



‘To See a Face is Already to Hear “You Shall Not Kill”’:
Levinas’s Development of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

by

Daniel Murphy, M.A.

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Head of Department: Prof. Philipp Rosemann

Supervisor: Dr Cyril McDonnell

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‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’

(Mark 4:23, NRSV)

‘Gradually, as he became more and more fervent in prayer, he had less and less to say, and finally he became completely silent. He became silent. Indeed, he became what is, if possible, even more opposite to speaking than silence; he became a listener. He thought that to pray is to speak; he learned that to pray is not only to be silent but is to listen.’

(Søren Kierkegaard, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*)

‘The essence of discourse is prayer.’

(Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’)

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of his philosophical career, Emmanuel Levinas did not spend much time reflecting on the method behind his thinking. The reason for this scarcity in his writings is clear from the response he gave to a question raised by Theodore de Boer at a meeting with a selection of Dutch philosophers in Leiden University on the 20th of May 1975. Concerning the matter of his own method in philosophy, Levinas remarks,

I do not believe that there is a transparency possible in method. Not that philosophy might be possible as transparency. Those who have worked on methodology all their lives have written many books that replace more interesting books that they could have written. So much the worse for the philosophy that would walk in sunlight without shadows.¹

In this respect, for Levinas, philosophers should spend the majority of their time *doing* philosophy, rather than merely reflecting upon *how* that philosophy is done, even if this risks some methodological ‘shadows’ along the way in that endeavour to direct ‘sunlight’ on the matters themselves. Yet, in the same answer to the question above, he also recognises and acknowledges that ‘the *way* by which one accedes’ toward a topic in philosophy constitutes an essential aspect with regard to ‘the meaning’ of that topic.² In other words, *what* one thinks in philosophy is largely determined by *how* one thinks.

This insight is one of the great lessons of phenomenology. It shows that, philosophically, one cannot fully appreciate objects of experience in thought without describing the particular manner in which they have been originally given in concrete life. Levinas displays an acute awareness of this doctrine thanks to his time spent studying under two of the central figures within the phenomenological tradition: Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.³ Despite their common philosophical outlook,

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Questions and Answers’, in *Of God Who Comes To Mind*, trans. by Bettina Bergo (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 79-99 (p. 89).

² *Ibid.*, p. 87, my emphasis.

³ Levinas’s comment above concerning ‘those who have worked on methodology all their lives’ thus replacing ‘more interesting books that they could have written’ is, undoubtedly, an allusion to Husserl.

however, Husserl and Heidegger put forward two *radically* different ways of thinking within their respective elaborations of phenomenology. For Husserl, phenomenology is a rigorous science of intentional consciousness and its objectivities, seeking to ascertain universal knowledge-claims in the form of essences given to perceptually-founded act experiences, once consciousness has been purified of all naturalistic interpretations of its being via his celebrated reduction of the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude. As Husserl puts it, stressing the universality of the type of knowledge sought in his definition of phenomenology, in the *First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913)⁴,

The study of the stream of experiences is, for its part, carried on in a variety of peculiarly structured reflective acts which themselves also belong to the stream of experiences and which, in corresponding reflections at a higher level, can be made the objects of phenomenological analyses. This is because their analysis is fundamental to a universal phenomenology and to the methodological insight quite indispensable to it (*unentberliche methodologische Einsicht*).⁵

The method of phenomenology advanced by Husserl represents an attempt ‘to reach the ultimate sources of meaning and knowledge by an analysis of the various acts of [intentional] consciousness’. Jes Bjarup, ‘Phenomenology, the Moral Sense, and the Meaning of Life: Some Comments on the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and A-T. Tymieniecka’, in *Husserlian Phenomenology in a New Key: Intersubjectivity, Ethos, the Societal Sphere, Human Encounter, Pathos. Book 2: Phenomenology in the World Fifty Years after the Death of Edmund Husserl*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), pp. 169-191 (p. 171). Elaborating on this point, Bjarup remarks that ‘Husserl is committed to the view that [his] phenomenological method must be a perfect method, that is to say, the objective is that the method, if correctly applied, will lead infallibly to meaning and truth. [This] method, rightly used, is the only rational way which will guarantee that meaningfulness and truthfulness prevail over meaninglessness and falsity. This is the reason for Husserl’s lifelong struggle and endless endeavour to clarify and describe [his] phenomenological method’. Ibid. Although Levinas credits Husserl for introducing phenomenology as a new way of doing philosophy, it is the ‘teachings and works’ of Heidegger, in his estimation, that offer the ‘best proof’ for the ‘fecundity’ of phenomenology as a philosophical discipline. Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology’, in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. & ed. by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 32-38 (p. 38).

⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982); *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. by Karl Schumann, *Husserliana* III/1 & 2 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1977 and 1995). Further references are to Kersten’s translation and abbreviated as *Ideas I*, with English pagination followed by the German pagination, separated by a slash.

⁵ Husserl, *Ideas I*, §75, ‘Phenomenology as a Descriptive Eidetic Doctrine of Pure Experiences’, p. 177/147.

By comparison, in his first major publication *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger argues that phenomenology is a hermeneutic inquiry into the question of the meaning of Being (*die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein*) and its relation to *Dasein*, retrieving that meaning of Being (*der Sinn von Sein*) from the particularity of one's own understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) as it has been implicitly deposited and explicitly expressed within language.⁶ As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*,

Whenever one cognizes anything or makes an assertion, whenever one comports oneself towards entities, even towards oneself, some use is made of 'Being'; and this expression is held to be intelligible 'without further ado', just as everyone understands 'The sky is blue', 'I am merry', and the like.⁷

Thus, for Heidegger, whereas 'beings are (*Seiendes ist*) quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained', the meaning of Being itself (*der Sinn von Sein*) "is" only in the understanding of those entities to whose being something like an understanding of Being belongs. Hence Being (*Sein*) can be something unconceptualized (*unbegriffen*), but it never completely fails to be understood (*es ist nie völlig unverstanden*).⁸

The divergences between these two methods in phenomenology — one focused on achieving eidetic intuition and the other on the hermeneutic retrieval of meaning — lead Husserl and Heidegger to approach concrete life in very different ways. Husserl describes concrete life as pertinent to that which *appears* as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. In contrast, Heidegger describes concrete life in terms of that which has been *disclosed to Dasein* as a result of its 'existence', that is to say,

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1927). Further references are to Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, with English pagination followed by German pagination, separated by a slash.

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 23/4: 'In allem Erkennen, Aussagen, in jedem Verhalten zu Seiendem, in jedem Sich-zu-sich-selbst-verhalten wird von "Sein" Gebrauch gemacht, und der Austruck ist dabei "ohne weiteres" verständlich. Jeder versteht: "Der Himmel ist blau"; "ich bin froh" und dgl.'

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228/183.

the particular manner in which *Dasein* is affected by and expresses *its own* understanding of Being in the world. Whilst learning a common lesson from both Husserl and Heidegger over the course of his earliest philosophical education, therefore, Levinas encounters two diametrically opposed approaches toward the description of concrete life in their respective ideas of phenomenology.⁹

The aim of this study is to highlight the significance of hermeneutic reasoning for the development of Levinas's version of phenomenology. It does so by tracing the chronological progression of Levinas's thought from his initial engagement with the work of Husserl and Heidegger in the 1920s up to and including the publication of his first major work *Totality and Infinity* (1961).¹⁰ Of course, Levinas's thinking continues to develop after the publication of *Totality and Infinity*. One major reason for this further development concerns Levinas's confrontation with the work of Jacques Derrida, most notably in response to the latter's essay 'Violence and Metaphysics'.¹¹

⁹ The question concerning to what extent Heidegger's idea of phenomenology should be considered as either a direct continuation or complete rejection of Husserl's is still one that draws considerable debate within scholarship today. In the 1960s, Herbert Spiegelberg was probably the first person to raise the question: 'How far is Heidegger's thinking rightfully to be included in the history of the Phenomenological Movement?' Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 2nd edn, Vol. 1 (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 1971), p. 275. Immediately after posing this question, Spiegelberg remarks that it is not 'easy to answer'. Ibid. On the one hand, there is the position that Heidegger takes his lead from 'an indication given by Husserl' which, subsequently, 'amounts to no more than an explicit account' of themes already implicit within Husserl's version of phenomenology. See, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), esp. 'Preface', pp. vii-xxiv (p. viii). On the other hand, there are commentators who claim that Husserl and Heidegger's respective versions of phenomenology 'have virtually nothing to do with each other'. See, Richard Schacht, 'Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology', in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 23 (1972), 293-314 (p. 294). See also, Søren Overgaard, 'Heidegger's Early Critique of Husserl', in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 11 (2003), 157-175, and Cyril McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology to the Question of the Meaning of Being* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2015). It is not the purpose of this study to address this contentious issue on its own terms but it will be addressed in relation to Levinas who, throughout his own writings, acknowledges a shared philosophical outlook between Husserl and Heidegger, whilst, also, identifying some radical differences between the two regarding method, research topics, and the very idea of phenomenology itself.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); *Totalité et Infini: Essais sur l'Extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961). Further references are to Lingis's translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 97-192.

Any consideration of this significant encounter, however, would require a much larger work thus residing beyond both the limits and parameters of the study at hand. By electing to focus attention on his early works, this study demonstrates that Levinas addresses his two main topics of concern in phenomenology, namely, ‘the brute fact of being’ (*le fait brutal de l'être*) and ‘the face of the Other’ (*le visage d'autrui*),¹² only with the assistance of the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research as advanced by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. It thus argues that Heidegger’s version of phenomenology holds much more importance for the development of Levinas’s own manner of thinking than Husserl’s scientific approach toward phenomenological research as pioneered in the *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901)¹³ and *Ideas I*.¹⁴

¹² Keeping in line with what has become common practice in Levinasian scholarship, this study will translate ‘*l'autre*’, the other in terms of a general sense of alterity, with a lower case ‘o’, i.e. ‘the other’, and ‘*l'autrui*’, the Other in terms of the individual human being encountered in concrete life, with a higher case ‘O’, i.e. ‘the Other’. Levinas himself is not always consistent when it comes to designating these terms with lower or higher case letters. When required, therefore, the French terms will also be included throughout this study.

¹³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. by John N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970); *Logische Untersuchungen. I. Teil: Prolegomena zur reinen Logik* (Halle, 1900), *II. Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis, In zwei Bänden* (Halle, 1901). Further references are to Findlay’s translation, with the English pagination followed by the German pagination and separated by a slash.

¹⁴ The influence of hermeneutic reasoning on Levinas’s thinking has not gone entirely unnoticed. The scholar who, perhaps, makes the connection in the most sustained manner is Renée van Riessen, in her, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas’ Hermeneutics of Kenosis* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2007). According to van Riessen, Levinas’s philosophy imparts ‘a hermeneutics of ethical existence’ centred on the theological concept of *kenosis*. *Ibid.*, p. 6. Van Riessen takes hermeneutics in this context to be a description of human existence ‘as it actually occurs’, that is to say, as it is lived concretely. *Ibid.* This leads van Riessen to maintain Levinas’s thought as ‘an answer to Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity’ by taking up the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research in order to ‘break open’ a new dimension of ‘the infinite’ from Heidegger’s ‘framework of finiteness’. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7. Whilst agreeing with these points, this study nevertheless displays an important difference to van Riessen’s work. For van Riessen, Levinas’s hermeneutics of ethical existence cannot be separated from the ‘religious elements’ which are said to inform it. *Ibid.*, p. 6. In contrast, this study will outline Levinas’s hermeneutic approach as a way of doing phenomenology thus acquiring evidence from nowhere other than concrete life itself. As a result, it disagrees with van Riessen’s claim that the ‘religious’ can never be omitted from the ‘ethical’ in Levinas’s philosophy. *Ibid.* In addition to van Riessen, Bettina Bergo also acknowledges the influence of hermeneutics on Levinas’s thought. See, Bettina Bergo, *Levinas between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013). Nevertheless, Bergo identifies this influence on a particular issue, namely, the interpretation of the Other as the Stranger. *Ibid.*, p. 54. This leads Bergo to conclude that, whilst Levinas is ‘indebted to Heidegger’s hermeneutic of *Dasein*’, it is actually Husserl’s way of doing phenomenology *qua* transcendental idealism that Levinas follows in order to outline the relationship with ‘something transcendent’. *Ibid.* This study will fundamentally disagree with Bergo on this point. Edith Wyschogrod also acknowledges the influence of ‘Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology’ on Levinas’s thinking but, specifically, in relation to the latter’s Talmudic exegesis.

Nevertheless, this position should not be regarded as an attempt to render Levinas as a Heideggerian thinker, for Levinas's own philosophical project emerges as an ethical challenge to Heidegger's endeavour to substantiate the care for one's own existence in *Dasein* as the first and last word in philosophy.¹⁵ With this point in mind, it will also be shown that Levinas undercuts both Husserl's establishment of phenomenology as 'transcendental idealism' and Heidegger's subsequent reformulation of phenomenology as 'fundamental ontology' thanks to an immanent critique of Heidegger's stress on the 'understanding of Being' (*Seinsverständnis*) in *Dasein* as the most concrete form of experience. Levinas does so, firstly, by discovering the absolute position of the lived body as it exists prior to the 'understanding of Being' in *Dasein* and, secondly, by showing in what manner 'the brute fact of being' and 'the face of the Other', two concrete ordeals absent from the phenomenological research of Husserl and Heidegger, affect us from this standpoint. Necessary for addressing these specific topics in phenomenology are the concrete descriptions of various 'affective dispositions' (*Befindlichkeit*) as well as a hermeneutic attitude embracing language as the constitutive source of meaningful experience. Both of these methodological devices Levinas appropriates from the philosophy of Heidegger before reforming them within the context of his own thinking. For Levinas, then, hermeneutics represents a particular way of doing phenomenology since it aims to express an understanding of life *from out*

See, Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 171. Unlike Wyschogrod, however, this study takes hermeneutics as a method employed within phenomenology so as to describe the significance of particular lived experiences in concrete life. It does not, therefore, consider hermeneutics in the exclusive sense of textual interpretation. De Boer recognises hermeneutic phenomenology, or, as he calls it, 'the philosophy of life', to constitute the main approach forwarded by Levinas in his later works. See, Theodore De Boer, 'Levinas on Theology and the Philosophy of Life', in *The Rationality of Transcendence: Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1997), pp. 169-183. All the same, this study endeavours to demonstrate that, whether known to Levinas or not, it also informs his earlier work.

¹⁵ According to Heidegger, '*Dasein* is a being which does not just occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact it is a being in whose being this being itself is at *stake* [literally, *what goes about*]' . Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32/12, Eng. trans. modified: 'Das Dasein is ein Seiendes, das nicht nur unter anderem Seienden vorkommt. Es ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein *um* dieses Sein selbst geht.'

of itself, that is to say, it describes life as it affects us concretely from a specific position in existence. Central to Levinas's description of concrete life is the infinite exteriority of the Other to my understanding of Being as a result of their independent existence. Thus, whilst utilising hermeneutics as a way of doing phenomenology, Levinas also rejects the possibility of any potential 'fusion of horizons' between the same (*le même*) and the other (*l'autre*), which Hans-Georg Gadamer upholds as the ideal of hermeneutics.¹⁶ As a result, this study contends that Levinas adopts Heidegger's approach toward phenomenological research in order to overcome 'fundamental ontology', which, in turn, leads him to develop the very idea of hermeneutic phenomenology toward, what Levinas calls, 'ethics'.

The first chapter of this study focuses on the formative years of Levinas's intellectual development, charting his specific lead into phenomenology as based upon his early engagements with the various works of Husserl and Heidegger. Accordingly, it covers the historical period from 1923, when Levinas first became a student of philosophy, up to 1940, just before Levinas went to fight for France in World War II. Following an elaboration of the particular context in which Levinas receives his phenomenological education, it will be shown that Levinas ultimately agrees with Heidegger's critique of Husserl's version of phenomenology on account of its reduction of concrete life to the domain of pure intentional consciousness. For Levinas, as with Heidegger, there is far more to concrete life than the intuitive acts of consciousness representing being in terms of that which appears as a result of perceptually-founded act experiences. This is not to suggest that Levinas accepts Heidegger's alternative description of the concrete as the understanding of Being in *Dasein*; rather, as a result of his initial engagement with phenomenology, Levinas uncovers a sense of being

¹⁶ See, Fred Dallmayr, 'Self and Other: Gadamer and the Hermeneutics of Difference', in *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, 5 (1993), 507-529.

previously neglected by both Husserl and Heidegger, namely, the brute fact of being itself. It is with this sense of being in mind that Levinas embarks upon his own description of concrete life and thus his own version of phenomenology. In order to address this topic fully, however, Levinas must commit himself to a hermeneutic approach in phenomenological research.

Chapter two details Levinas's phenomenological analysis of the brute fact of being as described over the course of his two principal works published after World War II: *Existence and Existents* (1947)¹⁷ and *Time and the Other* (1947).¹⁸ These works corroborate the central thesis of this study because Levinas uses them to undermine Heidegger's overall description of the concrete whilst, simultaneously, benefiting from Heidegger's particular way of describing concrete life within phenomenology. Levinas does this by retrieving a position in life *more* concrete than *Dasein*, namely, the lived body, through a phenomenological analysis of certain affective dispositions in the instant of sensation. Here, Levinas demonstrates that it is not Heidegger's method that leads to an inadequate description of concrete life, but Heidegger's philosophical presupposition that the meaning of Being must always rest upon the prevailing understanding of Being given in the facticity of *Dasein*. This chapter concludes with an account of Levinas's critique of Heidegger's analysis of death in *Being and Time*. By focusing on the concrete event of death, and not the mere association of death with the nothingness experienced in the affective disposition of anxiety, Levinas underscores the serious shortcomings of Heidegger's phenomenological description of human transcendence in concrete life.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001); *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2013). Further references are to Lingis's translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987); *Le temps et l'autre* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979). Further references are to Cohen's translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

Chapter three demonstrates that an accurate description of human transcendence in concrete life relies upon an encounter with the other (*l'autre*), which does not destroy the subject, as with the event of death, but which lifts the subject from the fatalism of its bodily immanence to the freedom constitutive of the reflective ego. Levinas discovers such an experience of the other through the concrete encounter with the face of the Other. The formulation of this topic for phenomenological research becomes Levinas's main philosophical aim during the 1950s. This chapter, therefore, examines several of Levinas's articles from this period that note the face-to-face relation as that which accounts for the concrete transcendence of the human being. For Levinas, the face of the Other also reveals itself in concrete life as expression. In this respect, language functions as the constitutive source of the face of the Other. Here, Levinas follows Heidegger's hermeneutic attitude whilst formulating the topic of the face of the Other within phenomenology since this approach situates meaning within the experience of language as opposed to the experience of perception, as Husserl would have it.

The fourth and final chapter of this study examines the way in which Levinas brings together all of his thinking hitherto in his first major work *Totality and Infinity* (1961). This work famously ratifies 'ethics', understood as the face-to-face relation, as experienced prior to the ontology of light and intelligibility articulated in both Husserl and Heidegger's respective versions of phenomenology. It is the concrete encounter with the face of the Other that separates the subject from the dark indeterminacy of elemental being thus allowing it to perceive and comprehend objects from within the understanding of Being. In this respect, the freedom belonging to the subject rests upon its fundamental responsibility to the Other. Nevertheless, this responsibility can be forgotten by the subject as a result of its newly obtained freedom. Heidegger's philosophy displays this possibility since it chooses to focus on that which is disclosed

in language for the purposes of understanding the question of the meaning of Being and its relation to *Dasein*. This approach overlooks the very expression of language as it first emerges in discourse with the Other. Levinas, therefore, does not take issue with Heidegger's hermeneutic approach that upholds language as the source of meaningful experience in concrete life, but simply objects to Heidegger's prioritisation of *what is said in language* over the *very saying of language* itself since this arrangement facilitates the dismissal of the alterity of the Other as a valid topic for phenomenological research.

Toward the conclusion of this study, it will become clear that the question of method emerges as a philosophical problem that Levinas must go on to confront in his second major work *Otherwise than Being*.¹⁹ This is because, in the very act of directing sunlight on the topics of 'the brute fact of being' and 'the face of the Other', Levinas runs the risk of undermining the initial darkness in which both are encountered by the lived body prior to thought.²⁰ Instead of changing his approach toward phenomenological research, Levinas chooses rather to place a further emphasis on the experience of language in order to solve this problem. As a result, it can be said that Levinas remains committed to hermeneutic phenomenology for the entirety of his philosophical career.

¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998); *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). Further references are to Lingis's translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

²⁰ Jens Zimmermann correctly identifies the essential role played by hermeneutics in the development of Levinas's 'ethics' before adding the following caveat: 'If one agrees with Levinas that ethical transcendence comes before all else, then hermeneutics must also serve ethics. In other words, Levinas preaches to hermeneutics the need for ethics. It is, however, a dangerous sermon, for its message threatens the very existence of philosophical hermeneutics. After all, if ethics is first philosophy, then ethics is also prior to hermeneutical philosophy; and since hermeneutics lays claim to universality, ethics and hermeneutics are from the outset in competition for universal validity'. Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 189. These reflections beg the following question: Is 'ethics', as conceived by Levinas, compatible with hermeneutics? Or, to put it differently: Can one employ hermeneutic reasoning as a way to uncover ethical transcendence without compromising the validity of that experience itself? Whilst representing a fundamental problem with respect to Levinas's overall thinking, it is not the aim of this study to offer an answer to these important questions. Our main aim rather is to follow Levinas's philosophical development so as to properly understand the method behind his thinking, irrespective of the methodological difficulties that Levinas encounters along the way and in general.

CHAPTER I

LEVINAS'S PATH TO HIS FIRST TOPIC IN PHENOMENOLOGY: THE BRUTE FACT OF BEING (1923–1940)

Although Levinas was a student of both Husserl and Heidegger and professes to be a follower of their way of doing philosophy, there is still much debate within contemporary scholarship regarding the extent to which Levinas himself should be regarded as a phenomenologist.¹ On the one hand, there is the view that Levinas is the *most* radical of all phenomenologists due to his discovery of a 'reality uninformed by human concepts' thus, finally, leading to the accomplishment of the phenomenological maxim which sought to get 'back to the things themselves'.² On the other hand, some scholars claim that Levinas is *not* a phenomenologist *at all* owing to the 'considerable distortions' of his 'phenomenological referents' as well as his 'abandonment' of Husserl's 'ambition of [scientific] rigour' as the basis for phenomenological research.³ In order to determine the accuracy of such accounts, it is necessary to address the questions that they beg; namely, what *is* phenomenology? Is there only *one way* of doing it? And, *who* should one take as defining the practice of phenomenology?⁴

¹ During an interview with Richard Kearney in 1984, Levinas upholds phenomenology as the 'most important' philosophical influence on his thinking before claiming that, 'from the point of view of philosophical method and discipline, I [Levinas] remain to this day a phenomenologist'. See, Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 66.

² Lee Braver, 'On Not Settling the Issue of Realism', in *Speculations IV*, ed. by Michael Austin and Paul Ennis (New York: Punctum Books, 2013), pp. 9-14 (p. 11).

³ Dominique Janicaud, 'The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology', trans. by Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn'* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), pp. 3-106 (p. 39). Whilst acknowledging that Levinas formulates his own conception of phenomenology, Janicaud fails to recognise that phenomenology is itself, as Paul Ricoeur notes, 'both the sum of Husserl's work and the heresies issuing from it'. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of Phenomenology*, trans. by Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 4, my emphasis. Under these circumstances, it is entirely possible to transgress Husserl's specific idea of phenomenology and still remain a phenomenologist.

⁴ The validity of these questions is borne out by the fact that, half a century after the publication of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, Pierre Thévenaz still found it necessary to ask them. See, Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology and Other Essays*, trans. by James M. Eddie (London: Quadrangle,

This chapter responds to these questions in light of Levinas's first publications as a scholar of phenomenology and as a philosopher in his own right. It will be shown that, whilst identifying an underlying commonality between their respective versions of phenomenology, Levinas nevertheless detects two *radically* different approaches toward phenomenological research at play in the works of Husserl and Heidegger. The reason for this is that, although Husserl is generally regarded as the founder of phenomenology as a new movement within philosophy, Heidegger had already developed a *new* idea of phenomenology by the time that Levinas became a student of theirs at the University of Freiburg in 1928. Levinas was thus introduced to phenomenology at a unique and highly controversial moment within the unfolding of its history. As a result, Levinas's views concerning what phenomenology is, how it should be practiced, and the possibilities concerning what research topics it can address, all originate from his initial engagements with and early assessments of Husserl and Heidegger's respective versions of phenomenology. Moreover, since this study argues that Heidegger's

1962). There are two main issues regarding the question 'what is phenomenology'? The first relates to the development of Husserl's own thought, from the so-called 'realism' of the *Logical Investigations* to the idealism of *Ideas I*. The second issue concerns the 'followers' of Husserl, who disagreed significantly with Husserl's idea of phenomenology, thus leading many to formulate their own versions of phenomenology. Even Husserl's most loyal of students did not follow his development of phenomenology. Adolf Reinach and Edith Stein, for example, regarded Husserl's defence of the existence of essences in the *Logical Investigations* as 'truly a realist alternative' against the prevailing Platonism and psychologism of their day, but rejected Husserl's later version of post-Kantian transcendental idealism in *Ideas I*. See, Kimberly Jaray, 'Reinach and Bolzano: Towards a Theory of Pure Logic', in *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy (Revue canadienne de philosophie continentale)*, 10 (2006), 473-491 (p. 473). Thévenaz refers to the so-called 'realism' of the *Logical Investigations* as a 'realism of ideal essences'. Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?*, p. 21. Recalling the initial shock that she and her colleagues shared with respect to Husserl's transcendental move, immediately after the publication of *Ideas I*, Stein notes: 'The *Logical Investigations* had caused a sensation primarily because it *appeared to be* a radical departure from critical idealism which had a Kantian and neo-Kantian stamp. It was considered a "new scholasticism" [by Stein and some of her colleagues] because it turned attention away from the "subject" toward the "things" themselves. Perception again *appeared* as reception, deriving its laws from objects not, as criticism has it, from determination which imposes its laws on the objects. All the young phenomenologists [Stein and her colleagues] were *confirmed* realists. However, the *Ideas* included some expressions which sounded very much as though their Master [Husserl] wished to return to idealism. *Nor could his oral interpretation dispel our misgivings*. It was the beginning of that development which led Husserl to see, more and more, in what he called "transcendental idealism" [...] the actual nucleus of his philosophy and to devote all of his energies to its establishment'. Edith Stein, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Vol. I, Life in a Jewish Family 1891-1916: An Autobiography*, trans. by Josephine Koeppel (Washington: ICS Publications, 1986), p. 250, my emphasis.

phenomenological approach, ultimately, holds much more importance to Levinas than Husserl's manner of thinking, it is necessary for us to follow Levinas's path *through* Husserl and Heidegger to the discovery of his first topic for phenomenological research.

§1.1 LEVINAS'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL EDUCATION

This section outlines the intellectual background of Levinas with specific reference to his phenomenological education. It examines the personal testimony of Levinas as well as those involved in his intellectual formation from 1923 through to 1929. This will enable us to properly contextualise and appreciate his distinct lead into phenomenology.

§1.1.1 *Levinas's Discovery of Phenomenology in Strasbourg*

Levinas's first encounter with phenomenology came during his time as a student at the University of Strasbourg. Levinas commenced his education here in 1923 as a seventeen year old,⁵ spending an initial year in Latin studies before quickly shifting his focus to Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology for his Licence degree.⁶ Of note amongst his teachers during this period were Charles Blondel, Maurice Halbwachs, Maurice Pradines, and Henri Carteron.⁷ Whilst none of these men were responsible for introducing Levinas to phenomenology, they nevertheless launched his initiation into 'the great philosophers'; including, as Levinas lists, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant

⁵ Danielle Cohen-Lévinas, *Lévinas* (Paris: Bayard, 2006), p. 11.

⁶ Raoul Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 11.

⁷ Blondel was the 'anti-Freudian' Professor of Psychology at Strasbourg, who aligned himself with the work of Léon Brunschvicg. Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*, trans. by Michael Kigel and Sonja M. Embree (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), p. 23. Likewise, Levinas always maintains a strong anti-Freudian stance throughout his own writings. Halbwachs was a sociologist in the Faculty of the Arts at the time. Ibid. Pradines was the Professor of General Philosophy. According to Malka, Pradines's courses 'unfailingly disclosed a rapport between morality and politics'. Ibid., p. 22. He was also said to have made an 'impression' on the young Levinas by 'citing the Dreyfus affair as an illustration of an ethics that triumphed over politics'. Ibid., p. 23. Levinas also goes on to uphold the priority of ethics over politics in his own unique way. Finally, Carteron was the Professor in Ancient Philosophy and was also an 'expert' on Descartes and Spinoza. Ibid. Levinas consistently engages with Descartes and Spinoza throughout his own career in philosophy.

and, of particular relevance to the Faculty of Arts at the time in the University of Strasbourg, Durkheim and Bergson.⁸ Following the completion of this program in 1927, Levinas quickly moved into the area of personal research and directed his attention specifically toward Husserl's phenomenology.⁹ It was thanks to Gabrielle Peiffer, a fellow philosophy student of his in the University of Strasbourg, that Levinas became acquainted with the work of Husserl at this time.¹⁰ Peiffer was preparing a dissertation on Husserl for the completion of her Superior Studies degree throughout the academic year of 1926/1927.¹¹ Over the course of her research for this dissertation, Peiffer recommended Husserl's *Logical Investigations* to Levinas which, subsequently, led him to read *Ideas I* having been 'very taken by [Husserl's] logic'.¹²

It was during the following academic year of 1927/1928 when Levinas's engagement with Husserl's phenomenology began to intensify. The reason for this upsurge was due to Levinas's acquaintance with Jean Héring.¹³ At this time, Héring was a member of the Faculty of Protestant Theology in the University of Strasbourg.¹⁴ Of more significance to Levinas, however, was the fact that Héring had been a student of Husserl in the University of Göttingen from 1909 to 1914.¹⁵ Héring had also been a

⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Phillipe Nemo*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 26.

⁹ Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 29. Peiffer's name, as Christian Y. Dupont remarks, 'sometimes appears (mistakenly) as "Pfeiffer"'. Dupont also notes that she used the pseudonym 'Catherine Kany' to publish several volumes of poetry. See, Christian Y. Dupont, 'Jean Héring and the Introduction of Husserl's Phenomenology to France', in *Studia Phaenomenologica XV*, ed. by Dermot Moran & Rodney K. B. Parker (California: Zeta Books, 2016), pp. 129-153 (p. 130). Levinas and Peiffer also translated Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* together from the original German into French. It was first published in France in 1931, with a second edition also appearing in 1947.

¹¹ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 29.

¹² Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation*, p. 11.

¹³ In his autobiographical essay entitled 'Signature', Levinas comments that his 'apprenticeship in phenomenology' began under Héring's guidance. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Signature', in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. by Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 291-295 (p. 291).

¹⁴ Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 38.

¹⁵ Dupont, 'Jean Héring and the Introduction of Husserl's Phenomenology to France', p. 130.

member of the Göttingen Circle and served as its president from 1912 to 1913.¹⁶ Following Husserl's transfer to the University of Freiburg in 1914, Héring remained in Göttingen to defend his thesis, completed under the direction of Husserl on the *a priori* according to Hermann Lotze and subsequently published in *Husserl's Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in 1921.¹⁷ Héring became a member of the Faculty of Protestant Theology in the University of Strasbourg after successfully presenting a thesis entitled 'Phenomenology and Religious Philosophy' for the Licentiate degree in 1925.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid. The Göttingen Circle was a collection of Husserl's earliest students who 'used to meet at least once a week for discussions and the reading of papers outside the lecture halls and seminar rooms'. These students included Adolf Reinach, Alexander Koyré, Roman Ingarden, Fritz Kaufmann, and Edith Stein. During meetings, the group would often employ phenomenology as a means to analyse the 'essential structure' of mundane phenomena such as 'the bouquet of wine' or 'the scent of tobaccos'. This turn toward the 'objective' was far from what Husserl had in mind when establishing the experience of the stream of consciousness as 'the basic phenomenological stratum'. As a result, Husserl often dismissed the activities of the group as 'picture book phenomenology'. See, Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, pp. 169-171. See also, *supra*, n. 4.

¹⁷ Dupont, 'Jean Héring and the Introduction of Husserl's Phenomenology to France', p. 130.

¹⁸ Ibid. In relation to *Phenomenology and Religious Philosophy*, it is noteworthy to highlight Héring's connection with Friedrich Schleiermacher. According to Dupont, Héring's thesis argues 'for a phenomenological approach to resolving the fundamental problems of religious philosophy and recovering the valid aspects of nineteenth-century Protestant theology'. Christian Y. Dupont, *Phenomenology in French Philosophy: Early Encounters* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2014), pp. 220. These problems developed due to a new generation of theologians, including, Emil Brunner, Friedrich Gogarten, and Karl Barth, all of whom 'struggled to free religious truth from psychological explanations of their origin'. Ibid. Following Schleiermacher's 'separation of religion from reflection', then, these thinkers reduced the philosophy of religion into 'pure psychologism'. Ibid., p. 221. Nevertheless, just as Husserl's *Logical Investigations* attempts to refute psychologism in logic, Héring's *Phenomenology and Religious Philosophy* does the same for psychologism in the philosophy of religion. By applying a phenomenological approach toward the philosophy of religion, Héring hoped to 'renew the revolution in religious philosophy initiated by Schleiermacher'. Ibid. Confirming this point, Dupont observes: 'Schleiermacher recognized that the only way to talk meaningfully about the objects of religion is to place oneself inside the religious consciousness. The fact that religious philosophy after Schleiermacher degenerated into philosophy of religion and psychologism was not due to Schleiermacher's reorientation of the religious question but rather to the manner in which subsequent analyses of religious consciousness were carried out. Phenomenology, in Héring's opinion, can complete Schleiermacher's revolution because its rigorous methodology of intentional and essential analysis is better suited to the task'. Ibid., pp. 229-230. Schleiermacher's revolution maintains that neither 'thought nor action' constitute the essence of religion; rather, as Frederick Copleston stresses, it is 'the feeling of dependence on the infinite'. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 152. Héring's approach also places an emphasis on the immediacy of feeling by rejecting Husserl's 'intuitionist principle' as the only way of doing phenomenology. For Héring, as Dupont notes, 'the actual method that one must use in approaching a given field of investigation depends on the nature of the particular field rather than upon formal criteria'. Dupont, *Phenomenology in French Philosophy: Early Encounters*, p. 230. This possibility of maintaining various approaches within phenomenology itself is something that Levinas also notices throughout his early readings of Husserl and Heidegger. Similarly, Levinas also prioritises the immediacy of feeling in his version of phenomenology. This influence comes to Levinas from Heidegger, who, as McDonnell notes, incorporates elements of

The academic year of 1927/1928 saw Levinas attend Héring's lecture course in the University of Strasbourg.¹⁹ During his interactions with Héring from this period, three significant events occurred with respect to Levinas's intellectual development. Firstly, Levinas was 'strongly encouraged' by Héring to undertake a research project on Husserl's thinking which would go on to become *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*.²⁰ Secondly, Héring provided Levinas with a copy of *Being and Time* thus introducing him to Heidegger's version of phenomenology. After reading this seminal work of Heidegger's, Levinas supposedly exclaimed to Héring, 'But there's no Husserl in it!'²¹ There are two different accounts relating to the manner in which Héring responded to this statement. Marie-Anne Lescourret states that Héring's response stressed that *Being and Time* 'goes farther than Husserl'.²² This account, however, has been questioned by both Malka and Dupont because 'it would have been out of place for Héring, as one of Husserl's most beloved and faithful students from his Göttingen days, to intimate that Heidegger', whom Héring did not know personally, 'had gone beyond his master'.²³ As an alternative, Dupont highlights the account provided by Danielle Cohen-Lévinas, the daughter-in-law of Levinas, with respect to Héring's response.²⁴ According to Cohen-Lévinas, Héring answered Levinas by noting,

Schleiermacher's thinking into his own version of phenomenology. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, Ch. 4, 'Heidegger's Appropriation of Biblical Hermeneutics into the Formulation of the Question of the Meaning of Being', pp. 224-253. Héring, like Heidegger, was influenced by Schleiermacher. Thus, in my estimation, the intersections between the thinking of Schleiermacher and Levinas deserve much more attention and exploration.

¹⁹ Ethan Kleinberg, 'The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas', in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, ed. by Julian Bourg (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 201-227 (p. 207).

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 2nd edn, trans. by André Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995); *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2010). Further references are to Orianne's translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash. On page six of the 'Preface' to the original French version of this text, Levinas mentions: 'M. Héring nous a vivement encouragé à l'entreprendre'.

²¹ Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 37.

²² Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), p. 74.

²³ Dupont, 'Jean Héring and the Introduction of Husserl's Phenomenology to France', p. 132.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

‘It seems that this book [*Being and Time*] is important’ and that ‘it [*Being and Time*] has renewed certain things’.²⁵ Regardless of which is taken as fact in this instance, both accounts concede that Levinas identified a major disparity between Husserl and Heidegger’s respective versions of phenomenology from the outset of his phenomenological education.²⁶ Finally, with respect to his intellectual development from this period, it was Héring who facilitated Levinas’s stay at the University of Freiburg for the entirety of the 1928/1929 academic year.²⁷ This year of study abroad allowed Levinas to engage with both Husserl and Heidegger in person.

§1.1.2 *Levinas’s Engagement with Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg*

In 1928, when Levinas arrived at the University of Freiburg, Husserl was in the process of retiring. Husserl’s retirement would leave the Chair of Philosophy temporarily vacant at the university.²⁸ Throughout this period, nevertheless, Husserl remained active as a teacher. He held his final seminar gatherings as Professor in Philosophy during the summer semester of 1928 on the topic of phenomenological psychology and, furthermore, oversaw a course on the phenomenology of empathy as emeritus professor during the winter semester of 1928/1929.²⁹ Levinas attended both of these courses and even gave a presentation in the final class of the former on the 25th of July 1928.³⁰ In addition to attending both of these courses, Levinas also paid occasional visits to Husserl at home for philosophical discussions and to give Husserl’s wife French lessons

²⁵ Cohen-Lévinas, *Lévinas*, p. 12.

²⁶ This disparity is outlined in much more detail by Levinas throughout his earliest publications in phenomenology. See, §1.2.

²⁷ Husserl confirms this detail in a letter to Roman Ingarden, from the 13th of July 1928, by writing, ‘Héring sent me [Husserl] a very gifted Lithuanian student [Levinas]’. Dupont, ‘Jean Héring and the Introduction of Husserl’s Phenomenology to France’, p. 132.

²⁸ Husserl officially retired on the 31st of March 1928. See, Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 85.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

upon her request.³¹ Reflecting upon his time spent in the company of Husserl during this period, Levinas reveals that Husserl ‘gave the impression of being somewhat pat, despite his emphasis on research’, whilst, simultaneously, noting that Husserl ‘had finished the research of his research’ at this time.³² Levinas then goes on to comment at length,

Certainly he [Husserl] believed that phenomenological research had just begun and that every discovered domain gave way to group work which would have to continue the investigation. But as to the methodology of the open horizons, there was no longer any surprise. The manuscripts piling up — and they are admirable in their precision and testify to an ingenious acuity of observation — were confirmations of earlier suggestions. These suggestions received considerable developments, fruitful enough, but the suggestions themselves were no longer unexpected. Sometimes one could guess them from already published work. There was also something pat about his oral teaching. It was difficult to enter into a dialogue. When you asked him something, there was always evocation of the famous manuscript where this theme had already been treated. Your question was always answered by an elaborate development, a lecture, but perhaps this line no longer struck you. You often had the impression, perhaps wrongly, that you knew the order of development and that you guessed the secret.³³

With respect to his recollections of Husserl from this period, Levinas concludes by observing that ‘I felt a very great respect [for Husserl] — despite the disappointment which I did not always admit — a sense of being present at a very important moment — at the last judgement — of thinking’.³⁴ In contrast to this sense of disappointment in relation to Husserl, Levinas’s view of Heidegger from this period could not have been more different.

Heidegger succeeded Husserl as Professor in Philosophy at the University of Freiburg in 1928, taking up the vacant Chair of Philosophy during the month of October.³⁵ His first, albeit unfinished, major work *Being and Time* had been published

³¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 33-34.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁵ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 207.

the year previously to widespread acclaim.³⁶ The first lecture-course that Heidegger delivered at the University of Freiburg as Professor in Philosophy was during the winter semester of 1928/1929 under the title of 'Introduction to Philosophy'. Far from resembling a traditional introduction to philosophy, however, this course proceeded by rejecting Husserl's conception of phenomenology as a 'rigorous science' in favour of establishing this discipline 'as a way of understanding human transcendence' in *Dasein*.³⁷ Heidegger's course, therefore, deliberately moved away from Husserl's custom of presenting to his students the essential features of intentional consciousness and its objectivities as instances of universal knowledge in which transcendence is achieved by the human being.

Levinas recalls the popularity of this lecture course in his essay 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology' (1929), noting that 'to be sure of having a seat at his [Heidegger's] lectures, which took place in one of the largest rooms of the university at five o' clock in the afternoon, I [Levinas] had to occupy it by ten o' clock in the morning at the latest'.³⁸ Moreover, this essay also demonstrates Levinas's admiration of Heidegger during this period since, as Levinas continues,

At the seminar, to which only the privileged were admitted, all nations were represented, mostly by professors: the United States and Argentina, Japan and England, Hungary and Spain, Italy and Russia, even Australia. Observing this brilliant assembly, I understood that German student whom I had met on the Berlin-Basel express on route to Freiburg. When asked where he was going, he answered without batting an eye: "I am going to the home of the greatest philosopher in the world".³⁹

Of course, Levinas would ultimately go on to express a profound sense of regret toward his enthusiasm for Heidegger in the wake of the latter's allegiance to the anti-Semitism

³⁶ *Being and Time* was edited and published by Husserl as Volume VIII of his *Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in the spring of 1927. It was also published by the Max Niemeyer publishing house for phenomenology in the same year. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p.1.

³⁷ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 323.

³⁸ Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology', p. 28.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

of the National Socialist Worker's Party in Germany under the leadership of Adolf Hitler in 1933.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, despite this eventual disenchantment, Levinas would continue to acknowledge the major impact that Heidegger had on his thinking and simultaneously profess the power and originality of Heidegger's work. In 1986, Levinas still vividly recalls that,

With Heidegger, everything seemed unexpected: the marvels of his analysis of affectivity, the *new access* to the everyday, the difference between being and beings, the famous ontico-ontological difference. The rigor with which all that was thought in the brilliance of formulations, absolutely impressive. Still today all this is more precious to me than the last speculative consequences of his project, the end of metaphysics, the themes of *Ereignis*, the *es gibt* in its mysterious generosity. What remains is Heidegger's ingenious application of phenomenological analysis discovered by Husserl and, alas, the horror of 1933.⁴¹

During the same interview, Levinas also comments,

Of course, I will never forget Heidegger's relation to Hitler. Even if this relation was only of a very short duration, it [the truth of Heidegger's relation to Hitler] will be forever. But the works of Heidegger, the way in which he practiced phenomenology in *Being and Time* — I knew immediately that this was one of the greatest philosophers in history, comparable to Plato, Kant, Hegel, Bergson. I have named five crossroads of philosophy: onto-theology, transcendental philosophy, reason as history, pure duration, and [the] phenomenology of being distinguished from beings. Not that I take very seriously this way of orienting oneself in the space of thinking. But whatever a serious orientation might be, Heidegger would not be absent from it.⁴²

By highlighting the 'new access to the everyday' that Heidegger brought to phenomenology, as that which was most 'precious' to his phenomenological education, Levinas shows a preference toward Heidegger's manner of thinking. This manner of thinking holds that our access to the world results from our affective dispositions toward those entities that constitute the meaningfulness of our experience of the world as opposed to, *contra* Husserl, the world viewed as the totality of things that appears on the basis of the transcendental conditions of a perceptual knowing consciousness. The

⁴⁰ This sentiment is probably most prominent in the following statement from Levinas: 'One can forgive many Germans, but there are some Germans it is difficult to forgive. It is difficult to forgive Heidegger'. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 25.

⁴¹ Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 33, my emphasis.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

emphasis on the ‘facticity’ of our mundane experiences, which caught Levinas’s attention here, Heidegger found in the hermeneutic approach of Dilthey as an alternative point of departure to the ahistorical approach toward our lived experiences in Husserl’s version of phenomenology.⁴³

Despite traveling to the University of Freiburg for the purpose of studying under Husserl in advance of submitting his doctoral thesis on Husserl’s phenomenology, it was Heidegger who actually had the decisive influence on Levinas during this period. As Levinas famously and succinctly puts it, ‘(I)t was as if, to use the language of tourists, I went [to Freiburg] to see Husserl and I found Heidegger’.⁴⁴ Taking into consideration this unexpected turn of events, from the perspective of Levinas at this time, it will be of benefit to investigate further Husserl and Heidegger’s philosophical relationship so as to appreciate the academic environment that determined, to a major extent, Levinas’s early understanding and assessment of phenomenology as a way of doing philosophy.

§1.1.3 *Husserl and Heidegger’s Philosophical Relationship*

In his autobiographical essay ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, Heidegger comments that his first encounter with the work of Husserl occurred at the beginning of his academic studies during the winter semester of 1909/1910.⁴⁵ At this time, Heidegger was a young student of theology at the University of Freiburg, whilst Husserl was at the University of Göttingen developing his idea of phenomenology. Nevertheless, as Heidegger notes, ‘the chief work for the study in theology still left enough of time for philosophy’ thus both volumes of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* ‘lay on [his] desk in the theological

⁴³ See, §1.2.7.

⁴⁴ Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, in *On Time and Being*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper Row, 1972), pp. 74-82 (p. 74).

seminary ever since [his] first semester there'.⁴⁶ Heidegger's discovery of Husserl's work came as a result of his familiarity with Franz Brentano's 1862 dissertation *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle* which, as Heidegger remarks, 'had been the chief help and guide of [his] first awkward attempts to penetrate into philosophy' since 1907.⁴⁷ Heidegger had ascertained from 'many references in philosophical periodicals' that 'Husserl's thought was determined by Brentano'.⁴⁸ Accordingly, Heidegger consulted Husserl's *Logical Investigations* to find an answer to the question that struck him upon reading Brentano's work, namely, '(I)f being (*Seiende*) is predicated in manifold meanings, then what is its leading fundamental meaning' or, to put the question in the usual style of Heidegger, 'what does Being (*Sein*) mean?'⁴⁹ Brentano's dissertation *did not* address this question.

Despite holding this question as a guiding path for his philosophical studies, Heidegger did not find an answer to it from his early readings of Husserl's work. Commenting on this point, Heidegger notes,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ After completing his doctorate degree in mathematics, Husserl attended, 'at first out of curiosity', Brentano's lectures at Vienna University from 1884 to 1886. Edmund Husserl, 'Reminiscences of Franz Brentano', trans. by Linda L. McAlister, in *The Philosophy of Brentano*, ed. by Linda L. McAlister (London: Duckworth, 1976), pp. 47–55 (p. 47). Soon, however, Husserl became captivated by Brentano's way of doing philosophy, by his insistence that philosophy is a rigorous science or it is nothing at all, as well as his attempt to develop a descriptive-psychological science that clarifies basic concepts deployed in the normative disciplines of ethics, logic, and aesthetics. These descriptive-psychological investigations led Husserl to devote himself and 'his life's work' to philosophy. Ibid., pp.47-48. After he left Vienna, Husserl continued to engage with Brentano's work, studying lecture scripts that he had 'diligently collected' from Brentano's 1887/1888 course entitled 'Descriptive Psychology'. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 70. Whilst it is not accurate to suggest, as Heidegger does, that Husserl's thought is 'determined' by Brentano's work on the several senses of being in Aristotle, Husserl is adamant about the point that Brentano's 'conversion (*Umwertung*) of the scholastic concept of intentionality into a descriptive root-concept of psychology constitutes a great discovery, apart from which phenomenology could not have come into being at all'. Husserl, 'Author's Preface to the English Edition' of *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: Unwin & Allen, 1931), pp. 5–22 (pp. 16–17). According to Husserl, '(I)ntentionality is the name (*der Titel*) of the problem encompassed by the whole of phenomenology. The name precisely expresses the fundamental property of consciousness'. *Ideas I*, p. 349/303. See, 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. 124-171 (p. 125).

⁴⁹ Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 74.

From Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, I expected a decisive aid in the questions stimulated by Brentano's dissertation. Yet my efforts were in vain because I was not searching *in the right way*. I realized this only very much later. Still, I remained so fascinated by Husserl's work that I read it again and again in the years to follow without gaining sufficient insight into what fascinated me.⁵⁰

Heidegger would later conclude that 'the right way' to answer the questions stimulated by Brentano's dissertation requires a new manner of thinking within phenomenology since these questions can only be sufficiently addressed through an inquiry into certain experiences omitted from Husserl's approach toward phenomenological research. This new manner of thinking, which Heidegger would go on to present in *Being and Time* through an existential-hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research, differs radically from the scientific approach of descriptive-eidetic analysis presented in the *Logical Investigations* as well as from the transcendental-idealism of Husserl's later works.⁵¹ Nevertheless, prior to this realisation and amidst his early academic

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 75, my emphasis.

⁵¹ For the duration of his 'repeated beginning' into Husserl's work as a young student of philosophy, which 'remained unsatisfactory' between the years of 1909-1913, Heidegger struggled to overcome one major difficulty with respect to the phenomenological method. Ibid., p. 76. This difficulty, as Heidegger observes, concerns the 'simple question' of 'how thinking's manner of procedure which called itself "phenomenology" [is] to be carried out' or, to put the question another way, how should one go about *doing* phenomenology? Ibid. Continuing on this issue, Heidegger comments, 'What worried me about this question came from the ambiguity which Husserl's work showed at first glance'. Ibid. The ambiguity that Heidegger speaks of in this case derives from his reading of the *Logical Investigations*, which identifies a contradiction between the first and second volumes of that work. This contradiction results from the fact that, whilst the first volume of the *Logical Investigations* presents a 'refutation of psychologism in logic by showing that the doctrine of thought and knowledge cannot be based on psychology', the second volume also contains a 'description of the acts of consciousness essential for the constitution of knowledge'. Ibid. As a result, Heidegger concludes that in the second volume of the *Logical Investigations* 'Husserl falls back with his phenomenological description of the phenomena of consciousness into the position of psychologism which he had just refuted'. Ibid. Nevertheless, Heidegger would go on to find a satisfactory explanation for this contradiction in 1913 with the publication of Husserl's *Ideas I* since this work develops the insights previously offered in the *Logical Investigations* into a 'fundamental science' established within 'transcendental subjectivity'. Ibid., p. 77. Owing to this development, then, Husserl retains the 'experiences of consciousness' as the main theme of phenomenology, which the *Logical Investigations* advocates, without falling back into the position of psychologism due to the fact that *Ideas I* now establishes the 'experiences of consciousness', as Heidegger correctly recognises, 'in the systematically planned and secured investigation of the structure of acts of experience together with the investigation of objects experienced in those acts with regard to their objectivity'. Ibid. Despite this satisfactory explanation, however, Heidegger maintained a fascination with the *Logical Investigations*, even after the publication of *Ideas I*, due to his estimation that the supposed 'ambiguity' of the position forwarded in the *Logical Investigations* allows for phenomenology to be developed *in a different way*. Ibid., p. 78. In other words, for Heidegger, one does not have to follow Husserl and uphold the main theme of phenomenology in line with universal knowledge-claims pertaining to the essential features of intentional consciousness and its objectivities,

frustrations, Heidegger continued to read Husserl's work at length between the years of 1909 and 1916 in a state of fascination.⁵² These frustrations, Heidegger informs us, only began to ease after Heidegger met Husserl in person following the latter's appointment to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg in 1916.⁵³

In 1916, Husserl aided Heidegger in publishing his qualifying dissertation, 'The Doctrine of Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus', by recommending it to receive funding for the printing costs from the Academic Association at the University of Freiburg.⁵⁴ Similarly, in 1917, Husserl offered to mentor Heidegger by writing in a letter dated from September the 24th of that year: 'I will gladly help you with your studies as well as I am able'.⁵⁵ Sixteen months later, following the completion of his military service, Heidegger was employed as Husserl's assistant at the University of Freiburg in January 1919.⁵⁶ Despite his close rapport with Husserl at this time, however, Heidegger did not come to endorse Husserl's approach toward phenomenological research. In explanation of this situation, Heidegger recalls,

Husserl's teaching took place in the form of a step-by-step training in phenomenological 'seeing' which at the same time demanded that one relinquish the untested use of philosophical knowledge. But it also demanded that one give up introducing the authority of the great thinkers into the conversation. However,

nor does one have to adhere to Husserl's particular standpoint of transcendental idealism when doing phenomenology. This realisation only occurred to Heidegger after revisiting the sixth of the *Logical Investigations*, which Husserl unwillingly republished at the behest of a number of repeated requests from 'friends and pupils' in 1922. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵² After switching his primary focus from theology to philosophy, in the wake of four semesters as a student at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger began to engage with Husserl's work in much more depth. In addition to the *Logical Investigations*, Heidegger also mentions reading *Ideas I* and 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science' during this period. Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 77.

⁵³ Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 78.

⁵⁴ Husserl confirms this point in a letter to Paul Natorp from the 8th of October 1917. Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, 'Correspondence to and about Each Other, 1914-1934', in *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927*, ed. by Theodore Kisiel & Thomas Sheehan (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), pp. 349-420 (pp. 355-356).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl's Philosophy* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), p. 90. Additionally, Hugo Ott notes that Husserl had made the case to the university and secured this position for Heidegger at Freiburg (1919-1923) on a twofold basis, firstly, that Husserl needed Heidegger to introduce his students to the beginnings of phenomenological research and, secondly, that it would provide financial security to Heidegger, who had just recently been married and was not yet employed. See, Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. by Allan Blunden (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp. 115-116.

the clearer it became to me that the increasing familiarity with phenomenological seeing was fruitful for the interpretation of Aristotle's writing, the less I could separate myself from Aristotle and the other Greek thinkers.⁵⁷

Along similar lines, Heidegger continues,

As I myself practiced phenomenological seeing, teaching and learning in Husserl's proximity after 1919 and at the same time tried out a transformed understanding of Aristotle in a seminar, my interest leaned anew towards the *Logical Investigations*, above all the sixth investigation in the first edition. The distinction which is worked out there between sensuous and categorical intuition revealed itself to me in its scope for the determination of the 'manifold meaning of being'.⁵⁸

From these reflections, therefore, it is evident that Heidegger was utilising phenomenology to investigate his own philosophical interests from the outset of his engagement with Husserl. Furthermore, Heidegger was also employing sources for these philosophical inquiries that Husserl did not approve of during this period. These sources included some of the 'great thinkers' from the philosophical tradition, whose work was extraneous for executing Husserl's tactic of 'phenomenological seeing', as well as the sixth of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* which, by Heidegger's own admission, Husserl 'could not quite get close to' after the publication of *Ideas I*.⁵⁹ As a result, Husserl only agreed to republish the sixth investigation in 1922 after giving into 'the wishes of friends of this work' – one of whom was Heidegger.⁶⁰

Taking these circumstances into account, the following reflections from Heidegger concerning his time working as Husserl's assistant at the University of Freiburg encapsulate the situation well. Heidegger writes,

Thus Husserl watched me *in a generous fashion, but at the bottom in disagreement*, as I worked on *the Logical Investigations* every week in special seminars with advanced students in addition to my lectures and regular seminars. Especially the preparation for this work was fruitful for me. There I learned one thing — at first rather led by surmise than guided by founded insight: What occurs for the

⁵⁷ Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 78.

⁵⁸ Ibid. For significance of the sixth of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in relation to Heidegger's 'determination of the manifold meaning of being', see McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, Ch. 1, §1.4, 'The Third Obstacle: Husserl's Sixth Logical Investigation and its Relation to 'the Question of the Meaning of Being'', pp. 27-47.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 79.

⁶⁰ Ibid. See also, *supra*, n. 51.

phenomenology of the acts of consciousness as the self-manifestation of phenomena is thought more originally by Aristotle and in all Greek thinking and existence as *aletheia*, as the unconcealedness of what-is present, its being revealed, its showing itself. That which phenomenological investigation rediscovered as the supporting attitude of thought proves to be the fundament trait of Greek thinking, if not indeed philosophy as such.⁶¹

This ‘one thing’ that Heidegger learned, which remained undeveloped at this time, led him to ask the following question in relation to Husserl’s work,

Whence and how is it determined what must be experienced as ‘the things themselves’ in accordance with the principle of phenomenology? Is it consciousness and its objectivity or is it the Being of beings in its unconcealedness and concealment?⁶²

Of course, Heidegger would ultimately go on to reject the former definition of phenomenology and interpret ‘the things themselves’, according to the so-called ‘principle of phenomenology’, consonant with the latter definition on account of the position elaborated in *Being and Time*. Yet, prior to this explicit rejection of Husserl’s definition of phenomenology and amidst his growing estrangement from Husserl’s approach toward phenomenological research, Heidegger continued to work as a teaching assistant at the University of Freiburg between the years of 1919-1923 with Husserl’s generous approval.

During this period, ‘Husserl believed that Heidegger was one of the select few (if not the only one) who really understood and followed his idea of phenomenology’.⁶³ Indeed, as Dorion Cairns remarks, Husserl often conveyed this view to Heidegger directly by proclaiming that, ‘You and I are phenomenology’.⁶⁴ These historical facts help to explain the motivations behind Husserl’s continued support for Heidegger as his assistant despite disagreeing with Heidegger’s approach toward teaching phenomenology. Furthermore, they also help to explain Husserl’s willingness to assist

⁶¹ Heidegger, ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, p. 79, my emphasis.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), p. 9.

