consciousness. 'Perhaps philosophy is defined by a break with participation in totality; and that is why it is theory, i.e. critique.'²¹⁹ The origins of which, Levinas maintains, Buber's position cannot quite account for.

Buber, who articulated with such penetration the Relation and the distancing that makes it [theoretical knowledge] possible, did not take separation seriously. Man is not just the category of distance and meeting, he is also a separate being. He accomplishes that isolation in a process of subjectification that is not just the recoil from the word *Thou*. Buber does not give expression to the movement, distinct from distancing and the relation, in which the *I* emerges from the self. It is impossible for man to forget his metamorphosis of subjectivity.²²⁰

The above passage also sheds additional light on our search for clarification around the question of freedom in Levinas's work, as it supports our interpretation of Levinas's early work, relating specifically to the split subjectivity of the self. The final sentence states that it is through this relation that the '*I* emerges from the self'. When the Other interrupts the self-centered narcissistic world of the self, the self is confronted by an otherness that cannot be contained by the self. This separateness creates a between, a vital distance from within which the 'I' can emerge from the self. With the emergence of critical consciousness comes freedom, hence the Other precedes the freedom of the 'I'.

Returning now to the final lines of 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', we see that for Levinas the encounter not only ruptures the narcissistic world of the self but it also places the self into question and through its very otherness asks the self to justify itself. Levinas adds an important extra dimension to Buber's general position, as not only does the encounter with the Other give rise to the subject, critical consciousness,

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

and hence philosophy, but this only occurs because it is an ethical metaphysical encounter that introduces goodness. In order for the self to be truly shaken from the Same it must be judged by the infinite that is higher than the self, and brought to feel ashamed. For Levinas, the very existence of moral conscience is testament of this dimension to the encounter that is absent in Buber's description. Describing the event as an equal and reciprocal dialogue does not convey the gravity of the encounter and the moral significance.

Is not moral conscience the critique of and the principle of the presence of self to self? Then if the essence of philosophy consists in going back from all certainties toward a principle, if it lives from critique, the face of the other would be the starting point of philosophy.²²¹

Through this encounter not only is the freedom of 'critique' invested, but it is simultaneously given a purpose and made good. As Peperzak notes: 'It [the subordination of freedom to the law of the Other] does not violate free will but rather gives it direction in giving it a task and a meaning'.²²² Levinas's position is even more radical than this quote from Peperzak suggests. This event is the very beginning of philosophy for Levinas, as without it the self would never call itself into question and therefore, would lack critical consciousness. Therefore, Levinas could be said to present a post-Kantian critique of Kant's critique.

§ 3.4 'THE RUIN OF REPRESENTATION' (1959)²²³ AND 'INTENTIONALITY AND METAPHYSICS' (1959)

'The Ruin of Representation' is an important article for the development of Levinas's thinking in this period, particularly on the issue of his relationship to the work of Husserl.²²⁴ Levinas returns to the latent potential in Husserl's phenomenology, not exploited by Husserl, for opening up the unexplored consequences of the passive dimension to intentional consciousness, first identified by Levinas in his 'The Work of Edmund Husserl'. As we saw in chapter one, this opens the way for Levinas to present a description of subjectivity whereby the subject, prior to actively bestowing meaning, passively receives meaning from the outside. Crucially, Levinas will show that this

²²¹ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 59.

²²² Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 71.

²²³ 'La ruine de la représentation' was first published in *Edmund Husserl 1859-1959* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), pp. 73-85. Reprinted in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*.

²²⁴ For a detailed reading of Levinas's relationship to the work of Husserl within this article, particularly on the issue of sense and sensibility, see, Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity*, pp. 67-81.

sense bestowal from the outside, through sensibility, is prior to the subject's active constitution of the world. Husserl's description of the structures of consciousness reveals that intentionality is embedded in an earlier transcendental horizon of sense that conditions intentionality.²²⁵ This article, therefore, is an important step in Levinas's thinking on freedom *through* Husserl, as his reading of Husserl enables him to philosophically defend, through phenomenological description, an excessive moment of meaning at the foundation of subjectivity. Therefore, it is a crucial step in Levinas's attempt to show that freedom is not foundational and unquestionable, but rests on a prior moment, on an essential openness to an alterity that cannot be fully constituted or known without remainder. At the end of the article Levinas comes to call this an *ethical Sinngebung*. This understanding of subjectivity presents a challenge to the philosophical tradition that prioritises the same at the expense of the other. This article marks a crucial step on Levinas's philosophical journey, but, as his use of the term *Sinngebung* demonstrates, at this stage of his work Levinas is still maintaining ties that he will later come to sever. It is nonetheless an *immanent critique* of Husserl's philosophical starting-point.

§ 3.4.1 LIFE'S PRESENT IS AN UNSUSPECTED ABSTRACTION

In order to place his own introduction to phenomenology into historical context, Levinas introduces 'The Ruin of Representation' by briefly comparing his personal experiences of both Husserl and Heidegger, and the extent to which he found them to embody their respective philosophies. Levinas then moves on to the standard description of phenomenology as theory of intentionality, and begins by unpacking what exactly this statement means. Obviously intentionality rules out sensationalism, however, Levinas points out, that the sensible plays an important role in phenomenology because 'intentionality rehabilitates the sensible'.²²⁶ Likewise, it is undeniable that the description of phenomenology as intentionality indicates a necessary

²²⁵ As was pointed out in chapter one, this particular reading of Husserl is very close to that of representatives of the Munich-Göttingen group, some of Husserl's earliest followers. This shows that in Husserl's earlier work at least this potential interpretation must have been evident. Despite this, none of these followers of Husserl's early phenomenology saw in this description of intentionality the ethical significance that Levinas attributes to it, at least not in the sense that Levinas understands ethics. (It could be argued that Stein's *On the problem of Empathy* is broadly concerned with ethics, given the question that Stein focuses on and the fact that she argues that persons have intrinsic value. See, Ch. I, n. 232 and n. 234.

²²⁶ Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 111-21 (p. 112).

correlation between the subject and object. However, this is by no means unique to phenomenology and this revelation alone would not have set his idea of phenomenology apart from certain other philosophies that have come before. If it was simply the case that through representation the subject ‘snatched’ permanent essences from every horizon, and by doing so could be called self-sufficient, then we would be left with an abstract theory of knowledge. Within the natural attitude, life’s present does indeed seem to afford the subject such a complete representation; this, however, is by no means the full picture.

Life’s present is precisely an unsuspected but primordial form of abstraction, in which beings behave *as if* this were their beginning. Re-presentation deals with beings *as if* they were entirely self-supporting, *as if* they were substances.²²⁷

Levinas’s use of ‘as if’ indicates to the reader that this is not an accurate account of the way that the human being exists in relation to the world and to each other, even though it appears that way to consciousness. Representation gives the impression that the subject is the origin of meaning. Through representation the initial passive moment of sense, which conditions representation, is not ‘known’ or ‘experienced’ by the subject and hence is left out of the representation.²²⁸ A positive, if unethical (in Levinas’s sense), attribute of representation is that the subject is not bombarded with potentially infinite stimulation, and ‘triumphs over the vertigo of the infinite’.²²⁹ However, certain implicit content goes overlooked, leaving only representation and so beings behave *as if* this were their beginning.

Levinas reiterates this point in another article published in the same year, ‘Reflections on the Phenomenological Technique’.²³⁰ In that article, Levinas turns to Husserl’s *Urimpression* to further describe the activity and passivity of consciousness and to explain how representation, and the constitution of an object, can be seen to be an abstraction of life’s present. ‘*To intend the object, to represent it to oneself, is already to forget the being of its truth.*’²³¹ Levinas tells the reader that the *Urimpression* [primal impression] ‘is the *here and now* par excellence’, in which the ‘body subject’ as

²²⁷ Ibid., my emphasis.

²²⁸ ‘It [representation] has the power to disinterest itself — be it only for an instant, the instant of representation — from the conditions of these beings.’ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ ‘Réflexions sur la ‘technique’ phénoménologique’ was first published in *Husserl* (Paris: Minuit, 1959), pp. 95-107.

²³¹ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Phenomenological ‘Technique’’, p. 94.

primarily a sensate subject is both passive and active.²³² Levinas stresses the importance of sensibility and describes it as a kind of ‘intentionality’, explaining that sensibility has a signification and wisdom. ‘The senses make sense’.²³³ Representation can overlook this indispensable place of the body, demonstrated by the marginal place that the body has occupied in not only the history of philosophical thought but also in Husserl’s own phenomenology.

Returning to the ‘The Ruin of Representation’, one of the most favourable aspects of phenomenology, for Levinas, is precisely the possibility to look beyond the ‘immediate’, what for consciousness appears to be *as if* that is all there is. These overlooked horizons, such as the crucial place of sensibility, can be revisited. The phenomenological study of such areas, previously unexplored by philosophy, can prove to be more objective than the ‘immediate’ that is constituted by consciousness.

It is as if the fundamental ontological event, already lost in a grasped or reflected object, were more objective than objectivity — a transcendental movement. The renewal of the very concept of the *transcendental* that recourse to the term ‘constitution’ may obfuscate, appears to us to be an essential contribution of phenomenology.²³⁴

The term ‘constitution’ can give the false impression that when the subject grasps the object they therefore come to know it in its entirety and without remainder. Levinas views the renewal of the concept of the transcendental as a pivotal contribution to philosophy by phenomenology, as it opens up the possibility of critiquing the dominance of the same, and equips philosophy with the way out of Idealism. Constitution can be said to obscure this important point as with constitution the emphasis is on the meaning bestowing powers of the subject. Whereas, with the concept of the transcendental, one is reminded that the fundamental ontological event does not occur at the level of the ego, the sphere of the same. The subject’s intentional relationship with the object is situated in and conditioned by an exteriority that escapes the totalizing gaze. Hence Levinas will go on to claim, with reference to Husserl’s own work, that sensibility is the primary horizon. This description of the structures of consciousness challenges philosophy understood as the ‘absorption of every “Other” by the “Same”’.²³⁵

²³² Ibid., p. 99.

²³³ Ibid., p. 98.

²³⁴ Levinas, ‘The Ruin of Representation’, p. 113.

²³⁵ Ibid.

§ 3.4.2 CONSCIOUSNESS SEES WITHOUT SEEING

Levinas goes on to argue that despite the tendency towards transcendental idealism in Husserl's philosophy, transcendence is the great theme of Husserl's work. The claim that an object can be represented in itself to consciousness could be problematic, as it seems to support solipsism. However, the intentionality of consciousness overcomes the threat of solipsism as intentionality is understood as a relation with what is exterior, 'the presence of the subject to transcendent things is the very definition of consciousness'.²³⁶ Although intentionality reveals a subject object correlation, and so points to the subject's presence to things, Husserl's description of intentionality goes further, as intentionality also gives a 'new meaning' to this presence.²³⁷ The immediate thought, however, does not grasp every content within the horizon of sensation, and gives meaning to only that which thought intentionally grasps, hence, an abstraction, and as such, only a misunderstanding. Intentionality focuses in on a particular phenomenon and by doing so overlooks the many other implicit contents.

[I]t is because the intention in its 'bursting forth toward the object' is also an ignorance and a failure to recognize the meaning of that object, since it is a forgetting of everything that intention only contains implicitly and that consciousness sees without seeing.²³⁸

Through intentional analysis we can seek to recover elements of the implicit content that is not *thought* in the subject's immediate presence to things but nonetheless *there* (given).

In support of his point Levinas refers to §20 of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* 'The peculiar intentional analysis',

everywhere its [intentional analysis] peculiar attainment (as 'intentional') is an uncovering of the *potentialities 'implicit'* in actualities of consciousness — an uncovering that brings about, on the noematic side, an 'explication' or 'unfolding', a 'becoming distinct' and perhaps a 'clearing' of what is consciously meant (the objective sense).²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 114. Husserl argues in his reduction that a thing, because it is spatial in essence, can never form a part of consciousness. Later on he demonstrates that the way a thing, in its very existence, shows itself to consciousness is on the basis of the actual harmony of one's actual intentional consciousness. Hence his famous conclusion that though consciousness does not depend upon the thing to exist, the thing depends upon one's own actual consciousness. While granting Husserl's analysis of the way the thing is *known* to consciousness, Levinas notes a prior being of the thing, not known, that is left outside of Husserl's own phenomenological meditations. Thus he can accept Husserl's particular version of post-Kantian transcendental idealism without following him down that road to transcendental idealism.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 46.

Levinas takes from this that these implicit potentialities contained within the explicit relation to the object are derived from other horizons and contain implicit meaning. It is not the case that these implicit meanings were explicit in the subject's immediate relation to the object, and were then forgotten, as 'forgotten' implies that they were initially 'known'. This implicit content remains hidden in the immediate relation. Consciousness arrived after the event and so cannot be expected to 'remember' that for which it was not present for. The natural attitude will never discover these other horizons no matter how scrupulously one looks.²⁴⁰

Presence to things implies another presence that is unaware of itself, *other horizons* correlative to these implicit intentions, which the most attentive and scrupulous consideration of the given object in the naive attitude could not discover.²⁴¹

Returning to Husserl, Levinas points out that in paragraph §20 Husserl goes on to argue that not only is every cogito a meaning of the thing it intends, but there is always a more than to the meaning that is explicitly meant.

As a consciousness, every cogito is indeed (in the broadest sense) a meaning of its meant (*Meinung seines Gemeinten*), but that, at any moment, this something meant (*dieses Vermeinte*) is more than what is meant at that moment 'explicitly' [...]. This *intending-beyond-itself* [*exceeding of the intention in the intention itself*], which is implicit in any consciousness, must be considered an essential moment of it.²⁴²

There is an excess of meaning contained in the immediate explicit thought, and so in the immediate the subject only partially grasps the meaning and overlooks many other potential meanings implicitly contained in the thought.

In Levinas's reading of Husserl, the subject is thought to be present to transcendent things, and, as transcendent, these things are situated within wider

²⁴⁰ Drabinski calls our attention to § 45 of Husserl's *Ideas I*, to outline further the potential source, in Husserl's work, of Levinas's reading. The implicit in thought is what is overlooked in the immediate representation, in the natural attitude, that can be retrieved through intentional analyses: 'the form of *'reflection,'* which has the remarkable property that what is seized upon perceptually in reflection is characterised fundamentally not only as something which exists and endures while it is being regarded perceptually but also as something which *already existed before* this regard was turned to it. [...] This signifies, then, that in the specific case of intensive mental processes not only are they consciousness of something and present as consciousness of something when they themselves are the Objects of a reflecting consciousness, but also that they are there already as a 'background' when they are not reflected on and thus of essential necessity are *'ready to be perceived'* in a sense which is, in the first place, analogous to the one in which unnoticed physical things in our external field of regard are ready to be perceived.' Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 98-99.

²⁴¹ Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation', p. 115, my emphasis.

²⁴² Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 46.

horizons, horizons that intentionality is not explicitly aware of. Levinas characterises what he terms '[t]he classical conception' of the relationship between subject and object as 'entirely conscious', believing that within this tradition the object is understood to be exactly what the subject thinks it to be in that present moment.²⁴³ Levinas's point here is that, in contrast to his reading of Husserl's phenomenology whereby intentionality thinks infinitely more than that which it is aware of, in his understanding of the 'classical conception' of the subject-object relation there is nothing left unthought, no excess of meaning that is implicitly hidden to immediate consciousness. In describing intentionality as having 'innumerable horizons' that do not form part of the object that is thought, but are nevertheless present implicitly in thought, this 'classical' epistemological approach is challenged.

By contrast [to this tradition], intentionality bears within itself the innumerable horizons of its implications and thinks of infinitely more 'things' than of the object upon which it is fixed [...]. Thus thought is no longer either a pure present or a pure representation.²⁴⁴

Thought is no longer conceived as a pure present or a pure representation, as there is always a more than what is explicitly meant in that moment, thought thinks more than it can think. Levinas acknowledges that this can be seen as either a monstrosity or a marvel, as this description questions the power of the subject to know the object completely. Unsurprisingly, Levinas's position is that it is a marvel, as through intentional analysis we can study these 'forgotten landscapes', and most importantly, question the autonomy and complete sovereignty of the self, and philosophically justify meaning from the outside. The freedom of representation can come to be justified. Levinas compares this identification of the presence of innumerable horizons to the psychological insight into the unconscious. However, in contrast to this, the phenomenological insight does not lead to a new psychology but to a new ontology. 'A new ontology begins: being is posited not only as correlative to a thought, but as already founding the very thought that nonetheless constitutes it.'²⁴⁵ Being is shown to come before thought. With the psychological insight into the unconscious, unknown depths

²⁴³ Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation', p. 115. Not untypical for Levinas, he does not give an example of who for him might be seen to typify this 'classical conception', and so this particular premise goes unsupported.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

within the Same are revealed, but the dominance of the Same is left intact.²⁴⁶ Levinas reveals the primary transcendence that conditions the 'I' and thus reveals the false abstraction that is the idea of the primacy of the Same.

The article sheds additional light on why Levinas returned to the work of Husserl in favour of that of Heidegger. Despite the profound influence of Heidegger, it is Husserl whom Levinas credits in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* as making the work possible.²⁴⁷ In what could only be read as an allusion to Heidegger, in 'The Ruin of Representation', Levinas states that Husserl's approach compromises 'the sovereignty of representation' more radically than the '[Heideggerian] affirmation of an active engagement in the world prior to contemplation'.²⁴⁸ Husserl's approach puts into question the sovereignty of representation by examining the very 'structures of pure logic', independent of any feeling or the will. Hence, representation is unsettled not by an irrationalism, but through a description of the structures of consciousness itself. Husserl reveals that there are implicit implications to thought that are operative in and on thought itself, even though immediate thought overlooks these implications and is blind to them prior to reflection. By carrying out the phenomenological reduction, and intentional analyses, we can return to the sources of representation, transcendental sensual horizons. What Levinas has discovered in Husserl's description of intentionality provides him with a vital philosophical component of his argument against the primacy of the Same and the unquestioned sovereignty of the self, and a way to put the freedom of representation and critical consciousness into question.

The idea of a necessary implication that is absolutely imperceptible to the subject directed on the object, only discovered *after the fact (qu'après coup)* upon reflection, thus not produced in the present, that is, produced *unbeknownst*

²⁴⁶ Levinas's point here would seem to imply a critique of lack of 'ethics' in psychoanalysis. Levinas refers to psychoanalysis on a number of occasions throughout his work, and his position is not always unified. This is also true of his position in this decade of his work. In 'The Ego and Totality' Levinas writes that psychoanalysis can be seen to call the primacy of the *cogito* into question, and given Levinas's own approach to philosophy this would seem to be a positive attribute. 'It is not only speech that psychoanalysis and history demolish in this way; in reality they end up with the destruction of the *I*, which identifies itself from within. [...] Psychoanalysis casts a basic suspicion on the most unimpeachable testimony of self-consciousness.' Levinas, 'The Ego and Totality', p. 34. His point of criticism that psychoanalysis also brings a distrust of language and communication, as we can no longer view individuals as meaning what they say, is reiterated in an 1957 article: 'Not only Marxism, but the whole of sociology and psychoanalysis bear witness to a language whose principal feature lies not in what words teach us, but in what they hide from us. We have a closed language, and a civilisation composed of aphasiacs.' Levinas, 'Freedom of Speech', in *Difficult Freedom*, p. 207. For more on Levinas's complex relationship with psychoanalysis, see, Critchley, *Ethics–Politics–Subjectivity*. At various stages throughout the text Critchley examines the presence of psychoanalysis, and psychoanalytic themes, in Levinas's work.

²⁴⁷ 'Husserlian phenomenology has made possible this passage from ethics to metaphysical exteriority.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 29.

²⁴⁸ Levinas, 'The Ruin of Representation', p. 116.

to me, puts an end to the ideal of representation and the subject's sovereignty, as well as to the idealism according to which nothing could enter into me surreptitiously (*subrepticement*).²⁴⁹

Although not dealt with by Levinas in this article, one can see how this reading of Husserl opens the way for Levinas to philosophically justify his position that the encounter with the Other occurs prior to the freedom of the subject, is not reducible to the powers of the subject, and takes the subject by surprise. It is a meaning from the outside that enters the subject 'surreptitiously'. Levinas believes that this description of consciousness, the full implications of which seemed to be lost to Husserl, place the idea of the subject's sovereignty into question. As the pure ego is transcendence in immanence, it is said to be both constituted and constituting.

§ 3.4.3 THE 'FORGOTTEN' HORIZON OF SENSIBILITY

In pointing out that on his reading of Husserl the subject is described as thinking more than one thinks, Levinas is not interpreting Husserl as claiming that there is a deficiency in intentionality itself. If this was the case, this would not challenge thought as beginning within the Same, and would only identify a lack in the subject's ability to think the whole of the world all at once. Such an analysis would result in a limitation of the Same, and an identification of the extent of the powers of the Same, but the 'I' would still be primary. As Levinas says, such a reading would show 'the banality of degrees of consciousness'.²⁵⁰ The implication that Levinas notices is more radical than this. For Levinas, Husserl's description of consciousness, as containing these overlooked horizons, show that the thought that goes towards an object is embedded in the wider context of sensible horizon, and as such is only a partial part of the picture. What is most radical about this position is not that these horizons are overlooked, but that that these horizons support and condition the subject's conscious movement toward the object.

What Husserl illustrates through his concrete analyses is that the thought that goes toward its object envelopes thoughts that open onto noematic horizons, which already *support* the subject in its movement toward the object. Consequently, they bolster it in its work as a subject; *they play a transcendental role*. Sensibility and sensible qualities are not the stuff of which the categorial

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

form or ideal essence is made, but the situation in which the subject already places itself in order to accomplish a categorial intention.²⁵¹

What is most significant for Levinas, and will become even more significant as his work develops further, is that these forgotten horizons of sensibility underpin the subject's intentional relation with the world. The ego is conditioned by these unthought horizons. The self is embedded in transcendental meaning prior to the subject's movement towards the object.

These forgotten conditions of sensibility, what Levinas terms the *situation* of the subject, breaks open the potential areas of study and reflection for philosophy as hermeneutic existential phenomenology, evident through the work of thinkers such as Heidegger. Philosophies of existence are given a new firmer footing. The philosophy of the lived body is also given a new significance, as intentionality is rooted in this incarnate existence, which is overlooked and excluded in objective representation.

Incarnate existence draws its being from those horizons, which, nonetheless, in a certain sense, it constitutes (since it becomes conscious of them) — as if here constituted being conditioned its own constitution.²⁵²

Herein lies a paradox, that Heidegger made great use of, that the subject both constitutes being and is constituted by it. 'The world is not only constituted but also constituting.'²⁵³ For Levinas, the praise for bringing about the possibility of such wide and divergent philosophies goes to Husserl. The subject finds itself both situated in a world and also free to constitute the world and give it meaning. This tension in the work of Husserl, between transcendental idealism on the one hand and engagement in the world on the other, which Levinas reminds us Husserl was often criticised for, is regarded by Levinas as one of Husserl's most important contributions. 'Objects are uprooted from their dull fixity to sparkle in the play of rays that come and go between the giver and the given. In this coming and going man constitutes the world to which he already belongs.'²⁵⁴ Hence, in order to carry out phenomenological analyses one must step outside of the natural attitude and place the question of the existence or nonexistence of objects and the world into parenthesis, or, perhaps more accurately speaking, put into parenthesis the interpretation of the world that absolutizes the mode of being of the world and reifies intentional consciousness. By doing so this 'play' of

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., pp. 117-18.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 118-19.

intentionality is respected. The idea of a fixed object is set aside, as the external object is both constituted and gives rise to the consciousness that constitutes it.

Levinas argues that the privileging of sensuous experience in phenomenology is testament to this ambiguity of constitution. As with sensuous experience the lines between the noesis and noema are blurred. The same is both clearly true of cultural phenomenon, which is both constituted by thought but is also operative in constituting that very thought. Meaning comes to the self from the outside and conditions the very way that the self then engages with the world. The constituting subject and that which is constituted are in some sense mutually (inter)dependent. However, Levinas stresses that they do not complete one another ‘like the pieces of a puzzle’ but ‘condition one another transcendently’.²⁵⁵ The straight forward separation between idealism and realism is left behind, as the relationship between the thinking subject and the world is revealed to be more complicated and interdependent, ‘being is neither inside nor outside thought, but thought itself is *outside itself*’.²⁵⁶ Immediate self-evidence is no guarantee of truth (whatever of certainty). One must phenomenologically reflect back on the experience, as it was experienced, to discover these ‘hidden horizons’, that most crucially for Levinas’s interest, are the ‘transcendental givers of its [the object] meaning’.²⁵⁷ The particular situation also forms a pivotal part of the experience and can change the meaning of that which is constituted. All of these dimensions come together to form the meaning of a given phenomenon, and the phenomenological approach reveals this interconnectedness and the way in which being and knowledge are conditioned. Without the awareness of such conditions thought can fall prey to ‘abstractions, equivocations, and gaps’.²⁵⁸

§ 3.4.4 TOWARDS AN *ETHICAL SINNGEBUNG*

In the final section of the article Levinas explicitly outlines just how radical he believes the potential implications of this new approach to be. Levinas maintains that if this latent possibility, implicitly contained in the work of Husserl, was developed along a particular trajectory, it could perhaps herald the end of an entire philosophical orientation. Contained within Husserlian phenomenology is the seed to overturn the

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 120, my emphasis.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

primacy of the philosophy of the Same, which Levinas argues, has dominated philosophy since the very beginning. ‘Philosophy arose in opposition to opinion, and led to wisdom as the moment of full self-possession in which nothing foreign or other any longer comes to limit the glorious identification of the Same in thought.’²⁵⁹

Only in the remaining two paragraphs of the article does Levinas briefly turn towards the particular way in which these dormant possibilities, in Husserl’s description of the structures of consciousness, can be developed and explored. Unsurprisingly, it is here that Levinas mentions that this analysis reveals that it is ethics that is at the heart of consciousness, and at the foundation of the meaning bestowing thinking subject.²⁶⁰ ‘The condition of truth may be sought in ethics.’²⁶¹ Though, for Levinas, Husserl himself seemed blind to this discovery made by him, and implicitly revealed in and through his work, that does not prevent Levinas from appropriating and developing it in that direction. The relation between the subject and that which is other no longer has to be thought as ‘an intolerable limitation’ of the thinker, nor as ‘absorption of this other’ into an ego, but as an ethical *Sinngebung*.²⁶² For Husserl, *Sinngebung* comes forth from a constituting ego that bestows meaning on the object that is absorbed into the Same. Levinas terms this event an ethical *Sinngebung* as it is an event of meaning, yet it is not complete, there is always a more than that escapes the grasp of the thinking subject, and as such leaves this uncontainable otherness intact. Levinas will come to show that the meaning of the event comes from outside. Intentionality is conditioned by sensibility, conditioned by exteriority, by an alterity that escapes complete representation. It is in Levinas’s first major work *Totality and Infinity* that we will fully see how this analysis makes ethics, as it is understood by Levinas, possible.

§ 3.4.5 ‘INTENTIONALITY AND METAPHYSICS’²⁶³ (1959)

Levinas’s article ‘Intentionality and Metaphysics’, also published in 1959, sheds additional light on Levinas’s reading of Husserl, affirms just how radical Levinas believes this new approach to be, and reveals some of the possibilities for developing

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ In this article there is no mention of the face, and Levinas does not apply this analysis to the human Other.

²⁶¹ Levinas, ‘The Ruin of Representation’, pp. 120-21.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 121.

²⁶³ ‘*Intentionalité et métaphysique*’ was first published in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger*, 149, no. 4, (October-December, 1959), 471-79.

phenomenology thanks to Husserl's description of intentionality. Continuing on from 'The Ruin of Representation', Levinas questions the primacy of objectifying intentionality and, drawing on Husserl's work on kinaesthetic sensations, presents a reading of Husserl that further supports his claim that transcendental intentionality is prior to and founds objectifying intentionality. This self's immediate engagement with exteriority is not that of a thinking subject who encounters exteriority through concepts and representation, even if constitution and representation give this impression. The self's immediate engagement with existence can only ever occur as a sensual body, whose very way of being is conditioned in and by this body. This point alone undermines the primacy of subjectivity understood as self rule through rationality and the will, at the very least, it reveals that the passivity and vulnerability of the position of the embodied self precedes and conditions that subject's conscious engagement with the world.

§ 3.4.6 HUSSERL AND KANT

Returning to his reading of Husserl in 'The Ruin of Representation', Levinas tells us that apart from the movement of consciousness towards an object, there is an earlier movement that is non-objectifying, and founds objectifying intentionality.²⁶⁴ This, Levinas argues, accounts for the possibility of 'infinite' phenomenological investigations, as one can seek to recapture overlooked aspects of this earlier movement, and it also accounts for Husserl's 'untiring distrust' of the naïve attitude that takes the object to be that which is encountered.²⁶⁵ This other movement cannot be termed subjective as it does not remain within the sphere of the subject. In slight contrast to the discussion in 'The Ruin of Representation', here Levinas takes issue with the use of the term horizon to explain this earlier movement. The term horizon or background implies that this non-objectifying intentionality is subordinate to, and merely the transcendental condition for, objectifying intentionality. The use of such terminology undermines the importance of this discovery by Husserl, and overlooks the original and ultimate relation that is transcendental intentionality.

²⁶⁴ '[F]or Husserl the movement of consciousness towards its object conceals another movement' Levinas, 'Intentionality and Metaphysics', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 122-29 (p. 122).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

In fact, the transcendental movement Husserl discovers in intentionality, concealed by the naïve vision of the object, accomplishes metaphysical, ontologically irreducible, original or ultimate relations.²⁶⁶

These original relations cannot be understood in the same manner as one understands the relation between the subject and the object, nor are they subject to the same logic, however, that does not mean that they are not ‘true’ or meaningful. They ‘belong to the metaphysics of the transcendent’.²⁶⁷

In order to further explain the importance of the transcendental movement of intentionality, and how it breaks up the simple subject-object correlation, Levinas moves on to compare Husserl and Kant on how their respective positions differ in relation to objectifying intentionality. Levinas notes that it was Husserl, and not Heidegger, who first broke with Kantianism by demonstrating that there is an intentional concrete life behind objectifying intentionality. Although both approaches have their similarities, an important aspect on which they part ways is that Kant puts forward his idea of synthesis to account for objectivity, and in place of this Husserl posits simple intuition, which is itself founded on a sensible intuition. On this point Levinas seems to favour Husserl, as sensible intuition is immediate. Transcendental intentionality is maintained in both approaches, and a favourable aspect of Kant’s philosophy is that it gives us an ‘exteriority that is not objective’.²⁶⁸ This movement by consciousness does constitute an outside, an other, but it is not constituted like an object, as it is not an act whereby the subject grasps the other in a complete self-sufficient movement. The other than me that is constituted partakes in that movement, ‘the Other (*l’Autre*) guides the transcendental movement without presenting itself to vision [...]’. The transcendental movement henceforth receives a structure entirely different from the subject-object polarization’.²⁶⁹ This movement beyond the subject-object polarization is one of the features of Husserl’s phenomenology that Levinas finds particularly favourable. However, he finds Husserl not entirely consistent on this matter, as the exteriority is polarised into objects.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

§ 3.4.7 THE TRANSCENDENTAL FUNCTION OF SENSIBILITY

This is not to say that one must abandon Husserl's work on the matter, for, as was shown above, his work harbours a crucial element which calls representation into question. In this section Levinas returns to the intentional movement that is prior to objectifying intentionality, which is an all-important component of his own thinking on freedom. What Levinas emphasises in the remainder of the article is that prior to objectifying intentionality is a more fluid, nonrepresentational, transcendental engagement with exteriority. As thinking renders the immediate sensual data into an object, it commits a violence of sorts, as objective intentionality 'conserves a sort of immobility' on the hyletic *datum*. The sensible is immediate, and prior to thinking or perceiving objects the self is immersed in the sensible. In the next section, drawing on a tiny selection of pages from Husserl's unpublished work, Levinas demonstrates this immersion through a discussion on the experience of a lived body by that body itself.

§ 3.4.8 KINAESTHETIC SENSIBILITY

Sensing cannot be removed from the sensing of the sensed. Sensation is the very movement of the sense organs, and the entire body. It is not a function that is added on to man, but the way that man is in the world. 'The movement of a sense organ constitutes the intentionality of sensing'.²⁷⁰ Sensation is prior to all acts of perception of objects, as it is prior to representation. It is kinaestheses, the body's sensations of the body's own movements, that situates the body in space and constitutes space, hence enabling the perception and constitution of objects. Consciousness is incarnate, and as such is situated in a space, a here, a zero point of orientation. It is as corporeal that the subject is in existence. What this point about the incarnation of consciousness reveals is a different intentionality from that of objectifying intentionality. Walking, dancing, talking, touching, tactile feeling and its many shades, comporting one's body for a necessary manoeuvre, all demonstrate non-representational and non-objectifying intentionality.²⁷¹ 'This phenomenology of kinaesthetic sensibility brings out intentions

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

²⁷¹ Levinas makes this same point in an article from 1960, 'The fact of having a hand, tensing one's muscles, walking, settling on a land, the sedimentation of a certain history in the thinking Ego, were necessary in order for the representation of a space, a time, and a physical causality even to be formed. Thus we would be wrong in placing this prepredicative work into representation, for which it is a

that are not at all objectifying, and reference points that do not function as objects'.²⁷² Such intentionality also captures aspects of human experience that are not mediated by thinking or knowledge, and often are reactions and movements that we perform without deliberation or conscious choice. Levinas points out that such everyday non-objectifying intentional relations put an end to the immobile idealist subject, or 'pure' transcendental consciousness as such, as they occur prior to representation and describe a subject that is immersed in sensual stimulation. Levinas's description of the subject as 'drawn into situations' captures the passivity of sensation and incarnation, in contrast to the idealist subject who seems to be detached from the world that they present to themselves through representation.²⁷³ In truth, the ego does not stand back from the situation and bring together various elements of sensation to form an object, sensing is a constant moving out of oneself, transcending itself. 'The ego does not remain in itself, absorbing every other in representation; it truly transcends itself.'²⁷⁴ All other acts rest upon this most basic intentionality, that of corporeal movement.