Heidegger in securing a position as Associate Professor at the University of Marburg in 1923.⁶⁵ In the midst of these events, nevertheless, Heidegger explicitly confirms his rejection of Husserl's version of phenomenology. Writing to Karl Löwith on the 20th of February 1923, with details from one of his final classes teaching as Husserl's assistant at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger reveals,

In the final hour of the seminar, I publically burned and destroyed the *Ideas* to such an extent that I dare say the essential foundations for the whole (of my work) are now cleanly laid out. Looking back from this vantage point to the *Logical Investigations*, I am now convinced that Husserl was never a philosopher, not even for one second in his life. He becomes ever more ludicrous.⁶⁶

Heidegger maintains this assessment of Husserl's work in another letter to Löwith from the 8th of May 1923. In relation to his lecture-course from that semester entitled 'Ontology — Hermeneutics of Facticity', Heidegger writes that it 'strikes the main blow against [Husserl's] phenomenology', before continuing that,

I now stand completely on my own feet. There is no chance of getting an appointment [as Professor in Philosophy at the University of Freiburg]. And after I have published, my prospects will be finished. The old man [Husserl] will then realize that I am wringing his neck — and then the question of succeeding him is out. But I can't help myself.⁶⁷

Irrespective of this unfavourable denunciation, Heidegger would not fully unveil his own version of phenomenology until the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927. Between the years of 1923 and 1927, then, Heidegger strategically develops his own unique and alternative version of phenomenology to Husserl's in order to address his own topic for phenomenological research, namely, the question of the meaning of Being and its relation to *Dasein*. Heidegger does so by assimilating certain elements of our lived experiences that have been deemed irrelevant for phenomenological research by Husserl's eidetic-scientific manner of thinking. These elements, as McDonnell's

⁶⁵ For his recommendations of Heidegger for two separate positions at the University of Marburg, see Husserl's letters to Paul Natorp from the 11th of February 1920 and the 1st of February 1922, Edmund Husserl & Martin Heidegger, 'Correspondence to and about Each Other, 1914-1934', pp. 366-369.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

research has shown, include a certain attitude appropriated from Dilthey's historical hermeneutics and Schleiermacher's biblical hermeneutics, both of which emphasize the experience of language as of more importance for understanding human life than what is given to perceptual experience, as well as an existential standpoint that Heidegger locates in the writings of Augustine, Jaspers, and Kierkegaard.⁶⁸

Husserl remained unaware of Heidegger's actual intentions over the course of these years. Reflecting on the nonconformity of Heidegger's work to his own during this period, Husserl admits to Cairns: 'I thought he [Heidegger] was with me and that I could not understand his language'.⁶⁹ Even with the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, which was included as a part of Husserl's *Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Husserl maintained this opinion of Heidegger.⁷⁰ It was not until the summer of 1929, after Heidegger had succeeded him to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg and amidst a growing sense of personal distance between the two, that Husserl came to realise the extent to which Heidegger's version of phenomenology differed from his own. In a letter to Georg Misch, from the 3rd of August 1929, Husserl first mentions his break with Heidegger's work acknowledging that it 'abandons' his 'method of constitutive phenomenology'.⁷¹ Similarly, but more emphatically, Husserl expands upon this point to Roman Ingarden,

⁶⁸ McDonnell's study demonstrates, convincingly, the precise manner in which Heidegger incorporates these specific methodological influences into his particular version of phenomenology in order to make 'the question of the meaning of Being' and its relation to *Dasein* a valid topic for phenomenological research. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, esp., Ch. 2, 3, and 4.

⁶⁹ Dorian Cairns, 'My Own Life', in *Phenomenology: Continuation and Criticism, Essays in Memory of Dorian Cairns*, ed. by Fred Kersten & Richard Zaner (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 1-13 (p. 7).

⁷⁰ Husserl published *Being and Time*, without reading it himself, to facilitate Heidegger's promotion to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg as Heidegger had no major publications at the time. After announcing his impending retirement in 1928, Husserl then wrote a glowing recommendation of Heidegger to the committee that would nominate his successor. See, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, 'Correspondence to and about Each Other, 1914-1934', pp. 390-391.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

in a letter dated the 2nd of December 1929. Referring to his ‘exhaustive’ study of Heidegger’s work during the summer months of 1929, Husserl writes,

I came to the conclusion that I can *not* admit this work [Heidegger’s version of phenomenology] within the framework of my phenomenology, and that unfortunately I must also reject it in its entirety as regards method, and in the essentials as regards content.⁷²

Perhaps the most damning account of Husserl’s disappointment, however, comes in a letter to Alexander Pfänder from the 6th of January 1931. In this letter, Husserl reflects on his philosophical relationship with Heidegger by writing,

Immediately after the printing of my last book [*Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929)], in order to come to a clear-headed and definitive position on Heideggerian philosophy, I devoted two months to study *Being and Time* along with some of his more recent writings [*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929) and ‘On the Essence of Truth’ (1930)]. I arrived at the *distressing* conclusion that philosophically I [Husserl] have *nothing to do with this* Heideggerian profundity, with this brilliant but *unscientific* genius; that Heidegger’s criticism [of Husserl’s work], both open and veiled, is based on a gross misunderstanding; that he may be involved in the formation of a philosophical system of the kind that I have always considered it my life’s work to render impossible forever. Everybody except me saw this long ago. I have not withheld my conclusion from Heidegger.⁷³

Taking the timeline of these events into consideration, then, it is clear that Levinas’s year of study abroad with Husserl and Heidegger occurred at a unique and highly controversial moment within the history of phenomenology. Not only did it coincide with a period when both Husserl and Heidegger were actively teaching at the University of Freiburg, it also transpired when the philosophical differences between their respective versions of phenomenology had become clear for all to see.

§1.1.4 *Levinas on Husserl and Heidegger’s Philosophical Relationship*

In light of the major philosophical differences that were emerging between Husserl and Heidegger with regard to their conceptions and definitions of phenomenology during the late 1920s, it is not surprising that from the outset of his initial encounter with

⁷² Ibid., p. 398.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 403, my emphasis.

phenomenology, Levinas could sense and identify a major disparity between Husserl and Heidegger's respective approaches toward phenomenological research. This detail has previously been noted on the subject of Levinas's reaction to Héring after reading *Being and Time* for the first time in Strasbourg. Nevertheless, in addition to that episode, Levinas also mentions instances from his year of study abroad at the University of Freiburg wherein both the professional and the personal distance between Husserl and Heidegger was demonstrable.

When asked about the relationship between Husserl and Heidegger at the University of Freiburg circa 1928/1929, Levinas responds,

Husserl was convinced that Heidegger remained his disciple, and he discovered slowly, I think, that Heidegger was not teaching the 'transcendental reduction'. There is a letter by Husserl to one of his students [Ingarden, from the 2nd of December 1929] where this disenchantment is recounted. And even the distanced character of the meetings between Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg was noticeable.⁷⁴

Furthermore, in reply to a subsequent inquiry about whether or not the students of philosophy at the University of Freiburg during this period were aware of the philosophical distance between Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas affirms that they 'knew it very well'.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, this awareness emerged from 'texts that were read and compared', to quote Levinas, 'not on the basis of facts'.⁷⁶ Concluding on this point, Levinas notes that he and his fellow students of philosophy at the University of Freiburg at this time 'compared theses and divergent orientations' in the various texts of Husserl and Heidegger still looking for 'signs of continuity' between their respective approaches toward phenomenological research.⁷⁷ This outlook highlights the difficulty that confronted Levinas during his phenomenological education, which it so say, that it begs the following question: How can Husserl and Heidegger, with their radically different

⁷⁴ Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 37. See also, *supra*, n. 72.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

‘theses’ and ‘divergent orientations’, both operate within the field of phenomenology? In other words, what constitutes phenomenology, how should phenomenological research be carried out, and, perhaps most pressing of all, who should Levinas take as defining what phenomenology is: Husserl or Heidegger? Levinas develops an answer to these questions in his earliest publications.

§1.2 LEVINAS’S INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF PHENOMENOLOGY

This section examines Levinas’s early assessments of Husserl and Heidegger’s respective versions of phenomenology by outlining the manner in which Levinas traces the convergences and divergences between Husserl and Heidegger’s work throughout his earliest publications. These publications are ‘On the Ideas of M. E. Husserl (1929)’⁷⁸, ‘Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology’ (1929), *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930), ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’ (1933)⁷⁹, and ‘Phenomenology’ (1934).⁸⁰ It will be shown that whilst identifying Husserl and Heidegger as both committed to phenomenology as a way of doing philosophy, Levinas nevertheless distinguishes and assesses their ideas concerning what exactly phenomenology is, how it should be implemented, and what phenomenology should study as vastly different. Despite these differences, however, Levinas also recognises an underlying commonality between Husserl and Heidegger which, subsequently, leads to a new form of post-Kantian phenomenological ontology in philosophy.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘On Ideas’, in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 3-31.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, trans. by the Committee of Public Safety, in *Diacritics*, 26 (1996), 11-32; ‘Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie’, in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, 113 (1932), 395-431. Further references are to the Committee of Public Safety’s translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

⁸⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Phenomenology’, in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 39-46.

⁸¹ There are, of course, questions within contemporary scholarship concerning the accuracy of Levinas’s readings of both Husserl and Heidegger. In this context, it is worth mentioning the more complex picture of Husserl’s work that is now available as a result of his posthumously published works. See, J. N. Mohanty, ‘The Unity of Husserl’s Work’, in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 2 (2003), 115-132.

§1.2.1 *Phenomenology as a Method for Describing the Concrete*

During his interview with Poirié, Levinas responds to a question concerning the appeal of phenomenology to him as a young student in philosophy. With reference to his early readings of Husserl's work, Levinas comments,

I read *Logical Investigations* very closely and I had the impression of gaining access not to yet another speculative construction but to a new possibility of thinking, different from deduction, induction, and dialectic, a new way of unfolding 'concepts' beyond the Bergsonian appeal to *the inspiration* of intuition. I had the impression of gaining access to the fact that the gaze directed to a thing is also a gaze which is covered up by that thing; that the object is a blinding abstraction if it is taken by itself; that it gives you less to see than it shows, creating an ambiguous discourse; that in turning back to consciousness, to the forgotten experience which is intentional — that is, which is animated by an intention intending something else than this mimed experience — and which, always the idea of something, opens a horizon of meanings, one discovers the concreteness or the truth where the abstract object is situated.⁸²

From this passage, it is clear that what appeals to Levinas about phenomenology from the outset of his studies concerns its ability to overcome 'speculative' and 'abstract' thinking owing to the discovery of the 'concreteness' from which all objects are 'situated'. If one considers an object in and of itself, for Levinas, it is merely a 'blinding abstraction' that 'gives you less to see than it shows' thus creating 'an ambiguous discourse' within philosophy. 'In turning back to consciousness', Husserl teaches Levinas to search for the intentional relation to the object as the '*forgotten*

Nevertheless, even if Levinas's readings of Husserl and Heidegger are inaccurate, they still form the basis for his own thinking which this study endeavours to understand as its primary goal.

⁸² Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 31, my emphasis. For Husserl, there is no 'mystical' seeing as there is for Bergson when it comes to grasping the life of intuition. According to Fiachra Long, Bergson's intuition is 'blinded by a mystical surplus which finds in concepts, particularly scientific concepts, simply an inadequate form of knowledge'. Maurice Blondel, *The Idealist Illusion and Other Essays*, trans. & intro. by Fiachra Long (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2000), p. 53. Under these circumstances, science cannot truly grasp life as it is lived *qua* 'spontaneous experience' in a reality that is 'continually renewing itself'. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54. Such knowledge, for Bergson, only comes from those who go beyond the 'intellectual' accounts of reality, i.e. the mystics. *Ibid.*, p. 53. In contrast, for Husserl, grasping the life of intuition involves, as Levinas calls it, 'hard labour' in order to determine the essential features of intentional consciousness and its objectivities as they have been intuitively given in concrete life. Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology', p. 37. Husserl calls this type of seeing 'eidetic ideation' and considers it to be the main goal of phenomenology as the 'rigorous science' of our actual conscious experiences. See, §1.2.4.

experience' that initially animates the psyche. Indeed, Levinas goes on to regard this as Husserl's primary lesson. In his autobiographical essay 'Signature', for instance, Levinas writes that 'Husserl brought a method to philosophy', before continuing that 'it consists in respecting the intentions which animate the psychic and the modalities of appearing which conform to these intentions, modalities which characterize the diverse beings apprehended by experience'.⁸³ Under these circumstances, only by determining the modalities of consciousness and its intentions, which present an object to consciousness, can the meaning of that object become properly appreciated and its concrete aspect uncovered. The *how* of the appearing of any 'object' or 'thing' to our experiences, in other words, is part of the *what* of that object or thing as it 'is'. Here, then, Levinas endorses phenomenology as a post-Kantian method of inquiry into our understanding of being, or ontology, due to its ability to grasp life prior to reflection which, subsequently, unlocks the analysis of concrete experience as a possibility for philosophical investigation.⁸⁴

Throughout his earliest publications, Levinas reinforces this view of phenomenology as a method for describing the concrete. In his very first composition entitled 'On the Ideas of M. E. Husserl' (1929), Levinas introduces his exposition of Husserl's work with a disclaimer that he must 'leave aside what is perhaps of *greatest interest*' in *Ideas I*, namely, 'the multitude of minute and scrupulous *concrete*

⁸³ Levinas, 'Signature', p. 291.

⁸⁴ Some commentators recognise this emphasis on 'the concrete' as the main interest for the phenomenological method, as far as Levinas is concerned. Nelson Maldonado-Torres highlights it by writing: 'For the early Levinas, phenomenology has to do with the rescue of concrete existence and concrete experience. This implies the irreducibility of both the real world and the subject. "Toward the concrete", states Levinas as he describes Husserlian phenomenology by appropriating the terms of Jean Wahl'. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 38. Similarly, Steven G. Smith notes that, for Levinas, phenomenology is a 'search for the "concrete" (i.e., the irreducible and underivable)'. See, Steven G. Smith, 'Reason as One for Another', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. by Richard A. Cohen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 53-72 (p. 57).

phenomenological analyses' which, as Levinas duly points out, 'defy summarizing'.⁸⁵ Later on in this text, Levinas continues in a similar fashion by claiming that Husserl utilises the transcendental-phenomenological reduction as a means to consider life in its 'concrete aspect'.⁸⁶ This focus on concrete experience with respect to phenomenology intensifies in Levinas's next publication 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology' (1929). In this text, Levinas makes numerous references to the fundamental role of the concrete in phenomenology. He mentions that 'intentionality' is 'the *concrete* element starting from which the world must be [approached and] understood'.⁸⁷ Levinas also criticises geometrical space as an 'abstraction' and highlights 'our presence in space' as 'the *concrete* situation which reveals extension to us'.⁸⁸

With this realisation in mind, Levinas proclaims that phenomenology will 'renew philosophy' since it will 'teach us to consider phenomena in their concrete freshness', that is to say, 'in their irreducible originality'.⁸⁹ Building on this claim further, Levinas continues,

The phenomenological method wants to destroy the world falsified and improvised by the naturalist[ic] 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.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Levinas, 'On Ideas', p. 3, my emphasis.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 12, my emphasis.

⁸⁷ Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology', p. 35, my emphasis.

⁸⁸ Ibid, my emphasis. Phenomenological analyses demonstrate that extended objects are always given to a subject within the spaces that it inhabits. The *a priori* judgement colour implies extension, therefore, which Husserl ascertains based upon the intuition of colour itself as a general object, only makes sense if it is grounded in the particular concrete experiences of the subject as it encounters the extended spaciousness of colours themselves. Such colours are not the so-called 'secondary qualities' of the objects of our sensory experience, as Descartes, Boyle, Locke and Brentano (the descriptive psychologist) would hold, simply because they belong to the concrete experience of the embodied subject's experiencing of the particular colour itself. The green of a leaf on the tree is experienced not as a secondary quality of experience, with extension the measurable and mathematically objectifiable primary quality of the leaf, nor as the theoretically constituted object of physics, e.g., as light particles or light waves or molecular movements etc.; it is, rather, the manifestation of the life and ripeness of the leaf itself in the concrete experiencing of that leaf by the subject itself. Prior to natural-scientific and naturalistic interpretations of the being of the object, therefore, there is the concrete experience of objects themselves based upon our presence in space. For more on the role of the body in Husserl's version of phenomenology, see, Søren Overgaard, *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), esp., Ch. 5, §4, 'Transcendental Subjectivity and the Body'.

⁸⁹ Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology', p. 36.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

This lost world ‘overflows nature’ but is retrievable, Levinas argues, through a phenomenological method of inquiry that ‘recaptures all of the contours and richness’ in ‘our concrete life’.⁹¹ In his doctoral thesis, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930), Levinas maintains this emphasis on concrete experience as central to the field of phenomenology. During the second chapter of this text, Levinas writes,

The great interest of Husserl’s conception then seems to be his starting point (the phenomenological starting point *par excellence*): to have tried to locate the existence of external things, not in their opposition to what they are for consciousness, but in the aspect under which they are present in *concrete* conscious life. What exists for us, what we consider as existing is not a reality hidden behind phenomena that appears as images or signs of reality. The world of phenomena itself makes up the being of our *concrete* life.⁹²

In addition to stressing the recognition of ‘external things’ from within ‘concrete conscious life’ as the starting point for phenomenology, Levinas once again goes on to highlight the significance of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction as the particular manner in which Husserl enables reflection on the concrete within his philosophy. ‘The reduction does not attempt to perform a mere abstraction which imagines consciousness without the world’, Levinas glosses in reference to Husserl, ‘on the contrary, it discovers our truly *concrete* life’.⁹³ Nevertheless, it is not just Husserl’s version of phenomenology that seeks to examine concrete experience, as far as Levinas is concerned.

Throughout these early publications, Levinas underscores the central role of the concrete in Heidegger’s version of phenomenology as well. In ‘Freiburg, Husserl, and

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 24/49, my emphasis. This text represents the first commentary on the work of Husserl in the French language. It is still to this day one of the best introductions to Husserl’s thought. Least of all because, unlike Husserl’s early followers, as De Boer correctly observes, Levinas understood Husserl’s ‘true objective’, which sought to overcome all naturalistic interpretations of being so as to establish the absolute existence of pure consciousness. De Boer, ‘An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy’, in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 1-32 (p. 3).

⁹³ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p.150/213, my emphasis.

Phenomenology’, Levinas notes that contrary to the abstract world of atemporal ideal objects, the phenomenological method uncovers ‘a world of things interesting and boring, useful and useless, beautiful and ugly, loved and hated, ridiculous and anguishing’.⁹⁴ These adjectives describe concrete experience in accordance with Heidegger’s particular research interests in phenomenology. They do not correspond to Husserl’s notion of the concrete.⁹⁵ Regardless of this difference, however, Levinas still maintains a focus on the concrete as central to Heidegger’s work. In ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’ (1932), for example, Levinas observes that Heidegger’s version of phenomenology establishes ‘*concrete* man at the centre of philosophy’ and that ‘the concept of consciousness’, which plays such a central role in Husserl’s version of phenomenology, ‘is only an abstraction’ precisely because, for Heidegger, it is the totality of man’s Being-in-the-world that defines how we experience ourselves,

⁹⁴ Levinas, ‘Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology’, p. 35.

⁹⁵ There are two very different concepts of the world at play in the works of Husserl and Heidegger. On the one hand, for Husserl, the world corresponds to ‘the totality of things that can be encountered or constituted through acts of outer perceptual-sense experience’. By comparison, for Heidegger, the world relates to ‘the expressed meanings of the significance of human experiences and human involvement in written records of our human endeavours’. McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, pp. 143-144. As McDonnell observes, Heidegger learns this concept of the world from Dilthey and uses it as a means to criticise Husserl’s conception of the world. Commenting on the manner in which the world is depicted by Husserl in his description of the natural attitude, Heidegger remarks in his early lecture-courses from the 1920s: ‘Here we need to be cautioned against a *widespread error* which consists in taking so-called “experience” (*Erlebnis*) in the sense of an isolated act, an artificial extract, as it were, from life, to be so-called “straightforward” or “plain experience” (*Erfahrung*), in which what is experienced is in turn supposed to unlock the meaning of the being-there of things and of reality in general’. Martin Heidegger, *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. by John van Buren (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 67, my emphasis. Here, Heidegger rejects Husserl’s dismissal of the everyday experience of human involvement in the world as an ‘artificial extract’ belonging to the thesis of the ‘natural attitude’, that is, the erroneous interpretation that objects simply lay there ‘present-in-stock’ (*Vorhanden*) whether or not the attention of the conscious subject is directed toward them. This is because the world of human involvement does not simply take things as having an essential meaning whether or not attention is directed toward them. It rather maintains that the very meaning of things, to quote McDonnell, ‘necessarily depends upon the particular way in which the meaning of such things is interpreted and articulated in our experiences of them’. McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 143. Heidegger’s conception of the world, therefore, does not only avoid falling back into the natural attitude, which Husserl wrongly believed, but it also demonstrates that Husserl’s way of looking at the world is entirely ‘unnatural’ from the standpoint of the concrete experience of the human being in the world. *Ibid.*, §2.9 ‘Husserl, Dilthey, and Heidegger’s Starting-Points in Phenomenology in Relation to the Experience of “the World”’, pp. 143-152. See also, §1.2.6.

including that of our consciousness.⁹⁶ Similarly, Levinas holds that Heidegger's project of 'fundamental ontology' reduces time to 'concrete time' as it is experienced in everyday life and that it is this 'concrete situation of existence that philosophizes'.⁹⁷ In this regard, Heidegger's approach evokes Kierkegaard's succinct point that we do not argue toward the existence of anything but from existence itself, and by existence Kierkegaard means concrete individual human existence.⁹⁸ Developing on this point, Levinas writes,

We will understand, finally, that Heidegger's constant preoccupation with 'everyday life', whose conditions in existence and authentic time he ceaselessly investigates, is not due to a simple interest in vindicating supposed abstractions to common sense. For we could ask whether, in Heidegger's thought, the fact that the philosopher feels obliged to start from common notions or to return to them is not better explained than by a simple invocation of the commonplace that all abstract truth must conform to the facts of experience. The alleged evidence of this dictum becomes contestable if we understand by 'experience' the vague experience of our everyday life. If, nevertheless, it is such experience that philosophers mean to take as their point of departure, then philosophy is not at heart contemplative knowledge about which one must pose such and such a question of method, but, conforming to Heidegger's ontologism, it is, in its most intimate essence, a possibility of concrete existence already in progress, as Pascal would say, always already fallen, finite possibility in the most specific and most tragic sense of the term.⁹⁹

This passage highlights Levinas's view that, whilst it is of central importance to phenomenology as such, Husserl and Heidegger disagree with respect to the manner in which the concrete is *given* in experience.

⁹⁶ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 24/416, my emphasis.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 26/420-421, my emphasis.

⁹⁸ Kierkegaard makes this point in 'The Absolute Paradox' with reference to the 'foolish' attempts within philosophy and theology to prove or disprove God's existence. If God does not exist, as Kierkegaard notes, 'it would be impossible to demonstrate it. But if he does exist, then it is foolish to want to demonstrate it, since I, in the very moment the demonstration commences, would presuppose it [God's existence] not as doubtful — which a presupposition cannot be — but as decided, because otherwise I would not begin [the demonstration]'. Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 7, Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 39. Kierkegaard then continues, 'It is generally a difficult matter to want to demonstrate that something exists [...] The whole process of demonstration continually becomes something entirely different, becomes an expanding concluding development of what I conclude from having presupposed that the object of the investigation exists. Therefore, whether I am moving in the world of sensate palpability or in the world of thought, *I never reason in conclusion of existence, but I reason in conclusion from existence*'. Ibid., p. 40, my emphasis.

⁹⁹ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 27/423.

Levinas reinforces this stance in a publication simply entitled ‘Phenomenology’ (1934). In this essay, Levinas records three distinct phases within the phenomenological movement. The first arrives with the early works of Husserl — catalogued mainly in the *Logical Investigations* — which brings about ‘a period of nuanced and subtle phenomenological descriptions’ in line with the intuition of essences.¹⁰⁰ The second phase marks Husserl’s passage towards transcendental idealism, wherein ‘the realm of ideas is set back within the transcendental consciousness in which it is constituted’.¹⁰¹ Finally, Levinas imparts the ‘existential phenomenology’ of Heidegger as the third phase of the movement remarking in the process that, whilst staying ‘faithful to the method of phenomenological description’, Heidegger’s work ‘reforms the very idea of the subject and conceives the goal of philosophy in an unexpected and original way’.¹⁰² This way maintains that the totality of the existing human being and not simply that of human consciousness, however understood or reduced through the transcendental reduction, functions as the necessary condition for the meaning of anything, including the topic of the meaning of Being itself, i.e., ontology. Concluding on this point, Levinas remarks,

For him [Heidegger] 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. A phenomenological analysis of *this existence*, an existence that is familiar *with the being which preoccupies it*, will permit us to clarify the very meaning of the notion of being. The study of this meaning, ontology, is philosophy itself [according to Heidegger].¹⁰³

Over the course of his early publications, then, Levinas repeatedly highlights the description of concrete experience as central to the concerns of phenomenology.¹⁰⁴ In

¹⁰⁰ Levinas, ‘Phenomenology’, p. 39.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas’s proclivity for identifying the concrete as central to the concerns of phenomenology could stem from his early exposure to Bergson. See, §1.1.1. Levinas argues that Bergson’s ‘principle contribution’ to philosophy is ‘the theory of duration’, that is to say, ‘the idea that the time of physics is merely derived’ from the *concrete* temporal ‘duration’ which constitutes our individual existence.

addition, Levinas also acknowledges that Husserl and Heidegger maintain two very different positions in relation to what actually stands for concrete experience. Levinas eventually arrives at his own position concerning the nature of the concrete on the basis of his early assessment of Husserl and Heidegger's work. The difference between Husserl and Heidegger's particular descriptions of the concrete, therefore, requires further examination in order to provide an accurate basis for any evaluation of Levinas's own understanding of the concrete.

§1.2.2 *Husserl's Description of the Concrete*

According to Levinas, Husserl's 'first task' toward describing the concrete involves determining 'the true nature of the human' and 'the proper nature of consciousness'.¹⁰⁵ It is necessary for Husserl to proceed with this task in order to overcome the dominant philosophical conception of consciousness and the human being from this historical period, which, in his estimation, completely fails to appreciate the concrete aspect of conscious life. This conception most notably prevails within the British empiricist tradition and, in particular, the kind of 'sensationalism' advanced by George Berkeley and David Hume. Levinas employs the term 'sensationalism' in this instance to refer to Berkeley and Hume's common aim to reconstitute 'the ideas and impressions of our geometrical concepts' as 'the empirical origin of our knowledge'.¹⁰⁶ Whilst documenting an affinity between sensationalism and phenomenology on this point due

Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 27. According to Levinas, 'Heidegger would not have been able to venture his conception of *Dasein*'s finite temporalization' without the 'Bergsonian conception of time'. Ibid. As a result, Levinas notes that 'the credit goes back to Bergson for having liberated philosophy from the prestigious model of scientific time'. Ibid. Whilst this study primarily addresses the influence of Husserl and, particularly, Heidegger on Levinas's thought, it does not underestimate the influence of Bergson on it. See, Miguel José Pale, 'Bergson & Lévinas on the Genealogy of Mind', in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 48 (2017), 304-318. See also, Nicolas de Warren, 'Miracles of Creation: Bergson and Levinas', in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, ed. by Michael R. Kelly (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2010), pp 174-200.

¹⁰⁵ Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology', p. 35.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

to a mutual feeling of ‘deep-seated incomprehension’ for ‘the abstract considered in itself’, Levinas ultimately remarks that Berkeley and Hume lean toward ‘the most naïve sort of empiricism’ in their ‘application of the categories of exterior things to man’, which is to say, ‘they consider human facts to be like things’.¹⁰⁷ In relation to the difference between sensationalism and phenomenology on this issue, Levinas comments,

If they [Berkeley and Hume] were right to see in the individual, the immediate, and the concrete the very atmosphere of comprehension into which the ideal objects of mathematics had to be reintroduced in order to be understood, they were wrong to believe that the sensation-thing was that individual, that immediate, that concrete.¹⁰⁸

Although correct to identify concrete experience as the source from which all things can be thought, Berkeley and Hume incorrectly posit the concrete as separate from that which originally gives it to thought, namely, consciousness. Their common outlook, therefore, rests upon a certain metaphysical presupposition which, following the guidance of Descartes, views consciousness and the object as two distinct substances thus creating an unbridgeable epistemological problem with reference to their relation.

Husserl seeks to overcome this difficulty by reforming the dominant conception of consciousness within philosophy since it is responsible for preserving the epistemological problem initiated by metaphysical dualism. Such an amendment to the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. John E. Drabinski expands upon Levinas’s position here well by noting that, whilst empiricism ‘bears a most striking resemblance to phenomenological research’, there is a ‘danger’ to empiricism that ‘qualifies any resemblance’. John E. Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 13. This is because, as Drabinski writes: ‘Empiricism conflates impression or sensation with appearance, and this conflation conceals what, strictly speaking, appears within the properly phenomenological attitude. Phenomenology is an empiricism in the sense that it returns philosophy to experience. But it is not just any experience to which we are returned. Phenomenology returns us to experience as it is *lived*’. Ibid. Drabinski also correctly identifies that Levinas formulates his own version of phenomenology to challenge Husserl’s ‘obsession’ with that which appears to intentional conscious through representation and theory. Ibid., p. 14. In doing so, Levinas returns to the empiricist notion of sensation in order to describe concrete life as it is immediately felt beyond appearances. This means that Levinas does not conflate sensation with appearance thus avoiding the metaphysical dualism of the traditional empiricists.

¹⁰⁸ Levinas, ‘Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology’, p. 34.

intellectual climate will justify concrete experience as an indispensable topic for philosophical reflection. Concerning Husserl's realisation of this feat, Levinas remarks,

Husserl's great originality is to see that 'the relation to the object' is not something inserted between consciousness and the object; it is consciousness itself. It is the relation to the object that is the primitive phenomenon — and not a subject and an object that would supposedly move toward one another.¹⁰⁹

Metaphysical dualism overlooks the fact that prior to the abstract positing of consciousness and the object as two distinct substances, there is a necessary 'relation to the object' in concrete experience. This relation to the object constitutes the 'primitive phenomenon' of consciousness and the principle topic of phenomenological research. By ascertaining this primitive phenomenon, Husserl arrives at a new conception of consciousness in accordance with its 'proper nature' amenable to philosophical reflection. Elaborating on this point, Levinas writes,

Husserl takes the term 'consciousness' to cover the sphere of the 'cogito' in the Cartesian sense of the term: I think, I understand, I conceive, I deny, I want, I do not want, I imagine, I feel, etc. The characteristic that necessarily belongs to the whole sphere of consciousness — both actual (attentive) and potential (the whole sphere of consciousness's possible acts, without which actual consciousness would be unthinkable) — is to be always 'consciousness of something'. Every perception is perception of the 'perceived'; every desire is desire of the 'desired', etc. Husserl calls this fundamental property of consciousness intentionality.¹¹⁰

Unlike the sensationalists, then, who consider both in a permanent state of immanence, Husserl marks an essential difference between consciousness and the object by noticing that consciousness 'does not turn in upon itself, like a thing, but tends toward the world'.¹¹¹ This tending toward the world — what Husserl refers to as 'intentionality' — does not correspond to the ability of consciousness to represent objects in the form of conceptual thought. It rather constitutes the very essence of consciousness itself. As a

¹⁰⁹ Levinas, 'On Ideas', p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Levinas, 'Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology', p. 34.

result of this discovery, Husserl reveals that ‘what is supremely concrete in man’ is precisely ‘his transcendence in relation to himself’, to use the words of Levinas.¹¹²

Husserl’s new conception of consciousness no longer focuses on the mere representation of objects by the reflective faculty of consciousness. Instead, it emphasises ‘states of consciousness’ (*Erlebnisse*) as they are immediately lived within concrete life. Confirming this point, Levinas writes,

We have said that intentionality is not the mere representation of an object. Husserl calls states of consciousness *Erlebnisse* — what is ‘lived’ in the sense of what is experienced — and this very expression connects the notion of consciousness to that of life, i.e., it leads us to consider consciousness under the rich and multiform aspects characteristic of our concrete existence.¹¹³

In this respect, experiences or states of consciousness cannot but be *lived* by one who actually exists. The experiencing (*er-leben*) of objects is what forms the very concreteness of our lived through (*er-lebt*) existence, and so, precedes any reflective acts of consciousness on such experiences (*Erlebnisse*). Regardless of this new conception of consciousness, however, which discloses ‘the rich and multiform aspects characteristic of our concrete existence’, the types of conscious experiences that interest Husserl over the course of his philosophical career are actually quite limited. This limitation stems from the fact that Husserl’s particular version of phenomenology holds ‘theoretical’ states of consciousness relating to ‘objectifying acts’ as, to quote Levinas,

¹¹² Ibid. As this chapter progresses, it will become clear that the problem of transcendence is a central theme within the discipline of phenomenology, as far as Levinas is concerned. The reason for this concern stems from Levinas’s estimation that, whilst both seeking to highlight the transcendence of the human being in relation to itself, Husserl and Heidegger simply go on to offer two different types of ‘false transcendence’ in their respective versions of phenomenology. According to Levinas, as Wyschogrod puts it, ‘if a subject persists through its transcending, it has failed to transcend itself’, that is to say, ‘it has merely changed one or several of its essential properties’. Wyschogrod, *The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, p. 121. The subject persists *qua* pure consciousness, for Husserl, in the act of transcending itself through the attainment of the essences pertaining to valid universal knowledge-claims; just as it does, for Heidegger, when *Dasein* transcends its inauthentic understanding of Being by raising anew the question of the meaning of Being today thus authentically understanding the temporality of the meaning of Being in general. By highlighting false forms of transcendence within the philosophical tradition, Levinas shares a research interest with Jean Wahl. Diane Perpich credits Wahl as a ‘reliable guide to Levinas’s formulation of the problem’. Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), esp., Ch. 1, ‘Alterity: The Problem of Transcendence’, pp. 17-29 (p. 28).

¹¹³ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 53/86.

‘the forms of intentionality that give a foundation to all others’.¹¹⁴ The term ‘objectifying acts’, in this context, does not refer to the mere representation of objects by means of conceptual thought seeing as this definition would denote a return to the sensationalist model of consciousness, which Husserl meticulously tries to overcome throughout his work. It refers rather to the fact that an object must necessarily *appear* as a state of consciousness through perceptually-founded acts in order for it to be considered as a concrete experience at all. In other words, whilst consciousness *qua* intentionality successfully discovers ‘the rich and multiform aspects characteristic of our concrete existence’, thus allowing for an analysis of concrete life from a variety of different *Erlebnisse* — such as, for instance, aesthetic, ethical, practical, and religious — Husserl asserts the primacy of ‘theoretical’ states of consciousness in his particular version of phenomenology by choosing to focus on the objectifying acts essential to the initial *appearance* of objects to consciousness. In support of this point, Levinas highlights a passage from the second of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*. This passage states that,

Each intentional experience is either an objectifying act or has its basis in such an act, i.e., it must, in the latter case, contain an objectifying act among its constituents, whose total matter is individually the same as its total matter.¹¹⁵

The term ‘matter’, in this case, consistent with the overall development of Husserl’s thought, does not refer to the independent existence of an object as a material thing opposed to the conscious perceiving of it. This position, once again, would simply return to the naïve dualistic stance of sensationalism. It denotes rather, firstly, the ‘objective pole’ of the object as a state of consciousness which, as Levinas comments, ‘enters inevitably into the [concrete] description of any object’ thus sustaining the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 61/97. See also, Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, II, §23, ‘The view of “matter” as a founding act of “mere presentation”’, p. 129/493-494.

givenness of the object as ‘identical while the predicates [of that object] change’.¹¹⁶ Secondly, it also refers to the specific way in which consciousness grasps a particular object *as* something. Levinas clarifies this notion by claiming that whilst it is possible to perceive the same Napoleon as both ‘victor at Iena’ and ‘vanquished at Waterloo’, the particular way in which Napoleon is grasped in each of these cases differs, that is to say, whilst the object remains identical, the ‘matter’ of the object changes.¹¹⁷ In *Ideas I*, Husserl employs two separate terms in order to further clarify the difference between these two distinct aspects of intentional consciousness. The term ‘*noeses*’ is employed to signify the particular ways in which an object is grasped by consciousness, or, as Levinas puts it, ‘the subjective side of intentionality’.¹¹⁸ Whereas, the term ‘*noemata*’ is employed to signify the ‘objective pole’ of the object apprehended in consciousness or ‘those things of which consciousness is conscious’.¹¹⁹ Of primary importance to Husserl in his particular version of phenomenology is the fact that the total *noemata* is originally given to consciousness, irrespective of the specific *noesis* intending them, on the basis of the objectifying acts founding concrete experience as such.¹²⁰ Affirming this point, once again, Levinas cites Husserl’s statement that,

The reference to an object is, in general terms, constituted in an act’s ‘matter’ [*noesis*]. But all matter [*noeses*], according to our principle, is the matter [*noemata*] of an objectifying act and only through the latter can it become the matter [*noesis*] for a new act-quality founded upon this. We must after a fashion

¹¹⁶ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 55/88-89.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55/89.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54/88.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ After the discovery of the sense-bestowing activity (*Sinngebung*) of intentional consciousness, documented in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl develops his theory of the noesis-noema correlation in phenomenological-descriptive psychology that is preparatory to his views of transcendental phenomenology in *Ideas*. Here, as de Boer comments, ‘there is a parallel between the apperipient sense or the material on the side of the act and the objective side on the side of the object’. Theodore De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 34. The way in which the object is referred to, the how of the referent, is part of the intended (material) object of the act. The object referred to and the object as referred to, then, can be distinguished and analysed from a correlative point of view, that is to say, we start with the perceived object as the intended object and that means there is an act that intends it. Husserl argues that discovering these acts, which ‘constitute’ the meaningful appearance of the intended object, is the task of a phenomenology of consciousness.

distinguish between primary and secondary intentions, the latter owing their intentionality to their foundation on the former.¹²¹

The objectifying acts of consciousness, therefore, reveal the *noemata* of an object as it initially *appears* to consciousness prior to any specific *noesis* intending that object in consciousness. It is for this reason that Husserl upholds the objectifying acts relating to theoretical states of consciousness as primary intentions, whereas, all other states of consciousness are regarded as secondary intentions within his version of phenomenology.

By upholding the primacy of theoretical states of consciousness as primary intentions, Husserl follows Brentano's descriptive-psychological *a priori* law that 'nothing can be judged, desired, hoped, or feared unless one has a presentation of that thing'.¹²² Unlike Brentano, however, who maintains a notion of 'pure presentation' — in which 'a mere imagine of an object' appears 'independently' from any acts of judgement, desire, hope, fear, or belief — as the basis for all subsequent intentional relations, Husserl demonstrates that 'matter does not exist independently of any quality', as Levinas notes, thus indicating that Brentano's notion of pure representation 'has itself a quality'.¹²³ This quality (*noesis*) corresponds to the theoretical states of consciousness which initially represent the complete object (*noemata*) to consciousness as a result of its objectifying acts. In this regard, Husserl clarifies the 'ambiguous' use of the term 'representation' in Brentano's descriptive-psychology in order to found, as Levinas observes, 'a new concept of representation' constitutive of the primary intentions of consciousness.¹²⁴ Focusing on these primary intentions leads Husserl to

¹²¹ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p.61/97. See also, Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, II, §41, 'New interpretation of the principle that makes presentations the bases of all acts. The objectifying act as the primary bearer of matter', p. 167/494.

¹²² Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. by A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Tyrell, and L. L. McAlister (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 84.

¹²³ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 57-58/91-93.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59/94..

uncover, as Levinas remarks, ‘the absolute sphere of life as consciousness’.¹²⁵ This absolute sphere of life brings Husserl into direct contact with the concrete as it presents itself to consciousness prior to any reflective acts from within consciousness.

The presentation of the concrete to consciousness prior to any reflective acts from within consciousness itself Husserl calls ‘intuition’. In order to clarify this position further it is useful to outline the difference that Husserl marks between the signifying acts of consciousness from the intuitive acts of consciousness. The signifying acts of consciousness distinguish a ‘mode of representation’ in which, as Levinas notes, ‘objects are meant without being given’.¹²⁶ In this respect, language can be employed to intentionally relate to an object even if the object itself has not been directly given through an objectifying act in that moment.¹²⁷ Levinas cites the second of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* to confirm this point. It notes that,

In virtue of such acts [the signifying acts of consciousness], the expression is more than a merely sounded word. It means something and, insofar as it means something, it relates to what is objective [i.e., what is intended via the signifying act].¹²⁸

Despite not relating to objects directly, then, signifying acts can still relate to them in a meaningful way. This is evident in ordinary discourse where, as Levinas puts it, ‘we content ourselves with the mere aiming at an object, at least provided that we

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 36/64.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 65/101.

¹²⁷ Here, Husserl’s instrumentalist view of language becomes evident. For him, the meaning of language, as De Boer puts succinctly puts it, ‘is determined exclusively by what is seen’, that is to say, as De Boer continues, it is a ‘faithful expression of clear givens’. De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, p. 378. Such ‘faithful’ expressions of a clearly given can be uttered when an object is seen directly through perceptual experience, recalled through memory, or anticipated through imagination. Either way, in each of these cases, language is an instrument used to signify the intended object of perceptually-founded acts. Heidegger’s view of language challenges this conception by highlighting the fact that words express the understanding of ‘one’s own lived experience’ thus language is constitutive to the life of the individual who expresses it. This view of language, as McDonnell observes, Heidegger borrows from Dilthey and is indicative of the general hermeneutic approach toward the meaning of being as it is lived and understood through (linguistic) expression. McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 227. It is this hermeneutic view of language that Levinas will follow throughout his own thinking.

¹²⁸ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, pp. 65-66/102. See also, Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, I, §9, ‘Phenomenological distinctions between the phenomena of physical expression and the sense-giving and sense-fulfilling act’, p. 192/280.

understand what is said to us and what we ourselves say'.¹²⁹ As a result, for Husserl, the character of a signifying act corresponds to those instances when objects are neither 'seen' nor 'reached', but only 'meant'.¹³⁰

In contrast, intuitive acts of consciousness are reached in perception when the object is given directly to 'vision', that is to say, it *appears* concretely to consciousness.

On this point, Levinas comments that,

Under the term intuitive acts, Husserl encompasses, on the one hand, perception (presentation, *Gegenwärtigung*) and, on the other, imagination and memory (re-presentation, *Vergegenwärtigung*). These notions have in common that the objects meant by these acts are themselves given and not only meant. They are acts 'in which objects [...] are given in person (*zur Selbstgegebenheit kommen*).' One should therefore not include in the concept of intuition the notion of 'sensible' or that of 'immediate', in the sense of 'given prior to any positive action of the mind'; one should not oppose intuition to 'intellection', but one should insist on the fact that intuition is an act that possesses its object. This is what is expressed by the concept of *Fülle*, fullness, which characterises intuitive acts, as opposed to the 'emptiness' of signifying acts.¹³¹

The signifying acts of consciousness are 'empty' due to the fact that they simply aim at their object without it actually being given directly in the moment of perception. Nevertheless, these acts can achieve 'fullness' once the object in question is directly given through an intuitive act, that is to say, when it is given in perception. This transition occurs within acts of intentional consciousness itself when, for instance, the description of an object (e.g., of a bridge in a book) becomes intuitively presented to consciousness in any corresponding objectifying act of memory or the vision of the object here and now in direct perception. This is why memory and imagination are also classed as intuitive acts by Husserl since they can recall or analyse concrete objects as they are primarily given as *the intended objects of those acts*. Of the three intuitive acts that Husserl demarcates, perception holds the most important role on account of the direct givenness of its object. It would be impossible to 're-present' any object through

¹²⁹ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 66/102.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 69/106-107.

acts of memory or imagination without it having first been presented directly to perception. As a consequence, Levinas notes,

In perception the fullness realises an object as it is in-itself. Perception characterised by the fact that it has its object ‘in flesh and bones’ (*leibhaftiggeben*) before it. Thus it is a privileged intuitive act, a primary intuition, as Husserl calls it. Perception gives us being. It is through reflecting on the act of perception that we must seek the origin of the very notion of being [as far as Husserl is concerned].¹³²

Intuitive acts of perception, therefore, epitomise the objectifying acts that are specific to theoretical states of consciousness which, subsequently, represent the concrete to consciousness. Nonetheless, these states of consciousness are what the ‘I’ *lives*. Only through reflection can they become objects for thought, as Levinas observes.¹³³ Thus, since reflection remains accountable for creating a ‘blinding abstraction’ of the object and, ultimately, ‘forgetting’ the intentional experience that initially gives it to consciousness, Husserl’s problem, methodologically speaking, concerns the specific way in which reflection must be employed in order to respect the concreteness of states of consciousness as they are lived.

§1.2.3 *Husserl’s Way of Describing the Concrete*

Husserl begins his reflections on the concreteness of states of consciousness by highlighting the approach that initially obscures them from thought. This approach concerns any mode of reflection from within, what Husserl calls, ‘the natural attitude’.¹³⁴ In the natural attitude, we take things, in perception, to be ‘simply there’ (*Vorhanden*) whether attention is directed toward them or not.¹³⁵ According to Husserl, the ‘thesis of the natural attitude’ is the basis for all erroneous interpretations of the absolute mode of the being of things in existence because it begins with a dualistic

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71/108.

¹³³ Levinas, ‘On Ideas’, p. 19.

¹³⁴ Husserl, *Ideas I*, Pt II, ‘The Considerations Fundamental to Phenomenology’, §27-32, pp. 51-62/48-57.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51/48.

metaphysical hypothesis of objects as existing independently from consciousness in addition to consciousness itself. In order to prove this point, Husserl describes the manner in which the very existence of a thing, given to outer sense perception, manifests itself only in and through perspectival variations admitting to further outer perceptions of the thing in question. Elaborating on Husserl's tactic here, Levinas writes,

A material thing is given to us through many aspects and perspectives, under many different lights, etc. 'A thing is [...] an object which is given to consciousness as one and identical in the continuous and regular flux of the multiple perceptions which flow into each other.' 'It can only appear from a certain angle, in which are already inscribed systematic possibilities of ever new perspectives.'¹³⁶

When an object is directly given to consciousness in concrete life, through acts of outer sense perception, it is never given completely. It is always perceived from a certain perspective at each and every moment. Due to the fact that the thing given to perception is spatial in essence, the appearing of the thing to our actual acts of outer perceptual-sense experience will be '*in principle incomplete*'.¹³⁷ Even if the memory of another perspective relating to an object is employed to imagine the future appearance of that object from a different perspective, it could still prove to be otherwise than what is expected as a result of the primacy that perception holds for supplying evidence to our intuitive experience of the object. Only when the object is 'seen' directly from a certain perspective can the memory or imaginations of that perspective obtain its validity. Husserl opposes this 'subjective' appearing of objects in concrete life to an *ideal* of 'objectivity' in which objects are considered as complete in and of themselves. This *ideal* stems from a prioritisation of the 'one and identical' relating to an object over the 'flux of multiple perceptions' grasping that object in all of its fullness. Concerning the character of this objective ideal, Levinas writes,

¹³⁶ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 5/23.

¹³⁷ Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 94/80.

No matter how fluid a series of subjective phenomena, it gives the intimation of a stable and objective thing which claims to have an independent existence transcending the flux of perception. This is the second characteristic of the experience of material objects. When we see one side of an object, the whole object is intimated as something which, through the relativity, presents itself as 'the temporal unity of enduring or changing properties.'¹³⁸

Despite never actually experiencing the complete object in concrete life, then, the objective ideal conflates the many perceptions of an object to 'intimate' the existence of a stable thing as enduring independently from the many different concrete perspectives of that object. This attitude establishes a naturalistic theory of being, for Husserl, since it posits the independent existence of things irrespective of the intuitive acts which account for their primary appearance to consciousness. The natural attitude, therefore, refers to any position upholding ideal objects, which have been abstracted from the incomplete perceptions of objects in concrete life, as indicative of an absolute, that is to say, independent, external world, which exists whether my actual consciousness is directed toward it or not.

The natural and mathematical sciences represent a system of thought functioning from within the natural attitude. These disciplines turn away from the intuitive acts of consciousness, which put us in direct contact with concrete life, so as to explain the apparent nature of 'real' and ideal objects of knowledge. On this point, Levinas remarks,

The natural attitude in which we live, and in which we remain while engaged in science, is unaware of the question of the meaning of consciousness and of transcendence. In this attitude we find [posited pre-predicatively] an existing world before us to which we belong along with other men and all animate nature. Its existence is implied in each of our acts that has the world as its object. The existence of the world is the general [hypo]thesis that characterises the natural attitude.¹³⁹

Each act of consciousness that focuses exclusively on the existence of the 'objective' world belongs to the natural attitude as it overlooks the concrete situation underlying it,

¹³⁸ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 6/24.

¹³⁹ Levinas, 'On Ideas', p. 11.

namely, the intentional correlation between consciousness and the object of perception. As a result, Husserl claims that the natural attitude must be ‘radically changed’ for the purposes of shedding light on the concrete life of consciousness itself. In other words, a special method is needed to unlock the hidden depth dimensions of our actual consciousness as it is lived. Husserl famously recommends, therefore, that we change our attitude by means of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction. When the transcendental-phenomenological reduction is applied to experience, as Levinas observes,

We no longer live in the existential thesis, which is not absolutely certain — but we do not reject it or move to its antithesis. We make this thesis itself the object of our investigations. The thesis open to doubt is thus ‘put out of action’ (*ausser Action gesetzt*), ‘excluded’ (*augeschaltet*), ‘put between parentheses’ (*eingeklammert*) — but it does not totally disappear. Without living in it, we can speak of it and of its properties. Husserl calls this [new] attitude the phenomenological *ἐποχή* [reduction].¹⁴⁰

The existence of the world, then, is not put out of action; rather, it is the erroneous interpretation of the world as having an absolute mode of existence independent from consciousness that is put out of action. Continuing on this point, Levinas writes,

The phenomenological *ἐποχή* [reduction] applies to all the existential positions of the natural attitude. Scientific, aesthetic, moral, and other judgements are put between parentheses; we do not allow ourselves to live in them. But we do not cease considering them: without siding for or against their value, without living in them, as we did in the natural attitude, we consider this life itself — this consciousness that posits all these propositions — in its concrete aspect. We also consider these propositions as posited by consciousness and exactly in the way they are posited by consciousness, in which they are presented and given in it. Seen from this perspective, these propositions are no longer what they were in the natural attitude; they are ‘phenomenologically reduced’. The phenomenological *ἐποχή* is also called the ‘phenomenological reduction’.¹⁴¹

In this respect, the transcendental-phenomenological reduction allows Husserl to analyse consciousness as the absolute sphere of life from which all propositions are found thus revealing the concreteness of consciousness to reflection.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Owing to the application of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction to pure consciousness which, *qua* intentionality, is always consciousness *of* something, consciousness turns back on itself and constitutes, as Husserl puts it, ‘a region of being original in principle’.¹⁴² Husserl refers to this act, in which consciousness is revealed to reflection, as ‘immanent perception’. Immanent perception should be differentiated from ‘transcendent perception’, as Levinas notes, in which consciousness aims toward an object ‘external’ to itself through acts of outer sense perception, memory, or imagination.¹⁴³ Under these circumstances, as Husserl comments, ‘there emerges an essential and fundamental difference between being *qua* consciousness and being *qua* thing’.¹⁴⁴ Whereas, being *qua* thing, as perceived transcendentally, is always incomplete due to its spatiality, being *qua* consciousness, as perceived immanently, is absolute since it appears as ‘something which is what it is’, to use Levinas’s phrase.¹⁴⁵

Confirming this point, Husserl writes,

The perception of a state of consciousness is a direct vision of something which is given (or could be given) in perception as something absolute and not as something identical in many different concrete perspectives. Everything which we have worked out about the givenness of the physical [external] thing loses its sense here and one must make that fully clear to oneself in detail. A state of consciousness of feeling is not given in many different concrete perspectives. When I consider it [in an act of reflective immanent perception], I have something absolute; it [the state of consciousness] has no sides that could be presented sometimes in one way and sometimes in another. I can think something true or something false about a feeling [through reflection], but what I see when I look at it [in an act of reflective immanent perception] is there, with its qualities, its intensity, etc., absolutely.¹⁴⁶

Irrespective of specific judgements that can be made *about* particular states of consciousness through reflection, immanent perception demonstrates that all judgements ultimately rest upon the experience of consciousness as it is lived concretely

¹⁴² Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 26/51-52. See also, Husserl, *Ideas I*, §33, ‘Preliminary Indication of “Pure” or “Transcendental” Consciousness As the Phenomenological Residuum’, pp. 63-66/57-60.

¹⁴³ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 26-27/52.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26/52.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27/52.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27/53. See also, Husserl, *Ideas I*, §44, ‘Merely Phenomenal Being of Something Transcendent, Absolute Being of Something Immanent’, pp. 94-98/80-83.

as states of consciousness. Only when a state of consciousness is immanently perceived as it has been initially represented as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness is perception considered as ‘adequate’, to use Husserl’s term.¹⁴⁷ This renders all acts of transcendent perception as ‘inadequate’ for a ‘direct vision’ of something given. By purifying perceptual experience of all naturalistic interpretations, then, with the assistance of the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and having successfully reduced experience to ‘the absolute position of consciousness’ through acts of immanent perception, Husserl uncovers an ‘absolute self, the existence of which cannot, in principle, be denied’ since any supposition that denies the states of consciousness relating to this self, which have already been intuitively given through the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness, would epitomise ‘nonsense’, according to Husserl.¹⁴⁸

§1.2.4 Husserl’s Idea of Phenomenology

Husserl’s personal aim is to establish philosophy as a ‘rigorous science’. This means that philosophy must achieve universal knowledge-claims to rival that of the mathematical sciences, if it is to hold any validity whatsoever.¹⁴⁹ In his 1911 *Logos* article ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’, Husserl confirms this view by noting,

¹⁴⁷ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 27/52.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 28/53. Husserl, *Ideas I*, §46, ‘Indubitability of the Perception of Something Immanent, Dubitability of the Perception of Something Transcendent’, pp. 100-104. Thus, Husserl has a specific view of the ‘concrete’ existence of our experiences that is given in reflective immanent perception which is central to his presuppositionless and absolute starting point in *Ideas I*. The perception of a current conscious experience (and its object) in an act of reflective immanent perception and the existence of that experience forms ‘a single concrete cogitatio’; that is to say, the existence of an experience immanently perceived and the perception of that experience are non-independent parts of a single act of thought. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 79/68. It thus forms a *concretum* (not of abstract parts, but interdependent parts). What Levinas will argue is that the lived nature of our experiences and those experiences immanently perceived also form a single *concretum*. In other words, the lived nature and the meaningful existence of those experiences cannot be examined abstractly from their *lived* meaning. With this existentialist turn, Levinas, following Heidegger, focuses on the ‘concrete life’ of our experiences in a different way to Husserl.

¹⁴⁹ Brentano is responsible for bestowing Husserl with this view of philosophy since, as Robin D. Rollinger correctly notes, the ‘ambition to philosophise scientifically stems from the profound and

No reasonable person will doubt the objective truth or the objectively grounded probability of the wonderful theories of mathematics and the natural sciences. Here there is, by and large, no room for private ‘opinions’, ‘notions’, or ‘points of view’. To the extent that there are such in particular instances, the science in question is not established as such but is in the process of becoming a science and is in general so judged. The imperfection of philosophy is of an entirely different sort from that of the other sciences just described. It does not have at its disposal a merely incomplete and, in particular instances, imperfect doctrinal system; it simply has none whatsoever. Each and every question is herein controverted, every position is a matter of individual conviction, of the interpretation given by a school, of a ‘point of view’.¹⁵⁰

Whilst the mathematical and natural sciences contain a ‘doctrinal system’, which strives to go beyond particular ‘opinions’, ‘notions’, and ‘points of view’ in the quest to ascertain universal knowledge-claims, philosophy contents itself with individual ‘convictions’ and ‘interpretations’ that constantly refute and invalidate each other throughout its history. Despite its many efforts, then, philosophy has failed to adequately apprehend the knowledge of the human spirit that it has always sought, at least, in the mind of Husserl. Similarly, their aims toward universal knowledge-claims notwithstanding, the mathematical and natural sciences, as Husserl comments, ‘have not in a single instance unravelled for us *actual* reality, the reality in which we *live*, move, and *are*’.¹⁵¹ The reason for this failure stems from the fact that the mathematical and natural sciences operate within the natural attitude and thus focus their attention on *ideal* objects as opposed to the objects that appear in the concrete life of pure intentional consciousness. Thus, Husserl aims to establish a ‘rigorous scientific philosophy’ so as to lay a ‘new foundation for philosophy in the sense of strict science’. Elaborating on this position, Husserl continues,

enduring impression’ that Brentano’s lectures had on Husserl. Robin D. Rollinger, *Husserl’s Position in the School of Brentano* (Dordrecht: Kulwer Academic Publishers, 1999), p. 1. These lectures convinced Husserl, the recently graduated Doctor of Mathematics, ‘that philosophy, too, is a field of serious work, that it, too, can and consequently *must* be treated in the spirit of the most rigorous science’. Ibid, my emphasis. See also, *supra*, n. 48.

¹⁵⁰ Edmund Husserl, ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’, in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper Row, 1965), pp. 71-147 (p. 74).

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 140, my emphasis.

This purpose is by no means foreign to the present age. It is fully alive in the naturalism that dominates the age. From the start, naturalism sets out with a firm determination to realise the ideal of a rigorously scientific reform of philosophy. It even believes at all times, both in its earlier and modern forms, that it has already realised this idea. But all this takes place, when we look at it from the standpoint of principle, in a form that from the ground up is replete with erroneous theory; and from a practical point of view this means a growing danger for our culture. It is important today to engage in a radical criticism of naturalistic philosophy. In particular, there is need of a positive criticism of principles and methods as opposed to a purely negative criticism based on consequences. Only such a criticism is calculated to preserve intact confidence in the possibility of a scientific philosophy, a confidence threatened by the absurd consequences of a naturalism built on strict empirical science.¹⁵²

Thanks to his own criticism of naturalism, Husserl has found a position of pure consciousness ‘absolutely clear of [methodological and epistemological] problems’ and from where ‘the most basic field work wherein things are given with absolute clarity’ can begin.¹⁵³ Phenomenological research, therefore, should endeavour to ascertain universal knowledge-claims from the absolute position of consciousness, as far as Husserl is concerned.

Since his personal aim is to transform philosophy into a rigorous science capable of ascertaining universal knowledge-claims with absolute validity, Husserl shows no interest toward describing individual states of consciousness in his version of phenomenology; rather, as Levinas observes, Husserl starts from individual states of consciousness and attempts to grasp in them ‘their essence’.¹⁵⁴ Expanding on this point, Levinas writes,

The essence of an object [as given through an individual state of consciousness] is its necessary structure: what makes it what it is, what makes any of its empirical characterisations *a priori* possible and comprehensible, or, in short, its principle. For instance, in order to have a determinate intensity, tone, and pitch, a sound must have tone, intensity, and pitch in general. They are a set of mutually and necessarily related characteristics which constitute the necessary structure of sounds.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁵⁴ Levinas, ‘On Ideas’, p. 18.

¹⁵⁵ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 109/159.

By starting with an individual state of consciousness in which a particular sound is given to direct perception here and now, Husserl seeks to find what is necessary to sound in general. Irrespective of the particular experience relating to a sound, then, it is possible to arrive at knowledge of that which is essential to sound as such, namely, intensity, tone, and pitch. In this respect, given in conjunction with the intuition of the object as it appears through individual states of consciousness is the intuition of the essences relating to that object. The purpose of phenomenological research, as Husserl conceives of it, concerns the clarification of these essences through philosophical reflection. With this point in mind, Levinas informs us,

Husserl's great discovery was the existence of inexact 'concepts', which are obtained not through idealization but by ideation. Thus, for example, in studying the essence of a 'state of consciousness', ideation starts with an individual *Erlebnis* and, dropping its individuality, raises it to the essence in all its concreteness and in all the vagueness which essentially belong to it. Phenomenology cannot consist in deducing the essence of this or that state of consciousness on the basis of some axiom, but in describing its necessary structure. And as our description is guided by an eidetic intuition, we produce an eidetic, while making a description.¹⁵⁶

In this respect, the essences that Husserl speaks of do not correspond to any ideal objects such as the Platonic 'essences'. On the contrary, they are experienced concretely as states of consciousness and can be apprehended through 'eidetic ideation' or 'phenomenological seeing' following the reduction of life to pure intentional consciousness. These essences are *a priori* epistemologically, not ontologically. Accordingly, 'the knowledge of essences is a "vision" of its object', as Levinas notes, 'which is not only signified or intended, but given "clearly and distinctly" with self-evidence', that is to say, found within the concrete life of perception. When Husserl famously proclaims that phenomenology will finally lead philosophy 'back to the things themselves', therefore, what he has in mind are the essences relating to universal knowledge-claims of absolute validity pertaining the concrete life of pure intentional

¹⁵⁶ Levinas, 'On Ideas', p. 19.

consciousness.¹⁵⁷ By reaching these objects of knowledge, the human being *qua* intentional consciousness achieves ‘transcendence’, in the mind of Husserl. Such a concept of transcendence is not ‘a natural scientific or metaphysical transcendence’; it is rather, as De Boer comments, ‘the transcendent interpretation of an immanent given’.¹⁵⁸ In other words, it is a sense of transcendence found within the immanence of pure intentional consciousness.

§1.2.5 *Heidegger’s Description of the Concrete*

Levinas commences his assessment of Heidegger’s version of phenomenology in a similar manner to his earlier considerations of Husserl’s work. In ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’ (1932), Levinas tell us that in order to ‘get to the heart’ of Heidegger’s philosophy it is fitting to begin with ‘one of the main obstacles of modern philosophy that Heidegger wishes to surmount’, namely, ‘the problem of knowledge’.¹⁵⁹ This epistemic problem, as illustrated above, develops from the tradition of metaphysical dualism which upholds the subject and the object as two distinct substances thus raising the following question: ‘How does knowledge correspond to being?’¹⁶⁰ According to

¹⁵⁷ Janicaud rejects Levinas as a phenomenologist because he does not follow Husserl down this specific path. On this point, Janicaud states that when Levinas ‘imposes his schema’, ‘we must accept “his” intentionality’ as well as “his” conception of phenomenology’ which, in the mind of Janicaud, is no phenomenology at all, rather, it is phenomenology ‘taken hostage by theology’. Janicaud, ‘The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology’, pp. 39-43. What Janicaud fails to note, however, is that there are different ideas of phenomenology, that is to say, phenomenology does not simply have to be the rigorous science that seeks universal knowledge-claims in the form of the essential features of intentional conscious and its objectivities. Heidegger’s idea of phenomenology, which offers a stark contrast to Husserl’s, is testament to this fact. See, §1.2.7. Heidegger shows Levinas that, once philosophy is fully committed to describing life in terms of its concrete aspect, Husserl’s specific idea of phenomenology can be overcome. This is why Janicaud is also wrong to associate Levinas’s thinking with theology since, for Levinas, religious concepts are meaningless as soon as they are removed from concrete life. Hence, Levinas’s custom of describing the original *experiences* that lead to the formulation of religious concepts as opposed to any abstract or speculative adherence to Biblical theology. To be sure, the most explicit example of this custom probably concerns Levinas’s approach toward the humility of Jesus at a conference of Catholic intellectuals held in Paris in April 1968, which treats the issue from a phenomenological perspective. See, Emmanuel Levinas, ‘A Man-God?’, in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 46-52.

¹⁵⁸ De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, p. 196.

¹⁵⁹ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 11/395.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12/396.

Levinas, when formulated in this way, the problem of knowledge ‘presupposes a free activity of thought and its isolation in relation to the object’.¹⁶¹ Defining both the question and problem of knowledge such as it arises within modern philosophy stemming from Descartes, Levinas elaborates,

‘How does the subject take leave of itself to attain the object?’ is what the problem of knowledge, in the last analysis, boils down to. Its true source is thus the concept of ‘subject’ as elaborated by modern philosophy. The *cogito* presided over the subject’s birth. The *cogito* was the affirmation of the privileged nature of the subject’s immanent sphere, of its unique place in existence; hence, the *cogito* was the specificity of the subject’s connection to the rest of reality, the *sui generis* nature which opens up the passage from immanence to transcendence, the passage from ideas contained in the thinking substance to their ‘formal existence’.¹⁶²

Under these circumstances, both the ‘birth’ of the subject and its ‘connection to the rest of reality’, that is to say, to extra-mental being, come as result of the subject’s thinking capacity. ‘Indeed, we could say that thought, in reaching out toward objects, does not actually take leave of itself, since its objects — considered as ideas and contents of thought — are, in a certain sense, already within it’.¹⁶³ The thinking substance that underpins modern philosophy, therefore, is ‘enclosed within itself’ since, as Levinas comments, ‘it must search within its own interior for signs of its conformity with being’.¹⁶⁴

Heidegger’s philosophy, like that of Husserl’s, takes issue with this particular stance on account of the fact that thought can never truly reach the object within this tradition; rather, thought can only constitute its own object by means of an abstraction from concrete life. Akin to Husserl, Heidegger maintains that what is truly concrete in the human being is its transcendence in relation to itself. ‘Transcendence’, as

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Here, the concept of ‘formal existence’, in the scholastic tradition that Descartes himself knows well, means actual extra-mental existence and is opposed to the meaning of the ‘intentional’ thought-object. This distinction plays a central role in Descartes’s famous use of the causal adequacy principle to prove the formal (actual, extra-mental) existence of God from the intentional (thought about) object of the idea of an all perfect being (God) in the *Meditations*.

¹⁶⁴ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 12/397.

Heidegger likes to put it, ‘constitutes selfhood’.¹⁶⁵ Unlike Husserl, however, for Heidegger, this transcendence does not emerge as an act of intentional consciousness. Indeed, Husserl’s insistence on equating being with that which appears to consciousness as a result of its objectifying acts inevitably leads his version of phenomenology to a version of post-Kantian transcendental idealism, identifying being as the product of thought. This is why Moran is correct to note that the transcendence of which Husserl speaks, with respect to the intuitive acts of intentional consciousness, corresponds to a ‘transcendence-in-immanence’.¹⁶⁶ Contrary to this view Heidegger claims that ‘transcendence means surpassing’, that is to say, an ‘occurrence’ from which the human being surpasses itself.¹⁶⁷ Such a ‘surpassing’ includes going beyond what the immanence of thought represents as transcendence. In view of this point, Heidegger establishes a fundamental difference between what thought represents *as* being from *the* being of what thought represents *to me* living in time. To clarify this point, Levinas writes,

Substance is that which is. Now, existence is for us essentially linked to time — whatever theory we might have about it. Even in the very terms which ancient philosophy has employed to speak of being we meet with these temporal indices. What is more, once we admit that the subject is temporal — that it subsists as an eternally present substratum, that it unfolds in time in a chain of causes and effects — can that subject be called a substance and can it have being except in a purely nominal sense? But if we acknowledge the substantiality of the subject, how do we understand that next to this temporal dimension, life, precisely as conscious life, is related at each moment of its passing to an object? This relation to the object as such is not a temporal event of which, so to speak, we could become aware. The relation points in a direction to which conscious life is bound in each moment of its passing, but in which it does not perjure. But on the other hand — and this is crucial — we cannot reduce the relation of subject to object as it persists within idealism, where the object is encompassed in consciousness, to one of these supra-temporal relations we know in an ideal world. For it is a matter of a relation lived out and established effectively by the individual beings such as we are.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, ‘On the Essence of Ground’, in *Pathmarks*, ed. and trans. by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 97-135 (p. 108).

¹⁶⁶ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 134.

¹⁶⁷ Heidegger, ‘On the Essence of Ground’, p. 107.

¹⁶⁸ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 12/397-398.

The individual human being is the condition that makes any meaningful talk about Being possible. This existential reduction lies at the root of the transcendental philosophy of the subject. Thus, when constituted as a result of its thinking capacity, the ‘existence’ of the subject loses its ‘temporal dimension’ due to the fact that the relation between the *cogito* and the object does not form a ‘temporal event’. This is because such a relation to the object transpires within the immanent sphere of consciousness itself as thought. The abstract positing of subject as a *cogito* by thought, therefore, represents ‘an evasion of time’ as it is lived by the subject through its concrete temporal existence.¹⁶⁹

According to Heidegger, as Levinas observes, to exist concretely is to be ‘temporalised’.¹⁷⁰ Under these circumstances, time ‘is not a characteristic of the essence of reality, a something, or a property’, but, to quote Levinas, ‘it is the expression of the fact of being or, rather, it is that fact of being itself’.¹⁷¹ It is for this reason that Heidegger makes a distinction between, on the one hand, ‘beings’ (*Seiendes*), as that-which-is, and, on the other hand, ‘Being’ (*Sein*), as temporal existence, not to be understood an infinitive ‘to be’. The ‘to be’ (*Sein*) of that-which-is (*des Seienden*), however the latter is known, then, contains a radical temporal resonance

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 13/398.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. Here, Heidegger follows Kant’s conclusion in the latter’s argument, *contra* Anselm, for the impossibility of an ontological proof for the existence of God, namely, that being is not a real predicate. Outlining this position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant contends: ‘Being is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves. In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition God is omnipotent contains two concepts that have their objects: God and omnipotence; the little word “is” is not a predicate in it, but only that which posits the predicate in relation to the subject. Now if I take the subject (God) together with all his predicates (among which omnipotence belongs), and say God is, or there is a God, then I add no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit the object in relation to my concept. Both must contain exactly the same, and hence when I think this object as given absolutely (through the expression, “it is”), nothing is thereby added to the concept, which expresses merely its possibility’. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 567. For Kant, then, mental being does not lead to existential being and this is why philosophy must begin ‘in the context of the entirety of experience’. Ibid., p. 568.

in Heidegger's use of the term 'Being' (*Sein*) since the 'to be' (*Sein*) of that-which-is (*des Seienden*) is not itself something that is a being (*Seiendes*). Heidegger refers to this distinction as the 'ontological difference'. Emphasising this difference, Levinas remarks,

To exist is to be 'temporalized'. To grasp time in its specificity is thus to challenge the very meaning of the word 'being' [*Sein*] which, as 'transcendent', traditional philosophy has excluded from its domain of research. The theory of time is thus ontology, but ontology in the specific sense of the term. Not only is ontology 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 in the sense of a that-which-is [*Seiendes*]. Ontology is opposed to that-which-is [*Seiendes*] in the very sense of the fact that it is and in its specific mode of being [*Sein*].¹⁷²

The modern metaphysical position, therefore, which reduces the subject to that-which-is (*das Seiende*) a *cogito*, overlooks the very 'to be' (*Sein*) of that-which-is (*des Seienden*), that is to say, the temporal existence of that-which-is (*das Seiende*) in lived human existence. This reduction of the subject to its thinking capacity typifies the failure of the philosophical tradition to address the ontological and temporal life of the subject as it is lived *concretely*, at least, as far as Heidegger is concerned.¹⁷³

Having successfully outlined a 'duality' within the human being between *what it knows* by way of thought and *what it is* owing to the ontological dimension of its temporal existence, Heidegger raises a philosophical question about '*the question (die*

¹⁷² Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 13/398-399: 'Exister, c'est se « temporaliser ». Saisir le temps dans sa spécificité, c'est donc s'attaquer à la signification même du mot être qu'à titre de « transcendant » la philosophie traditionnelle a exclu du domaine de la recherche. La théorie du temps est donc ontologie, mais ontologie au sens fort du terme. Non seulement elle ne s'identifie pas avec le réalisme (comme le veut l'emploi que font de ce terme les contemporains), mais elle est aussi tout autre chose que l'étude de l'essence de l'être entendu comme objet étant. Elle s'attaque dans l'objet étant à la signification même du fait qu'il est et à son mode spécifique d'être'.

¹⁷³ This leads Heidegger to claim, during his debate with Ernst Cassirer, that 'ontology is an index of finitude', whilst, simultaneously, formulating the central problem of his own thought as an endeavour to 'determine the finite as finite'. Martin Heidegger, 'Davos Disputation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger', in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. by Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 171–185 (p. 181). In doing so, Heidegger runs counter to the entire tradition of substantial metaphysics and the meaning of being understood as infinite presence. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, esp. 'Conclusion', pp. 327-347. Levinas was present at the debate in Davos, having been personally invited by Heidegger to attend. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 156.

Frage) of the meaning of Being'.¹⁷⁴ It is this questioning of the meaning of Being that Levinas finds at the core of Heidegger's philosophy. Owing to the ontological difference, Heidegger argues that the Being (*Sein*) of the human being, or of any other being for that matter, is not itself a being (*Seiendes*). This position, however, creates a methodological problem in relation to the manner in which the meaning of Being (*Sinn von Sein*) can be discussed at all. Elaborating on this point, Levinas notes,

The attributes of a be-ing (*Seiendes*) make it to be of this or that determination [e.g., the blue of the sky or the pitch of the singer]. In identifying its attributes, we say what it is, or end up at its essence. But alongside the essence of a be-ing (*Seiendes*), we can affirm, through a perception or demonstration, that it exists. And, indeed, *for classical philosophy*, the problem of existence, which was posited in addition to that of essence, was reduced to this affirmation of existence. But *determining just what this affirmed existence means has always been considered impossible*, since, being of a higher generality, existence was not capable of being defined.¹⁷⁵

By focusing on identifying the attributes of a being (*Seiendes*) in order to affirm its existence, classical philosophy has overlooked 'the problem of existence' in terms of the Being (*Sein*) of such beings (*des Seienden*). Furthermore, this approach demonstrates that as soon as Being (*Sein*) is grasped as a being (*Seiendes*) the 'to be' (*Sein*) of that being (*Seiendes*) is essentially 'forgotten' by thought. Heidegger's methodological problem, therefore, relates to the way in which Being (*Sein*), that is to say, the temporal existence of concrete human life, can be retrieved by thought without reducing the subject to a being (*Seiendes*) thus forgetting the question of the meaning of Being (*die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein*) itself.

¹⁷⁴ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 14/401, my emphasis.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 15/402-403, my emphasis. Hence, Heidegger's remarks during the introduction of *Being and Time* that the indefinability of being does not warrant or sanction neglect with respect to its meaning, rather, it evokes more questioning. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §1, 'The Necessity for Explicitly Restating the Question of Being', pp. 21-24/2-4.

§1.2.6 Heidegger's Way of Describing the Concrete

Whilst the meaning of Being cannot be reduced to a being (*Seiendes*), which thought can think, the human being nevertheless displays an understanding of the meaning of Being at every moment of its concrete existence. 'The understanding of Being is the determining characteristic and fundamental fact of human existence', as Levinas comments in reference to Heidegger.¹⁷⁶ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger outlines this position as follows,

'Being' [*Sein*] is a self-evident concept. 'Being' [*Sein*] is used in all knowing and predicating, in every relation to beings [*Seiendes*] and in every relation to oneself, and the expression is understandable 'without further ado'. Everybody understands, 'The sky *is* blue', 'I *am* happy', and similar statements.¹⁷⁷

Human beings demonstrate an understanding of Being through their mundane expressions of language in everyday life.¹⁷⁸ Significant to Heidegger in such expressions, as included in the passage above, is not the 'blue' of the 'sky' or the 'happiness' of the 'I'. These are simply attributes of a specific being (*Seiendes*) that has been abstractly posited by thought thus overlooking the concrete 'Being' (*Sein*) of such beings (*des Seienden*). Nevertheless, contained within expressions such as 'the sky *is* blue' and 'I *am* happy' is an understanding of what the verb 'to be' actually means since, as Heidegger puts it above, these expressions are understandable to everyone 'without further ado'. In other words, at no stage in using the verb 'to be' to express itself does the human being need to inquire into its meaning. It is rather 'self-evident'.

¹⁷⁶ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 15/403.

¹⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 23/4.

¹⁷⁸ Here, as McDonnell points out, Heidegger follows Dilthey's hermeneutic triad contained within the linguistic experience of *Erlebnis-Verstehen-Ausdruck*. This position holds that since the meaning of our experiences are expressed by us in language there must be some implicit understanding of that meaning in the act of expression itself. This means, for Heidegger, that the meaning of the 'to be' (*Sein*) of 'that-which-is' (*das Seiende*) is assumed or presumed in our very use of everyday expressions such as 'the sky is blue', 'I am happy', and 'similar statements'. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 142.

Thanks to its capacity for language, therefore, the human being possesses an *implicit* understanding of the meaning of Being.

Since it is contained implicitly within the expression of language, the understanding of Being does not represent a ‘theoretical act’ of intentional consciousness, as Levinas notes; it refers, rather, to ‘man’s very mode of being’, that is to say, ‘his existence’.¹⁷⁹ Expanding on this point, Levinas notes,

It [the understanding of Being] determines not his [man’s] essence, but his [man’s] existence. No doubt, if we consider man as a be-ing [*Seiendes*], the understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*] constitutes the essence of this be-ing [*Seiendes*]. But to be precise — and this point is fundamental to Heideggerian philosophy — man’s essence is simultaneously his existence. That which man *is* is at the very same time his way of being, his way of being-there, his way of self-‘temporalising’.¹⁸⁰

For Heidegger, then, the human being must not be reduced to a being (*Seiendes*), if the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) as its most concrete mode of existence is to be appreciated. In this respect, prior to all postulations about the essence of the human being as ‘a being’ (*als Seiendes*), the human being ‘exists’. Furthermore, this ‘existence’ endures as an understanding of Being, whatever it may mean or however one can attempt to define it. As a result, Heidegger makes a distinction between two different modes of being. The first he reserves for the term *Vorhandenheit*, which describes, as Levinas puts it, ‘the being of brute, inert things’, lying present-in-stock.¹⁸¹ The second refers to the mode of being distinct to the human being to which Heidegger labels ‘existence’. Since the essence of the human being corresponds to its existence in Heidegger’s philosophy, the term ‘*Dasein*’ is designated as the verbal expression for the fact that, as Levinas writes, ‘each element of man’s essence is a mode of existing, of

¹⁷⁹ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 16/404-405.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16/405.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17/405.

being (*Sein*) situated there (*Da*).¹⁸² Summing up Heidegger's position, Levinas continues,

In brief, the problem of being [*Sein*] that Heidegger poses leads us to man, for man is a be-ing [*Seiendes*] who understands being [*Sein*]. But, on the other hand, this understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*] is itself being [*Sein*] — it is not an attribute, but man's *mode of existence*. This is not a question of a purely conventional extension of the word 'being' to one of man's faculties, which in our case would be the understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*], but the bringing into relief of the very specificity of man, whose 'actions' and 'properties' are modes of being [*Sein*]. It is the abandonment of the traditional concept of consciousness as the point of departure, along with the decision to seek for the basis of consciousness itself in a more fundamental notion of being [*Sein*]— a notion of the existence of *Dasein*.¹⁸³

Heidegger's inquiry into the meaning of Being leads him to a study of the human being as *Dasein* since it is from this point of departure, and not that of pure consciousness, where the meaning of Being is implicitly expressed through *that being's* understanding of Being. In order to make *explicit* the meaning of Being, therefore, Heidegger must show that the understanding of Being as it is expressed in the 'existence' of *Dasein* is the equivalent to, as Levinas comments, 'time itself'.¹⁸⁴ Heidegger does this through, what he calls, 'an existential analytic of *Dasein*' which, rather than study man in a certain manner, as with the empirical sciences, attempts to describe the human being in 'all the richness' of its concrete existence.¹⁸⁵

The existential analytic of *Dasein* commences with an analysis of the place in which the understanding of Being is expressed in everyday life. This place corresponds to, as Levinas comments 'the phenomenon of the world'. Nevertheless, for Heidegger, the phenomenon of the world has a very specific meaning. It does not refer to the classical conception of the 'natural world', to which Husserl subscribes, as the total sum

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., my emphasis. In this 'decision', Heidegger begins with Kierkegaard's existential starting point which maintains that I cannot argue to the existence of anything but only from existence, and this, for Heidegger, extends to and includes the meaning of being itself as given in the understanding of Being of that individual existing human being. See, *supra*, n. 98.

¹⁸⁴ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 17/406.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

of objects given to outer sense perception and discovered as knowledge through reflection. On the contrary, it refers to the practical environment that *Dasein* inhabits at every moment of its concrete life. Expanding on this point, Levinas notes,

For collective consciousness, the world amounts to the unity of what knowledge discovers. But this notion of the world is ontic and derivative. Indeed, things, if one holds onto the concrete meaning of their appearance for us, are in the world. The world is presupposed by every appearance of a particular thing. It is within an environment that things solicit us. What is the import of this structure which phenomenological analysis must neither ignore nor efface? This notion of the world — the condition of every particular object — is revealed at first analysis as being closely involved with *Dasein*: the ‘environment’— that in which *Dasein* lives; ‘our world’— the ‘world of an epoch or a writer’ etc.¹⁸⁶

Prior to its appearance as a thing known through reflection, the object belongs to a particular environment in which it has a specific meaning for *Dasein*. By interacting with such objects in everyday life, *Dasein* expresses its understanding of Being practically.¹⁸⁷ This mode of existence Heidegger labels ‘Being-in-the-world’. Further expanding upon the structure of Being-in-the-world, Levinas informs,

The things in the middle of which *Dasein* effectively lives are, above all, objects of care, of solicitude, of handling. These are objects useful for something: axes for chopping wood, hammers for hammering, houses for sheltering us, handles for opening doors, etc. These are, in the very broad sense of the term, tools.¹⁸⁸

In the concrete everyday life of *Dasein*, objects do not simply *appear* as lying there present-in-stock (*Vorhandenheit*) waiting to be reflected upon, rather, they are used by *Dasein* for a specific purpose. Before I sit down to write, I do not contemplate the essential features of *a* chair in order to ascertain its meaning. Quite the reverse, *the* chair as it resides next to *the* table in *my* room already has a specific meaning based upon *my* Being-in-the-world. Heidegger makes this point explicitly in his lecture course from the summer semester of 1923 by writing,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 19/409.

¹⁸⁷ It is precisely because the meaning of worldly objects is determined by *Dasein*’s particular understanding of Being that Heidegger does not fall back into the natural attitude, as Husserl and other commentators thought, which takes objects in the world as having an essential and existential meaning irrespective of my ‘existence’ (in Heidegger’s sense of that term) in *Dasein* or any perceptual acts of consciousness, as Husserl had stressed. See, *supra*, n. 95.

¹⁸⁸ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 19/409-410.

What is there in *the* room there at home is *the* table (not ‘a’ table among many other tables in other rooms and houses) at which one sits in order to write, have a meal, sew, play. Everyone sees this right away, e.g., during a visit: it is a writing table, a dining table, a sewing table — such is the primary way in which it is being encountered in itself. This characteristic of ‘in order to do something’ is not merely imposed on the table by relating and assimilating it to something else which it is not. [...] This side is not the east side, and this narrow side so many cm. shorter than the other, but rather the one at which *my* wife sits in the evening when she wants to stay up and read, there at the table we had such and such a discussion that time, there that decision was made with a friend that time, there that work written that time, there that holiday celebrated that time. That is *the* table.¹⁸⁹

This conception of the world adheres to Dilthey’s view that the objects encountered by us in everyday life, as McDonnell puts it, ‘cannot be regarded as simply lying present-in-stock with an existential and essential meaning, whether attention is directed towards them, or not, as fostered in the thesis of the natural attitude because the very meaning of those things presented to our experiences necessarily depends upon the particular way in which the meaning of such things is interpreted and articulated in our experiences of them’.¹⁹⁰ The mode of existence belonging to a tool cannot be grasped by means of representation since, as Levinas notes, ‘the tool is not identical with that of a mere material object revealed to the contemplative perception or to science’.¹⁹¹ It is only by ‘handling’ the tool that the meaning of the object becomes evident as it is in the understanding of Being. This ‘handlability’ refers to a mode of existence that Heidegger labels *Zuhandenheit*. When grasped in relation to its ‘handlability’, the object belongs to ‘the totality of a system of referrals’, as Levinas puts it, which constitute the world as an environment.¹⁹² Only when a specific tool is damaged within this environment does it stand out as ‘a simple presence’, that is to say, becomes present-in-stock (*Vorhandenheit*) as an object inviting reflection.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, prior to its abstraction from everyday concrete life through reflection, the meaning of the

¹⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁰ McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 143.

¹⁹¹ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 19/410.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 20/412.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

object is determined by the understanding of Being owing to the existential mode of Being-in-the-world. It is for this reason that Heidegger maintains that the understanding of Being as it exists in *Dasein* is always ‘in-each-case-mine’ (*Jemeinig*), that is to say, it is a fact of *my* particular lived experience.¹⁹⁴ ‘Man exists in such a way that *his own existence* is always at stake for him’, to quote Levinas paraphrasing Heidegger.¹⁹⁵ Since this existence transpires as the understanding of Being, Being-in-the-world constitutes the ‘ontological condition’ of *Dasein*.¹⁹⁶

The ontological condition of *Dasein* is one of ‘possibility’. The term possibility in Heidegger’s philosophy refers to the ‘dynamic’ way in which existence transpires as Being-in-the-world. It thus, Levinas argues, corresponds to ‘a concrete and positive possibility expressed by saying that we can do this or that’.¹⁹⁷ Under these circumstances, the particular environment of *Dasein* offers certain possibilities in the face of which ‘it is free’. Developing this point, Levinas comments,

Man is always already thrust into the midst of his possibilities, with respect to which he has always already taken such and such a decision, and which he always already has or has not realized. These possibilities are not imposed on his existence from without, like accidents. But, on the other hand, they do not lie in front of him as objects of knowledge, as full-blown images one contemplates while weighing up the pros and cons of a situation. They are modes of his very existence, precisely because to exist for man is to seize his own possibilities. The basis of existence can thus only be a capacity to seize or to miss one’s own possibilities — a fundamental possibility of taking stock of oneself.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ The particularity of the understanding of Being for each individual *Dasein* adds a fundamental element of ‘historicity’ to Heidegger’s version of phenomenology. As Heidegger himself puts it: ‘(T)he nexus of life is in factual life; the facticity of life, *Dasein*, is in itself historical and, as historical, has a relation (as handability) to the objective historical world and time that precedes it’. See, Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 241. *Dasein*’s particular understanding of Being, therefore, into which it is ‘thrown’ (*Geworfen*), expresses a specific historical interpretation of the meaning of Being. Here, as Bambach notes, Heidegger echoes Dilthey, who understands the past not as a ‘prior happening’ but as ‘a form of experience with ontological consequences’ in the present. Ibid. This way of philosophising is dismissed by Husserl in his formulation of phenomenology as a strict science as a form of obscure ‘profundity’ that cannot achieve the ‘conceptual distinctness and clarity’ that comes with ‘rigorous theory’. Husserl, ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’, p. 144. By turning toward the historical in Dilthey, then, Heidegger knowingly goes against Husserl’s idea of phenomenology.

¹⁹⁵ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 17/406, my emphasis.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 22/412.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 22/414.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 23/414-415.

Since it is Being-in-the-world, *Dasein* always finds itself already ‘thrown’ (*Geworfen*) into an environment with a particular set of cultural and social norms. This historical context offers certain possibilities to *Dasein* as a means of expressing its understanding of Being. *Dasein* is characterised not by the fact of *having* possibilities, then, ‘but by the fact of *being* its possibilities’, as Levinas puts it.¹⁹⁹ In other words, ‘to-be-in-the-world is to be one’s possibilities’.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, by being its possibilities, *Dasein* understands itself *as possibility*. This is not a ‘conscious awareness’, as Levinas comments, but, ‘this understanding is the very dynamism of existence [in *Dasein*]’, that is to say, it constitutes the mode in which ‘existence *is* its possibilities’.²⁰¹ Concluding on this issue, Levinas writes,

In place of the consciousness traditional philosophy talks about, which, as it becomes aware, remains calm and contemplative, indifferent to the destiny and history of concrete man who is its object, Heidegger introduces the notion of *Dasein* understanding its possibilities, but which, *qua* understanding, *ipso facto* creates its destiny, is existence right-there. Thus, along with the concept of *Dasein*, the inner illumination, with which the philosophers of consciousness are familiar, becomes inseparable from the destiny and history of concrete man; both amount to the same thing. 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.²⁰²

The very ability to know oneself through contemplation as a consciousness, therefore, is founded upon the very dynamism of *Dasein* which, subsequently, understands such abstract illuminations as one of its concrete possibilities. As a result, the concept of *Dasein* as an elaboration of the human being as it exists concretely, ‘right-there’, becomes the fundamental standpoint for philosophy, at least, as far as Heidegger is concerned.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 23/415.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 23/416.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 23-24/416, my emphasis.

By existing toward its own possibilities, as Levinas asserts, '*Dasein* is always already beyond itself'.²⁰³ Owing to the use of tools in the particular environment that it inhabits, *Dasein* goes beyond itself to seize these possibilities. This going beyond oneself toward one's own possibilities Heidegger refers to as 'projection' (*Entwurf*).²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, since the possibilities of the particular environment in which *Dasein* finds itself thrown (*Geworfen*) have already been determined by a certain set of cultural and social norms, they are not really *Dasein*'s own. Instead, these possibilities conform to a sense of, what Heidegger calls, 'fallenness' (*Verfallenheit*), where the meaning of Being has been concentrated to 'the idle chatter' (*das Gerede*) of 'the crowd' (*das Man*).²⁰⁵ In everyday life, then, where the meaning of Being is expressed through a mutual understanding, as Levinas observes, 'it is reduced to superficial social relations, which are entirely determined by handling (*Zuhandenheit*) in common'.²⁰⁶ For example consider the tool of money. In everyday life, money is used within the world for a specific purpose, that is to say, as a form of payment for goods and services. For the most part, no one questions this purpose. We simply adhere to the possibilities of money as they have been given to us through our particular cultural, historical, and social context which, subsequently, constitutes our understanding of Being. Heidegger refers to such an understanding of Being as 'inauthentic' (*Uneigentlichkeit*). In order to arrive at an 'authentic' (*Eigentlichkeit*) understanding of Being, *Dasein* must seize its possibilities as its own. This means going beyond the fallen situation in which *Dasein* finds itself in everyday life so as to achieve its own 'destiny'. Such an achievement Heidegger deems to be a proper account of human 'transcendence', contrary to the 'transcendence-in-immanence' ascertained within Husserl's version of phenomenology.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 24/417.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 25/418.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 26/420.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 25/419.

According to Heidegger, *Dasein* understands its Being-in-the-world through affective dispositions (*Befindlichkeit*). These affective dispositions shed light on the particular manner in which *Dasein* exists concretely, ‘right-there’, in the world as its own environment. Elaborating on this point, Levinas notes,

Every understanding comes about in an affective disposition (*Befindlichkeit*). Affectivity, such as joy, fear, or sadness, is characterised [...] by its double direction: toward an object that is in the world, and toward itself, toward the one ‘for whom’ one is grieved, happy, or frightened. This taking stock of itself, fundamental for affectivity, shows moreover in the reflected form of verbs that expresses affective states — being delighted, frightened saddened, etc.²⁰⁷

Under these circumstances, affective dispositions do not correspond to ‘noeses’ intending objects (*noemata*) in a state of consciousness, akin to Husserl’s version of phenomenology. On the contrary, for Heidegger, these affective dispositions cannot be states of consciousness since they relate to the concrete life of *Dasein* as it exists ‘right-there’ prior to any act of intentional consciousness. Heidegger thus uses Kierkegaard’s existential starting point of concrete individual human existence to uncut Husserl’s prioritisation of intentional consciousness as the central standpoint in phenomenology.²⁰⁸ The reflexivity of the verbs relating to the expression of affective dispositions highlight this point. Emphasising this approach during an interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas explains,

Every emotion [affective disposition] has, according to him [Heidegger], what he calls a double intentionality: it is an emotion *before* something and *for* something. Fear is fear *about* what is terrifying and also fear *for myself*. Heidegger insists on the fact that in German verbs expressing emotions are always reflexive, as in French are the verbs to be moved, to be frightened, to be sad, etc.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 29/426-427.

²⁰⁸ See, *supra*, n. 98.

²⁰⁹ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 119. Reflexivity contains a type of passive awareness with respect to one’s self in contrast to the active awareness emitted through the reflective ego. Heidegger finds this in Dilthey too. For Dilthey, reflexive awareness (*Innewerden*) should be distinguished from reflective awareness (*Vorstellung*). With respect to reflexive awareness, Dilthey notes, ‘(I)t is a consciousness that does not place a content over against the subject of consciousness (it does not re-present it); rather, a content is present in it without any differentiation’. See, Jacob Owensby, *Dilthey and the Narrative of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 62. Expanding on this point, Owensby clarifies: ‘(I)n reflexive awareness something is *für-mich-da*, or there for me, as *lived*. Reflexive awareness is not a *vor-sich-stellen* (placing-before-oneself) in which a subject is confronted by an object. The subject and object

Whenever I fear something in the world, this fear also discloses something about *my* Being-in-the-world. The object of fear, then, does not simply appear to a disinterested consciousness which, subsequently, seeks to ascertain its essential features through the reflective acts of the intellect. Quite the opposite, the object initially affects me through the disposition of fear thus disclosing itself in the process. As a result, when affective dispositions are considered in line with Heidegger's version of phenomenology, they relate to, as Levinas puts it, 'modes of self-understanding'.²¹⁰

For the most part, the understanding of Being disclosed through affective dispositions merely sustain an inauthentic understanding of the meaning of Being. This is because what one fears and in which one finds joy can largely be determined by the cultural and social norms of the crowd (*das Man*). For example, one may fear a particular type of person based upon what has been said by others in the media, whilst, similarly, one may find joy in a particular activity that is governed by others for purposes distinct from one's own joy. Notwithstanding such circumstances, for Heidegger, there is a specific affective disposition that confronts *Dasein* as its 'ownmost possibility' thus facilitating an authentic understanding of Being. This affective disposition is anguish (*Angst*). In contrast to fear, which always has a determinate object in the world for *Dasein*, 'the object of anguish is not in the interior of the world like a "menacing thing"', to use Levinas's words.²¹¹ In fact, anguish does not have a corresponding object at all. Its object, as Levinas puts it, 'remains entirely indeterminate'.²¹² This indeterminacy of anguish reveals a sense of 'nothingness' (*das Nicht*) to *Dasein*, that is to say, it grants a way of being in which 'the nonimportance,

are not separated in *Innewerden*. Ibid, my emphasis. This is also the case for Heidegger since the emotion *about* something is also *for* myself, as Levinas puts it.

²¹⁰ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 24/417.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 30/427.

²¹² Ibid.

the insignificance, the nothingness of all innerworldly objects becomes accessible to *Dasein*'.²¹³ Whilst in anguish, *Dasein* becomes indifferent to the world of tools in which it resides. This indifference leads *Dasein* back to itself *qua* temporality.

Elaborating on this point, Levinas informs,

This is not a time conceived of as a succession of moments (which far from representing the originary phenomenon is a reification itself due to the fall); this is not a time-category. It is an existential time, whose production — temporalization — does not have this innocuous and indifferent aspect we are familiar with as fallen time, as the unilinear unfolding of moments of handling, as scientific time.²¹⁴

In the fallen state of everyday life, *Dasein* understands time based upon the idle chatter of the crowd. In this context, concrete time *qua* temporality is reduced to 'clock time', that is to say, 'a succession of moments' continuing *ad infinitum*. This conception of time forgets the 'originary phenomenon' of time as it is temporally lived by *Dasein* in concrete life. The affective disposition of anguish helps *Dasein* to remember its concrete temporality by disclosing a sense of nothingness as an essential aspect of any entity belonging to its world, including that of *Dasein* itself.²¹⁵ Equipped with this awareness, *Dasein* can now return to the world of tools and raise anew *the question* of the meaning of Being in order to reinterpret the meaning of that-which-is according to its ownmost possibility 'not to be'. Implicitly contained within the understanding of 'to be' (*Sein*) of that-which-is (*des Seienden*), then, is an explicit awareness of the 'absolute' possibility 'not to be' of that-which-is. As a result, anguish reveals the 'totality of *Dasein*'s ontological structure', to use Levinas's words, that is to say, its

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 28-29/245.

²¹⁵ According to McDonnell, here, Heidegger plays on the Judeo-Christian Easter liturgical rites in the injunction on Ash Wednesday, of which Heidegger, from his Catholic upbringing, would have been well aware: 'Remember man that thou are dust and on to dust thou shalt return'. 'When viewed from this particular point of view', as McDonnell notes, 'memory in human beings extends into the future as well as into the past'. McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 177. As a result, the future memory of one's own death becomes present through the mood of anguish thus disclosing a sense of radical temporality in *Dasein*.

temporality.²¹⁶ Moreover, for Heidegger, to lead an authentic existence means taking ‘care’ (*Sorge*) of the understanding of Being as disclosed through the affective disposition of anguish since, only in light of the sense of nothingness, which anguish brings to *Dasein*’s world, can one truly ‘know thyself’. The concrete ontological situation of the human being *qua* temporality, therefore, becomes the basis for the very possibility of philosophising in the wake of Heidegger’s inquiry into the question of the meaning of Being. This is why Heidegger labels his philosophical project and definition of phenomenology as ‘fundamental ontology’.

§1.2.7 Heidegger’s Idea of Phenomenology

According to Heidegger, a correct description of concrete life involves an inquiry into the *particular* lived experiences of *Dasein* since it is only from this standpoint that the meaning of Being *qua* temporality can become authentically understood. Confirming this point in his summer semester lecture-course of 1919, Heidegger notes that the ‘ultimate philosophical motive’ is ‘to interpret life from out of itself’, that is to say, as it is lived ‘primordially’.²¹⁷ This attitude immediately puts Heidegger in conflict with Husserl due to the latter’s insistence on excluding all particularity from the quest to ascertain universal knowledge-claims in agreement with a rigorously scientific conception of philosophy. Observing this point in a lecture course from 1923, Heidegger mentions to his students,

For Husserl a definite ideal of science was prescribed in mathematics and the mathematical natural sciences. Mathematics was the model of all scientific disciplines. This scientific ideal came into play in that one attempted to elevate [philosophical] description to the level of mathematical rigour.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 30/428.

²¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*, trans. by Tracy Colony (London: A&C Black, 2010), p. 119.

²¹⁸ Heidegger, *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 56.

Consequently, as soon as the transcendental-phenomenological reduction is performed and life is reduced to the concrete position of pure intentional consciousness, the ‘facticity’ of *Dasein*, that is to say, the particularity of its lived experience, is deliberately ‘bracketed’, ‘cancelled’, and ‘put out of action’ within Husserl’s version of phenomenology.²¹⁹ This way of doing philosophy, for Heidegger, ‘is all a mistake’ considering that it produces an ahistorical understanding of the human being as pure consciousness and an atemporal understanding of the meaning of Being as seen through eidetic ideation.²²⁰ Whilst commencing his philosophical reflections with the intention of grasping life in its concrete aspect, then, Husserl’s personal commitment to the idea of philosophy as a rigorous science of universal essences, akin to the mathematical model of science, inevitably leads him back to a form of abstraction as realised through the active intellect. Levinas identifies this characteristic of Husserl’s thought under the guise of ‘intellectualism’. Following an explication of the intuition of essences in his doctoral thesis on Husserl, Levinas remarks,

Here again, one can reproach Husserl for his intellectualism. Even though he attains the profound idea that, in the ontological order, the world of science is posterior to and depends on the vague and concrete world of perception, he may have been wrong in seeing the concrete world as a world of objects that are primarily perceived. Is our main attitude toward reality that of theoretical contemplation? Is not the world presented in its very being a centre of action, as a field of activity or care — to speak the language of Martin Heidegger?²²¹

Despite his acknowledgment of the concrete aspect of Husserl’s thought, Levinas nonetheless recognises Heidegger’s phenomenological analyses as *more* concrete. Heidegger himself maintained this judgment. In fact, several years before the publication of *Being and Time*, it directs Heidegger to conclude, *contra* Husserl, that it

²¹⁹ McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 286.

²²⁰ Heidegger, *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 56.

²²¹ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 119/174.

is entirely ‘unphenomenological’ to ‘bring mathematics into play as the model for all scientific disciplines’, which, of course, includes the disciple of philosophy itself.²²²

Rather than follow a mathematical approach as the basis for the discipline of philosophy, Heidegger argues that the ‘human sciences’ contain ‘a more radical tendency for philosophising’.²²³ This is because the ‘radical tendency’ of the human sciences relates to the view that, as Heidegger puts it, ‘one should approach a scientific discipline not as a system of propositions and grounds for justifying them, but rather as something in which factual *Dasein* critically confronts itself and explicates itself’.²²⁴ Here, as McDonnell remarks, ‘Heidegger follows Dilthey’s view that “meaning” as it is lived by us expresses itself in what a human being does, says, reads, writes, produces and so forth and it has to be approached and analysed in that manner’.²²⁵ Under these circumstances, the meaning of Being corresponds to the *particular* manner in which the human being expresses itself, that is to say, ‘exists’, in concrete life. Any attempt to understand the meaning of Being, therefore, should involve an investigation into such expressions of life. As Dilthey himself states,

Lived experience generates its own expressions. The latter are found in literature, etc. [...] Thus meaning is a category obtained from life itself.²²⁶

Life itself as lived by each individual *Dasein* and expressed through its *particular* understanding of Being functions as the concrete source for philosophical reflection, in the mind of Heidegger. Contrary to Husserl’s estimation, then, ‘meaning’ is not a ‘logical concept’, for Heidegger, rather, as Gadamer comments in relation to Dilthey’s

²²² Heidegger, *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, pp. 56-57, my emphasis.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²²⁵ McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 81.

²²⁶ Wilhelm Dilthey, ‘Fragments for a Poetics (1907–1908)’, in *Dilthey, Poetry and Experience, Selected Works*, Vol. 5, ed. by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 223–231 (p. 229–230).

central insight, 'it is to be understood as an expression of life'.²²⁷ Further emphasising this point, Gadamer continues,

Life itself, flowing temporality, is ordered towards enduring units of significance [meaning]. Life interprets itself. Life itself has a *hermeneutical* structure. Thus life constitutes the real ground of the human sciences.²²⁸

Along these lines, the meaning of Being, as Heidegger conceives of it, relates to the *particular* manner in which *Dasein* expresses its understanding of Being in the world. *Dasein*'s life is what it expresses and what it expresses is life. This circular structure of life understanding and interpreting itself *qua Dasein* commits Heidegger to a hermeneutical approach within philosophy since it encapsulates the very 'expression' of the 'existential fore-structure of *Dasein* itself'.²²⁹ Furthermore, Levinas duly recognises this aspect of Heidegger's thought by saying that 'the understanding and interpretation of [*Dasein*'s] facticity is the analytic ontology itself of *Dasein*'.²³⁰ As a result, 'the things themselves', which phenomenological research seeks to uncover, now concern the individual expressions of the understanding of Being in *Dasein* considering that, for Heidegger, implicitly contained within such expressions is an understanding of the meaning of Being itself *qua* temporality. Heidegger changes the methodological emphasis within phenomenology, therefore, from a 'vision' of what is intuitively given as a result of perceptual experience, à la Husserl, to a 'listening' to what is intuitively given in the expression of language through everyday statements such as 'I *am* happy' and 'the sky *is* blue'.²³¹ The hermeneutic ear, in other words, precedes the scientific eye, as far as Heidegger is concerned.

²²⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald D. Marshall, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 220.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 195/153.

²³⁰ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 24/417.

²³¹ See, Cyril McDonnell, 'Understanding and Assessing Heidegger's Topic in Phenomenology In Light of His Appropriation of Dilthey's Hermeneutical Manner of Thinking', in *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* (2007), pp. 31–54, esp., §II, 'Hearing Re-replaces Seeing (Dilthey Replaces Husserl)', pp. 40–41.

§1.2.8 *Phenomenology as Ontology*

On account of its aspiration to grasp life in its concrete aspect, irrespective of the particular way in which the concrete is described, phenomenology introduces a new form of ontology into philosophy. This form of ontology surmounts the naturalistic tendencies of metaphysical dualism which, subsequently, bring about the reification of the subject and object as two distinct substances that merely exist in line with ‘natural causality’. Expanding on this point, Levinas notes,

If to be means to exist the way nature does, then everything which is given as refractory to the categories and to the mode of existence of nature will, as such, have no objectivity and will be, *a priori* and unavoidably, reduced to something natural. The characteristics of such objects will be reduced to purely subjective phenomena which, with their multifarious structure, are the products of natural causality [...] As long as naturalistic ontology is accepted, existence, including the existence of nature, is not determined by the meaning of life. Rather, life itself must, in order to exist, be conceived on the model of nature. That is, life must be integrated in casual chains and granted reality only inasmuch as it belongs to them [...] Therefore, in order to go conclusively beyond naturalism and its consequences, it is not enough to appeal to descriptions which emphasis the particular character, irreducible to the naturalistic categories, of certain objects. It is necessary to *dig deeper, down to the very meaning of the notion of being*, and to show that the origin of all being, including that of nature, is determined by the intrinsic meaning of conscious [and existential] life and not the other way around.²³²

It is this necessity, then, to dig down deeper than naturalism, to the very origin of the meaning of the notion of being, that encapsulates the concrete setting of phenomenological ontology considering that, in doing so, phenomenology successfully uncovers the original relation between the subject and object within concrete life itself.

For Husserl, this relation corresponds to intentionality, that is to say, the objectifying acts of the subject *qua* consciousness, which make possible the initial appearance of objects to consciousness. In Heidegger’s version of phenomenology, the concept of intentionality is transformed to describe the specific manner in which objects

²³² Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, pp. 17-18/39-40, my emphasis.

are used by the subject *qua Dasein* within its particular environment. Intentionality, for Heidegger, thus becomes ‘handlability’ (*Zuhandenheit*). Confirming this point, Levinas observes,

Intentionality, as Husserl said, is a specific comprehension, and hence, in handling, a *sui generis* vision comes to light which Heidegger defines by the term ‘circumspection’ [*Umsicht*]. Language expresses moreover the fact of such circumspection: French, for example, says, ‘to know how to write’, ‘to dance’, ‘to play’, etc.²³³

Whereas intentionality comprehends its object through vision, handlability understands its object through circumspection as it is expressed within language. Here, once again, the difference between Husserl’s scientific and Heidegger’s hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research becomes noticeable. Regardless of this fundamental difference, nevertheless, both Husserl and Heidegger ground their thinking in an essential ‘correlationism’, to use Quentin Meillassoux’s term, between the experiencing subject and the object of experience.²³⁴ However adequately or inadequately, authentically or inauthentically an object may be comprehended, either through vision or circumspection, it is already understood *in some way* by the subject, that is to say, it is already experienced. Under these circumstances, being is always an understanding of Being within phenomenology. This detail, for Levinas, is the defining characteristic of phenomenological ontology. Making this point during an interview with Nemo, Levinas claims that ‘phenomenology in the largest sense of the terms’ is a ‘grasping of oneself’ which transpires by ‘getting back to oneself’.²³⁵ In other words, owing to its description of the concrete, phenomenology comprehends the meaning of Being in accordance with the lived experience of the subject. Discovering the meaning of Being, therefore, simply requires clarification or retrieval on the part of the subject.

²³³ Levinas, ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’, p. 20/410-411.

²³⁴ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. by Ray Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 7.

²³⁵ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 30.

Levinas's philosophy challenges the prevailing standpoint of correlationism within phenomenology.²³⁶ He does so because the human being can never truly be said to achieve transcendence in relation to itself if it always comes back to what it has already experienced, just as objects can never be classified as 'the things themselves' if they ultimately correspond to an experiencing subject. Even when *Dasein* 'transcends' its inauthentic understanding of the meaning of Being to reach an authentic understanding of Being *qua* temporality, the potential for such an understanding already rests upon the experience of anguish correlative to *Dasein*. Heidegger's account of transcendence, therefore, simply offers another variety of 'transcendence-in-immanence' from that found in Husserl's version of phenomenology. Nevertheless, Levinas attempts to overcome the correlationism characteristic of phenomenological ontology, having fully accepted the legitimacy of its critique of naturalism. Levinas does not, therefore, return to any abstract or speculative thinking throughout his philosophy. On the contrary, as this study will show, Levinas endeavours to demonstrate that a proper account of transcendence can be outlined from the standpoint of concrete life provided that concrete life is described *in the correct manner*. It is this attitude that demonstrates Levinas's commitment to the method of phenomenology.

²³⁶ Many contemporary scholars reject any version of phenomenology that does not resemble the correlationist model of the discipline as, strictly speaking, phenomenological. Tom Sparrow, for instance, maintains that it is 'wrong' to categorise Levinas as a phenomenologist because, in his view, 'phenomenology is at the bottom antirealism', that is to say, 'a philosopher who practices phenomenology implicitly endorses an idealist ontology' based upon the fact that it is always the experiencing subject that constitutes the meaning of being in the discipline. Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 60. By seeking to go beyond phenomenological ontology qua comprehension, then, Levinas should be considered as providing us with a 'transgressive realism', for Sparrow, which is 'nonphenomenological'. Ibid. Nevertheless, as this study will demonstrate, Levinas reforms phenomenological ontology to discover a sense of the 'real', or being, independent from the experiencing subject within concrete life. This sense of being reveals itself without being understood by the experiencing subject. It is for this reason that Levinas can remain a phenomenologist and describe a confrontation with something beyond the subject.

§1.3 LEVINAS'S FIRST TOPIC IN PHENOMENOLOGY

Both of Husserl and Heidegger's approaches in phenomenology conceive the meaning of being as always correlative to an experiencing subject. Nevertheless, over the course of his first two compositions as an independent thinker, namely, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' (1934)²³⁷ and *On Escape* (1935)²³⁸, Levinas discovers another sense of being in concrete life, namely, 'the brute fact of being' (*le fait brutal de l'être*). This sense of being has an independent meaning, irrespective of the understanding of the experiencing subject. Yet, it is still experienced. Levinas begins to chart a proper account of human transcendence as a result of this concrete ordeal. This section examines the discovery of this research topic by Levinas as his first in phenomenology.

§1.3.1 *Levinas and the Problem of Human Transcendence*

In his first article as an independent thinker, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', Levinas explicitly takes up an issue that has occupied phenomenology since its inception, namely, the problem of human transcendence. This problem becomes even more pressing during the first half of the twentieth century due to certain political developments which, as Levinas notes, threaten 'the very principles of civilisation'.²³⁹ These political developments relate to 'the philosophy of Hitler' and its biological conception of the human being.²⁴⁰ Hitler's biological conception of the human being, as Levinas notes, originates from an awakening of 'elementary feelings' located within the

²³⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', trans. by Seán Hand, in *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1990), 62-71.

²³⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); *De l'évasion* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1982). Further references are to Bergo's translation, with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

²³⁹ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', p. 63.

²⁴⁰ Later on in his career, Levinas excludes 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' from his list of publications precisely because, as Adriaan Peperzak observes, 'he [Levinas] regretted that he had honoured his target [Hitler's biological conception of the human being] by naming it a "philosophy"'. Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), p. 4.

body.²⁴¹ Moreover, for Hitler, these ‘elementary feelings’ relate to ‘the secret nostalgia within the German soul’ that strives for a sense of ethnic and cultural belonging (*Volkstum*) thus linking it to ‘a certain number of these ideas’ common to those who share the same ‘flesh and blood’.²⁴² As a result of this outlook, hostility is directed toward ‘any rational assimilation or mystical communion’ between human beings that are not based on, as Levinas puts it, ‘a community of blood’.²⁴³

According to Levinas, this conception of the human being rejects the notion of transcendence by asserting that the human being is determined by a definite set of material conditions to which it is essentially ‘chained’.²⁴⁴ It also enforces the notion of immanence as the essential aspect of the human being. In consequence of this enforcement, Hitler’s biological conception of the human being also rejects the very foundation of Western civilization.²⁴⁵ This is because, for Levinas, ‘the spirit of freedom’ signifies the ‘conception of human destiny’ at the heart of Western philosophy.²⁴⁶ Elaborating further on this conception of human destiny, Levinas comments,

This conception is a feeling that man is absolutely free in his relations with the world and the possibilities that solicit action from him. Man is renewed eternally in the face of the Universe. Speaking absolutely, he has no history. For history is the most profound limitation, the fundamental limitation.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 64.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁴⁵ In this respect, as Robert J. S. Manning puts it, ‘Levinas raises the possibility that what has led to the rise of the philosophy of Hitlerism is not only [certain] political and economic conditions’, within Germany at the time, ‘but [it] is also the impotence and bankruptcy of modern European liberal thought’. Robert J. S. Manning, ‘Serious Ideas Rooted in Blood: Emmanuel Levinas’s Analysis of the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, ed. by Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 125-136 (pp. 125-126). Indeed, Levinas intimates as much himself in a prefatory note written for the occasion of the English translation of ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, fifty six years after its initial publication, by claiming that ‘the bloody barbarism of National Socialism’ did not stem from ‘some contingent anomaly of human reasoning’ or ‘accidental ideological misunderstanding’, rather, it grew from a ‘the essential possibility of elemental Evil into which we can be led by logic and against which Western philosophy has not sufficiently insured itself’. Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 63.

²⁴⁶ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 64.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

Under these circumstances, the history of Western civilization plays out as a realisation of the ideal behind liberalism since, as Levinas puts it, ‘in the world of liberalism, man is not weighed down by a History in choosing his destiny’, rather, man seeks to overcome the conditions preventing him from determining *his own path* in life.²⁴⁸ In this respect, liberalism discovers the essence of the human being on a plane ‘superior to reality’ since it transcends all determinate conditions to endure as ‘pure freedom’.²⁴⁹ In view of this point, Levinas gives a brief sketch of the history of this ideal as it unfolds within Western philosophy. From Socrates, who, in prison as documented by Plato in the *Phaedo*, recognises a transcendent soul as weighed down by an immanent material body, through Christianity, which aims to free us from the guilt of the past and to resurrect our original state of innocence in the present as a result of the Eucharist, on to modern French political thinkers, who confess to a notion of reason with the power to exorcise ‘physical, psychological, and social matter’, Levinas continually finds the notion of transcendence as an essential aspect of the human being within the philosophical tradition.²⁵⁰

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the liberal ideal begins to come under attack within Western philosophy, firstly, by Karl Marx and, then again, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Following Kant’s critique of transcendent metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, both Marx and Nietzsche choose to prioritise the notion of immanence as the essential aspect of the human being.²⁵¹ Marx does so by emphasising

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

²⁵¹ Nevertheless, it must be noted that despite his critique of transcendent metaphysics, Kant himself does not prioritise the notion of immanence in his philosophy. This is because, for Kant, a good human life and a good human society are intrinsically linked to the idea of the freedom of the individual will — despite Kant’s insistence that it is impossible to prove that such an idea exists in reality — as conceived through the moral law of the categorical imperative. Making this point in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes: ‘What is essential in every determination of the will by the moral law is that, as a

that essential to the experience of the human being is the fact that it is ‘prey to material needs’.²⁵² Furthermore, since the human being is primarily ‘at the mercy of a matter and a society’, and one which no longer obeys ‘the magic wand of reason’, the ‘concrete and servile existence’ endured by the human being on account of its material needs gains more ‘weight and importance’ than does ‘impotent reason’, as far as Marx concerned.²⁵³ As a result, Marx focuses on the immanent conditions that have been forced upon the human being to the point that, unlike the tradition of liberalism, ‘it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’.²⁵⁴ Similarly, Nietzsche’s philosophy prioritises the immanence of the ‘will-to-power’ as experienced through the bodily impulses of the human being. He does so by rejecting any philosopher who speaks of ‘unearthly hopes’, that is to say, transcendent ideals, and implores his readers to ‘remain true to the earth’.²⁵⁵ This conception of the earth regards it as ‘a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or

free will — and not only without the cooperation of sensible impulses but the *rejection* of all of them and with *infringement* upon inclination in so far as they could be opposed to the [moral] law — it is determined solely by the [moral] law. [...] For, *all* inclination and *every* sensible impulse is based on feeling and the *negative* effect on feeling (by infringement upon the inclination that take place) is *itself feeling*’. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, revised edn, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 61, my emphasis. By rejecting the inclinations of the will, then, and dismissing the impulses of feeling for their negative effects on determining the freedom of the will in line with the moral law of the categorical imperative, Kant demonstrates his allegiance to the tradition of liberalism since, as he puts it in ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’, only through ‘mankind’s *exit* from its self-incurred immaturity’ — an immaturity defined by the ‘laziness and cowardice’ of blindly accepting the immanent conditions in which one resides — does ‘the *freedom* to make a public use of one’s reason in all matters’ happen. Immanuel Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’, in *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, trans. by James Schmidt (California: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 58-64 (pp.58-59).