§ 3.4.9 INTENTIONALITY OF INCARNATION

In this section Levinas begins by stating that 'kinaesthetic transitivity' can take us beyond the traditional epistemological distinction between realism and idealism. Levinas argues that realism, by identifying being and the object, eventually collapses into idealism, as the constitution of the object as an object comes from the subject. As Levinas phrases it, 'representation, is always in proportion to consciousness. It is the adequation between ego and non-ego, Same and Other'.²⁷⁵ Neither approach leaves room for a difference that is not, on the final assessment, reducible to consciousness. In both approaches, therefore, as representation remains unquestioned, consciousness remains the source of meaning. 'Hence idealism imposes itself like a tautology [...]. What exceeds the limits of consciousness is absolutely nothing *for that consciousness*.'²⁷⁶

condition, and from which the thinking subject is already nourished before representing the world to itself.' Levinas, 'The Permanent and the Human in Husserl', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 130-34 (p. 132). 'Le permanent et l'humain chez Husserl' was first published in *L'Age Nouveau* 110 (July-September, 1960), 51-56.

²⁷² Levinas, 'Intentionality and Metaphysics', p. 126.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., my emphasis.

Levinas believes that transcendental intentionality, which fundamentally is the horizon of sense and incarnation, challenges this long history that prioritises the ego and the Same, and brings an end to idealism. He describes intentionality as an act of transitivity. It is an embodied engagement with exteriority, a constant moving out of oneself, that takes place continuously in our most basic activities such as praxis, emotion and valuation. It is this that Levinas regards as ‘the newness of phenomenology’, and what demarcates phenomenology and idealism, as phenomenology moves beyond objectifying intentionality.²⁷⁷ Although Levinas believes phenomenology of kinaestheses and the body to be intentionality *par excellence*, the significance of this radical novelty contained in phenomenology is something that Levinas believes Husserl himself overlooked.

In his own work Husserl gives priority to the pure ego of the reduction, and in doing so overlooks incarnate intentionality. Levinas maintains that by describing the incarnate ego as the pure ego’s perception of itself as in a relationship with the body, Husserl implies that there is a distance between the pure ego and incarnate intentionality. Levinas wonders how Husserl can account for this distance that allows the pure ego to grasp its self, as if it was a ‘theoretical act of a disincarnate being’.²⁷⁸ Levinas maintains that this methodological move by Husserl, to return to the pure ego of the reduction, undermines the radical significance of his own description of intentionality, for,

in the obsession of the Reduction, in this unsurmountable temptation to seek the intention of a pure ego behind the intentionality of incarnation, I think what is at stake is a *positive possibility*, constitutive of kinaesthesia, of the *memory of its origin in interiority*.²⁷⁹

Levinas maintains that Husserl’s ‘obsession’ with the reduction blinds him to a potentially *positive possibility* that consequently remains dormant in his own work, and in doing so Husserl compromises the novelty of phenomenology and returns to idealism. As the pure ego must seek oneself ‘*after the fact*’ objectifying intentionality is what is emphasized, to the detriment of the earlier moment of transcendent intentionality of sensibility.²⁸⁰ In relation to this point, Levinas makes an interesting comment which he does not elaborate on, ‘Man wholly masters his destiny only in

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 128.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., my emphasis.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

memory, in the remembrance of things past'.²⁸¹ It would seem that man's sense of self-sufficiency is supported through reflective theoretical thinking that can be quite selective, whereby one can overlook the immediacy of the self's incarnate intentional engagement with existence, and all the limitation and powerlessness that it involves. By prioritising the pure ego and reflective consciousness the profound insight, given to us by Husserlian phenomenology, into the transcendence of intentionality realized by sensibility, remains unexploited.

At the end of the article Levinas emphasises the importance of incarnate intentionality, the fact that as embodied consciousness exceeds its interiority and connects with the exteriority.²⁸² The body is not an exterior object that one can stand back from and study like the biologist would study an external objectified body. Consciousness is itself embodied. The body is lived from the inside and all experiences are experienced through the very body that is having the experience. What is most significant, for Levinas, about this new way of understanding the body, as a system of kinesthesia, is that it undermines the position that views consciousness as primarily objectifying. Importantly for Levinas, it opens the way for alternative descriptions of existence that are not reducible to 'the logic of objects'.²⁸³ It presents a way to overcome representation and the tendency towards totalization of objects that occurs through objectifying intentionality. Transcendence towards being can be expressed otherwise. Through the phenomenological study of incarnate intentionality philosophy can be brought back to the 'land of men'.²⁸⁴ By opening a way beyond objectifying intentionality the very real everyday lived experience of men and women can be taken seriously and reflected upon philosophically, without being totalized and crushed. In a footnote Levinas states that without the movement beyond objectifying intentionality we could never make sense of certain human experiences such as art and theology. Transcendental intentionality makes an array of aspects of human life intelligible and meaningful whilst resisting totalization, such as beauty, art and spirituality. Levinas finishes the article by telling us that,

the alleged sovereignty of objectifying thought, which in fact imprisons the thinker within himself and his categories and, placing him beneath the jurisdiction of objectivity and nature, mocks the metaphysical adventures of

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² On this point Levinas criticises Bergson whom he claims has a tendency to seek mind freed from the body. Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

saints, prophets, poets, and quite simply, living men and women, as mere childish.²⁸⁵

Far from giving man power over the world through knowledge and concepts, objectifying thought restricts the potential of human thought, and closes it off to many aspects of experience that defy such conventions and logical norms.

§ 3.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although in the last article discussed above Levinas has nothing to say about the significance of ethics in his interpretation of Husserl's account of consciousness, one can see the pieces of his argument coming together. The excess, that is to say, the more than that consciousness cannot contain, will become the moral moment for Levinas at the basis of consciousness. It is the placing of the self into question from the outside that will give rise to consciousness. For Levinas, it is not the activity of knowing that defines consciousness, rather it is the self's engagement with the outside, the exterior, the other than the self. If the exterior always submitted to the will of the Same and was entirely consumable and containable by the Same, then there would be no exterior of which to speak. There would only be the Same. If consciousness is the engagement with an outside that remains outside, there needs to be an otherness that remains different at the basis of consciousness. Levinas will come to argue that only the face of the human other is profoundly different enough, and other enough, to shock the self into the realisation that there is an outside that will remain outside, and hence inaugurate consciousness at its most fundamental, as transcendental intentionality. This moment will be described as a moment of sensibility that brings meaning from the outside, a meaning not containable and consumable by consciousness, an encounter with an excessive exteriority.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

CHAPTER IV

FREEDOM RESTING ON TRUTH IN *TOTALITY AND INFINITY*

In stating his conclusions in the final pages of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas clearly sets out the place of freedom for that whole text. Under the heading ‘Freedom Invested’ he explains that one of the major consequences of endeavouring to write an essay on metaphysical exteriority is that freedom is not taken as an *unquestioned* starting point in that endeavour. In other words, Levinas’s approach to this issue calls for a justification of freedom, not its dismissal, for, as he argues:

If, in contradistinction to the tradition of the primacy of freedom, taken as the measure of being, we contest vision its primacy in being, and contest the pretension of human emprise to gain access to the rank of *logos*, we take leave neither of rationalism, nor of the ideal of freedom. One is not an irrationalist nor a mystic nor a pragmatist for questioning the identification of power and *logos*. One is not against freedom if one seeks for it a justification. Reason and freedom seem to us to be founded on prior structures of being whose first articulations are delineated by the metaphysical movement, or respect, or justice — identical to truth. The terms of the conception making truth rest on freedom must be inverted.¹

It is these ‘prior structures of being’, upon which our theoretical and practical engagement with the world rests, that concern Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*. By not taking intentional consciousness as the most fundamental aspect of human life Levinas asks what founds the freedom of representation and rationality. This is why Levinas insists in the passage from his conclusion cited above that ‘[o]ne [he] is not against freedom if one seeks for it a justification’. Levinas accepts that human life involves the capacity of freedom, demonstrated through critical consciousness, self-reflection, and the subject’s ability to make choices aligned with reason. As this is the case, it raises the question, how is it that this crucial capacity came about?

Levinas seeks to ground subjectivity elsewhere than in the *cogito*, and in doing so he has set himself a very difficult task, one that stretches the limitations of language and the boundaries of historical linear time. As he puts it himself,

[w]e have sought outside of consciousness and power for a notion of being founding transcendence. The acuity of the problem lies in the necessity of maintaining the I in the transcendence with which it hitherto seemed incompatible. Is the subject only a subject of knowings and powers? Does it not present itself as *a subject in another sense*?²

¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 302-03.

² *Ibid.*, p. 276, my emphasis.

As the text is a defence of subjectivity, Levinas wishes to preserve the I in transcendence, but an I that is not reducible to freedom. Transcendence cannot be founded in freedom, as freedom would leave no room for the other. Levinas puts forward the reverse. Freedom must be founded in transcendence. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas does this by firstly sketching a view of selfhood that is understood as separated by sensible corporeality, is at home in the world and relates to exteriority in terms of enjoyment. By describing the separated self in such terms Levinas opens a way in which a profound exteriority can breach the life of the separated self, who is already in a relation with exteriority, importantly understood as Desire and not as Need.

Such originality, which breaks with a long and venerable tradition, is not without its problems. His attempt to think through the self's primordial engagement with the world, and to explain the self's immersion in the world 'before' the emergence of the conscious subject, is problematical. The main question that this approach raises for freedom is the question of whether or not the self is said to be free before the encounter with the Other, which brings about an orientation in the self towards what Visker calls 'ethical freedom', or is the self only made free through the encounter?³ As noted by a number of commentators, Levinas employs both transcendental and empirical language and this causes some confusion too, not least of which relates to our particular concern.⁴ This tension has led to two broadly competing readings of *Totality and Infinity*, both of which have consequences for understanding the description of freedom given in the text. One reading argues that the encounter with the Other is a transcendental condition for the possibility of subjectivity as we know it, including freedom, language, and society. Here freedom is viewed as invested by the Other. The other reading, interprets the encounter with the Other as an historical empirical event that re-orientates subjectivity from a self-centred egotistical free being, to an ethically free being that is for the Other.⁵ This view regards the subject as initially arbitrarily

³ Visker, *The Inhuman Condition*.

⁴ See, Robert Bernasconi, 'Rereading *Totality and Infinity*', in *The Question of the Other. Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. by Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 23-34.

⁵ This oversimplification of both the transcendental and empirical readings does not capture the many varied nuances of these readings, and is not intended to diminish the important contributions of commentators and critics of Levinas's work on this issue, it serves, rather, to draw a rough distinction between two broadly and inwardly varied positions. Amongst the commentaries that could be said to have an empirical reading, there are varying degrees to which Levinas's description is read as straightforwardly linear. Westphal, for example, interprets the 'egoist' self as preceding the 'responsible' self, as it is necessary to have a self that can be interrupted. 'The first exit from this world devoid of

free and for itself, later to be re-oriented by the Other, who invests freedom as morally good and for the Other. Both of these readings are firmly rooted in the text, and so, in order to clarify the description of freedom given, the question of which is more accurate, and why this confusion exists, needs to be addressed first in this final chapter of our study.

§ 4.1 THE MEANING OF FREEDOM IN *TOTALITY AND INFINITY: AN ESSAY ON EXTERIORITY*

One crucial, yet overlooked factor which has contributed to the two different readings of *Totality and Infinity* indicated above, is the two senses in which ‘freedom’ is used by Levinas in relation to his description of the self. One is in his description of the separated self *prior to* the encounter with the Other, and the second, is used to describe that which is invested *through the encounter with* the Other. In this chapter it will be argued that this distinction, although ambiguous, is essential in understanding how Levinas can maintain that the separated self prior to the encounter is ‘free’, and yet, also argue that the self is only made free through that very encounter. Within the empirical reading this double sense of the term freedom is most often interpreted as the introduction of the good; the self is initially egotistical, self-centred and ‘free’, and in the empirical encounter is made ethically ‘free’. Levinas’s wider understanding of freedom as representation, knowledge and critical consciousness, however, is often overlooked. Given that throughout the text Levinas argues that without the Other the self would be lacking in language, time, self-consciousness, exteriority, sociality and the freedom of objectivity and reflective consciousness, in a purely empirical reading, the self prior to the encounter would be a very strange empirical self indeed. As Levinas himself says, more of an animal existence, a stomach without ears.⁶ Thus Levinas’s use of both transcendental and empirical language is not only due to a limitation of language; it is also due to the complex nature of his analysis and description. It will be argued that the encounter is both a transcendental condition for the possibility of subjectivity as we experience it, and also, crucially, a very real reoccurring empirical encounter that constantly leads the subject to place themselves into question.

meaning [*il y a*], subjectivity, and objectivity is that of the psychism or *conatus essendi*, the self which places itself at the centre and makes everything else a means to its own ends. But there is another exit, subsequent developmentally but more fundamental ontologically, and in this sense more truly first. It is the emergence of the responsible self, decentred by the proximity of the Other.’ Westphal, ‘The welcome wound: emerging from the *il y a* otherwise’, p. 211.

⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 134.

Given the ambiguity that exists in the text, one would have to say that this disagreement among commentators is at least partially owing to a lack of clarity in the author's expression. However, given the limitation of language and the ongoing development of Levinas's thinking, perhaps this was the only way through to the other side of this problem. The final expression of this difficult description of subjectivity will have to wait until *Otherwise than Being*.⁷ A crucial aspect of the text that helps us to begin to understand how the encounter is both an on-going transcendental condition and an historical empirical event is Levinas's description of time in terms of both historical time and the time of eschatology, which will be examined below. We must remember that *Totality and Infinity* is by no means the end of Levinas's oeuvre, but the first of his major works, and in that respect only the beginning. In Levinas's later work it becomes clear that any talk of a 'before' the encounter illustrates a limitation of language, and that there really is no before of which to speak. Though our study ends with this text, our attempt to shed some light on the status of the question of freedom in the text can also be seen as a contribution to the wider question around the development and consistency in Levinas's philosophy as a whole.

§ 4.1.1 PREFACE: WAR AND MORALITY

Levinas famously opens *Totality and Infinity*, echoing Plato's question in the *Republic*, by stating, '[e]veryone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality'.⁸ For Levinas, if in seeking to describe and explain the phenomenon of goodness we begin with an autonomous free and independent subject, the explanation that we will be left with will always relegate morality to the service of ontology, leaving us with such explanations as a clash of freedoms resulting in a master-slave relation, or a war of all against all that is curtailed through a social contract, or, in more naturalistic language, an evolutionary socially advantageous trait that has contributed to ensuring the survival of our species. In contrast to such an approach Levinas does not simply accept freedom as a given, rather, through his analysis he pushes back before freedom and in doing so provides an account

⁷ Levinas will later reassess this necessity. Beginning with the publication of 'La substitution' in (1968), Levinas begins to work through a description of subjectivity that does away with the interior exterior distinction, and develops a description of subjectivity as 'hostage', 'persecution', 'trauma' and 'substitution'. A reworked version of 'La substitution' becomes a central section in *Otherwise than Being*.

⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.

for freedom as invested from the outside. By describing morality as the basis of subjectivity, and as prior to freedom, Levinas not only provides a justification of morality but also a justification of freedom.

Initially the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* can seem a little disjointed from the subtitle of the text, *An Essay on Exteriority*, as the Preface concentrates on the question of war and peace.⁹ On closer reading, however, one can see just how intrinsically connected this question is to the main focus of the text, a treatise on metaphysical exteriority that challenges the philosophy of the Same, which Levinas believes to dominate the entire tradition of Western philosophy. Levinas opens the text by opposing the phenomenon of war to morality, and this opposition reflects the distinction in the title of the text, between totality and infinity.¹⁰ In the Preface Levinas groups together war, totality, ontology and the philosophy of the Same. Although these themes are by no means identical, what binds them together is that, for Levinas, each of them is an all embracing system that leaves no room for any alterity. ‘The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy.’¹¹ In such a totalizing system unique individuality is overlooked, individuals are objectified and gain significance through their relationship to the whole. So too is true of the unicity of the present, which is ‘sacrificed’ for a future end goal.¹² War is described as the pure experience of pure being, and therefore morality, as war’s opposite, must bring us beyond being.

Levinas believes that the dominant approach to philosophy throughout the tradition, as favouring a totalizing and complete thought structure, far from benign, has

⁹ The importance of the question of war’s challenge to morality is often overlooked in the secondary scholarship. There are some notable exceptions to this, see, Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, see, also, Robert Bernasconi, ‘Different styles of Eschatology: Derrida’s Take on Levinas’ Political Messianism’, *Research in Phenomenology*, 28 (1998), 3-19.

¹⁰ We should keep in mind that the terms of the title ‘totality’ and ‘infinity’ should not be read as one term versus the other, as is indicated by the conjunction ‘and’ in the title. As we shall see as this chapter develops, Hegelian dialectical logic is one of the main antagonists to Levinas’s thought, as is the understanding of Being as One that can be traced as far back as Parmenides. If Levinas was to simply oppose totality to infinity this would result in a Hegelian dialectic. In the text Levinas seeks to describe human existence as simultaneously with being whilst desiring the infinite. As Levinas says, ‘Between a philosophy of transcendence that situates elsewhere the true life to which man, escaping from here, would gain access in the privileged moments of liturgical, mystical elevation, or in dying — and a philosophy of immanence in which we would truly come into possession of being when every “other” (cause of war), encompassed by the same, would vanish at the end of history — we propose to describe, within the unfolding of terrestrial existence, of economic existence [...] a relationship with the other that does not result in a divine or human totality, that is not a totalization of history but the idea of infinity. Such a relationship is metaphysics itself.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 52. On this point, see, Bernasconi, ‘Rereading *Totality and Infinity*’, p. 24. See, also, Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 120.

¹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.

¹² ‘For the ultimate meaning alone counts; the last act alone changes beings into themselves.’ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

indirectly influenced all areas of Western culture. The impact that this totalizing system has had on political and social institutions is evident in the prevalence of war. A thought structure that seeks total concepts and absolute certainty can lead to a similar political drive for hegemony, favouring uniformity over diversity.¹³ The only way in which to combat totalitarian systems is through its opposite, that of morality. If the Same is characterised by the drive for complete certainty and absolute knowledge, achieved by the absolute assimilation of the known into the same, then its opposite, morality, is a moment of excessive exteriority that not only resists any attempts of assimilation into the Same but through its very resistance places the Same into question. For Levinas, then, couched in the discussion about war and peace is not only the central question of the text but also this particular question highlights just how much is at stake, the very humanity of man. Hence, Levinas begins with this opening line, '[e]veryone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are duped by morality'.¹⁴ Do individual acts of kindness towards one another, no matter how few, speak to a genuine dimension to the human being, or is morality merely a social contract, a limitation of humanity's predatory nature?

In order for morality to prevail over war, and to disturb the dominance of the ontological order of things, Levinas tells us that the 'eschatology of messianic peace' must 'superpose itself' upon the ontology of war.¹⁵ In contrast to a time that gains its significance by reference to the totality Levinas introduces eschatological time, which he says, is beyond the totality and beyond history, but not beyond the past or the

¹³ For Levinas, this is one such way of understanding how a nation that brought the world many of the high points in philosophy, literature and music could also be responsible for the devastation of the Shoah. The atrocities of The Third Reich were never far from Levinas's mind, and this is partially illustrated in the use of the term 'totality', which binds together the philosophy of the Same and the metaphysical position that underlies war. As pointed out by Caygill, the use of the term 'totality' within the modern philosophical tradition, initially taken from the work of Kant, (for whom 'totality', 'unity' and 'infinity' as transcendental ideals, *a priori* structures of the human understanding, are regulative and not constitutive principles), become constitutive in the post-Kantian idealists of such thinkers as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. 'Totality' was also a prominent component of the lexicon of the Third Reich. "Totality" was at once the specific term identified by Victor Klemperer, the philologist of the language of the Third Reich, as 'one of the keystones' of 'everyday Nazi discourse' as well as, and perhaps not coincidentally, one of the central concepts of modern philosophy'. Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 94. On the possible link between the drive for certainty and hegemony and the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany see Simon Critchley's Blog post 'The Dangers of Certainty: A Lesson From Auschwitz', The New York Times Opinionator, February 2, 2014 <<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/the-dangers-of-certainty/>> [accessed on 4 February 2014]

¹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

present.¹⁶ By introducing this double description of time as historical ontological time and the time of messianic peace, which is central to any understanding of the text, Levinas is attempting to displace the centrality of the philosophy of history within modern philosophy. Although the term ‘eschatological time’ has obvious teleological implications, generally associated with the end, or last time, this is not the meaning that Levinas wishes to convey. The intended meaning is closer to the Greek etymological roots of the terms, captured by the prefix ‘ex’, which denotes ‘out of’, ‘from’, or ‘beyond’, and in this sense one can see the use of the term by Levinas to capture a time that is both outside of historical time and yet reflected within human experience.¹⁷ As

¹⁶ Levinas (in similar fashion to Kierkegaard) explicitly mentions Hegel as an example of such a system that overlooks the unique significance of the now, and the unique significance of each individual, in favour of a judgement of history in its totality. *Ibid.*, p. 23. De Boer reminds us that Levinas’s understanding of ‘totality’ can contain history, even though history is still unfolding, as for Levinas totality is not a closed whole, but, what De Boer terms, a horizontal infinity. De Boer argues this view of totality as a horizontal infinite process was influenced by Husserl’s *Ideen I*. In contrast to this horizontal view of history as a totality Levinas ‘opposes’, what De Boer terms, the ‘vertical concept of Infinity’. De Boer, ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’, p. 9. Although the time of the infinite is ‘opposed’ to the determination of historical time, Levinas is not suggesting that historical time can be done away with. Rather, the time of eschatology brings the possibility of the good, and the judgement of ‘politics in history’ at each moment. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 22. The superimposition of the time of eschatology onto historical time is a complex idea to represent. In his 1963 article ‘The Trace of the Other’ Levinas makes it clear that the breach of historical time brought about by the Face of the Other should not be thought of as the meeting point between two distinct times, rather, it is an ‘incision’ in historical time. ‘Nor is it an instantaneous cross-section of the world in which time would cross with eternity. It is an incision made in time that does not bleed.’ Levinas, ‘The Trace of the Other’, p. 354. In the same article Levinas qualifies his use of the term beyond, and explains that ‘beyond’ is an attempt to capture that the ‘beyond’ is beyond all disclosure and outside of what can be known, but that is not to say that what cannot be known or experienced cannot be operative *within experience*. ‘The *beyond* is precisely beyond the “world”, that is, beyond every discourse — like the One of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which transcends all cognition, be it symbolic or signified.’ Levinas, ‘The Trace of the Other’, p. 354.

¹⁷ ‘The eschatological, as the “beyond” of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23. In his later work Levinas reassess his use of this term and moves away from it. When asked by Kearney about eschatology, Levinas emphasised that we do not have to think of eschatology in terms of eternity, rather we should think of a perpetual movement towards God, a constant striving towards that is never fulfilled. Bernasconi points out that Levinas’s reappraisal may be due to the perhaps unwarranted criticisms of Levinas’s use of the term eschatology raised by Derrida in his ‘Violence and Metaphysics’. Derrida’s criticisms could be said to be unwarranted, as, despite the theological implications, one does not have to interpret eschatology exclusively as an event that will occur in the future, and indeed, very often amongst Christian biblical scholars this is not the case. Rudolf Bultmann and Alexander Schmemmann, for example, both interpret ‘eschatology’ to mean that the Kingdom of God is both at hand and also yet to come. See, Hilarion Alfeyev, ‘Eschatology’, in *The Cambridge Companion To Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. by Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 107-20. Whatever motivated this change, Levinas makes it clear that he is reluctant to use the term due to the teleological baggage and implications. ‘Eschatology’ (*eschaton*) implies ‘that there might exist a finality, an end (*fin*) to the historical relation of difference between man and the absolutely other, a reduction of the gap that safeguards the alterity of the transcendent, to a totality of sameness.’ This would of course be too close to a Hegelian synthesis, which Levinas here characterises as ‘a radical denial of the rupture between the ontological and the ethical’. Levinas and Kearney, ‘Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 30. See, Robert Bernasconi, ‘Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida’s Take on Levinas’s Political Messianism’, *Research in Phenomenology*, 28 (1998), 3-19.

Bernasconi phrases it '[t]he beyond of history is, rather, that which interrupts history. It is that which history cannot recoup. Eschatology in Levinas is not a question of the future, but a disturbance or interruption of the present'.¹⁸

To say that eschatological time goes beyond history, and therefore beyond a teleological system within a totality that withholds judgement until the culmination of acts, is not to promote a view of 'subjectivity free as the wind'.¹⁹ In fact, Levinas argues that by removing the focus from a linear historical time, each instant is given its full significance, *and* responsibility in the now can come to the fore. Each individual is answerable for their actions, or lack thereof, and cannot hide behind the anonymity of history.²⁰ Levinas links this conception of time to his idea of infinity introduced in his work of the 1950's, as eschatological time is a relationship 'with *a surplus always exterior to the totality*'.²¹ It is beyond the totality and beyond history, yet, crucially, is reflected within human experience and breaks through ontological historical time. What eschatology brings, by breaching the totality, is the possibility 'of a signification without a context'.²² Levinas informs the reader that it is this relation that *Totality and Infinity* seeks to describe.

The rest of the Preface clarifies for the reader what this relation is and how Levinas will go about describing such a relation. In doing so, the reader gains a sense of just how innovative Levinas's approach is, and also how it breaks with any methodology that has come before. The relation that Levinas strives to describe is outside of both representation and objectivity, and resists an understanding of truth based on evidence and knowledge. This being the case, Levinas assures the reader that this does not mean that one is left with the opposite, that of opinion an illusion. By pushing back before all relations with being that are characterised by representation, objectivity and knowledge, one also pushes back before the antithesis, reaching back before the totality itself. What Levinas seeks to describe is 'a situation that conditions the totality itself', that of the encounter with transcendence in the face of the Other.²³

¹⁸ Bernasconi, 'Different styles of eschatology: Derrida's take on Levinas's political messianism', p. 7.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 22.

²⁰ This emphasis on the present, and how the judgement of acts should not be postponed until the culmination of history, is a development of Levinas's argument presented in a very early essay 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', wherein Levinas argues that the forgiveness of God and redemption could break with a view of time as purely historical and deterministic. See, Ch. I, §1.10 Later in this text Levinas will develop this idea alongside his critique of Heidegger's understanding of time, by examining interiority and pardon. See, § 4.2.7.

²¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 22.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 24.

Levinas is aware that he cannot philosophically demonstrate ‘eschatological “truths”’, and so he proposes to begin with the experience of totality and push back ‘to a situation where totality breaks up’.²⁴ The attempt to do this will bring Levinas to the very limits of philosophical thinking and language, and beyond the boundaries of historical linear time. It will also accompany Levinas beyond the confines of the text, and into his later work, which in some regards can be said to be marked by this very problem of attempting to articulate that which is beyond articulation.²⁵

§ 4.1.2 TRANSCENDENTAL READING

As Levinas is seeking to describe a relation that accounts for our experiences as we experience them, he compares his approach to Kant’s transcendental method.²⁶ It is important to emphasize here that Levinas qualifies this comparison by pointing out that his method ‘resembles’ the transcendental method, and so despite the similarities there are differences between them.²⁷ De Boer is the most notable defender of the transcendental reading of *Totality and Infinity*, presented in his article ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’. In his article, De Boer argues that Levinas attempts to found ontology through metaphysics, by integrating aspects of phenomenology, transcendental philosophy and dialogical philosophy. De Boer maintains that for Levinas dialogue with the Other is the transcendental framework for the subject’s intentional relation to the world. De Boer compares Levinas’s method with that of

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ As Cohen astutely phrases it, ‘Levinas’ writings, then, are paradoxical. As philosophy they must justify themselves, but their justification lies beyond the text, not in a reference, a signified, but in what is essentially elusive: goodness, sincerity. [...] This is precisely the trouble with knowledge, in a double sense: by essence it cannot know the good, but it is disturbed by the good, by the ethical plenitude that encompasses and escapes it. [...] His writings are signs of lost traces. Levinas admits this paradox [...]. Yet it is by raising this paradox, by invoking its nonmeasurable movement, that his writings make sense in transgressing sense.’ Cohen, ‘Introduction’, in *Face to Face with Levinas*, pp. 1-10 (p. 9).

²⁶ Levinas, ‘Signature’, pp. 292-93. See, De Boer’s important article ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’.

²⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 25. Peperzak rightly warns of the drawbacks of the term, suggesting that the term ‘transcendental method’ is unsuitable given the philosophical baggage that comes with the term, most notably the connection to a transcendental and foundational consciousness ‘in search for an ultimate ground of all beings’. Peperzak favours the less problematic ‘intentional analysis’. See, Peperzak, *To The Other*, p. 232. In support of his unease with the term Peperzak references Levinas, who, in an interview conducted in 1975, he himself acknowledged such draw backs. Peperzak admits that Levinas does not reject the term absolutely. In fact, far from simply not absolutely rejecting the term, Levinas clarified that he had no difficulty with the term provided that ““transcendental” signifies a certain priority: except that ethics is before ontology”. Despite the philosophical baggage, Levinas went on to describe his work as ‘a transcendentalism that begins with ethics’. Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Questions and Answers’, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. by Bettina Bergo ed. by Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 79-99 (p. 90).

Kant's transcendental reduction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. By transcendental Kant means conditions that make experience and knowledge possible. Just as our experience, for Kant, justifies the claims he made, so too does our experience of being part of a community, language, objectifying consciousness, knowledge, and our ability to be self-critical, justify the face of the Other as a transcendental condition for experience as we experience it. It is what makes such central aspects of human life possible.²⁸ As De Boer states,

[s]imilarly, human egoism, together with the facts of (self-) critical knowledge and community (as situations in which *the totality breaks*), are indications pointing to the epiphany of the Other's face.²⁹

Through his novel application, and interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology, Levinas uncovers a wider horizon that is forgotten in ordinary immediate consciousness, which nevertheless conditions consciousness.

De Boer refers to Levinas's 'Signature' to further support his convincing reading. In that article Levinas argues that the strictly cognitive relation has 'transcendental conditions' such as language, history, culture and the body. 'To hold out one's hands, to turn one's head, to speak a language, to be the "sedimentation" of a history — all this *transcendentally* conditions contemplation and the contemplated.'³⁰ Further on in 'Signature' Levinas goes on to affirm that the fundamental experience *par excellence*, which is the foundation of all experience, is the encounter with the face of the Other. 'The fundamental experience which objective experience itself presupposes is the experience of the Other. It is experience *par excellence* [...]. Moral consciousness is thus not a modality of psychological consciousness, but its condition.'³¹ Although Levinas himself uses the term 'experience' here, in his more philosophical work he often expresses increasing reservations about the term, as for Levinas, experience prioritises intentional consciousness. In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas qualifies his use of the term experience, '[t]he relation with infinity cannot, to be sure,

²⁸ In his *Foundations of a Critical Psychology* De Boer further explains his thinking behind his belief that Levinas's philosophy is an *ethical* transcendental philosophy and what uniquely distinguishes it from other forms of transcendental thinking. 'It is not making explicit universal principles that lie at the basis of our experience [...]. It can be named a transcendental philosophy because it is an investigation of the *conditions* for the Good Life and of the sources of Utopia. Here the transcendental foundation is not an abstract principle but a *concretissimum*, the critical confrontation with the countenance of the Other.' Theodore de Boer, *Foundations of a Critical Psychology*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983), p. 177.

²⁹ De Boer, 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy', p. 29, my emphasis.

³⁰ Levinas, 'Signature', p. 292.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

be stated in terms of [intentional] experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it'.³²

Levinas's method is said to 'resemble' the transcendental approach as in his work he is exploring previously unthought of horizons that condition experience, underpin subjectivity, and give rise to objectifying consciousness. However, in distinction from Kant's approach, beside from the obvious difference being that Levinas is putting the transcendental ego into question, he will also argue that although the transcendental relationship with the infinite that is he seeking to describe makes experience as we experience it possible, this 'transcendental condition' is an event that can be detected within historical experience, time and time again, even though it is outside of experience and not reducible to it. As the event eludes representation, although the infinite is encountered in the world through an empirical event, it transcends the event as it defies representation and knowledge.³³ As De Boer rightly points out, 'The condition for experience is not itself experienced'.³⁴

Levinas goes on to affirm the resemblance to the transcendental method by stating that the idea of infinity, encountered in the face of the Other, 'is the condition for every opinion as also for every objective truth'.³⁵ Going further still, on the next page, Levinas argues that this encounter with infinity founds subjectivity, and has 'philosophical primacy', hence the comparison to Kant's transcendental method.³⁶ If freedom is a property of subjectivity, then the idea of infinity likewise founds freedom.