²⁵² Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 67. As Marx himself notes: ‘But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed, this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life.’ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Pt 1 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), p. 48.

²⁵³ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 67.

²⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by S. W. Ryazanskaya (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 21.

²⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by, Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp., ‘On the Hinterworldly’, pp. 20-22.

smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself'.²⁵⁶ The driving force behind this 'eternal reoccurrence of the same' is the 'will-to-power', which, according to Nietzsche, the human being discovers through the 'great intelligence' of the body.²⁵⁷ Any ideals that do not correspond to the 'natural value' of the body's 'deepest instincts', then, should be destroyed since they merely subsist as a way for the 'ruling class' to control the 'reality' of our freedom *qua* will-to-power.²⁵⁸

It is this outlook that Hitler exploits with his biological conception of the human being. Developing this point in reference to the 'new conception of man' that has arisen in the West, Levinas maintains,

The biological, with the notion of inevitability it entails, becomes more than an object of spiritual life. It becomes its heart. 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. To be truly oneself does not mean taking flight once more above contingent events that always remain foreign to the Self's freedom; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining.²⁵⁹

Before the prioritisation of the state of immanence in relation to the human being, the body emerges as a problem for the self to overcome in its pursuit of freedom. Nevertheless, by deeming the body as 'something eternally foreign' to the essence of

²⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Book, 1968), esp., §1067, pp. 549-550.

²⁵⁷ To use Nietzsche's words: 'The body is a great intelligence, a plurality with one mind, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd. And the little intelligence, my brother, which you call 'spirit' – is a tool of the body, a little tool and a plaything of the great intelligence. [...] But a great matter – which you will not believe – is the body and its great intelligence. It says not I, but it does I'. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'The Despisers of the Body', pp. 22-24.

²⁵⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), §27, pp. 24-25. Here, Nietzsche expresses an implicit critique of Kant's understanding of freedom which, explicitly, disregards the inclinations of the will and rejects the impulses of feeling. Dismissing the 'absolute nature of Kantian morality', Nietzsche replaces the theological opposition of good and evil, embedded in Kant's thinking, with the common opposition of good and bad where, as one commentator notes, 'humans generally associate strength with being good and weakness with being bad'. Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.19. Thus, for Nietzsche, to be good means cultivating strength by following one's own bodily instincts.

²⁵⁹ Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', p. 69.

the human being, as a result of transcendent concepts such as the immortal soul, the ‘classical interpretations’ of ‘traditional Western thought’ did not ‘sufficiently insure’ philosophy against the possibility of reducing the human being to its bodily immanence.²⁶⁰ This is because the body is *not* something eternally foreign to the human being, rather, as Levinas comments, it is ‘closer and more familiar to us than the rest of the world’.²⁶¹ Further emphasising this point with the use of a rhetorical question, Levinas asks: ‘Do we not affirm ourselves in the unique warmth of our bodies long before any blossoming of the Self that claims to be separate from the body?’²⁶² Similarly, Levinas also highlights the experience of pain as an instance where ‘all dualism between the self and body must disappear’.²⁶³ With the help of another rhetorical question, Levinas inquires, ‘(A)nd in the impasse of physical pain, is it not the case that the sick man experiences the indivisible simplicity of his being when he turns over in his bed of suffering to find a position that gives him peace?’²⁶⁴ Such existentialist-phenomenological reflections lead Levinas to conclude the following,

Physical pain can reveal an absolute position. 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.²⁶⁵

Levinas thus acknowledges the concreteness of the body as a legitimate aspect of human experience. It is this ‘absolute position’ in ‘the world of matter’ to which the self must adhere over the course of its life.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁶² Ibid. Such experience of the unity of one’s own incarnate consciousness is not addressed either by Husserl in the transcendental reduction to pure intentional consciousness or by Heidegger in his reduction to the question of the meaning of Being in fundamental ontology.

²⁶³ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Heideggerism’, p. 68.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

This detail notwithstanding, for Levinas, it is ignorant to reduce the human being to the immanence of the body, precisely because the self who adheres to this body already demonstrates the concreteness of human transcendence on account of its freedom to think. There is thus a ‘duality’ within the human being between the self and its body. The thinking capacity of the human being establishes a free self at a critical ‘distance’ from the body ‘to which it is chained’ enabling the human being to choose its own ‘truth’.²⁶⁶ Furthermore, as Levinas remarks, the thinking self is ‘free to the point of being able *not* to cross this distance and *not* to make a choice’.²⁶⁷ In other words, a consequence of the freedom of the self is the possibility of discarding transcendence as an essential aspect of human life. Highlighting this possibility within thought, Levinas notes,

Skepticism is a basic possibility for the Western spirit. But once the distance has been crossed and the truth grasped, man nonetheless retains his freedom. Man can regain control and go back on his choice. Within the affirmation the future negation is already brewing. 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.²⁶⁸

The very ability to prioritise the immanent condition of the human being, therefore, presupposes the freedom to think which, subsequently, verifies that a concrete movement of transcendence has already occurred between the self and its body. This is Levinas’s main bone of contention with Marx and Nietzsche.²⁶⁹ It is not their respective

²⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Whilst disagreeing with Marx and Nietzsche’s final conclusions, Levinas nevertheless takes their work, as one commentator notes, ‘very seriously’. Brock Bahler, *Childlike Peace in Merleau-Ponty and Levinas: Intersubjectivity as Dialectical Spiral* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), p. 130. This is because they both start from the correct position, for Levinas, namely, the concrete feeling of one’s own body. In this respect, the respective critiques of ideology advanced by Marx and Nietzsche are justifiable. To be sure, for Levinas, ‘at the end of the nineteenth century, when all values were classified and put in their place, it was he [Nietzsche] who foresaw what the twentieth century would make of those values’. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 149. In this sense, Nietzsche warns against the danger of totalising narratives, just as Levinas goes on to do. See, *Nietzsche and Levinas: ‘After the Death of a Certain God’*, ed. by Jill Stauffer & Bettina Bergo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). See also, Rafael Winkler, *Philosophy of Finitude: Heidegger, Levinas and Nietzsche* (Bloomsbury, 2018). In my estimation, the relationship between Levinas and Marx warrants further attention.

critiques of society or transcendent moral values to which Levinas takes issue, especially since ideology can, ultimately, be used to prevent the ‘free flight of the spirit’; it is, rather, Marx and Nietzsche’s forgetfulness with respect to what is truly essential to the human being, namely, its state of transcendence *qua* thought which, subsequently, does not concern ideology.²⁷⁰ It pertains rather to a concrete movement from the finality of the material body to the freedom of the thinking self. In light of this realisation, Levinas sets himself the philosophical task of describing this movement of transcendence as it occurs in the concrete life of the human being.²⁷¹ He does this by starting with the experience of the material body that the free self ‘struggles against’ in order, firstly, to circumvent any indictments of transcendent metaphysics and, secondly, to avoid formulating the human spirit by abstraction. This approach validates Levinas as a legitimate Post-Kantian thinker, thus innocent of charges against ideology from the sceptical eyes of Marx and Nietzsche, whilst further demonstrating his commitment to phenomenology as a method for describing concrete life.

§1.3.2 *The Need to Escape from Oneself*

Levinas begins to describe this movement of transcendence in *On Escape* (1935). As the title of this publication suggests, the movement of transcendence is depicted here as an ‘escape’ from the ‘weight’ of the very fact of being itself — the ‘brutality’ and

²⁷⁰ Levinas, ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’, p. 67. To become aware of one’s social condition presupposes the possibility of freeing oneself from the determinism entailed by that situation. In this respect, contrary to Marx’s original claim, being does not sufficiently determine consciousness since, as Levinas comments, the freedom to think always gives the self ‘the power to shake off’ the social situation that seems extraneous to its material condition. Ibid. Similarly, with respect to Nietzsche, the ability to dismiss consciousness as ‘just a net connecting one person to another’, which turns the world into ‘generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator’, thus rendering everything that enters consciousness as ‘shallow’, ‘thin’, ‘relatively stupid’, ‘a sign’, and a mark of the ‘herd’ morality, also presupposes the reflective capacity of consciousness. See, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), esp., §354, ‘On the “genius of species”’, pp. 297-300.

²⁷¹ Simon Critchley also notes, correctly, that it is in ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’ where Levinas gets his ‘first inkling’ of the problem that he will continue to face throughout his work. Simon Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 30.

‘seriousness’ of which is revealed in the depths of one’s own body — to the free self which is capable of acknowledging ‘the brutality of its existence’ in thought.²⁷² According to Levinas, it is an ‘elemental truth’ that ‘there is being’ (*il y a l’être*), irrespective of ‘the image of being such as things offer it to us’.²⁷³ In relation to the ‘image of being’ as it is offered to us as ‘things’, Levinas remarks that,

They *are*. Their essence and their properties can be imperfect; [but] the very fact of [their] being is placed beyond the distinction between the perfect and the imperfect. The brutality of its assertion (that of the fact of being) is absolutely sufficient and refers to nothing else. Being is: there is nothing to add to this assertion as long as we envision in a being only its existence.²⁷⁴

Under these circumstances, being has a meaning independent from the manner in which it is comprehended or grasped by the subject. This viewpoint offers a direct challenge to phenomenological ontology as conceived by Husserl and Heidegger. For them, the meaning of being is always correlative to the experiencing subject, where things are comprehended either from the standpoint of a pure intentional consciousness, detached from the world of objects that it knows through vision, or that of *Dasein*, as it is embedded within a world of tools that it understands through circumspection. Such perspectives, for Levinas, attest to a ‘bourgeois spirit’ of self-sufficiency and ignore the reality of the world that ‘opposes’ us.²⁷⁵ In addition to the experiences of the world outlined by Husserl and Heidegger there is also an experience of ‘world-weariness’ in

²⁷² Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 52/94-95.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 50/93.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51/93.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50/92. Noteworthy here is the fact that Levinas employs somewhat of a Marxist critique against Husserl and Heidegger. Indeed, Levinas even goes so far as to say that the self-sufficient conception of the subject ‘nourishes the audacious dreams of a restless and enterprising capitalism’ by presiding over ‘capitalism’s work ethic’ as well as ‘its cult of initiative and discovery’ which, subsequently, ‘aims less at reconciling man with himself than at securing for him the unknowns of time and things’. *Ibid.* This is not to suggest that Levinas himself is a Marxist. To be sure, in his interview series with Nemo, Levinas claims that ‘there are many things for which I can still not pardon Marx’. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 43. Nevertheless, Levinas also mentions that there is a ‘generosity’ and ‘devotion’ to the other person in Marxism on several occasions, whilst, simultaneously, holding that Marx cannot be condemned for the political ideologies that used his thinking for violent ends. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 81, p. 88, and p. 180. In this respect, it is worth acknowledging, as Caygill does, that Levinas’s readings of Marx and Nietzsche are very ‘subtle’ and ‘equivocal’. Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 207.

human life.²⁷⁶ The experience of suffering through one's own body, for instance, 'consists of the impossibility of interrupting it', whilst, simultaneously, revealing 'an acute feeling of being held fast', that is to say, of being chained to an absolute position in existence.²⁷⁷

The experience of world-weariness reveals a tragic fate for the human being when it is reduced to its state of immanence. This is because from the standpoint of immanence the human being is essentially finite. It is nothing more than its material body which is subsequently perishable, as the experience of suffering demonstrates. The fate of the human being, therefore, when reduced to the state of immanence, is like that of a game in which the outcome has already been decided. Making this point in reference to the notion of 'the vital urge', or, to use Nietzsche's language, the will-to-power, Levinas remarks,

The propensity toward the future and the 'out-ahead-of-oneself' contained in the vital urge mark a being destined for a race-course. The urge is creative but irresistible. The fulfilment of a destiny is the stigma of being: the destination is not wholly traced out, but its fulfilment is fatal, inevitable.²⁷⁸

Whilst the vital urge is that which drives our bodies forward out of the present moment of suffering, its final destination has already been set. Indeed, there may be room to play along the way. But the outcome of the game is 'inevitable'. It is for this reason that Levinas equates the meaning of being when it is grasped within the immanence of the body along the same lines as the meaning of Being grasped by Heidegger in *Dasein*

²⁷⁶ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 52/94.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. Since Levinas conceives of the 'world' in relation to the 'weight' felt through one's own body in the instant of need, he does not maintain that this world possess an essential or existential meaning whether or not attention is directed toward it. It is not possible, therefore, to accuse Levinas of falling back into the natural attitude here.

²⁷⁸ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 54/97.

since both reduce the essence of the human being to temporality.²⁷⁹ Heidegger's account of human transcendence, therefore, is erroneous in the mind of Levinas.

The fact of human consciousness validates, what Levinas calls, 'the need to escape' from the immanent condition of one's own body. The immateriality of thought attests to this need as an act of 'excedence' that has already taken place.²⁸⁰ The term 'excedence' in this case refers to the distance established between the free thinking self and the body to which it is chained. Under these circumstances, it is the very ability of thought to reflect upon the brutality of its own bodily existence that proves the transcendence of the human being. The need to escape, therefore, has nothing to do with the concept of 'innumerable lives' or the aspiration to 'break the chains of the [free] I to the [bodily] self'.²⁸¹ After all, an infinite being would have no need 'to take leave of itself' since, as Levinas suggests, it would already be self-sufficient.²⁸² The need to escape, therefore, contests the 'alleged peace-with-self' that phenomenological ontology has hitherto upheld seeing as this outlook, ultimately, belongs to a 'certain civilization' that has forgotten the concreteness of human need as a result of its bourgeois spirit of self-sufficiency.²⁸³

§1.3.3 *Levinas's Preliminary Description of the Concrete*

Traditional philosophical approaches toward the matter of need support an idea of it as a 'privation' or 'lack'. When considered on its own terms, need always seems to aim toward something else in order to curb itself. Further explaining this approach, Levinas writes,

²⁷⁹ It is notable that in *Being and Time*, as William J. Richardson observes, Heidegger offers no analysis of the human body. William J. Richardson, 'Heidegger among the Doctors', in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. by John Sallis, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 49-66 (p. 52).

²⁸⁰ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 54/98.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55/99.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 56/99.

In the first place, need seems to aspire only to its own satisfaction. The search for satisfaction becomes the search for the object able to procure it. Need thus turns us toward something other than ourselves. Therefore, it appears upon initial analysis like an insufficiency in our being, impelled to seek refuge in something other than itself.²⁸⁴

This account of need is a little too hasty, as far as Levinas is concerned, since it ‘assumes a metaphysics in which need is characterised in advance as an emptiness in a world where the real is identified with the full’.²⁸⁵ In other words, this account of need is abstract due to the fact that it ignores the concrete situation from which need first arises. The feeling of ‘malaise’, that is, of being ‘ill at ease’ with oneself, encapsulates this situation. According to Levinas, malaise is not ‘a purely passive state’, rather, it transpires as ‘a refusal to remain in place’ or as ‘an effort to get out of an unbearable situation’.²⁸⁶ The concreteness of need in such cases does not indicate ‘a lack to be filled’.²⁸⁷ On the contrary, the suffering of malaise reveals ‘a plenitude of being’ from which the self endeavours to escape.²⁸⁸ In the instant of extreme hunger, for example, the self does not simply accept its condition of suffering. Quite the reverse, the self is uneasy and seeks food to abscond the ‘dead weight’ at the depth of its being.²⁸⁹ As a result, need ‘does not foreshadow the end’ *qua* death. It clings rather to the present, as Levinas notes, ‘which then appears at the threshold of a possible future’.²⁹⁰ Only from the perspective of this present, in which need has already been satisfied, can it be posited as a lack through thought.

The satisfaction of need does not destroy it considering that needs are always ‘reborn’ within concrete life and due to this incessant return of need ‘disappointment

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 58/103.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 58/104.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 59/105.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 69/120.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 60/106.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 59/105.

also follows their satisfaction'.²⁹¹ This is because no matter how vigorously the self may try to satisfy its needs, it can never manage to rid itself from the *demand* to satisfy those needs. In order to strengthen this position, which argues for 'the inadequacy of the satisfaction of need', Levinas examines the phenomenon of pleasure since transitional interpretations maintain that it is in the moment of pleasure when 'the satisfaction of need comes to pass'.²⁹² Nevertheless, when subjected to phenomenological analysis, a different account of pleasure is discovered since it is always fleeting and never whole in concrete life. Describing this phenomenon as it emerges in concrete life, Levinas notes,

Pleasure appears as it develops. It is neither there as a whole, nor does it happen all at once. And furthermore, it will never be whole or integral. Progressive movement is a characteristic trait of this phenomenon, which is by no means a simple state. This is a movement that does not tend toward a goal, for it has no end. It exists wholly in the enlargement of its own amplitude, which is like the rarefaction of our existence, or its swooning. In the very depths of incipient pleasure there opens something like abysses, ever deeper, into which our existence, no longer resisting, hurls itself. There is something dizzying to pleasure's unfolding. There is ease or cowardice. The [human] being feels its substance somehow draining from it; it grows lighter, as if drunk, and disperses.²⁹³

Here, it is clear that the pleasure does not constitute an adequacy of the satisfaction of need. This is because the main characteristic of pleasure is 'the enlargement of its own amplitude'. It thus emerges after the satisfaction of need as an incessant movement toward itself like an ever-deepening abyss. Under these circumstances, it creates a state of 'ecstasy' which, seemingly, leads to the 'abandonment' of the dead weight at the depths of one's own being.²⁹⁴ The phenomenon of pleasure, therefore, 'opens a dimension in the satisfaction of need in which malaise glimpses an escape' considering that, as Levinas puts it, the satisfaction of need in such cases appears as the 'liberation

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 60-61/107.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 61/107-108.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 61/108.

from being'.²⁹⁵ This liberation, nonetheless, is merely 'a deceptive escape'. For, unlike the act of excedence, which ends in the establishment of a free thinking self, the movement of pleasure has no end.²⁹⁶ Pleasure is simply a 'process', as Levinas puts it, the process of postponing being.²⁹⁷ Whilst conforming to the demand of need, then, pleasure is 'incapable of equalling' this demand since the brute fact of being will always come back to haunt the self in the pursuit of pleasure. Consequently, Levinas follows Kierkegaard and upholds the simple pursuit of pleasure as the path toward 'disappointment'.²⁹⁸

§1.3.4 Levinas's Way of Describing the Concrete

The concreteness of need becomes palpable when life is described from the absolute position of the body. This position reveals an existence that is, to quote Levinas, 'asserted without reference to anything else'.²⁹⁹ It is an 'absolute' existence revealed in the instant of need. Whilst Heidegger uses Kierkegaard's existential starting point of concrete individual human existence as a way to criticise Husserl's prioritisation of pure

²⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 61-62/108-109.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 62/109-110.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 62/110.

²⁹⁸ According to Kierkegaard, the pursuit of pleasure is what characterises life as it is lived in the aesthetic stage of existence. In this stage of existence, as Copleston remarks, the human being lives life purely on the level of the senses by seeking pleasure in whatever manner that it may arrive. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, p. 342. However, there is no 'remedy' or 'salvation' for the human condition in this stage of existence. Ibid. As a result, the human being will inevitably enter into a state of 'despair' or disappointment in the aesthetic stage of existence, as it realises the futility of its incessant search for pleasure. Ibid. Whilst, for Kierkegaard, as David A. Roberts notes, this sense of disappointment leads to an instance of self-awareness for the human being, this is not the case for Levinas. David A. Roberts, *Kierkegaard's Analysis of Radical Evil* (London: A&C Black, 2006), p. 58. Only through the act of excedence, in which the self becomes aware of itself in thought, can the human being achieve self-awareness, as far as Levinas is concerned. This means going beyond the level of pure sensation which, in turn, presupposes an encounter with the face of the Other (*le visage d'autrui*), as will be outlined in the next chapter of this study. There are many other noteworthy parallels between the thinking of Levinas and Kierkegaard. See, *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, ed. by J. Aaron Simmons & David Wood (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008). See also, Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008). Levinas himself wrote a couple of short essays on Kierkegaard and occasionally mentions him throughout his other writings. See, Emmanuel Levinas, 'Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics' and 'A Propos of "Kierkegaard vivant"', in *Proper Names*, trans by. Michael B. Smith (California: Stanford University Press, 1996).

²⁹⁹ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 55/98.

intentional consciousness as the central standpoint in phenomenology, Levinas does the same to criticise Heidegger's prioritisation of *Dasein*.³⁰⁰ It is possible for Levinas to do this because, despite Heidegger's claims of concreteness, *Dasein* is actually quite an abstract phenomenon. '*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry', as Levinas goes on to note.³⁰¹ Furthermore, there is no analysis of the basic needs that confront human beings throughout their everyday lives in the 'existential analytic' of *Dasein*. This is problematic, for Levinas, because, as De Boer puts it, 'most people are more concerned about their daily bread than they are worried about the authenticity of their existence — and rightly so'.³⁰² Consequently, the analysis of need reveals something *more* concrete to Levinas than the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, namely, the absolute existence of the lived body. Just as Heidegger regards himself as *more* phenomenological than Husserl, therefore, by finding something *more* concrete than that which *appears* as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness, Levinas regards himself as *more* phenomenological than Heidegger.

Despite this immanent critique of Heidegger's description of the concrete, Levinas nevertheless accepts Heidegger's way of describing the concrete. Central to Heidegger's way of describing the concrete is the particular experiences of affective dispositions (*Befindlichkeit*). Only through these experiences does *Dasein* understand the specific manner in which it exists 'right-there' in its environment. Nevertheless, having successfully undercut the position of *Dasein*, thanks to the discovery of the absolute existence of the lived body, Levinas can now apply the experience of affective dispositions in a novel way. The particular experience of malaise, for instance, when liberated from the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, puts the lived body in direct

³⁰⁰ See, *supra*, n. 98 and §1.2.6.

³⁰¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 134/142. McDonnell also highlights the abstract character of *Dasein* on the basis that it is primarily 'sexless'. McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 159.

³⁰² De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 6.

contract with the brute fact of being itself. It is in such ‘affective events’ that ‘the true meaning of need is revealed’, in the mind of Levinas.³⁰³ In addition to the concrete experience of malaise, Levinas also describes the particularity of ‘shame’ and ‘nausea’ in *On Escape* as affective events that put the lived body in direct contact with the brute fact of being.³⁰⁴ The notion of affectivity is of interest to Levinas, then, precisely because it is ‘foreign to notions that apply to that which is’, in the sense that it is not ‘reducible to categories of thought and activity’, when apprehended from the absolute position of the lived body. In other words, it surmounts ‘the image of being’ as it is presented to intentional consciousness or as it is disclosed in *Dasein* and confronts the lived body with the brute fact of being itself. As a result, it is by developing the idea of an existential-hermeneutic phenomenology — from an inquiry into the particular experiences of *Dasein* to that concerning the particular experiences of the concrete body — that Levinas makes ‘the brute fact of being’ a valid topic for phenomenological research.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 62/109.

³⁰⁴ When subjected to phenomenological analysis from the absolute position of the lived body, the affective disposition of shame corresponds to the self’s awareness of its basic ‘nudity’. Ibid., p. 64/112. The term ‘nudity’ is not used in the literal sense here. It signifies, rather, ‘the nakedness of our total being in all its fullness and solidity, of its most brutal expression of which we could not fail to take note’. Ibid., p. 65/113. In this respect, the affective disposition of shame overcomes the self’s idea of itself and confronts it with the brute fact of its being. Similarly, in the affective disposition of nausea the self is confronted with ‘the very being of the entity that we are’, to quote Levinas. Ibid., p. 68/118. For when nausea is experienced, one has ‘no choice but to vomit’. Ibid., p. 67/117. The involuntary heaving of the body in the instant of vomiting is, for Levinas, ‘the very experience of pure being’. Ibid. It is worth noting that Levinas describes nausea as a concrete event that puts us into contact with the ‘real’ three years before John Paul Sartre did the same in his novel *Nausea*. See, John Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Galliard, 1938). Moreover, Levinas was indirectly responsible for introducing Sartre to phenomenology since, as Levinas comments during his interview with Kearney, citing the autobiographical works of Simone de Beauvoir: ‘One day in the early thirties, Sartre chanced upon a copy of my book on Husserl [*The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*] in the Picard bookshop just opposite the Sorbonne. He picked it up, read it, and declared to de Beauvoir, “This is the philosophy I wanted to write!”’ Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 68.

³⁰⁵ In this respect, Levinas precedes Merleau-Ponty by ten years in placing the lived body at the centre of existential-phenomenology. See, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

§1.3.5 *Levinas's Reassessment of Phenomenology*

Before devoting the entirety of his attention to a phenomenological analysis of the brute fact of being, Levinas publishes an article in tribute to Husserl. This article, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl' (1940), was published shortly after Husserl's death in 1938 and supports a view of Husserl's philosophy 'as revolutionary in its contents as in its influence'.³⁰⁶ Whilst the main objective of this article is to summarise the central points in Husserl's elaboration of phenomenology, by bringing out 'the unity of the phenomenological inspiration, its physiognomy, [and] its message', Levinas also takes this opportunity to highlight a certain possibility within Husserl's thought previously neglected by him. Accordingly, it is only necessary to address the latter at this point since Levinas's summary in this particular article simply repeats the main aspects of Husserl's thought that section two of this chapter has already delineated.³⁰⁷

Toward the conclusion of 'The Work Edmund Husserl', Levinas highlights the conception of '*Urimpression*' within Husserl's version of phenomenology. The term *Urimpression* is used by Husserl to refer to the 'primary impression' of being as it is given 'now'. Further elaborating this point, Levinas informs,

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. But it is a present that does not bind it; the impression passes. The present is modified, loses some of its acuteness and actuality, and is only retained by a new present that replaces it, and that in turn moves away and remains attached, in a new retention, to a new present. This retention is also an intention. It thinks the moment, as it were, which it retains at the edge of the past into which it is about to sink, to be subsequently found again by memory, and it identifies that moment with self-evidence. Thus, duration,

³⁰⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, pp. 47-87 (p. 47).

³⁰⁷ Indeed, in 'The Work of Edmund Husserl', Levinas still maintains the return to the concrete as essential for the whole enterprise of phenomenology. *Ibid.*, §8, p. 66. Levinas also reinforces his prevailing view that it is the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness that lead to the experience of the concrete, in the mind of Husserl. *Ibid.*, §6, pp. 58-62. The prioritisation of perceptual experience and vision is also acknowledged in relation to Husserl's work. *Ibid.*, §7, pp. 62-66. And, finally, Husserl's idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science of valid universal knowledge claims is also repeated by Levinas. *Ibid.*, §12, pp. 78-80.

which is renewal and freedom in each of its instants, is constituted. The mind is already free vis-à-vis its outflow. It is open onto the future through a protention — as Husserl calls it. Thus, time is not a form which consciousness assumes and that comes from the outside. It is truly the secret of subjectivity itself, the condition for a free mind.³⁰⁸

The primary impression of being is described above by Levinas as an ‘original passivity’. Being is initially impressed onto us prior to any activity of the experiencing subject. Under these circumstances, there is a sense of being to be retrieved within Husserl’s phenomenology independent from the meaning of being comprehended by pure intentional consciousness. Nevertheless, Husserl did not see this possibility himself due to his prioritisation of describing the concrete as it is experienced from the position of pure intentional consciousness and not human incarnate consciousness. For, as soon as intentionality is directed toward the primary impression of being it ‘passes’. This is because the given ‘now’ becomes immediately modified by consciousness. It turns into a memory from a new present that has already replaced it. Furthermore, the ability of consciousness to think this past moment opens it up to the future since it can identify that moment in the present and anticipate its return. This is why the duration of time constitutes the essence of consciousness, for Husserl, just as ecstatic temporality constitutes the essence of *Dasein*, for Heidegger. The prioritisation of the standpoints of temporal duration and ecstatic temporality, therefore, leads to the neglect of the topic of the brute fact of being within phenomenology. It is for this reason that Levinas begins his phenomenological descriptions from the instant of need, as experienced concretely through the absolute position of the body, prior to temporal duration or ecstatic temporality.

The next chapter of this study will demonstrate that, despite highlighting the potential to retrieve the primary impression of being within Husserl’s version of

³⁰⁸ Levinas, ‘The Work of Edmund Husserl’, p. 77.

phenomenology, Levinas *still* follows Heidegger's way of doing phenomenology.³⁰⁹ It seems to me, then, that Levinas is simply trying to distance himself from Heidegger in 'The Work of Edmund Husserl' by highlighting this aspect of Husserl's thinking.³¹⁰ This is not surprising given Heidegger's commitment to Hitler seven years earlier.³¹¹ Regardless of this affirmation toward Husserl, however, for Levinas, phenomenology endures as an inquiry into certain affective dispositions relating to the particular experiences of the lived body which facilitate the description of the brute fact of being itself. It thus remains an existential-hermeneutic phenomenology.

³⁰⁹ In this respect, Will Buckingham is incorrect to insinuate that Levinas's idea of phenomenology starts from the 'enigma' that Husserl attributed toward traditional philosophy for not being 'clear and precise' with its knowledge claims throughout his efforts to make it a universal science of intentional consciousness and its objectivities. Will Buckingham, *Levinas, Storytelling and Anti-Storytelling* (London: A&C Black, 2013), p. 47. It is rather Heidegger's idea of phenomenology as the hermeneutic science of particular lived experiences that Levinas takes as the starting point for his own development of phenomenology.

³¹⁰ Levinas's attempt to distance himself from Heidegger is also evident from the fact that he abandoned a book that he was preparing throughout the 1930s on Heidegger's work. See, his second footnote of 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology' (1930), which thanks the *Revue philosophique* for publishing 'the first sections of the first part of the work in preparation'. Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 11/396.

³¹¹ Heidegger officially joined the Nazi Party in April 1933, just three months after Hitler's rise to power, when he accepted the position as rector at the University of Freiburg. In his inaugural lecture as rector, Heidegger commits himself to Hitler by claiming that the sense of identity of the German *Volk* can only be retrieved under the guidance of a spiritual *Führer*, i.e. Hitler. See, Bret W. David, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 103. Heidegger's commitment to Hitler occurs during the same year that Levinas composes 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism'. Despite the prefatory note to this article, written fifty six years after its initial publication, which links the 'philosophy of Hitlerism' to the Heideggerian ontology of a being (*Seiendes*) concerned with its own Being (*Sein*), Heidegger's name is completely absent from 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism'. It thus begs the question, why did it take Levinas so long to explicitly attempt to distance himself from Heidegger. It seems to me that the answer is twofold. Firstly, Levinas speaks of Heidegger's commitment to Hitler as if it came as a shock to him. In an interview with Malka, Levinas asserts: 'We know what Heidegger was in 1933, even if he was so during a brief period, and even if his disciples — many whom are estimable — forget about it. For me, it is unforgettable. One could have been everything except Hitlerian, even if it was inadvertent'. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 94. Similarly, in a different interview, Levinas comments about his time spent as a student of Heidegger during the period of *Being and Time*: 'At that point, *one could in no way imagine* that Heidegger would take such a tragic political position'. *Ibid.*, p. 158, my emphasis. Levinas's remarks here give the impression that he initially struggled to come to terms with the fact that it was possible for Heidegger, whose philosophy after all had a major impact on Levinas, could become a committed Nazi. Secondly, World War II had basically started when Levinas was writing 'The Work of Edmund Husserl'. This conflict would have compelled Levinas to explicitly distance himself from the philosophy of a member of the political organisation that started the war due to their violent ideology.

CHAPTER II

LEVINAS'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BRUTE FACT OF BEING (1940–1947)

Levinas's final publication before the outbreak of World War II, namely, 'The Work of Edmund Husserl' (1940), highlights the possibility of retrieving the brute fact of being as a topic for phenomenological research from within Husserl's version of phenomenology. Yet, despite highlighting this possibility in relation to Husserl, Levinas's next two publications, *Existence and Existents* (1947) as well as *Time and the Other* (1947), both of which appear after the conclusion of the war, return to the work of Heidegger in order to analyse the topic of the brute fact of being within phenomenology.¹ This chapter shows that Levinas does so because only Heidegger's way of describing the concrete, that is to say, the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research, can describe *how* the brute fact of being affects the existing individual within concrete life. Central to this description is a phenomenological analysis of the affective disposition of fatigue as located in the particular experiences of the lived body. Despite this allegiance to Heidegger's way of doing phenomenology, Levinas also reinforces his critique of the description of the concrete given by Heidegger during this period. This is because Heidegger overlooks the existence of the

¹ Heidegger's influence on Levinas's thinking from this period of his philosophical development is well noted. Stella Sandford, for instance, highlights Heidegger's influence both in relation to Levinas's research topic in phenomenology, which 'attempts to think Being without resorting to notions such as "concept", "category", or "substance", whilst, simultaneously, acknowledging that Heidegger 'paved the way' for Levinas methodologically in terms of his phenomenological analyses of fatigue and indolence, even though both of these affective dispositions are absent from the work of Heidegger. Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: A&C Black, 2001), pp. 9-10. This view is echoed by Daniele Rugo, who insists that, even after this historical period, 'Heidegger's influence never really ceases to play a role in Levinas's thinking'. Daniele Rugo, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness: Philosophy and Powers of Existence* (London: A&C Black, 2013), p. 111. Colin Davis also recognises this as a period where Levinas signals the 'importance' of the 'Heideggerian enterprise' whilst, also, 'announcing a reversal of Heidegger's [philosophical] priorities'. Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 34.

lived body in his project of fundamental ontology. In order to demonstrate this point, Levinas forwards a detailed critique of the analysis of death in *Being and Time* which, subsequently, reveals a form of abstraction at the heart of Heidegger's philosophy.² It is through this critique that Levinas encounters a sense of alterity within concrete life. This leads him toward his next topic in phenomenology and opens up the possibility for a concrete account of human transcendence within philosophy.

§2.1 EXISTENCE AND EXISTENTS (1947)

This section examines the manner in which Levinas addresses the topic of 'the brute fact of being' from a phenomenological perspective in *Existence and Existents*.³ Whilst the introduction of this work expresses the 'profound need' to 'leave the climate' of Heidegger's philosophy, which reduces the meaning of Being to the immanence of time as experienced and expressed in *Dasein*, it also acknowledges the 'large influence' of Heidegger and maintains the unfeasibility of simply leaving that climate 'for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian'.⁴ This is because, as far as Levinas is concerned, Heidegger supplies philosophy with the *most* concrete description of life to

² The association between death and the nothingness of anxiety in Heidegger's version of phenomenology denotes that death is already 'understood' and 'cultivated' as a possibility that *Dasein* is 'being-for'. See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §53, 'Existential Projection of an Authentic Being-for-Death', p. 306/261. This form of 'inner brooding' over one's own death in the affective disposition of anxiety presupposes an element of reflection which abstracts a certain idea of death from concrete life. See, *infra*, n. 37.

³ Levinas began writing *Existence and Existents* during his captivity as a prisoner between the years of 1940 and 1945 in World War II. Six years after moving to Paris in 1934, as Malka notes, Levinas 'was mobilised to the front, like everyone else, comfortless but intent on doing his duty' as part of the French army. Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 65. On the 18th of June 1940, following the battle of the Somme, which started thirteen days earlier, Levinas was captured by the German forces having been driven to surrender with what remained of his infantry. *Ibid.* Following a few months of internment in France, Levinas was transported to Germany to a *stalag* near Hanover. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 40. Here, Levinas and his fellow Jewish prisoners were separated from the others in the camp. *Ibid.* Life in the camp consisted of twelve hours of hard labour per day. Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 69-70. Levinas remained here until 1945 after the German forces surrendered on the 18th of April. *Ibid.*, p. 79. Levinas's father, mother, and two brothers were all executed in Lithuania by German forces during in war. *Ibid.*, p. 80. His wife and daughter survived thanks to Maurice Blanchot and a Catholic monastery, both of whom supplied safe refuge in Paris. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79. Blanchot had been a close friend of Levinas since their student days in the University of Strasbourg. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be*, p. 29.

⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 4/18.

date. It would be imprudent of Levinas, therefore, to reject or ignore Heidegger's thinking. Instead, Levinas demonstrates, with the help of hermeneutic reasoning, that there is something *more* concrete than the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, namely, the 'relationship' with the brute fact of being as encountered in the instant of bodily sensation. This novel position, from which the act of transcendence or 'excedence' commences, undercuts both Husserl and Heidegger's respective descriptions of the concrete, whilst, simultaneously, accepting the validity of Heidegger's way of describing the concrete through the analysis of certain affective dispositions.

§2.1.1 Restating 'the Brute Fact of Being' as 'Being in General'

Levinas outlines the first aim of *Existence and Existents* as setting out 'to approach the idea of Being in general in its impersonality'.⁵ This appeal to the topic of 'Being in general' (*l'être en général*) demonstrates a thematic continuation with respect to the developments made by Levinas in two of his previous publications: 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' (1934) and *On Escape* (1935). Both of these publications, as evident from the first chapter of this study, highlight 'the brute fact of being' as Levinas's first original topic for phenomenological research. In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas maintains the importance of this topic by deeming it as the necessary starting point for an analysis of the instant 'in which a being, a subject, an existent arises in impersonal Being'.⁶ Such an analysis denotes the second aim of *Existence and Existence*. The expression 'Being in general', therefore, simply acts as Levinas's new phrase for signifying 'the brute fact of being'.

⁵ Ibid., p. 3/17.

⁶ Ibid.

From the outset of *Existence and Existents*, Levinas illustrates the idea of ‘Being in general’ in relation to Heidegger’s version of phenomenology.⁷ In the very first paragraph of the introduction to this work, Levinas commences by reiterating an idea central to Heidegger’s philosophy, namely, the ontological difference. Levinas writes,

The distinction between that which exists and its existence itself, between the individual, the genus, the collective, God, beings designated as substantives, and the event or act of their existence, imposes itself upon philosophical reflection — and with equal facility disappears from its view. It is as though thought becomes dizzy pouring over the emptiness of the verb to exist, which we seem not to be able to say anything about, which only becomes intelligible in its participle, the existent, that which exists. Thought slips imperceptibly from the notion of Being qua Being, that by virtue of which an existing being exists, to the idea of a cause of existence, a ‘Being in general’, a God whose essence will indeed contain existence, but which will nonetheless be ‘a being’, and not the deed, activity, pure event or work, of Being. This latter will be understood in the confusion with beings.⁸

Here, the reiteration of the ontological difference, i.e., the view that the ‘to be’ of something is not itself ‘a being’ (*Sein ist nicht Seiendes*), serves to highlight the transcendent idea of ‘a being in general’ that has come to dominate the philosophical tradition. By always linking the meaning of Being (*der Sinn von Sein*) to ‘a being’ (*Seiende*) on account of transcendent concepts pertaining to being qua being, a cause of existence, or God, the entire history of metaphysics demonstrates a ‘forgetfulness’ of the meaning of the ‘to be’ (*Sein*) of beings (*Seiendes*) themselves, that is to say, the deed, activity, pure event, or work of existence. Heidegger refers to this manner of thinking about the meaning of Being in relation to some causal being as the ‘onto-theological constitution of metaphysics’ and calls for its ‘destruction’ for the purposes of raising anew ‘the question of the meaning of Being’ in his philosophical project of ‘fundamental ontology’.⁹ Levinas does not follow Heidegger down the path of

⁷ Despite following Heidegger down this path, however, there is no ‘methodological privileging of Dasein’ in Levinas’s effort to think ‘Being in general’, as Sanford correctly observes. Sanford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, p. 9.

⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 1/15.

⁹ See, for more on this aspect of Heidegger’s thought, Iain Thomson, ‘Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger’s Destruktion of Metaphysics’, in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 8 (2000), 297-327. During the academic term of 1975/1976 at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, Levinas gave a

fundamental ontology. Yet, Levinas both agrees with Heidegger and recognises the insufficiency of relating the question of the meaning of the ‘to be’ (*Sein*) of ‘beings’ (*Seiendes*) with the transcendent idea of ‘a being in general’ as established by the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics. This is because such an establishment of metaphysics cannot address, what Levinas refers to as, ‘the event of Being’.

Elaborating on this point, Levinas remarks,

What is the event of Being, Being in general, detached from beings which dominate it? What does its generality mean? It is certainly something else than the generality of a genus. Already the ‘something’ in general, the pure form of an object, which expresses the idea of ‘a being’ in general, is above genres, since one does not descend from it toward species by adding specific differences. The idea of ‘a being’ in general already deserves the name *transcendent*, which the medieval Aristotelians applied to the One, Being and the Good. But the generality of Being — of what makes up the existence of an existent — *is not equivalent to that transcendence*. Being cannot be specified, and does not specify anything.¹⁰

The transcendent idea of ‘a being in general’ as ‘something’, that is to say, as the pure form of an object residing over all genus and species, does not equate to the ‘existence’ of an ‘existent’ since, for Levinas, existence or Being in general, cannot be specified as it does not specify anything. Accordingly, Being in general ‘is not a quality which an object supports, nor what supports qualities’, as Levinas comments, ‘nor is it the act of a subject, even though the expression “this is” Being becomes an attribute — for we are immediately obliged to state that this attribute adds nothing to the subject’.¹¹ Levinas thus agrees with Heidegger and Kant that ‘being is not a real predicate’ of any existing thing. Nevertheless, things *are*. It is this ‘brute fact’ that things *are* which Levinas seeks to address philosophically without resorting to any transcendent ideas that would implicate ‘a being in general’.

lecture course entitled ‘God and Onto-theo-logy’. See, Emmanuel Levinas, ‘God and Onto-theo-logy’, in *God, Death, and Time*, trans. by Bettina Bergo (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 119-224. In this lecture course, Levinas acknowledges the validity of Heidegger’s critique of the history of metaphysics in ‘taking God for being’ and maintains that this critique opens up a new historical epoch marked by ‘the death of God’ and ‘the end of onto-theo-ology’ thus facilitating a possible understanding of God as ‘the *other* of being’. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁰ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 2/16-17, my emphasis.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3/17.

This particular stance emphasises Levinas's commitment to the phenomenological method since it holds that the meaning of 'Being in general' must be found within concrete life. During the introduction of *Existence and Existents*, Levinas further acknowledges this commitment by declaring that the topic of 'Being in general' ensues from 'certain positions of contemporary ontology' which have 'nothing in common with realism' as they do not 'presuppose an affirmation of the external world and of its primacy over consciousness'.¹² These positions refer to the work of both Husserl and Heidegger who put forward different accounts of the meaning of being on the basis of concrete experience — the meaning of being as thing given to outer perceptual-sense experience and the mode of being as (conscious) experience given to inner perception in the transcendental reduction, for Husserl, and the meaning of being as given in the understanding of Being in *Dasein* where, for Heidegger, the question of the meaning of Being itself is raised anew. Yet, despite the differences between these two accounts, Husserl and Heidegger share a common philosophical standpoint in considering the meaning of Being as correlative to an understanding subject. For Husserl, this subject corresponds to the transcendental ego, which permits the intuitive appearance of objects to intentional consciousness as founded through perceptual acts; for Heidegger, this subject pertains to *Dasein*, the place in which the meaning of Being is understood and expressed 'right there' in the world. As a result, both Husserl and Heidegger constitute the meaning of Being in accordance with a *personal* relation to that which is experienced in concrete life. This standpoint leaves the idea of 'Being in general' in all of its *impersonality* unaddressed within phenomenology. It is up to Levinas, then, not to dispel but to discover 'the brute fact of being' in its 'impersonality' within concrete life so as to confirm it as a valid topic for phenomenological research.

¹² Ibid, p. 3/18.

§2.1.2 *The Brute Fact of Being in Concrete Life*

According to Levinas, phenomenology advances as a method for describing the concrete. For Husserl, this method permits the description of that which appears to one's own actual consciousness, and, for Heidegger, it leads to the description of that which is disclosed as a matter of fact in, what Heidegger terms, '*Dasein*'. The various analyses of the concrete resulting from the phenomenological method, then, always follow and depend upon a description of life as it is immediately lived in person before any reflection takes place. This remains the case whether the concrete is apprehended through the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness (Husserl) or via the understanding of Being in *Dasein* (Heidegger). By seeking to highlight aspects of concrete life corresponding to 'Being in general' in all of its 'impersonality', Levinas seems to be pushing the phenomenological method to its limit since, hitherto, phenomenology has always commenced and concluded with immediate first person experience.¹³ Be that as it may, the very fact that such a limit is encountered within

¹³ This is despite the fact that both Husserl and Heidegger acknowledge a distinction between a being of beings and our understanding of the being of that being, whatever such an understanding might be. Husserl does so in the context of his world annihilation thought experiment in *Ideas I*. Expanding on this context, De Boer comments: 'The experiment involves a destruction in thought; it is an experiment of imagination, which can lead to the discovery of the independence or non-independence of the contents of consciousness. In this case it is applied to the relationship between consciousness and the world. The outcome is that when we think consciousness away, the world disappears because it is a correlate of acts of consciousness. When the world is eliminated in thought, however, consciousness is only modified. All it means is that certain ordered, experiential connections are lacking, experiences that fit together harmoniously. Husserl concludes from this that the world has a mode of existence that depends on consciousness; it has a merely phenomenal, relative existence, and "beyond this, nothing". In a comment Husserl made on this own formulation, the latter phrase was altered to: "and beyond this an absurdity"'. De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 6-7. The difference between the two wordings here is of importance since, as De Boer continues, 'it is true that the phenomenal world without a constituting consciousness is inconceivable; yet does this mean that there is nothing left?' Ibid., p. 7. In other words, is there a sense of being beyond that which appears to intentional consciousness? Levinas demonstrates that there is and thus shows the limits of Husserl's representative account of being. Similarly, Heidegger also acknowledges such a sense of being by maintaining that 'beings *are*, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained'. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §39, 'The Question of the Primordial Totality of *Dasein*'s Structural Whole', p. 228/183. Nevertheless, Heidegger immediately deems such a sense of being as an invalid topic for phenomenological research since, for him, 'Being is only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs'. Ibid. Put differently, being only makes sense from the point of view of *Dasein* due to its implicit understanding

concrete life reveals something about being, in the mind of Levinas, precisely because it discloses a moment in which the personal relation to being, originating from the understanding of Being constitutive of our meaningful world, falls short. Thus the experience of a limit, within concrete life, exposes an ontological event that is, to use Levinas's phrase, 'singularly instructive'.¹⁴ It reveals a moment when 'the continual play of our relations with the world is interrupted'.¹⁵ In such moments, 'we find neither death nor the "pure ego"', *contra* Heidegger and Husserl, 'but the anonymous state of being'.¹⁶ Expanding upon this point, Levinas comments,

Expressions such as 'a world in pieces' or 'a world turned upside down', trite as they have become, nonetheless express a *feeling* (*sentiment*) that is authentic. The rift between the rational order and events, the mutual impenetrability of minds opaque as matter, the multiplication of logical systems each of which is absurd for the others, the impossibility of the I rejoining the you, and consequently the unfitness of understanding for what should be its essential function — these are things we run up against in the twilight of a world, things which reawaken the ancient obsession with an end of the world.¹⁷

We experience the interruption of the world in concrete life. This interruption occurs when our ideas about the world fail to correspond accurately to our experience of being. It demonstrates that the meaning of being 'is not synonymous with the relationship with a world', rather, as Levinas notes, 'it is antecedent to the world'.¹⁸ This experience of the world interrupted bestows us with a certain 'feeling' or 'sense' (*sentiment*).

of Being, at least, as far as Heidegger is concerned. This view leads Heidegger to conclude that whilst 'Being can be something unconceptualised', 'it never completely fails to be understood'. *Ibid.* Levinas challenges this stance also in *Existence and Existents* by showing that there is indeed a concrete sense of being that goes beyond the understanding of Being in *Dasein*.

¹⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/23. It also denotes a singularly significant point of departure in the unfolding of Levinas's own thinking about 'being' and 'the meaning of being' within the limits recognised by phenomenology up until this point. By finding this new potential within phenomenology, therefore, Levinas surpasses both Husserl and Heidegger's research in phenomenology.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7/23 : 'Des expressions comme « monde cassé » ou « monde bouleversé », pour courantes et banales qu'elles soient devenues, n'en expriment pas moins un sentiment authentique. La divergence entre les événements et l'ordre rationnel, l'impenétrabilité réciproque des esprits opaques comme la matière, la multiplication des logiques, absurdes les unes pour les autres, l'impossibilité pour le moi de rejoindre le toi, et, par conséquent, l'inaptitude de l'intelligence à ce qui devait en être la fonction essentielle — autant de constatations qui, dans le crépuscule d'un monde, réveillent l'antique obsession de la fin du monde'.

¹⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/23.

Furthermore, we express this ‘feeling’ or ‘sense’ in and through language owing to phrases such as ‘a world in pieces’ or ‘a world turned upside down’. Such expressions form the basis for speculative ideas pertaining to ‘the ancient obsession with an end of the world’. Once stripped of its speculative and ‘mythological overtones’, however, and considered in its concrete aspect, the phrase ‘an end of the world’ expresses the moment when our meaningful world is destroyed by the brute fact of being itself.¹⁹ At this stage, it is important to highlight Levinas’s approach for addressing this particular research topic in phenomenology since he is not considering the intuitive appearance of objects to intentional consciousness as a result of perceptually founded acts. On the contrary, Levinas is seeking to understand the meaning of certain lived experiences as they are expressed through language. He is doing this by analysing specific expressions in language with respect to a particular ‘feeling’ or ‘sense’ which arises from the lived experience of an interruption of our meaningful world.²⁰ This is nothing like Husserl’s scientific pursuit of universal knowledge-claims of absolute validity pertaining to the objects of intentional consciousness. It is rather an interpretative retrieval of the significance of a particular lived experience akin to the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research advanced by Heidegger.

Yet, despite adhering to his approach toward phenomenological research, Levinas does not agree with Heidegger’s description of the concrete. This is because Heidegger’s idea of the concrete always refers to the understanding of Being in *Dasein*. For instance, even when our implicit understanding of Being is ‘interrupted’ in the experience of anguish, thus allowing for our meaningful world to be questioned and reinterpreted, the encounter with nothingness in such moments still rests upon the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 7/23.

²⁰ Levinas plays on the French word *sentiment* in this context seeing as it can be translated both as ‘sense’ and ‘feeling’. The ‘sense’ of Being in general, then, derives from a particular ‘feeling’ which, as will become clear over the course of this chapter, stems from the lived body.

explicit understanding of Being revealed through an awareness of *one's own* death, which belongs to *Dasein's* essential structure. In this regard, the topic of 'Being in general' is suppressed by Heidegger due to the fact that his description of the concrete always rests upon an understanding subject, namely, *Dasein*.²¹ Levinas seeks to demonstrate that prior to the understanding of Being in *Dasein* there is an experience of 'Being in general' within concrete life. This experience becomes evident 'in the situation of an end of the world', as Levinas puts it, since it is in such moments when 'the primary relationship which binds us to Being [in general] becomes palpable'.²² This is an experience of its own kind (*sui generis*). Straightaway, it is important to emphasise that Levinas utilises the terms 'relationship' here by analogy. Confirming this point, Levinas admits,

But the word relationship is not appropriate here; it implies terms, substantives. It takes them to be coordinated, but also independent. The relationship with Being [in general] is only remotely like that; it is called a relationship only by analogy.²³

A relationship always corresponds to the coordination of two independent constituents. In Heidegger's version of phenomenology, this relationship is evident in the understanding of Being as an association between the independent constituents of the world and *Dasein*. We also see it in Husserl's version of phenomenology as a result of the constitution of being established from the intuitive appearance of independent

²¹ This point is also evident based on Heidegger's rejection of the experience of 'resistance' as an encounter with reality in itself, *contra* Dilthey and Max Scheler. On this point, Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*: 'Resistance is encountered in a not-coming-through, and it is a hindrance to willing to come through. With such willing, however, something must have already been disclosed which one's will and one's drives are out for'. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §43, 'Dasein, Worldhood, and Reality', p. 253/210. In other words, what determines the will and one's drives, for Heidegger, are the possibilities contained within its specific environment and it is only on the basis of such possibilities that the experience of resistance can be understood. Nevertheless, having undercut Heidegger's description of the concreteness of *Dasein* by grasping life in the instant of need, Levinas can now show that experiences like that of resistance and interruption have a *different significance* from the absolute position of the lived body which, subsequently, endures prior any sense of the understanding of Being in *Dasein*.

²² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/23.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 8/23-24.

objects to intentional consciousness through the harmony (*zusammenhang*) of *one's own* actual perceptual experiences.²⁴

The idea of 'Being in general' that Levinas seeks to highlight does not convey this type of relationship. 'In the situation of an end of the world', which functions as the moment in concrete life when the brute fact of being reveals itself, the distinction between the source of experience and what is experienced disappears. 'For the Being which we become aware of when the world disappears is not a person or a thing, or the sum total of persons and things', as Levinas remarks, 'it is the fact that one is, the fact that *there is*'.²⁵ As a result, Levinas refers to 'Being in general' as the *il y a* since it signifies that *there is* being irrespective of our specific understanding of Being.²⁶ Despite this fact, however, Levinas maintains that a 'relationship' exists between us and this anonymous sense of being by virtue of the fact that we *exist*. On the point, Levinas writes,

Who or what is does not come into communication with its existence by virtue of a decision taken prior to the drama [of existence], before the curtain rises; it takes up this existence by existing already.²⁷

²⁴ According to Husserl, a 'concrete' relationship always corresponds to a particular association between 'non-independent' constituents. The immanent perception of a currently lived experience, for example, forms one concrete *cogitation* and this fact is used by Husserl to demonstrate the absolute and necessary existence of one's own actual consciousness itself. An abstract content, by comparison, is one that can exist in relation apart from the thing under consideration, e.g., the particular colour of a coloured thing (whether the leaf is green or brown), even though extension forms a concrete part of any possible coloured thing since, for Husserl, colour itself implies extension. This analysis of dependent and non-independent parts of a relationship still holds true within phenomenology, which rejects all metaphysical presuppositions, based upon the necessary correlation of apodictic certainty, that is to say, 'an inability to be otherwise', between the source of experience and what is experienced. See, De Boer, *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, p. 22.

²⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/24.

²⁶ Levinas's appeal to the brute fact that *there is* being (*il y a l'être*) is an explicit move away from Heidegger's conception of the being that gives itself to *Dasein* (*es gibt Sein*) in the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*). Further explaining this difference, Levinas notes: 'The Heideggerian *es gibt* is a generosity. That is the great theme of the later Heidegger: being gives itself anonymously. But like an abundance, like a diffuse goodness. On the contrary, the *there is* is unbearable in its indifference. Not an anguish but horror of the unceasing, of a monotony deprived of meaning. [...] My effort in *Existence and Existents* consists in investigating the experience of the exit from this anonymous "nonsense"'. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be*, p. 45. Whilst the *il y a*, then, does not have a corresponding object it should not be equated with the nothingness of anguish; rather, as Levinas describes, it is like 'a noise returning after every negation of this noise'. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 48. Accordingly, Levinas links the experience of it with 'horror and 'panic'. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/24.

Prior to our understanding of Being, then, we have already made ‘a contract with existence’, to use Levinas’s phrase, that is to say, we have already demonstrated an adherence toward ‘existence’ in concrete life.²⁸ If we did not, we would simply not ‘exist’. The fact that we do ‘exist’ implies that ‘an incomparable event’ has already taken place. This event corresponds to the moment when an individual ‘existent’ arises out of anonymous ‘existence’ to take ownership over *its own* existence.²⁹ It describes, what Levinas calls, ‘an event of birth’, or, ‘hypostasis’.³⁰

§2.1.3 *The Event of Hypostasis*

Whilst deliberating over the event of birth, that is to say, the moment in which a distinct existent arises in anonymous existence, i.e., hypostasis, it is of importance to remember that Levinas does so from a phenomenological perspective.³¹ This perspective endeavours to analyse and attest to concrete life prior to all reflection. Concrete existence, therefore, corresponds to ‘the fact of existing, outside of thought’ where, as Levinas notes, the ‘affectivity and action’ of ‘things and persons’ constitute ‘the

²⁸ Ibid., p. 16/33.

²⁹ A description of this movement from anonymous existence toward the advent of a personal existent denotes the central aim of *Existence and Existents*. Incidentally, as Seán Hand observes, the English translation of *Existence and Existents* loses sight of the significances of this movement for Levinas’s overall philosophical project. Seán Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 30. A more faithful translation of the original French title, *De l’existence à l’existant*, would be *From Existence to the Existent*. Under these circumstances, Levinas progresses in the opposite direction of Heidegger, who starts from the understanding of Being, belonging to the personal experience of *Dasein*, and then attempts to arrive at an understanding of Being in general *qua* temporality. Heidegger’s insistence on describing concrete life from the standpoint of *Dasein*, however, prevents him from ever appreciating the generality of being in all of its impersonality, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned.

³⁰ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/24.

³¹ The term ‘hypostasis’, as Clarence W. Joldersma remarks, ‘is the Greek version of the word for substance’. Clarence W. Joldersma, ‘The Importance of Enjoyment and Inspiration for Learning from a Teacher’, in *Levinas and Education: At the Intersection of Faith and Reason*, ed. by Denise Egéa-Kuehne (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 43-55 (p. 46). However, since Levinas argues from a phenomenological perspective, this term should not be considered in line with the substantial metaphysics of the Greek tradition. Instead, for Levinas, hypostasis refers to an accomplishment in existence since in order to be a distinct existent it is necessary to maintain a place from which to exist. The event of hypostasis refers to this continuous renewal of one’s own place in existence. ‘Hypostatic existents’, therefore, are never ‘static’, to use John Llewelyn’s phrase, seeing as ‘even their standing still is the accomplishment of a movement, the accomplishment of commencement, a fresh start that interrupts the droning ground-base of impersonal being’. John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 23.

conduct of life'.³² Prior to participating in this existence, 'an event of birth' must take place so as to become a 'thing or person' capable of 'affectivity and action'. According to Levinas, 'this event occurs at each moment' when 'the conquest' over Being in general 'continually recommences'.³³ Under these circumstances, 'an event of birth' does not signify the biological process of being born. Such a process characterises a once-off event transpiring within history. Furthermore, it also presupposes an attitude toward existence as 'the struggle for life', that is to say, as the 'pure and simple existence' which becomes 'an objective' through the biological requirement of 'satisfying our needs'.³⁴ When considered in this way, existence 'appears as a struggle for the future' owing to 'the care that a being takes for its endurance and conservation'.³⁵ Nevertheless, it also represents, as Levinas comments, 'the struggle of an already existent being for the prolongation of its existence'.³⁶ Consequently, this view does not 'grasp the relationship of an existent with its existence' as deeply as Levinas would like seeing that it demonstrates an attitude toward existence 'which arises from reflection'. In other words, such an approach does not consider the event of hypostasis *concretely*; rather, it involves active reflection on 'the meaning of life' which takes place 'over and beyond that birth' as 'an already constituted existence turns back over itself'.³⁷ To consider the event of hypostasis concretely, then, means describing

³² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 8/24.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10/26.

³⁵ *Ibid.* This view, of course, also belongs to the understanding of Being in *Dasein* since, as Heidegger notes in definitive terms: '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 (*Sein*), that Being (*Sein*) is an *issue* for it'. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32/12. What is at stake for *Dasein*, therefore, when expressing its understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) is that very Being (*Sein*) itself. This is why Heidegger claims that *Dasein* can either 'own' or 'disown' itself. Only the former corresponds to an 'authentic' understanding of Being, for Heidegger, considering that, in such cases, *Dasein* expresses concern for its own being and nothing else. It is this singular view which reduces the meaning of Being (*der Sinn von Sein*) to concern for oneself that Levinas seeks to challenge in his version of phenomenology.

³⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 10/26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10-11/26-27. Such reflection on the meaning of life, or Being, in which an already constituted existence 'turns back over itself' also holds for Heidegger's characterisation of and reflection on *Dasein* as a being for its own death. This type of reflection, as Schleiermacher had already pointed out, is a

the moment in which a distinct existent becomes separated from anonymous existence. Such an event does not constitute a single moment in time. On the contrary, it occurs at each moment when a distinct existent takes ownership of a concrete position in being.

According to Levinas, all thought presupposes a concrete position where active reflection happens. Reflection does not occur ‘outside of space’, as idealism has led us to believe, rather, thought occurs ‘here’, that is to say, it has a specific location, place, or position.³⁸ The philosophical tradition has overlooked this concrete position of thought due to its preference to commence from the very fact of consciousness itself. The fact of consciousness, however, already implies substantives considering that it always corresponds to a personal relation with existence. In this regard, as Levinas confirms, ‘consciousness appears to stand out against the *there is (il y a)* by its ability to forget and interrupt it’.³⁹ The existence of a distinct existent, therefore, presupposes that anonymous existence has already been interrupted and, moreover, the forgetfulness of the concrete position of consciousness ensues due to the fact that it has been taken up prior to the emergence of consciousness itself. On this point, Levinas writes,

Consciousness is a mode of being, but, in taking up being, it is a hesitation in being. It thus gives itself the dimension of retreat.⁴⁰

By epitomising the capacity to reflect on being, consciousness reveals a hesitation toward Being in general. It establishes a ‘secure’ present from which thought can ensue thus opposing itself to ‘the anonymous flow of existence’.⁴¹ Nevertheless, behind this ‘secure’ present of the reflective ego remains the location or position from which a

product of ‘analytic contemplation’, which forgets the ‘genuine states of feeling’ that persist ‘unaltered during a series of diverse acts of thinking and willing’, and takes up ‘no relation’ to such reflections. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. by Rev. D. M. Baille et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 7. Thus, in addition to ‘the objective self-consciousness of a self’, e.g. *Dasein*, as a being for its own death, there is also a genuine sense of concrete experience *qua* feeling that remains untouched by objective ‘self-approval’. Incidentally, like Schleiermacher, Levinas also emphasises feeling as the most concrete form of experience. See, §2.1.5.

³⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 65/100.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64/99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23/42.

distinct existent has already taken ownership over its place in existence. This place reveals the ‘true’ present of the existent’s distinct existence since it corresponds to the condition that ultimately constitutes thought. As a result, thought seeks to ‘catch up’ with this necessary condition through reflection despite always ‘lagging behind’ due to its dimension of retreat.⁴²

Consciousness belongs to a certain place. Moreover, for Levinas, the concreteness of this place can be described phenomenologically from the absolute position of the lived body. Here, Levinas continues with his initial description of the concrete in *On Escape* (1935), which undercuts both Husserl and Heidegger’s respective versions of phenomenology by highlighting the concreteness of the body as lived in the instant of need.⁴³ In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas recommences along these lines by criticising the abstract explanation of the body as an object which philosophy has subsequently come to accept as a result of metaphysical dualism.⁴⁴ ‘The

⁴² Ibid., p. 65/100. Here, Levinas is critiquing the idea of ‘pure’ consciousness as initially established within the Post-Kantian German Idealist tradition, with thinkers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and subsequently taken up within phenomenology by Husserl. For both Fichte and Husserl, philosophy begins and ends with the pure thinking ego. Additionally, for both, as Kah Kyung Cho notes, the ‘world’ is ‘something created by this ego’. Kah Kyung Cho, ‘Phenomenology as a Rigorous Philosophy in Theory and Practice’, in *Philosophy and Science in Phenomenological Perspective*, ed. by Kah Kyung Cho (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), pp. xi-xxiii (p. xviii). In this respect, consciousness does not rest upon any place, rather, it is the world that rests upon consciousness. By founding the independent existence of the world in the instant of need, Levinas challenges Husserl without resorting to any naturalistic interpretations concerning the existence of the world.

⁴³ See, §1.3.4.

⁴⁴ Despite his critique of metaphysical dualism, Husserl still adheres to an abstract understanding of the body in his version of phenomenology. De Boer notes that in *Ideas I* there are two ways that Husserl outlines the manner in which ‘consciousness is bound to the world’. De Boer, *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, p. 348. Firstly, for Husserl, ‘consciousness forms a psycho-physical unity together with a body’ and, secondly, ‘it is a consciousness of the world’. Ibid. Thus, De Boer remarks that, ‘(F)ollowing Ricoeur’s lead, we could speak of these two aspects as incarnation and perception. Ricoeur rightly adds: “the second is the key to the first for Husserl”’. We see that Husserl does not return to the first relation at all. The argument is made in connection with the perceived thing. Once it has been shown that the perceived thing is an intentional correlate of consciousness, it is accepted as a foregone conclusion that this holds for one’s own body as well. One’s body is also a dependent correlate of consciousness, and the incarnation that appears to bind consciousness and the body together into a unity is an illusion of the natural attitude.’ Ibid. As a result, the existence of consciousness is not dependent on the body, for Husserl, rather, it is the existence of the body, conceived here as a mere object of perception, that is dependent on consciousness. This supposition by Husserl leaves the topic of the lived body unaddressed within phenomenology. In addition to Levinas and Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty also addresses the topic of the lived body within phenomenology.

body excluded by Cartesian doubt', Levinas informs us, 'is the body object'.⁴⁵ Under these circumstances, the body is maintained as an extended substance ontologically distinct from the thinking substance grasping it. Nevertheless, for Levinas, there is another understanding of the body implicit in the Cartesian *cogito*. As Levinas explains,

The *cogito* does not lead to the impersonal position: 'there is thought,' but to the first person in the present: 'I am something that thinks.' The word *thing* is here admirably exact. For the most profound teaching of the Cartesian *cogito* consists in discovering thought as a substance, that is, as something posited. Thought has a point of departure. There is not only a consciousness of localisation, but a *localisation of consciousness*, which is *not in turn reabsorbed into consciousness*, into knowing. There is here something that stands out against knowing, that is a condition for [reflective] knowing.⁴⁶

Thought emerges as a constituent of a particular thing that exists. Furthermore, this thing is something that 'I am', that is to say, it is my 'point of departure'. Levinas links this point of departure to the body as experienced concretely, 'the first person in the present'. When analysed in this way, it proves 'that I do not only *have* a body' but *am* a body, to quote Levinas.⁴⁷ My body, therefore, not understood as an object but as my 'point of departure', corresponds to the 'base' from which I can 'take up' existence. In this respect, my base is not 'posited', as Levinas observes, rather, 'it is a position'.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 65/100.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66/100-101, my emphasis.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69/105. Yet, since I possess the ability to think and know myself as a body, I am also *more* than this body. In this respect, Levinas agrees with Gabriel Marcel when the latter suggests that I am my body but my body is not me. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, trans. by G. S. Fraser (London: Harvill Press, 1950), p. 101. In other words, whilst my body is the fundamental position from which I exist, I am not reducible to the immanence of my body. To reduce my existence to that of a body would be to understand one's own body abstractly and not concretely or phenomenologically. Levinas was acquainted with Marcel personally and, as Cohen notes, 'attended the Saturday evening gatherings of the philosophical avant-garde at Marcel's house in the 1930s'. See, Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 34, n. 8. These gatherings were also attended by Ricoeur, for whom, as one commentator observes, Marcel was somewhat of a mentor. Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 58. The three of these men would all go on to view consciousness as necessarily incarnate. Levinas wrote two articles on Marcel. See, Emmanuel Levinas, 'Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Philosophy', in *Outside the Subject*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 14-29. See also, Emmanuel Levinas, 'A New Rationality: On Gabriel Marcel', in *Entre Nous*, pp. 53-55. For a commentary on the relationship between Levinas and Marcel, see, Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 69/105.

Prior to its appearance as an object of thought, the body exists as my point of departure. It thus reveals an event corresponding to ‘the interruption in anonymous being of localization itself’.⁴⁹ When taken as ‘an event’, the body is not seen as ‘a being’, ‘substantive’, ‘instrument’, ‘symbol’, or ‘symptom of position’.⁵⁰ It is rather seen as the very condition from which anonymous existence transforms into a personal existent. Under these circumstances, consciousness always belongs to a certain place, that is to say, it is necessarily embodied. Levinas reflects on the notion of sleep, or the ‘retreat of consciousness toward unconsciousness’, in order to prove this point.⁵¹ He tells us,

To sleep is to suspend physical and psychic activity. But an abstract being, hovering in the air, lacks an essential condition for this suspending: a place. The summoning of sleep occurs in the act of lying down. To lie down is precisely to limit existence to a place, to position.⁵²

If consciousness was truly disembodied and we existed as abstract beings ‘hovering in the air’ as transcendent souls, thinking substances, purely rational agents, or transcendental egos, sleep would not be possible. Sleep can only happen if there is somewhere from which to sleep, that is to say, if there is a place for consciousness to become unconscious. Concluding on this point, Levinas comments,

A place is not an indifferent ‘somewhere,’ but a base, a condition. Of course, we ordinarily understand our localization as that of a body situated just anywhere. That is because the positive relationship with a place which we maintain in sleep is masked by our relations with things. Then only concrete determinations of the surroundings, of the setting, and the ties of habit and of history give an individual

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 69-70/105.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 64/100.

⁵² Ibid., p. 66/102. For Levinas, since one’s own actual body functions as the ‘essential condition’ for any act of consciousness, including those which attempt to grasp consciousness in abstract terms, that is to say, as independent from all worldly relations, the concreteness of the lived body is the necessary prerequisite for the transcendental reduction of *Ideas I*, which Husserl uses as a means to place the body between brackets in order to ascertain the absolute existence of consciousness. Drabinski is correct, therefore, when he claims that it is by elaborating on the concreteness of the lived body that Levinas seals the critique of Husserl’s version of phenomenology for being *too abstract*. John E. Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 31. Although this critique of Husserl began with Heidegger’s formulation of the subject *qua Dasein*, the exclusion of the body from fundamental ontology prevents Heidegger from appreciating the depth of concrete life as found in the work of Levinas.

character to a place which has become our home (*le chez-soi*), our hometown, our homeland, the world. When detached from its atmosphere, localization is generally taken to be presence in an abstract extension, like that of a star in the infinity of space. Sleep re-establishes a relationship with a place *qua* base. In lying down, in curling up in a corner to sleep, we abandon ourselves to a place; *qua* base it becomes our refuge. Then all our work of being consists in resting. Sleep is like entering into a contract with the protective forces of a place; to seek after sleep is to gropingly seek after that contact. When one wakes up one finds oneself shut up in one's immobility like an egg in a shell. This surrender to a base which also offers refuge constitutes sleep, in which being, without being destroyed, is suspended.⁵³

As a result of our body *qua* base, then, consciousness can both arise and retreat. This place, however, does not refer to a specific environment of concrete determinations. It rather denotes a necessary condition prior to the experience of 'ideal' or 'geometric' space.⁵⁴ In other words, consciousness always presupposes that a concrete event has already taken place within existence, namely, the event of hypostasis, in which a distinct existent *qua* lived body transmutes the anonymous flow existence and takes ownership of its own position in existence.

§2.1.4 *Concrete Life in the Instant*

The notion that consciousness rests upon a specific place is not exactly a novel position within phenomenology. It is, after all, this idea that underpins Heidegger's critique of Husserl's version of phenomenology. Owing to his hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research, Heidegger uncovers a particular condition presupposed by Husserl's description of concrete life *qua* intentional consciousness. Heidegger describes this position as the place (*der Ort*) in which an implicit understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) is explicitly expressed by that-which-is (*Seiende*) temporally unfolding within an awareness of what it means 'to be' (*Sein*), namely, *Dasein*. In this respect, prior to the appearance of objects to intentional consciousness, there is already a meaningful world to which one belongs and in which one always participates. Similar

⁵³ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 67/102-103.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69/104-105.

to Levinas's approach above, Heidegger even makes this point in relation to the Cartesian *cogito* by reversing Descartes's famous phrase to '*sum, ergo, cogito*'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the place that Levinas seeks to highlight in *Existence and Existents*, as the condition arrived at in the event of hypostasis, should not be equated with the place of *Dasein*. It is, in fact, an entirely different experience of place and of being placed in being as it describes a base much deeper than that of our understanding of Being in *Dasein*.⁵⁶ Explaining this point, Levinas comments,

The here that belongs to consciousness, the place of its sleep and of its escape into itself, is *radically different* from the *Da* [there] involved in Heidegger's *Dasein*. The latter already implies world. The here we are [Levinas is] starting with, the here of position, precedes every act of understanding, every horizon and all [experience of] time. It is the very fact that consciousness is an origin, that it starts from itself, that it is an existent. In its very life as consciousness it always precedes from its position, from the pre-existing 'relationship' with a base, a place, which in sleep it embraces to the exclusion of all else [arrived at in and through conscious reflection].⁵⁷

The place that Levinas describes as our point of departure 'precedes every act of understanding, every horizon and all time'. Whilst the notion of a place underlying consciousness is not exactly a new topic for phenomenological research, the formulation of place as preceding all temporal experience is revolutionary within phenomenology. The reason for this innovation stems from the fact that temporality constitutes the very essence of subjectivity, as far as Husserl and Heidegger are concerned, irrespective of their different formulations of subjectivity as pure intentional consciousness and *Dasein*.

According to Husserl, concrete life as experienced through intentional consciousness constitutes a temporal flow. Each moment (impression) arrives from a

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 254/211.

⁵⁶ Jacques Taminiaux phrases this difference quite well by saying: 'Whereas Heidegger defines the individual existent as *being-there*, Levinas defines it as *here-being*. The *Da* of *Da-sein* is right-away absorbed into an ek-static movement. Levinas objects that the emphasis put on such movement overlooks what he [Levinas] calls the position of consciousness'. Jacques Taminiaux, 'The Presence of Being and Time in Totality and Infinity', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Joelle Hansel (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), pp. 3-22 (p. 9).

⁵⁷ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 68-69/104, my emphasis.

preceding moment (retention) and anticipates the next moment (protention) within the temporal unity of conscious experience. This ‘abiding structure’, as one commentator calls it, makes phenomenological reflection possible as well as defining, for Husserl, the very being of consciousness itself.⁵⁸ Without this structure, therefore, consciousness would not be able to reflect upon and know itself.⁵⁹ Summing up Husserl’s position on temporal flow of subjective life *qua* consciousness, Sebastian Luft writes,

In short, Husserl’s analysis of time-consciousness thematises the temporality of the flow of subjective life itself. Conscious life is a dynamic flow of ever-new now-points in which the Ego lives in the ‘lived present’. However, the ‘nows’ are not discrete points (as, for example, in Aristotle’s concept of time), but each present consciousness is embedded in a temporal horizon, in that each now-impression is preceded by a previous one which is not ‘past’ but which ‘lingers’, and likewise, the present now anticipates a new now. Hearing a melody as melody (and not a sequence of unrelated tones) is only possible if that which I just heard is retained while I hear a present note and the hearing of the note now anticipates another coming note. The analysis of the temporal structure of subjective life itself reveals that the primal impression of the now is embedded in a series of immediate past retentions and protentions immediately to come.⁶⁰

Under these circumstances, the subject does not experience time as a steady present which offers a distinct perception at each moment. It rather experiences the present within a temporal unity owing to the various perceptions retained and anticipated in each and every moment. This is why Husserl goes to such extreme lengths to ‘purify’ the present moment of all naturalistic interpretations so as to apprehend the original givenness of concrete life in his version of phenomenology. ‘Naturalistic’ interpretations of the present moment cannot truly apprehend the original givenness of concrete life since they always include past retentions and future protentions. For this

⁵⁸ Thomas Seebohm, *Hermeneutics: Method and Methodology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 99.

⁵⁹ To use Seebohm’s words: ‘This formal structure of three mutually founded abstract moments is a standing, abiding structure. The upsurge and flowing off of time is the upsurge and flowing off of contents within this standing form. The whole structure is pre-given for the ego, for its lived experience, and for its intentional activities. An intentional activity that does not happen in time is an impossibility. To have a temporal horizon is essential for intentional acts in general, and inner temporality is not constituted by a synthesising spontaneity: it is the form in which active consciousness and an ego upsurge like all other contents’. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

⁶⁰ Sebastian Luft, *Subjectivity and Lifeworld in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. 248.

reason, Husserl claims that, whilst necessary for eidetic and constitutive analysis, the transcendental phenomenological reduction nevertheless represents an ‘unnatural’ way of apprehending experience.⁶¹ Certainly, we can examine the original givenness of sound, for instance, within the phenomenological reduction to facilitate the constitution of ‘pitch’ as belonging necessarily to the essence of sound given that, as Levinas observes, it is ‘presupposed by all the other contingent predicates which can belong to sound’.⁶² Irrespective of the apodictic certainty pertaining to this abstract truth, however, our ‘natural’ perception of sound does not merely convey ‘pitch’ or ‘a sequence of unrelated tones’. It rather gives itself as a temporal structure, as Luft intimates above, through the experience of a melody. Husserl confirms this position in his lectures on internal time-consciousness by writing,

The perception of the sound in the perception’s ever new now is not a mere having of the sound, even of the sound in the now-phase. On the contrary, we find in each now, in addition to the actual physical content, an adumbration; or better: we find a unique sound-adumbration that terminates in the actually sensed sound-now. If we focus reflectively on what is presently given in the actually present now with respect to the sound of the postilion’s horn, or the rumbling of the coach, and if we reflect on it just as it is given, then we note the trail of memory that extends the now-point of the sound or of the rumbling. This reflection makes it evident that the immanent thing could not be given in its unity at all if the perceptual consciousness did not also encompass, along with the point of actually present sensation, the continuity of fading phases that pertain to the sensations belonging to earlier nows. The past would be nothing for the consciousness belonging to the now if it were not represented in the now; and the now would not be now — that is, for the perceiving consciousness pertaining to the moment in question — if it did not stand before me in that consciousness as the limit of a past being. The past must be represented in this now as past, and this is accomplished through the continuity of adumbrations that in one direction terminates in the sensation-point and in the other direction and in the other direction becomes blurred and indeterminate.⁶³

Perceptual experience, therefore, which the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness establish as the foundation of our subjectivity, necessarily corresponds to

⁶¹ Dan Zahavi notes this point by highlighting the various ways in which Husserl describes the transcendental-phenomenological attitude as ‘an unnatural direction for thought’ based upon its endeavour to inquire into concrete life ‘prior to all natural knowledge and science’. Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Legacy: Phenomenology, Metaphysics, and Transcendental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 147.

⁶² Levinas, ‘On Ideas’, p. 5.

⁶³ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, trans. by J. B. Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), p. 290.

the temporal unity of past, present, and future in the ‘living now’, as far as Husserl is concerned.

Heidegger’s formulation of subjectivity does not rest upon perceptual experience or the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. It rests on the place (*der Ort*) in which an understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) is explicitly expressed by that which is (*Seiende*) temporally unfolding within an implicit awareness of what it means to be (*Sein*), that is to say, it rests upon the ‘there’ (*Da*) of Being (*Sein*) — *Dasein*. Regardless of this fundamental difference to Husserl’s formulation, however, for Heidegger, subjectivity still maintains its temporal structure within *Dasein*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes this point by highlighting ‘the formal existential totality of *Dasein*’s ontological structural whole’.⁶⁴ ‘The Being of *Dasein*’, as Heidegger explains, ‘means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)’.⁶⁵ Heidegger thus begins with the fact that *Dasein* is ‘Being-already-in-the-world’. This phrase corresponds to Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* as ‘thrown’ (*Geworfen*) into the world, which is to say, that *Dasein* ‘always already’ finds itself within a specific concrete situation not of its choosing. *Dasein*’s ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*) constitutes the meaningful background of experience that we carry with us throughout our lives. It, therefore, represents the past in *Dasein*’s ‘formal existential totality’. Similar to past moments in Husserl’s formulation of subjectivity, *Dasein*’s ‘thrownness’ lingers in the present on account of our ‘Being-alongside entities encountered within the world’. Heidegger alludes to this state as *Dasein*’s ‘fallenness’ (*Verfallenheit*). The state of ‘fallenness’ describes *Dasein*’s everyday existence toward ‘entities encountered within the world’, which is to say, that *Dasein* interacts with entities based upon the understanding of Being it has been

⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 237/192.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

previously thrown into. In this respect, *Dasein*'s 'fallenness' refers to the present situation that we occupy through our practical engagement with entities in the world. Finally, Heidegger mentions that *Dasein* is 'ahead-of-itself'. This idea of *Dasein* 'Being-ahead-of-itself' relates to the concept of 'projection' (*Entwurf*) in Heidegger's philosophy. *Dasein*'s thrownness establishes possibilities for action, which is to say, that the understanding of Being we find ourselves in projects itself onto the world around us and enables our engagement with entities. Projection, then, constitutes the future aspect of *Dasein*'s ontological structure. Furthermore, it is due to this future aspect of projection that *Dasein*, most significantly, comes into contact with *its own* death as the end of all its possibilities, or, to use Heidegger's phrase, 'the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*'.⁶⁶ Death confronts *Dasein* with its own temporal structure in the affective disposition of anxiety by deeming its 'fallenness' as an 'inauthentic' (un-owned) understanding of Being thus allowing for its 'thrownness' to be discarded in order for the meaning of Being (*der Sinn von Sein*) to be authentically reinterpreted (owned) and projected toward the future in *Dasein*. Notwithstanding his critique of Husserl's emphasis on the experience of consciousness, then, Heidegger clearly maintains the temporal structure of subjectivity in *Dasein*, as the totality of past, present, and future, which founds my actual concrete individual existence.

It is this formulation of subjectivity that Levinas seeks to overcome in *Existence and Existents*.⁶⁷ His reason for doing so corresponds to the fact that both Husserl and

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 294/250.

⁶⁷ Neal DeRoo also notices this critique of Husserl and Heidegger within Levinas's version of phenomenology. In DeRoo's words, 'the horizons of retention and expectation', as put forward hitherto in phenomenology, 'reduce the novelty of time to the predictability of horizons'. Neal De Roo, *Futurity in Phenomenology: Promise and Method in Husserl, Levinas, and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 58. This means that all time becomes predicated on, as DeRoo correctly observes, 'the possibilities of the (present) subject'. Ibid. Thus, for both Husserl and Heidegger, it is impossible for anything to be experienced outside of subjective horizons. One of Levinas's philosophical goals is to rescue the possibility of experiencing genuine 'novelty' within concrete life. In other words, Levinas wants to show that something completely unexpected can happen beyond the temporal horizons of the subject. In an article written in 1980, entitled 'The Old and the New', Levinas outlines this goal

Heidegger neglect a fundamental aspect of concrete life, namely, the encounter with the brute fact of being. This encounter cannot occur from the point of view of temporal subjectivity considering that this formulation of the subject always has a personal relation to existence through either the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness or the understanding of Being in *Dasein* thus comprehending being as fundamentally meaningful. In order to highlight the impersonal ‘relationship’ with existence, Levinas seeks to highlight ‘the instant’ *par excellence*. ‘The instant’ contains within it the act by which, as Levinas notes, ‘existence is acquired’, that is to say, the moment when an existent arises out of anonymous existence to take ownership of a distinct position in existence.⁶⁸ As such, ‘the instant’ signifies the ‘accomplishment of existence’ thus establishing ‘the present’ from which temporal subjectivity can then unfold.⁶⁹ This is not an achievement (*Leistung*) of consciousness (Husserl) or of *Dasein* in the affective disposition of anxiety (Heidegger). It corresponds rather to the absolute position of the lived body, where, as Levinas writes,

Each instant is a beginning, a birth [...] an instant is a relationship, a conquest, although this relationship does not refer to any future or past, nor to any being or event situated in that past or future. An instant *qua* beginning and birth is a relationship *sui generis*, a relationship with and initiation into Being.⁷⁰

The event of birth, which founds the place from which temporal subjectivity begins, can only be grasped in the instant since contained within this singular moment is the fundamental ‘relationship’ with existence as ‘hypostasis’, that is to say, ‘the upsurge of an existent into existence’.⁷¹ As a result of this critique of Husserl and Heidegger’s common take on subjectivity, then, Levinas discovers an impersonal ‘relationship’ with

explicitly with reference to Bergson, who makes the human being ‘the original place of rupture’ in which the ‘welcoming’ of ‘absolute novelty’ can take place. See, Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Old and the New’, in *Time and the Other*, pp. 121- 138 (pp. 132-133).

⁶⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 75/111.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74/111.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75/111.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25/45.

being. This ‘relationship’ does not stem from ‘intentionality’ (Husserl) or ‘handlability’ (Heidegger) since both form personal relationships with being, rather, it is felt through the lived body as pure sensation in the instant.⁷²

§2.1.5 *The Instant of Sensation*

When concrete life is reduced to the instant prior to temporal subjectivity as lived through the body a new conception of sensation arises within philosophy. In formulating this new conception, Levinas criticises the tradition of metaphysical dualism for identifying sensation with ‘the acts of feeling, suffering, desiring or willing that ‘belong to the life of the mind’ by virtue of the fact of their ‘being conscious’, ‘being experiences’, and ‘being thoughts in the Cartesian sense’.⁷³ He also criticises empiricism for ‘locating the origin of cognition in sensation’ thus remaining ‘faithful to this identification’.⁷⁴ Such accounts, for Levinas, neglect the ‘peculiar savour’ and ‘density’ of sensation, which, prior to any acts of cognition, seems ‘obscure’ and ‘confused’ in its original purity.⁷⁵ Further explaining this point, Levinas comments,

In sensation there is, according to the traditional interpretation, no movement more inward that would be prior to the apprehension in it. In sensation the sensible object shall be constituted, but the mind is already constituted; it is already a knowing and apprehending.⁷⁶

⁷² Joseph Libertson acknowledges the notion of pure sensation as lived in the instant of the body as Levinas’s attempt to recover the primary impression (*Urimpression*) of being prior to any intentional acts of consciousness within phenomenology. In such instants of sensation, ‘(T)he subject is no longer a pure subject, [and] the object is no longer a pure object. The phenomenon is at the same time that which is revealed and that which reveals, being and the access to being. The concept of *Urimpression* implies a pure vulnerability or susceptibility of closure in the economy of manifestation’. Joseph Libertson, ‘Levinas and Husserl: Sensation and Intentionality’, in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 41 (1979), 485-502 (p. 488). As a result, the instant of bodily sensation obscures the distinction between subject and object to reveal the brute fact of being in general. Nevertheless, it is still through the description of certain affective dispositions as felt in the instant of bodily sensation that Levinas discovers this encounter with the brute fact of being. Heidegger’s way of describing the concrete, therefore, remains essential for Levinas’s version of phenomenology, despite this reengagement with Husserl. See, §1.3.5.

⁷³ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 42/67.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42/67-68.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42/68.

From the standpoint of the thinking subject, sensation always leads to the constitution of the sensed object. It thus belongs to the material of perception in the correlative relationship between subject and object.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, having successfully established the absolute position of the lived body in the instant prior to the thinking subject, Levinas can now reformulate the notion of sensation outside of correlational terms. In doing so, Levinas writes,

Sensation is not the way that leads to an object but the obstacle that keeps one from it, but it is not of the subjective order either: it is not the material of perception [...], it returns to the impersonality of elements.⁷⁸

Under these circumstances, then, sensation corresponds to a sense of experience prior to the constitution of subject and object as two distinct entities. It reveals the ‘impersonality of elements’ in the instant of sensation as opposed to the personality of objects when apprehended by an already constituted thinking subject. As a result, for Levinas, sensation when reduced to the instant of the body exposes the basic mode in which an existent lives in a distinct position in existence thus illustrating its ‘relationship’ with existence in general.

In order to give his new conception of sensation validity, Levinas progresses with a phenomenological analysis of concrete life as lived in the instant of the absolute position of the body. The evidence for Levinas’s analyses come from certain affective dispositions in which sensation exposes an existent’s preexisting contract with existence.

⁷⁷ This is also the case for Husserl who accepts *hyletic* (sensory) data but *not* as something, to quote Uwe Meixner, ‘that is *given*’ or ‘that is simply *present* to consciousness’. Uwe Meixner, *Defending Husserl: A Plea in the Case of Wittgenstein & Company versus Phenomenology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), p. 440. Expanding on this point, Meixner comments: ‘Sensory, or *hyletic*, data are, for Husserl, *not* “simply present to consciousness”; on the contrary, what according to him, is simply present to consciousness are the intentional objects of experience (for example, a tree *as perceived* in the perception). And note, hyletic data are neither “brute” nor primitive for Husserl. The best way to regard them is this: they are dependent aspects of irreducibly intrinsically meaningful experiences, which become visible only in the reflective attitude and only if, in that attitude, one is guided by a [scientific] phenomenologist’s theoretical purpose of elucidating the experience’s intentionality: the constitution — within the experience — of the experience’s *noema*’. Ibid. Sensory data, therefore, as far as Husserl is concerned, never leads to the brute fact of being; rather, it embellishes the description of an already perceived object of intentional consciousness.

⁷⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 47/75.

Here, Levinas's way of describing the concrete is consistent with his hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research in *On Escape* (1935).⁷⁹ In that text, Levinas focused on the affective dispositions of malaise, shame, and nausea in order to describe the encounter with the brute fact of being. In *Existence and Existents*, the affective disposition of 'fatigue' takes centre stage.⁸⁰ Developing this account, Levinas observes,

The numbness of fatigue is a telling characteristic. It is an impossibility of following through, a constant and increasing lag between being and what it remains attached to, like a hand little by little letting slip what it is trying to hold on to, letting go even while it tightens its grip. Fatigue is not just the cause of letting go, it is the slackening itself. It is so inasmuch as it does not occur simply in a hand that is letting slip the weight it finds tiring to lift, but in one that is holding on to what it is letting slip, even when it has let it drop but remains taut with the effort. For there is fatigue *only in effort and labour*. To be sure, there does exist a soft languor of lassitude, but it is already the sleep to which the action in its fatigue clings.⁸¹

The first noteworthy point from this passage concerns the description of fatigue as a 'lag' between existence and 'what it remains attached to', namely, an existent. Once again, Levinas highlights the fact that, as soon as it can be posited, an existent has already taken on or made a contract with existence. Otherwise, there would be no individual existent to acknowledge. Secondly, this passage notes that fatigue is not a 'letting go' of existence; rather, it constitutes a 'slackening' of the contract that the existent has already made with existence prior to giving its consent. This point becomes clear in the instant of fatigue when the existent *senses* the 'weight' of existence to which

⁷⁹ See, §1.3.4.

⁸⁰ Levinas also describes the affective dispositions of indolence and insomnia from a phenomenological perspective in *Existence and Existents*. Indolence reveals the original effort involved with beginning, that is, taking up one's place in existence, since it is 'a recoil before action', 'a hesitation before existence', or, put plainly, 'an indolence about existing'. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 15/32. In order to exist, one must begin and, at times, this beginning is a daunting prospect. Similarly, in the state of insomnia, the anonymous rumbling of the *il y a* reveals itself since, as Levinas notes, 'wakefulness is anonymous'. Ibid., p. 63/96. Continuing along these lines, Levinas writes: 'It is not that there is *my* vigilance in the night; in insomnia it is the night itself that watches. *It* watches. In this anonymous nightwatch where I am completely exposed to being all the thoughts which occupy my insomnia are suspended on nothing. They have no support. I am, one might say, the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought. Ibid, p. 63/96-97. As a result, insomnia challenges my ability to become unconscious through sleep thus revealing more to being than the meaning which I give it.

⁸¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 18-19/38, my emphasis.

it is tied since, in order to complete its tasks, the existent must exert a considerable effort. Continuing along these lines, Levinas comments,

But human labour and effort presuppose a commitment in which we are already involved. We are yoked to our task, delivered over to it. In the humility of man who toils bent over his work there is surrender, forsakenness. Despite all its freedom, effort reveals a condemnation; it is fatigue and suffering. Fatigue does not arise in it as an accompanying phenomenon, but effort as it were lunges forward out of fatigue and falls back upon it.⁸²

Despite the freedom of the existent to do certain tasks, therefore, the fact that it must labour in order to do so presupposes that it is ‘already involved’ in a state not of its choosing. This state corresponds to the ‘condemnation’ of ‘fatigue and suffering’, which, for Levinas, constitutes the very meaning of existence itself.⁸³

The constitution of existence in relation to fatigue and suffering becomes clear when the meaning that effort ‘bears within itself’ is retrieved from a phenomenological analysis of the instant. Levinas begins this line in inquiry by contrasting effort to the experience of listening to a melody. This particular example is significant considering that it is an allusion to the same one previously employed by Husserl.⁸⁴ Levinas thus utilises this example to further demonstrate the difference between his description of the concrete, as encountered in the instant of sensation, from the experience of the concrete

⁸² Ibid., p. 19/39.

⁸³ It is the concrete act of transcending this immanent condition of suffering and fatigue, to which we are condemned through our bodies, in the event of thought itself that Levinas claims Nietzsche fails to truly appreciate with his desire for the human being to exist in a state of pure bodily immanence. For Nietzsche, as one commentator observes, ‘the suffering body signals the possibility of overcoming the individuation it suffers in its very suffering of extreme pain’. David Boothroyd, ‘Beyond Suffering I Have No Alibi’, in *Nietzsche and Levinas: ‘After the Death of a Certain God’*, pp. 150-164 (p. 156). Nietzsche makes this point with the example of Jesus who, whilst suffering on the cross, comes to a state of complete ‘disillusionment’ with respect to his ideological beliefs (‘My God, why hast thou forsaken me!’) and discovers ‘enlightenment’ in relation to ‘the deceptions of life’. Ibid. Nevertheless, despite the validity of this point in terms of the deceit of ideology, Nietzsche’s solution is simply to embrace bodily suffering as our access to the real *qua* will-to-power. Levinas’s objection to Nietzsche on this issue is that by reaching the level of thought, thus transcending our bodily immanence, the human being *already* demonstrates a sense of dissatisfaction with respect to being condemned to a state of suffering. This point, for Levinas, does not evoke any ideological concepts. It is merely a fact of concrete life. Nietzsche’s description of the concrete is thus insufficient, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned.

⁸⁴ See, *supra*, n. 63.

through the temporal subjectivity of intentional consciousness that is emblematic of Husserl's version of phenomenology.⁸⁵ On this point, Levinas remarks,

In listening to a melody we are also following its entire duration. Without here undertaking an analysis of complex musical phenomena, we can say that the different instants of a melody only exist to the extent that they immolate themselves in a duration, which in a melody is essentially a continuity. Insofar as a melody is being lived through musically, and is not being scrutinized by a professor listening to his pupil, that is, is not work and effort, there are no instants in the melody.⁸⁶

Each instant of a melody only exists as part of a temporal unity, or, to use a term borrowed from Bergson, 'duration'. Accordingly, each instant does not count as such given that, as Levinas notes, 'the instants of a melody exist only in dying'.⁸⁷ It is only when a wrong note occurs that our experience of the melody as 'lived through' can be interrupted thus facilitating each instant of the melody to be 'scrutinized' in the same vein as 'a professor listening to his pupil'. Further developing this point, Levinas continues,

A wrong note is a sound that refuses to die. Here the present is not constantly vanishing only for the reflection that declares the present ungraspable; in its very way of being produced in a melody, it is an evanescence, it is stamped with nullity.⁸⁸

It is worth noting here that Levinas makes this point in somewhat of a Heideggerian fashion since he defends the notion that our experience of what is present-in-stock (*Vorhandenheit*), in the form of the individual notes that comprise each instant of a melody one can scrutinize through reflection, only arises when our experience of what is handleable (*Zuhanden*), in the form of the continuous melody as lived through, breaks down or goes awry. This similarity notwithstanding, there is a major difference between Heidegger and Levinas on this issue since Heidegger is highlighting the manner in which our abstract understanding of time, as an endless stream of now-points,

⁸⁵ See, §2.1.4.

⁸⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 21/41.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 21-22/41.

derives from our concrete experience of ecstatic temporality in *Dasein*. In contrast, Levinas is contending that the very experience of music cannot be isolated from its temporal duration and, as such, it cannot account for the instant of sensation. Incidentally, this point also confirms why Heidegger cannot grasp the instant of sensation in his version of phenomenology. Supporting this viewpoint, Levinas informs us that,

Unlike the case of real beings, in music there can be no reproduction of it which would not be its very reality, reproduced with its rhythm and duration. Music is preeminently something played. There is no mental image of a melody; to reproduce it is to play it again mentally. An inaptitude for what is nothing but a game is perhaps the principal reason for the deadly boredom of those inveterate adults who frequent concerts out of duty. Duration in which the instant is not self-possessed, does not stop, is not present, is what makes music like a game.⁸⁹

One who does not enjoy listening to or playing music must make an effort to do so. Each note being listened to or played, therefore, involves work at the instant of sensation in such cases. In contrast, those who enjoy listening to or playing music do not experience it as work or effort. For them, music is like a game.

According to Levinas, when concrete life is experienced as a game, the existent forgets its condemnation to the essential fatigue and suffering of existence. The reason for this forgetfulness concerns the fact that all games are ultimately aimed toward a goal which, subsequently, receives all of our focus. Elaborating on this issue, Levinas emphasises,

Effort and play are mutually exclusive. Of course there can be effort in sports, but then the game is played as it were over and beyond effort, at a plane where we live out a separation between effort and its goal, where it is possible to enjoy what is disinterested and gratuitous in effort. The effect occurs in a broader psychological system that refers to a history and a temporal horizon.⁹⁰

Whilst sport certainly contains a fair amount of effort, there is a necessary separation between the goal of the game and the effort dispensed throughout the playing of the

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 22/41-42.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 22/42.

game. For example, let us consider the sport of rugby. The physicality of rugby cannot be doubted. Yet, during the game of rugby, each player does not focus on the effort involved in playing the game. Their effort rather is focused on achieving a certain goal, namely, performing to the best of their ability in order for their team to win. Hence, Levinas's statement that sport occurs already on the level of a 'broader psychological system'. This system presupposes a certain 'history' and thus the temporal experience of the player. In this respect, the existent has already been posited and its original contract with existence has duly been forgotten.⁹¹ In contrast to this position, however, Levinas continues,

But in its instant, effort, even effort in sports, is a suspending of all play, a serious undertaking, and fatigue. 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 in 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.⁹²

When concrete life is grasped in the instant of sensation, even in sport, all play is suspended to reveal the fatigue and suffering involved in each moment. To reference the sport of rugby, once again, the force that one feels when tackled, the strain in one's legs when running, and the weight that one bears when lifting a teammate describes the effort required for playing the game in the first place. This effort becomes even more palpable when a player is injured during the game and has to withdraw from it. For them, the game is over and their focus duly shifts from their psychological goal to their ontological suffering. It is for this reason that Levinas must overcome the formulation of temporal subjectivity, common to both Husserl and Heidegger, despite their vast

⁹¹ This point, of course, exposes the fundamental difficulty of Levinas's philosophical task. By attempting to grasp a certain ontological event, i.e. hypostasis, prior to the temporal duration of the subject, Levinas aspires to understanding what occurs before our very ability *to understand*. David Kangas and Martin Kavka are correct, therefore, when they say that, in his philosophy, 'Levinas seeks a meaningful content prior to form, prior to what the subject is capable of positing through its spontaneity [freedom to think] — a meaningful content prior to meaning'. David Kangas and Martin Kavka, 'Hearing, Patiently: Time and Salvation in Kierkegaard and Levinas', in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, pp. 125-152 (p. 135).

⁹² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 22/42.

differences, since only in the instant of sensation can phenomenological analysis describe the essential fatigue and suffering of existence.

By exposing the instant of sensation to phenomenological analysis, Levinas uncovers 'the brute fact of being' in concrete life through the original 'relationship' between existence and the existent. This 'relationship' becomes palpable thanks to the affective disposition of fatigue which, subsequently, reveals the effort behind the event of hypostasis in which the existent takes leave of anonymous existence. Concluding on this point, Levinas tells us,

In the simplicity, unity and obscurity of fatigue, it is like the lag of an existent that is tarrying behind its existing. And this lag constitutes the present. Because of this distance in existence, existence is a relationship between an existent and itself. It is the upsurge of an existent in existence. And conversely this almost self-contradictory moment of a present that tarrying behind itself could not be anything but fatigue. Fatigue does not accompany it, it effects it; fatigue is this time-lag. Here the taking up of existence in the instant becomes directly perceptible. Fatigue is to be sure not a cancellation of one's contract with being. The delay it involves is nonetheless an inscription in existence, but what is peculiar to this inscription, its sort of hesitation, enables us to surprise it, to catch sight of the operation of assuming which the existence that is taken up already always involves.⁹³

In the instant of fatigue, our contract with existence becomes evident due to the effort required for maintaining our commitment to ourselves as an existent. When we commit to existing through effort, we take on existence and found a place from which action can begin. This place, therefore, constitutes the 'true present' that subjectivity as temporal duration and ecstatic temporality rests upon. It is the absolute position of the lived body. In this regard, Levinas argues,

If the present is thus constituted by the taking charge of the present, if the time-lag of fatigue creates the interval in which the event of the present can occur, and if this event is equivalent to the upsurge of an existent for which to 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. This activity of inactivity is not a paradox; it is the act of positing oneself on ground, it is rest inasmuch as rest is not a pure negation but this very tension of a position, the bringing about of a here. The fundamental activity of rest, foundation, conditioning, thus appears to be the very relationship with being, the upsurge of an existent into existence, a hypostasis.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 24-25/44-45.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 25/45.

Underlying the temporal duration characteristic of the active thinking subject resides the lived body in a state of passive sensation as its necessary foundation. Furthermore, it is from this standpoint of that the topic of 'Being in general' can be uncovered for phenomenological research. Husserl could not see this foundation since, for him, our primary relationship with being results from the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. Husserl's approach toward phenomenological research, therefore, prioritises temporal duration through the perceptual experience of the active intellect. It is for this reason that Levinas favours the passivity contained within Heidegger's hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research since, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is fundamentally *open* to the meaning of Being through the reflexive experience of affective dispositions.⁹⁵ Unlike Heidegger, however, Levinas has no interest in addressing the topic of the question of the meaning of Being and its relation to *Dasein* within phenomenology. This is because, like Husserl, Heidegger's formulation of *Dasein* as ecstatic temporality cannot grasp the lived body and thus cannot address the topic of 'Being in general' within phenomenology. Nevertheless, since he has successfully destabilised *Dasein* as the fundamental 'there' (*Da*) of 'Being' (*Sein*), by undercutting it with the lived body as the necessary 'here' from which temporal subjectivity must emerge, Levinas can now employ Heidegger's approach toward phenomenological research in a novel way. He does this by using certain affective dispositions, such as fatigue, malaise, shame, and nausea, to retrieve the *sense* of 'Being in general' as it is lived in the instant of the body as opposed to using this approach to shed light on the understanding of Being as it is experienced and expressed in the

⁹⁵ Whilst stressing the difference between Heidegger's ontological difference, i.e., Being (*Sein*) is not a being (*Seiende*), and Levinas's ontological separation, i.e., the existent is not existence, De Boer also acknowledges this 'connection' between Heidegger and Levinas with regard to the role of affective dispositions (*Befindlichkeit*) in their respective versions of phenomenology. De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 124.

ecstatic temporality of *Dasein*.⁹⁶ It is for this reason that Levinas refrains from using the word ‘experience’ in relation to the lived body given that ‘experience’ always corresponds to an experiencing subject, which already presupposes temporal subjectivity and thus a personal relation to being through some understanding of Being. Instead, Levinas prefers the word ‘ordeal’ in relation to the encounter with ‘Being in general’ in the instant of bodily sensation considering that an ‘ordeal’ refers to something not of our choosing. It is, rather, something that has to be *endured* and *perdured*.⁹⁷

§2.2 TIME AND THE OTHER (1947)

Whilst *Existence and Existents* focuses on describing the movement from anonymous existence to the birth of a distinct existent in existence, *Time and the Other* (1948) outlines the concrete life of a distinct existent following the event of hypostasis.⁹⁸ This section will show that when concrete life is reduced to the instant of bodily sensation it reveals a fatalistic determinism from which the human being enacts ‘the need to escape’. Contrary to Marx and Nietzsche, then, Levinas demonstrates that our bodily immanence offers no real solace for the human being. It is this ‘tragic’ state of existence that prompts rather the movement of transcendence in which the human being

⁹⁶ Van Riessen also notices this reformation of the concept of *Befindlichkeit* in Levinas’s version of phenomenology. ‘For Heidegger affectivity provides access to authenticity’; whereas, to quote van Riessen, ‘for Levinas there can only be true affectivity if the relation to the other (*l’autre*) is involved’. Van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God*, p. 9. The other (*l’autre*), in the case of *Existence and Existents*, corresponds to the brute fact of being, which persists beyond the understanding of the temporal subject.

⁹⁷ Levinas makes this point explicitly during an interview with Malka by saying: ‘I prefer the word “ordeal” (*épreuve*) over “experience” (*expérience*), because the word “experience” expresses always a knowledge [understanding of Being] of which the I is master. In the word “ordeal” there is at the same time the idea of a [concrete] life of a critical “testing” which exceeds the I which is its scene’. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 97.

⁹⁸ The philosophical content that comprises *Time and the Other* was originally prepared for a series of lectures given by Levinas at the Philosophical College in Paris during 1946/1947. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. vii. This college was founded by Jean Wahl. Wahl was an early supporter of Levinas’s work in France and the two quickly became close friends. This is evident from the very first page of *Totality and Infinity*, which offers a dedication to Wahl and his wife Marcelle. Other contributors at the Philosophical College in Paris from this period include Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alexandre Koyré, Francis Jeanson, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Jacques Lacan. Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 151.

acquires the freedom to think. Nevertheless, this freedom presupposes a concrete event that allows the self to become aware of the fatalism of its body immanence. Levinas uncovers this concrete event following a critique of Heidegger's account of human transcendence in the affective disposition of anxiety, when *Dasein* is confronted with the apparent nothingness of its own death. In this account, Heidegger overlooks the concreteness of death which, in reality, annihilates the subject. As a result, Levinas considers the reflection on death in *Dasein* as an *inadequate* description of human transcendence.

§2.2.1 *The Solitude of Existence*

According to Levinas, the concrete life of a distinct existent when reduced to the instant of sensation in the body is characterised by 'solitude'. Elaborating on this point, Levinas writes,

It is banal to say we never exist in the singular. We are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationships. Through sight, touch, sympathy and cooperative work, we are with others. All of these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the other. But I am not the other. I am alone. It is thus the being in me, the fact that I exist, my existing, that constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or relationship. One can change everything between beings except existing. In this sense, to be is to be isolated by [and through] existing.⁹⁹

We encounter other existents at each and every moment throughout our experience; the buildings that I see when walking in the city, the chair that I touch when sitting at my desk, the family members that I understand (and misunderstand) during conversations, and the colleagues that I work alongside in order to achieve a goal. All of these

⁹⁹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 42/21. Here, once again, the influence of Kierkegaard on Levinas's thinking is noticeable since, for Kierkegaard, there is nothing more concrete in life than a human being's own individual existing. See, *supra*, Ch. 1, n. 98. Heidegger also utilises Kierkegaard's existential starting point to undercut the supposed concreteness of pure intentional consciousness in Husserl's version of phenomenology. Unlike Heidegger, however, who finds the particularity of existing in the very expression of the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, Levinas recovers the particularity of existing through the expression of existence in the lived body. With the help of Kierkegaard, then, Levinas undercuts the supposed concreteness of *Dasein* in the same manner that Heidegger did with respect to Husserl. See, §1.3.4.

experiences are relational considering that they denote the correlation between an experiencing subject and an experienced object. *I see the building, I touch the chair, I understand (and misunderstand) my family members, and I work alongside my colleagues.* These ‘objects’ and ‘others’ belong to *me* as a part of *my* experience. By including such examples in the passage above, then, Levinas is highlighting the manner in which objects and others have hitherto been considered within the phenomenological tradition. For Husserl, intentionality constitutes the foundation of all experience. In this respect, every object and all others must necessarily *appear* to consciousness, irrespective of the particular way in which they are grasped by consciousness. Similarly, for Heidegger, the meaning of all objects and every other must necessarily correspond to the particular way in which they have been disclosed to *Dasein* in the understanding of Being.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to this approach, Levinas insists that ‘I am not the other’. The fact of my existing, which results from my upsurge in anonymous existence, is my sole responsibility and relates to nothing or no one else. As a result of reducing objects and others to personal experience, therefore, both Husserl and Heidegger neglect the independence of such existents.

An existent is independent by the simple fact that it exists. Indeed, one can share many things with a fellow existent on a conceptual level (such as, nationality, gender, sexuality, race, species, chemical elements, etc.). Nevertheless, it is impossible to share in a fellow existent’s *existing*. Developing on this point, Levinas remarks,

Existing resists every relationship and multiplicity. It concerns no one other than the existent. Solitude therefore appears neither as the factual isolation of a Robinson Crusoe nor as the incommunicability of a content of consciousness, but

¹⁰⁰ Of course, it is true that Heidegger claims that the understanding of Being in *Dasein* extends to and includes equally, as McDonnell duly points out, ‘oneself, the world, and others’. McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 59. Nevertheless, there is scant treatment of the existence of others in *Being and Time* or in any of Heidegger’s later works. This ignorance toward the independent existence of others is arguably Levinas’s main problem with Heidegger’s thinking.

as the indissoluble unity between the existent and its work of existing. [...] Solitude lies in the very fact that there are existents.¹⁰¹

I am independent because I exist. Nothing or no one else can share in my existing. Both Husserl and Heidegger cannot appreciate this fact within their respective versions of phenomenology for different reasons, in the mind of Levinas. For Husserl, the problem is methodological. This is because Husserl's way of describing the concrete prioritises the experience of perception and the fact of one's existing cannot and does not *appear* as a perceptual object. It is rather something that is felt in the instant of bodily sensation. Central to uncovering such instances are the concrete descriptions of certain affective dispositions. This approach Levinas implements from Heidegger's way of describing the concrete. Thus, for Heidegger, the problem of failing to appreciate the solitude of existence is not methodological. On the contrary, it stems from his philosophical presupposition which holds that the meaning of Being must always correspond to the understanding of Being in *Dasein*. In this respect, Levinas uses Heidegger's approach toward phenomenological research in order to retrieve the independence of the lived body that had been previously left ignored within fundamental ontology.

What is of particular significance in relation to the existing individual is not the expression of the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, as Heidegger would have it. On

¹⁰¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 43/22. This point, once again, reminds us of Kierkegaard's remarks that the actions of Napoleon cannot be proved to be of Napoleon if Napoleon did not exist in the first place. To use Kierkegaard's own words: 'If one wanted to demonstrate Napoleon's existence from Napoleon's works, would it not be most curious, since his existence certainly explains the works but the works do not demonstrate his existence unless I have already in advance interpreted the word "his" in such a way as to have assumed that he exists. But Napoleon is only an individual, and to that extent there is no absolute relation between him and his works — thus someone else could have done the same works. Perhaps that is why I cannot reason from the works to existence. If I call the works Napoleon's works, then the demonstration is superfluous, since I have already mentioned his name. If I ignore this, I can never demonstrate from the works that they are Napoleon's but demonstrate (purely ideally) that such works are the works of a great general, etc'. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 40-41. Accordingly, we do not prove the existence of anything; rather, we prove that an existent is a particular type of thing. Rather than 'proving' the fact of existence, then, Levinas simply 'attests' to an existential position that has been ignored by both Heidegger and Husserl in their respective versions of phenomenology.

the contrary, Levinas shows that it is the solitary existence of one's own living body.

Concluding on this point, Levinas writes,

Solitude is the very unity of the existent, the fact that there is something in existing starting from which existence occurs. The subject is alone because it is one. A solitude is necessary in order for there to be a freedom of beginning, 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.¹⁰²

In the event of hypostasis, a distinct existent separates itself from anonymous existence.

For that reason, it is 'alone' or 'one'. Furthermore, this concrete position of solitude allows the body to go about its 'work of existing', that is to say, owing to the 'abandonment' of anonymous existence and the 'despair' that solitude unveils, the 'virility', 'pride', and 'sovereignty' of a distinct existent can now begin its 'mastery over existing' and thus be itself. Under these circumstances, the identity of a distinct existent is characterised 'not only as a departure from self', to quote Levinas, 'it is also a return to self'.¹⁰³ In other words, one's work of existing can only occur from a position of solitude and, likewise, solitude can only be established through one's work of existing. This formulation of subjectivity does not dramatize 'a simple tautology'.¹⁰⁴ It rather encapsulates the 'turning' of the self 'back upon itself'.¹⁰⁵ Since Levinas is describing the concrete life of the lived body in this instance, this turning back upon oneself should not be apprehended under the guise of a 'serene' or 'purely philosophical' reflection.¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, it should be regarded as the body's necessary occupation with itself in an ontological sense. The concrete existence of the body is expressed through its very own existing. As a result, this expression cannot be

¹⁰² Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 54-55/35.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 55/36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56/37.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

reflectively understood since the lived body is neither a subject nor an object of thought.¹⁰⁷

§2.2.2 *Concrete Life as Materiality*

As soon as a distinct existent takes up its own position in existence, it must work to sustain that specific location. In doing so, the existent becomes solely occupied with its own existing. This occupation Levinas refers to as ‘materiality’. Explaining this idea, Levinas notes,

The price paid for the existent’s position lies in the very fact that it cannot detach itself from itself. The existent is occupied with itself. This manner of being occupied with itself is the subject’s materiality. Identity is not an inoffensive relationship with itself, but enchainment to itself. Beginning is made heavy by itself; it is the present of being and not a dream. Its freedom is already limited by its responsibility. This is its great paradox: a free being is already no longer free, because it is responsible for itself.¹⁰⁸

Here, Levinas continues along the same lines of ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’ and *On Escape* by highlighting the self’s enchainment to its body as an obligatory requirement of existence. One does not *choose* to associate oneself with a particular body; rather, one *must* respond to a particular body to which one is necessarily bound. The body’s freedom to begin, therefore, also denotes a material responsibility which immediately undermines that freedom. Along these lines, shortly after the passage above, Levinas continues,

I do not exist as a [transcendent] spirit, or as a smile or a breath of air; I am not without responsibility. My being doubles with a having; I am encumbered by myself. And this is material existence. Consequently, materiality does not express

¹⁰⁷ This is why Husserl could not appreciate the concreteness of actual existence in his version of phenomenology since it is not something that appears as an object of transcendent perception nor does it constitute the life of the ego when grasped through reflection in immanent perception. As a result, Husserl rejects any talk of ‘actual existence’ as belonging to the natural attitude since, as Levinas himself notes, ‘the phenomenological *ἐποχή* [reduction] applies to all existential positions’. Levinas, ‘On Ideas’, p. 12. What Levinas shows, however, following the lead of Heidegger, is that actual existence can be appreciated without presupposing a naturalistic metaphysics thus making it a valid topic for phenomenological research.