³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 25.

³³ It is this event that Levinas will continue to struggle to describe in his later work, requiring him to push the boundaries of philosophy and continue to commit violence to language. In an article that is to follow shortly after *Totality and Infinity*, 'The Trace of the Other' (1963), Levinas will introduce the term 'the trace' in an attempt to capture the sense that consciousness cannot capture the presence of the Other, as objectifying consciousness arrives too late. 'Its [the face] wonder is due to the elsewhere from which it comes and into which it already withdraws. [...]. A face is in the trace of the utterly bygone, utterly passed absent [...]. For a face is the unique openness in which the signifyingness of the transcendent does not nullify the transcendence and make it enter into an immanent *order*; here on the contrary transcendence refuses immanence precisely as the ever bygone transcendence of the transcendent.' Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', p. 355.

³⁴ De Boer, 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy', p. 26.

³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 25.

³⁶ 'This book then does present itself as a defence of subjectivity, but it will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded (*fondée*) [based/grounded] in the idea of infinity. It will proceed to distinguish between the idea of totality and the idea of infinity, and affirm the philosophical primacy of the idea of infinity.' Ibid., p. 26. Later on in the text when Levinas describes sensibility as fundamentally a mode of enjoyment, prioritising the affective content over any secondary representational function, he once again uses language that resonates with Kant's transcendental method, although his position is very different from Kant's. 'Rather than taking sensations to be contents destined to fill a priori forms of objectivity, a transcendental function *sui generis* must be recognised in them [...] a prior formal structures of the non-I are not necessarily structures of objectivity.' Ibid., p. 188.

In pushing back prior to subjectivity, prior to freedom, Levinas is consequently challenging the view that intentionality defines consciousness. ‘All knowing qua intentionality already presupposes the idea of infinity, which is pre-eminently *non-adequation*.’³⁷

In his article ‘Rereading *Totality and Infinity*’, Bernasconi, gives a critical reading of De Boer’s transcendental reading of *Totality and Infinity* and shows how elements of the text make an exclusive transcendental reading problematic. Most notably, in Section II of the text ‘Interiority and Economy’, Levinas himself uses both transcendental and empirical language to describe the life of the self prior to the encounter with the infinite. Bernasconi is correct to highlight the aspects of the text that could be said to complicate De Boer’s reading, however, his criticisms do not point to a deficiency in De Boer’s thinking, as much as to Levinas’s somewhat unclear descriptions. Pointing out, ‘[t]he puzzle is that Levinas himself seems unable to decide between these rival interpretations’.³⁸ Both readings are rooted in the text, though usually drawing on different sections of the text, and so it would seem that part of the problem must lie in Levinas’s description. I suggest that the lack of clarity in the text relating to this very question reflects, perhaps, not so much Levinas’s indecisiveness but perhaps an unavoidable failed attempt on his behalf to as of yet express in language a dimension of life that resists expression and representation. Levinas’s later work will be marked with a persistent struggle to move away from ontological language and seek new ways to ‘say’ that which can never be ‘said’. The tension between the empirical and transcendental readings of the text reveal this difficulty, which Levinas had not yet found a way around, as he was still unavoidably working his way through the problem. We will return to the problem of the paradox of language at the end of this chapter.

Levinas’s dual description of time in terms of historical time and the time of eschatology is not only crucial in understanding his novel description of human life, and is testament to the continuous presence of the two strands of thought that are simultaneously operative in his work, that of his Jewish religious heritage and the heritage of Greek philosophy, it also helps us to understand how his description of the encounter with infinity has been interpreted as both a transcendental condition and an

³⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁸ Bernasconi, ‘Rereading *Totality and Infinity*’, p. 23.

empirical event.³⁹ The encounter with the infinite, through the face of the Other, is a moment when eschatological time breaks through the totalizing ontological time of history. Human life takes place within this juxtaposition of historical linear time and eschatological time. The tension within the text between empirical and transcendental language manifests in this understanding of time, as on the one hand, the encounter with the Other is an historical empirical event, and yet, is outside of human experience and not reducible to it. In his interview with Kearney Levinas remarked:

The interhuman relationship emerges with our history, with our being-in-the-world, as intelligibility and presence. The interhuman realm can thus be construed as a part of the disclosure of the world as presence. But it can also be considered from another perspective — the ethical or biblical perspective that transcends the Greek language of intelligibility — as a theme of justice and concern for the other as other, as a theme of love and desire, which carries us beyond the infinite being of the world as presence. The interhuman is thus an interface: a double axis where what is ‘of the world’ qua *phenomenological intelligibility* is juxtaposed with what is ‘not of the world’ qua *ethical responsibility*.⁴⁰

The question of the empirical and transcendental reading of the text has important ramifications for understanding Levinas’s description of the origins of freedom. Firstly, this issue centres on whether or not the self is initially free and for itself and is then re-orientated and made ethically free through a historical empirical encounter. Or, secondly, it raises the question regarding whether the Other is the transcendental condition that makes subjectivity possible by investing freedom. For Levinas, the time of the infinite is juxtaposed on the historical ontological time. It is not so much an either/or as a both/and. Hence Levinas says:

This ‘beyond’ the totality and objective experience is, however, not to be described in a purely negative fashion. It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. The eschatological, as the ‘beyond’ of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility.⁴¹

³⁹ In one of his overtly religious writings Levinas further clarifies his use of the term ‘eschatology’ and the influence of the Jewish scriptures in this regard. ‘However, eschatology possesses a number of styles and genres, and it was the Jewish Bible which probably discovered the one which consists in feeling responsible in the face of the future one hopes for others. Yet ever since the creation, it was to be found in the humanity of man. It cannot be the cause of wars.’ Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse. Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. by Gary D. Mole (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. xviii

⁴⁰ Levinas and Kearney, ‘Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 20.

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23. At this stage of his writing Levinas is yet to abandon the term ‘experience’, however, he qualifies his use of the term, in an attempt to distance himself from an interpretation of experience that implies a direct correlation between the *noesis* and *noema* which prioritises the meaning giving intentional consciousness that, for Levinas, represents the same. ‘The relation with infinity cannot, to be sure, be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it [...] but if experience precisely means a relation with the absolutely other, that is,

Levinas's thinking on time helps to show how this relation with infinity that is both outside of experience and makes experience possible, also constantly penetrates experience and points to the beyond. The separated self can forget the infinite, once again live a purely egotistical life, and it takes an historical encounter with the Other to re-orientate the self once more.

Consistent with his criticisms of intentionality raised in his earlier work, Levinas repeats that as intentionality remains an *adequation* with the object, it stays within the totality of the Same. As Levinas is attempting to describe subjectivity as both within a totality and also breached by infinity, then intentionality, which consumes the object totally, cannot 'define consciousness at its fundamental level'.⁴² There must be a prior moment whereby the same is placed into question from the outside. For Levinas, this prior moment is the welcoming of the Other, 'in it the idea of infinity is consummated'.⁴³ In a move that once again resembles Kant's transcendental method, Levinas plainly describes incarnate consciousness, and then argues that only a description of consciousness that is founded by the idea of infinity, an idea that overflows the thought that thinks it, can account for such a description of consciousness.

The incarnation of consciousness is therefore comprehensible only if, over and beyond adequation, the overflowing of the idea by its ideatum, that is, the idea of infinity, moves consciousness.⁴⁴

Intentional thought alone could not be thought of as breaching the immanence of the Same, for although it is a reaching out beyond the I, it involves a complete return again, thought remains closed in on itself.⁴⁵ Action, however, that is rendered possible by the incarnation of consciousness, breaks forth from the immanence of the Same and is therefore regarded by Levinas as a form of violence. By breaking with the immanence of the Same action brings something new into being, something that cannot be contained by thought alone. With action a 'surplus of being' breaks forth 'over the

with what always overflows thought, the relation with infinity accomplishes experience in the fullest sense of the word.' Ibid., p. 25.

⁴² Ibid., p. 27.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The extent to which intentionality can be said to breach immanence will depend on the particular understanding of intentionality. In Husserl's famous reduction, for example, because the transcendence of the physical thing is uncovered as constituted through the harmony of one's own actual experiences, this transcendence, for Husserl, is a transcendence within radical immanence. Thus there are several versions of the intentionality of consciousness, not all of them presuppose or imply radical otherness in the way that Levinas argues.

thought that claims to contain it'.⁴⁶ This fundamental engagement with infinity in turn 'sustains activity' and is the source of both 'activity and theory'.⁴⁷ Levinas contrasts this view of consciousness as founded in the idea of infinity with the Heideggerian conception of disclosure. For it is not a question of disclosing these hidden, 'nocturnal events' [the welcoming of the face], as this would presuppose that the events are contained in the Same, and would overlook the newness of the events. Although philosophy can be said to dis-cover (in the original sense of make known or reveal) the significance of these fundamental events, they are not reducible to knowledge.

It is this hidden event that conditions and founds subjectivity, that occurs prior to the subject's reflective engagement with the world, and is outside of the *noesis-noema* structure of consciousness, that Levinas wishes to shed light on. Levinas aims to uncover this forgotten experience out of which objectifying thought lives, and he credits the possibility of such an endeavour to the work of Husserl.

Intentional analysis is the search for the concrete. Notions held under the direct gaze of the thought that defines them are nevertheless, unbeknown to this naïve thought, revealed to be implanted in horizons unsuspected by this thought; these horizons endow them with a meaning — such is the essential teaching of Husserl.⁴⁸

It is these 'unsuspected' horizons that are 'unbeknown' to thought, and yet condition thought, that Levinas wishes to describe.

§ 4.2 'THE SAME AND THE OTHER'

Confirmed through Levinas's own admission, Section I should be read as a preparatory section that introduces the reader, unfamiliar with Levinas's writings, to his distinctive way of thinking about and approaching philosophy, his novel interpretation of the history of philosophy, his own terminology and the broad strokes of the argument to follow.⁴⁹ Levinas begins the main text with a reflection on metaphysics and transcendence.⁵⁰ As he situates his approach to philosophy, and the particular subject

⁴⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. In relation to this point Levinas refers the reader to his article 'The Ruin of Representation'. See, Ch. III, § 3.4

⁴⁹ 'We should like at least to invite him [the reader] not to be rebuffed by the aridity of certain pathways, by the labour of the first section, whose preparatory character is to be emphasized, but in which the horizon of this whole research takes form.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ In describing the structure of metaphysical desire as transcendence Levinas explicitly references Jean Wahl's *Existence humaine et transcendance*. Wahl was an important influence of the development of

area of the text, as belonging within this area of first philosophy he begins by outlining to the reader the basic structure of metaphysics as he understands it.

§ 4.2.1 METAPHYSICS AND TRANSCENDENCE

Metaphysics is defined by Levinas as a movement towards the ‘elsewhere’, the ‘other’, that disturbs one’s state of otherwise being ‘at home’ (*chez soi*) with oneself.⁵¹ This movement is then further characterised as Desire, a desire for the other (*autre*). This desire is a constant movement out of one self and towards the other that is never fulfilled, as the other remains other, and as such remains outside of the self, outside of the same. By way of further explaining metaphysical desire, Levinas contrasts this desire with the attempt by the existent to possess and consume other objects that through consummation can become mine. This is the case for both a literal consuming through the act of eating and drinking, or the assimilation of the other through possession, knowledge and concepts. ‘Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor.’⁵² In contrast to this, the other of metaphysical desire is the ‘*absolutely other*’, which escapes all attempts at assimilation and remains exterior with its alterity intact. ‘The metaphysical desire tends towards *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*.’⁵³

Levinas thinking, particularly in relation to how Levinas thinks transcendence and desire. Wahl’s understanding of transcendence as a ‘doubling back’, a double movement that not only brings the self out of the immanence of the Same and towards an alterity that is both prior to, and also not reducible to, knowledge and concepts, but also hollows out a space within the self that makes room for interiority, is an obvious influence on Levinas. Levinas described this understanding of transcendence in a paper from 1976, ‘Jean Wahl: Neither Having nor Being’, ‘[t]hus transcendence is perhaps the essential element of Wahl’s teachings — but a transcendence indifferent to hierarchy. A bursting toward the heights or a descent towards the depths of the sensible world; trans-ascendance and trans-descendence are purely, and pure, transcendences. [...] There is in this transcendent movement an accomplishing of oneself that is at once a destruction of oneself, a failure that is triumph. [...] Before belonging to the empire of Nature or to the self-awareness of Spirit, it is in breaking through the border of being that the logically unjustifiable uniqueness of the human person is identified.’ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Jean Wahl: Neither Having nor Being’, in *Outside the Subject* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 51-64 (p. 62). Wahl was also a forerunner to Levinas in relation to the emphasis he placed on the sensible life of the self and the importance of affectivity and the self’s immersion in immediate sensible lived life in the world that is outside of objectifying knowledge and concepts. Levinas argues that sensible life is a necessity for both consciousness and morality. See, Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Jean Wahl and Feeling’, trans. by Michael B. Smith, in *Proper Names*, pp. 110- 18.

⁵¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 33. The translator, Lingis, informs the reader that ‘*chez soi*’ is a reference to Hegelian *bei sich*, which Levinas will refer to when he later describes the concrete manner in which an existent exists for itself.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Levinas elaborates further on what is distinctive about metaphysical desire by contrasting desire with ‘need’.⁵⁴ Need is generally understood as arising as a result of a lack or deficiency, and when the need is fulfilled the existent returns to a state of equilibrium. On this understanding ‘need’ never really disturbs the existent’s state of being at home with oneself. Desire, however, is not based on any such lack and is a movement toward the other that can never result in a complete return to oneself, as it is a desire that can never be satisfied.⁵⁵ The separation that exists between the absolutely other and the existent who desires it can never be dissolved, the distance between the two will always remain.⁵⁶ Levinas explicitly names this absolutely other (*autre*) as the human Other (*d’Autrui*) and the Most-High (*Très-Haut*).⁵⁷

In the final paragraph of this section Levinas brings up freedom for the first time in the text and links freedom with consciousness, metaphysical desire and goodness. Levinas argues that when the human being is understood as primarily motivated by need, and need is seen to explain society and history, certain aspects of humanity, arguably those aspects that set us apart as human, are left unaccounted for. Levinas accepts that the events of the twentieth century seem to support this view, ‘that hunger and fear can prevail over every human resistance and every freedom!’, and given the horrendous deeds committed by human beings against one another, one could not doubt the reality of the dominion of ‘things and the wicked’ over man.⁵⁸ If this alone was an accurate portrayal of the human being it would seem that any defence or explanation of freedom

⁵⁴ This is not a new distinction in Levinas’s thinking. As we have seen, as early as *On Escape* Levinas wrote about the desire to escape being, irrespective of any particular destination. Levinas also discussed desire as an end in itself in *Existence and Existents*. The term does undergo development however. As we seen in the last chapter, Levinas first began to describe the metaphysical relation in terms of desire in ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’. See, Ch. III, § 3.3.

⁵⁵ ‘The metaphysical desire does not long to return, for it is desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁶ Levinas describes this distance in terms of ‘height’, which he first introduced in ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’. See, Ch. III, § 3.3. In contrast to the Hegelian *bei sich* Levinas retrieves the more ancient Platonic understanding of desire and ‘height’. Within the text itself Levinas directly makes reference to Plato’s *Republic*, but in contrast to Plato Levinas argues that although this distance is to be understood as ‘height’ the absolutely other is no longer in the heavens but is invisible. Peperzak points out that this section contains allusions to Plato’s *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Philebus*. When Levinas returns to this distinction between ‘need’ and ‘desire’ in subsection D ‘Separation and The Absolute’, of Section I, p. 103, he once again makes use of Plato’s own analysis of Desire and the importance of ‘height’ in the relation between the Good and Being. See, Peperzak, *To The Other*, p. 132.

⁵⁷ Despite equating the absolutely other with the Most-High, which is reasonable to read as a reference to God, Levinas does not further explore this assertion in any detail in the present text. In his post *Totality and Infinity* work Levinas will return to explicitly develop the way in which the absolutely other can be understood as God. See, Levinas, ‘The Trace of the Other’ (1963), and ‘God and Philosophy’ (1975), in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, pp. 55-78.

⁵⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 35.

would be futile. However, what separates humanity from such ‘animality’ is that human beings have the ability to reflect on this element of the human condition and can take steps, wherever possible, to hinder the domination of need. We are free to try and safeguard freedom. Human beings are not only corporeal beings with material needs, but we are also conscious agents.⁵⁹

Freedom consists in knowing that freedom is in peril. But to know or to be conscious is to have time to avoid and forestall the instant of inhumanity. It is this perpetual postponing of the hour of treason — infinitesimal difference between man and non-man — that implies the disinterestedness of goodness, the desire of the absolutely other or nobility, the dimension of metaphysics [ethics].⁶⁰

Despite our physical condition and needs, despite our absolute reliance on exteriority for food and shelter, because we are conscious, human beings can take steps to ensure that these basic needs are met in advance and in turn ‘free’ ourselves from this dependency. As conscious beings who can postpone this hour of need, we exist, for the most part, in this space where need is postponed and is prevented from arising in the first place. Levinas will argue that metaphysical desire alone can account for the advent of consciousness. Metaphysical desire alone can justify and invest freedom.

§ 4.2.2 METAPHYSICS PRECEDES ONTOLOGY

In line with his work of the 1950’s Levinas equates cognition, knowledge and theory with the freedom of the subject, as concepts enable the subject to assimilate the alterity of the other and remain unquestioned and dominant. In doing so preserve a false view of existence in which the Same dominates. Levinas then goes on to argue that ontology as a philosophical approach seeks to do just that, as seeking to comprehend being is also a drive for domination and control.

To theory as comprehension of beings the general title of ontology is appropriate. Ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom — the

⁵⁹ In subsection D, ‘The Dwelling’, of Section II ‘Interiority and Economy’, Levinas returns to this point and elaborates on the relationship between corporeality, consciousness and freedom. Levinas describes consciousness as a postponing of the corporeality of the body, to be conscious is to be given time. This time in turn affords the existent the opportunity to create social, political and economic institutions that bring with them the freedom to engage in the world beyond mere toil for survival. Levinas argues that both self consciousness and time are given through the encounter with the Other. Hence Levinas says, ‘[t]o be free is to build a world in which one *could be* free’. Ibid., p. 165, my emphasis.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other.⁶¹

This particular mode of philosophy ‘renounces’ the metaphysical desire described earlier by Levinas, as it favours the domination of the Same at the expense of the ‘marvel of exteriority’.⁶² Ontology, however, runs into a problem when it deploys a theoretical device that cannot be accounted for within the ontological approach. Ontology is also concerned with critique. The calling into question of its own dogmatism cannot be explained via ontology as ontology is the domination of the Same. Levinas explains that as freedom is the bases of the ontological approach, situating the source of criticism within freedom itself would lead to infinite regress.⁶³ From where then does the propensity to question its own dogmatism come from? It is here that Levinas declares one of his main premises:

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.⁶⁴

This ‘ethics’ or ‘metaphysics’ as Levinas also names it, as the calling into question of the Same by the other founds, as it makes possible, critical consciousness. Levinas has already established that metaphysics is characterised by the desire for the absolutely other, and on those grounds Levinas claims that Metaphysics therefore precedes Ontology. Only the encounter with the Other can breach the Same, and place the self into question, and in doing so bring objectivity and critical consciousness. This has implications for understanding both the place and role of ‘freedom’ in human subjectivity.

Firstly, as Levinas has equated the domination of the same through theory and knowledge with freedom, then by calling into question the supposedly self generation of the critical faculty, he is also calling into question the view that freedom is sovereign and likewise requires no explanation or grounding. Secondly, Levinas traces the view that aligns freedom with sovereignty and self-mastery as far back as Socrates, whose theory of anamnesis serves as a perfect example of ‘the primacy of the same’.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ ‘This would lead to an infinite regression if this return itself remained an ontological movement, an exercise of freedom, a theory’. Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Anamnesis, from the Greek *anamnēsis* (ἀνάμνησις) meaning to recall or to recollect, is a position put forward by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Socrates explains that learning is the process of remembering knowledge already within us and does not involve receiving anything from

That reason in the last analysis would be the manifestation of a freedom, neutralising the other and encompassing him, can come as no surprise once it was laid down that sovereign reason knows only itself, that nothing other limits it.⁶⁶

Freedom *par excellence* is seen as the exercise of one's reason and cognitive capabilities unhindered by the outside. By arguing that the same could not possibly be the origin of the capacity of the subject to be critical, and that this ability must have its origin outside of the subject, Levinas not only calls into question the limitations of freedom, but he also questions freedom's origin. By doing so he calls into question the view within the history of philosophy that sees freedom as sovereign.⁶⁷ Again we see that in challenging this view Levinas's approach takes him back beyond the starting point that has been taken for granted by so many that have come before him, the rational free subject, and he attempts to describe a more fundamental element of human life that is overlooked in such a starting point.

In prioritising the free rational subject philosophy has not only made an epistemological error, by overlooking a more fundamental moment that grounds the subject, but centrally for Levinas, this approach is also unethical, or, perhaps, it is more accurate to call this starting point *aethical*. Comprehension of being, knowledge and conceptualization, is understood by Levinas as removing alterity from the being of what one seeks to understand, and in doing so a violence is committed against the other that is understood. Just as he has done in his work of the 1950's Levinas argues that phenomenology is no exception to this characterisation of philosophy and the drive for knowledge. Levinas does not deny the originality and ingenuity of Husserl's

the outside; hence Levinas regards it as a prime example of the primacy of the same at the expense of alterity. There is no dialogue, only monologue in this recollection. In his interesting article, 'Anamnesis as Alterity?', which explores this very topic, moving beyond Levinas's well-known critical position on *anamnesis*, Leask convincingly suggests that Levinas's treatment, despite himself, 'might even take us to the threshold of a "positive" phenomenology of *anamnesis*', when *anamnesis* is understood in a similar sense to the interpretation given by Jean-Louis Chrétien. See, Ian Leask, 'Anamnesis as Alterity?', in *Transcendence and Phenomenology*, pp. 421-33.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ This comment on the propensity within the history of philosophical thought to align sovereignty with freedom is similarly argued by Hannah Arendt in her 1958 text *The Human Condition*. Interestingly, in a manner resembling Levinas's own analysis, Arendt argues that the phenomenon of the plurality of human people is a common sense rebuttal of this position. Arendt also claims that such a position can lead to dangerous political and social consequences, whereby in order for one man to be truly sovereign others must be eradicated or placed under his dominion. 'If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth.' See, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 234. James Mensch makes this connection in his 'Lectures on Levinas's Totality and Infinity', p. 21. <http://www.academia.edu/1738226/Lectures_on_Levinas_Totality_and_Infinity> [accessed Feb 2014].

phenomenology but he does not view it as a break from this overriding tendency in the history of philosophy to violate alterity by apprehending an individual being through a categorisation or general conceptualization.

Since Husserl the whole of phenomenology is the promotion of the idea of *horizon*, which for it plays a role equivalent to that of the *concept* in classical idealism; an existent arises upon a ground that extends beyond it, as an individual arises from a concept.⁶⁸

Heidegger's philosophy does not escape this criticism either. Though Heidegger's shift from the transcendental intentional ego to *Dasein* questions the primacy of consciousness in our everyday engagement with the world, Levinas is still dissatisfied with this starting point. The view of the modern subject may be redefined by Heidegger, but Levinas believes his approach remains within the dominant philosophical framework that he is challenging because there is still no accountability to, or presence of alterity, hence no ethics.

To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing?), subordinates justice to freedom.⁶⁹

Levinas explains that 'freedom' in this instance does not mean the freedom of the will, rather it means remaining the same and unaffected by the other.⁷⁰ Heidegger's philosophy, despite questioning the supremacy of the modern conscious subject, still preserves the pre-eminence of the Same.

As Heidegger prioritises the question of the meaning of Being above all else, and overlooks the unique singularity of every existent in favour of the being of that existent, Levinas sees his philosophy as unethical. Not only is ontology as a branch of philosophy deficient when it comes to describing a fundamental moment in the life of the existent, that is pre-theoretical and pre-conceptual, but Levinas also believes that it leads to dangerous and unethical political and social consequences. Ontology is not only a philosophy of injustice but it is also a philosophy of power. Levinas reiterates his claim that thematization and conceptualization represent the possession of the other

⁶⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 44-45. For a longer reflection on the various interpretations of the term 'horizon', see, Cornelius A. Van Peursen, 'The Horizon', trans. by Frederick A. Elliston & Peter McCormick, in *Husserl: Exposition and Appraisals*, ed. by Frederick A. Elliston and Peter McCormick (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1977), pp. 182-201.

⁶⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 45.

⁷⁰ 'Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other'. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

and the eradication of all otherness, by seeking to contain the other within the set parameters of a concept. Through promoting the dominance of the Same, and the drive to know and possess being, ontology is therefore egoism. Levinas believes that this egoism is not contained within philosophical discourse but can be further demonstrated in the attempt to possess not only knowledge but the very earth itself. 'Possession is pre-eminently the form in which the other becomes the same, by becoming mine.'⁷¹ Hence, for Levinas, this underlying egoism accounts for Heidegger's distrust of technology and his nostalgia for pre-technological man who was more firmly rooted to the soil. Levinas once again links Heideggerian thought with paganism.⁷² To further demonstrate the anonymity of the other within this approach Levinas emphasises that ontology becomes an ontology of nature, 'impersonal fecundity, faceless generous mother'.⁷³ This obedience to an anonymous force, be that faceless mother earth or Being in general, for Levinas, logically leads to the submission to another power, the domination of a imperialist tyrannous State.

Tyranny is not the pure and simple extension of technology to reified men. Its origin lies back in the pagan "moods", in the enrootedness in the earth, in the adoration that enslaved men can devote to their masters. Being before the existent, ontology before metaphysics, is freedom (be it the freedom of theory) before justice. It is a movement within the same before obligation to the other.⁷⁴

For Levinas it is imperative that this view of freedom as sovereignty, egotistical, and primarily for the self, does not go unchallenged. There is far too much at stake. Levinas goes on to say that these terms, the 'same' before the 'other', 'freedom' before 'justice', must be reversed. Not only in order to present a more accurate account of subjectivity, and a more accurate account of the origins and justification of freedom, but also to avoid the devastating political and social consequence that have arisen partially as a consequence of this approach to philosophy and this view of the human condition. Ethics must be given its rightful place, at the bases of not only all other philosophical thought, but also the origins of the human person.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Levinas uses such terms as 'sedentary peoples, the possessors and builders of the earth.' Ibid. In this section Levinas once again characterises Heidegger's philosophy as pagan. See, Ch. III, § 3.3.3.

⁷³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 46.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁵ Although at this stage of his work Levinas is yet to specifically refer to Ethics as first philosophy, his argument is consistent with this position that will later be phrased in these terms, as demonstrated throughout the text, for example, 'the comprehension of Being in general cannot *dominate* the relationship with the Other. The latter relationship commands the first [...]. Ontology presupposes metaphysics'. Ibid., pp. 47-48.

§ 4.2.3 SEPARATION AS DESIRE

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas challenges the view that describes the subject's relationship with exteriority as one based on any kind of need that stems from a privation or lack. Although the subject undeniably has basic needs, Levinas argues that primarily the subject's way of living in the world is the pursuit of enjoyment and pleasure, and not the fulfilment of a need.⁷⁶ The existent eats for enjoyment, and not for sustenance. In section II we explore Levinas's description of the economic life of the separated self, and how this description relates to the freedom of the self. For now, it is necessary to acknowledge both the methodological and logical importance of Levinas's account of separation based on desire and not need, for his overall analysis in *Totality and Infinity* and, in particular, his justification of freedom.

In several passages throughout the text Levinas reiterates the importance of an absolute separation between the same and the other, and why it is that the idea of infinity and the structure of desire requires this separation. Levinas is well aware, and acknowledges, that in accounting for the separation in being through desire, and not through need, he is breaking with a long philosophical tradition. Levinas specifically mentions Parmenides, Hegel and Spinoza as privileging unity over difference, but many other unmentioned philosophers could fit this description.⁷⁷ Philosophers within this tradition cannot help but begin with the empirical reality of separation, but this separation is accounted for as an illusion, a fault, or a fallenness that, in the end, will ultimately be overcome when difference is reconciled and unity is achieved.⁷⁸ Such a description of being, as ultimately a unity, leads to an understanding of separation as explained in terms of a lack or a need. By describing separation as a need, the difference in being is seen and evaluated as a space in the totality that will ultimately be filled when unity is achieved or returned to once again. One of the reasons that Levinas

⁷⁶ On this point Levinas separates himself specifically from Heidegger, who Levinas reads as explaining *Dasein*'s engagement with the world as based on utility, '[t]he things we live from are not tools, nor even implements, in the Heideggerian sense of the term. Their existence is not exhausted by the utilitarian schematism that delineates them as having the existence of hammers, needles, or machines. They are always in a certain measure — and even the hammers, needles, and machines are — objects of enjoyment, presenting themselves to "taste", already adorned, embellished.' The fact that these 'tools' are decorated reveals an aesthetic value that goes beyond pure utility. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷⁸ By way of example Levinas refers to the aforementioned philosophers when he describes the various accounts for separation, such as an illusion (Parmenides), and also when he describes the arguments offered for the reconciliation of difference and the unification of being, such as 'a moment of a history that will be concluded by union' (Hegel). *Ibid.*

describes separation in terms of metaphysical desire is that he wishes to avoid a description of separation that leads to a complete unification, or the consuming of the other into the same to fill a void.⁷⁹ In order to safeguard alterity and to avoid a totality, Levinas must think separation in such a way that, on the one hand, separation is maintained in its own right, and not based on a negation or correlation, and, on the other hand, in such a way that still allows for an encounter with what is outside of the separated being. Levinas achieves this through his account of metaphysical desire and the idea of infinity.

Levinas maintains that only when separation is described as complete and whole is desire possible. In his descriptions of desire Levinas moves away from a formal logic of need and dependency, whereby the goal is assimilation and unity. In many sections throughout *Totality and Infinity* Levinas both implicitly and explicitly argues against the formal dialectical logic of Hegel, who is an obvious antagonist on this very point.⁸⁰ In a direct challenge to Hegelian dialectic Levinas argues for a distinct separation that is not based on an opposition, nor as a result of a correlation, or negation, that together form a closed system.⁸¹

[T]he relationship with the Other does not have the same status as the relations given to objectifying thought [of the other], where the distinction of terms also reflects their union. The relationship between me and the Other [*qua* fellow human being] does not have the structure formal logic finds in all relations. The terms remain absolute despite the relation in which they find themselves. The relation with the Other is the only relation where such an overturning of formal logic can occur.⁸²

Although Levinas logically needs to explain separation based on metaphysical desire, if the idea of infinity and the alterity of the Other are to remain outside of a *noema noesis* correlation, in order to avoid substituting one logical totality for another, Levinas explains that the relationship with infinity is not reducible to, and so, goes beyond a logical totality.⁸³ As outlined by Levinas in the passage quoted above, ‘the relation with

⁷⁹ This adds to Levinas complementary reading of Plato’s description of the Good beyond Being, as it breaks with this tradition that sees being as an all encompassing unity. It is a good that is desired beyond any need, ‘The Good is Good *in itself*’. Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁰ Often Levinas implicitly distances his approach from the dialectical logic of Hegel, although Hegel is not always directly addressed. Such as, ‘Thesis and antithesis, in repelling one another, call for one another. They appear in opposition to a synoptic gaze that encompasses them; they already form a totality [...]. An absolute transcendence has to be produced as non-integrateable.’ Ibid., p. 53.

⁸¹ Levinas’s criticism of Hegel has similarities to Kierkegaard’s criticism of the Hegelian system of thinking, as the value of the individual is derived from its part in the overall system and so its unique singularity is done away with, ‘levelled-off’, or overlooked.

⁸² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 180.

⁸³ ‘Correlation does not suffice as a category for transcendence.’ Ibid., p. 53.

the [recognition of the absolute existence of the] Other is the *only* relation where such an overturning of formal logic can occur'. In contrast to Hegelian dialectic logic Levinas argues that, 'the atheist separation is *required* by the idea of Infinity, *but it is not dialectically brought about by it*'.⁸⁴ Levinas's appropriation of Descartes' descriptions of the idea of 'infinity' reflects this attempt to avoid a logical totality, by arguing that when the same encounters infinity it encounters an idea that surpasses all attempts to fully know and contain it. With infinity, the Same is said to think more than it can think. The Same encounters an alterity that is beyond the powers of the self, and puts those very same powers into question, which for Levinas is the source of ethics or 'metaphysics'. 'Infinity opens the order of the Good. It is an order that does not contradict, but goes beyond the rules of formal logic.'⁸⁵ For Levinas, the concrete way in which this metaphysical idea is encountered everyday is in the reality of sociality.⁸⁶

But the order of Desire, the relationship between strangers who are not wanting to one another — desire in its positivity — is affirmed across the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. Then the plane of the needy being, avid for its complements, vanishes, and the possibility of a sabbatical existence, where existence suspends the necessities of existence, is inaugurated.⁸⁷

§ 4.2.4 FREEDOM AND *CREATIO EX NIHILO*

In contrast to the philosophical notion of being as unity, Levinas draws on a different understanding of how to think being that is rooted in a tradition older than the philosophical origins of being as unity, namely, that of the idea of creation presented in the creation narratives in the Hebrew Bible.⁸⁸ This is another example of Levinas's rich religious heritage informing his philosophical thinking, in this particular instance, on the way in which we can think separation in being that is not reducible to a deficiency. In the biblical tradition the creator creates beings that are distinct and separate and who also, even when in relationship with the creator, do not diminish the distance between

⁸⁴ Ibid., my emphasis.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

⁸⁶ The relation with the infinite that is described in terms of metaphysical desire imposes itself on the separated I as 'a concrete moral experience'. Ibid., p. 53.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 104. Thus a rapprochement between Levinas and Judeo-Christian metaphysical thinking is possible, or, at least, a compatibility is possible. See, William Desmond's attempts to do post-Kantian and post-Hegelian philosophy of religion in light of the critical Judeo-Christian philosophical belief in creation out of nothing, in William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), esp., Ch. 7, 'Creation: The Universal Impermanence'. And, Desmond, *God and the Between* (USA, UK and Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), esp. Ch. 12, 'God Beyond the Whole: On the Theistic God of Creation'. See, also, *infra*, n.94 and De Boer's comments.

⁸⁸ See, Mensch, 'Lectures on Levinas *Totally and Infinity*', p. 42.

them, nor are they taken into God.⁸⁹ ‘Infinity is produced by withstanding the invasion of a totality, in a contraction that leaves a place for the separated being. Thus relationships that open up a way outside of being to take form.’⁹⁰ It is a relationship that leaves room for desire (for the infinite), but that is not based on dependency and need (between each other).

One implication that stems from understanding separation as a lack or a fallen state, which Levinas wishes to avoid, pertains directly to freedom. By positing the separated beings relationship with exteriority as based on need and lack, the self is situated in a closed system, wherein it is reliant on exteriority to fulfil its needs. Within such an understanding the freedom of the self is already limited and compromised. ‘Need indicates void and lack in the needy one, its dependence on the exterior, the insufficiency of the needy being precisely in that it does not entirely possess its being and consequently is not strictly speaking *separate*.’⁹¹ Within such a perspective it is difficult to argue for the origins and justification of moral freedom (and moral responsibility), as from the beginning the separated being’s relationship with exteriority is one based on need and dependency. This view of freedom as compromised from the start could also be said to support a Hobbesian view of the basic condition of the human being in the state of nature, wherein freedoms must compete with one another in the struggle to meet their needs.⁹² In place of such a view that curtails freedom from the start Levinas describes the separated being as desiring the infinite, but not in need of the infinite, and therefore even in a relationship with the same the infinite can remain

⁸⁹ ‘Society with God is not an addition to God nor a disappearance of the interval that separates God from the creature. By contrast with totalization we have called it religion.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 104. Thus Levinas replaces the religion of totalization with a religion beyond totalization (in similar fashion to the way Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued for a religionless religion of Christianity that entails political-ethical critique of the ideologies of totalitarianism).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁹² When the self’s engagement with the world is explained as based on need, the self is fundamentally in a state of vulnerability and insecurity from the beginning, and also in competition with others. In the Hobbesian state of nature rival freedoms must compete with one another, as each has the same basic needs, to achieve security and to maintain their own existence, even if that comes at the cost of others. In describing Hobbes’s view on the natural condition of man, outlined in his *Leviathan*, Kinch Hoekstra explains, ‘[t]he best strategy to obtain security is to master as many others as one can; but because this is true for everyone, the ensuing situation will be one in which each is prepared to attempt to conquer each other.’ Kinch Hoekstra, ‘Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Mankind’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. by Patricia Springborg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 109-27 (p. 110). By describing the separated self’s fundamental engagement with the world as resting on enjoyment and the love of life, this condition of ‘mankind’ is likewise challenged. Although in Levinas’s description of the self enjoying the world, the self does not yet have concern or responsibility for the Other, nor is the self in direct competition with the Other.

exterior to the self. 'For an existent is an existent only in the measure that it is free, that is, outside of any system, which implies dependence.'⁹³

A different but related consequence of viewing freedom this way is that since the separated being is described as radically separate and self-sufficient, the encounter with alterity can offer a genuine possibility of novelty, as it introduces something entirely distinct and new that comes from outside of a totality. In alterity, as genuinely separate and distinct, the 'new' is not taken into the same to fill a deficiency but opens up wider possibilities previously impossible for the separated self alone. Levinas again makes a loose reference to the monotheistic religious tradition as informing this view. 'Creation *ex nihilo* breaks with system, posits a being outside of every system, that is, there where *its freedom* is possible'.⁹⁴ As the freedom is created out of nothing it is also not dependent on the infinite in such a way as to limit the self, and in this sense can be said to be free.⁹⁵

Levinas's thinking on the necessity of an understanding of separation based on desire also sheds additional light on why, logically, Levinas must posit a separated self that exists prior to the encounter with the Other, even though it does not have to be interpreted as an empirical historical event that results in a progression from selfish living to being for the Other. Only an already self-sufficient being can 'desire' infinity. 'Here the relation connects not terms that complete one another and consequently are reciprocally lacking to one another, but terms that suffice to themselves.'⁹⁶ It is, therefore, of methodological importance for Levinas's argument that he describes the

⁹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 104. Kierkegaardian existentialist critique of systems is audible in this view of Levinas, which is further reflected in the similarities between both thinkers' criticisms of Hegel. However, even though Levinas also maintains that subjectivity is outside of any system, in distinction to Kierkegaard, he emphasises that the disruption of the 'system' begins with the Other and not I. 'It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other.' *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104, my emphasis. In his article 'Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', De Boer discusses how Levinas interprets the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* as supporting the idea of human independence. 'This notion expresses that the creature has not simply issued from the Father, and is neither an emanation of divine being nor a decrease in the being of the Absolute. Creation out of nothing means that man is absolutely other, absolutely new.' De Boer, 'Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', p. 38. The creator calls forth what De Boer terms 'a formally free being'. However, this independence is not free as the wind as it simultaneously involves an absolute passivity and responsibility. De Boer goes on to examine Levinas's reassessment of his use of the term creation in his work after *Totality and Infinity*. De Boer attributes the development in Levinas's thinking around the concept of creation to the same factor that motivated much of Levinas's later development, the attempt to move away from language that brings with it too many traditional ontological connotations.

⁹⁵ Levinas first made this similar point in his 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' article. See, Ch. I §1.10.

⁹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 103.

self as a self-sufficient separated self who ‘lacks nothing’.⁹⁷ Levinas describes Desire as, ‘the need of him who lacks nothing, the aspiration of him who possesses his being entirely, who goes beyond his plenitude, who has the idea of Infinity’.⁹⁸ If separation is described as a result of a deficiency or as a lack, then any description of the relationship with the other would ultimately result in a formal totality, and the preservation of the dominance of the Same. As was shown in the previous chapter, such a relation for Levinas is violent and unethical, as all alterity is ultimately done away with. In order to avoid such a problem, and maintain the alterity of the Other, Levinas explains the structure of being as separation, and as metaphysical desire for the infinite. Only a separated self can encounter the Other, and only a separated self can be affected by the Other, while leaving the alterity of the Other intact.⁹⁹ By describing being as plurality and exteriority, therefore, Levinas avoids an account of separation that rests on a fall, or deficiency, that will eventually result in unification and integration into ‘the same’ once again.

A consequence of this description of radical separation, which adds support to Levinas’s description of the separated economic self concerned only with its own self, is that the separation required is so radical that the separated self can ‘forget’ infinity entirely, and come to live an ‘atheistic’ life, removed from any participation from being.¹⁰⁰

But we then understand that the idea of infinity, which requires separation, requires it unto atheism, so profoundly that the idea of infinity could be *forgotten*. The *forgetting* of transcendence is not produced as an accident in a separated being; the possibility of this forgetting is necessary for separation.¹⁰¹

The ‘forgetting’ of infinity which is necessary for separation, in empirical terms, translates as a separated self who lives a life devoid of ethics concerned only with its own satisfaction and happiness. Levinas will further describe this separation within the same as requiring a place, a localization, and he will name the body as the mode in which a being exists separately, and will go on to describe the way in which the body

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid. ‘This relation is Desire, the life of beings that have arrived at self-possession’. Ibid.

⁹⁹ Levinas reiterates this point in the conclusion of the text, ‘To posit being as exteriority is to apperceive infinity as the Desire for infinity, and thus to understand that the production of infinity calls for separation, the production of the absolute arbitrariness of the I or of the origin.’ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁰⁰ Throughout the text ‘atheism’ is a term used by Levinas for the life of the separated self who ‘maintains itself in existence all by itself’. It is the ‘breaking with participation by which the I posits itself as the same and as I’. It is used by Levinas to capture the complete separation of the I from the infinite. Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 181, my emphasis.

‘dwells’ in the world. These aspects of the life of the separated self will be further explored later in this chapter when we focus on Section II of the text, for now, we will turn to another consequence of separation that holds importance for the place of freedom in Levinas’s philosophy, interiority.

§ 4.2.5 SEPARATION AS INTERIORITY

Levinas tells us that as the idea of infinity necessitates a separated self that does not derive its separation based on any opposition or correlation to infinity, but is complete and separate in its own right. Thus separation does not rest on an logical opposition to the Other, it rather must be firstly accomplished as the result of a positive movement. Levinas names this positive movement, that produces the separation of the Same, ‘an inner life, a psychism’.¹⁰² Separation as interiority, therefore, is a resistance to totality because it carves out a space for the separated being to have an inner life, for ‘thought’.¹⁰³ Levinas explains that the way in which the psychism is described in abstract terms leads to what appears to be a logical paradox. This logical paradox has two distinct but closely related dimensions; the first, which is merely raised here, is the logical problem of how the separated self can appear to precede its own cause (of being a separated self). Interiority as thought is produced by separation and offers a resistance to the totality since it is an inner time and life of a separated self, however, the improbable phenomenon of thought, what Levinas notes as a ‘revolution’ in being, requires an explanation.¹⁰⁴ As consciousness constitutes the world, it appears to the mind that the transcendental subject is the source of the world and of meaning, that representation conditions life. Although this is how it may appear to consciousness, Levinas will argue that life (pre-)conditions representation. We shall focus on this paradoxical point presently, what Levinas calls the posteriority of the anterior, by turning our attention to the place of time and representation, and intentional consciousness in Levinas’s clarification of this complex issue. We will firstly turn to the second paradoxical consequence of Levinas’s description of interiority, which he proceeds to develop here; although the separated self exists as a single self, the self is never fully with its self.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ ‘For in it [thought] the *After* or the *Effect* conditions the *Before* or the *Cause*: the *Before* appears and is only *welcomed*.’ Ibid., my emphasis.

Thought keeps the being at a distance from itself, ‘for by virtue of time this being is not *yet*’, the self is not all at once.¹⁰⁵ In distinction to a non-thinking being, such as a stone, which is solely at the mercy of the elements and the external world, the thinking self has memory and anticipation of the future to inform its actions.¹⁰⁶ ‘[B]y virtue of the psychism the being that is in a *site* remains free with regard to that site; posited in a site in which it maintains itself’.¹⁰⁷ Interiority and thought affords the separated being a position, a perspective on existence, what Levinas terms an ‘as-for-me’.¹⁰⁸ As a thinking being with interiority the human being can transcend its material historical circumstances. Thus the value of a human life cannot be judged or understood completely from an objective historical standpoint, which reduces individuals to numerically equal actors, and judges them from a distance, after the event. Such a viewpoint only has access to the external actions of such actors.

Interiority is the very possibility of a birth and a death that do not derive their meaning from history. Interiority institutes an order different from historical time in which totality is constituted, an order where everything is *pending*, where what is no longer possible historically remains always possible.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ This triadic view of time as retention and pretention in the present is of course not new to phenomenology, and is rooted in Husserl’s discussions of the internal time-consciousness of the subject. It is also important for the work of many other thinkers in the phenomenological tradition such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. See, Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*: ‘We find many streams, inasmuch as many series of primal impressions begin and end. However, we also find a connecting form, inasmuch as, for all, not merely does the law of the transformation of the now into the no longer and, on the other side, of the not yet into the now function separately, but also something akin to a common form of the now exists, a likeness generally in the mode of the flux.’ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. by James S. Churchill (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 102. Levinas views Husserl’s theory of temporality as merely a modification of the present and as such a prioritising of representation and presence. When asked by Kearney if Husserl’s theory of temporality points to an otherness beyond being, Levinas replied: ‘However radically Husserl’s theory of time may gesture in this direction, particularly in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, it remains overall a cosmological notion of time; temporality continues to be thought of in terms of the present, in terms of an ontology of presence. [...] To be more precise, the past, Husserl claims, is retained by the present, and the future is precontained in, or protended by, the present.’ Levinas and Kearney, ‘Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 26. Heidegger, however, gives an existential twist to this concept of time, stressing the interconnectedness of the experience of present-past-future in our lived expectation of the future and understanding of the past. Since one’s own death is anticipated in *Angst*, and one’s own death is outside (a ‘not-yet’) of one’s self, this points in Heidegger’s thematization of ‘time’ some notion of ‘otherness’ to ‘presence’ but which Heidegger does not develop in his thought in *Being and Time* (or in later works). Here is a possibility for Levinas to engage in a radical immanent critique of Heidegger’s (and Husserl’s) respective phenomenological reflections and analysis of time-consciousness.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Life permits it an as-for-me, a leave of absence, a postponement, which precisely is interiority’. Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

The description of the separated self as always being at a distance from itself is similar to Heidegger's description of *Dasein* as being out ahead of itself, yet the significance that Levinas gives to interiority, and the crucial role interiority plays in Levinas's description of freedom, distances him from Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*'s historicity. *Dasein* is primarily defined by what it does, 'Dasein finds "itself" proximally in *what* it does, uses, expects, avoids — in those things environmentally ready-to-hand with which it is proximally *concerned*.'¹¹⁰ In contrast to the Heideggerian thesis that *Dasein*'s freedom lies in *Dasein*'s resolute acceptance of the finite circumstance in which *Dasein* finds itself thrown into, Levinas emphasises the freedom that interiority grants the self.¹¹¹ *Dasein*'s freedom lies in *Dasein*'s willingness to resolutely accept the historical circumstances that *Dasein* finds itself in, and to embrace *Dasein*'s ownmost possibility, which is ultimately, for Heidegger, that of being a 'Being-towards-death'.¹¹² Thus, for Heidegger,

[t]he resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*. In one's coming back resolutely to one's thrownness, there is hidden a *handing down* to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one [...]. The more authentically Dasein resolves — and this means that in anticipating [its own] death it understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost distinctive possibility — the more unequivocally does it choose and find the possibility of its existence, and the less does it do so by accident.¹¹³

In place of this reading of Heidegger, within which an emphasis is placed on the concrete historical conditions that determine the fate of *Dasein*, Levinas argues that such history overlooks the unique interiority that separates thinking beings from one another, and their ability to transcend such situations. When History constructs a

¹¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 155, (SZ 119).

¹¹¹ For more on Levinas's reading of Heidegger's description of resoluteness in relation to freedom, see, Ch. I, §1.5, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology'.

¹¹² Levinas interpreted Heidegger's description on time as introducing an element of alterity absent from Husserl's description, as through the mood of *Angst* before death *Dasein* becomes aware of its future possibilities. This emphasis on the future releases *Dasein* from the present. See, Levinas and Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', p. 26. The ethical dimension of Levinas's description of time, nonetheless, is still absent from Heidegger's ontological description. *Dasein* remains concerned with *Dasein*'s own death and *Dasein*'s ownmost existence. Time, for Heidegger, remains finite as it lacks the ethical intersubjective dimension which, for Levinas, opens onto the infinite. For more on Levinas's description of temporality in comparison to that of Husserl's and Heidegger, see, Cohen, 'Levinas and the Problem of Phenomenology'. Cohen argues that Levinas's new description of time is informed by the descriptions offered by both Husserl and Heidegger, rendering justice to them both.

¹¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 435, (SZ 383-84).

unified narrative, it reduces separated thinking beings to mere objects determined by history, creating a unified linear time, ‘the chronological order of the history of the historians outlines the plot of being in itself, analogous to nature’.¹¹⁴ Human persons also exist beyond the confines of objective historical time, and have a vast interiority, and as such they are not entirely at the mercy of unfolding historical events. It would be impossible to record the inner life that is lived by every separated being that lived through the moments that are recorded in history, as chronological time could never account for, or capture, the inner time of each separated self. This is why Levinas argues that the life of the separated self is not purely determined by the trajectory of history. As each separated self has its own unique time in the form of its own interiority, it has possibilities that go beyond those made available by the course of history.

The real must not only be determined in its historical objectivity, but also from interior intentions, from the *secrecy* that interrupts the continuity of historical time. Only on the basis of this secrecy is the pluralism of society possible.¹¹⁵

In the attempt to construct a history from a so-called neutral position each individual’s alterity is overlooked, and when viewed as numerically equal from a detached position one can neither encounter alterity nor give an account of the pluralism of society.¹¹⁶ ‘The time of universal history remains as the ontological ground in which *particular existences* are lost, are computed, and in which at least their essences are recapitulated.’¹¹⁷ Levinas’s point is that the meaning and value of a human life is lived beyond and transcends what could be encapsulated in a unified historical narrative, which not only overlooks the interior life of each individual but also undermines their freedom. Thus it is of importance to address the issue of ‘freedom’ in Levinas’s work as it is integral to his philosophizing.

¹¹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 55.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

¹¹⁶ Levinas returns to this point in Section III C, The Ethical Relation and Time, ‘What is above all invisible is the offense universal history inflicts on particulars.’ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55, my emphasis. Note the Kierkegaardian stress on particular existences, their uniqueness that is obliterated by scientific ‘systems’ or ‘systematic forms’ of thought and analysis. All sciences, historical and eidetic (of Husserl), therefore, overlook this. It is arguable, however, that though Dilthey sought a science of the ‘unique’ in historical life, his ‘science’ never was comparable to historical or eidetic-mathematical or natural science but modelled on hermeneutical retrieval of the significances of particular experiences themselves expressed in language in and for our evolving human historical understanding that is never complete but always unfolding in and through time and history.

§ 4.2.6 FECUNDITY: LIFE BEYOND THE POWER OF THE I

If interiority alone was emphasised as the way in which the separated individual can escape fatalism dictated by the progression of history, we would be left with a lone individual. How would this lone individual, however, *know* that self to be alone? In other words, one must ask the critical question how interiority as ‘thought’ is possible at all? For Levinas, ultimately it is the interruption of the Other that gives rise to thought and interiority. Later we will examine how, for Levinas, the encounter of the Other is the condition for the possibility of rational thought and objectivity. Here, however, we will first look at how Levinas introduces an additional way in which the Other enables the self to escape a purely objective historical understanding of time, and which also gives a significance to human life that cannot be captured by an objective historical viewpoint, and that transcends the individual life span of that particular individual, namely, through fecundity.

Informing Levinas’s analysis of fecundity and of how life transcends historical time, is his wider description of time as historical and eschatological, first raised in the Preface. Fecundity enables Levinas to further argue that time is infinite and to question the adequacy of Heidegger’s description of time as finite and Heidegger’s reduction of time to (and so, an extension of) *Dasein*’s mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*).

A human life is not lived in isolation, but is lived with others, it is intersubjective. We are inter-dependent beings. This is the human condition. The value of an individual life, therefore, is not confined to the historical time-span in which it is lived, nor is it confined to that physical life span, or as a member of a logical genus (society) for it has significance for others who live on. For Levinas, the birth of a child — he exclusively refers to a son — brings with it the possibility for the self to triumph over death, and hence to be freed from fate.¹¹⁸

This is why the life between birth and death is neither folly nor absurdity nor flight nor cowardice. It flows on in a dimension of its own where it has meaning, and where a triumph over death can have meaning. This triumph is not a new

¹¹⁸ In his interview with Nemo Levinas explains that this description of ‘filiality’ is not restricted to biological kinship, he broadens this definition of ‘filiality’ to include any paternal relationship between a subject and an other, such as that between a disciple and a master. His point being that one’s influence on others continues on after the death of the subject, and so the death of the subject does not entirely annihilate the subject. One’s legacy is immeasurable. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 71. The movement away from a purely biological reading of kinship can be said to be already present in the text itself, where it is used as a ‘prototype’. ‘The human I is posited in fraternity: that all men are brothers is not added to man as a moral conquest, but constitutes his ipseity.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 279-80.

possibility offered after the end of every possibility — but a resurrection in the son in whom the rupture of death is embodied.¹¹⁹

In section four of the text, ‘Beyond the Face’, Levinas specifically examines filiality and fecundity, and how procreation enables the I to continue beyond its biological life and to see a significance in life beyond biological life. This analysis also reveals, for Levinas, categories of subjectivity that are not reducible to the power and the freedom of the subject, hence it is of importance in our attempt to understand freedom in the work of Levinas to briefly examine this section of the text.¹²⁰

From the viewpoint of the natural scientist, of that of the biologist and the physician, death is the end of the organism and the culmination of life. Leaving the natural scientific worldview aside, even from the existential-phenomenological perspective on death given by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, death is seen as strictly final, as the end of all possibilities for *Dasein*.¹²¹ Both of these definitions capture very little of the meaning of death that goes beyond the view of death which considers only the death of the isolated lone individual. When in our analysis we do not overlook the fundamental intersubjective dimension of a human life the meaning of death widens significantly, be that from the first person perspective of either the one who is dying, or that of their loved ones. For Levinas, death is not reducible to the end of being. Whilst accepting that as death approaches the individual is prevented from projecting possibilities into the future, that belong strictly to the subject, and hence this is why death is agonising and suffocating, because the being has no more time, Levinas believes that this is only *part* of the story. In contrast to Heidegger who focuses on the individual, Levinas does not overlook ethical intersubjectivity, and argues that it is our

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

¹²⁰ ‘The I as subject and support of powers does not exhaust the “concept” of the I, does not command *all* the categories in which subjectivity, origin, and identity are produced. Infinite being, that is, ever recommencing being — which could not bypass subjectivity, for it could not recommence without it — is produced in the guise of fecundity.’ Ibid., p. 268, my emphasis.

¹²¹ ‘The full existential-ontological conception of death may now be defined as follows: *death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein’s ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein’s end, in the Being of this entity towards its end.*’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 303 (SZ 258/59). As Levinas puts it, ‘For a being to whom everything happens in conformity with projects, death is an absolute event, absolutely a posterior, open to no power, not even to negation.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 56. In his analysis of death in *Being and Time* Heidegger is interested in the significance of death understood from the perspective of *Dasein*, for whom death is its ownmost possibility, non-relational and not to be outstripped. Talk of death with others is described as belonging to the everyday inauthentic talk of death attributed to “they”, which instead of enabling *Dasein* to be certain of its ownmost possibility actually distances *Dasein* from this authentic understanding. ‘They say, “It is certain ‘Death’ is coming”. *They* say it, and the “they” overlooks the fact that in order to be able to be certain of death, *Dasein* itself must in every case be certain of its ownmost non-relational potentiality-for-Being.’ See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ¶ 52 (p. 301, SZ 257).

relationships with others that ensure our freedom, beyond a fate that is determined by the historical circumstances of our life and the possibilities they present us with.

Without multiplicity and discontinuity — without fecundity — the I would remain a subject in which every adventure would revert into the adventure of a fate. A being capable of another fate than its own is a fecund being. In paternity, where the I, across the definitiveness of an inevitable death, prolongs itself in the other, time triumphs over old age and fate by its discontinuity.¹²²

The meaning and significance of an individual biological life transcends that of the individual's own lifetime, and opens up onto a future that continues on beyond the life of the I. This perspective extends the freedom of the I beyond the immediate powers of the I, localised within one lone individual. Levinas's analysis reveals yet another significant aspect of human life that is not reducible to the freedom of the self. In this text Levinas focuses on biological fecundity, and the birth of a child, 'it is the child, mine in a certain sense or, more exactly, me, but not myself'.¹²³

Levinas devotes a sizeable portion of the text to a phenomenological analysis of Eros, and erotic relations, which can result in this illogical possibility whereby the child is in a sense both the self and yet not the self. We will not examine these sections of the text, as they do not pertain directly to our study, except to mention a couple of aspects of Levinas's description of the erotic relation, which relates directly to his understanding of freedom. Levinas's description of the erotic relation adds to his challenge of the primacy, and exclusivity, of the understanding of subjectivity whereby the subject's engagement with the world is always mediated by intentional consciousness. The erotic relation is described as an aspect of the life of the subject that is outside of the paradigms of knowledge, power and possession, as the feminine other (the beloved) eludes the grasp of the masculine subject (the lover).

In voluptuousness the Other, the feminine, withdraws into mystery. The relation with it is a relation with its absence, an absence on the plane of knowledge — the unknown — but a presence in voluptuousness. 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.¹²⁴

¹²² Ibid., p. 282.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 271. Levinas goes on to explain that this understanding of Being breaks with the classical conception of Being as one, and in its place puts forth the idea of Being as plurality and not Unity. See, *ibid.* pp. 274-77. This alternative view of Being that challenges a prevalent metaphysical idea, from Parmenides to Heidegger, is present throughout the text. Levinas believes that Being understood as Unity compromises transcendence, as everything is ultimately the Same. Levinas's entire philosophical enterprise, that of taking seriously the place of alterity, which cannot be consumed by the Same, rests on an understanding of Being as plurality.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 276-77.

The place of the feminine and of women in Levinas's philosophy has received some criticism, most famously by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. More recently Levinas's philosophy has had a more varied feminist reading of his work, not all of which have been critical.¹²⁵ Some of the criticism has been directed at the description of the feminine as mystery, a reading that is also applied to *Time and the Other*. Although Levinas's descriptions of the woman in the erotic relation does deserve some criticism, an aspect of a particular criticism addressed to the 'mystery' of woman overlooks the point that Levinas makes in *Totality and Infinity*, that the erotic relationship is outside of intentionality and hence escapes the totalizing gaze of consciousness, hence remaining mysterious. A feminist reading of these sections of *Totality and Infinity* is complicated further by Levinas's comments in an interview with Nemo, in which Levinas remarked that 'feminine' and 'masculine' do not have to be understood as consistent with the gender male and female, but are an attribute of 'every human being'.¹²⁶ This clarification by Levinas also provides a possible reading beyond the heteronormativity that seems to pervade the text, as it moves away from a reading that equates feminine with female, and describes the object of one's erotic desire as mysterious, be that male or female. The possibility of moving away from a strictly biological and gendered reading of the text is further supported when read alongside Levinas's later comment in the same interview, that despite the emphasis on biological reproduction in the text 'biological filiality is only the first shape filiality takes; but one can very well conceive filiality as a relationship between human beings without the tie of biological kinship'.¹²⁷ There are ways in which a paternal attitude with regard to the Other is manifest in human relationships beyond the concrete example of a parent and a child. The essential point is that such a relationship enables the subject to transcend its own individual life, biological existence, and material substance, to have possibilities

¹²⁵ See, Ch. II, n. 177. For more on this aspect of his work, see, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*. See, also, the work of Luce Irigaray, Catherine Chaliel and Tina Chanter, in *Re-Reading Levinas*. Also, specifically in relation to this section of the text, see, Luce Irigaray, 'The Fecundity of the Caress: A reading of Levinas, Totality and Infinity section IV, B "The Phenomenology of Eros"', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, pp. 231-56. For another critical reading on the place of the feminine in the broader work of Levinas, see, Jacques Derrida, 'At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am', trans. by Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, pp. 11-48.

¹²⁶ 'Perhaps, [...] all these allusions to the ontological differences between the masculine and feminine would appear less archaic if, instead of dividing humanity into two species (or into two genders), they would signify that the participation in the masculine and in the feminine were the attribute of every human being.' Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 68.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

that reach beyond that subject, and even that subject's own lifetime. It demonstrates that being is plurality and not unity.

The inability to grasp the Other of the erotic relation is not due to a deficiency on the part of the subject, but because the erotic relation is outside of the paradigm of knowledge and intentional consciousness.

To love to be loved is not an *intention*, is not the thought of a subject thinking his voluptuousness and thus finding himself exterior to the community of the sensed [...]. Voluptuousness transfigures the subject himself, who henceforth owes his identity not to his initiative of power, but to the passivity of the love received. His passion and trouble, constant *initiation* into a mystery rather than *initiative*. *Eros* can not be interpreted as a superstructure having the individual as basis and subject.¹²⁸

This description of Eros falls outside of the view of subjectivity wherein the subject is described in terms of autonomous freedom, knowledge and power. The passivity of the sensible subject is also apparent in Levinas's descriptions of the erotic act, and adds to Levinas's descriptions of the subject as primarily sensing itself in the world, as opposed to being mediated through a cognitive activity. Sensation is the primary way that the self engages in the erotic act. It is a tactile act that is centred on caressing and being caressed. One feels the other, feels itself feeling the other, and is also felt. The act is not mediated by, nor belongs primarily to, intentional thought, which for Levinas is always totalizing.

The 'transcendence of fecundity' does not have the structure of intentionality, does not reside in the powers of the I [...] the erotic subjectivity is constituted in the *common* act of the sensing and the sensed as the self of an other.¹²⁹

In his descriptions of Eros Levinas revisits an idea first raised in *Existence and Existents*; that the subject is chained to itself, and so paradoxically freedom and the burdensome responsibility for its own existence together constitute the I. Eros, however, brings a new freeing dimension to his analysis, as it offers the subject a way out, that does not result in a return to the self once again, it 'arrests' the return of the I to itself. This occurs in two ways, one, through the love one has for the Other their pain and pleasure is intimately linked with the self's own, and two, through the birth of a child.¹³⁰ 'In eros the fundamental exigencies of the subjectivity are maintained — but in this

¹²⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 270.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 271, my emphasis.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

alterity the ipseity is graceful, lightened of egoist unwieldiness.’¹³¹ Elsewhere in the text Levinas explains that erotic desire cannot be described as a clash of powers, and nor does it result in the I possessing and negating the Other, it is an encounter that is prior to freedom understood as knowledge and power, ‘it [erotic love] takes place beyond all pleasure, all power, beyond all war with the freedom of the other’.¹³² It is an encounter between two separate and distinct beings that despite coming together remain separate and distinct. Erotic desire is based on a plurality that far from being eradicated, through procreation, results in the generation of a third.¹³³ Building on his critique of erotic love outlined in ‘The Ego and the Totality’, the birth of a child, which is the introduction of a third, can open up the closed, self-referential, society of two.¹³⁴ Self-interest or other interest between two can never produce an ‘ethic’, in Levinas’s sense, but care for the other, outside of you and me does. Levinas argues that the continuation of the next generation, the birth of the young, shows that death is not the end, even if it brings an end to the power of the subject. Fecundity frees the subject from fate as it opens up a future that is entirely unknown and unforeseeable. ‘It is not the finitude of death that constitutes the essence of time, as Heidegger thinks, but its infinity.’¹³⁵ This is a radical critique of Heidegger’s account of death, which is blind to this crucial intersubjective dimension of a human life that transcends the powers and the freedom of the I, even after death.

§ 4.2.7 SEPARATION AND TIME: HEIDEGGER AND BERGSON REVISITED

Reminiscent of his work of the 1930’s, wherein Levinas was critical of the view of freedom presented in the work of both Heidegger and Bergson, Levinas returns to his criticisms only now he has a more developed philosophical position of his own. In

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 301.

¹³² Ibid., p. 271.

¹³³ Levinas’s particular emphasis on a son, without ever mentioning the possibility of a daughter, can be said to undermine the force of his point. It could be interpreted as maintaining a totality that is never fully placed into question, as the son is seen as ensuring the continuation of the father. In the beloved the father encounters his own future self in the potential son, and so, is not truly open to difference. This point is made by Irigaray in ‘The Fecundity of the Caress’, wherein she phrases it: ‘The aspect of fecundity that is only witnessed in the son obliterates the secret of difference. As the lover’s means of return to himself outside himself, the son closes the circle. [...] His retreat and his appeal to his genealogy, his future as a man, his horizon, society, and security. Turning around in a world that remains his own. [...] The seduction of the loved one (*aimée*) serves as a bridge between the Father and the Son.’ Irigaray, ‘The Fecundity of the Caress’, p. 245.

¹³⁴ For our discussion on ‘The Ego and the Totality’, see, Ch. III, § 3.2.7-§ 3.2.10.