¹⁰⁸ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 55/36.

the contingent fall of the spirit into the tomb or prison of a body. Materiality accompanies — necessarily — the upsurge of the subject in its existent freedom.¹⁰⁹

Under these circumstances, material existence does not refer to the physical ‘matter’ of one’s own body. Such an outlook would presuppose a dualistic metaphysics and compromise the concreteness of Levinas’s phenomenological standpoint. Furthermore, it would risk reducing the human being to the ‘tomb or prison’ of its body thus adding credence to the philosophy of immanence which Levinas endeavours to overcome. Material existence, then, corresponds to the very work of existing that follows the upsurge of a distinct existent in existence. For, if an existent ceases with its work of existing, then *it* will cease to exist. In addition to the freedom to begin from one’s own position in existence, there is also a ‘weight’ and ‘heaviness’ ensuing from this specific location. In this respect, even though it is free to act in certain ways, the body must always respond to the demands that existence places upon it.¹¹⁰ This fact of concrete life is absent from Husserl and Heidegger’s respective versions of phenomenology due to, as Levinas declares in *On Escape*, a ‘bourgeois spirit’ of self-sufficiency.¹¹¹

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas continues this objection specifically in relation to Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world as tantamount to concrete life. Commencing with this critique, Levinas declares,

Solitude is not a higher-level anxiety that is revealed to a being when all of its needs are satisfied. It is not the privileged experience of being toward death, but the companion, so to speak, of everyday existence haunted by matter. And to the extent that material concerns issues from hypostasis itself and express the very event of our existent freedom, everyday life, far from constituting a fall, and far from

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 56/37. For all of the alleged concreteness of Heidegger’s analysis of human existence in *Dasein*, the notion of material responsibility downright escapes him. For instance, *Dasein* never gets tired. It is thus quite angelic like ‘a breath of air’ or abstract like a transcendent ‘spirit’. William Young is correct to observe that Levinas begins to undermine the concreteness of *Dasein* on this exact point since ‘fatigue discloses a subject who is not simply thrown into the world, but rather one fundamentally unsettled within itself’. William Young, *Uncommon Friendships: An Amicable History of Modern Religious Thought* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010), p. 130. This unsettled self relates to the lived body that must respond to its own materiality in order to sustain its position in existence.

¹¹⁰ It is for this reason that Levinas says ‘matter is the misfortune of hypostasis’ before emphasising that ‘materiality and solitude go together’. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 58/39.

¹¹¹ See, §1.3.2.

appearing as a betrayal with regard to our metaphysical destiny, emanates from our solitude and forms the very accomplishment of solitude and the infinitely serious attempt to respond to its profound unhappiness.¹¹²

Solitude is confirmed by the fact that I am a distinct existent burdened with the responsibility of my own material existence. It is not, contrary to Heidegger's estimation, a 'higher-level anxiety' recognised in the awareness of oneself as a 'being-for-death' (*Sein-zum-Tode*). The solitude highlighted by Levinas here precedes all self-awareness, that is to say, it characterises life as it is lived concretely in the instant of bodily sensation. Furthermore, the importance relating to the 'material concerns' of a distinct existent seems to be lost on Heidegger in his phenomenological analysis of concrete life.¹¹³ For Heidegger, such concerns 'would be a fall, a flight before the uttermost finality that these needs themselves imply, an inconsequence, a non-truth, inevitable, to be sure, but bearing the mark of the inferior and the reprehensible', to use Levinas's words.¹¹⁴ The concern most important for *Dasein* relates to the authenticity of *its* understanding of Being when confronted with the fact of *its own* death in the affective disposition of anxiety. This experience confirms the 'solitude' of *Dasein*. Any concerns other than this simply denote an inauthentic understanding of Being, that is, 'a flight before the essential', or, 'idle chatter', as far as Heidegger is concerned.

Levinas contests this view by stating that everyday life is not a concern for the authenticity of one's own understanding of Being, rather, it is 'a preoccupation with salvation'.¹¹⁵ The term 'salvation' in this instance relates to our 'material concerns'. In concrete life, we are preoccupied with our salvation due to the various endeavours that we make in order to satisfy our material needs. We go to work in order to get paid so that we can buy food to eat. We pay our bills so that we have home where we can rest

¹¹² Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 58/39.

¹¹³ See, *supra*, n. 108.

¹¹⁴ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 59/40-41.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58/39.

in comfort and security. We buy clothes to protect us from the elements as we go about our daily business. However much these preoccupations are called a ‘fall’, ‘everyday life’, ‘animality’, ‘degradation’ or ‘base materialism’, as Levinas remarks in allusion to Heidegger, they are ‘in no way frivolous’.¹¹⁶ Accordingly, Levinas proclaims that we behave like the ‘frightful bourgeois in the midst of Pascalian, Kierkegaardian, Nietzschean, and Heideggerian anxieties’ before maintaining that ‘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’.¹¹⁷

§2.2.3 *The Interval of Enjoyment*

Only when our material concerns have been duly satisfied can we then go on to ‘enjoy’ life. Levinas describes this aspect of our existence as a ‘loosening’ of ‘the bond’ between the self and its material responsibility.¹¹⁸ In other words, despite the self’s necessary enchainment to its body, it can nevertheless overcome the ‘weight’ of existence thus enabling the emergence of an ‘interval’ from which ‘enjoyment’ can proceed. The ‘interval’, for Levinas, corresponds to a delay in one’s own material responsibility following the temporary satisfaction of bodily needs. From this position, the self uncovers a world of ‘nourishments’ previously overlooked within phenomenology. Levinas makes this point in relation to Heidegger, for whom the world constitutes the environment in which *Dasein* expresses its understanding of Being — whether authentic or inauthentic — through its practical engagement with objects *qua* tools. Elaborating on this stance, Levinas remarks that,

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 59/41.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 59-60/42. Here, once again, Levinas imparts somewhat of a Marxist critique against the listed thinkers.

¹¹⁸ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 62/44. This ‘loosening’ is also evident in the ability to reflect upon the authenticity of one’s own existence. Nevertheless, since Levinas is currently describing life prior to the very ability to reflect, this issue will be left unaddressed until the fourth chapter of this study. See, *infra*, n. 123.

Since Heidegger we are in the habit of considering the world as an ensemble of tools. Existing in the world is acting, but acting in such a way that in the final account action has *our own existence for its object*. Tools refer to one another to finally refer to our care for existing. In turning on a bathroom switch we open up the entire ontological problem.¹¹⁹

Each and every action occurs in relation to the ‘care for existing’ which, subsequently, reveals itself in the understanding of Being since, for Heidegger, ‘existence’ always corresponds to the particular manner in which *Dasein* expresses its understanding of itself in the world.¹²⁰ Under these circumstances, the final description of action, ultimately, relates to one’s own existence in *Dasein*, at least, in the mind of Heidegger. This account of action, however, does not satisfy Levinas because,

What seems to have escaped Heidegger — if it is true that in these matters something might have escaped Heidegger — is that prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments. Human life in the world does not go beyond the objects that fulfil it. It is perhaps not correct to say that we live to eat, but it is no more correct to say that we eat to live. The uttermost finality of eating is contained in food. When one smells a flower, it is the smell that limits the finality of the act. To stroll is to enjoy fresh air, not for health but for air. These are the nourishments characteristic of our existence in the world.¹²¹

Contrary to Heidegger’s estimation, action does not always occur to disclose one’s own understanding of Being. I do not eat or breathe as a result of the understanding of Being that has been factually given to me in *Dasein*, whether inauthentically, as part of the understanding of Being others have given to me, or authentically, as a choice of my own within the awareness of myself as a being-for-death. I eat and breathe because the nourishment that food and air give me is enjoyable. In this state of enjoyment, the work of existing no longer seems like ‘work’ for a distinct existent. ‘Though [still] in the pure and simple identity of hypostasis’, to quote Levinas, the self ‘separates from itself’,

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 62-63/45.

¹²⁰ For Heidegger, as with Kierkegaard, ‘existence’ always relates to the existing individual. The ‘truth’ of existence, then, concerns the specific way in which this individual lives their life, that is to say, expresses their existence. This existentialist concept of *doing* the truth, as McDonnell notes, can be distinguished from *knowing* the truth in terms of propositional knowledge claims. McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 78. Unlike Levinas, therefore, existence is never a ‘brute fact’, as far as Heidegger is concerned.

¹²¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 63/45-46.

that is to say, it ‘does not return to itself immediately’ so as to establish a ‘relationship with everything that is necessary’ for an enjoyable life.¹²²

It is important to emphasise that the interval of enjoyment does not constitute the temporal duration of pure consciousness or the ecstatic temporality of *Dasein* as found in Husserl and Heidegger’s respective versions of phenomenology. Levinas is careful to highlight that the interval of enjoyment remains on the level of sensation in which the object of nourishment is absorbed into the self.¹²³ It thus concerns the life of the body and its ‘earthly nourishments’, to quote Levinas.¹²⁴ In this respect, the interval of enjoyment concerns ‘a way of being free from the initial materiality through which a subject is accomplished’.¹²⁵ The state of enjoyment, then, ‘already contains a forgetfulness’ of material responsibility thus representing the ‘first abnegation’ of the contract made with existence in the event of hypostasis.¹²⁶ The ‘way of being free’ in the interval of enjoyment gives a sense of self-sufficiency which denies the instant of need behind such a ‘freedom’. Abnegations of this kind, ultimately, lead to the objections raised by Marx and Nietzsche highlighting the philosophical ignorance relating to our immanent situation in concrete life.¹²⁷ Whilst disagreeing with Marx and Nietzsche on the idea that one’s immanent condition signifies what is of most value to

¹²² Ibid., p. 63/46.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 64/46. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will also highlight the enjoyment of ‘celestial’ or intellectual nourishments which the reflective ego, once established, absorbs through perceptual experience and/or the acquisition of knowledge. At this specific juncture, however, Levinas has not yet described how the reflective ego is established. This issue will thus be returned to in the fourth chapter of this study. See, §4.3.3.

¹²⁵ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 63/46.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 64/46. Claire Elise Katz also recognises this point in relation to Levinas’s critique of Heidegger’s description of the concrete since Levinas undercuts the ‘morality’ of authenticity for the ‘morality’ of salvation through earthly nourishments which, subsequently, is ‘forgotten’ by Heidegger. Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 33.

¹²⁷ See, §1.3.1.

the human being, Levinas nevertheless acknowledges material responsibility as ‘the first morality’ which ‘one *must* pass through’.¹²⁸

§2.2.4 *The Suffering of Immanence*

Despite acknowledging material responsibility as the first morality, which one *must* necessarily pass through, Levinas is quick to note that ‘it is not the last’.¹²⁹ This is because the immanent condition of bodily solitude dooms the self to a fate not of its choosing. Even the state of enjoyment cannot overcome the fact of one’s materiality which, subsequently, always demands a response in order to preserve the distinct position of an existent in existence.¹³⁰ This continual requirement of sustaining one’s position in existence leads Levinas to describe the solitude of bodily immanence as ‘suffering’. From the outset of this description, Levinas reinforces his particular stance in phenomenology, which undercuts both the temporal duration of pure consciousness (Husserl) as well as the ecstatic temporality of *Dasein* (Heidegger), by emphasising suffering in the instant of bodily sensation. Along these lines, Levinas advises,

I am going to pursue the analysis of solitude in the pain of need and work, not in the anxiety of nothingness; and I am going to lay stress on the pain lightly called physical, for in it engagement in existence is without any equivocation. 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. It is the very irremissibility of being.¹³¹

Immediately, in this passage, Levinas marks a significant difference between his analysis of suffering and Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety. For Heidegger, anxiety does not concern the ‘physical suffering’ of a distinct existent; rather, it relates to *Dasein*’s awareness of itself as a being-for-death which, subsequently, opens up the possibility

¹²⁸ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 64/46, my emphasis.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ This point was previously made by Levinas in *On Escape* by outlining the way in which pleasure always ends in disappointment. See, §1.3.3.

¹³¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 69/55.

for an authentic understanding of Being. This stance already exhibits a forgetfulness of material responsibility, as far as Levinas is concerned, since in order to reflect upon oneself as a being-for-death the instant of need must have already been overcome. Here, Levinas's main issue with Heidegger becomes evident. It is not the *way* that Heidegger describes the concrete to which Levinas disagrees since, after all, the notion of affectivity is essential to Levinas's own philosophical project. It is rather Heidegger's description of the concrete as the understanding of Being in *Dasein* that Levinas contests, precisely because it overlooks the concreteness of our material responsibility. By analysing the real 'physical' suffering of the body as opposed to the 'moral' suffering of anxiety, which one can subsequently equate with 'nothingness' following the concrete ordeal itself, Levinas successfully retrieves the 'irremissibility of being' to which the self is necessarily bound.

The fact that it is condemned to this condition reveals the reason why the self exhibits the need to escape. The human being seeks freedom. This is even the case for Marx and Nietzsche.¹³² When reduced to a state of bodily immanence, however, the human being experiences the 'finality' of a determinate condition not of its choosing which, subsequently, culminates in suffering.¹³³ In this sense, for Levinas, the body does not offer the human being any real sort of freedom. It is this concrete fact that Marx and Nietzsche fail to recognise following their respective critiques of ideology. Emphasising this point, Levinas notes,

In suffering there is an absence of all refuge. It is the fact of being directly exposed to being. It is made up of the impossibility of fleeing or retreating. The whole

¹³² For Marx, this denotes becoming free from an oppressive social order, which condemns people to a certain situation in society, so as to establish 'an association of free individuals'. Nicholas Churchich, *Marxism and Morality: A Critical Examination of Marxist Ethics* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1994), p. 243. Similarly, Nietzsche seeks to free the individual from the transcendent values of traditional morality in the name of becoming 'what you are', namely, will-to-power. See, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How To Become What You Are*, trans. by Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Levinas argues that once we become free from the ideologies of society and morality we are still condemned to the finality of being itself.

¹³³ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 68/55.

acuity of suffering lies in the impossibility of retreat. It is the fact of being backed up against life and being. In this sense suffering is the impossibility of nothingness.¹³⁴

The lived body, for Levinas, functions as the base from which a distinct existent can begin its work of existing. This base becomes the place to which the self retreats in order to rest thus allowing it to suspend its existence without destroying it. Nevertheless, the instant of suffering reveals another side to the body. With respect to this side, the body no longer constitutes a refuge to which the self retreats for rest. It rather directly exposes the self to the weight of its own material responsibility. Furthermore, in the instant of suffering, the self struggles to respond to this weight since, for one reason or another, it no longer has the ability to do so. If a person is suffering from a serious illness, for example, there is no place for them to retreat. The illness contaminates their body and directly exposes them to the brute fact of their being. Similarly, if a person is homeless, their place of refuge is exposed to the elements thus meaning that their existence cannot be fully suspended through sleep. Indeed, the homeless person can fall asleep but, as they sleep, they feel the cold of the wind, the moisture of rain, and the noise of the city all in full force. The homeless person is confronted with the brute fact of being.

It is for this reason that Levinas claims that the instant of suffering uncovers ‘the impossibility of nothingness’. Even associating the experience of anxiety with the nothingness of death, as Heidegger does, presupposes a place of retreat from which such an association can be made, namely, *Dasein*. In the instant of bodily suffering, however, there is no retreat. From this concrete standpoint, the nothingness of anxiety does not correspond to the idea of death. It exposes rather the nothingness of ‘Being in

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 69/55-56.

general' which, subsequently, refuses the ability to retreat.¹³⁵ Elaborating on this horrifying ordeal, Levinas comments,

Is not anxiety over Being — horror of Being — just as primal as anxiety over death? Is not the fear of Being just as ordinary as the fear for Being? It is perhaps even more so, for the former may account for the latter. Are not Being and nothingness, which, in Heidegger's philosophy, are equivalent or coordinated, not rather phases of a more general state of existence, which is nowise constituted by nothingness? We shall call it the fact that there is (*il y a*). In it subjective existence, which existential philosophy takes as its point of departure, and the objective existence of the old realism merge. It is because the *there is* has such a complete hold on us that we cannot take nothingness and death lightly, and we tremble before them. The fear of nothingness is but the measure of our involvement in Being. Existence of itself harbours something tragic which is not only there because of its finitude. Something that death cannot resolve.¹³⁶

Anxiety over existence, that is to say, the *fear of* the brute fact of being itself, precedes anxiety over death as conceived by Heidegger as the *fear for* the authenticity of my own Being (*Sein*). The reason for this antecedence concerns the very concreteness of death. For Heidegger, the experience of nothingness in the affective disposition of anxiety discloses 'the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*' thus establishing *Dasein*'s 'ownmost possibility' *not* to be, i.e. its death, as an essential part of its understanding of what it means for *Dasein* to be.¹³⁷ This association of the experience of nothingness with death, however, already rests upon the ecstatic temporality of *Dasein* seeing that it allows for the anticipation of one's own death in the future to be understood in the present. As a result, Heidegger does not describe the *concreteness* of death; rather, he provides an instance of 'analytic contemplation', to use

¹³⁵ The nothingness of Being in general relates to the fact that, strictly speaking, it is without content, that is to say, it is not an object given to perceptual experience nor is it disclosed to the understanding of Being in *Dasein*. Nevertheless, it is encountered concretely as *something*. Levinas sometimes describes it as a 'weight' being forced upon the body in the instant of sensation beyond the constitutive abilities of the subject. 'Reality has weight when one discovers its contexts', to quote Levinas. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 160.

¹³⁶ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 5/19.

¹³⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 294/250. The question of the meaning of Being and its relation to *Dasein*, therefore, does not, contrary to Critchley's estimation, correspond to the disjunctive question of Hamlet ('To be or not to be?'). Simon Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 2: On Mineness', in *The Guardian*, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jun/15/heidegger-being-time-philosophy>. It is rather, as McDonnell correctly points out, a conjunctive question of one's own 'to be' and 'not to be'. That is the question in *Dasein*. McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 293.

Schleiermacher's terms, by making a *reflective* association between the nothingness of anxiety and death which, subsequently, overlooks the concreteness of death with respect to the lived body.¹³⁸

According to Levinas, the concreteness of death from the standpoint of the body becomes proximal in the instant of pain and suffering. Thus, Levinas observes,

Pain of itself includes it [death] like a paroxysm, as if there were something about to be produced even more rending than suffering, as if despite the entire absence of a dimension of withdrawal that constitutes suffering, it still had some free space for an event, as if it must still get uneasy about something, as if we were on the verge of an event beyond what is revealed to the end in suffering. The structure of pain, which consists in its very attachment to pain, is prolonged further, but up to an unknown that is impossible to translate into terms of light — that is, that is refractory to the intimacy of the self with the ego to which all our experiences return.¹³⁹

In the pain of suffering, death reveals itself as a possible end to suffering. Even though suffering constitutes the inability to withdraw from the inflicted pain, there is nevertheless some free space for an 'event' to emerge *through* the ordeal of suffering, namely, death. This detail notwithstanding, in such cases, death still arises as, 'an impossible nothingness', to quote Levinas, since it cannot be translated into 'light', or, to put it differently, the *concreteness* of death cannot be experienced or known. It is the end of all experience and knowledge thus rendering it unknown and unknowable.

Developing this analysis further, Levinas remarks,

The unknown of death, which is not given straight off as nothingness but is correlative to an experience of the impossibility of nothingness, signifies not that death is a region from which no one has returned and consequently remains unknown as a matter of fact; the unknown of death signifies that the very relationship with death cannot be taken place in the light, that the subject is in relationship with what does not come from itself. We could say it is a relationship with mystery.¹⁴⁰

Here, Levinas explicitly marks the difference between Heidegger's *idea* of death from the *concreteness* of death. Whereas, for Heidegger, death can be assimilated by *Dasein*

¹³⁸ See, *supra*, n. 37.

¹³⁹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 69/56.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70/56.

in the understanding of Being as its ‘ownmost possibility’, for Levinas, death constitutes a mystery in relation to the ‘passivity’ of the lived body.¹⁴¹ Making this point even more forcefully, Levinas continues,

Being toward death, in Heidegger’s authentic existence, is a supreme lucidity and hence supreme virility. It is *Dasein*’s assumption of the utmost possibility of existence, which precisely makes possible all other possibilities, and consequently makes possible the very feat of grasping possibility — that is, it makes possible activity and freedom. Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom, whereas for me [Levinas] the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering. It finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and in some way passive.¹⁴²

Rather than signifying ‘the possibility of the absolute impossibility’ in *Dasein*, as it does for Heidegger, the proximity of death in the instant of suffering reveals that ‘at a certain moment we are no longer able *to be able*’.¹⁴³ Contrary to Heidegger’s view, then, death as a concrete event corresponds to ‘the impossibility of possibility’.¹⁴⁴

When death occurs in concrete life, an existent loses its distinct position in existence. In this respect, the existent has no place from which to begin its work of existing, nor does it have a place from which an association between the nothingness of anxiety and death can be made. Accordingly, death ‘marks the end of the subject’s virility and heroism’.¹⁴⁵ With this in mind, Levinas concludes,

Death is never now. When death is here, I am no longer here, not just because I am nothingness, but because I am unable to grasp. My mastery, my virility, [and] my heroism as a subject can be neither virility nor heroism in relation to death.¹⁴⁶

Under these circumstances, the concreteness of death is never ‘assumed’, rather, as Levinas remarks, ‘it comes’.¹⁴⁷ The approach of death in the instant of suffering, then, reveals that there is something other (*l’autre*) than my mastery, my virility, and my

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 70/57.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 70-71/57-58.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 74/62.

¹⁴⁴ In this respect, ‘the step beyond inauthenticity into authenticity that would ensure the virility of the subject and complete fundamental ontology is interrupted’. Dennis King Keenan, *Death and Responsibility: The ‘Work’ of Levinas* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 47. Thus, ‘at the very moment when the subject gains its mastery’, for Heidegger, ‘he or she is impotent’, for Levinas. Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 72/59.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 73/61.

heroism as a subject. 'Right away this means that existence is pluralist', to quote Levinas.¹⁴⁸ In other words, it reveals that there is always *more* to existence than the meaning that I can give it. This point notwithstanding, the sense of otherness brought about through the proximity of death in the instant of suffering does not offer an escape from the immanence of the body since, in the concrete event of death, the subject is 'crushed by the other', to use Levinas's words, that is to say, it ceases to exist altogether. Moreover, even with the 'annihilation' of a distinct existence, the anonymous rumbling of the *il y a* persists thus further affirming the 'impossibility' of nothingness.¹⁴⁹ Death cannot resolve, therefore, the suffering of or escape from immanence. It is for this reason that Levinas rejects Heidegger's account of human transcendence in *Dasein*.¹⁵⁰ As a result, Levinas seeks another event in which the other (*l'autre*) is encountered concretely, without annihilating the subject, considering that such an event will account for the escape from the immanence of the body thus sufficiently describing the act of 'excedence'.

§2.2.5 *Transcendence and the Other*

The concrete event which accomplishes the escape from the immanence of the lived body is the encounter with the face of the Other (*le visage d'autrui*). This concrete encounter 'at once gives and conceals the Other' (*l'autrui*) to a subject which 'does not

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 75/63.

¹⁴⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 56/86.

¹⁵⁰ Since death itself reveals a limit to our understanding of Being, it already signals a sense of otherness within our understanding of what it means to be. Heidegger himself glimpses this limit in his version of phenomenology by upholding the awareness of one's own death in the affective disposition of anxiety as that which facilitates human transcendence. This is acknowledged explicitly by Levinas during his interview with Kearney: 'Heidegger [...] introduced an element of alterity into his own phenomenological description in *Being and Time*, when he analysed time in terms of our anguish before death'. Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 77. In *Time and the Other*, however, Levinas shows that Heidegger does not think this limit through adequately since the otherness of death annihilates the subject as a concrete event. It thus cannot account for a concreteness of human transcendence.

assume it', as Levinas notes, but still finds it 'in front of (*devant*) the subject'.¹⁵¹ It does not assume the Other because in this stage of Levinas's 'dialectic' of transcendence the subject is a mere body which cannot assume anything. Nevertheless, as a body it still encounters the Other 'in front of' it. In this regard, the concrete encounter with the face of the Other (*l'autrui*) brings a sense of the other (*l'autre*) to existence *without* 'crushing' the subject as with the event of death. Levinas does not detail the specifics of this concrete event in *Time and the Other*. He merely upholds it as the situation which accomplishes the subject of temporal duration and ecstatic temporality. Confirming this point, Levinas writes,

Relationship with the future, the presence of the future in the present, seems all the same accomplished in the face-to-face with the Other. 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. The condition of time lies in the relationship between humans, or in history.¹⁵²

Under these circumstances, it is the face-to-face situation that Levinas identifies as responsible for elevating the subject out of the immanence of its bodily condition thus allowing it to know and understand itself through thought and history. It consequently accounts for the act of 'excedence'. Levinas's next philosophical task, therefore, concerns the formulation of the face of the Other as a valid topic for phenomenological research. Once this task is achieved, it will facilitate a proper description of human transcendence as it occurs in concrete life. The next chapter of this study will focus on this topic.

¹⁵¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 78-79/67.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 79/68-69.

CHAPTER III

LEVINAS'S FORMULATION OF HIS SECOND TOPIC IN PHENOMENOLOGY: THE FACE OF THE OTHER (1947–1957)

The face of the Other (*le visage d'autrui*) has, undoubtedly, become the topic most associated with Levinas since his philosophy came to prominence in the latter half of the twentieth century. No term in Levinas's philosophical vocabulary, however, has been 'subject to more analysis or given rise to more confusion', as Moran notes, than that of 'the face'.¹ This is because, far from preserving its common meaning, for Levinas, the concrete encounter with the face of the Other represents an experience that is *sui generis*.² It is not an object of intentional consciousness given to perceptual experience nor is it something belonging to the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*). The face of the Other, rather, is that which lifts the subject out of the fatalism of its bodily immanence by donating the gift of language which, subsequently, gives the subject the freedom to think. The encounter with the face of the Other, therefore, justifies the concrete act of human transcendence, as far as Levinas is concerned. This chapter examines the various ways in which Levinas formulates the face of the Other as a valid topic for phenomenological research during a selection of texts composed and published during the 1950s. It will be shown that, since the face of the Other expresses itself as language, it would not be possible to address it,

¹ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 347.

² Bernard Waldenfels notes that 'what is called "face" in English is less common than it seems to be' in the other languages that Levinas spoke. Bernard Waldenfels, 'The face of the other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, pp. 63-81 (p. 64). Elaborating on this point, Waldenfels comments: 'The French word *visage*, like the German *Gesicht*, refers to seeing and *being seen*. The Hebrew expression *panim*, not unlike the German *Angesicht* or *Anlitz*, emphasizes *the face facing us* or *our mutual facing*. The Russian term *lico* means face, cheek, *but also person*, similar to the Greek *prosôpon* which literally refers to the act of 'looking at' and which stands not only for the face, but also for masks and roles, rendered in Latin by *persona*'. Ibid, my emphasis. Levinas plays on some of these meanings, as will be made clear over the course of this chapter, to signify the face as 'the aim' of the Other which regards me long before I can regard them. This is precisely because the face of the Other does not appear to me as an object given to sense perception or as a tool belonging to my understanding of Being.

philosophically, without the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research. Whilst offering the face of the Other as a concrete event *beyond* question, thus challenging the fundamentality of Heidegger's overall philosophical project, Levinas nevertheless continues to employ Heidegger's way of doing phenomenology as the basis of that critique.

§3.1 'IS ONTOLOGY FUNDAMENTAL?' (1951)³

The first article composed by Levinas during the 1950s bears the title 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' This title represents a direct critical allusion to Heidegger's philosophical project for it is the very primacy of this claim in Heidegger's version of phenomenology that Levinas wishes to question. Levinas's reengagement with Heidegger's position becomes immediately noticeable from the introduction of 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' Under the heading 'The Primacy of Ontology', Levinas begins by writing,

The primacy of ontology among the branches of knowledge would appear to rest on the clearest evidence, for all knowledge of relations connecting or opposing beings to one another implies an understanding of the fact that these beings and relations exist. To articulate the meaning of this fact — i.e., to take up once again the problem of ontology, which is implicitly resolved by each one of us, even if forgetting about it — would seem tantamount to constructing a fundamental knowledge without which all philosophical, scientific or common fields of knowledge are naïve.⁴

Here, Levinas asserts that 'the primacy of ontology' rests on the 'clearest evidence' of 'an understanding of the fact' that beings exist and that 'the meaning of this fact' is 'implicitly resolved by each one of us, even if forgetting about it'. This terminology comes directly from *Being and Time*. The basis for 'fundamental ontology', according

³ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', in *Entre Nous*, pp. 1-11; 'L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?', in *Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), pp.13-24. Further references are to Smith and Harshav's translation with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1/13.

to Heidegger, rests upon the ‘understanding of Being’ that ‘implicitly exists’ within the facticity of *Dasein* and, moreover, this ‘understanding of Being’ can become ‘explicitly resolved’ by each one of us through an awareness of ourselves as a being-for-death when assailed by the affective disposition of anxiety. It is for this reason that Heidegger calls the ‘understanding of Being’ a ‘pre-ontological understanding’ in *Being and Time*⁵ and a ‘non-understanding’ in his earlier lecture-courses.⁶ Moreover, for Heidegger, this fundamental condition is presupposed by all other types of knowledge — philosophical, scientific, and common fields — throughout their respective claims about the meaning of beings and the relations between them. This also extends to and includes the ‘essences’ discovered through eidetic ideation by Husserl in his particular version of phenomenology. As a result, the understanding of Being in *Dasein* constitutes the most concrete form of experience, as far as Heidegger is concerned, thus ratifying it as the starting point for phenomenological research.

In the introduction of ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, Levinas also highlights, what he calls, the ‘dignity’ of the phenomenological method for rejuvenating ‘ontological research’ within contemporary philosophy. He comments that these investigations derive from ‘the urgent and original nature’ of the phenomenological account of ‘evidence’ which, subsequently, rises above the abstract and speculative ‘illuminations’ of traditional metaphysics and allows thinkers such as Husserl and Heidegger to breathe new life into philosophy.⁷ The pivotal role of ‘evidence’ for phenomenological research has been previously emphasised by Levinas. In his doctoral thesis on *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930), Levinas cites ‘evidence’ as ‘the very

⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §4, ‘The Ontical Priority of the Question of Being’, pp. 32-35/11-15.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. by Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979), § 17, ‘Correlation of the question of being and the questioning entity (*Dasein*)’, pp. 147-150/198-202. Further references are to Kisiel’s translation with the English pagination followed by the German pagination and separated by a slash.

⁷ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 1/13.

origin of the notion of being' within Husserl's version of phenomenology.⁸ Expanding on this point, Levinas notes,

Evidence is a form of intentionality in which an object is facing consciousness in person and in the same guise as it was meant. If we say that evidence is the criterion of truth, we do not mean that evidence is only a subjective index of truth; we do not mean that being could appear in such a way as to invalidate the most certain of evidences. Evidence is defined precisely by the fact that it is the presence of consciousness in front of being.⁹

Under these circumstances, 'evidence' corresponds to the primary givenness of directly intended objects prior to reflection. Furthermore, these objects can be known *by* consciousness since they form the concrete life *of* consciousness as a result of the objectifying acts which initially represent them *to* consciousness. Husserl maintains that once our perceptual experiences have been purified of all naturalistic interpretations about being, the essential features of concrete life can be uncovered as they are intuitively given to consciousness. It is the specific philosophical aim of Husserl's idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science to make these 'essences' of universal validity known. 'Evidence' also plays a central role in Heidegger's version of phenomenology and, similar to Husserl, this 'evidence' corresponds to the primary givenness of concrete life prior to all reflection. Unlike Husserl, however, Heidegger's conception of 'evidence' does not stem from the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. On the contrary, it arises from, as Levinas comments, our experience in 'everyday life', that is to say, our 'concrete existence already in progress' which, subsequently, finds itself 'always already fallen' and in a state of 'finite possibility'.¹⁰ Heidegger's conception of 'evidence', then, refers to the understanding of Being as it is expressed by *Dasein* within its specific environment.

⁸ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 75/114.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Levinas, 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', p. 27/421.

These separate accounts of ‘evidence’ within phenomenology further emphasise the difference between Husserl and Heidegger’s respective descriptions of the concrete. According to Heidegger, to apprehend the meaning of being as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness, à la Husserl, presupposes that being itself is initially open to questioning.¹¹ This fundamental questionability of being, for Heidegger, depends on the place in which the question of the meaning of Being can be asked, namely, *Dasein*. It is for this reason that Heidegger claims that his version of phenomenology offers *more* concrete evidence than Husserl’s specific version of phenomenology. Moran is correct, therefore, in his assessment of Heidegger’s position that it constitutes a ‘re-thinking [of] intentionality in terms of the transcendence of *Dasein* in a way which radically transforms the whole [phenomenological] problematic, overcomes Husserl’s intellectualism, and leads to the question of [the meaning of] Being’.¹² Levinas also notes and expands upon this point during the conclusion of *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930). He writes,

Historicity and temporality form the very substantiality of man’s substance. This structure of consciousness, which occupies a very important place in the thought of someone like Heidegger, for example, could also have a place in the Husserlian framework, inasmuch as that it requires only that we respect the intrinsic meaning of the phenomena. Yet it has not been studied by Husserl, at least in the works published so far. He never discusses the relation between the historicity of consciousness and its intentionality, its personality, its social character. The absence of this problem in Husserl’s work seems to be determined mainly by the general spirit of his thought. The historicity of consciousness does not appear as an

¹¹ Contrary to Husserl, who thinks that modern philosophy persists in a state of ‘crisis’ due to its choice of ‘irrationality’ over and against the clarity of reason as found in the mathematical sciences, Heidegger maintains that the crisis of philosophy relates to the very forgetfulness of the original questionability of Being. For Husserl, as R. Philip Buckley notes, ‘the crisis is somehow the simple case of a malfunctioning that must be fixed, a lack of efficiency which must be overcome, a poor operation that must be improved’. R. Philip Buckley, *Husserl, Heidegger and the Crisis of Philosophical Responsibility* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), p. 157. In this sense, the crisis of philosophy requires an answer, as far as Husserl is concerned. In contrast to this stance, for Heidegger, the crisis of philosophy relates to the forgetfulness of a question, namely, the question of the meaning of Being. Thus, as Buckley correctly remarks, ‘the crisis consists not so much in a lack of “knowledge” about Being, but in overlooking the [original] mystery of Being’. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158. This mystery is the very questionability of Being.

¹² Dermot Moran, ‘Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl’s and Brentano’s Accounts of Intentionality’, in *Phenomenology: Critical Concepts in Philosophy*, Vol. 1, ed. by Dermot Moran and Lester E. Embree (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 157-183 (p. 157).

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.¹³

There are a couple of points worth noting in this passage. Firstly, Levinas underlines the validity of Heidegger's approach toward phenomenological research by maintaining that 'historicity and temporality form the very substantiality of man's substance', which Heidegger himself, under the influence of Dilthey and Kierkegaard, affirms in his particular version of phenomenology. Secondly, Levinas holds that Husserl could have addressed these topics in phenomenology, if 'the intrinsic meaning of the phenomena' were respected by him. As an explanation for this oversight by Husserl, Levinas points to 'the general spirit of his thought' which seeks 'suprahistorical' universal knowledge-claims so as to determine the eidetic structure of our conscious experiences thus giving 'intuition an intellectualist character'. It is this 'admission of representation as the basis of all acts of consciousness', then, that prevents Husserl from recognising the historicity and temporality of our actual lived experiences. 'The historicity of consciousness does not appear as an original phenomenon', that is to say, it cannot be reduced to an object of perceptual experience. Heidegger thus shows that concrete life does not boil down to the theoretical acts of intentional consciousness. Levinas *agrees* with Heidegger on this point thus inferring that Heidegger's way of thinking does put us in contact with a *more* concrete aspect of life than Husserl's version of phenomenology. Confirming this

¹³ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, pp. 156-157/221. Here, Levinas's objections echo those made by Dilthey (and then Heidegger) concerning the ahistoricity of Husserl's thinking about the 'life' of consciousness as lived by the human being. According to Dilthey, it is impossible for us to 'free ourselves' from the particular historical context in which we find ourselves seeing that any potential escape would involve overcoming 'the fundamental characteristic of all human consciousness', namely, 'historicity'. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, Vol. VIII, trans. & ed. by H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 38. Heidegger agrees with Dilthey on this point since, as McDonnell observes, 'the meaning of Being that we find in-the-world, if it is to make sense at all, is to be retrieved from the meaning that is embedded in human experience itself', which is fundamentally historical. McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 152. There is, however, in Heidegger's own thinking an equally ahistorical transcendental view of history within the history of philosophy itself. See, Philipp Rosemann, 'Heidegger's Transcendental History', in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 40 (2002), 501-523.

position in *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Levinas highlights the fact that Husserl gives 'primacy to the being of the world of perception' in order to respect 'the intrinsic meaning of our [concrete] life', before remarking, however, that,

Here again, one can reproach Husserl for his intellectualism. Even though he attains the profound idea that, in the ontological order, the world of science is posterior to and depends on the vague and concrete world of perception, he may have been wrong in seeing the concrete world as a world of objects that are primarily perceived. 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?¹⁴

Levinas restates this position in 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' He does so by intimating that Husserl's manner of thinking *presupposes* Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology. In a section entitled 'Contemporary Ontology', Levinas stresses,

Ontology is not the triumph of man over his condition, but in the very tension in which that condition is assumed. This possibility of conceiving contingency and facticity not as facts presented to intellection but as the act of the intellection — this possibility of demonstrating the transitivity of understanding and a 'signifying intention' within brute facts of data (a possibility discovered by Husserl, but attached by Heidegger to the intellection of being in general) constitutes the great novelty of contemporary ontology. Henceforth, the understanding of being implies not just a theoretical attitude, but *the whole of human behaviour*. *The whole man is ontology*. His scientific work, his affective life, the satisfaction of his needs and his work, his social life and his death articulate, with a rigor that assigns a determined function to each of these aspects, the understanding of being, or truth. Our entire civilization emanates from this understanding — be it in the form of the forgetting of being. It is not because there is man that there is truth. It is because being in general is inseparable from its disclosedness, it is because there is truth, or, if you like, it is because being is intelligible, that there is humanity.¹⁵

Whilst phenomenology in general, that is, both Husserl and Heidegger, demarcates 'the great novelty of contemporary ontology', for Levinas, it is Heidegger's manner of thinking in particular that *comes to define* this way of doing philosophy seeing as 'the understanding of being implies not just a theoretical attitude', *contra* Husserl, 'but the whole of human behaviour', *pro* Heidegger. As a result, the understanding of Being, which exists in *Dasein*, achieves full expression in human existence owing to the

¹⁴ Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 119/174.

¹⁵ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', p. 2/14, my emphasis.

particular way in which human beings comport themselves in a world of tools.

Affirming this point, Levinas remarks,

The essential contribution of the new ontology may appear *in its contrast to classical intellectualism*. To understand a tool is not to see it, but to know how to use it; to understand our situation in reality is not to define it, but to be in an affective state. To understand being is to exist. All this seems to indicate a break with the *theoretical structure* of Western thought. 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.¹⁶

This view of ontology comes directly from *Being and Time* and, more significantly, in Levinas's estimation, it offers the most fundamental description of concrete life within contemporary phenomenology.

In 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', Levinas seeks to challenge Heidegger position in order to save ontology from 'drowning' in 'existence'.¹⁷ Accordingly, the title of Levinas's article, under consideration at the moment, represents a direct allusion to Heidegger's philosophical project of fundamental ontology and could effectively be rephrased as the following rhetorical question: Is 'Fundamental Ontology' Fundamental? For Levinas, there are aspects to life more concrete than the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, such as, the concrete encounter with the Other who facilitates the subject's transcendence of its fatalistic bodily immanence. Developing this point, Levinas comments,

Our relation with him [the Other] consists in wanting to understand him, but this relation exceeds the confines of understanding. Not only because, besides curiosity, knowledge of the Other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation, but also because, in our relation to

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 3/15, my emphasis.

¹⁷ Ibid. The phrase 'drowning in existence' here is a metaphorical way of expressing the condemnation to one's own immanent condition. For Levinas, that which defines the human being, as Cynthia D. Coe correctly observes, is 'the transcendence of the mind rather than the immanence of the body'. Cynthia D. Coe, *Levinas and the Trauma of Responsibility: The Ethical Significance of Time* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), p. 136. The very ability to know oneself as a body, therefore, or to know one's own historical situation, presupposes that one has already transcended their state of bodily immanence. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that, for Levinas, the mind is never *disembodied*. It is always chained to a specific point of departure. For this reason, contrary to what some commentators maintain, the transcendence that Levinas speaks of in such instances cannot be equated with the transcendence of the ego as understood by Husserl. See, Nigel Zimmermann, *Facing the Other: John Paul II, Levinas, and the Body* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015), p. 145.

the Other, the latter does not affect us by means of a concept. The Other is *a being and counts as such*.¹⁸

Whenever we speak of the Other, we attempt to understand them. In Heidegger's version of phenomenology, for instance, the Other belongs to *Dasein*'s existential structure *qua Miteinandersein* (Being-with-the-other-person). This ontological relation constitutes the Other either as part of the 'inauthentic crowd' (*das Man*) or as a fellow participant in an 'authentic community' of *Dasein* as a result of *Fürsorge* (care-for-the-other-person).¹⁹ Under these circumstances, the Other always remains part of the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) in the mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) of *Dasein*, as far as Heidegger is concerned. According to Levinas, however, the Other is an independent being and 'counts as such' even in relation to whatever understanding of the Other that I may achieve. This independence derives from the concrete fact that we do not merely speak *of* the Other as part of our understanding of Being. On the contrary, we also speak *to* the Other as an interlocutor. Validating this position, Levinas writes,

Is not the independence of the Other achieved through his or her role as one who is addressed? Is the person to whom we speak understood beforehand in his being? Not at all. The Other is not first an object of understanding and then an interlocutor. The two relations are merged. In other words, addressing the Other is inseparable from understanding the Other. To understand a person is already to speak to him. To posit the existence of the Other by letting him be is already to have accepted that existence, to have taken it into account. 'To have accepted',

¹⁸ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', p. 5/18, my emphasis. Hence, that which is my fellow human being cannot be reduced to *my* understanding of the 'to be' (*Sein*) of beings (*des Seienden*) as it is implicitly expressed by and deposited within the 'existence' of *Dasein*, whose own understanding of the 'to be' (*Sein*) of beings (*des Seienden*) is what concerns that being (*Seiende*). Heidegger does note that my understanding of the 'to be' of beings extends to and includes myself, the world, and others, yet 'brackets' any contemplation of 'others' in his version of phenomenology as 'fundamental ontology'. In sum, for Levinas, this phenomenological approach is not fundamental enough.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §26, 'The Dasein-with of Others and Everyday Being-with', pp. 153-163/117-125. It must be remarked that, for Heidegger, to 'care' for the Other relates either to the 'leaping in' for the Other, in which *Dasein* 'throws' the Other out of their own 'position' in order to act on their behalf, or the 'leaping ahead' of the Other in the care for one's own existence, which gives back the possibility of the Other to become authentic in their own right. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159/122. In both cases, the relation to the Other rests upon the understanding of Being in *Dasein*. These two positions, therefore, do not acknowledge the independent existence of the Other on their own terms.

and ‘to have taken into account’ do not come down to an understanding, a letting be. Speech delineates *an original relation*.²⁰

By speaking *to* the Other, we have already acknowledged them as an independent being, irrespective of what we may say *of* the Other and even of what the Other may say to me about themselves. The very existence of the Other is assumed in any relation to the understanding of the Other, yet it is never reducible to what I can or do understand about another person.²¹ In this respect, the very phenomena of language, without which there would be no understanding of Being or manner in which to express it, rests upon ‘an original relation’ to the Other as interlocutor. It is for this reason that Levinas emphasises ‘the function of language not as subordinate to the consciousness we have of the presence of the Other, or of his proximity, or of our community with him, but as a condition of that conscious realisation’.²² In other words, the very fact that we can speak *of* the Other at all presupposes that we have already spoken *to* the Other and attested to their independent existence in one way or another and at some time or another. If we did not, we simply would not have the means to express such a thought seeing as it is only through the concrete relation to the Other that we initially acquire language.

The relation to the Other, for Levinas, then, consists in ‘instituting sociality’ through an original encounter that is ‘irreducible to understanding’ and ‘prior to any

²⁰ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 6/18, my emphasis.

²¹ In dramatic parlance, the actors as *personae dramatis* wear the masks (*personae*) through which they speak (*per-sonare*) in order to reveal who they are and who we are as listeners bearing witness to the expressed events of their lives. In terms of the Other, for Levinas, it is their face which speaks and reveals both who they are as well as whom we are through our response to their independent existence.

²² Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 6/18-19. Here, once again, Levinas follows Dilthey and Heidegger’s idea of philosophy/phenomenology, *contra* that of Brentano and Husserl, since language is upheld as the basis for conscious reflection on anything. Confirming this point, McDonnell writes: ‘By comparison to the form of historical-social-hermeneutic research that Dilthey advocates in his idea of “descriptive psychology”, the “descriptive method” that is proposed by Brentano and Husserl of intentional consciousness reflecting on itself is, in Dilthey’s eyes, profoundly abstract, ahistorical, solipsistic and forgetful of the fact that one’s own self-understanding is bound up with the way others are understood’. McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 125. Whilst disagreeing with Dilthey and Heidegger’s attempt to understand the Other based upon what is said *of* them *in* language, Levinas nevertheless agrees that the encounter with the Other is fundamentally an encounter with language.

participation in a common content through understanding'.²³ This concrete encounter to the Other breaks the solitude of the lived body, owing to the gift of language, which facilitates the relationship between two distinct existents in existence. Thus, from the start of the 1950s, and then after, Levinas seeks to show that the entire scope of 'contemporary ontological research', or 'phenomenology', following Heidegger's affirmation of the fundamental questionability of Being, *presupposes a relationship with the independent existence of the Other which lies beyond that question.* Furthermore, since everything that is understood 'to be' in being is questionable, at least, according to Heidegger, who Levinas accepts as the defining figure in phenomenology, it must follow that the relation to the Other, which occurs beyond question, 'is therefore not ontology', to use Levinas's words.²⁴ The methodological problem facing Levinas going forward, therefore, will be to find a way to describe our original encounter with the Other in concrete life, thus remaining phenomenological, without reducing that encounter to the domain of 'ontology' or 'the understanding of Being' so as not to undermine the independent existence of the Other.

Levinas takes some preliminary steps toward addressing our original encounter with the Other in the final section of 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' He proceeds negatively by outlining the way in which the Other *should not* be considered if their independent existence is to be acknowledged in thought. In relation to Heidegger, Levinas comments that the Other should not be considered as a being in correlation to *Dasein* seeing as the meaning of such beings are always already determined by the understanding of Being. In this respect, the understanding of Being does not 'invoke' the Other, rather, to quote Levinas, it 'only names them'.²⁵ As a result, the independence of the Other cannot be recognised within Heidegger's version of

²³ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', p. 7/20.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 9/21.

phenomenology on account of the fact that as soon as the Other is understood, in any way whatsoever, they immediately become an object of our experience and their independence is subsequently overlooked. Concluding on this point, Levinas remarks,

And thus, with regard to beings, understanding carries out an act of violence and of negation. A partial negation, which is violence. And this partialness can be described by the fact that, without disappearing, beings are in my power. The partial negation which is violence denies the independence of beings: they are mine.²⁶

If *Dasein* is the fundamental place from which all beings are understood, then all beings belong to the understanding of Being. In this regard, they are possessed by *Dasein* and their independence is negated. Nevertheless, for Levinas, Husserl's version of phenomenology is also guilty of this 'violence' considering that 'vision', *qua* perceptual experience, also 'exercises power over the object'.²⁷ The reason behind this power stems from the fact that as soon as a being is *seen* or, to use the language of phenomenology, *appears*, it has done so as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. As a result, the Other becomes an object of experience and thus belongs to or is possessed by the conscious subject. With this in mind, Levinas comments,

Possession is the mode by which a being, while existing, is partially denied. It is not merely the fact that the being is an instrument and a tool — that is to say, a means; it is also an end — consumable, it is food, and, in enjoyment, offers itself, gives itself, is mine.²⁸

In the state of enjoyment, beings are encountered as mine. They can be used as tools, they can be consumed as food, and they can be known through knowledge. In this manner, whilst such beings are not me, they nevertheless *belong to me*. This is what Levinas means by saying that such beings are only 'partially' denied or negated. With

²⁶ Ibid, p. 9/21-22.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 9/22.

²⁸ Ibid.

respect to the Other, however, *they can never be possessed*. On this point, Levinas notes,

The meeting with the other person [*l'autrui*] consists in the fact that, despite the extent of my domination over him and his submission, I do not possess him. He [the Other] does not enter entirely into the opening of being [*Dasein*] in which I already stand as in the field of my freedom. It is not in terms of being in general that he comes toward me. Everything from him that comes to me in terms of being in general certainly offers itself to my understanding and my possession. I understand him in terms of his history, his environment, his habits. What escapes understanding in him [the Other] is himself, the being.²⁹

Irrespective of the way in which the Other is understood in *Dasein*, there is always an aspect of their being that escapes the understanding of Being, namely, the independence of the Other as a distinct *existent in existence*. Consequently, the very existence of the Other is not reducible to my 'existence' in '*Dasein*' (in Heidegger's sense of those terms). The independence of beings is something that Heidegger himself recognises in *Being and Time* with the assertion that '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 nature is ascertained'.³⁰ Nevertheless, Heidegger could never address or respect this independent existence due to the fact that, in his words, the meaning of 'Being (*Sein*) "is" only in the understanding of those entities (*des Seienden*) to whose Being (*Sein*) something like an understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) belongs'.³¹ Thus Heidegger's overall philosophical goal to raise anew the question of the meaning of Being, which fundamentally relies upon the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, excludes any questions concerning the independent existence of beings, including that of the Other, in his elaboration of phenomenology as 'fundamental ontology'. Yet this very project does assume and requires the acknowledgement of the experience of the very existence of things, including the existence of the Other, outside

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 228/183.

³¹ Ibid.

of the understanding of Being in *Dasein* as a pivotal experience from which fundamental ontology departs. This part of concrete experience, however, Heidegger chokes to forget.

In the final few pages of ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, Levinas begins to show, *contra* Heidegger, that the independent existence of the Other can indeed be respected and addressed within phenomenology. He does so by considering the difference between the Other (*l’autrui*) and other objects (*l’autre*) that we encounter in concrete life. According to Heidegger, as McDonnell correctly asserts, the understanding of Being in *Dasein* ‘extends [to] and includes equally the world, myself and my fellow human being’.³² Under these circumstances, for Heidegger, there is no real difference between the manner in which we encounter other objects in the world from that of the Other. Both are encountered either as, to use Heidegger’s terminology, *Zuhanden* (handleable) or *Vorhanden* (present-in-stock).³³ This analysis of the Other is extremely short-sighted, in Levinas’s estimation. The reason behind this claim stems from the fact that, unlike other objects, the Other cannot be possessed. In support of this point, Levinas argues,

I cannot deny him [the Other] partially, in violence, by grasping him [the Other] in terms of being in general, and by possessing him [the Other]. The other [*l’autrui*] is the only being whose negation can be declared only as total: a murder.³⁴

³² McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, p. 154.

³³ There are some scholars who attempt to find an ‘ethics’ in Heidegger’s thinking. Lawrence J. Hatab, for instance, speaks of ‘the possibility of empathy as an ekstastic being-in-there-with-the-Other, of empathetic concern as a fundamental element of *Dasein*’s social world’. Lawrence J. Hatab, ‘Heidegger and the Question of Empathy’, in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 249-274 (p. 256). It seems to me, however, as it also does to Levinas, that such an ‘empathetic concern’ cannot be ‘fundamental’, for Heidegger, precisely because what is fundamental in his version of phenomenology is ‘ontology’, that is to say, the concern for one’s own ‘to be’ as found in the expression of the understanding of Being in *Dasein*. Incidentally, Hatab cites ‘the face-to-face encounter with someone undergoing pain or misfortune’ as an example when the ‘ekstastic being-in-there-with-the-Other’ becomes a possibility. *Ibid.* In this sense, Hatab fails to appreciate the fundamental critique of Heidegger’s thinking as it is forwarded by Levinas which, subsequently, highlights the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, who suffers, as an ontological ordeal residing outside or beyond the understanding of Being in *Dasein*.

³⁴ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 9/22.

Whilst the Other can be dominated into submission and can be understood in terms of their history, environment, and habits, they can never be possessed in the same way that other objects can be possessed due to the fact that the Other is an independent being with the ability not only to *resist* but to *call into question* my understanding of Being. This is because when objects are used, consumed, and understood in the state of enjoyment, either as tools, food, or knowledge, they are ‘partially negated’ in the sense that those objects are not destroyed, rather, they become part of me and my experience. They belong to my understanding of Being. With respect to the Other, however, their independence as a distinct existent in existence can never become part of me. This aspect of their existence cannot be denied — not even partially. Any negation of the Other, therefore, can only transpire as a ‘total negation’. In other words, if the Other resists my understanding of Being and does not submit to it, they can be destroyed, that is to say, murdered.

Heidegger’s version of phenomenology maintains that my understanding of Being can only be questioned *in Dasein* after I become assailed by the affective disposition of anxiety and develop an awareness of myself as a being-for-death. By considering the independent existence of the Other, however, Levinas demonstrates that our understanding of Being can be questioned from the *outside*.³⁵ Moreover, for Levinas, this external questioning cannot be denied, even if the Other, who questions my understanding of Being, is murdered. Expanding on this notion, Levinas remarks,

The other [*l’autrui*] is the only being I can want to kill. I can want to. Yet this power is the complete opposite of power. The triumph of this power is its defeat as power. At the very moment when my power to kill is realized, the other [*l’autrui*] has escaped. In killing, I can certainly attain a goal, I can kill the way I hunt, or cut

³⁵ Furthermore, this question is much more fundamental than the question of the meaning of Being as asked by *Dasein* itself due to the fact that it is the external question of the Other that initially gives the subject a sense of self-awareness and thus the ability to inquire into the meaning of anything. Before the subject is free to question itself and the meaning of Being, therefore, it has already *responded to* the external question posed by the face of the Other, whether the subject is aware of it or not.

down trees, or slaughter animals — but then I have grasped the other [*l'autrui*] in the opening of being in general, as an element of the world in which I stand.³⁶

The desire to murder the Other results from the fact that they have questioned my understanding of Being and, ultimately, refuse to submit to it. Furthermore, when this desire is acted upon, the questioning of the Other is not undone, it is merely ignored. As a result, the act of murder confirms that the Other ultimately resides beyond my understanding of Being thus rendering me powerless over their independent existence.

Acknowledging the Other as an independent being, exterior to my understanding of Being, means recognising them as they are in themselves. It denotes an acknowledgement of 'the face of the Other'. Commencing this description of the face, Levinas confirms that 'the temptation of a total negation', which is to say, murder, only becomes a possibility with 'the presence of the face'.³⁷ In this respect, the face of the Other is immediately regarded by Levinas as the source of the question posed externally toward my understanding of Being. Furthermore, 'to be in relation with the other face to face' is to be 'unable to kill'.³⁸ This is because even if I choose to murder the Other, I cannot choose to kill their independence which remains as the initial question posed by their face. To acknowledge the independent existence of the Other, therefore, means entering into a dialogue with them following this external questioning of our understanding of Being. It is for this reason that Levinas upholds the face-to-face relation as 'the situation of discourse'.³⁹

The 'face' of the Other signifies an event beyond the understanding of Being. 'In it', Levinas comments, 'the infinite resistance of a being to our power is affirmed precisely in opposition to the will-to-murder that it defies, because, being completely

³⁶ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', p. 9/22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10/22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

naked — and the nakedness of the face is not a figure of speech — it means by itself’.⁴⁰ Under these circumstances, when the existence of the Other is directly acknowledged through dialogue by virtue of their face, they are stripped of all mediating factors and regarded as they are *in themselves* beyond the understanding of Being. Levinas thus sets ‘the signifying of the face in opposition to understanding and meaning grasped on the basis of the horizon’.⁴¹ This is what the term ‘naked’ means for him.⁴² The infinite exteriority of the face of the Other, nonetheless, creates methodological complications for Levinas since it raises the following question: How can the face of the Other become a topic for phenomenological research without grasping the Other, in some way, from within a horizon of understanding thus failing to acknowledge their ‘face’? The difficulty of answering this question is already quite apparent in ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’ ‘Vision’, as Levinas remarks, ‘exercises power over the object’.⁴³ In this respect, the ‘face’ of the Other cannot be ‘seen’, strictly speaking, on the basis that such an appearance would result from the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness and the perceptual experience of the subject would, ultimately, determine an understanding of the Other. As a result, Husserl’s approach toward phenomenological research offers no help to Levinas for addressing the topic of the face of the Other within phenomenology. At the same time, however, in ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, Levinas states that when the independent existence of the Other has not been duly

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 10/23.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The failure to understand this important point often leads to mischaracterisations in relation to what Levinas actually means by ‘the Other’. For example, in a radio discussion with Malka held in 1983, following the massacres of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Chatila by the Phalangists, during which Israeli Defence Forces failed to intervene, Levinas was asked is not the Other of the Israeli ‘above all the Palestinian’? See, Robert Bernasconi, ‘Who is my neighbour? Who is the Other? Questioning ‘the generosity of Western thought’, in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Vol. IV: Beyond Levinas*, ed. by Claire Elise Katz with Lara Trout (London: Routledge, 2005), 5-30 (p. 10). In response to this question, whilst asserting that, certainly, ‘there are people who are wrong’ in such situations, Levinas comments that his ‘definition of the Other is completely different’. Ibid. This is because the terms ‘Palestinian’ and ‘Israeli’ already relate to an understanding of Being and thus do not correspond to the nakedness of the face of the Other.