¹³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 284.

response to the perceived fatalism in Heidegger's *Being and Time* Levinas argues that it is the encounter with the Other that disturbs the predetermined trajectory of historical conditions, by presenting new possibilities to the self that do not have their origin in the individual alone. When possibility is restricted to the lifespan of the individual, viewed in isolation from genuine relations with others, the individual's freedom is reduced to fate. Without the interjection of the Other the self is slave to an isolated destiny, trapped in a self-referential circle. 'His freedom writes his history which is one; his projects delineate a fate of which he is master and slave.'¹³⁶ Through emphasising the ethical intersubjective dimensions of life, not fully seen or appreciated by Heidegger, Levinas widens the analysis of a human life beyond the life and death of the individual, to include the broadening of possibilities that the Other brings, and the continuation of time made possible by the next generation and the legacy that the self leaves behind.¹³⁷ For Levinas, fecundity opens up an infinite and *discontinuous* time, 'it lifts from the subject the last trace of fatality'.¹³⁸ The future that is not yet cannot be determined by the historical conditions of the subject alone, the Other brings a future that transcends such historical conditions.

The Other is also said to condition time, and save the self from fate in another sense. Expanding further on his critique of fatalism in *Being and Time*, Levinas here reflects on the possibility of pardon and how pardon can free the subject from the past. This analysis develops an idea alluded to in Levinas's 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' (1934), whereby freedom in the pagan tradition is shown as reducible to fate and contrasted with an understanding of freedom derived from the monotheistic tradition that ultimately rests on repentance and redemption. Whereas in the 1930's this redemption rested on the monotheistic God, now in *Totality and Infinity* pardon can come to the self from the Other, and in doing so alter the definitiveness of historical time. When the Other forgives the subject for an act they committed the subject is somehow freed from the act, '[pardon] permits the subject who had committed himself in a past instant to be as though that instant had not past on [...] pardon acts upon the

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 275. The use of the term 'project' is a deliberate reference to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and how *Dasein* lives in anticipation for the future, caught up in a future project that is not yet, which indicate *Dasein*'s care for its existence in order to forestall *Dasein*'s ultimate death.

¹³⁷ 'Fecundity continues history without producing old age. Infinite time does not bring eternal life to an aging subject; it is *better* across the discontinuity of generations, punctured by the inexhaustible youths of the child.' Ibid., p. 268.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 301.

past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it'.¹³⁹ Pardon or forgiveness (for wrong done) does not erase the past (wrong done), does not cancel or raise it to a different meaning in any Hegelian sense; but it does raise and deepen what it is to be a human being, human subjectivity, and therein increase human 'freedom'. The objective events of historical time do not have the final say, time is not a linear sequence of events which 'link up with one another indifferently'.¹⁴⁰ Through reconciliation events can be pardoned and time can be altered and given by the Other to the subject. Levinas tells us that pardon 'represents an inversion of the natural order of things' as historical time is *in a sense* undone, or, at least the domination of the historical time is overcome.¹⁴¹ Thus the time of messianic peace can rupture the time of history.

At different places in the text Levinas argues that the Other conditions time, and one senses that this is the case due to the novelty made possible by the Other. Time is saved from being 'but the [mere] image of eternity', and saved from the totalizing gaze of history.¹⁴² In this section of the text Levinas describes this time, which transcends the evidence of history, as made possible by paternity.¹⁴³ As was shown in chapter one, Levinas was very taken by Bergson's defence of free will through his account of duration, but for Levinas Bergson's intuition lacked the theoretical philosophical force necessary to account for freedom. Whilst acknowledging his debt to Bergson, moving on from Bergson, Levinas shows that the refusal of the totalization of time, and hence the avoidance of fate and the justification of freedom, rests on the encounter with the Other.¹⁴⁴ Time as duration may constantly add something new, such as the flowers in springtime, but only the human Other can definitively break with the past, whilst connecting up with it once again. The child, for Levinas, offers a reprieve for the self and accounts for the infinity of time. It is a chance to begin again, to be afresh, without taking up the burden of the past. In distinction to Bergson's continuous duration, Levinas explains infinite time in terms of a discontinuous duration: 'The past is recaptured at each moment from a new point, from a novelty that no continuity, such as

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 283.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁴³ In Section II of the text Levinas describes time in terms the ability to postpone the needs that arise from being corporeal. A home, labour and possession all offer the self the time to delay the time of need of hunger. Each of these possibilities, however, rest on consciousness which only comes to the self through the encounter with the Other. See, *ibid.*, p. 166

¹⁴⁴ 'If time does not make moments of mathematical time, indifferent to one another, succeed one another, it does not accomplish Bergson's *continuous duration* either.' *Ibid.*, p. 283.

that which still weighs on the Bergsonian duration, could compromise.’¹⁴⁵ The I will die, but through fecundity and the relation with the Other, what is created in that relation will continue on.¹⁴⁶

The discontinuous time of fecundity makes possible an absolute youth and recommencement, while leaving the recommencement a relation with the recommenced past in a free return to that past [...] and in free interpretation and free choice, in an existence as entirely pardoned.¹⁴⁷

This description of fecundity and time adds further weight to Levinas’s description of being as plurality, against the view of being as one, and it has implications for the proper way to understand ‘freedom’. ‘Being is no longer produced at one blow, irremissibly present. Reality is what it is, but will be once again, another time *freely* resumed and pardoned.’¹⁴⁸ Infinite being is produced as a plurality of times, and not just one unified homogeneous time. The relation with the Other introduces new possibilities that would not be possible for the subject alone. The future that is not yet cannot be determined by the historical conditions of the past precisely because the Other brings a future that transcends such historical conditions, and ultimately with the birth of the child transcends even the empirical life of the subject.¹⁴⁹ Although in this section of the text the discussion of time relates directly to fecundity, Levinas’s point that time is both within and beyond the purely historical view, is an important ongoing discussion that is raised throughout the text in different contexts, first raised in the Preface. What is of importance to each of these contexts is that his description of time incorporates a relation with the transcendent that breaks through a linear historical view of time. Time, for Levinas, is both within and beyond history. It is interesting to note that the very last line of this section, which is the final section of the text, before Levinas moves onto his overall conclusions, he explicitly once again raises this issue of the juxtaposition of the time of history and messianic time first raised in the Preface.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 278. Time, which comes to the self from the Other, brings something new to being, ‘time adds something new to being, something absolutely new’. Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁴⁶ Again, although Levinas explains fecundity in biological and material terms it does not have to be exclusively thought of in those terms. ‘Biological fecundity is but one of the forms of paternity. Paternity, as a primordial effectuation of time, can, among men, be borne by the biological life, but be lived beyond that life.’ Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 282.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 284, my emphasis.

¹⁴⁹ Again this reading does not have to be confined to biological fecundity, although this is Levinas’s focus in the text. The legacy of the subject will outlive the biological life of the subject, and is the result of many wide and varied influences on the subject, not least of which is the influence of human others.

The completion of time is not death, but messianic time, where the perpetual is converted into eternal. Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return the infinite time does not prohibit. Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness? The problem exceeds the bounds of the book.¹⁵⁰

Just as in the Preface, here we have Levinas alluding to his earlier point that the time of messianic peace ruptures the time of history, and in doing so transcendence breaches immanence.¹⁵¹ Despite the subtle prevalence of this central point throughout the text, here on the final line, when Levinas raises it once again, he seems to accept certain limitations to the extent to which we can fully articulate this point and answer this question, at least within the confines of the current study.¹⁵²

Levinas's description of time as the juxtaposition of both eschatological time and historical time, indirectly relates to the overlap of both the transcendental and empirical reading of the text. As this breach of finite historical time is outside of experience, and yet conditions human experience as we know it, Levinas believed the term 'transcendental' to at least closely resemble what it was that he was trying to articulate. This is not to say that it is a once for all event, that operates as an ultimate foundation on which to build experience, on the contrary, human experience is continuously saturated with this juxtaposition of the finite and the infinite, the historical and the eschatological. Levinas does not want to choose between a philosophy of transcendence, that situates the 'true life' elsewhere, or between a philosophy of immanence, which would eradicate all otherness and result in a totality at the end of history. He wishes, rather, to describe how the relationship with the Other, with transcendence, takes place within 'terrestrial existence'.¹⁵³ The metaphysical desire for the infinite is concretely enacted in the world, and witnessed in historical time, through

¹⁵⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 285.

¹⁵¹ Caygill proposes that Levinas's answer to the question posed in the opening of the text, that it is important to know whether or not we are duped by morality, is given in this final section of the book, 'The Infinity of Time'. Caygill believes the issue behind the opening question of the text about morality, and the closing question about messianic consciousness, to be the basic theme of the whole work, namely, 'war and peace'. Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 97.

¹⁵² This is a question that Levinas will return to throughout his work to come, and it is a question that he never seems to definitively answer. However, many aspects of his thought suggest that he favours the view that Messianic Time should be seen as an extreme vigilance that must remain forever watchful. The threat of what he terms here 'extreme evil' will be ever present, and hence the need for 'extreme vigilance'. 'I have described ethical responsibility as *insomnia* or *wakefulness* precisely because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort that can never slumber.' Due to a later rethink on his use of the term eschatology, Kearney asks Levinas if he would accept the term 'messianic', and Levinas replies, 'Only if one understands messianic here according to the Talmudic maxim that "the doctrine of the law will never have peace, neither in this world nor in the next'. Levinas and Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', pp. 30-31.

¹⁵³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 52.

the subject's encounter with the face of the Other.¹⁵⁴ Likewise the subject's response to the Other should be a very real and concrete action, such as offering food and shelter, the giving of the goods of one's economic existence.¹⁵⁵ The possibility of ethical behaviour, such as a pardon for a wrong done, or sacrifice made for a stranger, or simply the welcoming of the Other into one's home, point to the continual presence of the time of eschatology. However, this essential empirical dimension of the encounter does not capture the underlying metaphysical relationship of desire between the separated self and the infinite, for that can only be glimpsed as a passing interruption, which is outside of the order of freedom understood as consciousness and cognition and is not reducible to representation and knowledge.¹⁵⁶ Not only is the encounter outside of the order of freedom understood in this way, but importantly for Levinas the encounter invests the subject with the freedom of consciousness, objectivity, and hence choice.

This important premise, at the very centre of Levinas's work, that consciousness is not the primordial way that the existent relates to being, leads us back to the second paradoxical aspect of separation as interiority and thought mentioned above. Currently we will examine Levinas's displacement of Idealism, and his criticisms of the primacy of representation, carried on from his earlier work. We shall then turn to his concrete descriptions of the sensible affective separated self to be found in Section II of the text.

§ 4.2.8 THE FREEDOM OF REPRESENTATION

In the section 'Separation as Interiority' discussed above, Levinas writes that '[t]he cause of being is thought or known by its effect *as though* it were posterior to its effect'.¹⁵⁷ This is related to a central aspect of Levinas's thought that is familiar to us from our examination of his previous work. A main tenant of Levinas's thinking is his questioning of the primacy of consciousness, the directionality of sense, and the

¹⁵⁴ Levinas explains that it is this concrete event that uproots the subject from history. 'History is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a judgement is borne upon it. When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history.' Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ 'No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with *empty hands* and *closed home*.' Ibid., p. 172, my emphasis.

¹⁵⁶ Shortly after *Totality and Infinity*, in an article entitled 'The Trace of the Other' (1963), Levinas introduces 'the trace' in an attempt to capture how the residue of the breach of historical time, of ontology, by the infinite, both gives rise to and defines the humanity of man and yet will always remain unknowable. See, Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other'.

¹⁵⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 54.

possibility that not all meaning must be actively constituted by the subject [*Sinngebung*]. Rather, prior to the conscious constitution of the meaningfulness of the world the self receives meaning passively from the outside. This primary passivity of the self, nonetheless, is hidden by the prominence of reflective consciousness, and by the very fact that this underlying primordial engagement with being is beneath, or one could say prior to, reflective consciousness.¹⁵⁸ Through intentional consciousness the ego represents objects to its self, and constitutes the world, *as though* it were the source of the meaning of that object. The underlying hidden passivity of subjectivity and the dominance of intentional consciousness partially accounts for the unquestioned prominence of the modern subject within philosophy, until relatively recently. It appears as though representational thought conditions life, however, Levinas argues, it is in fact the reverse.

Even its cause, older than itself, is still to come. The cause of being is thought or known by its effect *as though* it were posterior to its effect. [...] But this illusion is not unfounded; it constitutes a positive event. The posteriority of the anterior — an inversion logically absurd — is produced, one would say, only by memory or by thought.¹⁵⁹

It is ‘memory’ and ‘thought’ that are responsible for this illusionary order of the meaning of being, whereby consciousness seems to be at the foundation of that which it comes to constitute. Levinas does not simply take memory and thought as an unquestionable property of subjectivity, he describes this phenomenon rather as ‘a revolution in being’ that therefore calls for an explanation.¹⁶⁰ The explanation he gives is the calling into question of the Same by the infinite, which in concrete terms is brought about through the encounter with the face of the Other.¹⁶¹

Thought, as a revolution in being, is an effect of the event that consciousness comes too late to constitute, and in doing so consciousness seems to precede the event.

Separation is not reflected in thought, but produced by it. For in it the *After* or the *Effect* conditions the *Before* or the *Cause*: the *Before* *appears* and is only welcomed [...]. The present of the *cogito*, despite the support it discovers for itself *after the fact* in the absolute that transcends it, maintains itself all by itself — be it only for an instant, the space of a *cogito*.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ This point relates back to the importance of the split subjectivity, see, Ch. II. In trying to describe this split in subjectivity one must revert to spatial (beneath), or linear (before) description, but the limitation of language must be kept in mind here. Both the pre-reflective sentient self and the intentional ego are ever present dimensions of the human person’s relation with being.

¹⁵⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 54.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-71.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Levinas once again brings out the similarities between his approach and that of Descartes, pointing out that just as in Descartes's third meditation the *cogito* comes to know that the idea of the infinite is the cause of its own being, known after the effect, so too is the infinite in Levinas's analysis the cause of thought, and yet encountered after the fact. Levinas explains to the reader that in one way there is little we can do about the apparent logical absurdity of the position that he is trying to articulate, as it resists such logic. This tension will inevitably arise when the metaphysician seeks to articulate the metaphysical, as the metaphysician is limited by language.¹⁶³

In a later section of the text, 'Freedom and Representation as Gift', Levinas returns to this question of how we can account for the freedom and sovereignty of representation, which for him appears as 'an exceptional possibility of this separated existence'.¹⁶⁴ Levinas dismisses two possible ways of accounting for human life that includes both the freedom of representation and action. He maintains that it is equally difficult to derive action and desire from theoretical consciousness as it is to derive the freedom of representation from action. Levinas's answer is that representation is itself conditioned, as it rests on the disturbance by the Other to the primordial pre-reflective sensible life of the self.

Representation is conditioned. Its transcendental pretension is constantly belied by the life that is already implanted in the being representation claims to constitute. But representation claims to substitute itself *after the event* for this life in reality, so as to constitute this very reality. Separation has to be able to account for this constitutive conditioning accomplished by representation — though representation be produced *after the event*.¹⁶⁵

In Section II below, we will examine Levinas's description of the separated self as the body, affective sensibility, and the preconscious life of enjoyment. Representation and thought ultimately rest on this prior relation of enjoyment, but without the Other consciousness would not spontaneously arise out of the immediacy of the life of enjoyment. Representation requires a degree of distance and time that comes through being put into question *through the encounter* with the Other.¹⁶⁶ As we shall see below, this mode of existing as a separated self is beneath the level of reflective consciousness,

¹⁶³ '[A]ll this articulates the ontological separation [A] between the metaphysician and the metaphysical.' Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁶⁶ 'Appropriation and representation add a new event to enjoyment. They are founded on language as a relation among men.' Ibid., p. 139.

but consciousness itself is unaware of this fact, as it seems to precede the very life it comes to constitute. This, Levinas argues, is the constant oversight of Idealism.¹⁶⁷ Levinas uses the analogy of a wave that when it returns to wash upon the strand would strangely wash beneath the mark it left behind.¹⁶⁸

Throughout the text Levinas explicitly refers to the work of Husserl, which he reads as having an ‘excessive attachment to theoretical consciousness’ and, as a result, views the object of consciousness, through the primacy of representation, as if it were an achievement (*Leistung*) of consciousness.¹⁶⁹ Hence, Levinas views intelligibility and knowledge as the total adequation of the thinker with what is thought. As was shown in previous chapters, this complete eradication of all that is other, through the freedom of representation, leaves the free exercise of the same unquestioned. Levinas believes that this privileging of the freedom of representation must be placed into question, if we are to make sense of morality. If morality must be seen to rest on the freedom of the ego then we are indeed duped. By pushing back before the freedom of consciousness, and describing an affective life that is outside of the order of freedom and nonfreedom, Levinas can avoid a clash of freedoms, a master-slave dialectic, or a purely naturalistic explanation that explains morality as a socially evolved phenomenon that serves the survival of the species.¹⁷⁰ In the conclusion of the text Levinas makes it clear that he cannot find a justification for the phenomenon of morality if he begins with freedom.

If freedom were posited outside of this [metaphysical] relation [with the face], every relation within multiplicity would enact but the *grasp* of one being by another or their common participation in reason, where no being looks at the face of the other, but all beings negate one another.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ ‘That representation is conditioned by life, but that this conditioning could be reversed after the event — that idealism is an eternal temptation’. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁶⁸ ‘A marsh wave that returns to wash the strand beneath the line it left, a spasm of time conditions remembrance.’ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁶⁹ ‘In clarity the exterior being presents itself as the work of the thought that receives it.’ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁷⁰ A development in Levinas’s thought after *Totality and Infinity* is to shift from his description of the fully separated self of enjoyment to a description of the subject as ‘hostage’, ‘persecution’ and ‘substitution’ from the start. This move can be partially seen as an attempt to make very clear that he is in no way resting morality on the freedom of the ego. ‘It is through the condition of being a hostage that there can be pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity in the world — even the little there is, even the simple “after you sir”. All the transfers of sentiment which theorists of original war and egoism use to explain the birth of generosity (it isn’t clear, however, that there was war at the beginning; before wars there were altars) could not take root in the ego were it not, in its entire being, or rather its entire nonbeing, subjected not to a category, as in the case of matter, but to an unlimited accusative, that is to say, persecution, self, hostage, already substituted for others.’ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Substitution’ (1968), trans. by A. Lingis in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, pp. 80-95 (p. 91).

¹⁷¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 302.

If freedom were taken as the unquestioned starting point, one of two things is possible, knowledge or violence, with no room left for a justification of morality outside of those two systems. The self would either entirely assimilate the other as an object of knowledge, or would clash with the other as an obstacle to be dominated or eradicated.¹⁷² Levinas, therefore, does not take freedom to be at the foundation of subjectivity, but in his questioning of freedom he does not argue against freedom. Far from it, by describing freedom as invested through the encounter with the Other, both freedom and morality are justified.

§ 4.2.9 THE ORIGINS OF OBJECTIVITY

For Levinas, if we were to ground the freedom of representation in a principle of cognition, this would be to ground freedom in itself, which not only seems to imply an infinite regress, but such a response also avoids the question that seeks an explanation and grounding of freedom. This position would still take the freedom of representation as a given.¹⁷³

Knowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin — in an unnatural movement to seek higher than one's own origin, a movement which evinces or describes a created freedom.¹⁷⁴

In the text Levinas contrasts this view of a created freedom, a freedom that has been invested from the outside, with that of what he terms a '*causa sui*'. '*Causa sui*' is sometimes said of God in traditional metaphysics, but the human being is not (a) God, it is not self-generated. Levinas uses the term to represent the position within philosophy that takes the freedom of reflective consciousness as a given.¹⁷⁵ Levinas argues that this view of freedom as '*causa sui*' is deficient for several reasons, most notably for his own

¹⁷² As De Boer notes, 'no one can be a slave of the Good. Slavery exists only within the sphere of the totality, in which autonomous beings limit and dominate each other', 'Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', p. 38. Levinas situates the encounter with the Other prior to the freedom of the self, thus he avoids the problem of a clash of freedom or a master slave relation. Levinas first made this point in his article 'Freedom and Command' (1953), see, Ch. III, §3.2.

¹⁷³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 85.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁵ Levinas says of such a tradition, 'The spontaneity of freedom is not called in question; its limitation alone is held to be tragic and to constitute a scandal.' *Ibid.*, p. 83. It is an obstacle (*scandalum*) that trips one up, and gets in the way of giving a proper account of subjectivity.

purposes, as it can only lead to a clash of freedoms and so undermines morality.¹⁷⁶ Such a view cannot account for any limitation to freedom, as this would seem to diminish freedom, and so this position views the limitations put on such a freedom from exteriority as an affront to freedom. In order to not dismiss morality and the moral life as a genuine phenomenon within the life of the human person, Levinas cannot and does not begin from the idea of freedom. The Other does not oppose or limit my freedom, but invests freedom. 'It is therefore not freedom that accounts for transcendence of the Other, but the transcendence of the Other that accounts for freedom'.¹⁷⁷

Freedom, be it that of war, can be manifested only outside of totality, but this 'outside totality' opens with the transcendence of the face. To think of freedom as *within* totality is to reduce freedom to the status of an indetermination in being, and forthwith to integrate it into a totality by closing the totality over the 'holes' of indetermination.¹⁷⁸

For Levinas the notion of independence and separation must be grounded elsewhere than freedom. Levinas grounds separation in the description of the separated self as affective sensibility and not as a conscious free subject. This enables him to argue for the investment of freedom as critical consciousness. Hence he describes this freedom as a created freedom in contrast to a freedom understood as *causa sui*.

Objectivity, for Levinas, is not a natural way for the separated self to exist, as it does not account for why a freedom unlimited would begin to distance itself from that which it is immediately engaged with.¹⁷⁹ As Levinas says, '[t]he objects are not objects when they offer themselves to the hand that uses them, to the mouth and the nose, the eyes and the ears that enjoy them'.¹⁸⁰ In enjoyment there is no significant distance between the I and the object of its enjoyment, as it can be completely assimilated and can become mine. The life of enjoyment is prior to objectivity and intentional representative consciousness. Objectivity is a property of consciousness, which itself requires an explanation. For Levinas, speech, rather, is the basis of all signification and

¹⁷⁶ 'Thus freedom, an abstraction that reveals itself to be self-contradictory when one supposes it to have a limitation, can not describe beings in the relation that does not constitute totality, beings in war.' Ibid., pp. 223-24.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ In relation to this point, that intersubjectivity is the foundation of objectivity, Peperzak notes that Levinas is alluding to the fifth of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, where '[w]ithout another being there in front of me, I could not free myself from immersion in the elementary enjoyment of my surroundings. [...] Objects are born when I place things in the perspective of other persons. Detached from their hedonistic and egocentric function, those things receive an intersubjective meaning and existence.' Peperzak, *To The Other*, p. 165.

¹⁸⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 94.

objectivity. Without that initial address from the Other the self would be void of objectivity, reflective consciousness and language.¹⁸¹ ‘The objectivity of the object and its signification comes from language’, which in keeping with his previous work, Levinas argues is primarily an address to someone, a discourse.¹⁸² This function of language comes before any attempt to communicate knowledge or to verbalise one’s internal life. Speech is vocative before it is nominative.¹⁸³

In contrast to his earlier work, in this text Levinas describes speech primarily as teaching, and the first thing that the Other teaches to the self is the very presence of the Other.¹⁸⁴ Language is also taught to the self by the Other, and along with language *perception* as objectification *is taught*. Hence this rules out all naturalistic explanations of both language and perception as products of stimuli and effects. ‘It is because phenomena have been taught to me by him who presents himself [...] — by speaking — that henceforth I am not the plaything of a mystification, but consider objects.’¹⁸⁵ The immediacy of enjoyment is broken up by a distance that objectivity brings, along with a shared world that one can speak about with others and have its own views of the world confirmed or denied.¹⁸⁶ In being confronted by something that the I cannot contain and completely assimilate, the I comes to know that there is a complete distance and a separation between itself and exteriority. The predominant view in modern philosophy equates freedom with knowledge, and as knowledge rests on certitude Levinas argues that freedom in this tradition is therefore solitary and cannot be a basis for an adequately

¹⁸¹ ‘Speech is thus the origin of all signification — of tools and all human works [...] Language is not one modality of symbolism; every symbolism refers already to language.’ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁸³ As Lingis phrases it, ‘[b]efore speech is informative, it is vocative and imperative’. A. Lingis, ‘The Malice in Good Deeds’, in *Nietzsche and Levinas “After the Death of a Certain God”*, pp. 23-32 (p. 23).

¹⁸⁴ Just as in his earlier work Levinas made it clear that the face is not seen but heard, so too does he stress this point throughout the text. In several places Levinas contrasts language with vision. Vision is regarded as more easily belonging to the immanence of the same as images are more readily understood as complete and immanent to thought. Speech is a greater immediate challenge to the freedom of the subject, as it is not so easily fully assimilated. ‘Speech refuses vision, because the speaker does not deliver images of himself only, *but is personally present in his speech*, absolutely exterior to every image he would leave. In language exteriority is exercised, deployed, brought about. [...] Language is the incessant surpassing of the *Sinnggebung* by the signification’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 296, my emphasis. Thus the reason why the ‘self’ that is expressed in speech is neither a subject nor an object of knowledge for the speaker or hearer is precisely because that self is the one doing the expressing in the expression of the expressed signification. In this sense then, this self is ‘inexpressible’, outside of the expressed as ‘absolutely exterior to every image he would leave’.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁸⁶ ‘To be an object, to be a theme, is to be what I can speak of with someone who has broken through the screen of phenomena and has associated me with himself.’ Ibid.

full description of human life as we live it.¹⁸⁷ In contrast to this Levinas argues that truth comes from plurality, ‘the locus of truth is society’.¹⁸⁸

Knowledge, objectivity and representation, are aspects of the life of the self because they were addressed by the Other, and in that address invested with freedom understood as reflective consciousness. The existent becomes conscious through a relationship with a radical alterity that calls its spontaneous freedom into question. Thus Levinas calls this calling into question the freedom of the I ‘conscience’. The metaphysical condition for the possibility of consciousness is therefore conscience and desire, and this is concretely encountered through the welcoming of the Other. ‘Conscience and desire are not modalities of consciousness among others, but its condition. Concretely they are the welcoming of the Other across his judgment.’¹⁸⁹

By not accepting the conscious subject as a given Levinas breaks with the tradition of transcendental thinking, and yet, Levinas also pushes empirical thinking as far as it can go. The dimension of human life that he wishes to describe, despite its mundane reality and everyday occurrence, is not directly open to the gaze of intentional consciousness. The encounter with infinity transcends concrete experience, whilst also being encountered in a very real way in the everyday social occurrences in the world. It takes place within the interval between the sensible event and representation. Hence consciousness is blind to it. Consciousness arrives on the scene too late to capture certain crucial aspects of human life, and yet by its very nature, will never notice these dimensions that escape its own totalizing gaze. There is an unbridgeable gap that exists between the encounter with the infinite at the level of the pre-reflective sensible self, and the intentional ego that comes too late to constitute that event.¹⁹⁰ As Hanlon phrases it, ‘consciousness arrives on the scene too late to objectify the experience’.¹⁹¹

What is essential for Levinas is that the very event that conditions and produces reflective consciousness is beyond what can be known and captured by consciousness.

¹⁸⁷ When philosophy focuses on the life of reason alone, we are left with a strange abstraction that does not resonate with the ordinary lived experience of human beings. As Levinas says himself, ‘[t]his book’s insistence on the separation of enjoyment was guided by the necessity of liberating the I from the situation into which little by little philosophers have dissolved it as totally as reason swallows up the subject in Hegelian idealism’. Ibid., p. 298.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ ‘The *cogito*, we said, evinces separation. [...] That there could be a chronological order distinct from the “logical” order, that there could be several moments in the progression, that there is a progression — here is separation.’ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁹¹ Hanlon, ‘From Existence to Responsibility. Restlessness and Subjectivity in the Early and Late Levinas’, p. 289.

This is what makes the event so crucial, and what founds reflective consciousness. It is the very fact that it is an excessive event that is greater than anything consciousness can contain, that places the power and sovereignty of consciousness into question, and hence a radical separation between the same and the Other can exist, and the freedom of representation can come about.¹⁹² Hence Levinas argues: ‘Representation derives its freedom with regard to the world that nourishes it from the relation essentially moral, that with the Other’.¹⁹³ By describing the life of the affective self outside of the order of freedom and nonfreedom, Levinas does not indicate the limitation of the freedom of representation, as he pushes back before such a distinction. By asking what gives rise to the freedom of representation and reflective consciousness in the first place, Levinas believes himself to have presented a proper defence of freedom.

De Boer regards the sections of the text that deal with the founding of the theory of knowledge as among the most fascinating of the whole work, and they inform his transcendental reading of the text. For De Boer, part of the reason why he reads Levinas as arguing that the Other is the transcendental condition of the Same, is because without the Other objectivity and critical awareness would not be possible.

Of itself, human freedom is uninhibited. To know is to exercise freedom’s power. Why, then, should this power be hampered by objectivity, why should it let itself be arrested by inconvenient truths? According to Levinas, there would be no objectivity if the Other were not watching; it is he who interferes with our spontaneous naïveté and prompts critical awareness. This breach in natural dogmatism would be impossible without the presence of the Other’s face, before whom arbitrariness shies back and is ashamed. [...] Knowledge cannot be founded in itself — Levinas turns against the entire tradition of the autonomy of thought.¹⁹⁴

Within the sections of the text that deal with the founding of the theory of knowledge, Levinas makes it clear that it is the relationship with infinity, concretely enacted as the encounter with the Other, that founds critical consciousness and objectivity. Given that without the encounter with the Other the self would be devoid of objectivity, language, reflective consciousness and time, it is difficult to support a strictly empirical linear reading of the text, as it is hard to imagine such a life of the separated self prior to this empirical encounter.

¹⁹² ‘The total freedom of the same in representation has a positive condition in the other that is not something represented, but is the Other.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 126.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁹⁴ De Boer, ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’, pp. 16-17.

It is in Section II that Levinas turns to his description of the life of the separated self. Given that it is devoted to describing the life of the separated self it is unsurprising that this section is seen as supporting the empirical reading of the text. It is to this description of the preconscious life of the separated self to which we now turn. Here we will see how Levinas develops a description of the separated self as affective sensibility. This description enables him to argue that the self, through a relationship of enjoyment with exteriority, is susceptible to the ethical encounter with the Other, prior to any engagement with the world at the level of reflective consciousness. Something spoils the self satisfied happiness of the life of enjoyment of the separated self and brings the unnatural facility of critical consciousness, and with it, a created freedom.

§ 4.3 'INTERIORITY AND ECONOMY'

As was outlined in the earlier section of this chapter, at this stage in Levinas's thinking he believes that it is necessary to maintain a self sufficient separated self, and one that has its own identity, prior to the encounter with the Other, in order for him to be able to argue for metaphysical desire.¹⁹⁵ Levinas needs to be able to describe *this self* as self-sufficient, and as not in 'need' of the Other to fill a deprivation or lack — hence the self and the Other can maintain separation even in relation — and yet, he also needs to leave an opening for the purposes of making sense of how such a self-sufficient self can be disturbed from the outside. Levinas finds this opening in his description of the self in terms of passive affectivity, grounded in sensibility and not mediated by cognition. This provides an opening to exteriority precisely because the self is already in a relation with the other. Through grounding this immediate engagement with existence in sensibility, understood as a love of life, rooted in enjoyment and not need, Levinas also avoids presenting the self as deficient and needing to assimilate and dominate exteriority.¹⁹⁶ Thus Drabinski rightly characterises his evaluation of the text:

It is our basic contention that *Totality and Infinity* must be read as a phenomenological rethinking of sense and transcendentality, but one that first

¹⁹⁵ 'If the same would establish its identity by simple *opposition to the other*, it would already be a path of a totality encompassing the same and the other.' As Levinas says himself, that step in his argument is 'important for the possibility of metaphysics.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 38.

¹⁹⁶ As Duyndam argues, 'The radical passivity of enjoyment opens the "inverted" self to the transcendent other. [...] Enjoyment performs my part of what Levinas calls separation [...] enjoyment does not so much conflict with the other's appeal to me; it is the very condition of my openness to the appeal.' Joachim Duyndam, 'Sincerely Me. Enjoyment and the Truth of Hedonism', in *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*, pp. 67-78 (p. 67).

must break with the nucleus of meaning constituted by the free subject. Levinas accomplishes this break in part by situating the founding condition of experience in the sensible.¹⁹⁷

This description of the pre-reflective sensible life of the self, that is prior to representational consciousness, and hence prior to freedom understood as representation, also enables Levinas to avoid a master-slave relation, or a clash of freedoms, and hence a foundation on which to ground morality and in the process justify freedom. Just as in 'The Ruin of Representation' (1959), when Levinas argues that representation removes the subject from the wider horizons in which the subject is embedded, in this text Levinas examines one such horizon in greater detail, the horizon of the sensible.

Levinas's descriptions of the separated self as primordially living a life of enjoyment, free of any awareness of responsibility to the Other, does not have to be read as an historical event that occurs in one's own life prior to any empirical encounter with the Other. We must keep in mind that the title of the text is totality *and* infinity, as both are crucial elements of human life. The sensate life of enjoyment, prior to the subject's cognitive engagement with the world, is an ever present primordial element of human life. As is the interruption of the face of the Other that takes place at this level, which is outside of experience understood as mediated by intentional consciousness, and yet is the condition for such awareness and objectivity. Both of these dimensions of human life, the affective sensible passive self and the consciously-engaged subject, run concurrently to one another. The descriptions of the life of the same are not of a life before, that will cease after the encounter, but of the elements of life that are lived blind to the Face of the Other. The sensible life of enjoyment is an ever present reality of corporeal living that is not eliminated through the encounter with the Other, but can be justified and made good. As Levinas remarks:

The description of enjoyment [...] assuredly does not render the concrete man. In reality man has already the idea of infinity, that is, lives in society and represents things to himself.¹⁹⁸

An important question, therefore, to ask of this section of the text, is the question of whether or not freedom is part of the description of the separated self prior to the encounter with the Other, and in what sense does Levinas use the term freedom in this

¹⁹⁷ Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*, p. 87. Chapter four of this work (pp. 83-128) is devoted to a comprehensive study into the importance of sensibility in *Totality and Infinity*.

¹⁹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 139.

context. In answer to this question what we note is that Levinas makes a significant difference between the limited sense in which he uses the term freedom to describe the separated self prior to the encounter and the sense in which freedom is used to describe that which is invested by the Other.

§ 4.3.1 SEPARATION AND ENJOYMENT

In Section II Levinas sets out to further describe the structure of the Same by turning to a concrete description of relations that remain within the Same.¹⁹⁹ Here Levinas reminds us that although what he is seeking to describe is prior to representational consciousness and objectification, he does not mean for it to be read as a criticism of intellectualism but as its condition.

But we maintain that the social relation is experience pre-eminently, for it takes place before the existent that expresses himself, that is, remains in himself. In distinguishing between the objectifying act and the metaphysical we are on our way not to the denunciation of intellectualism but to its very strict development.²⁰⁰

Distancing himself from the approach of both Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas states that the metaphysical relation that he is seeking to describe cannot be understood in terms of intentionality nor will it be founded in the existent's relation to the world, such as *Dasein's* care. Both of these descriptions begin too late for Levinas, who tells us that '[d]oing, labour, already implies the relation with the transcendent'.²⁰¹ *Dasein's* 'care' for existence already implies some level of awareness of one's own existence. Levinas's description of the life of enjoyment begins prior to any such awareness. Levinas's reading of Husserl, that the basic act of consciousness is seen as representation, also applies to enjoyment, as every other act is rooted in this originary

¹⁹⁹ For a more in depth summary of this section of the text, see, Peperzak, *To The Other*, pp. 147-61.

²⁰⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 109.

²⁰¹ Ibid. Although Levinas's descriptions differ from Heidegger's, Wyschogrod makes the point that Levinas's descriptions of the separated self's most basic way of being in the world, as enjoyment and habitation, are similar to Heidegger's descriptions of the primordial comportments that capture being in the world. Edith Wyschogrod, 'Language and alterity in the thought of Levinas', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, pp. 188-205 (p. 194). Despite the similarity between the two approaches, Bergo reminds us that an important difference remains, as was mentioned in Ch. I., Heidegger's moods are already a kind of comprehension, whereas Levinas begins before any such critical faculty. Enjoyment is rooted in the corporeality of the separated self and is immediate in a way that any consciousness can never be. Bergo, 'The Flesh Made Word; Or, The Two Origins', pp. 99-100.

act of representation.²⁰² By prioritising consciousness, such representation will always be cut off from non-objectifying acts such as breathing, eating, sleeping etc. De Boer makes an interesting observation on this point: ‘In a way the sovereignty of enjoyment is greater than that of constituting consciousness, for the mastery of absolute consciousness is naked and poor’.²⁰³ Consciousness may be the only way that the self can come to know the world, but consciousness can never enjoy the world.

Levinas finds Heidegger’s approach likewise deficient at describing sensible life, as it priorities our mortality, and *Dasein*’s care for being in order to preserve *its own* being. In doing so, Heidegger overlooks the relation of enjoyment.²⁰⁴ Levinas does not detach the vital components for maintaining life from the love of life. Eating is not merely done for sustenance; in fact we very rarely eat purely to stay alive, for eating is done for the joy of eating. By describing this relation with exteriority as enjoyment the self is already rising above purely ontological categories, as life is lived for enjoyment and not purely for the preservation of being. Levinas tells us that ‘[t]o be an I is to already be beyond being in happiness [or unhappiness]’.²⁰⁵ Levinas also views Heidegger’s approach as deficient on moral grounds: ‘Food can be interpreted as an implement *only in a world of exploitation*’.²⁰⁶ Food is seen purely as an implement of survival when our more immediate engagement with food as enjoyment is overlooked. By prioritising the utility of food, in terms of ensuring our survival, food is interpreted as a resource that potentially each must struggle against one another for, or can be used to exploit others. In his interview with Kearney, Levinas compares Heidegger’s work to an interpretation of the work of Darwin, as on his reading both emphasize the drive to preserve one’s own being as the primary motive in the human condition.²⁰⁷

²⁰² ‘To enjoy something would thus mean: to represent something first and second to evaluate or ascribe value to the representation.’ De Boer, ‘Enmity, Friendship, Corporeality’, p. 133.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁰⁴ For a deeper analysis of the relationship between Heidegger and Levinas on the sensibility of the self, see, Alphonso Lingis ‘The Sensuality and the Sensitivity’, in *Face to Face with Levinas*, pp. 219-30.

²⁰⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 120.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134, my emphasis.

²⁰⁷ ‘In *The Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger defines *Dasein* in almost Darwinian fashion as “a being that is concerned for its own being”. Levinas and Kearney, ‘Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 26. Bernasconi questions this way in which Levinas aligns the thought of Heidegger with social Darwinism. In doing so, Bernasconi claims, Levinas uses Heidegger’s thought as a ‘surrogate’ for Darwinism, unfairly criticising Heidegger in place of directly confronting Darwinism and related ideas. ‘By doing so, he finds a way of confronting the idea of a struggle for existence on terms of his own choosing’. Robert Bernasconi, ‘Levinas and the Struggle for Existence’, p. 172. See, Ch. II, n. 32. In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas develops his description of the basic characteristic of all beings and borrows a term from Spinoza to characterise this view, ‘*conatus essendi*’, which is very close to the Darwinian and Heideggerian position he summarises here. Despite Levinas’s increasingly negative view of beings as inherently self-serving and egocentric, for Levinas ontology does not have the final word, in fact it cannot account for

Levinas's affective sensible self does not represent itself to itself through thought. Rather, the corporeal self non-cognitively feels itself in existence prior to thinking. 'One does not know, one lives sensible qualities: the green of these leaves, the red of this sunset'.²⁰⁸ Levinas describes this sensible immersion in existence as primarily the enjoyment of life.²⁰⁹ 'Separation is first the fact of a being that lives somewhere, from something, that is, that enjoys.'²¹⁰ Adding to his description of separation as interiority explored in Section II, Levinas explains that concretely the separated being first and foremost has a position in being, a presence in which it is 'at home with oneself (*le chez soi*)'.²¹¹ The mode by which the self is concretely positioned in existence is the body. By describing the self as first and foremost an affective body Levinas moves beyond the dualist tradition inherited by Descartes.²¹² Levinas begins from the living body, from incarnate life, and so, rejects the idea of embodied *consciousness*. This also enables Levinas to avoid the position that the

language and words at all. It could be argued that although Levinas's thought can be used to contribute to a rethinking of this view of humanity, his own description of the human being remains somewhat within this paradigm. It seems that he accepts the basic premise that the human being has a predisposition towards egotistical living. Granted, for Levinas, such predispositions are connected to ontological structures, which Levinas claims are at least momentarily subverted by the metaphysical relation to the infinite. However, if it was not for the Other the self would remain wrapped up in the immediacy of narcissistic egotistical living. Levinas still views being, and our egotistical ontological existence, as essential negative. For a critical reading on Levinas's negative view of Being, see, Leask, *Being Reconfigured*.

²⁰⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 135.

²⁰⁹ Peperzak criticises Levinas's description of the self's existence in the world as one that is based primarily on enjoyment, as it leaves out a phenomenological description of the hardship that inevitably comes with existence such as sickness, pain, disaster, the volatility of nature. Peperzak rightly wonders if a description that takes account of such elements would challenge the ego centric nature of Levinas's description, as the hostility of exteriority would displace the egocentrism of the self. Although it is fair to say that Levinas's description is unfairly weighted towards the *jouissance* of life, it is still the case that for Levinas the human Other is profoundly different from all that is other, no matter how bleak. See, Adriaan Peperzak, 'Sincerely Yours. Towards a Phenomenology of Me', in *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*, pp. 55-66. In his earlier work *Existence and Existents*, Levinas does address some of the more negative aspects of existence, such as insomnia, and such aspects of life still appear to belong to this level of existence. See, Ch. II.

²¹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 216.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²¹² This of course is does not begin with the work of Levinas. Contemporaries of Levinas, that belong to the group characterised as existential phenomenologists, present a similar challenge to the Cartesian view of consciousness. Levinas was familiar with the work of Merleau-Ponty, whose *Phénoménologie de la perception* was first published in French in 1945. The centrality of the body in Merleau-Ponty's account of perception presents a radically different understanding of consciousness to that of the Cartesian view. Levinas mentions Merleau-Ponty twice in *Totality and Infinity*, and makes reference to Merleau-Ponty's 'corporeal intentionality' in the section of the text that argues that discourse finds signification. *Ibid.*, p. 207. For a brief comparison between Levinas and Merleau-Ponty on corporeality, see, De Boer's 'Enmity, Friendship, Corporeality'. Also, Bettina Bergo, 'Radical Passivity in Levinas and Merleau-Ponty (Lectures of 1954)', in *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*, pp. 31-52. For more on the similarity between both Levinas's and Merleau-Ponty's critical reading of Husserl, see, Timothy Mooney, 'On the Critiques of Pairing and Appresentation in Merleau-Ponty and Levinas', in *Transcendence and Phenomenology*, pp. 448-94.

corporeal nature of subjectivity, and all of the needs that come with it, are seen as a restriction to the freedom of the conscious subject, as the self is primarily described as a sensate body. The body embedded in the world, that is the source of its enjoyment, is prior to the freedom of representation.

The world I live in is not simply the counterpart or the contemporary of thought and its constitutive freedom, but a conditioning and an antecedent. The world I constitute nourishes me and bathes me.²¹³

Levinas's description of the corporeal self's engagement with exteriority as the love of life, then, undermines the position that the needs of the body are an affront to freedom.²¹⁴ This very approach to the mind-body problem is as a result of the dualist tradition, whereby the body and its needs are superfluous to consciousness, and hence undermine its autonomy. In Levinas's approach such a concern loses its validity, through the very enjoyment of life lived in corporeality.²¹⁵ The relationship between the self and the other-than-the-self is seen in terms of enjoyment. The body as the concrete separation of the self brings life, which, for Levinas, is primarily the love of life. Eating is a pleasure and not a chore. The life of enjoyment is life lived from the other, the elements, and not a life dependent on lack and need. 'The elements do not receive man as a land of exile, humiliating and limiting his freedom.'²¹⁶ Even the basic material needs of the I are not a limitation to freedom, as the order of freedom and non-freedom are outside of this paradigm.

In the pain of needs reason does not revolt against the scandal of a *given* pre-existing freedom. For one cannot first posit an I and then ask if enjoyment and need run counter to it, limit it, injure it, or negate it.²¹⁷

The concrete separation of the self described as enjoyment, therefore, is an important step in Levinas's overall attempt to ground freedom in morality, in opposition to a tradition that grounds morality in freedom. If the separated self was described as primordially dependent on exteriority and in need, then this would easily lead to a

²¹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 129.

²¹⁴ 'What we live from does not enslave us; we enjoy it'. Ibid., p. 114. 'The sensible world, overflowing the freedom of representation, does not betoken the failure of freedom, but the enjoyment of a world.' Ibid., p. 140.

²¹⁵ In his article 'Enmity, Friendship, Corporeality' De Boer discusses the relationship between the body and freedom in *Totality and Infinity*, and argues that freedom exists precisely as body. 'In a concrete sense freedom consist in the suppleness and the agility of the body, in deft anticipation of a blow, in fleetness of foot.' De Boer, 'Enmity, Friendship, Corporeality', p. 138. De Boer convincingly argues that for Levinas the reliance of the body on the external world, for the fulfilment of bodily needs, is not seen as depletion of the subject's autonomy or freedom.

²¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 140.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

Hobbesian description whereby the state of nature is a war of all against all. By describing the separated self in a relationship with exteriority characterised as desire, and enjoyment, Levinas avoids beginning from a place of need and deficiency, and hence the self is not in competition with others but wrapped up in its own selfish enjoyment. Though this description is far from the Hobbesian war of all against war, it is not yet ethical either. Separation as enjoyment, nonetheless, is a necessary condition for the possibility of both the encounter with the Other and also the possibility of a genuine meaningful response.²¹⁸ In Section III Levinas goes on to argue that the concrete separation of the self understood as enjoyment, conditions the possibility of the self responding to the Other in a meaningful material fashion.

Speech is not instituted in a homogenous or abstract medium, but in a world where it is necessary to aid and to give. It presupposes an I, an existence separated in its enjoyment, which does not welcome empty-handed the face and its voice coming from another shore.²¹⁹

If it were not for the life of enjoyment the self would have nothing to offer the Other and nowhere to welcome them. The *material* character of responsibility, therefore, is central for Levinas, of what use is an open heart but closed hands. A genuine response to the Other must consist of a physical gesture and a material giving, be that abdicating your place for the Other, welcoming them into your home, or offering the food you intend to eat to the Other.

The level at which the separated self dwells in existence as enjoyment, is devoid of the ethical significance of life that comes from being confronted by the Other, it does not yet involve an awareness of one's responsibility for the Other. In fact it involves practically no 'awareness' at all. As Duyndam writes, '[e]njoyment is not a relationship with an object [...] enjoyment is the relationship with this relationship'.²²⁰ We can add to Duyndam's reading presented in the article that this immediate unmitigated immersion in enjoyment is partially due to the fact that the life of enjoyment lacks

²¹⁸ Duyndam convincingly argues that within *Totality and Infinity* enjoyment is not incompatible, or conflicting, with responsibility, but is its necessary condition. See, Duyndam, 'Sincerely Me. Enjoyment and the Truth of Hedonism'. Llewelyn makes a similar point: 'The true and just plurality of society is concretely produced in hospitality extended to the Other from within the economic base of a home in which the subject that enjoys and maintains itself in separation says to the Other 'Peace'. '[T]he relationship in question is one that allows space for the individual subject in inner identification with itself and its own happiness, bliss or indeed salvation to welcome the other into its home.' Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas. The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 67 and pp. 68-69.

²¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 216. Again this shows the material nature of morality for Levinas. The vision of the face is encountered in economic life, and deserves an economic response. This presupposes that one must have a place in which to welcome the Other, and have possessions to share.

²²⁰ Duyndam, 'Sincerely Me. Enjoyment and the Truth of Hedonism', p. 74.

objectivity. The self reference of interiority is concretely accomplished as enjoyment, because in enjoyment, although the self is in relation with exteriority, it results in a complete return to the self.²²¹ While through enjoyment the self is in a relation with the non-self, the other, this other poses no shock to the self's being at home with itself, as it is not sufficiently other enough and is entirely consumed. Through nourishment the other is consumed and becomes 'mine', 'my own energy, my strength, me'.²²² The radical otherness of the Other is required to shock the self into the realisation that there is an alterity not reducible to the Same. The Other is not a threat to the freedom of the self but what prompts the self to become aware of their egotistical enjoyment and in the process invests freedom understood as representation and objectifying thought.

There is a fundamental passivity to this description of the self that enables Levinas to explain how it is possible for such a self-sufficient existent to be put into question from the outside. By describing the sensibility of the body Levinas articulates a fundamental openness and passivity, prior to constituting consciousness. Initially the body is fundamentally a position in being, a place, and as sensible it cannot but be affected by exteriority. The ground under your foot, the sun in your eyes and the breeze on your skin, all affirm exteriority prior to any constitution of it. The self is passive before it is active. Even the act of grasping by the hand is conditioned by the position of the body. It is not the constituting ego that is primary, but the sensible body. 'To posit oneself corporeally is to touch an earth, but to do so in such a way that touching finds itself already conditioned by the position [...] as though a painter would notice that he is descending from the picture he is painting.'²²³

§ 4.3.2 FREEDOM AS A 'NULL' FREEDOM

There is wide agreement amongst commentators on *Totality and Infinity* that Levinas's description of the self, prior to the encounter with the Other, is of a self that lives a purely egotistical free life and one that, through the encounter with the Other, is re-orientated, turning that self away from a self-centred preoccupation, and to Other-centred responsibility, from egotistically free to ethically free. The self is judged by the

²²¹ 'Enjoyment accomplishes the atheist separation; it deformatizes the notion of separation, which is not a cleavage made in the abstract, but the existence at home with itself of an autochthonous I.' Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 115.

²²² Ibid., p. 111.

²²³ Ibid., p. 128.

Other and hence given the opportunity to begin anew and to have the possibility of a moral life.²²⁴ Many critics see this as a transition from an unethical freedom to an ethical freedom. Visker, for example, summaries this view, when he remarks:

Indeed it seems Levinas' entire philosophy is based on this contrast between a pre-ethical freedom which is disoriented, like a compass needle at the Earth's poles that has only itself as a point of reference, and a freedom that is imposed upon us from outside and is thus able to provide us with the orientation we need.²²⁵

Outside of the encounter with the Other, the self lives in the categories of the same, living purely for itself and without any purpose other than its own enjoyment. The Other interrupts the self, in an act that has not been freely initiated by the self, yet the self must respond to this imposition. This is, partially, why Levinas maintains that responsibility is older than freedom, pre-dates one's exercise of freedom. The focus in the existing literature has mainly been on the ethical reversal to the freedom of the self that the Other brings.²²⁶ This focus is unsurprising given the nature of Levinas's thought, and of course it is a fundamental aspect of his thought, and so, one that should be highlighted. This, however, is not the full picture. By turning our attention specifically to the sense in which Levinas uses the term 'freedom', both to characterise the egotistical life of the self, and to characterise that which is invested by the Other, we will see that there is more to the 'freedom' invested by the Other than the ethical reorientation that is generally given attention.²²⁷ To clarify this point, let us turn specifically to how the 'freedom' of the self is described in Section II of the text.

²²⁴ This crude characterisation overlooks the differences between the individual readings that fall within this broad category.

²²⁵ Visker, *The Inhuman Condition*, p. 149. Although Visker does not give consideration to the aspect of Levinas's argument that maintains that the Other also brings the freedom of critical consciousness and self-reflective thought, he provides an excellent summary of how the self is involuntarily egocentric by virtue of having to be one's own being and that it is the Other that reorients the self by bringing a meaning not derived from the self. See, pp. 142-57. Visker's contrast here between a 'pre-ethical' freedom and an 'ethical' freedom lends itself to a linear interpretation, even though what he is describing is the contrast between the life of the self undisturbed by the Other and the unchosen ethical responsibility that comes through the encounter. As we will see in §4.4.1 these two sensibilities are concurrent realities of human life that, argued in §4.4.4, should not be understood in straight forward linear sense.

²²⁶ There are exceptions to this general trend, for example, De Boer, 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy'.

²²⁷ Due to the focus of our study, what concerns us is the usage of the term freedom in relation to Levinas's description of the separated self and the change that occurs to the freedom of the self due to the encounter with the Other. Levinas discusses freedom in more than these two senses in the text. For example, in certain sections of the text Levinas uses the term in relation to social and political freedom, such as the 'freedom' and potential benefits that can come from the creation of a society and the establishment of social, political, and cultural capital and infrastructure. Such phenomenon affords the subject the time and the space to go beyond a life dedicated to immediate sustenance. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 165.

When Levinas uses the term ‘freedom’, and ‘sovereignty’, to describe the egotistical life of enjoyment it is used in the very minimal sense of the possibility of commencement, meaning the minimal requirement of having a position in being.²²⁸ Levinas describes this egotistical existence as like a hungry stomach without ears, as it is entirely consumed with its own immediate enjoyment, and lacks any awareness of anything beyond that.

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 communication and all refusal to communicate — without ears, like a hungry stomach.²²⁹

Levinas compares this way of existing to an animal existence, as it lives only for the present and is absorbed by its own immediate pleasure, lacking any critical consciousness or solitude.

The ‘sovereignty of enjoyment’ is a material independence that comes from being a living body, and as a living body it can undergo influences. The affective sensibility of the body is what brings joy, but this porous nature also brings vulnerability and the possibility of sickness and danger. This inherent vulnerability that comes with being a body rules out the possibility of a self-initiated idealist freedom, or what Levinas refers to as a *causa sui*, which cannot be affected from the outside. Nor should it be thought of as a ‘limited or finite freedom’.²³⁰ By beginning with the body Levinas shows that the understanding of freedom as consciousness, almost independent of the body and independent of the context of any particular situation, is an intellectual abstraction.²³¹ ‘The insecurity of the morrow, hunger and thirst scoff at freedom.’²³² This ‘freedom’ that comes from being a body, with a position in being, is so minimal that Levinas calls it a ‘null freedom’. It is merely a by-product of life that is shared with all beings.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 148. In the conclusion Levinas describes this freedom as ‘my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over things, this freedom of a “moving force”, this impetuosity of the current’. Ibid., p. 303.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 164.

²³¹ As Jill Stauffer phrases it, ‘[w]hat is innate or admirable about the human being according to what sometimes gets called “the Western tradition” is subjected by Levinas to reversal: the subject is not free and autonomous by nature but rather is shot through with vulnerabilities against which neither time nor opportunity to defend itself.’ Jill Stauffer, ‘The Imperfect. Levinas, Nietzsche, and the Autonomous Subject’, in *Nietzsche and Levinas “After the Death of a Certain God”*, pp. 33-47 (p. 35).

²³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 241.

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 (*une liberté nulle*). Freedom is as it were the by-product of life (*le sous-produit de la vie*).²³³

This ‘freedom’ bears very little resemblance to Levinas’s use of the term freedom when referring to critical consciousness and the freedom of knowledge, which is the possession of objects through concepts.²³⁴ Although both descriptions of freedom involve possession of the other — one literally consumes exteriority through nourishment and the other assimilates objects through knowledge — the vital difference is the distance that objectifying consciousness brings, and that is invested *by the Other*. This possibility of moving beyond this animal-like egotistical existence is brought through the encounter with the Other, when the egotistical life of sovereignty is disturbed.²³⁵

Levinas states that the very minimal freedom, understood as a commencement, is necessary in order to have the possibility of creating a world in which a greater degree of freedom, such as a freedom from the immediacy of needs and the higher social freedoms that can come from social institutions and mutual cooperation, can be achieved. However, such possibilities are built upon the encounter of the Other, without whom our ‘freedom’ would be no more than that of any other form of ‘life’. Trapped in the present, an existent may have the feelings of fear and danger, but Levinas describes these as ‘feeling par excellence’, as they are limited to the present they are not consciousness which is described as the ‘possibility of making use of time’.²³⁶ Human beings, who take up habitation, build a home, and dwell on the earth are in the privileged position of being able to build a world, a society, social institutions, which enable us to establish infrastructure that can bring social freedoms. Levinas tells us, ‘[t]o be free is to build a world in which one *could be free*’.²³⁷ The establishing of a

²³³ Ibid., p. 165.

²³⁴ This distinction between two different understandings of freedom, one as a ‘mere by-product of life’ and the other understood as the freedom of critical self-reflective thought, each related to the self and the ego respectively, was made by Levinas as early as *Existence and Existents*. See, Ch. II, § 2.1.14.

²³⁵ ‘The happiness of enjoyment is stronger than every disquietude, but disquietude can trouble it; here lies the gap between the animal and the human.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 149.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 165, my emphasis. This point makes one reassess the accuracy of the idiom ‘free as a bird’. ‘Freedom’ is used here to describe the benefits that come from living in a stable, peaceful society, that through the founding of political and social institutions, one has the time and the possibility to transcend a life dominated by the material needs of the body and to pursue many other interests. Moral freedom and moral peace, however, is more than this as political and social institutions — which are human products with all necessary imperfections therein — ‘may be only the systematic perpetration of injustice’. Matthew O’Donnell, ‘Peace and Conflict’, in Matthew O’Donnell, *Moral Concern for Society*, ed. by James McEvoy (Maynooth: St Patrick’s College and the Irish Philosophical Society, 2006), pp. 107-12 (p.

home, and labour, which point to a withdrawal from the immediacy of enjoyment, and therefore require time, require an explanation.²³⁸ This sense of time, and the possibility of postponement, comes to the self from the relationship with infinity, concretely described as the encounter with the Other.²³⁹ Representational consciousness removes us from the immediacy of the body, brings time, by bringing a distance from the present.²⁴⁰

Levinas goes on to further describe the concrete structures of the Same by describing the economic life of the self. We are once again reminded that human existence as we know it, including meaning, critical consciousness, awareness of time, the freedom granted by social institutions, language, and society, all rely on the metaphysical relationship of Desire that is enacted concretely through the encounter with the Other. Without whom none of this would be possible. The economic life of the self is built upon the more fundamental life of enjoyment, and adds a complexity to life that would not be possible for the self alone. Although the economic life of the self is founded on the encounter with the Other, Levinas describes it is within the structures of the Same and outside of the ethical-metaphysical relation to the Other.

§ 4.3.3 ECONOMIC LIFE AND FREEDOM

Already in Section I of the text Levinas explains that our economic life in the world, such as the home, labour, and the economy, articulate the structure of the Same.

This reversion of the alterity of the world to self-identification must be taken seriously; the ‘moments’ of this identification — the body, the home, labour, possession, economy — are not to figure as empirical and contingent data, laid

111). Moral freedom entails a freedom to do better than previously, hence, in principle, it must unfold as a permanent critical calling into question whatever we have responsibility for and that includes the existing laws and order in any given society.

²³⁸ ‘This withdrawal implies a new event; I must have been in relation with something I do not live from’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 170.

²³⁹ ‘But time, which manifests itself in the recollection of dwelling, presupposes [...] the relation with an other that is not given to labour — the relationship with the Other, with infinity, metaphysics.’ Ibid., p. 166.

²⁴⁰ De Boer argues that postponement is the basic concept in Levinas’s philosophy of time. Happiness is seen by Levinas as one of the basic modalities of being in the world, however, happiness can always pass, depending on what the future holds. De Boer tells us that Levinas points out that our weapon against this constant threat is postponement. Freedom is possible because of time. Free to prepare yourself for the future. When one is not free to do this, when one is held down through physical violence and reduced to an object among other objects, this freedom is reduced to nothing. Without the freedom of the body, the freedom of the will is severely compromised. See, De Boer, ‘Enmity, Friendship, Corporeality’.

over the formal skeleton of the same; they are the articulations of this structure.²⁴¹

Levinas calls the identification of the Same ‘the concreteness of egoism’.²⁴² In Section II Levinas describes these concrete elements of the habitation of the ‘I’ in the world. Economic life belongs within the description of the structure of the Same as it is blind to the face of the Other and centres around the self, but this is not to say that it is prior to the encounter with the Other, and therefore before the Other invests the self with freedom. Levinas makes it clear that the economic life of the subject, presupposes the disruption to the Same by the Other, put differently, presupposes a relation with infinity, a relation with the transcendent: ‘Labour, however, already requires discourse and consequently the height of the other irreducible to the same, the presence of the Other.’²⁴³ The complexity of economic life presupposes language, sociality, the home, and objectifying thought, all of which rest on the freedom of representation, which the Other invests.²⁴⁴

Economic life is a continuation of the life of enjoyment, although it incorporates a level of complexity that is absent from the immediacy of the sensibility of the body. In economic life, ‘I maintain myself egoist and separated, identifying in the diverse my own identity as the same, through labour and possession. The Other signals himself but does not present himself’.²⁴⁵ Economic life is blind to the face of the Other because in labour I work to maintain myself, and in the realm of commerce other human persons are reduced to their utility. I can avoid the Other, and fulfil my needs through the use of my labour. The radical otherness of the face remains hidden, even though one works alongside others. There is an anonymity to economic life that hides the face. I cannot approach someone in their unique singularity through their work, as products of labour hide the alterity of the maker. Also, the Other is beyond the power of the self in a way that is profoundly different from external objects that the self can mould and bend to their will through labour and work. ‘But the stranger also means the free one. Over him I have no power (...*je ne peux pouvoir*).’²⁴⁶ Such objects do not disturb the ‘I’s

²⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 38.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 117. ‘Doing, labour, already implies the relation with transcendent’. Ibid., p. 109.

²⁴⁴ The passage from instantaneous enjoyment to the fabrication of things refers to habitation, to economy, which presupposes the welcoming of the Other. Ibid., p. 146.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 39. In the preceding pages Levinas described the I’s at home (*chez soi*) in the world as a site where ‘I can’ (*je peux*), and as such I am free. The French term ‘*pouvoir*’ can also be translated as ‘can’

being at home with oneself (*le chez soi*). Other people can also be controlled by the power of the self in economic life, but when the self treats people like other objects, the self is blind to the face. The Other eludes the power of the self.

Levinas's descriptions of work reveal ways in which the freedom of the individual is restricted in economic life. Although labour is the means through which the I can procure wages, and can maintain its interiority and its home, paradoxically work is also a means by which the I can be exploited. Within the economy the I becomes an anonymous wage-earner. 'Thus the product of labour is not an inalienable possession, and it can be usurped by the Other.'²⁴⁷ Not only is the product of the I's labour usurped, but the I also has very little control over how the work will be interpreted and used by others.²⁴⁸ In this sense, the product of one's labour is abortive, as it has a destiny beyond the control of the I. The power of the subject does not accompany the product beyond its production.²⁴⁹ As a will and a freedom the I can produce products, and through the procurement of those products by others, its freedom is compromised. 'The labour which brings being into our possession *ipso facto* relinquishes it, is in the very sovereignty of its powers unceremoniously delivered over to the Other.'²⁵⁰ Levinas clarifies that this restriction to the freedom of the I does not stem from an action of any other but from the fact that it is beyond the power of the I to be able to see the future.

§ 4.3.4 SEPARATION: FORGETTING OF THE INFINITE

The economic life of the separated self obviously does not cease as a result of the encounter with the Other, as economic life is an integral part of human life.²⁵¹ For Levinas, the life of enjoyment will remain an ever present reality for the separated self. It is of importance to note, however, that the ethical reorientation to the egotistical life of the self that the disruption by the Other can bring can be short lived, for, just as in Section I, where Levinas argued in more abstract terms that the same can forget infinity,

or 'being able', and alludes to Husserl's "I can" and Heidegger's "*Seinkönnen*". Both of which emphasize the activity of the subject, whereas the Other interrupts the existent prior to any 'I can'. See, Ch. I, n. 213.

²⁴⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 176.

²⁴⁸ 'The worker does not hold in his hands all the threads of his own action'. Ibid.

²⁴⁹ 'A separation opens between the producer and the product'. Ibid., p. 227.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ The self and the Other will also always remain separated. 'The same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and absolve themselves from this relation, remain absolutely separated.' Ibid., p. 102.

so too in concrete terms the separated self can forget the Other.²⁵² This point helps us to understand how the Other is the condition for representational thought, which is evident in the economic life, and yet at the same time the Other is absent from economic life. The I that lives in economic life has the freedom of representational thought — language and society are testament to that — but the moral orientation given to the freedom of the Same to be a freedom for the Other, is lacking. One way in which Levinas explains this is by arguing that separation of the self is so radical that the self is separated to the point of forgetting the infinite. This also accounts for the very real possibility of the self to display truly selfless behaviour, and yet for this behaviour to be short lived. The self needs to be continually put into question by the face of the Other in order to be reminded of its responsibility to the Other, and to have the possibility of readjusting its behaviour accordingly. As Levinas tells us in his title, life is lived between both totality *and* infinity.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Levinas's thinking at the time of *Totality and Infinity* was that this description of the separated self was a necessary step in his argument. As he says,

[e]goism, enjoyment, sensibility, and the whole dimension of interiority — the articulations of separation — are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the Other which opens forth from the separated and finite being. Metaphysical Desire, which can be produced only in a separated, that is, enjoying, egoist, and satisfied being, is then not derived from enjoyment.²⁵³

This description of the separated self describes the self at the level of affective sensibility, and although it is 'before' the cognitive conscious aspects of the self this before is not to be understood in an historical sense, it is rather an ongoing dimension of the human person, and at the level at which the Other confronts the self. Levinas also views it as a methodological and logical necessity that enables him to avoid positing separation as a non-dialectical relation, and thus move beyond a description of the self that is deficient and in need of exteriority, and also, give an explanation for how it is that a fully separated self can be disturbed by the Other. Levinas tells us that the interiority that ensures separation must produce a being that, on the one hand, is

²⁵² In his work, *Discovering Levinas*, Morgan presents a similar reading, which he returns to throughout his text. Morgan argues that the self, in Levinas's description, is primarily and primordially 'for-the-other', but that the self becomes engrossed with prioritising its own self over the being of the other. Through the encounter with the face this priority is reordered once again. The encounter sets it right, by returning the self to its 'true original self'. 'The Ego returns to its true, original self by being accused and hence through its tie to the other person, spontaneity returns to passivity, as it were'. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas*, p. 82.

²⁵³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 148.

absolutely ‘closed over upon itself’, guaranteeing its self-sufficiency and separateness, and, on the other hand, this ‘closedness’ must not prohibit exteriority from speaking to the separated self. ‘In the separated being the door to the outside must hence be at the same time open and closed.’²⁵⁴ The Other knocks on that door.