⁴³ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 9/22.

acknowledged, it implies that ‘I have not looked straight at him’, which is to say, ‘I have not looked him in the face’.⁴⁴ It seems to me that, in such instances, Levinas employs the term ‘looked’ as an analogy — similar to the manner in which he previously referred to our ‘relationship’ with ‘Being in general’ in *Existence and Existents*.⁴⁵ As his work progresses, Levinas will find it increasingly difficult to find an adequate form of expression for his topics of research in phenomenology due to the fact that they ultimately resist our understanding of Being and always remain exterior to it. This is already evident in the final paragraph of ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’ when Levinas poses the following question: ‘How is the vision of the face no longer vision?’⁴⁶

‘The articulations of vision’, as Levinas informs, ‘in which the relation of the subject to the object is subordinate to the relation of the object to light — which is not an object’, also applies to Heidegger, in the sense that, ‘the understanding of a being consists in going beyond that being — precisely into openness — and perceiving it upon the horizon of being’.⁴⁷ In this regard, Heidegger’s approach does not differ from Husserl’s with respect to the manner in which beings are understood. Both give equal authority to the experiencing subject as the source from which all objects are understood. The only difference between Husserl and Heidegger on this matter is that instead of ‘light’ operating as the mediating factor for the appearance of objects through perceptual experience, Heidegger maintains the understanding of Being in *Dasein* as the mediating factor for the disclosure of beings in general. Despite this similarity, however, Levinas preferences Heidegger’s approach toward phenomenological research for addressing the topic of the face of the Other due to the fact that it focuses on the

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 9-10/22.

⁴⁵ See, §2.1.2.

⁴⁶ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 11/23.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 5/17.

experience of language as opposed to the perceptual experience which Husserl upholds as central to his particular version of phenomenology. The significance of the experience of language becomes clear at the tail end of the question just mentioned in ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, when Levinas informs his readers that the ‘vision’ of the face of the Other is not really a ‘vision’ at all; it concerns, rather, ‘hearing and speech’, that is to say, the ‘face’ relates to the phenomenon of language.⁴⁸ Acknowledging the independent existence of the Other, therefore, denotes *listening* to what is expressed by virtue of their ‘face’ which *cannot* be seen but only *heard*.⁴⁹

§3.2 ‘ETHICS AND SPIRIT’ (1952)⁵⁰

The next of Levinas’s publications from the 1950s to address the topic of ‘the face of the Other’ is ‘Ethics and Spirit’. At the beginning of this article, Levinas bemoans the separation that occurs between the spiritual order and ethical relations within human history. He remarks that ‘for a long time Jews thought that every situation in which humanity recognizes its religious progress’ amid ‘ethical relations’ that it simultaneously finds ‘its spiritual meaning’.⁵¹ With the advent of Christianity, however, and ‘the realist affirmation of irrational facts’, which ‘draw their significance

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 11/23.

⁴⁹ This manner of thinking proceeds in a similar way to Heidegger, who speaks of *listening* to the *call* (*der Ruf*) of conscience and *hearing* the meaning of Being in the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) as it has been deposited in *Dasein*. In *Being and Time*, as John D. Caputo notes, ‘conscience’ is a ‘call’ that ‘summons’ *Dasein* ‘back to itself’ as its ownmost possibility. John D. Caputo, *Demythologising Heidegger* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 75. This call does not come from the outside but instead it is ‘disclosed’ to *Dasein* as part of its own understanding of Being. Only by ‘listening’ to this call of conscience, as opposed to the idle chatter of the crowd, can *Dasein* come to possess an authentic understanding of Being. This is further linked to the experience of the nothingness of death, as Caputo correctly remarks, which arrives, for Heidegger, through the affective disposition of anxiety about one’s own death. Ibid., pp. 75-76. Levinas reforms this approach by relating the call of conscience to ‘hearing’ the external ‘call’ of the face of the Other and the importance of ‘listening’ to one’s own actual responsibility for (*pour*) the Other in front of (*devant*) the Other. See, §4.4.4.

⁵⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, pp. 3-10; ‘Ethique et Esprit’, in *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme*, 3rd edn (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), pp. 13-23. Further references are to Hand’s translation with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 4/15.

from some intimate and impenetrable experience', 'spiritual values' begin to find their meaning in line with 'material goods' in the sense that they become offered to those who wish to 'grow rich'.⁵² As a result, the ethical relations that Jews recognise at the heart of the spiritual order become forgotten and ignored within the Christian world in favour of self-salvation and the promise of eternal life with God after death.⁵³ One of the main aims of 'Ethics and Spirit' is to reaffirm the fundamental connection between the spiritual order and ethical relations in line with the traditional Jewish stance on the subject. Levinas, however, does not merely assert his view as a theological opinion. Judaism may indeed represent 'a religion of the spirit' as far as Levinas is concerned;⁵⁴ but, the term 'religion' here means the primary 'bond' with the Other 'which is not reducible to the representation' of the Other.⁵⁵ Once this concrete meaning of the spiritual order is clarified, then, the valid message of Judaism can achieve its formal expression within philosophy.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 3-4/14-15.

⁵³ Levinas's critique of Christianity is dealt with in depth by Caygill. The prestige of Christianity is robbed in the eyes of Levinas due to the fact that, for two thousand years in which it came to dominate the spiritual life of Europe, it had the chance to make the world a better place only for six million defenceless human beings to be exterminated on the continent during World War II. See, Emmanuel Levinas, 'Place and Utopia', in *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 99-102. In relation to this point, as Caygill notes, Christianity represents a 'utopian rejection of this world in favour of the kingdom not of this world'. Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 84. For Levinas, when one focuses on saving oneself in the next life, they forget their direct responsibility for the Other in this life. Christianity, therefore, would represent a selfish ethics in which doing good for the Other always aims at the end of personal salvation. It is for this reason that Levinas holds Christianity to preference 'my place in the sun' over that of the independent existence of the Other. Ibid.

⁵⁴ Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 6/17.

⁵⁵ Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', p. 7/20. The term 'religion' comes from the Latin '*religare*', which means 'to bind', and '*religio*', which means 'obligation'. In theology, these terms relate to the faithful 'bind' with and moral 'obligation' to God as the creator. For Levinas, however, as a Post-Kantian thinker, they concern the necessary 'bond' with and ethical 'obligation' to the Other who, by calling me into question during the face-to-face relation, bestows the gift of thought and language thus leading to a sense of self-awareness. In light of this point, the following statement made by Levinas to Kearney achieves full clarity: "Going towards God" is not to be understood here in the classical ontological sense of a return to, or reunification with, God as the beginning or end of temporal existence. "Going towards God" is meaningless unless sense in terms of my primary "going towards the other person". I can only go toward God by being ethically concerned by and for the other person — I am not saying that ethics presupposes belief. On the contrary, belief presupposes ethics as that disruption of our being-in-the-world which opens us to the other'. Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 74

Levinas commences 'Ethics and Spirit' with the claim that 'nothing is more ambiguous than the term "spiritual life"'.⁵⁶ Here, there is a return to one of the main topics considered in 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' (1934), namely, the philosophical requirement of describing the concrete transcendence of the human spirit following the valid critiques of ideology forwarded by Marx and Nietzsche.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, at this stage of his career, Levinas has a much firmer philosophical basis in which to address the topic of the transcendence of the human spirit and its meaning in concrete life having already described the fatalism of the immanent condition to which Marx and Nietzsche give philosophical credence⁵⁸ as well as having discovered the concrete encounter with the face of the Other which facilitates the transcendence of the human being.⁵⁹ As such, Levinas's first attempt towards clarifying the meaning of the term 'spiritual life' utilises the language previously employed in 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' Levinas ruminates,

Could we not make it [the term 'spiritual life'] more precise by excluding from it any relation to violence? But violence is not to be found only in the collision of one billiard ball with another, or the storm that destroys a harvest, or the master who mistreats his slave, or a totalitarian State that vilifies its citizens, or the conquest and subjection of men in war. Violence is to be 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.⁶⁰

In 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', Levinas defines 'violence' as a 'partial negation' — when independent beings are considered to be a part of my understanding of Being — as well as with respect to the 'total negation' of the Other through the act of murder. Levinas now broadens this definition to include the idea of causation ('the collision of one billiard ball with another'), natural evil ('the storm that destroys a harvest'), moral

⁵⁶ Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 6/18.

⁵⁷ See, §1.3.1.

⁵⁸ See, §2.2.4.

⁵⁹ See, §2.2.5.

⁶⁰ Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 6/18.

evil ('the master who mistreats his slave'), political oppression ('a totalitarian State that vilifies its citizens'), and the human cost of historical conflicts ('the conquest and subjection of men in war'). As a result, 'violence' now encompasses 'any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act', that is to say, when one being dominates or subjugates another being, whether this action occurs 'naturally' or 'socially'.⁶¹ Since 'spiritual life' excludes such acts of violence, Levinas must find a situation exterior to these examples in concrete life so as to maintain his phenomenological approach. In light of these stipulations, Levinas advances,

But is a cause without violence possible? Who welcomes without being shocked? Let mystics be reassured: nothing can shock reason. It collaborates with what it hears. Language acts without being subdued, even when it is the vehicle for an order. Reason and language are external to violence. They are the spiritual order. If morality must truly exclude violence, a profound link must join reason, language and morality. If religion is to coincide with spiritual life, it must be essentially ethical. Inevitably, a spiritualism of the Irrational is a contradiction. Adhering to the Sacred is infinitely more materialist than proclaiming the incontestable value of bread and meat in the lives of ordinary people.⁶²

According to Levinas, the correct meaning of the term 'spiritual life' is found in line with language and, by association, reason. These attributes allow the subject to transcend its immanent condition by giving it the freedom to reflect upon and thus understand itself. Furthermore, since language and reason are 'spiritual', or, transcendent, the freedom to reflect cannot be shocked by the immanence of violence. Even if one chooses to forcibly dominate the Other in concrete life, language always

⁶¹ Levinas goes on to equate this violence with the idea of the *conatus essendi*. Further explaining this point, Levinas notes: 'In the *conatus essendi*, which is the effort to exist, existence is the supreme law. However, with the appearance of the face on the inter-personal level, the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" emerges as a limitation of the *conatus essendi*. It is not a rational limit. Consequently, interpreting it necessitates thinking it in moral terms, in ethical terms. It must be thought of outside the idea of force. It is in the human being that a rupture is produced with being's own law, with the law of being. The law of evil is the law of being'. Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Paradox of Morality: An interview with Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Provocation of Levinas*, trans. by Andrew Benjamin & Tamra Wright, ed. by Robert Bernasconi & David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 168-180 (p. 175). Under these circumstances, the effort to existence in bodily immanence as a response to one's own materiality is the violent order that the face of the Other interrupts and allows the subject to transcend. This renders being itself evil, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned. See, for more on the topic of evil in Levinas's work, Richard J. Bernstein, 'Evil and the temptation of theodicy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi & Simon Critchely (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 252-267.

⁶² Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 7/18.

allows those who are subjugated to resist. For example, no matter how much the British Empire attempted to conquer the island of Ireland through physical force over the course of human history, the ‘spiritual life’ of the Irish people, that is to say, the ability of the Irish to reflect upon and express themselves as *not* British through language and reason, allowed them to say ‘NO’ to colonialism thus ‘resisting’ the understanding of Being *qua* British imperialism. In this respect, the ‘spiritual life’ of the Other, which constitutes their ability to reflect upon and express themselves through language and reason, can never be assimilated by me. Hence, Levinas’s initial claim that to recognise the ‘spiritual life’ of the Other is already to link language and reason with ‘morality’. In other words, by acknowledging the Other as a being with an ‘internal life’, on account of their ability to reason and express themselves in language, one has *already identified a difference* between them and other objects encountered in the world. This identification, as far as Levinas is concerned, forms the concrete basis for morality as such.⁶³

That human beings can reflect upon their experiences and express themselves through language and reason is a fact of concrete life. Nevertheless, unlike the history of philosophy, which takes this ability as a given and allows it to endure unquestioned, Levinas seeks a justification for the human ability to reflect upon and understand oneself, the world, and others through language and reason. To formalise this problem

⁶³ It also marks the human being’s break from the ‘natural attitude’, as Husserl defines it, considering that, once we accept that we transcend our mode of being in the natural world through language, we do not need to go through the highly strenuous intellectual-therapeutic act of implementing the ‘transcendental reduction’, which, to use Husserl’s words, belongs to ‘our perfect freedom’, in order to break out of the natural attitude. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 58/54. In this respect, Levinas does not fall back into the ‘natural attitude’ when addressing the topic of the Other within phenomenology, unlike other related thinkers. Edith Stein, for instance, as Michael F. Andrews comments, posits a sense of ‘alterity’ that is present in the world ‘before language arrives on the scene’. Michael F. Andrews, ‘A Phenomenology of Ethics and Excess: Experiences of Givenness and Transcendence According to Edith Stein’, in *Edith Stein: Women, Social-Political Philosophy, Theology, Metaphysics and Public History: New Approaches and Applications*, ed. by Antonio Calcagno (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2016), 119-132 (p. 128). This sense of alterity comes from the Christian idea of God which, as Andrews also confirms, happily commits Stein to ‘the natural attitude’. *Ibid.*

as a question, it may be asked: What is it that differentiates human beings from all other beings in existence and allows them to transcend the order of violence so as to reach the spiritual order of language and reason? The answer to this question, as far as Levinas is concerned, pertains to the human necessity of recognising the face of the Other. In order to support this position, Levinas emphasises a ‘banal’ fact with respect to the concrete life of human beings which, ‘in one sense, quits the order of violence’.⁶⁴ This fact pertains to the everyday human event of ‘conversation’. According to Levinas, despite its banality, conversation occurs as ‘the marvel of marvels’ in concrete life since it demonstrates the fact that human beings escape the solitude of their bodily immanence and relate to each other in the spiritual order of language.⁶⁵ The ‘banal’ fact of conversation, therefore, points to a significant aspect of human life that becomes *forgotten* during routine conversations between people every day. This aspect concerns the fact that any conversation with another person always already presupposes an initial recognition of that person as a human being and not as a mere object of experience.

Elaborating on this point, Levinas notes,

To speak, at the same time as knowing the Other, is making oneself known to him. The Other is not only known, he is greeted. He is not only named, but also invoked. To put it in grammatical terms, the Other does not appear in the nominative, but in the vocative. I not only think of what he is for me, but also and simultaneously, and even before, I am for him. In applying a concept to him, in calling him this or that, I am already appealing to him. I do not only know something, I am also part of society. This commerce which the word implies is precisely action without violence: 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.⁶⁶

Collaboration, invocation, and co-operation as partners in the conversation are essential ingredients of a dialogue. Thus, even if I try to assimilate the Other into my understanding of Being by naming or conceptualising them, in one way or another, the

⁶⁴ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 7/19.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 7-8/20.

simple fact that *I am speaking to them* at all presupposes that I have *necessarily recognised* the Other in the vocative sense. I am speaking with them as a human being due to the fact that I have already recognised them as such. In this respect, for Levinas, human beings stand out amongst other beings, or mere ‘things’, in existence. ‘Things give, they do not offer a face’, as Levinas puts it, ‘they are beings without a face’.⁶⁷

According to Levinas, even if I do not speak to the Other directly, as they stand in front of me, I nevertheless appeal to the Other whilst I speak of them or whilst I speak in general. The justification for this position stems from my very capacity to express myself through language and reason since this ability presupposes an initial recognition of the face of the Other which happens by necessity for the human being. The very fact that I can express myself through language and reason, therefore, proves that I have already accepted my place in society amongst other human beings as opposed to mere ‘things’ in existence. In this respect, I have risen above the order of violence, which only seeks sovereignty and domination, and entered into a non-violent relation with the Other by joining the spiritual order. Expanding upon this position, Levinas comments that in the spiritual order,

Speaking and hearing become one rather than succeed one another. Speaking therefore institutes the moral relationship of equality and consequently recognizes justice. Even when one speaks to a slave, one speaks to an equal. What one says, the content communicated, is possible only thanks to this face-to-face relationship in which the Other counts as an interlocutor prior even to being known.⁶⁸

Here, it becomes clear that speaking is only possible if the face of the Other has already been recognised, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned. The simple fact that human

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 8/20. In an article published in 1948, entitled ‘Reality and its Shadow’, Levinas highlights that both the strength and danger of art relates to the fact that it tries to give a face to things, that is to say, it tries to make things speak. According to Levinas, however, it is only through criticism that works of art come to speak. Without criticism, they remain suspended in time and thus without reality. As a result and unlike the Other, artworks are not meaningful in themselves but require the understanding of the critic in order to bring them to life. See, Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Reality and its Shadow’, in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp. 1-13.

⁶⁸ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 8/20.

beings have the ability to express themselves through language and reason in everyday conversation proves that human beings *cannot but* recognise the face of the Other. This is why Levinas calls the ‘banal’ fact of conversation ‘the marvel of marvels’ since it denotes a ‘moral relationship of equality’ at the centre of human interactions prior to all of our various rationalisations and ideological expressions. Indeed, for Levinas, language and reason can be utilised for violent ends. For example, one can employ reason in order to devise of a racist ideology, the expression of which could lead to the subjugation or annihilation of the Other, as with Hitler and the Nazi Party. Even in such instances, however, the simple fact that one can employ reason in the first place, so as to conceive of a racist ideology, prior to its expression in political discourse, presupposes an initial recognition of the face of the Other and thus a ‘moral relationship of equality’ between existing human beings. Hence, Levinas’s claim above that ‘even when one speaks to a slave, one speaks to an equal’.

One cannot but *recognise* the face of the Other. Nevertheless, whether one *acknowledges* the face of the Other through language and reason, or not, is another matter entirely. This is because no sooner as the spiritual order has been reached I have already ‘escaped’ the solitude of bodily immanence and entered into the temporal duration of the reflective ego. Thus, ‘(W)hat one says, the content communicated’, and, by extension, what one thinks, ‘is possible only thanks to this face-to-face relationship in which the Other counts as an interlocutor prior even to being known’, as Levinas remarks above.⁶⁹ The concrete encounter with the face of the Other, then, grants me the freedom to reflect in the first place. Yet, since the initial recognition of the face of the Other occurs *prior to* thought, it follows that this recognition is not initially *known by* thought. Under these circumstances, the transcendental condition for thought — the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

face of the Other — becomes immediately forgotten by thought as soon as the subject becomes self-aware. Consequently, whether or not a responsive acknowledgment of the face of the Other arises in the spiritual order turns out to be a matter for one's own individual freedom, which the ability to reflect bestows upon us.⁷⁰

Having already identified the face of the Other in concrete life as an ethical precondition for the exercise of my individual freedom, Levinas, in the final section of 'Ethics and Spirit', outlines the way in which this fundamental aspect of human life can be retrieved by thought *today*, thus leading to an acknowledgment of the face of the Other in language and reason.⁷¹ The first approach employed by Levinas with respect to this problem is negative in the sense that it concerns how *not* to acknowledge the face of the Other. He emphasises that,

The face is not the mere assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes, etc.; it is all that, of course, but takes on the meaning of a face through the new dimension it opens up in the perception of a being. Through the face, the being is not only enclosed in its form and offered to the hand, it is also open, establishing itself in depth and, in this opening, presenting itself somehow in a personal way. The face is an irreducible mode in which being can present itself in its identity. A thing can never be presented personally and ultimately has no identity.⁷²

To approach or 'look' at the Other as the intended object of an act of outer perceptual sense-experience, that is, as a knowable object of thing-perception, is to ignore how we actually encounter the Other in concrete life. Here, then, it is clear that although the face, in everyday discourse, refers to 'the mere assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes,

⁷⁰ This is what makes the matter of freedom so 'difficult', for Levinas, as the title of the selection of essays containing 'Ethics and Spirit' would suggest. The subject is free to denounce its responsibility *for* the Other by not choosing to acknowledge their face. Nevertheless, in doing so, the subject still remains responsible *to* the Other based upon the necessary recognition of their face which, subsequently, bestows the subject with the very freedom to choose.

⁷¹ The idea of retrieving the forgotten encounter with the face of the Other in concrete life and making it relevant again for thought today represents a similar approach to Heidegger's philosophical aim of retrieving the forgotten question of the meaning of Being and making relevant again for thought today (*heute*). Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 21/2. McDonnell notes that Heidegger's methodology here is comparable to the 'hermeneutic task' of 'the Protestant reformers in making the living word of God relevant today' for readers of the Bible. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, Ch. 4, 'Heidegger's Appropriation of Biblical Hermeneutics into the Formulation of the Question of the Meaning of Being'. This methodological device, then, also finds its way into the thinking of Levinas as a result of his acceptance of Heidegger's way of describing the concrete.

⁷² Levinas, 'Ethics and Spirit', p. 8/20.

etc.’, for Levinas, the term ‘face’ means something very different. The meaning of the ‘face’, as far as Levinas is concerned, applies to the specific way in which a certain type of ‘being’ — the human being — establishes itself with a certain ‘depth’ in existence thus leading to the presentation of itself in a ‘personal way’. Unlike mere ‘things’ in existence, which never present themselves personally since their meaning is always constituted by us in the understanding of Being, human beings present themselves with an ‘identity’, that is, a personal uniqueness other than objects of thing-perception. The necessary recognition of such identities by human beings opens up a ‘new dimension’ in the ‘perception’ of being and thus in Levinas’s understanding and development of phenomenology. In this instance, nonetheless, the use of the term ‘perception’ is methodologically problematic for Levinas in his efforts toward acknowledging the face of the Other in language and reason. This is because the ‘perception’ of any phenomenon, as Husserl shows, implies that it has initially *appeared* as a result of the objectifying acts of intention consciousness. In this regard, the phenomenon in question has become known as a part of the understanding of Being and, subsequently, its independent existence has been ignored or forgotten. Levinas himself accepts this point in ‘Ethics and Spirit’ by writing,

To know is to perceive, to seize an object — be it a man or a group of men — to seize a thing. Every experience of the world is at the same time an experience of self, possession and enjoyment of self: it forms and nourishes me. The knowledge that makes us move out of ourselves is also like our slow absorption and digestion of [reflected upon] reality.⁷³

The perception of any phenomenon is simultaneously the ‘absorption’ of that phenomenon through knowledge or the understanding of Being. Levinas is fully aware of this fact. Confirming this awareness, once again, Levinas persists that,

Knowledge seizes hold of its object. It possesses it. Possession denies the independence of being, without destroying that being — it denies and maintains.⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 9-10/22.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 8/21.

Yet, despite this persistence, Levinas still continues to use the language of perception whilst contemplating the face of the Other in 'Ethics and Spirit'. For instance, Levinas claims that one acknowledges the face of the Other when 'one looks at a look' before continuing that 'to look at a look is to look at something which cannot be abandoned or freed, but something which aims *at you*'.⁷⁵ It seems to me that in such cases Levinas simply struggles to find an adequate form of expression in order to describe the concrete encounter with the face of the Other as something beyond the grasp of the experiencing subject. In light of the development of his thought so far, this difficulty is not surprising due to the fact that the concrete encounter with the face of the Other transpires as an ontological ordeal on the level of sensation prior to the establishment of subjective experience as temporal duration or ecstatic temporality. As a result, any attempt to express what occurs *prior to* temporal duration or ecstatic temporality will always run the risk of reducing such ontological ordeals to ontic experiences.

Regardless of this difficulty in relation his philosophical project, Levinas persists with the task at hand, namely, endeavouring to acknowledge the face of the Other in language and reason following its necessary recognition within concrete life. After initially proceeding negatively, Levinas now approaches this topic in a positive manner. He comments,

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. The Other [l'autrui] is the only being that one can be tempted to kill. This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of the face.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 8/20, my emphasis: 'On regarde un regard. Regarder un regard, c'est regarder ce qui ne s'abandonne pas, ne se livre pas, mais qui vous vise: c'est regarder le visage'.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 8/21.

Since Levinas has already dismissed the common meaning of the face as a ‘mere assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes, etc.’, the use of similar terminology in this passage should be regarded, once again, as a form of analogous expression. For example, the ‘eyes’ that Levinas refers to here should be appreciated in line with his concept of ‘nakedness’. No two people share the same eyes. Each set of eyes is unique just as each human being is independent in relation to the understanding of Being. This is why Levinas insists that the ‘face’ offers ‘an absolute resistance to possession’. To acknowledge ‘the face’ in language and reason means entering into a dialogue with the Other as opposed to any effort to possess them. It requires going beyond one’s own understanding of Being and *listening* to what the Other expresses through their resistance to my understanding of Being. According to Levinas, when the face of the Other is acknowledged, that is to say, *listened to*, it becomes clear that ‘the order of morality’ functions as ‘the condition for conscious thought’.⁷⁷ In support of this point, Levinas notes, ‘to see a face is *already to hear* ‘You shall not kill’, and to *hear* ‘You shall not kill’ is to *hear* ‘Social justice’.⁷⁸ With this in mind, Levinas continues,

‘You shall not kill’ is therefore not just a simple rule of conduct; it appears as *the principle of discourse* itself and of spiritual life. Henceforth, language is not only a system of signs in the service of a pre-existing system. Speech belongs to the order

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 9/21.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 8-9/21, my emphasis. In an article published in 1949 entitled ‘The Transcendence of Words’, Levinas makes the point that perceptual experience already presupposes an encounter with language. He writes, ‘In sound, and in the consciousness termed hearing, there is in fact a break with the self-complete world of vision and art. In its entirety, sound is a ringing, clanging scandal. Whereas, in vision, form is wedded to content in such a way as to appease it, in sound the perceptible quality overflows so that form can no longer contain its content. A real rent is produced in the world, through which the world that is here prolongs a dimension that cannot be converted into vision. It is in this way, by surpassing what is given, that sound is the symbol *par excellence*. If none the less it can appear as a phenomenon, as a here, it is because the transcendence it brings about operates only in verbal sound. The sounds and noises of nature are failed words. *To really hear a sound, we need to hear a word. Pure sound is the word*’. Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Transcendence of Words’, in *The Levinas Reader*, trans. & ed. by Seán Hand (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 144-149 (pp. 147-148), my emphasis. In ‘Ethics and Spirit’, Levinas reinforces this point by saying that to *see* a face is already to *hear* what it expresses. This idea echoes Heidegger’s critique of Husserl which claims that objects of experience are never general objects of perception (e.g., a table) but have individual significances based upon what is expressed in them (e.g., *the dinner table in my family home*). See, §1.2.6. Similarly, for Levinas, the face of the Other is not a general object. Its significance rather is in the individuality of what it expresses, namely, the independent existence of the Other. The hermeneutic ear precedes the scientific eye. See, §1.2.7.

of morality before belonging to that of theory. Is it not therefore the condition for conscious thought?⁷⁹

The ‘banal’ fact of conversation, then, endures as ‘the marvel of marvels’, for Levinas, since it demonstrates an acknowledgement of the face of the Other in concrete life which, subsequently, affirms the recognition of the face of the Other as the underlying principle of ‘spiritual life’.⁸⁰ ‘The presence of the face is precisely the very possibility of understanding one another’, as Levinas puts it.⁸¹ As soon as I attempt to acknowledge the Other on their own terms, rather than as part of my own understanding of Being, I ‘move out’ of myself. In contrast, ‘the violent man does not move out of himself’, to use Levinas’s words, rather, ‘he possesses’ and, as previously shown, ‘possession denies independent existence’.⁸² As a result, Levinas concludes,

Only the vision of the face in which the ‘You shall not kill’ is articulated does [thinking] not allow itself to fall back into an ensuing complacency or become the experience of an insuperable obstacle, offering itself up to our power. 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.⁸³

Only by *listening* to what the face of the Other expresses do I acknowledge its fundamental role in concrete life since it is not an ‘experience’ of temporal duration or ecstatic temporality. It is rather ‘a moving out of oneself’ that has already occurred prior to my ability to reflect upon experience and to express my understanding of that

⁷⁹ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 9/21, my emphasis.

⁸⁰ For Husserl, ‘the marvel of all marvels’ corresponds to the ‘banal’, but least understood fact that our consciousness is always a consciousness of something. Similarly, for Heidegger, ‘the marvel of all marvels’ relates to the ‘banal’, but least understood fact that the human being exists within an implicit understanding of what it means to be. Thus, by highlighting conversation as ‘the marvel of all marvels’ in which the Other is initially a partner in dialogue, Levinas demonstrates the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the human being, our fellow human being, our consciousness, and language in both Husserl and Heidegger’s respective versions of phenomenology. Levinas clearly wishes to rectify these points and devote his attention to them through a significant *yet immanent* critical development of phenomenology.

⁸¹ Levinas, ‘Ethics and Spirit’, p. 9/21.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 9/22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.10/22, my emphasis.

experience as part of a society. ‘Society is the miracle of moving out of oneself’, to quote Levinas.⁸⁴ It thus requires the inter-dependency of equals and alterity if society is to work at all. As a result, the miraculous is not that I am a self-conscious being (Husserl) or that I can question the meaning of Being (Heidegger) but that my self owes itself to the ethical exigence of responsibility emitted from the face of the Other which, subsequently, requires dialogue.

§3.3 ‘FREEDOM AND COMMAND’ (1953)⁸⁵

In an article entitled ‘Freedom and Command’, Levinas begins to consider what the Other (*l’autrui*) expresses when their face is listened to as opposed to the mere sight of their body as just another being (*l’autre*) given to perceptual experience. He explicitly states in this article that his aim is to ‘bring out’ the ‘originality of the encounter with a face’, which articulates the ‘structure of command’ prior to the commands made by the various ‘institutions’ that structure society.⁸⁶ The first step towards doing so involves addressing what it means ‘to command’. On this point, Levinas comments,

To command is to act on a will. Among all the forms of doing, to act on a will is to truly act. It is to act on an independent reality, on what does not only offer great resistance, but absolute resistance, resistance of a different order from great resistance. It is not he who labours, that is, moves matter, that we call a man of action, not he who makes war, but he who orders others to labour and to war.⁸⁷

In this respect, ‘to command’ simply means to place ‘order’ on to an ‘independent reality’ by means of a ‘will’. The term ‘independent reality’, for Levinas, signifies that which offers ‘absolute resistance’ to the freedom of our will. Conversely, when reality does not resist our will, it simply becomes part of our personal reality thus ceasing to be

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 9/22.

⁸⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 15-23; ‘Liberté et commandement’, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 58 (1953), 264-272. Further references are to Lingis’s translation with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 21/270.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 15/264.

independent. In the passage above, Levinas uses the examples of ‘labour’ and ‘war’ to express this idea. For instance, my will ‘moves matter’ as a result of labour and subsequently matter becomes transformed for my own ends. Similarly, ‘war is looking for the Achilles’s heel; it is to envisage the other, the adversary, with logistics calculations, like an engineer measuring the effort needed to demolish the enemy mass’, as Levinas notes, ‘the other becoming a mass is what describes the relationship of war, and in this it approximates the violence of labour’.⁸⁸ According to Levinas, both war and labour are violent not in the straightforward sense of using force. This much is obvious. Rather, for Levinas, as previously noted, violence concerns any action which ‘denies the independence of beings’.⁸⁹ Since, in Levinas’s philosophy, it is the face of the Other that resists my power absolutely and cannot be negated through violence, it must necessarily follow that the only ‘independent reality’ available to ‘order’ concerns the call of action to the Other. Whilst we cannot call our experiences to order, we can nevertheless call others to action. Hence, Levinas’s claim above that ‘it is not he who labours’ or ‘he who makes war’ that is referred to as ‘a man of action’ but ‘he who orders others to labour and to war’. This ability Levinas refers to as ‘freedom’.⁹⁰

If ‘commanding’ means to place ‘order’ on to an ‘independent reality’ by means of a ‘will’, and if ‘independent reality’ corresponds, strictly speaking, to the existence of the Other, as it does for Levinas, then only those in positions of power have the freedom to command. ‘To command is then to do the will of the one who obeys’, to use Levinas’s words.⁹¹ Such an expression immediately raises the issue of tyranny, of which Levinas is fully aware. ‘Along with the rational orders of the philosopher-king

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 19/268.

⁸⁹ Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, p. 9/22.

⁹⁰ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 15/264.

⁹¹ Ibid.

appears the tyrant's orders', as Levinas remarks.⁹² The orders of a tyrant, however, do not necessarily correspond to 'the will of the one who obeys'. This is evident due to the 'freedom of thought' which, ultimately, can 'resist' the orders of tyrants — even if these orders must be obeyed in public out of the fear spread by acts of lethal punishment — meaning that 'the will of the one who obeys' can always 'know itself' as 'violated' under the rule of a tyrant.⁹³ Furthermore, as soon as a tyrant acts against the will of the one who obeys, their freedom to command becomes nullified since the 'independent reality' of the Other no longer receives acknowledgment. 'So great is the power of the tyrant, so total does its efficacy prove to be, that in the final analysis it is null', as Levinas affirms, 'for the absolute on which this tyranny is exercised is but so much material exposed to violence'.⁹⁴ As a result of their violent actions, the tyrant ironically loses their freedom to command since those commanded become part of the tyrants understanding of Being thus failing to constitute an independent reality to command.

In light of this realisation, Levinas reflects upon what it means to command the Other in a 'non-violent' way, that is to say, to place 'order' on to an 'independent reality' by means of a 'will' that is 'free' in accordance with 'the will of the one who obeys'. Conveying the result of these reflections, Levinas observes that,

Freedom consists in instituting outside of oneself an order of reason, in entrusting the rational to a written text, in resorting to institutions. Freedom, in its fear of tyranny, leads to institutions, to a commitment of freedom in the very name of freedom, to a State.⁹⁵

Under these circumstances, it is through the establishment of a just State that commands can be placed on to the Other in a non-violent way. These commands come in the form of a 'written text', i.e. a legal constitution, which aims to uphold the freedom of all citizens belonging to the State. This 'order of reason' is instituted 'outside of oneself',

⁹² Ibid., p. 16/265.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 16-17/266.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 17/266.

that is to say, it has an ‘exterior existence’ as an object, i.e. a written text, in order to ensure its ‘incorruptibility’.⁹⁶ No single person can control the law in a just State considering that as soon as one attempts to do so they immediately become a tyrant and thus relinquish their own freedom to command. As a result, what it means to command pertains to the act of freedom that ensures the freedom of the Other. ‘The supreme work of freedom consists in guaranteeing freedom’, and so, as Levinas remarks, ‘it can only be guaranteed by setting up a [social] world where it would be spared the ordeals of tyranny’.⁹⁷ In this respect, for Levinas, one of the ways in which the self moves out of itself and acknowledges the face of the Other in concrete life is through the establishment of democratic institutions. Concluding on this topic, Levinas notes,

We must impose commands on ourselves in order to be free. But it must be an exterior command, not simply a rational law, not a categorical imperative, which is defenceless against tyranny; it must be an exterior law, a written law, armed with force against tyranny. Such are commands as the political condition for freedom.⁹⁸

There are social structures that enable freedoms and there are social structures that do not enable freedoms. Just (external) social structures enable personal (internal) freedom. This concept of freedom represents a radical critique to those which came before it. For Levinas, I am not free before the law (*contra* Jean-Jacques Rousseau); nor does my freedom derive from a rational principle discovered by thought (*contra* Kant). My freedom to act in the world, rather, stems from the social condition founded on the acknowledgement of the face of the Other and, likewise, my freedom to reflect, which enables the very discovery of rational principles and the ability to express such principles in language, emerges from the necessary recognition of the existence of the face of the Other.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ This radical critique of Levinas’s toward the traditional philosophical view that freedom is found on the autonomy of the subject has been highlighted by Elizabeth Meade. For Levinas, as Meade correctly

It is by virtue of our ‘personal will’ that the ‘impersonal reason’, which guarantees our freedom, becomes an actuality. This ‘personal will’ is ‘free’ in the sense that it always remains exterior to the ‘order of reason’ that it is the law. The incessant exteriority of our personal will to the impersonal reason of the law makes it possible for us to call into question the institutions established by the will in an attempt to ensure our freedom. On this point, Levinas notes,

But the commands of written law, the impersonal reason of institutions, despite their origin in free will, become in a certain way alien to the will, which is at every instant renewed. Institutions obey a rational order in which freedom no longer recognizes itself. The freedom of the present does not recognize itself in the guarantees that it has provided itself against its own degradation. The last will and testament drawn up with a lucid mind can no longer be binding on the testator who has survived. The will experiences the guarantees that it has provided against its own degradation as another tyranny.¹⁰⁰

Under these circumstances, only when our personal will freely chooses to obey the impersonal reason, which it has previously established in order to ensure its own freedom, do the commands of the law appear as the source of our freedom. A just State, therefore, *should not* simply ‘force another to accept the impersonal reason of the written text’, as Levinas remarks.¹⁰¹ This would be tyranny. It should rather use ‘persuasion’ so as to demonstrate that the freedom to question the law and democratic institutions already presupposes a ‘prior acceptance of impersonal reason’ which, subsequently, has been founded on a necessary recognition of the face of the Other.¹⁰²

Levinas formulates this point rhetorically with the following questions,

Before placing themselves in an impersonal reason, is it not necessary that different freedoms be able to freely understand one another without this understanding being

notes, ‘autonomy cannot be the condition for ethics because it is through the ethical encounter with the Other that the self becomes free’. Elizabeth Meade, ‘Freedom Justified: Morality as Heteronomy in the Thought of Levinas’, in *Moral Heteronomy: History, Proposals, Arguments*. Special Issue of *Dialegethai: Rivista telematica di filosofia*, 19 (2017), <https://mondodmani.org/dialegethai/eme01.htm>. In this sense, contrary to the traditional philosophical outlook, for Levinas, the freedom of the subject is found on, as the title of Meade’s article suggests, heteronomy, that is to say, our responsibility *to (à) the Other*.

¹⁰⁰ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 17/266-267.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18/267.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

already present in the midst of that reason? Is there not a speech by which a will for what we call coherent speech is transmitted from freedom to freedom, from individual to individual? Does not impersonal discourse presuppose discourse in the sense of this face-to-face situation? In other words, is there not already between one will and another a relationship of command without tyranny, which is not yet an obedience to an impersonal law, but is *the indispensable condition* for the institution of such a law? Or again, does not the institution of a rational law as a condition for freedom already presuppose a possibility of direct understanding between individuals for the institution of that law?¹⁰³

The ability to ‘freely understand one another’, which always remains exterior to the rational order of understanding as such, that is to say, the necessary recognition of ‘speech’ that is ‘transmitted’ between individual freedoms, corresponds to the concrete encounter with the face of the Other. Furthermore, contrary to tyrannical acts of war, which exercise violence through solitary efforts of the will and completely fail to acknowledge the independent existence of the Other, the face commands me to participate in a dialogue with the Other thus facilitating the movement out of my bodily immanence toward the spiritual order of language and reason in a non-violent way. Expanding on this point at length, Levinas observes that,

The face, the countenance, is the fact that a reality is opposed to me, opposed *not in its manifestations*, but as it were in its way of being, ontologically opposed. 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*, which puts my freedom into action. It is not that to which I oppose myself, but what is opposed to me. It is an opposition inscribed in its presence *before [devant] me*. It does not at all follow my intervention; it opposes itself to me insofar as it turns to me. The opposition of the face, which is not the opposition of a force, is not a hostility. It is a pacific opposition, but one where peace is not a suspended war or a violence simply contained. On the contrary, violence consists in ignoring this opposition, ignoring the face of a being, avoiding the gaze, and catching sight of an angle whereby the *no* inscribed on a face by the very fact that it is a face becomes a hostile or submissive force.¹⁰⁴

The face of the Other is not a hostile force considering that its opposition to me does not relate to the various conceptual manifestations that can be applied to another human being. Consequently, as soon as one refers to the ‘face’ in accordance with categories

¹⁰³ Ibid., my emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 19/268/269, my emphasis.

such as race, gender, age, sexuality, nationality, or religion, they completely fail to acknowledge the face of the Other, in the mind of Levinas.¹⁰⁵ The face of the Other, therefore, must relate to a ‘naked’ being ‘divested’ of all ‘forms’ and ‘categories’, that is to say, ‘an unqualified substance’, which, subsequently, renders ‘an entity as an entity’ in its ‘personal presentation’.¹⁰⁶

The ‘independent reality’ encountered through the face of the Other opposes me long before I can oppose it, either via action or in thought. The reason for this state of affairs hinges on the fact that it is the face of the Other that initially ‘puts my freedom into action’. As such, the opposition of the face of the Other does not constitute an opposing force seeking to assimilate me into their understanding of Being. It is rather a ‘pacific opposition’ resulting from its lack of form. ‘This way for a being to break through its form’, as Levinas comments, ‘which is its apparition, is, concretely, its look, its aim’.¹⁰⁷ The aim of the face of the Other pertains to the fact that it presents itself as itself. In other words, it corresponds to the fact that the face of the Other resists any possibility of assimilation by always saying ‘NO’ to *my understanding* of Being. The face of the Other, therefore, is a source of ‘expression’. This detail is precisely what separates the Other (*l’autrui*) from other things (*l’autre*) in existence.¹⁰⁸ ‘A face has a

¹⁰⁵ When Sonia Sikka, then, categorises the Other in Levinas’s work as ‘the naked face of a *man* without a homeland’ and thus ‘the face of a *Jew*’, she fundamentally misrepresents the manner in which Levinas employs the term ‘naked’ in his philosophy. Sonia Sikka, ‘How Not to Read the Other: “All the Rest Can Be Translated”’, in *Philosophy Today*, 43 (1999), 195-206 (p. 197), my emphasis. The Other cannot correspond to any conceptual terms such as ‘man’ or ‘Jew’ since, through their face, they are encountered prior to the very ability to conceptualise as such.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 20/269.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ When attempting to describe the phenomenon of the face of the Other, Perpich labels it ‘as a figure of unreconstructed paradox’. Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 54. According to Perpich, ‘it represents that which is unrepresentable’ and ‘it presents immediacy through the mediation of an image’. Ibid. It seems to me that Perpich sees the face as a paradox because she is trying to understand it in terms of perceptual experience. Nevertheless, once it is regarded not in relation to perception but as a source of language and expression, the face begins to lose its paradoxical character.

meaning not by virtue of the relationships in which it is found, but out of itself, that is what expression is', to use Levinas's words.¹⁰⁹

By linking the face of the Other with expression, Levinas immediately aligns himself with the hermeneutic manner of reasoning common to Post-Kantian thinkers such as Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger — all of whom maintain that our primary access to meaning occurs not as a result of perceptual experience but through the experience of language. For these thinkers, language does not simply function as a transparent instrument employed by thought in order to represent that which is 'seen', whether given to consciousness through perceptual experience or eidetic ideation.¹¹⁰ On the contrary, for these thinkers, language is primarily expressive of the meaning of Being itself in the sense that it constitutes the very way in which being is understood. Levinas shares this understanding of language with Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger, as noticeable from the following passage of 'Freedom and Command',

For expression *does not consist in presenting to a contemplative consciousness a sign which that consciousness interprets by going back to what is signified*. What is expressed is not just a thought which animates the other; it is also the other present in that thought. Expression renders present what is communicated *and the one who is communicating; they are both in the expression*. But that does not mean that expression provides us with knowledge about the other. The expression does not speak about someone, is not information about a coexistence, does not invoke an attitude in addition to knowledge; *expression invites one to speak to someone*. The most direct attitude before a being is not the knowledge one can have about him, but is social commerce with him.¹¹¹

Thus, for Levinas, communication (as expression) grounds representation as distinct from the view that representation grounds communication (as expression). If the

¹⁰⁹ Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', p. 20/269.

¹¹⁰ For Husserl, as McDonnell points out, the constitution of the meaning of a word in the *Logical Investigations* relates to 'the way our consciousness animates marks on a page', that is to say, in Husserl's version of phenomenology, language is seen as an instrument used by consciousness so as to represent an object that is not given directly to perception. McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 234. Heidegger objects to this theory of language for being unphenomenological. In other words, as McDonnell also notes, it is 'not confirmed by our experience of language itself'. Ibid. Our concrete experience of language, rather, reveals it to be constitutive of the understanding of our experience as such. This is the hermeneutic theory of language which Heidegger follows in the wake of Dilthey and Schleiermacher.

¹¹¹ Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', p. 20-21/270, my emphasis.

experience of language is taken for what it is, and this is precisely the starting point of hermeneutic phenomenology, then an entirely different phenomenology to Husserl's idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science based upon perceptually-founded acts ensues. Heidegger, in his 1925 summer semester lecture-courses, had already departed from Husserl on this very point, for, as he teaches and stresses to his students,

It is [...] a matter of fact that our simplest perceptions and constitutive states are already expressed, even more, are interpreted in a certain way. What is the primary and originary here? [Heidegger rhetorically asks, and he answers.] It is not so much that we see the object and things [...] rather the reverse; we see what one says about the matter.¹¹²

According to Levinas, however, 'what one says' in language overlooks the fact of *who* is doing the expressing in the expression of any communicative act. Under these circumstances, the face of the Other does not simply communicate the particular experiences of another person in everyday language or 'what one says' about matters. It rather expresses the particularity of the experience of the Other themselves, which always remains exterior to both my understanding of Being and 'what one says'.

Continuing along these lines, Levinas writes,

Here is where expression differs from signs or symbols, which in narratives suggest by their revelation the mysterious and the hidden. Expression is not less, but more direct than intuition; it is the archetype of direct relationship. A veritable 'phenomenology' of the noumenon is effected in expression. The encounter with a face is not only a fact belonging to anthropology. It is, absolutely, a relationship with that which is. Perhaps man alone is a substance, and therefore is a face.¹¹³

Unlike the instrumental view of language, which underpins Husserl's version of phenomenology and which merely functions as a way for consciousness to re-present

¹¹² Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, p. 56/75: 'Faktisch ist es auch so, daß unsere schlichtesten Wahrnehmungen und Verfassungen schon *ausgedrückte*, mehr noch, in bestimmter Weise *interpretierte* sind. Wir sehen nicht so sehr primär und ursprünglich die Gegenstände und Dinge, sondern zunächst sprechen wir darüber, genauer sprechen wir nicht das aus, was wir sehen, sondern umgekehrt, wir sehen, was man über die Sache spricht'. Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology as *hermeneutic* phenomenology stems from his avid early interest in Dilthey (as well as Husserl) during his early student years and lecturing career. See, McDonnell, 'Understanding and Assessing Heidegger's Topic in Phenomenology in Light of his Appropriation of Dilthey's Hermeneutic Manner of Thinking', §II, 'Hearing Replaces Seeing (Dilthey Replaces Husserl)', pp. 40-41.

¹¹³ Levinas, 'Freedom and Command', p. 21/270.

objects that have already been experienced through intuition, the expressive view of language, which Levinas supports along with Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger, contains the potential for ‘the archetype of a direct relationship’ with ‘independent reality’. Despite this potential, however, neither Schleiermacher, nor Dilthey, nor Heidegger could discover such a relationship in their respective hermeneutic approaches toward philosophy and phenomenology. This is because each of these thinkers fail to acknowledge the face of the Other seeing as they all seek, in one way or another, to understand (*Verstehen*) the lived experience (*Erlebnis*) of the Other through the expression (*Ausdruck*) of ‘what one says’ in language. In other words, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger, despite their many differences, all pursue the assimilation of the Other into the understanding of Being, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned. Of importance to Levinas is not the different utterances that the Other freely chooses to articulate in common discourse; it is rather the very fact that their face speaks prior to any act of free expression.¹¹⁴ To recognise this fact is also to acknowledge the face of the Other and, by extension, to awaken a ‘direct relationship’ with ‘independent reality’. It is for this reason that Levinas upholds the face of the Other, toward the conclusion of ‘Freedom and Command’, as that which the battle-cry of the phenomenological movement relentlessly sought after, namely, the ‘thing in itself’.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ In his later work, Levinas marks this distinction much more clearly by differentiating the saying (*le dire*) of language from what is said (*le dit*) in language. Levinas prioritises the former in his philosophy and employs it, methodologically, in order to argue that the *unsaying* of things said in language has significance for ethical experience. Making this point explicitly during one of his interviews with Nemo, Levinas comments: ‘In discourse I have always distinguished, in fact, between the *saying* and the *said*. That the *saying* must bear a *said* is a necessity of the same order as that which imposes a society with laws, institutions and social relations. But the *saying* is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The saying is a way of greeting the Other, but to greet the Other is already to answer for him. It is difficult to be silent in someone’s presence; this difficulty has its ultimate foundation in this signification proper to the saying, whatever is the said. It is necessary to speak of something, of the rain and fine weather, no matter what, but to speak, to respond to him and already to answer for him’. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 88.

¹¹⁵ Levinas, ‘Freedom and Command’, p. 20/270.

§3.4 'THE EGO AND THE TOTALITY' (1954)¹¹⁶

The difference between various utterances another person freely chooses to articulate in everyday discourse and the expression of the face of the Other occurring prior to any act of free speech receives further attention in Levinas's next publication 'The Ego and the Totality'. In the third section of this article, entitled 'The Ego as a Singularity', Levinas states,

As the manifestation of a reason, language awakens in me and in the other [*l'autrui*] what is common to us. But in its expressive intention it presupposes our alterity and our duality. It is enacted between beings, between substances which do not enter into their remarks, but put them forth. The transcendence of the interlocutor and the access to the other [*l'autrui*] by way of language make manifest that man is a singularity. This singularity is not that of individuals which are subsumed under a concept, or which articulate its moments. The ego is ineffable, above all because it speaks; it responds and is responsible. The other [*l'autrui*] purely as interlocutor is not a content known and qualified, apprehendable on the basis of some general idea which governs it. He faces, referring only to himself. In speech between singular beings, the inter-individual signification of beings and things, that is, universality, is first constituted.¹¹⁷

Here, Levinas notes that it is through the ability of language to conceptualise that which is common to us that my relation to the meaning of the world of things and other beings is mediated. In this regard, as de Boer comments, 'in Buber's terms the I-Thou relationship is the transcendental condition for the I-It relationship'.¹¹⁸ This marks

¹¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Ego and the Totality', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 25-46; 'Le Moi et la Totalité', in *Entre nous*, pp. 25-52. Further references are to Lingis's translation with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36/38-39.

¹¹⁸ De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 2. Levinas often acknowledges the influence of Buber on his thought. On this topic, Levinas notes: 'My interest in the intersubjective relation, my [Levinas's] principle theme, has often been compared to the philosophy of Buber, who distinguishes the I-Thou, relation between persons, from the I-It, the relation between man and things. The relation to the other man is irreducible to the knowledge of an object. This is certainly a terrain of reflection where Buber has been before me [Levinas]'. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 72. Buber was a student of Dilthey, who wrote about the necessity of reading about the lived experiences of other people from the past in order to understand oneself and one's historical situation in the present. As Dilthey himself puts it: 'Because our mental life finds its fullest and most complete expression only through language, [...] explication finds completion and fullness only in the interpretation of the written testimonies of human life'. Wilhelm Dilthey, 'The Understanding of Other Persons and their Expressions of Life', in *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding*, trans. by Kenneth L. Heiges (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), pp. 123-144 (p. 135). The hermeneutic prioritisation on the experience of language, then, as fundamental to the experience of the Other and in terms of understanding oneself, also comes to Levinas through his readings of the works of Buber. For more on the relationship between Levinas and Buber, see *Levinas &*

Levinas's definitive starting point and departure from Husserl and Heidegger's approach toward the meaning of the world, being, and each other within transcendental phenomenology. The I-Thou relationship that is founded and grounded in dialogue is the pre-condition for any meaningful talk about the being of the world, of things, of fellow human beings, and of the meaning of Being itself. It is thus presupposed by Husserl's definition of phenomenology as a version of post-Kantian transcendental idealism and Heidegger's later effort to establish transcendental phenomenology as fundamental ontology. Levinas, in other words, radicalises and revises the significance of dialogue in approaching the matter both of intersubjectivity and post-Kantian transcendental phenomenology. The fact that the Other speaks testifies to their 'singularity', as Levinas notes above, and, moreover, only through the relation between two singular beings, which language enables, does the idea of 'universality', that is to say, a universal reason with the ability to unite us under a common concept, achieve its first constitution.

In 'The Ego and the Totality', Levinas marks a distinction between the manner in which I exist for myself and the way in which I am conceived both by myself and others through conceptualisation. The former Levinas refers to as the 'ego', whereas the latter is labelled as the 'totality'. The 'ego' is 'ineffable' because it is not in the words that I express; rather, the ego is that which is doing the *expressing* of the words. Expanding upon this point, Levinas alludes to other thinkers within the phenomenological movement, who have addressed the topic of intersubjectivity and the problem of trying to understand the Other. He writes,

To the ego as an entity there corresponds no concept. That is why the framework of the 'experience' of the other [*l'autrui*] could not be drawn out by a work of abstraction applied to oneself, which would yield the 'concept' of the ego. The

Buber: Dialogue & Difference, ed. by Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, and Maurice S. Friedman (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004). See also, Emmanuel Levinas, 'Martin Buber and The Theory of Knowledge' and 'Dialogue with Martin Buber, in *Proper Names*, pp. 17-39.

philosophers of *Einfühlung* at least knew that the ‘experience’ of the other [*l’autrui*] cannot be obtained by a simple ‘variation’ of the self and the projection of one of those variants outside of oneself. They were looking for an irreducible way of access to the you, and when they located it in empathy and love they were in the end stating that each encounter begins a new amorous adventure.¹¹⁹

Prior to Levinas, efforts in phenomenology sought to grasp the Other as an ‘alter-ego’. Husserl, for instance, posited that the experience of the Other as an alter-ego that could be known through the analogous apperception of one’s own experiences.¹²⁰ In this regard, Husserl follows, uncritically, his mentor Brentano who argues in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* that the only way I can know the mental life of another human being is through analogy based upon the inner perception of one’s own mental phenomena. ‘(F)or, someone else can no more apprehend my psychical phenomena through inner perception that I can those that belong to him’.¹²¹ By comparison to ‘the direct perception of our own psychical phenomena we have’, Brentano stresses, ‘*an indirect knowledge of the mental phenomena of others*’.¹²² Husserl’s methodological and theoretical commitment to following Locke and Brentano in the assumption that the only way in which we can have knowledge of our consciousness is through consciousness reflecting directly upon its own activities prevents both Brentano and Husserl from acknowledging the alterity of the mental life of the Other (*l’autrui*) as an experiential fact of one’s own mental life.¹²³ It also prevents Husserl (and Brentano)

¹¹⁹ Levinas, ‘The Ego and the Totality’, p. 36/39.

¹²⁰ See, for an account of and discussion on Husserl’s approach toward the Other in his version of phenomenology, Lorraine Viscardi-Murray, ‘The Constitution of the Alter Ego in Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology’, in *Research in Phenomenology*, 15 (1985), 177-191.

¹²¹ Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, p. 37.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ ‘Reflection is a name for acts (*ein Titel für Akte*) in which the stream of mental processes (*Erlebnisstrom*), with all its manifold occurrences (mental process-moments, *intentionalia*) become evidentially apprehensible and analysable (*evident faßbar und analysierbar*). It is, as we can also say, the name of the method of consciousness leading to the cognition of any consciousness whatever (*Sie ist, so können wir es auch ausdrücken, der Titel der Bewußtseinsmethode für die Erkenntnis von Bewußtsein überhaupt*). Husserl, *Ideas I*, §77, ‘The Phenomenological Study of Reflections on Mental Processes (*Erlebensreflexionen*)’, p. 177/147. As McDonnell notes, ‘this is what lies behind Husserl’s methodological insistence on giving up authority and tradition in any practice of “phenomenological seeing” in his “phenomenological workshops” at Freiburg University, as Heidegger recounts and which he attended in 1919.’ McDonnell, ‘Husserl’s Critique of Brentano’s Doctrine of Inner Perception and its

from seeing the independence of the Other as an important topic in phenomenology, precisely because they ignore the experiential fact of a concrete given outside of my consciousness that is *still* experienced, namely, the very existence of the Other as the precondition for any intelligible thought and communication about one's self, our mental life, the Other, and the world. Instead, Husserl has to argue that since I cannot live through the experience of another person through acts of inner perception and reflection on my own consciousness, yet I experience that person as possessing abilities such as language and reason, which presuppose an ego, I can employ the concrete experience of myself as an ego, with its experiences, and extend it to the Other through apperception *but only by analogy*. Herein Husserl locates the constitution of the meaning of the Other as an 'alter-ego'. This approach toward the Other, nonetheless, receives further attention from Max Scheler and Edith Stein, both of whom employ 'love' and 'empathy' as ways to apprehend the experience of the Other which goes beyond the mere analogous constitution of the Other as an 'alter-ego'.¹²⁴ Yet such approaches still endeavour to understand the experiences of the Other on its own terms in relation to the consistency of *my own* understanding of such experiences. Levinas takes issue with these approaches since they all attempt to understand the Other with respect to *my own* experience. Any attempt to understand the Other in this way, for Levinas, leads to the assimilation of their experience into my understanding of Being which, by extension, fails to acknowledge their independent existence and thus acts violently toward them. It is for this reason that Levinas acknowledges the Other as the

Significance for Understanding Husserl's Method in Phenomenology', in *Maynooth Philosophical Papers*, pp. 74-111 (p. 85, n. 85). See also, Heidegger, 'My Way to Phenomenology', p. 79.

¹²⁴ See, for more on the topic of understanding the Other through empathy after Husserl, Curtis Hutt, 'Identity, Alterity, and Ethics in the Work of Husserl and His Religious Students: Stein and Levinas', in *Philosophy Today*, 53 (2009), 12-33. See also, for a comparison of Stein and Levinas's approaches toward the Other, Michael R. Paradiso-Michau, 'Empathy and the Face: Edith Stein and Emmanuel Levinas', in *Listening to Edith Stein: Wisdom for a New Century, Collection of Essays*, ed. by Kathleen Haney (Washington DC: ISC Publications), pp. 267-284.