De Boer convincingly argues that another more subtle problem that Levinas avoids by positing a self-sufficient existent that exists prior to the encounter with the Other, is a problem that has been raised to criticise the dialogical tradition in general and Buber in particular, when he argues that ‘I become through you’ (*Ich werde am Du*). When we begin to scratch the surface of Buber’s position, the argument quickly descends into circularity. In order to have a genuine encounter one would have to presuppose a self, but how can we have a self, prior to this encounter, if selfhood only arises as a result of the encounter? Another question this approach raises is how did the Thou become prior to this encounter? To be consistent one would have to maintain that it was a result of a prior encounter. But what of the Thou of that encounter? The argument quickly descends *ad infinitum*, needing an original Thou to found the first ‘I’. De Boer notes that in his *Der Andere* M. Theunissen deals with this problem by positing the becoming of a *true self* in this encounter, however, De Boer does not hold this position to do away with the problem, as in doing so Theunissen reverts back to the solitary ego of the transcendental view. De Boer maintains that Levinas, in contrast to Buber, deals with the problem by positing a self-sufficient self prior to the encounter with the Other:

Levinas’s articulation is clear. Becoming oneself through the Other is ‘investiture’. In the encounter a transformation from egoism to altruism takes place. I am not ‘constituted’ by the Other, for in my joyous existence I already was an independent being. I am judged by the Other and hence given the opportunity to begin anew. Encounter does not mean that my freedom is restricted but that I am awakened to responsibility.²⁵⁵

A consequence of such a radical separation is that the separated being ‘forgets’ infinity.

But the separated being can close itself up in its egoism, that is, in the very accomplishment of its isolation. And this possibility of *forgetting* the transcendence of the Other — of banishing with impunity all hospitality (that is all language) from one’s home, banishing the transcendental relation that alone

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ De Boer, ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’, p. 31.

permits the I to shut itself up in itself — evinces the absolute truth, the radicalism, of separation.²⁵⁶

Although it is only as a concrete separated being that the self can encounter the Other and also have something to give, paradoxically, separation also involves the possibility of shutting oneself up in one's own home, not only shutting out the Other in the process, but forgetting the Other completely. Levinas tells us that to do so is to take advantage of the possibilities that are afforded to the self as a result of the relationship *with* the Other, such as objectivity, society, and a home, and yet to not acknowledge the responsibility that one has *to* the Other. A renunciation of your debt to, and your responsibility for, the Other, is possible due to separation. One may be able to forget and close themselves up in their home, but they cannot undo the responsibility to the Other. As Levinas says, it is like accepting the benefits of a game while deciding that you are personally exempt from the rules. To illustrate his point Levinas makes reference to Gyges, who in Plato's *Republic* tells the story of a ring that turns the wearer invisible and subsequently permits the wearer to behave in any way that they may wish, free from any repercussions or the judgement of others.

Gyges's ring symbolizes separation. Gyges plays a double game, a presence to the others and an absence, speaking to 'others' and evading speech; Gyges is the very condition of man, the possibility of [both] injustice and radical egoism, the possibility of accepting the rules of the game, but cheating.²⁵⁷

Gyges need not give an account of his actions precisely because he has made himself invisible in those actions therein knowingly abdicate his responsibility towards and for the others whom he cheats.

The encounter with the Other, just like the life of enjoyment of the self, are both situated at the level of the sensible, which is outside of representational consciousness. This 'forgetting', therefore, is to be understood as a renunciation of the responsibility one has for the Other and thus is a possibility of an ontological being. Just as human life is lived between the time of history and messianic peace, human existence is defined by both a propensity for living for oneself and the metaphysical desire for the infinite. It is not a question of either being for yourself or being for the Other, since

²⁵⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 172-73, my emphasis. This passage is very similar to a passage in *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas describes 'egoism' as the forgetting of responsibility: 'The unlimited initial responsibility, which justifies this concern for justice, for oneself, and for philosophy can be forgotten. In this forgetting consciousness is a pure egoism. But egoism is neither first nor last.' Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 128.

²⁵⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 173.

both are possible. It is rather, aside from the rare examples of a life lived predominantly governed by self-interest or the interest of the Other, that each of us at times act in ways that speak to both sensibilities. On this point we are in agreement with Peperzak, who tells us:

Levinas's philosophy does not fix the opposition between a narcissistic ego and a moral law of altruism that should be urged upon its egoism. Ego is *at the same time* turned and returned to itself by the spontaneous egoism of its being alive (a *zooion* or *animal*) and transcendent, that is, exceeding its own life by desiring, i.e., by a nonegoistic 'hunger' or generosity for the Other. This duality is *not* the classical twofold of the body and spirit. The reflexivity of ego's self-identification is as corporeal, sensible, and affective as ego's orientation and dedication to the Other.²⁵⁸

Both of these possibilities are present simultaneously, the self is both a spontaneous freedom, in the sense of a mere commencement in being, and in a relation of desire with the infinite which calls this very 'freedom' into question. As Levinas puts it early on in the text, '[t]he miracle of creation lies in creating a moral being. And this implies precisely atheism, *but at the same time*, beyond atheism, shame for the arbitrariness of the freedom that constitutes it.'²⁵⁹ Later in the text, Levinas makes a similar point, 'metaphysical thought, where a finite has the idea of infinity — where radical separation and relationship with the other are produced *simultaneously*'.²⁶⁰

Despite that fact that both of these sensibilities are present in the self, using the medium of language Levinas must explain both separately. Towards the very end of this chapter we will briefly acknowledge the limitations of language that complicate Levinas's attempt to articulate what is beyond constituting consciousness and not reducible to concepts. This is something that Levinas will continue to struggle with far beyond this early major work. For now, it is to the second simultaneous sensibility, still at the level of affective sensibility, and therefore prior to the freedom of representation and reflective consciousness, that we shall examine. Not only does the human Other call this spontaneous null freedom into question, but through this questioning the Other brings the distance necessary for objectivity and time, and hence invests the freedom of representation and the possibility of a moral life.

²⁵⁸ Peperzak, *To The Other*, p. 137. Peperzak follows a convention whereby omega [ω] is transliterated as oo rather than an o with a macron [\bar{o}]; ζῷον can also be transliterated as zōon.

²⁵⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 89, my emphasis.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 299, my emphasis.

§ 4.4 'EXTERIORITY AND THE FACE'

Section III of the text 'Exteriority and the Face' has by far received the most attention in the secondary literature. Levinas's description of how the encounter with the Other disturbs the self's egotistical life, and through this encounter the self is opened up to living for-the-Other, is by now a familiar reading. As this mostly empirical description dominates the readings of this section, we will not revisit what has become familiar ground. Our reading, rather, will focus on Levinas's description of the investiture of freedom that the Other brings to the self, a freedom that can never, in principle, be self-generated by that self. We will keep in mind the question of whether or not the self is free prior to the encounter and as a result of the encounter is made ethically free, or, that the self, prior to the encounter, has no more 'freedom' than any other form of life, a mere commencement in being not even worthy of the name 'freedom'. This makes a straightforward empirical reading of this issue problematic, as what kind of empirical life is possible without language, objectivity, time, critical consciousness and self-awareness?²⁶¹ It would be a strange life indeed, and Levinas's comparison to an animal existence would be quite appropriate. As this is the case, Levinas's self assessment of his affinity with Kant's transcendental approach seems quite fitting, though there are significant differences. Levinas, in places, undeniably describes the encounter with the Other in empirical terms, but it an empirical reading informed by a transcendental approach.²⁶² Although the encounter conditions subjectivity, the concrete encounter with the Other can happen time and again, but it is an event that in a sense has always already occurred. This is the strange logic of the anterior-posteriori. The Other is said to be prior to the freedom of the self because the encounter occurs at the pre-cognitive

²⁶¹ A potential problem that is raised by some commentators against *Totality and Infinity*, when the movement from egotistical 'freedom' to ethical 'freedom' is read in an empirical and linear fashion, is that what if the subject manages to avoid the encounter, does the subject then live a egotistically free life? This problem is noted by Bernasconi in his article: 'What is the question to which "substitution" is the answer?', in which he argues that Levinas's reformulation of his description of subjectivity given in *Otherwise than Being* does away with the possibility of this potential problem. See, Robert Bernasconi, 'What is the question to which 'substitution' is the answer?' in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, pp. 234-51 (p.246). Our reading of *Totality and Infinity* shows that this potential problem is in fact, not a problem, when the two different senses of the term freedom are taken into account. If this is a 'problem', it does not represent an oversight in Levinas's description, but reveals a possibility for the human person. One can indeed ignore the face of the Other, or perhaps become blind and desensitised to it, but this does not mean that the encounter has not happened. For, as it has been shown, it is not just ethical freedom that comes through the encounter, but also the freedom of representation and each of the freedoms that follow.

²⁶² This reading is informed by a very similar reading presented by Drabinski in *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*. 'The language of empiricism is therein co-opted, but with a twist of the transcendental'. p. 87.

level of sensibility, which is below the level of the freedom of representation. The Other is said to ‘invest’ the self with freedom, as without the Other the self would lack objectivity, language, time, and the freedom of representation.

§ 4.4.1 SENSIBILITY FOR THE FACE OF THE OTHER

In the opening pages of Section III Levinas once again uses language that resonates with the transcendental method, whilst also distancing his starting point significantly from that of Kant’s. When describing sensation, Levinas emphasises that sensation is primarily enjoyment, and should not be understood as sense ‘content’ there to facilitate objectification. Levinas is distancing his approach from the dominant position in modern philosophy that takes the subject as both primary and a given. Levinas tells us,

Rather than taking sensations to be contents destined to fill a priori forms of objectivity, a transcendental function *sui generis* must be recognised in them [...]; a priori formal structures of the non-I are not necessarily structures of objectivity [...]. The senses have a meaning that is not predetermined as objectification.²⁶³

Having described this immediate life of enjoyment in the preceding section, remaining at the precognitive level of affective sensibility, Levinas moves on to describe a sensibility that is profoundly different from the sensibility of enjoyment, that of the face of the human Other. The face disturbs the self’s being at home with itself in a way that the other which is consumed through enjoyment never could. The face speaks to the self, and in doing so opens up a dimension of transcendence that would never come through vision, as vision is an all-consuming grasping.²⁶⁴ ‘The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist.’²⁶⁵

Drabinski, in agreement with Lingis, reads *Totality and Infinity* as describing two different sensibilities that share the same logical structure, that of sense from the outside. One, a sensibility of sensuous enjoyment, which Lingis describes as appropriation, and the other a sensibility for the face of the Other, which Lingis

²⁶³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 188. Levinas explicitly refers to Kant’s *The Critique of Pure Reason* and compares Kant’s approach to his own, which he here refers to as a ‘transcendental phenomenology of sensation’.

²⁶⁴ ‘Vision is not a transcendence’. Ibid., p. 191.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

describes as expropriation and responsibility.²⁶⁶ This is an important distinction to make, as it raises the question of the radical difference between these two sensibilities, and why it is that it is the face of the Other alone that can disturb the egoistic self-referential life of enjoyment. Drabinski remarks, correctly, that it is only the human Other that is capable of marking the relation of separation. And we can add that this separation is necessary to bring about the distance from the immediacy of enjoyment that is necessary for time, objectivity and critical consciousness to appear. Not only does the face stimulate the calling into question of the spontaneity of the self, the ‘null’ freedom of the self, enabling the possibility of a life lived in consideration of Others, but this interruption also brings with it objectivity and reflective consciousness.²⁶⁷

Levinas emphasises that the human Other is more radically other than the other of the world, as it is ‘*prior to every initiative*, to all imperialism of the same’.²⁶⁸ The otherness of the exteriority of being of nature is not quite radical enough to bring the self to question its own self, such a realisation can only come when the self is confronted by an alterity that is cannot consume. In the immediacy of enjoyment, the self lives from the other, which is completely consumed. The Other resists such possession, and it is this passive resistance that makes it different from the other of exteriority in the life of enjoyment. What is striking about the face is that it speaks to the self, addresses the self, and in doing so obligates the self to respond. Only the human Other can address the self in this way, ‘the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power *exercised*, be it enjoyment or knowledge’.²⁶⁹ Just as in his earlier work, even though Levinas uses the term ‘face’ to describe the Other, the sensibility of the face is *an auditory* stimulation rather than a visual one. Language, which comes from the Other, is the first teaching and the beginning of objectivity.²⁷⁰ In the address, the self is confronted by an alterity that cannot be consumed, and in the confrontation the self is made aware that the Other is

²⁶⁶ Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*, p. 108. Drabinski refers here to Lingis’s article, see, Lingis, ‘The Sensuality and the Sensitivity’, p. 227.

²⁶⁷ ‘The structure of consciousness or of temporality — of distance and truth — results from an elementary gesture of the being that refuses totalization. This refusal is produced as a relation with the non-encompassable, as the welcoming of alterity — concretely, as presentation of the face. [...] The welcoming of alterity hence conditions consciousness and time.’ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 281.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39, my emphasis.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198, my emphasis.

²⁷⁰ ‘Language makes possible the objectivity of objects and their thematization.’ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

not the self, and cannot be taken under the control of the self. This brings self-awareness, which is necessary for objectivity.²⁷¹

The major difference between the Other and the other (*qua* empirical other) is the dimension of height that characterises the Other, what Levinas terms, the ‘asymmetry of the face’. This is an important point for it explains how Levinas avoids a Hobbesian clash of freedoms or a Hegelian master-slave dialectic in one’s encounter with the Other. The Other does not contest or cancel the freedom of the I but simultaneously calls that self into question and invests that self with freedom to act responsibly for the Other.

To posit being as Desire and as goodness is not to first isolate an I which would then tend toward a beyond. It is to affirm that to apprehend oneself from within — to produce oneself as I — is to apprehend oneself with the same gesture that already turns towards the exterior to extra-vert and to manifest [...] it is to affirm that the becoming-conscious is already language, that the essence of language is goodness, or again, that the essence of language is friendship and hospitality.²⁷²

Before we turn to the investiture of freedom which the encounter with the other presents to the self, we will briefly examine the asymmetry of the relation, as this will help to clarify how it is that Levinas avoids a clash of freedoms, and opposes a tradition that grounds morality in freedom in favour of grounding freedom in morality *qua* responsibility for the Other.

§ 4.4.2 ASYMMETRY OF THE INTERPERSONAL AND FREEDOM

One initial point to make about the asymmetrical nature of the relationship is that due to Levinas’s phenomenological heritage the description is given from the first person perspective of the self that is encountered. It is the self that is interrupted, disturbed, and called to respond to the Other, therefore, the weight of responsibility falls on that self. The self cannot escape its own self and cannot reverse the encounter. From a neutral third person perspective the Other and the self may appear as a numerically equal, but from the perspective of the self *in the moral encounter* the Other is higher

²⁷¹ ‘Consciousness of the object — thematization — rests on distance with regard to oneself, which can only be time; or, if one prefers, it rests on self-consciousness [...] But it is from the welcoming of the infinity of the other that it receives the freedom with regard to itself that this disposition requires.’ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 305.

and demands a response. The self cannot undo the disturbance to their life by the Other, and no one can take their place.

[These differences between the Other and me] are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being ‘starting from oneself’ toward ‘the Other’. The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which cannot arise without this orientation) summarizes the theses of the present work.²⁷³

The Other addresses the self in order to elicit a response, the burden of responding is therefore placed on the subject who is addressed, even if they did not initiate or encourage such an encounter. The other puts a claim on the self – and that claim cannot be self-generated by that self.

A more important factor that explains the asymmetry of the relation is that the disturbance of the self by the Other, brings the self concretely into contact with the idea of infinity, which overflows the power of the I, and calls this power into question.²⁷⁴ In contrast to his earlier work, in this text Levinas emphasises that the Other is the poor, the widow and the orphan. The Other is in need. The resistance of the Other to the power of the self is a passive resistance; paradoxically, it is the vulnerability of the Other that places the demand on the self to respond, and this adds a dimension of ethical height.²⁷⁵ ‘To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible [before the Other]’.²⁷⁶ One must respond to the Other, as they cannot undo the disruption, but Levinas tells us that one cannot expect from the Other what they can expect from him/herself. One can only respond from their own position, and in this sense the *asymmetry* is further preserved.²⁷⁷

As noted by many commentators on Levinas’s text, in the encounter the Other calls the spontaneous freedom of the self into question.²⁷⁸ In this calling into question the Other becomes aware of its egotistical living and feels ashamed. ‘Freedom then is inhibited, not as countered by a resistance, but as arbitrary, guilty, and timid; but in its

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 215.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 213-15.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

²⁷⁷ The idea of the relation between the self and the Other as asymmetrical is not new to *Totality and Infinity*. See our previous discussion in Ch. III, § 3.3.9.

²⁷⁸ For example, see, Rudi Visker, ‘The Core of my Opposition to Levinas. A Clarification for Richard Rorty’, *Ethical Perspectives*, 4 (1997) 2, 154- 170; Morgan, *Discovering Levinas*; Catherine Chaliier, ‘The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the Hebraic Tradition’, in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, ed. by Adriaan T. Peperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 03-12.

guilt it rises to responsibility.²⁷⁹ The self becomes aware that it is guilty of living only for itself, and as a result, the self feels ashamed, and with this new awareness, the arbitrary freedom of the self can be given an ethical reorientation.

My arbitrary freedom reads its shame in the eyes that look at me. It is apologetic, that is, refers already from itself to the judgment of the Other which it solicits, and which does not offend it as a limit. [...] It is not a *causa sui* simply diminished or, as it is put, finite.²⁸⁰

We should keep in mind that the encounter with the Other takes place outside of the paradigm of power and freedom, as it occurs at the level of affective sensibility. The Other does not limit the freedom of the self but invests it. As we outlined above, Levinas argues that the freedom of the subject is created, invested, and not self-caused, its freedom, then, is not a given but a gift.

Throughout the text Levinas argues against the age old idea of being as one, and in its place argues for a multiplicity in being that is not reducible to a totality of beings. This multiplicity, however, does not result in a clash of freedoms or in a war of all against all precisely because Levinas does not take freedom as a given and situates the face-to-face relation outside of the order of freedom and non-freedom. A pivotal premise to Levinas's philosophy is that the freedom of the self is not primary, but is invested from the outside, through a transcendental relationship with infinity. Hence, in the conclusion Levinas remarks, '[m]orality is not a branch of philosophy, but [*qua metaphysics*] first philosophy'.²⁸¹ In his later work he will develop his argument that claims metaphysics precedes ontology. Levinas opened *Totality and Infinity* wondering whether we are duped by morality, and if morality was founded in freedom then he believes this would indeed be the case. Consistent with his attempt throughout the text to show that this is not the case, when Levinas describes the face-to-face encounter, he explains that what he is describing is not a Hobbesian war of all against all, or a Hegelian clash of freedoms, but a discourse, an address. The face is presented as a stranger but does not oppose the self. The face is not an obstacle, or an enemy. 'The being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy.'²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 203.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Levinas, again, highlights a deficiency in the approach which takes freedom as primary. Reason is universal, and if reason were to be taken as primary, how then could we account for moral reasoning, which entails the ability to put oneself into question, and how could we account for society, which is based on plurality? '[B]ut they [Hegelians] have yet to make understandable how a rational animal is possible, how the particularity of oneself can be affected by the simple universality of an idea, how an egoism can abdicate?'²⁸³ Levinas's solution is not to take rationality as primary, but to seek for it a justification. For Levinas, the pluralism of society is the condition for reason. How can an existent that is purely for its own self and immersed in being as enjoyment, step back from its own enjoyment and be rational, objective, and set its own enjoyment aside. For Levinas, this is possible because in the encounter with the Other the self has been put into question, judged by the Other, and comes to feel ashamed of its naïve self-centred living. The Other puts into question the 'brutal spontaneity' of the self, 'introduces into me what was not in me'.²⁸⁴ This putting into question by the Other brings not only the possibility of living a moral life, but also founds the freedom of reason. 'But this "action" upon my freedom precisely puts an end to violence and contingency, and, in this sense also, founds Reason.'²⁸⁵ Paradoxically freedom arises through the event that places my freedom into question. The resistance of the Other is not a violence, as it is a passive resistance. It is not a struggle between freedoms as in the encounter freedom is invested. The face, as the idea of infinity, resists all appropriation by the self and is beyond representation.²⁸⁶ 'But the other absolutely other — the Other — does not limit the freedom of the same; calling it to responsibility, it institutes (*instaure*) and justifies it.'²⁸⁷ We shall turn now to analyse this idea of freedom as founded, justified, and 'invested'.

§ 4.4.3 FREEDOM INSTITUTED

There is no denying that Levinas describes the separated self that is prior to the encounter as 'free', but as we argued above, the meaning of the term in this context is

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 208.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 203.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 203-04.

²⁸⁶ 'The face with which the Other turns to me is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face'. Ibid., p. 215.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., trans. mod., p. 197. Thomas translates '*instaure*' as 'institutes', instead of founds, and this translation is more consistent with Levinas's earlier work.

significantly different from the meaning of the term when used to describe what the Other invests. Both the freedom of representation and the minimal freedom of commencement, described by Levinas as a 'null' freedom, imply possession. However, there is a vital difference between them, which requires the distance from immediacy that the Other brings to the self by introducing self-awareness and time. In the life of enjoyment the self consumes exteriority in a mindless immediacy, through the immersion of the body in sensual pleasure. At this level not only does the self lack an awareness of the Other, but the self also lacks an awareness of its own self. When the Other disturbs the self, and the self becomes aware of an alterity that it cannot consume, a vital distance is introduced that brings with it, time, self-awareness and critical consciousness. Rationality is founded in this ethical event. When the self is brought to feel ashamed of a life governed by sensual pleasure, simultaneously this awareness brings with it the distance necessary for thought. The freedom of representation only comes from the relation with infinity, the ethical relation with transcendence.

In places Levinas's description of the self gives the impression that the self is 'free' prior to the encounter, and in the encounter the self becomes responsible, for example: 'Freedom then is inhibited, not as countered by a resistance, but as arbitrary, guilty, and timid; but in its guilt it rises to responsibility'.²⁸⁸ Although Levinas does describe the self prior to the encounter with the Other as 'free', he argues that through the encounter freedom is instituted, and so, freedom begins *with the encounter*. 'This presentation [the face] is pre-eminently nonviolence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and institutes it.'²⁸⁹ Lingis translates '*l'instaure*' as founds, and though this is not wrong 'institutes' is closer to the root of the word in both the French and English, as it derives from the Latin *instituire* meaning *in-* 'towards' and *statuere* 'to set up', as in, to initiate something, to set something up, to establish it.²⁹⁰ What is of importance about the use of this verb is that something new, *that was not there before*, is brought about, not just given an ethical orientation.

In his overall conclusion, in a section called 'Freedom Invested', Levinas states that the I is at the same time arbitrarily free, and maintains a relation with exteriority that is beyond the power of the I, and that calls the power of the I into question.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 203.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ See, 'institute' in *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Sara Hawker, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 526.

Freedom, the event of separation in arbitrariness which constitutes the I, *at the same time* maintains the relation with exteriority that morally resists every appropriation and every totalization in being.²⁹¹

This description of the I is particularly important given that it appears in the last few pages of the work, wherein Levinas is summing up his overall approach. Levinas goes on to add that in order to explain sociality and to make sense of morality, without reducing it to some ulterior end or function, freedom must be understood as posited within this relation. If freedom were taken as a given, or if freedom were posited prior to the relation with the Other, this would result in the violence of war or knowledge, whereby multiplicity would be eradicated either by force or by the unity of knowledge. Within either system, be that knowledge or war, beings would be reduced to objects.²⁹²

§ 4.4.4 ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

Given the linear description in certain places within the text of a self that is egotistically free and then, through the encounter, it is re-oriented to become ethically free, it is easy to see where the empirical, linear reading of the text comes from. The way in which Levinas describes the encounter, and perhaps even the very structure of the book — the section on exteriority and the face come after the section that describes the life of the separated self — both contribute to the empirical reading of the text. However, we must keep in mind that at this stage of his work Levinas believed that it was necessary to posit a fully separated self, even if this was for methodological purposes, and it does not need to be read as an empirical description of the life of the self prior to the encounter. His description of the time of both messianic peace and that of history, also help us to think through this problem. The self lives in an ontological world, but it is one in which the time of eschatology and messianic peace constantly breaks through. The metaphysical relationship with infinity is there from the beginning, as is the propensity to live an egotistical life, wrapped up with one's own enjoyment. It takes the radical otherness of the poor, the widow, and the orphan to remind the self of its relationship with infinity, which causes it shame for its own egotistical life. The shame comes as the self is reminded that the life it lives is owed to the Other, and to forget that, is to accept the benefits of the game but refuse to play by the rules, just like Gyges. However, it

²⁹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 302, my emphasis.

²⁹² Ibid.

will be forgotten once again. In this regard, we could describe the encounter as an event that is already, but not yet.

We should also keep in mind that the encounter with the Other happens at the level of affective sensibility, which is not before consciousness in a linear sense, but is an ever present reality of the human being. It is a passive openness to exteriority that is outside of the realm of freedom and nonfreedom, that not only makes the enjoyment of life possible, but also makes it possible for the Other to disturb the Same. This is how the self is responsible before it is free. Drabinski argues that when *Totality and Infinity* is read as a text about sense, a straightforward empirical reading becomes problematic, if not unsupportable, as it reveals structures that come before and founds the empirical descriptions.

The empirical character of his descriptions cannot be taken in absence of the transcendental problematic. The intertwining of the empirical and the transcendental languages describes exteriority as sense and attaches the genesis of that sense to the alterity of sensibility.²⁹³

Drabinski argues that the Other bestows meaning on the self, and one such meaning the self receives from the Other is its own sense of its self. Even though in places Levinas himself describes the encounter as if the I was already a subject prior to the encounter, subjectivity is founded through the encounter. This is precisely why Levinas calls the freedom of the I a created freedom and not a *casa sui*. Drabinski calls this novel approach by Levinas, which is both critical of the modern subject, whilst incorporating transcendental and empirical language into his descriptions, a ‘postsubjectivistic transcendental [approach]’.²⁹⁴

In a similar manner, Bernasconi argues that the question should not be whether the empirical or transcendental approach most accurately describes Levinas’s account of the face-to-face encounter, rather, for Bernasconi, Levinas is trying to find a way between these two options.

The empirical and the transcendental have their place in Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* in the discussion of the intentionality of enjoyment and of representation [...]. Levinas does not choose between them or attempt to reconcile them.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity. The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*, p. 125.

²⁹⁴ ‘This new, postsubjectivistic transcendental is an enigmatic “condition” precisely because this transcendental intertwines (and so does not bifurcate) the language of the transcendental and the empirical.’ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁹⁵ Bernasconi, ‘Rereading *Totality and Infinity*’, p. 31.

Bernasconi rightly points out that Levinas's description of the separated self as primarily a sensible body, and not a constituting consciousness, challenges the traditional understanding of the transcendental method, whereby the transcendental ego is primary, but that is not to say that the transcendental method must be entirely rejected.²⁹⁶ As Bernasconi himself notes, early on in the text Levinas claims that his method *resembles* the transcendental method. What both approaches have in common is that the condition for experience is itself beyond experience. What distinguishes Levinas's approach is that even though that which conditions experience transcends experience, this particular transcendental event continues to disturb consciousness, through the empirical encounter of the face of the human Other, despite the event always lagging just behind constituting consciousness. The life of enjoyment, just like the encounter with the Other, takes place in this strange space between the happening of an event and the constituting of that event by consciousness. Despite this lag, consciousness appears to underlie that which it comes to represent. This is what Levinas calls the absurd logic of the *anterior posterior*. Bernasconi summarises how this point relates to Levinas's unusual application of both transcendental and empirical argument:

Levinas follows the transcendental method to the point where it is halted and in order to sustain itself must draw on that which is radically exterior to it. This exteriority is itself therefore the condition both for that which had been revealed in transcendental thought and for transcendental thought itself.²⁹⁷

Already, but not yet, captures the strange logic of the anterior posterior, as the event will appear to consciousness as though consciousness was the source of its meaning, even though the meaning has come to consciousness already from the outside. Thought can never capture the face of the Other, even though experience will bear the mark that the face has left behind. Paradoxically, the object that consciousness can never constitute, the face, is what gives rise to constituting consciousness and the freedom of representation.

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* —

²⁹⁶ 'The structure of enjoyment is therefore an offense against the transcendental method, which in Levinas's mind is closely tied to representation.' Ibid., p. 29.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

an ontological role that specifies the meaning of the fundamental possibility, a meaning invisible in that condition.²⁹⁸

Our reading of the text shows that although Levinas does describe the separated egotistical self as free prior to the encounter with the Other, to characterise his early position as arguing that the already free egotistical and separated self is made ethically free in the encounter with the Other, only captures part of this complex picture. We could of course place the blame for the confusion and the ambiguity within the text in the hands of Levinas, as he is the author. Keeping in mind that this text is in many ways only the beginning of his mature work, and not the end, perhaps he had no choice but to work through this problem in order to try to find an alternative way of expressing what, by his own admission, is beyond the all-consuming grasp of constituting consciousness. Perhaps even in his later work the problem of a linear reading does not completely disappear. When discussing substitution in *Otherwise Than Being*, Jill Stauffer makes the point that although in some respects Levinas cannot help but describe the emergence of subjectivity in an almost linear fashion, it should not be read as linear.

The narrative cannot be construed as linear — though, of course, one difficulty is that it can only be written as linear. Rather than thinking of becoming-subject as a past event already accomplished, Levinas describes it as an affective movement that has never concluded. It's not that I was at first self-sufficient and then consented to be affected by others, but nor is it the case that at first I was riddled with unchosen responsibility only then to be offered some autonomy. The other is always already there, but it is also the case that, in order to be interrupted by the other's proximity, I have to have been an ego coiling in on itself, complacent in its enjoyment, enjoying its sufficiency to self. Levinas will not give us an origin on which to hang our theory.²⁹⁹

Granted this point is made in relation to a later development in Levinas's thought, but in some respects the same point could be made in relation to *Totality and Infinity*. As an earlier text Levinas had not yet worked through and developed these more nuanced ways of describing the responsibility of the self towards the Other. However, the

²⁹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 173.

²⁹⁹ Stauffer, 'The Imperfect. Levinas, Nietzsche, and the Autonomous Subject', p. 41. Critchley also questions the accuracy of a linear reading of Levinas's description of the movement of the self, albeit in relation to a different aspect of Levinas's thinking. Critchley wonders if we should read Levinas's description as a movement from the *il y a* to the Subject, to *Autrui*, to *illegality*, arguing that the persistence of the *il y a* in Levinas's work troubles such a reading. 'However, the question that must be asked is can or indeed, should one read Levinas in a linear fashion, as if the claim to ethics as first philosophy were a linear ascent to a new metaphysical summit [...]. Is the neutrality of the *il y a* ever decisively surmounted in Levinas's work? And if this is so, why does the *il y a* keep on returning like the proverbial repressed, relentlessly disturbing the linearity of the exposition?' Critchley, *Very Little – Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, p. 77.

tension between the empirical and transcendental language, the strange logic of the anterior posterior, his description of the time of history and the time of messianic peace, and the ever present passivity of affective sensibility, all show that within *Totality and Infinity* Levinas was already beginning to think of the encounter with the Other as an already, but not yet. Before we turn to our conclusion, we will lastly consider if part of the problem of the ambiguity within the text is the paradox of language. We will address the point that perhaps in attempting to try to think the unthinkable, and to use language to express that which he is trying to think through, this problem of both the articulation and the interpretation of the event as liner, reflects not just the nature of consciousness but also a fault of language.

§ 4.4.5 PARADOX OF LANGUAGE

In his study *The Foundation of Phenomenology. Edmund Husserl and the Quest for a Rigorous Science of Philosophy*, Marvin Faber discusses the paradoxes of phenomenology, as discussed by Fink in an article that was fully endorsed by Husserl, ‘The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism’.³⁰⁰ Among them is the paradox of language. This paradox states that the communicating phenomenologist cannot but use language, and yet phenomenology cannot be sufficiently communicated using natural language, as doing so makes it difficult to avoid a naturalistic interpretation. If in an attempt to avoid this problem one was to apply another language then they run the risk of a mystical interpretation, or simply communicating nonsensically, as they would go beyond any regular usage of the words. Faber paraphrases Husserl: ‘Expressing his belief that the mundane meaning of all available words cannot be entirely eliminated, Husserl concludes that no phenomenological analysis [...] can be presented adequately’.³⁰¹ Faber warns that a reader may only grasp the mundane meaning of the word and overlook the

³⁰⁰ Faber notes that Husserl wrote a preface for the original German edition of Fink’s article (1933), in which he states that he agrees with every statement in the essay. Fink was Husserl’s private assistant at that time. For an English translation of the article, see, Eugen Fink, ‘The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism’, in *Edmund Husserl. Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, Vol I, ed. by Rudolf Berney, Donn Welton and Gina Zavota (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 177-241.

³⁰¹ Marvin Faber, *The Foundation of Phenomenology. Edmund Husserl and the Quest for a Rigorous Science of Philosophy*, rev. 3rd edn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967), p. 558.

transcendental significance, and as a result, '[i]t follows that one may even quote the text of Husserl correctly, and still have a wrong interpretation'.³⁰²

Although this observation is made in relation to Husserl's writings, setting aside the question of the status of Levinas as a phenomenologist, the problem of language is one that also troubles Levinas's work. This problem is perhaps particularly pertinent for Levinas, not only because he too is trying to avoid the natural attitude, but also, as he challenges the primacy of consciousness and is trying to describe a situation that is prior to consciousness, and outside of all attempts by consciousness to grasp it, the problem is of particular relevance to his work. Levinas's struggle with language is therefore of great significance. When trying to describe an event that is somehow outside of experience, and yet has a profound effect on experience, Levinas only has the language he, like all of us, have been given by others. This language comes to him from the very tradition that he is seeking to circumvent, and given that to name something, and to identify a concept, is to limit it, the language he uses cannot but commit the very problem that he is seeking to avoid. The suppression of alterity by the Same. Even the very sequence of the words on the page lends themselves to a linear interpretation, and a two-dimensional view, but as Stauffer reminds us above, this does not mean that what the author is describing must be interpreted as linear. Levinas is trying to explore the depths to the person that although are beneath consciousness, they are ever present.

In the German preface to *Totality and Infinity*, written by Levinas in 1987, he writes,

Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence already avoids the ontological — or more exactly, *eidetic* — language which *Totality and Infinity* incessantly resorts to in order to keep its analyses, which challenge the *conatus essendi* of being, from being considered as dependent upon the empiricism of a [naturalistic-empirical] psychology.³⁰³

A much commented on development from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being* is the way in which Levinas shifts his use of language, and tries to deal with the ongoing problem of trying to say what cannot be captured in words or represented in concepts and knowledge. Through Levinas's own admission, he is still constrained by ontological language in *Totality and Infinity*. The problem of language adds to the

³⁰² Faber, *The Foundation of Phenomenology. Edmund Husserl and the Quest for a Rigorous Science of Philosophy*, p. 559.

³⁰³ Levinas, 'Totality and Infinity. Preface to the German Edition', in *Entre Nous*, pp. 198-200 (pp. 197-99).

difficulties we face when trying to interpret the text, even when reading sections interpretable as a linear description, from egotistical freedom to ethical freedom, we should be mindful of this problem. Levinas spoke about this topic in length in his interview with Kearney. Despite his struggle with the ontological ‘Greek’ language of philosophy, Levinas acknowledged that in some respects this problem might never be overcome. ‘We can never completely escape from the language of ontology and politics. Even when we deconstruct ontology we are obliged to use its language.’³⁰⁴ Not only does language present a problem for Levinas in that it restricts him from expressing what it is he wishes to say, but this is also an ethical problem, as ontological language is totalizing and absolute in nature, it implies that we can know with complete certainty. Nevertheless it is a restriction that he must work within.

We have no option but to employ the language and concepts of Greek philosophy, even in our attempts to go beyond them. We cannot obviate the language of metaphysics, and yet we cannot, ethically speaking, be satisfied with it: it is necessary but not enough.³⁰⁵

Levinas, however, remains optimistic.

I disagree, however, with Derrida’s interpretation of this paradox. Whereas he tends to see the deconstruction of the Western metaphysics of presence as an irredeemable crisis, I see it as a golden opportunity for Western philosophy to open itself to the dimension of otherness and transcendence beyond being.³⁰⁶

Once we acknowledge the particular baggage that comes with the language of Western philosophy, by struggling to find another way to express philosophy, as Levinas will continue to do in *Otherwise than Being*, we are in a position to change it.

In his work after *Totality and Infinity* Levinas will continue to try and find a way to express what is almost inexpressible. Although it cannot be denied that his thinking undergoes development, the question around the extent to which his position radically changes is an ongoing one. One can wonder if it is his position that he fundamentally alters, or if it is not more the case that the biggest shift is in the way in which he expresses his thought. In an article on Levinas’s philosophy Blanchot remarks:

In each of his books Levinas continually refines, by an ever more rigorous reflection, what was said on this subject in his *Totality and Infinity*: what, properly, had been said, that is, thematized, and thus was always already said, instead of remaining to be said. From this one of the persistent and insoluble problems of philosophy derives: how can philosophy be talked about, opened up,

³⁰⁴ Levinas and Kearney, ‘Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 22.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

and presented, without, by that very token, using a particular language, contradicting itself, mortgaging its own possibility?³⁰⁷

Blanchot's point, that Levinas struggles with a new way to say what has already been said, is shared by De Boer, who notes that Levinas's shift in terminology from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being* should be seen as a deepening of earlier notions and not so much a critique.³⁰⁸ As De Boer says, '[i]n his later writings Levinas is increasingly preoccupied by the problem of what can and what cannot be articulated. He speaks about the "pain of expressing" and the need to "abuse" language.'³⁰⁹

At one point in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas says of substitution:

Substitution frees the subject from *ennui*, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distraction of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out. [...] It [this liberation] is brought out without being assumed, in the undergoing by sensibility beyond its capacity to undergo. This describes the suffering and vulnerability of the sensible as *the other in me*. The other is in me and in the midst of my very identification.³¹⁰

This idea of the other in me contrasts greatly with the idea of a fully separated egoistical self, but at the same time this is very close to the position Levinas puts forward in *Totality and Infinity*. A consistency between the two positions is the fundamental place of the sensible, which has both methodological importance and is of significance to Levinas's philosophical position. The sensible, what is described above as '*the other in me*', and the stress on the self as an affective sensibility that is never not in a relationship with exteriority, is present in Levinas work from as early as *On Escape*, although it is not expressed in the same manner. A question that is asked of Levinas's later work is if he abandoned the idea of a radically free subject in favour of a subject that is persecuted from the start.³¹¹ By paying close attention to the two senses Levinas

³⁰⁷ Blanchot, 'Our Clandestine Companion', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, pp. 41-50 (p. 45).

³⁰⁸ 'Upon closer inspection this shift is less a critique than a deepening of the earlier notions.' De Boer, 'Beyond Being. Ontology and Eschatology in The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', p. 39

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40

³¹⁰ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 124-25.

³¹¹ One such reading is presented by Benda Hofmeyr, who argues that in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes the self that lives purely for itself as 'radically free' prior to the encounter, and through the encounter this freedom is justified and made good. On this reading, in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas 'disposes' of this freedom, calling this way of living as 'non-freedom'. Hofmeyr believes that there is 'a clear paradigm shift' from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*, 'from egoism and freedom to ethics and subjection' (Hofmeyr does clarify that this paradigm shift is nevertheless not a hard break). As a result of this reading, Hofmeyr raises the question, 'Did he [Levinas] manage to find a viable explanation for the possibility of ethicality in this amoral, indifferent world, or did he throw out the baby (radical freedom) with the bathwater in his turn to radical passivity?' Hofmeyr is correct to point out that a major shift does occur between these texts, and the way in which Levinas describes subjectivity will

gives to the term ‘freedom’, in relation to the subject in *Totality and Infinity*, we can see that within the text the separated self is at the same time in a metaphysical relation of desire and wrapped up in its own egotistical living, as the infinite is forgotten. The question of the continuity between *Totality and Infinity* and his later work, on the question of freedom, would require much further study, and would bring us beyond the bounds of this study.

§ 4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

From as early as his dissertation, wherein he raised the question of what gives rise to the *Homo philosophus*, Levinas was beginning to re-think the foundation of critical, self-reflective thought. He continued to increasingly question the acceptance of the free rational meaning-giving subject as a given; instead, he wanted to discover what gives rise to the freedom of representation and rationality. In *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* Levinas began to formulate his answer, that it is the ethical encounter with the face of the human Other that brings time, self-awareness, and representational consciousness. In the work of the 1950’s, alongside a growing preoccupation with the ethical significance of that encounter, his argument began to take on a more definite shape and definitive voice. As this is the case, why, then, in his first major work *Totality and Infinity*, would Levinas argue that the separated self is ‘free’ prior to the encounter?

Granted that the self is described as ‘free’ at the level of affective sensibility that runs ‘beneath’ consciousness, this freedom, however, is no more than any other form of life, a mere position in being, a ‘null’ freedom. It is at this level that the self is disturbed by the Other, before it has time to constitute the event, give it meaning, or choose for it to happen. Nevertheless, the self must respond, even if that response is to ignore the interruption. As we have seen, without such an interruption the self would remain trapped in the present, lacking the distance necessary for time, objectivity, representation, rationality and the meaningful freedoms that such qualities can bring. To borrow a phrase from Daniel Dennett, the Other invests a freedom worthy of the

change considerably. Hofmeyr’s summation of Levinas position, which is similar to many other scholars, is indeed correct, but it is not the complete picture. By focusing on the way in which Levinas uses the term ‘freedom’ in the text, we have seen that his argument is not so clear, and is also slightly more nuanced than may initially appear. See, Hofmeyr, ‘Radical Passivity: Ethical Problem or Solution?’, pp.15–30 (p. 21).

name, a freedom worth wanting.³¹² A strictly empirical reading, which focuses on the ethical reorientation that the Other brings, overlooks Levinas's argument that proposes that the encounter with the Other also brings the freedom of representation and not just the possibility of a moral life.

Just as we seen with *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, the confusion stems from the ambiguity of the term 'freedom', which is used in more than one sense throughout the texts. Also, contributing to this confusion is the way in which Levinas must struggle with language to express his description of the subject that resides *between* 'totality' and 'infinity', *between* eschatological and historical time. A self that as a result of the structures of consciousness appears to its self as though it were the foundation of meaning, as though nothing came before, as all exteriority appears to be constituted. It seems that the encounter with the Other is somehow always an already, but not yet.

³¹² Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984).

CONCLUSION

On the question of freedom in Levinas's work, the emphasis in the scholarship to date has mainly been on the place of freedom in relation to his ethical/metaphysical interest.¹ This is not surprising given the direction that his thought took after the war and the focus of his mature work. This tendency in the scholarship is also understandable given that much research has concentrated on his mature work.² However, as this thesis has demonstrated, of equal importance in Levinas's thought is his understanding of freedom as critical self-reflective thought. In tracing the development of Levinas's thought in relation to freedom from his earliest work up to *Totality and Infinity* the importance of this lesser appreciated view of freedom has been demonstrated, and consequently the role of ethics in Levinas's work has been modified. Looking back over this study, we can see that the question of freedom had concerned Levinas prior to his more well-known interest in ethics. Levinas's philosophy contains both an argument for, and a justification of the freedom of the subject.³ We have become accustomed to the view that for Levinas it is through the encounter with the Other that the freedom of the self is made good, and so, we can be saved from being arbitrary and egotistical. While this view is not incorrect, we have seen that it is by no means the complete picture. Further to this, what Levinas argues, is that without the Other the self would not be free, at least

¹ Levinas's position on freedom is commonly characterised exclusively in terms of his negative view of freedom as spontaneity in relation to the ethical reversal to this freedom that the Other can bring. Take for example the accurate portrayal by Steven Hendley, '[f]or Levinas morality begins in the way my relation to the Other calls the pursuit of my freedom into question. As he develops this idea, everything else in the world is an invitation to my freedom, a potentially unlimited expanse of opportunities to pursue my life as I see fit. But in the face of the Other I find my freedom to use the world as I see fit called into question'. Steven Hendley, 'Autonomy and Alterity: Moral Obligation in Sartre and Levinas', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, 4 vols, II, pp. 123-44 (p. 126). More recently, commentators of Levinas's work have begun to move away from the almost exclusive interest in ethical metaphysical dimension of his thought that had previously dominated the field. See, for example, Sparrow, *Levinas Unhinged*, which is an important example of recent 'heterodox' research into Levinas's work. This thesis can be said to contribute to this new wave of Levinasian scholarship, offering an important account of aspects of Levinas's philosophy which readers are less familiar with.

² This study not only contributes to scholarship on the question of freedom, autonomy and subjectivity in Levinas's early work but it also indirectly adds to the wider ongoing discussion around the question of the development of Levinas's thought in general. One issue that has divided commentators is the question of the extent to which we can say that Levinas's development from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being* constitutes a major shift or a consistent development.

³ In recent years, important work has been done around the question of the passivity of the subject in the work of Levinas, and the implications that this view has for understanding ethical agency. A collection of some of the great work done on this topic is *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas*. Notwithstanding that important study and the important work of others, the need for a thorough investigation into the place of freedom in Levinas's work was needed. This dissertation aimed to contribute to that work.

not in any meaningful sense of the term. The Other brings to the self far more than the possibility of an ethical re-orientation. To read Levinas in this way is to place ontology (viewed as the study of beings in their being as understood in their being) before the study of beings as beings, where the Other, one's own fellow human being, is not known at all *but greeted*. To read Levinas in this way, then, is to place ontology before 'metaphysics' (in Levinas's sense of that term). Levinas's attempt to argue against this very totalitarian-ontological approach to the determination of the self and the Other, one that eclipses the radical alterity of the Other, epitomizes his whole philosophical approach.

Throughout this study, we have seen that Levinas does not use the term freedom in an univocal sense. Despite this, Levinas has been consistent with the meanings that he does apply, however difficult at times that may be to uncover. These meanings are also interconnected. As Levinas was heavily influenced by both the phenomenology of Husserl and the work of Heidegger, in keeping with phenomenology, Levinas began his reflections with the hope of describing human life, setting aside questions that pertained to the natural attitude, and yet, through Heidegger's influence, Levinas did not take the isolated conscious modern subject as his starting point. An important aspect of the view of the modern subject, from Descartes through to Kant and beyond, despite the many variations, is to understand freedom as rational self-governance and meaning-giving thought. By pushing back before consciousness, or, perhaps, one could also say under consciousness, Levinas also pushed back before the freedom of the subject, understood as critical consciousness, objectivity and rational agency. In placing this understanding of freedom into question, and not just accepting it as a given, Levinas never intended to argue against freedom, or to undermine its importance; he sought, rather, to find an explanation and justification for this freedom. In doing so, Levinas has also shown that this freedom is a complex phenomenon. Against the tradition that has viewed freedom as autonomy, Levinas argues that freedom is heteronomy.⁴

We have seen that, in this period of Levinas's work at least, Levinas believes that without the initial interruption by the Other the self would be trapped in the present, in a self-referential circle, consumed by its own enjoyment and lacking the distance necessary for objectivity. It is the Other that interrupts this life and disturbs the self by

⁴ As Levinas says in, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' (1957), '[e]xistence is not condemned to freedom, but judged and invested as a freedom. Freedom could not present itself all naked. This investiture of freedom constitutes moral life itself, which is through and through a heteronomy'. Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 58.

calling it into question. The Other confronts the self with an alterity that resists all attempts at assimilation. This interruption brings with it the distance necessary for language, time, objectivity and rationality. Despite this claim of the Other on the self, the self lives in an ontological world and, as such, can get caught up in its own egotistical living. It takes the radical alterity of the infinite Other — described in *Totality and Infinity* as the poor, the widow, the orphan — to rupture this self-centred existence, even for just a moment, confronting the self with the arbitrariness of a life preoccupied with *its own* pleasure. This moment in the life of the self is not of the self's making or choosing, it escapes the all-encompassing gaze of consciousness, and occurs in a time outside of the powers of consciousness, and at the level of the affective sensible body. Nevertheless, the self must respond to the Other. As Levinas sums it up,

[e]thics *redefines* (my emphasis) subjectivity as this heteronomous responsibility, in contrast to autonomous freedom. Even if I deny my primordial responsibility to the other by affirming my own freedom as primary, I can never escape the fact that the other has demanded a response from me *before* I affirm my freedom not to respond to his demand. Ethical freedom is *une difficile liberté*, a heteronomous freedom obliged to the other [...]. The other haunts our ontological existence and keeps the psyche awake, in a state of vigilant insomnia. Even though we are ontologically free to refuse the other, we remain forever accused, with a bad conscience.⁵

It is not only moral conscience that is granted in and through the encounter with the Other, but so too is critical representative consciousness. The Other, in other words, brings the freedom of representation, self-awareness and critical consciousness, by introducing ethical consciousness prior to intentional consciousness.⁶ Such capabilities are the bedrock of self-governance, the ability to make rational choices and the ability to decide how one ought to live and ought to have lived (but did not, or did not want to). Hence, furthermore, political and social freedoms are also possible through the encounter with the Other precisely because the Other not only invests rationality and time but also because it is through mutual cooperation that social institutions are built and maintained. Levinas views such institutions as necessary for freedom, understood as the freedom from the immediate needs of the body, and the social and political

⁵ Kearney and Levinas, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', pp. 27-28.

⁶ In 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', Levinas argues, '[e]thical consciousness itself is not invoked in this exposition as a "particularly recommendable" variety of consciousness, but as the concrete form of a movement more fundamental than freedom, the idea of infinity. It is the concrete form of what precedes freedom'. Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 58.

freedoms that can come from such a society. As Levinas states in *Totality and Infinity*, ‘[t]o be free is to build a world in which one *could be free*’.⁷ However, Levinas is by no means naïve enough to hold that the freedom of rationality is sufficient for safeguarding such political and social freedoms. His experiences of the first half of the last century, and his critical reading of the dominance of the Same in the intellectual history of the West, taught him too well that the unquestioned freedom of reason can be a very dangerous thing. Freedom must be continuously called into question, and one should never become complacent, and never feel that they are good enough,

the moral justification of freedom is neither certitude nor incertitude. It does not have the status of a result, but is accomplished as movement and life; it consists in addressing an infinite [ethical] exigency to one’s freedom, in having a radical non-indulgence for one’s freedom.⁸

From his earliest writings, it is evident that, for Levinas, freedom involves the possibility of novelty, a possibility that can only be brought by a difference that breaches the totality of the Same. It may seem contradictory to think that it is paradoxically a disturbance to the life of the self, not of the self’s own choosing, that brings freedom, but without such a disturbance the self would not have the infinite possibilities that the Other brings. Freedom is again shown, for Levinas, to rest on the transcendental metaphysical relation of desire, and is also once again shown to be a difficult freedom. The Other may bring such possibilities, and with them genuine freedom, but the self can always ignore their responsibility to the Other and act like Gyges, who profits from the rules of the game but refuses to play by them.

Like many great philosophers, Levinas describes, what on reflection, are obvious and mundane aspects of human life, leaving the reader wondering how they overlooked a simple truth that was hidden in plain sight. The centrality of the body in Levinas’s thought is one such observation. The significance of his insights into existential phenomena such as fatigue, nausea, insomnia, illness and sensual enjoyment, point to the existence of implicit meaning that is not reducible to intentional consciousness and beyond the powers of the self. Such reflections prompt us to rethink the idealist understanding of the self as primarily free, self-sufficient and the foundation of all meaning. The old idealist understanding of the primacy of consciousness would seem to be an intellectual abstraction when faced with the everyday reality of sickness,

⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 165, my emphasis.

⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 304.

famine and disease.⁹ To posit freedom with no regard for our concrete lived life and the reality of what it is to be a human person, leads to a detached formal concept.¹⁰ In contrast to a tradition that begins with the thinking subject, and advocates for the self's reflection on itself, Levinas begins his reflection at the level of the sensate body. It is at this level that the self is disturbed by the Other, in a moment prior to freedom understood as rationality and conscious self-governance.

The affective sensible nature of the body also blurs the lines between the body and exteriority. The air we breathe, the food we consume, the sun on our face, are continuous elements of human life. One could say the same of sickness and disease. Is the tumour that grows within, or the blood clot that causes a stroke — each hastening death unbeknownst to the afflicted individual — foreign bodies or exterior constraints to freedom? So many human experiences reveal the idea of complete sovereign control to be farcical. Events happen to us that are completely beyond our control and outside of our power to undo them, but we are still free to respond. One such reality is the everyday presence of other people, who interrupt, address us, make requests and disrupt our plans without our consent. Levinas's work reveals the significance of some of the many human experiences that reveal a fundamental passivity that underlies the conscious subject's engagement with the world. In doing so, Levinas does not wish for this line of inquiry to conclude that we are not free, but to point out that it is not so simple. This fundamental passivity does not lead to hopelessness, or even to helplessness. For Levinas, it is that which brings humanity to human life. This passivity, which is initially lived as an immediate enjoyment of life, is what enables the encounter with the Other to take place. Levinas's work helps us to begin to think

⁹ To reduce the question of freedom to an either/or, whereby the subject is said to be either free or determined is a false dichotomy. As Cohen phrases it, summarising Levinas's position, '[t]he human is neither wholly free nor wholly determined. Pure freedom and pure necessity are mental constructs, products of intellectual abstraction, alien to the [experiential] structures of morality'. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy. Interpretation After Levinas*, p. 7.

¹⁰ As Hayat observes in his study on freedom in the work of Levinas, although Levinas wishes to leave behind the idealist abstract understanding of freedom, that bears little resemblance to the concrete lived reality of the human person in a world that is conditioned by material circumstances and historical events, he did not wish to surrender freedom to fate or accept material determinism. 'Il s'agit pour Levinas de trouver la voie de la liberté, qui délivre de la croyance en une fatalité de l'existence, sans tomber dans les errements de l'idéalisme qui ignore le poids des déterminations matérielles.' Hayat, *La liberté investie. Levinas*, p. 10. Levinas is not blind to the reality of the world, and just how easily 'free' people can be controlled by violence, intimidation, persuasion and ideology. Yet, Levinas argues that freedom is essential, and such ongoing threats to freedom make it all the more important to present a description of freedom that does not turn away from such realities. Levinas by no means wants to reduce the human being to a mere material object whose future is determined by external processes, but nor does he wish to surrender freedom. It is not such a simple dichotomy.

differently about our lived reality, and freedom's place within that context. His questioning of freedom does not do away with freedom, it raises it, rather, to higher heights, justifies it and gives it meaning.

In his work, Desmond raises similar concerns about the modern view of freedom understood as autonomy and complete self-determination in an idealised sense, and the implicit unquestioned primacy that it holds.¹¹ His questioning is also partially motivated by ethical concerns, one of which is the far reaching implications that such a view gives rise to, many of which may take centuries to unfold. The devaluing of the self's relationship to other-being is one of the main worrying implications that Desmond names. Desmond's description of this view of freedom is similar to Levinas's own,

[i]t makes straight the way *for our determining power* as the sole source of value. And so we are a determining origin that passes into and through other-being as a means to itself as the true end. Other-being becomes the medium of our own self-determination. This tends to be the dominant logic of modern freedom, and not in any merely negative sense of freedom from external restraint.¹²

Desmond calls such a view of freedom, 'at best equivocal, at worst delusionary and megalomaniac'.¹³ Just like Levinas, who in questioning such a view of freedom does not by any means wish to deny freedom, so too Desmond tell us, '[m]y point is not to deny freedom, but to question any absolutizing of autonomy as the fullest truth of freedom'.¹⁴ Similarly to Levinas, Desmond makes the point that there is a passivity to being that precedes the self's endeavour to be.

¹¹ Desmond is equally as distrustful of the way in which certain postmodern thinkers try to move beyond the 'narcissism of autonomy' by deconstructing autonomy or devaluing autonomy to the point of 'autonomy's self-laceration', however, he sees more promise in the latter. 'If postmodernism is still not free enough of the narcissism of autonomy, or is not yet more than autonomy's self-laceration, the full promise of both the intimacy and the universal have not been understood. I think the latter leads to a sense of freedom beyond autonomy in which we are released truly to what is, released too from our own self-encirclement.' Christopher Ben Simpson, 'Between God and Metaphysics: An Interview with William Desmond', *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics*, 1 n. 1 and 2 (2012), 357-73 (p. 370). Although in that interview Desmond does not mention Levinas's work as an example of 'autonomy's self-laceration', he may well have had Levinas in mind, as he has written elsewhere of Levinas's 'hyperbolic responsibility' that for him seems more suited to God than a human being. Desmond, 'Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas', p. 113. Desmond has engaged with the thought of Levinas on many occasions, most notably in 'Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas' wherein Desmond offers an excellent critical reading of Levinas that raises a number of valuable questions. Such as, Desmond's criticism of Levinas for a general tendency towards dualistic thinking (such as Same and Other, Ontology and Metaphysics, Being and the good) which Desmond seeks to avoid in his own similarly metaphysical work by situating himself in the *between*. Desmond, 'Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas'.

¹² Desmond, *God and the Between*, p. 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

For we are given to be before we give ourselves to be. There is a *passio essendi*, a patience of being, more primordial than our *conatus essendi*, our endeavour to be. [...] we are first as having received our being rather than as having determined it for ourselves, through ourselves. The *passio essendi* is closer to the more ultimate energizing sources of our *conatus essendi* but it also defines the vulnerability of our finitude.¹⁵

When self-determination is idolized, and autonomy is seen as absolute, the *passio essendi* is overlooked and the view of freedom as *conatus essendi* is incorrectly given free reign. As a consequence, when the primary stress is on autonomy the other will always be seen as a means to the end of the goal of self-determination, ‘the other will always be secondary, serving for the self’.¹⁶ Setting aside the question of whether such a view is morally reprehensible due to the many political, social, and ecological inequitable consequences, Levinas has shown us that such a view is also empirically incorrect.

Levinas reminds us that outside of a time when we are caught up with our own enjoyment, and wrapped up in our own concerns, there is an older time that calls this time into question, and reminds us that we are responsible before we are free. As Levinas says in ‘As Old as the World?’

[m]en are not only and in their ultimate essence ‘for self’ but ‘for others’ [...]. You are a self, certainly. Beginning, freedom, certainly. But even if you are free, you are not the absolute beginning. You come after many things and many people. You are not just free; you are also bound to others beyond your freedom. You are responsible for all. Your liberty is also fraternity.¹⁷

Levinas presents us with an opportunity to re-think freedom, and our fundamental relation to one another, which not only broadens our understanding of what it means to be human, but can potentially alter our human relations. In his interview with Nemo Levinas remarked:

It is extremely important to know if society in the current sense of the term is the result of a limitation of the principle that men are predators of one another, or if to the contrary it results from the limitation of the principle that men are *for* one another.¹⁸

Though it may not be self-evident from this particular quotation, central to this concern is the question of the meaning of freedom of the individual. To highlight this point we

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, “‘As Old as the World?’” in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 70-88 (p. 85).

¹⁸ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 80.

could phrase this problem differently: Is the human being primarily free for itself and in competition with others, or is the human being only made free by being put into question from the outside, through the encounter with the Other? Levinas believes that if we begin by unquestioningly positing the freedom of the subject, we can then never account for the phenomenon of goodness. How can we make sense of the fact that it is possible — indeed occurs to a lesser and greater degree on a daily basis — for one person to put the needs of the Other before their own. For Levinas, if we begin with an autonomous free and independent subject, we cannot avoid explaining society as a curtailing of a clash of freedoms, a war of all against all, or an evolutionary advantageous trait that has enabled the survival of our species.¹⁹ Such views downgrade morality to an instrument of social regulation, an attempt to postpone war indefinitely. Levinas found such explanations unsatisfactory, because in the attempt to explain morality, these arguments simply explain it away. Levinas provides us with an account of freedom and morality that lies elsewhere.

An integral part of Levinas's justification for this position lies in his equally important, yet often overlooked, understanding of freedom that we have focused on in this study. For Levinas, without the ethical interruption of the face of the human Other the self would never have the impetus to place its self into question and hence could never question its own behaviour and could never judge its own actions. For Levinas, without such an event, the freedom of self-reflective critical thought could not of itself arise. Even if one wished to defend a Kantian approach to ethics, which similarly to Levinas calls for the self-limitation of the subject, one would still need to account for how it is that the subject can come to place its self into question in the first place. The freedom to place oneself into question, which is the very freedom that makes morality possible, is for Levinas a consequence of the ethical event. A freedom that is the result

¹⁹ In his work, *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins explores a plausible explanation, from a neo-Darwinian evolutionary biological point of view, for morality and altruism. He puts forward four main explanations, (1) genetic kinship, (2) reciprocal altruism, (3) reputation acquiral, and (4) the potlatch effect. Although Dawkins argues that altruism is in fact beneficial for evolution, in a way that outright selfish behaviour is not, each of these explanations still, ultimately, rest on the purpose of the survival and replication of genetic material. 'Such a gene [suicidal altruistic gene], on average, tends to live on in the bodies of enough individuals saved by the altruist to compensate for the death of the altruist itself.' See, Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30th anniversary edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 93. For a discussion of Dawkins position, see, Adrain R. Kumarasingham, 'Dawkins and Morality', Academia.edu <https://www.academia.edu/1210816/Dawkins_and_Morality> [accessed 09/07/2014]. For a challenge to Dawkins account, and a challenge in general to the view that nature is inherently selfish, from the standpoint of a fellow evolutionary natural biologist, see, Joan Roughgarden, *The Genial Gene. Deconstructing Darwinian Selfishness* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009).

of a preceding responsibility, and one that allows for the possibility of both recognising and responding to this prior responsibility.

It could be argued that although Levinas's thought can be used to contribute to a rethinking of this view of humanity, as a war of all against war, his own thinking remains somewhat within this paradigm. Although Levinas's thought offers a challenge to this tradition by emphasising the saving grace that comes through the face of the Other, Levinas does not completely step outside of it. It seems that to some extent he accepts the basic premise that humanity has a predisposition towards egotistical living. Granted, for Levinas, such predispositions are connected to ontological structures, which Levinas claims are at least momentarily subverted by the metaphysical relation to the infinite. However, for Levinas, if it was not for the Other the self would remain wrapped up in the immediacy of narcissistic egotistical living. Levinas still views Being, and our egotistical ontological existence, as essential negative.²⁰ Ultimately, for the later Levinas, it is the grace of God that 'calls our ontological will-to-be into question' and 'turns our nature inside out'.²¹ As being is viewed in such negative terms, God as beyond being is necessary to account for what little goodness there is. In this way Levinas's own thinking still falls prey to old metaphysical presuppositions that can be seen to dilute his overall thesis. Setting this point aside, there is much potential in Levinas's work to contribute to the rethinking of this dominant view of humanity. We could utilize Levinas's work to critique this view of humanity that Levinas himself seems to fall victim of. Like all great philosophical growth, the potential is there to move through and beyond such thought.

Levinas teaches us that perhaps society is not built upon the need to curtail aggression, the will to dominate, or the power to control others, but comes from the need to facilitate and negotiate our responsibility to Others in a complex world. This of course is not to ignore the many abhorrent deeds that human beings commit to their fellow humans, other species and the planet itself, on a daily basis, but, perhaps this

²⁰ For an in depth discussion on Levinas's negative view of Being, see, Ian Leask, *Being Reconfigured*. See, also, Bernasconi, 'Levinas and the Struggle for Existence', for an excellent analysis on the often overlooked prevalence of a Darwinism view of human nature in Levinas's work. Wood makes a similar point in his 'Some Questions for My Levinasian Friends', p. 160.

²¹ 'The word of God speaks through the glory of the face and calls for an ethical conversion, or reversal, of our nature. [...] But the moral priority of the other over myself could not come to be if it were not motivated by something beyond nature. The ethical situation is a human situation, beyond human nature, in which the idea of God comes to mind. In this respect, we could say that God is the other who turns our nature inside out, who calls out ontological will-to-be into question.' Levinas and Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', p. 24-25.

behaviour cannot be attributed solely to a propensity within the human person. Perhaps partial blame can lie with the implicit metaphysical assumption and morally questionable idea that humanity is inherently concerned only with its own being. If we take seriously this observation by Levinas, that at the most basic level the self harbours an openness to the Other that leads to mutual cooperation and not to a conflict that must be mediated by competition, then perhaps we could be more hopeful about the potential of human relations. Far from Levinas's philosophy causing a problem for the view of the subject as free, by claiming that we are responsible before we are free, Levinas gives an account of not only how we are free but also *why* we are free. And so, he provides an answer to the profoundly thought-provoking platonic moral question, 'why be moral?'

In closing, I hope that this study contributes to the ongoing research into the work of Levinas. Our work is shaped and informed by the work of others that have come before us, contributing to an ongoing dialogue, and to the work that remains to be done. Levinas has taught us that knowledge and understanding is a collective endeavour, which can trace its beginnings to the primordial event of having been placed into question from the outside. Just as any individual subject is not the origin of the meaning of the world, no one individual will definitively answer the questions that face us. All we can do is offer the product of our work, which once it is written is beyond our control to dictate or governor how it will be received, or control the meaning it will be given by others. Our power and freedom does not stretch that far.

*Between You and all of us
We do not have the
First word
We are spoken to first*

*The first word comes
In the cooing of the mother
& we are wooed into words
Coming into conversations
Long under way
Without us*

*Wooed into words
We come too early
To presumption
And complaint*

William Desmond²²

²² Desmond, *God and the Between*, p. 1.

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This bibliography contains a selection of works that I found of most relevance to the topic of freedom in the early work of Levinas. The bibliography is divided into three main sections. Section (A) gives details of selected primary texts of Levinas, in chronological order of original composition or publication. In each entry, the English title and publication details are given first, followed by the French title and original details of publication and composition, and then followed by the French edition used for this study. Section (B) gives details of the most pertinent secondary literature directly relating to the work of Levinas consulted on the topic, in alphabetical order. Section (C) gives details of general works not directly related to Levinas, but which were of relevance in the completion of this study, listed in alphabetical order.

SECTION (A): SELECTED PRIMARY TEXTS OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS

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