‘third’, outside of ‘you’ and ‘me’, in order to respect their independent existence. On this point, Levinas comments in relation to the love that exists between two people that,

To love is to exist as though the lover and the beloved were alone in the world. The intersubjective relationship of love is not the beginning, but the negation of society. And in that there is, to be sure, an indication of its essence. Love is the ego satisfied by the you, apprehending in the other [*l'autrui*] the justification of its being. The presence of the other [*l'autrui*] exhausts the content of such a society. The affective warmth of love brings about the consciousness of this satisfaction, contentment, plenitude found outside of, and eccentric to, oneself. The society formed by love is a dual society, a society of solitudes, excluding universality. The universality of love can only be built up in time, by means of successive infidelities, or by the change of friends. The love of the neighbour depends on chance proximity; it is hence love of one being to the detriment of another, always privilege even if it is not preference. The morality of respect presupposes the morality of love. Love makes blind the respect which is impossible without blindness toward the third person and is only a pious intention oblivious of the real evil.¹²⁵

Two individuals in love close themselves off to society considering that they both find ‘satisfaction’, ‘contentment’, and ‘plenitude’ in each other. As such, the ‘neighbour’ or the ‘third person’ becomes ignored and ‘othered’ in the process of this amorous dialogue between me and you. According to Levinas, this state of affairs also holds for contemporary religious conceptions of love for God as found in Kierkegaard which, ‘cleared of magical notions’, that is to say, purified of any speculative and abstract thinking about God, promote love to ‘the rank of the essential situation of religious existence’ considering that such a situation does not contain our ‘social reality’.¹²⁶

Elaborating on this notion, Levinas remarks,

The real you is not the beloved, detached from the others; he presents himself in a different situation. The crisis of religion in contemporary spiritual life is due to the consciousness that society goes beyond the confines of love, that a third party is wounded as he witnesses amorous dialogue, and that the society of love itself does him wrong. The lack of universality is not here due to a lack of generosity, but is

¹²⁵ Levinas, ‘The Ego and the Totality’, p. 31/33.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 32/33. For Kierkegaard, as Westphal observes, ‘love for God comes first’ and this love takes place in a ‘hidden inwardness’ in which the subject is in dialogue with God through prayer. Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, p. 70. It is by *listening* to God in this amorous dialogue that the ‘love for the neighbour’ originates within the subject, in the mind of Kierkegaard. Ibid. In contrast, for Levinas, it is precisely this approach that forgets, ignores, and others the third party, which has already spoken *to me*. For, if they did not, I would not have the ability to conceive of a God in which to speak and listen. As a result, for Levinas, true dialogue and prayer involves *listening* to the Other *qua* third party thus acknowledging their exclusion from society.

due to the intimate essence of love. All love — unless it becomes judgment and justice — is the love of a couple. The couple is a closed society.¹²⁷

I cannot truly love the Other through ‘amorous dialogue’ or intimacy due to the fact that in the confines of such a relationship I merely find justification for my own being and vice versa. Furthermore, in such relationships, there is the exclusion of a ‘third party’ who, in the process of bearing witness to the amorous dialogue and intimacy of a couple, does not receive any of their love. Accordingly, Levinas conceives of the third party as ‘the neighbour’ since one does not *choose* their neighbour. The proximity of the neighbour depends upon pure chance and this is also the case for the third party. If love is the answer, as contemporary religion suggests, then it must extend to all and that includes those ‘othered’ in society. This type of universal fraternity cannot be appreciated by dualistic conceptions of love and friendship. Without such inclusion, society becomes a ‘dual society’ or ‘a society of solitudes’ wherein those who are not loved by another suffer in silence as their fellow human beings engage in amorous dialogues or intimate relationships with their loved ones or God. ‘The crisis of religion thus comes from the impossibility of isolating oneself with God and forgetting all who remain outside of the amorous dialogue’.¹²⁸ This, as Levinas informs us, means that ‘the true dialogue is elsewhere’.¹²⁹

True dialogue involves the subject going beyond itself and that also includes going beyond the one it loves, which forms part of its totality. Levinas refers to this ‘going beyond’ as forming a ‘relationship’ with ‘exteriority’.¹³⁰ Further developing this idea, Levinas writes,

¹²⁷ Levinas, ‘The Ego and the Totality’, p. 32/33-34.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32/34.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33/34. Here, Levinas recognises and demands a thinking of the ‘*metaxu*’, to use William Desmond’s terminology. See, William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995). Nevertheless, for Levinas, Desmond’s metaxological understanding of being would still represent an understanding of Being and thus an exclusive preserve resulting from the ethical relation with the

The exteriority of discourse is an exteriority without violence. The absolute which supports justice is the absolute status of the interlocutor. His modality of being and of manifesting himself consist in turning his face to me, in being a face. That is why the absolute is a person. To isolate one being from the midst of others, and to be isolated with him in the equivocal secrecy of the between-us, does not ensure the radical exteriority of the absolute. 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.¹³¹

The Other as an independent being comes between the lover and the beloved. They interrupt amorous dialogue and intimacy and do so by presenting their 'face'. There is no face of the Other, therefore, between two lovers since there is no exteriority in such a relationship. On the contrary, the relationship between the lover and the beloved constitutes a totality. As a result, the face of the Other exclusively signifies 'the radical exteriority of the absolute'; the 'absolute' in this case not referring to 'a theological thesis' but to the 'unimpeachable', 'isolated', and 'severe witness', who inserts themselves between lovers thus breaking that totality, without which 'God could not be God'.¹³² In other words, the face of the Other ensues as the concrete experience that gives rise to the very idea of God in the first place, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned.¹³³

Other which could always call into question any potential metaxological understanding of love between you, me, and the third party. In this respect, Levinas thinks the *metaxu* in a concrete phenomenological way as opposed to the metaphysical approach forwarded by Desmond. According to Desmond, 'there is generally a tendency to dualistic thinking in Levinas, for example, ontology versus metaphysics, being versus the good'. William Desmond, 'Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Vol. III, Levinas and the Question of Religion*, pp. 80-120 (p. 114). On the topic of dialogue, at least, Levinas does not think dualistically.

¹³¹ Levinas, 'The Ego and the Totality', p. 33/34.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Rudi Visker is incorrect, therefore, to suggest that religious words like 'God' and 'creation' are 'necessary' for Levinas to describe 'human relations'. Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition: Looking at Difference after Heidegger and Levinas* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004), p. 108. Indeed, Visker goes as far as to suggest that Levinas's thinking cannot do without God. Ibid., p. 82. Hitherto, Levinas has used the language of phenomenology to describe the encounter with the face of the Other. When Levinas begins to incorporate religious terminology into his thinking, he does so in order to highlight certain experiences from the Biblical tradition which have been overlooked by philosophy. These references are informed by his own readings of the Bible as a teenager. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 21. 'Every philosophy', as De Boer notes, 'has its *Sitz im Leben* (place in life)'. De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 85. Levinas thus utilises what he knows to make *philosophical* points. He does not, as Visker unfairly suggests, try to sneak God into his philosophy through the back door like a 'mole'. Visker, *The Inhuman Condition*, p. 82.

In a society of solitudes, where the amorous love and intimacy between two people governs, the neglect shown toward the third party is not intentional. Although Levinas refers to this neglect as a ‘social wrong’, he nevertheless affirms that it is ‘committed without my knowledge’.¹³⁴ I do not choose to neglect the third party; rather, I do so by virtue of the fact that I choose to focus all of my attention on the beloved. With the *intended* intimacy that I give to my beloved, there comes an *unintended* neglect of the third party. Here, once again, the influence of hermeneutic reasoning finds its way into Levinas’s thought since hermeneutics sets itself the aim of retrieving unintended meanings that have been obscured by intentional expressions. In this respect, an essential aspect for uncovering the meaning of any text or work of art or experience involves delving into the conditions which gave rise to the meaningfulness of that text or work or art or experience, whether the author, the artist, or the experiencing subject is aware of it or not. These conditions always contribute toward the origin of the meaning of a text, an object of culture, or an experience. Consequently, as Schleiermacher famously put it, the aim of reading a text is to ‘understand the author *better than the author himself*’.¹³⁵ Levinas, then, sets himself the task of hermeneutically retrieving this implicit neglect of the Other in their radical exteriority, which lies as the critical foundation of our experience, so as to make this topic of research explicit within phenomenology.

By inserting themselves between the lover and the beloved, the Other *qua* third party breaks the totality of an achievable understanding between those who agree among themselves in the sense that they demonstrate that there is something outside of

¹³⁴ Levinas, ‘The Ego and the Totality’, p. 33/35.

¹³⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticisms*, trans. and ed. by Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 23. To quote Schleiermacher directly on this point: ‘The task is also expressed as follows, to understand the utterance at first just as well and then better than its author. For because we have no immediate knowledge of what is in him, we must seek to bring much to consciousness that can remain unconscious to him, except to the extent to which he himself reflectively becomes his own reader. On the objective side he has even here no other data than we do’. Ibid.

the amorous dialogue and intimacy between two people. This interruption, for Levinas, gives the self the ability to reflect upon itself and to become aware of its own totality. In other words, it establishes an 'ego'. 'In thinking, a being which situates itself in the totality is not absorbed into it', as Levinas comments, 'it exists in relationship with a totality, but remains here, separated from the totality — me'.¹³⁶ As soon as it becomes separated from its totality, the ego can become aware of its neglect toward the Other *qua* third party. Whether or not the ego chooses to acknowledge the face of the Other is another matter entirely and depends upon the freedom of the individual ego. Nevertheless, this does not refute the fact that the very ability to reflect and to make a choice rests upon the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. Confirming this point, Levinas upholds,

This relationship of an individual with the totality which thought is, in which the ego takes account of what is not itself and yet is not dissolved into it, presupposes that the totality is manifested not as a milieu that as it were only brushes up against the skin of a living being, as the element in which it is immersed, but is manifested as a face in which a being confronts me. This relationship of both participation and separation which marks the advent of, and the *a priori* proper to, thought, in which the bonds between the parts are constituted only by the freedom of the parts, is a society, is beings that speak, that face one another. Thought begins with the possibility of conceiving a freedom external to my own. Conceiving of a freedom external to my own is the first thought.¹³⁷

The subject escapes the solitude of its bodily immanence by reaching the level of thought, language, and reason. Furthermore, for Levinas, this escape is only possible on account of the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. It is for this reason that Levinas maintains that the subject is responsible *to* the Other as a result of the necessary recognition of their face, whilst simultaneously insisting that the subject is responsible *for* the Other since whether their face is acknowledged, or not, rests solely upon the freedom of the newly established ego.

¹³⁶ Levinas, 'The Ego and the Totality', p. 27/27.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28/29.

§3.5 ‘PHILOSOPHY AND THE IDEA OF INFINITY’ (1957)¹³⁸

According to Levinas, the vast majority of thinking within the philosophical tradition denotes a failure to acknowledge the face of the Other. He outlines this view explicitly in an essay entitled ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’. Levinas begins his reflections in this essay by stating that ‘every philosophy seeks truth’ before positing two separate directions within philosophy that interact with the idea of truth.¹³⁹ The first corresponds to the notion of truth that implies experience. In relation to this connection, Levinas explains,

In the truth a thinker maintains a relationship with a reality distinct from him, other than him — ‘absolutely other’ [*Absolument autre*], according to the expression taken up again by Jankelevitch. For experience deserves its name only if it transports us beyond what constitutes our nature. Genuine experience must even lead us beyond the nature that surrounds us, which is not jealous for the marvellous secrets it harbours, and, in complicity with men, submits to their reasons and inventions; in it men also feel themselves to be at home. Truth would thus designate the outcome of a movement that leaves a world that is intimate and familiar, even if we have not yet explored it completely, and goes toward the stranger, toward a beyond, as Plato puts it.¹⁴⁰

This notion of truth prioritises the ‘experience’ of what is ‘beyond’ our own world. It is a concrete ‘movement’ as opposed to any type of abstract reflection or speculative thought. Noteworthy here is the development made by Levinas regarding the term ‘experience’. Previously, Levinas demonstrates hesitance toward using the term ‘experience’ on account of the fact that experience always presupposes an experiencing subject which, subsequently, blocks any access to that which resides beyond the understanding of Being.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, in the passage above, Levinas reintroduces the term ‘experience’ with a new meaning, namely, that which ‘transports us beyond’

¹³⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 47-59; ‘La philosophie et l’idée de l’Infini’, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 62 (1957), pp. 241-253. Further references are to Lingis’s translation with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47/241.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ See, §2.1.5.

ourselves. Thus, for Levinas, the term ‘experience’ now comes to exclusively signify the concrete encounter with the other (*l’autre*).

The second interaction with the idea of truth found within the philosophical tradition refers to ‘the free adherence to a proposition’ or ‘the outcome of a free research’.¹⁴² This approach denotes the type of truth discovered through reflection by an already established subject with the freedom to think. Expanding on this point, Levinas comments,

The freedom of the investigator, the thinker on whom no constraint weighs, is expressed in truth. What else is this freedom but the thinking being’s refusal to be alienated in the adherence, the preserving of his nature, his identity, the feat of remaining the same despite the unknown lands into which thought seems to lead? 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.¹⁴³

This approach toward truth takes the freedom of the subject as its starting point, its autonomy, and uses it to reduce all that is other (*l’autre*) into the same (*le même*). Levinas introduces the term ‘same’ here to refer to the totality of one’s own experience and understanding of Being. In this respect, every act of the subject that seeks to acquire knowledge of the world represents ‘the conquest of being by man over the course of history’.¹⁴⁴ On the subject of these two interactions with truth, Levinas informs that ‘the choice of Western philosophy has most often been on the side of freedom and the same’, that is to say, it has preferred truth as ‘the free adherence to a proposition’ or ‘the outcome of a free research’ over and against truth as an ‘experience’

¹⁴² Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, pp. 47-48/241.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 48/241-242.

¹⁴⁴ Levinas tends to identify the history of philosophy as imperialistic in the sense that it preferences the identity of the same over and against anything other. This idea is encapsulated by the figure of Odysseus, who, as Jill Robbins points out, quoting Levinas, finds himself again and again in all of his adventures, like an autonomous consciousness, ‘who through all of his peregrinations is only on the way to his native land’. Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 21. In contrast to Odysseus, Levinas preferences the figure of Abraham, who leaves ‘his fatherland forever for a land yet unknown’. *Ibid.* This departure symbolises the concrete movement of transcendence that the human being experiences in the face of the Other.

of the ‘beyond’.¹⁴⁵ By doing so, the philosophical tradition has often excluded the Other in its attempt to, as Levinas notes, ‘encompass every other in the same’ and to ‘proclaim the philosophical birthright of autonomy’.¹⁴⁶

Throughout the history of philosophy, anything encountered as foreign to the life of the autonomous subject became a topic of concern. By reflecting on such topics of concern, the original strangeness of that which is foreign becomes familiar to the thinking subject. Thus, Levinas writes,

Autonomy, the philosophy which aims to ensure the freedom, or the identity, of beings, presupposes that freedom itself is sure of its right, is justified without recourse to anything further, is complacent in itself, like Narcissus. When, in the philosophical life that realizes this freedom, there arises a term foreign to the philosophical life, other — the land that supports us and disappoints our efforts, the sky that elevates us and ignores us, the forces of nature that aid us and kill us, things that encumber us or serve us, men who love us and enslave us — it becomes an obstacle; it has to be surmounted and integrated into this life. But truth is just this victory and this integration. In evidence the violence of the encounter with the non-I is deadened. The commerce with exterior truth as enacted in true cognition is thus not opposed to freedom, but coincides with it. The search for truth becomes the very respiration of a free being, exposed to exterior realities that shelter, but also threaten, its freedom. Thanks to truth these realities, whose plaything I am in danger of becoming, are understood by me.¹⁴⁷

Genuine alterity could never be accounted for within philosophy due to the fact that all that is other (*l'autre*) immediately becomes part of the same (*le même*) through reflection and thought. Levinas gives a couple of examples from the philosophical tradition to support this point. From Socrates, who, in the *Meno*, teaches that ‘every lesson introduced into the soul was already in it’, to Descartes, who’s *cogito* operates as ‘the origin of the ideas that relate to exterior things, and thus account for the real’.¹⁴⁸ As a result, Levinas concludes that ‘every philosophy is — to use Husserl’s neologism — an egology’.¹⁴⁹ This is why Husserl’s version of phenomenology could not grasp the

¹⁴⁵ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 48/242.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49/242-243.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49/243.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50/243. Whereas the term ‘experience’ now refers exclusively to an encounter with the other, for Levinas, the term ‘egology’ relates to life as it is lived from within the domain of the same in which

genuine strangeness of 'Being in general' since his phenomenological theory of being rests upon that which appears to the ego as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. Even with respect to Heidegger, who rails against the prioritisation of the ego within philosophy, this remains the case on account of 'a second characteristic of the philosophy of the same', namely, 'its recourse to neuters', to use Levinas phrase.¹⁵⁰ A 'neuter', for Levinas, is a term employed within philosophy as an attempt to 'understand' the non-I based upon its supposed 'generality'.¹⁵¹ In relation to Heidegger this term is 'Being' (*Sein*). Expanding on this point, Levinas remarks,

When Heidegger traces the way of access to each real singularity through Being, which is not a particular being nor a genus in which all the particulars would enter, but is rather the very act of being which the verb to be, and not the substantive, expresses [...], he leads us to the singularity across a neuter which illuminates and commands thought, and renders intelligible. When he [Heidegger] sees man possessed by freedom rather than possessing freedom, he puts over man a neuter term which illuminates freedom without putting it in question. And thus he is not destroying, but summing up a whole current of Western philosophy.¹⁵²

For Heidegger, as Levinas points out, the term 'Being' refers to the 'to be' (*Sein*) of a being (*Seiende*), which is not a being itself but that which is expressed and deposited in the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) in *Dasein*. Furthermore, this understanding of Being extends to myself, the world, and my fellow human beings, at least, as far as Heidegger is concerned. In this respect, Heidegger simply replaces the autonomous thinking subject of traditional philosophy, which makes all strangeness familiar by virtue of thought and reflection, with *Dasein*. Autonomy does not rest upon the freedom to think in *Dasein*; it stems, rather, from one's own death which, as Levinas identifies, is always 'my power' due to the fact that 'no one can substitute himself for

anything other is reduced to the totality of the understanding of Being. Egology, therefore, as Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani correctly notes, 'posits subjectivity as a soul in dialogue with itself' which, subsequently, 'resorts to neuters — either in the form of an abstract essence or as a third term' — in order to conceptualise that which is other to its own autonomy. Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani, *Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Non-Violence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 54.

¹⁵⁰ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 50/243.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 51/244-245.

me to die', that is to say, it is a 'solitary' and 'personal' moment of 'resoluteness'.¹⁵³ Thus, it is the awareness of oneself as a being-for-death when assailed by the affective disposition of anxiety that gives the subject its autonomous power in Heidegger's philosophy.¹⁵⁴ Concluding with these reflections on Heidegger, Levinas notes,

Being and Time, Heidegger's first and principal work, perhaps always maintained but one thesis: Being is inseparable from the understanding of Being; Being already invokes subjectivity. But Being is not a being. It is a neuter which orders thought and beings, but which hardens the will instead of making it ashamed. The consciousness of his finitude does not come to man from the idea of infinity, that is, is not revealed as an imperfection, does not refer to the Good, does not know itself to be wicked. Heideggerian philosophy precisely marks the apogee of a thought in which the finite does not refer to the infinite (prolonging certain tendencies of Kantian philosophy: the separation between the understanding and reason, diverse themes of transcendental dialectics), in which every deficiency is but weakness and every fault committed against oneself - the outcome of a long tradition of pride, heroism, domination, and cruelty.¹⁵⁵

Heidegger's philosophy seeks to understand finite experience from the point of view of finitude itself. In this sense, it does not refer to the infinite at all. This approach toward philosophy, for Levinas, leads us to a 'heroic freedom' finding the justification for its actions in *its own* understanding of Being thus remaining 'ethically indifferent' and 'foreign to all guilt with regard to the Other'.¹⁵⁶ In order to overcome this approach, Levinas seeks to reintroduce the infinite into philosophy. However, in order to remain phenomenological, Levinas must do so by describing a concrete encounter with the infinite as opposed to any abstract or speculative accounts of the infinite characteristic of pre-Kantian thinking. As a result, Levinas hopes to show the 'truth' of the infinite as an 'experience' beyond the finitude of the understanding of Being as opposed to any propositional research about the infinite through reflection.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 51/245.

¹⁵⁴ Summarising this position in *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: 'anticipation reveals to *Dasein* its lostness in the they-self, and brings its 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 illusion of the "they", and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious'. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 311/266.

¹⁵⁵ Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', p. 52/245-246.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53/246.

In 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', Levinas takes his first steps down this path with reference to the idea of infinity as found in the philosophy of Descartes. Levinas claims that his own description of our experience of the infinite will contain only 'the formal design of the structure it outlines'.¹⁵⁷ What Levinas means by this statement is that whilst it will be upheld that the idea of the infinite 'has been put into us', akin to Descartes's approach, the *source* of this gift will not be the same in both formulations.¹⁵⁸ In this regard, Levinas agrees with Descartes that there is indeed a 'relationship' between the finite and the infinite. Developing this position, Levinas writes,

This relationship is not that which connects a container to a content, since the I cannot contain the infinite, nor that which binds a content to a container, since the I is separated from the infinite. The relationship which is thus described negatively is the idea of infinity in us.¹⁵⁹

Under these circumstances, although there is a relationship between the finite and the infinite, this relationship is not symmetrical. In other words, whilst there is an idea of the infinite within finite experience, this idea cannot be reduced to a particular content.

With this point in mind, Levinas continues,

The intentionality that animates the idea of infinity is not comparable with any other; it aims at what it cannot embrace and is in this sense the infinite. To take the converse of the formulas we used above, we can say that the alterity of the infinite is not cancelled, is not extinguished in the thought that thinks it. In thinking infinity the I from the first *thinks more than it thinks*. Infinity does not enter into the *idea* of infinity, is not grasped; this idea is not a concept. The infinite is the radically, absolutely, other. The transcendence of infinity with respect to the ego that is separated from it and thinks it constitutes the first mark of its infinitude.¹⁶⁰

By thinking a thought that is more than it can think, the ego is confronted with something beyond the finiteness of its own understanding of Being, namely, the idea of infinity. Furthermore, since the ecstatic temporality of the understanding of Being and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 53/247.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 54/247: 'Elle a été mise en nous'.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 53-54/247.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 54/247.

the temporal duration of the ego are finite in essence, it must follow that this idea of infinity, which can be thought but not known, has come from elsewhere. Descartes makes this point in his Third Meditation by writing,

It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite.¹⁶¹

Levinas agrees with Descartes on this point. Nevertheless, Levinas disagrees with Descartes on the source of this ‘infinite substance’. For Descartes, the infinite substance that I can think but cannot know is an innate idea that God has ‘placed’ in me as the ‘basis for believing that I am somehow made in his [God’s] image and likeness’.¹⁶² As a committed post-Kantian phenomenologist, it is impossible for Levinas to accept this as the source of the idea of infinity since Descartes’s account depends upon a certain transcendent and abstract concept, i.e. God, which has no corresponding experience in concrete life. Rather than maintaining this unphenomenological position, Levinas upholds the idea of infinity as resulting from ‘the social relationship’.¹⁶³ Explaining this position, Levinas comments,

This relationship consists in approaching an absolutely exterior being. The infinity of this being, which one can therefore not contain, guarantees and constitutes this exteriority. It is not equivalent to the distance between a subject and an object. An object, we know, is integrated into the identity of the same; the I makes of it its theme, and then its property, its booty, its prey or its victim. The exteriority of the infinite being is manifested in the absolute resistance which by its apparition, its epiphany, it opposes to all my powers. Its epiphany is not simply the apparition of a form in the light, sensible or intelligible, but already this no cast to powers; its logos is: ‘You shall not kill’.¹⁶⁴

Under these circumstances, it is the face of the Other and its expression of ‘You shall not kill’ that, for Levinas, corresponds to the source of the idea of infinity. This is

¹⁶¹ Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 31.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁶³ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, pp. 54/248.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55/248.

because, whilst it is encountered in concrete life as a phenomenological experience, the face of the Other resists every attempt to encompass it within the understanding of Being. A sense of exteriority is thus experienced beyond the finitude of the temporal subject in front of the face of the Other.¹⁶⁵ Concluding on this point, Levinas remarks,

Here is established a relationship not with a very great resistance, but with the absolutely other, with the resistance of what has no resistance, with ethical resistance. It opens the very dimension of infinity, of what puts a stop to the irresistible imperialism of the same and the I. We call a face the epiphany of what can thus present itself directly, and therefore also exteriorly, to an I.¹⁶⁶

Unlike the traumatic resistance that the lived body encounters when it is confronted by the brute fact of being, the resistance of the face of the Other is a resistance *without* resistance. This passive or ‘ethical’ resistance constitutes an experience with that which is ‘beyond’ the understanding of Being thus opening ‘the dimension of infinity’ and a path otherwise than the imperialism of the same.

§3.6 ‘FREEDOM OF SPEECH’ (1957)¹⁶⁷

Toward the end of the 1950s, Levinas upholds the expression of the face of the Other with its passive resistance to the imperialism of the same, which opens a path otherwise than that of violence in existence, as a ‘prophetic word’ (*parole prophétique*).¹⁶⁸ He does so in an article entitled ‘Freedom of Speech’. In this article, Levinas bemoans the fact that in modern political discourse there are no acknowledgments given to the

¹⁶⁵ According to Hilary Putnam, the strength in Descartes’s argument, for Levinas, lies not in its attempt to prove the existence of God but in its acknowledgment of a reality which the subject could not have constructed itself. Hilary Putnam, ‘Levinas and Judaism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, pp. 33-62 (p. 42). Along these lines, Putnam continues: ‘It isn’t that Levinas accepts Descartes’s argument, so interrupted. The significance is rather that Levinas transforms the argument by substituting the other for God. So transformed, the “proof” becomes: I know the other (*l’autrui*) isn’t part of my “construction of the world” because my encounter with the other (*l’autrui*) is an encounter with a fissure, with a being who breaks my categories’. Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Levinas, ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’, p. 55/248.

¹⁶⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Freedom of Speech’, in *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 205-207; ‘Liberté de parole’, in *Difficile liberté*, pp. 287-290. Further references are to Hand’s translation with the English pagination followed by the French pagination and separated by a slash.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 207/290.

independent existence of those who speak considering that no sooner than one speaks does their expression become interpreted and thus reduced to an understanding of Being. Making this point in relation to the victims of Stalinism, following the denial of any wrongdoing by Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union at the time,¹⁶⁹ Levinas remarks,

The most troubling circumstance of de-Stalinization is the way in which the language it revives at the level of collective experience is totally discredited. We can no longer believe in words, for we can no longer speak. It is not that freedom of speech still remains out of reach for most of the world, or that men use words to tell lies. We can no longer speak, because no one can begin his discourse without immediately bearing witness to something other than what is said. Psychoanalysis and sociology lie in wait for the speaker. Words are symptoms or superstructures, such that conscious cries and gestures form part of the nightmare they had to interrupt.¹⁷⁰

Rather than *listen* to the individual experiences of those who speak, political movements reduce those experiences to an ideological outlook so as not to stall their so-called ‘destiny’.¹⁷¹ In this sense, history has no meaning other than the understanding of Being, or ideology, of any given political party. Totalising thinking thus rules the political sphere.¹⁷²

According to Levinas, this political totalitarianism rests upon an ontological totalitarianism. In other words, it adheres to the violent order of existence in which one being endeavours to dominate and subjugate another being in order to solidify its own position in existence. Within this violent order, as Levinas comments,

Being is all, a Being in which nothing finishes and nothing begins. Nothing stands opposed to it, and no one judges it. It is an anonymous neuter, an impersonal universe, a universe without language. We can no longer speak, for how can we

¹⁶⁹ Whilst many journalists and commentators at the time simply dismissed Khrushchev’s speeches as ‘propaganda’, Levinas saw in them rather ‘the implicit or explicit metaphysics on which the political thought of the West depends’, namely, the imperialism of the same over and against the other. See, Howard Caygill, ‘Levinas’s Political Judgement’, in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Vol. IV, Beyond Levinas*, pp. 85-100 (p. 92).

¹⁷⁰ Levinas ‘Freedom of Speech’, p. 206/288-289.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205/288.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 206/288.

guarantee the value of a proposition, if not by offering another proposition which, however, no one can answer for?¹⁷³

When this violent order contaminates the political sphere, it is impossible for dialogue to occur since no propositions hold any value outside of the party line. This situation leads to the domination of ‘falsehoods’ in which ‘what one says’ about the Other stands for more than the truth of the independent existence of the Other who speaks.¹⁷⁴ Levinas thus proclaims that ‘the word counts only because of the eternal order which it manages to bring to consciousness’.¹⁷⁵ Whereas the philosophical tradition identifies this ‘eternal order’ in a universal narrative in which ‘the speaking man feels part of a discourse that speaks itself’, Levinas seeks to overcome this totalitarianism by equating the ‘eternal order’ with the infinite allusiveness of the face of the Other. Making this point at the conclusion of ‘Freedom of Speech’, Levinas notes,

The only believable word is the one that can lift itself out of its eternal contest and return to the human lips that speak it, in order to fly from man to man and judge history, instead of remaining a symptom or an effect or a ruse. This is the word of a discourse that begins absolutely in the person in possession of it, and moves towards another who is absolutely separate. It is a masterful word that Europe can no longer hear. It is a word that penetrates to the heart. And in a precise sense, one that contains not a whiff of saintliness, it is a prophetic word.¹⁷⁶

Whilst the speaking man can find himself as part of a universal discourse that speaks itself through him, the expression of the face of the Other can always judge this discourse as imperialistic due to its infinite exteriority.¹⁷⁷ This ‘prophetic word’ of the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 207/289-290.

¹⁷⁴ To use Levinas’s words on this issue: ‘Through a thousand cracks, falsehood seeps into a world that cannot recover its self-control. [...] Surpassing one falsehood does not mean that we enter the realm of truth, but that we lie beyond the previously established limits’. Ibid., p. 206/289.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 207/290.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Whilst appropriating Dilthey’s historical hermeneutic approach into his own thinking as a way to circumvent Husserl’s idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science of intentional consciousness and its objectivities, Heidegger ultimately finds Dilthey’s philosophy as incapable of asking the question of the meaning of Being. According to Heidegger, Dilthey is correct to say that the human being is fundamentally historical. Nevertheless, for Heidegger, the human being is not fully determined by its history, that is to say, it can transcend its historical facticity and ask the question of the meaning of Being in order to give its own meaning to experience beyond the current historical norms and values. On this point, McDonnell notes, ‘If the question of the meaning of Being is to be retrieved and re-awakened and addressed as a question, then a different kind of experience containing its own understanding of the

face of the Other, for Levinas, has been *forgotten* in Europe today. Consistent with the development of Levinas's thought so far, it can be said that this forgetfulness results from the dominance of the philosophy of immanence following Kant's critique of transcendent metaphysics. Consequently, having successfully formulated the face of the Other as that which justifies the transcendence of the human being in a concrete manner, thus circumventing any Marxist or Nietzschean complaints against 'saintliness', it is now Levinas's philosophical task to show in detail the manner in which the free speaking and thinking subject results from its fundamental responsibility in front of (*devant*), to (*à*), and for (*pour*) the Other so as to retrieve and make relevant the prophetic word for philosophy *today*.¹⁷⁸ Levinas does this in his first major work, *Totality and Infinity*, which will be the focus of the next and final chapter of this study.

questionable meaning of Being itself needs to be found and brought into play. Here Heidegger advances Dilthey's thought in a direction that is clearly of no concern to Dilthey, but of central significance to Heidegger. And in *Being and Time* Heidegger believes that he has found just such "a phenomenal basis" that makes the meaning of Being "worthy of questioning" in the anticipatory awareness, in the present, of my own death in the future, as disclosed from within the particular mood of *Angst*'. McDonnell, *Heidegger's Way through Phenomenology*, p. 155. Thus, for Heidegger, it is the 'outside' perspective of the totality of *Dasein*'s existential structure in the affective disposition of anguish that facilitates human transcendence. Having already found Heidegger's account of human transcendence to be inadequate, Levinas upholds the Other as the true judge of history since their face offers the subject a genuine outside perspective and thus a way to transcend its immanent condition. See, §2.2.4.

¹⁷⁸ Whilst failing to highlight its hermeneutic elements, Leora Batnitzky also identifies this as Levinas's main philosophical task. In Batnitzky's own words: 'Levinas aims to show that my obligation to another person [the Other] constitutes the starting point for all truth. Philosophy cannot fully grasp what Levinas calls "the face of the Other". Philosophy can, however, by way of a [hermeneutic] phenomenological retrieval, recover what ontology — the quest for the meaning of being — has forgotten: namely, the way in which the subject has already been "called" into responsibility by the revelation of the Other's moral authority'. Leora Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 28.

CHAPTER IV

LEVINAS'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FACE OF THE OTHER IN *TOTALITY AND INFINITY* (1961)

In his book *Heidegger in France*, Janicaud argues that *Totality and Infinity* represents Levinas's 'decisive turn against Heidegger' before continuing that 'a careful study by a historian of contemporary philosophy should be able to show whether this turn led Levinas to exaggerate matters, sometimes doing violence to the texts [of Heidegger], in particular concerning the use of "totality" and "violence", which cannot be imposed on the analytic of *Dasein* without betraying it'.¹ Having made these points, Janicaud is quick to acknowledge that his 'perspective is not that of a historian of philosophy'.² In light of the methodology employed within this study, which traces the historical development of Levinas's thought as based upon his various engagements with Husserl and Heidegger, this much is obvious. For, if it was Janicaud's perspective, then surely he would have discerned the fundamental critique made by Levinas to Heidegger's description of the concrete in *Time and the Other*. Similarly, Janicaud would have also identified that Levinas makes this critique by utilising Heidegger's way of describing the concrete thus destabilising the understanding of Being in *Dasein* as the most concrete position in existence. In this respect, Levinas does not 'betray' the analytic of *Dasein*. He simply reveals that it is not fundamental.

This chapter argues that far from representing a 'decisive turn against Heidegger', *Totality and Infinity* continues along the same lines as Levinas's previous works by offering an *immanent critique* of fundamental ontology. In this sense, Levinas

¹ Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, trans. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 121-122.

² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

takes up Heidegger's way of doing phenomenology in order to overcome the fatalism of its conclusions. It will be shown that with the assistance of hermeneutic reasoning, Levinas finds that the call of the face of the Other is heard by the lived body prior to the call of conscience from the (authentic) self to the (inauthentic) self in *Dasein* which, for Heidegger, discloses the understanding of Being *qua* temporality.³ It is for this reason that Levinas famously proclaims in *Totality and Infinity* that 'ethics' or, as he also calls it, 'metaphysics', that is to say, the face-to-face relation, *precedes* ontology.

§4.1 'PREFACE'

When attempting to understand Levinas's philosophical project, as it is presented in *Totality and Infinity*, it is of importance to consider those thinkers against whom Levinas advances his own position. In the 'Preface' of this work, Levinas's position is made clear in relation not only to Husserl and Heidegger but also Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. This section examines the 'Preface' of *Totality and Infinity* in order to ascertain Levinas's specific passage through these thinkers, who are all considered by Levinas as essential interlocutors for his phenomenological analysis of the face of the Other.

§4.1.1 *Morality and War*

'Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality'.⁴ With this sentence, Levinas opens *Totality and Infinity* and, ever since its publication in 1961, many commentators have sought to make sense of this claim. In relation to this sentence, one recent commentator, for example, notes that

³ Janicaud believes that, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas fails to address the theme of the call of conscience in *Dasein*. Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, p. 121. Not only is this comment factually erroneous, it is also on this exact point where Levinas develops hermeneutic phenomenology in a novel direction that Heidegger could not identify due to his own philosophical presuppositions. See, §4.4.4.

⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21/5.

‘to be duped by morality is to believe in the moral in a world fundamentally dominated by war as the ultimate principle of reality’.⁵ Moati’s explanation of this sentence would be fine, if Levinas actually upheld war as ‘the ultimate principle of reality’. Levinas does indeed highlight war as quite possibly ‘the greatest’, that is, the most common ordeal in life which, subsequently, ‘renders morality derisory’.⁶ Yet, for Levinas, reality does not simply contain one ‘ultimate principle’; rather, there is a ‘plurality’ within existence itself.⁷ In other words, there are different ways of existing within existence. It is not war alone, as defined when one being seeks to dominate or subjugate another being, and nothing else.⁸ There are also instants exterior to this violent order and it is, in particular, the fundamental event ‘producing’ such instants that Levinas seeks to describe over the course of *Totality and Infinity*.⁹ This fundamental event is the concrete encounter with the face of the Other. In order to make sense of the opening sentence from *Totality and Infinity*, then, Moati’s explanation must be set aside.

In her commentary on the opening sentence of *Totality and Infinity*, Perpich correctly makes the point that here, for Levinas, there is an allusion to ‘the sceptic [who] voices the suspicion that morality is for the weak and easily led’, as Nietzsche had suggested, before continuing with her remarks that ‘Levinas’s opening line hints there is a bit of sceptic in all of us’.¹⁰ To be sure, there is much for the philosopher to be sceptical about since, as Levinas will later put it, ‘philosophy is not separable from scepticism, which follows it like a shadow it drives off by refuting only to find it once

⁵ Raoul Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being: A Guide to Totality and Infinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 1.

⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21/5.

⁷ See, §2.2.4.

⁸ See, §3.2.

⁹ With respect to the verb ‘to produce’, Levinas remarks that ‘the term “production” designates both the effectuation of being (the event “is produced”, an automobile “is produced”) and its being brought to light or its exposition (an argument “is produced”, an actor “is produced”)’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 26/11. In this sense, that which ‘produces’ a way of existing other than violence, namely, the face of the Other, both occurs as a concrete event — the necessary recognition of the face of the Other — and as the source of the free acknowledgement of the face of the Other occurring in thought.

¹⁰ Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 78.

again on its path'.¹¹ Nevertheless, this way of considering philosophy belongs to a certain historical situation because the statement 'with which *Totality and Infinity* begins', as Silvia Benso duly observes, 'contains the enunciation of a problem that has become more and more urgent' in the wake of 'Nietzsche's criticism of all forms of moralistic asceticisms sublating the faithfulness of the earth into the illusory promise of a kingdom of heaven in which all wrongs and injustices will be mended and compensated'.¹² Along these lines, consideration must also be given, of course, to Marx and Freud who, in conjunction with Nietzsche, are famously dubbed 'the masters of suspicion', by Ricoeur, not only because of their shared 'decision to look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as "false" consciousness' but also precisely because of their expressed aim 'to clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of "destructive" critique but by an invention of an art of interpreting [the meaning of concrete life]'.¹³ The suspicion shown by these thinkers to the supposed validity of meaning residing in transcendent concepts belonging to moral ideals as accurate interpretations of reality only becomes possible following Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics. As a result, everyone will *not* readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether or not we are duped by morality; rather, it is only those who both *accept* Kant's critique and *appreciate the relevance* of the objections raised by the so-called 'the masters of suspicion' who will readily agree to this statement.

Whilst holding some reservations about Freud, Levinas does accept Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics and appreciates the objections raised by Marx and

¹¹ Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 168/213.

¹² Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 173.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Denise Savage (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), p. 33.

Nietzsche.¹⁴ The acceptance of Kant's critique is evident from his commitment to phenomenology as the correct method for philosophy. The focus of Levinas's thinking so far has been to describe life from its concrete lived aspect. Any abstract or speculative thinking, therefore, should be rejected as accurate accounts of concrete life. Similarly, Levinas shows a measure of scepticism toward moral thinking when its exposition becomes separated from the ethical relations occurring within concrete life.¹⁵ In this respect, Levinas appreciates the objections raised by Marx and Nietzsche concerning abstract and speculative thinking on morality. Nevertheless, Levinas previously criticised Marx and Nietzsche for refusing the need to escape from oneself, which all human beings exhibit through the concrete movement of transcendence from the fatalistic determinism of bodily immanence to the freedom of the ego.¹⁶ Such an escape rests on the necessary recognition of the face of the Other and is ultimately fulfilled in the free acknowledgment of the face of the Other, at least, as far as Levinas is concerned. In this sense, Levinas's disagreement with Marx and Nietzsche does not relate to their insistence on returning to concrete life as the main domain for

¹⁴ Levinas's main source of disagreement with Freud concerns the fact that for the latter one can never truly escape the determinism of immanence, even with the advent of consciousness. All conscious acts, for Freud, ultimately, fall back on unconscious desires. In contrast, for Levinas, the very fact of consciousness already attests to an escape from one's own immanent condition. Additionally, for Freud, the fundamental drive which all human actions stem from is *Eros*, or, sexual yearning. Even acts of *Agape*, or, unconditional love, are derivative in the mind of Freud. On this topic, Levinas comments: 'I am definitely not a Freudian; consequently I don't think that *Agape* comes from *Eros*. But I don't deny that sexuality is also an important philosophical problem; the meaning of the division of the human into man and woman is not reduced to a biological problem. I used to think that otherness began in the feminine. That is, in fact, a very strange otherness: woman is neither the contradictory nor the opposite of man, nor like other differences. I can say no more about it now; I think in any case that *Eros* is definitely not *Agape*, that *Agape* is neither a derivative nor the extinction of love-*Eros*. Before *Eros* there was the Face [*le visage*]; *Eros* itself is possible only between faces. The problem of *Eros* is philosophical and concerns otherness. Thirty years ago I wrote a book called *Le temps et l'autre* [*Time and the Other*] – in which I thought that the feminine was otherness itself; and I do not retract that, but I have never been a Freudian. In *Totalité et Infini* [*Totality and Infinity*] there is a chapter on *Eros*, which is described as love that becomes enjoyment, whereas I have a grave view of *Agape* in terms of responsibility for the other [*l'autrui*]. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy, Justice, and Love', in *Entre Nous*, pp. 103-121 (p. 113). In this respect, Levinas's position is the complete opposite to Freud's since it holds that *Eros* is actually derived from *Agape*, understood as the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. Akin to his objections to Marx and Nietzsche, then, Levinas finds Freud's description of our immanent condition to be inadequate.

¹⁵ See, §3.2.

¹⁶ See, §1.3.1.

philosophical reflection; it concerns, rather, the validity and accuracy of their descriptions of that concrete life. Whilst correct to dismiss transcendent ideas pertaining to moral thinking in the wake of Kant's critique, Marx and Nietzsche are incorrect to dismiss morality completely since, as Levinas demonstrates in *Totality and Infinity*, there is a morality to be found *within concrete life itself* which does not rest upon any abstract or speculative concepts. The significance of this experience of morality pertains to the ethical encounter with the Other in the face-to-face relation. As a result, the opening sentence of *Totality and Infinity* grants that morality *should* be approached and treated with scepticism, *unless* its meaning and significance can be found, attested to, and validated in concrete life itself.¹⁷

§4.1.2 *Philosophy as War*

War, as one way of existing within existence, does not simply transpire by dint of action, in which and through which one being attempts to dominate the other as a result of physical force. Of course, such actions are a form of violence. 'But', to use Levinas's words, 'violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action'.¹⁸ In this respect, the violence of war corresponds to any attempt of 'interrupting' the 'continuity' of the Other by denying their independence and making

¹⁷ At this stage of his career, Levinas uses the terms 'morality' and 'ethics' interchangeably to refer to the concrete encounter with the face of the Other. Nevertheless, in his later career, Levinas makes a strict distinction between the two terms. Explaining this distinction to Kearney, Levinas notes: 'This distinction between the ethical and the moral is very important here. By morality I mean a series of rules relating to social behaviour and civic duty. But while morality thus operates in the socio-political order of organising and improving our human survival, it is ultimately founded on an ethical responsibility towards the other [*l'autrui*]'. Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 80. Whereas, 'morality' refers to a certain set of rules that one can freely conceive of in thought, then, ethics corresponds to the necessary recognition of the face of the Other which justifies thought as such.

¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21/6.

them adhere to 'roles', 'commitments', and 'actions', which do not stem from their own existence. Under these circumstances, war encompasses any understanding of the Other seeking to fix them within a certain 'totality'.

According to Levinas, there is nothing more culpable of this violence than the history of Western philosophy. Under these specific circumstances, he shares the suspicions of Nietzsche. Elaborating on this point, Levinas comments,

The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to in order to bring forth its objective meaning. For the ultimate meaning alone counts; the last act alone changes beings into themselves. They are what they will appear to be in the already plastic forms of the epic.¹⁹

If war is considered as 'the ultimate principle of reality', as Moati suggests, then it is arrived at through an act of philosophical reflection. This is because the aim of philosophy has always been the acquisition of knowledge²⁰ and the establishment of an 'objective meaning' in the form of an 'epic', so as to explain all of reality.²¹ The problem with this approach, for Levinas, relates to the fact that as soon as objects or other people become known they are effectively grasped within the totalising understanding of Being that accompanies and grounds such knowledge thus negating their individuality or independent existence. In this regard, the 'unicity of each present', or the 'instant', as Levinas also calls it, in which the Other can speak the unknown and present themselves as the face, becomes 'sacrificed' for a so-called 'future' known by or

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 21-22/6.

²⁰ One has to look no further than the famous opening line of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to find support for this claim: 'All men by nature desire to know'. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.1, 980a22, trans. by W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 1552-1728 (p. 1552).

²¹ One of the finest examples of this scheme can be found in Hegel's speculative dialectic of absolute spirit and its prioritisation of the 'universal', which Levinas refers to explicitly in *Totality and Infinity*, along with Durkheim's 'social', Freud's 'unconscious', as well as the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) in Heidegger, as 'insidious forms of the impersonal and the neuter' found within the philosophical tradition. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 272/305.

knowable to thought. Consequently, the Other ‘will appear to be in the already plastic forms of the epic’, where ‘the ultimate meaning alone counts’, the use Levinas’s words, and the particular meaning of the Other is negated.²²

§4.1.3 *Philosophy and the Eschatology of Messianic Peace*

If war is conceived as ‘the ultimate principle of reality’, it can only be done so from within the totality. A common way of viewing reality as war from within the totality is through the study of history considering that it continuously reveals a narrative of opposing forces seeking to dominate and subjugate each other. Despite this actuality, Levinas claims that there is another way to consider reality by means of philosophical reflection. He notes, ‘morality will oppose politics in history and will have gone beyond the functions of prudence or the canons of the beautiful to proclaim itself unconditional and universal when the eschatology of messianic peace will have come to superpose itself upon the ontology of war’.²³ Under these circumstance, by freely acknowledging the ‘prophetic word’ of the face of the Other, which Levinas now refers to as ‘the eschatology of messianic peace’, philosophy can transcend ‘the functions of prudence’ and ‘the canons of the beautiful’ defended by moral thinkers from within the totality — the type of thinking rejected by the ‘masters of suspicion’ — so as to reveal the ‘unconditional’ and ‘universal’ behind thought as such, namely, the face of the Other. In doing so, the principle of war within philosophy can be overcome thus facilitating the possibility of ‘peace’ in which the Other is not totalised by thought.

In contrast to the war of the totality, the face of the Other expresses peace. This is what makes it a ‘messianic eschatology’. Yet, such a conception of peace differs

²² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 22/6.

²³ *Ibid.*

from the peace found within the study of history. Elaborating on this point, Levinas comments,

The peace of empires issued from war rests on war. It does not restore to the alienated beings their lost [moral] identity. For that a primordial and original relation with being is needed.²⁴

When peace occurs within the totality, it follows on from an initial war. Moreover, in such instances, violence becomes part of the identity of the ‘alienated beings’ of war since they now feel the need to defend their individuality as a result of the initial attack on them.²⁵ To achieve actual peace within thought, therefore, the ‘primordial and original relation’ underlying thought must be freely acknowledged. This relation is the encounter with the face of the Other which, as Levinas argues over the course of *Totality and Infinity*, is necessarily recognised within concrete life prior to thought. The difficulty of achieving this goal within philosophy is not lost on Levinas considering that, to use his words, ‘philosophers distrust [the eschatology of messianic peace]’.²⁶ The reason for this distrust stems from the fact that the face of the Other, from which the eschatology of messianic peace announces itself, always remains exterior to the totality and thus cannot be located within the ‘ultimate meaning’ of an ‘epic’. As a consequence, the eschatology of messianic peace for such philosophers represents ‘a subjective and arbitrary divination of the future’ that is not known nor knowable by thought, ‘the result of a revelation without evidences’, and a ‘tributary of faith’ which

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ This also remains the case when two opposing forces reach a truce in a conflict and an end to war seems to have succeeded, as Jeffrey Dudiak notes, ‘where recourse to dialogue has put an end to or averted a violent outbreak, that it has simply been — by threat, by ruse, or by rhetoric — the imposition of another form of violence, where “interlocutors” have been forced to accept the terms of an “agreement” against their wishes and best interests’. Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. xvi. In such instances, ‘dialogue’ is not based upon the free acknowledgement of the face of the Other, nor is the Other seen as a true ‘interlocutor’. Such an account of ‘peace’, therefore, remains within the totality and reinforces the dominance of the same.

²⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 22/6.

‘belongs naturally to opinion’.²⁷ Despite such protestations from the philosophical tradition, Levinas endeavours to show that there is indeed ‘evidence’ for the messianic expression through the encounter with the face of the Other which, subsequently, transpires within concrete life.²⁸ Central to Levinas’s approach for doing so will be to emphasise the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research.

§4.1.4 *The Messianic Expression in the Face of the Other*

Since philosophy as war always begins from that which has been represented owing to perceptual experience and seeks ‘evidence’ for its knowledge claims from within the totality, it will never be able to freely acknowledge the eschatology of messianic peace. This is because the ‘evidence’ for the messianic expression stems from the encounter with the face of the Other and thus always remains exterior to the totality since this concrete event is, ultimately, experienced prior to thought. Despite the incessant exteriority of the face of the Other, however, there is indeed ‘evidence’ for the eschatology of messianic peace as the ‘breach of totality’, which can be acknowledged by thought. On this point, Levinas comments,

The first ‘vision’ of eschatology (hereby distinguished from the revealed opinions of positive religions) reveals the very possibility of eschatology, that is, the breach of totality, the possibility of a *signification without a context*. The experience of morality does not proceed from this vision — it consummates this vision; ethics is an optics. But it is a ‘vision’ without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalising objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type — which this work [*Totality and Infinity*] seeks to describe.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 22/6-7. This holds for any historical science of ‘facts’ as well as the atemporal eidetic science of ‘essences’ in Husserl’s version of phenomenology, where the task of the philosopher *as a scientist* is different from those scientists examining any other dimension of reality.

²⁸ De Boer recognises in Levinas’s attempt to give philosophical credence to what has been traditionally maintained as an ‘opinion’ the influence of Dilthey’s ‘philosophy of life’ and Heidegger’s idea of existential-hermeneutic phenomenology. Below the ‘objective truth’ of philosophical knowledge, lies the ‘subjective truth’ of ‘pre-philosophical experience’ which, as De Boer puts it, ‘is not the cradle of errors’ that ‘must be overcome by thought; it is, rather, a source of inspiration, a fertile soil whose implicit rationality thought must bring to light’. De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 102. For Levinas, the concrete encounter with the face of the Other is the source of inspiration *par excellence*.

²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23/8, my emphasis.

Before unpacking this passage it is essential to reiterate, once again, that Levinas uses the term ‘vision’ here as an analogy (hence, the inclusion of scare quotation marks around the word). The reason for this qualification is that the face of the Other, as the concrete encounter from which the messianic expression originates, cannot be reduced to an ‘image’ and always remains ‘bereft of the synoptic and totalising objectifying virtues of vision’. Nevertheless, it is possible to acknowledge this fundamental event of human life *in* thought without reducing it *to* the totality.³⁰ This is what Levinas means when referring to the ‘vision’ of eschatology and the ‘optics’ of ethics. To freely acknowledge the face of the Other in thought, which has already been recognised necessarily prior to thought as a result of the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, means to regard the signification of being in a manner ‘wholly different’ than that of war. Similarly, it is to consider philosophy in line with the ethical relation which, originally, bestows human beings with the very ability to take a step back from themselves and to reflect as such.

By freely acknowledging the face of the Other, philosophy goes beyond the violence of war and overcomes the dominance of the totality. In doing so, it demonstrates that there is always more to and in the meaning of being than that which can be thought and totalised. Elaborating on this point, Levinas avers,

Eschatology institutes a relation with being beyond the totality or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present. Not with the void that would surround the totality and where one could, arbitrarily, think what one likes, and thus promote the claims of a subjectivity free as the wind. It is a relationship with a surplus always exterior to the totality, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as though another concept, the concept of infinity,

³⁰ The ego, as the source of all thought, exists in the totality, as that which has already been thought, whilst simultaneously never being fully consumed by the totality since it is the ego that does the thinking and speaking. In this sense, the ego can always question what has already been thought in the act of thinking. This is why the face of the Other, as that which always remains exterior to the totality, can be acknowledged by thought without reducing it to the totality. See, §3.4, ‘The Ego and the Totality’. The ‘face to face’ encounter breaks in and through the totality. Thus the necessity of always ‘unsaying’ what has already been ‘said’, for the later Levinas.

*were needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality.*³¹

Since the concept of infinity first arises from the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, this ontological event initiates the ‘breach of totality’.³² Such a ‘breach’ demonstrates a relation ‘beyond’ the totality with a ‘surplus always exterior to the totality’, which cannot be encompassed within the totality yet remains as ‘primordial’ as the totality itself. It breaks *in* and *through* the totality. In many respects, totality can only be recognised as totality by understanding it in relation to something else outside of that totality, which, for Levinas, is the infinite. Under these circumstances, the ‘evidence’ for the eschatology of messianic peace rests upon a certain ‘situation’ within concrete life, where the limit of the totality *as* totality is recognised and transcended within that recognition through the acknowledgment of the infinite outside of the totality. This ‘situation’ is not something that can be represented by thought nor can it be contained within the ‘objective totality’. Furthermore, it is not the ‘void’ surrounding the totality, that is to say, a sense of nothingness, which one could utilise to promote arbitrary claims about the ‘real’ beyond the totality or what really counts in the totality.³³ It is rather a *lived experience*, as Levinas comments, ‘reflected within the totality and history’ as that which is presupposed *by* the totality and history. In this manner, as Levinas notes,

Without substituting eschatology for philosophy, without philosophically ‘demonstrating’ eschatological ‘truths’, we can proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions the

³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 22-23/7. Hence, as emphasised by Albert Dondeyne, the fact that Levinas entitled this work ‘totality *and* infinity’ as opposed to ‘totality *or* infinity’. See, De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 3. One cannot think infinity, for Levinas, in disjunction from the totality. His style of reasoning is always conjunctive. Any objections raised against Levinas with respect to ‘dualistic thinking’ must acknowledge this detail.

³² See, §3.5.

³³ This is why Levinas objects to natural and pre-Kantian understandings of theology. Levinas argues that traditional theology, as Nigel Zimmerman observes, ‘is an example of a mistaken notion that God, as the object of science, might be contained within a subjective discourse contained within reason’. Nigel Zimmerman, *Levinas and Theology* (London: A&C Black, 2013), p. 64. In this respect, as Zimmerman continues, ‘reason would be simply a violent rendition of interpreting what is other as the same’. *Ibid.*

totality itself. Such a situation is the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other.³⁴

De Boer refers to this approach as ‘a transcendental reduction’, ‘a way down’, or ‘a descent to the source’ of experience.³⁵ As a result, the ‘evidence’ for the eschatology of messianic peace is not to be found on account of that which is represented in perceptual experience. The idea of infinity, after all, resists such experiences. The ‘evidence’ for the eschatology of messianic peace is rather to be retrieved from a certain *lived experience* which gives rise to the idea of infinity and conditions the totality itself. In relation to this lived experience, Levinas writes,

The relation with infinity cannot, to be sure, be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very *infinition* is produced precisely in its overflowing. The relation with infinity will have to be stated in terms other than objective experience; but if experience precisely means a relation with the absolutely other, that is, with what always overflows thought, the relation with infinity accomplishes experience in the fullest sense of the word.³⁶

Prior to the ‘objective experience’ of the free thinking subject, which can totalise the meaning of Being in line with a specific understanding of Being, there is a lived ‘subjective’ experience of the ‘absolutely other’ in concrete life which accomplishes experience as such. This lived experience with absolute alterity corresponds to the concrete encounter with the face of the Other since it places us in direct contact with independent reality precisely because the Other presents themselves *as themselves* prior to any understanding of Being that I can and do possess from within the totality.

§4.1.5 *The Concrete Encounter with the Face of the Other*

Ever since Kant’s project of critical philosophy, experience has come to be understood with respect to finitude. ‘All our cognition begins with experience’ and, moreover,

³⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 24/9-10.

³⁵ De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 22.

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 25/10.

since experience is finite, as Kant observes, ‘no cognition in us precedes experience, and with experience every cognition begins’.³⁷ This remains the case for Kant even though he claims that it is indeed possible to achieve *a priori* knowledge. As Kant famously puts it and adds, ‘there is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience. [...] But although all our cognition commences with experience, it does not on that account all arise from experience’.³⁸ The reason for this stems from the fact that Kant reforms the very idea of *a priori* knowledge. For him, such knowledge no longer refers to that which occurs ‘independently of this or that experience’; rather, it is to be considered as that which occurs ‘absolutely’ of ‘all experience’.³⁹ In this regard, the items corresponding to *a priori* knowledge claims are not encountered in concrete life precisely because they are understood to be the necessary pre-conditions of concrete life. *A priori* knowledge claims of this kind may indeed lead us to an idea of infinity. Nevertheless, such an idea of infinity can never find a corresponding object in concrete life and thus, for Kant, cannot be upheld as ‘real’. Elaborating on this position, in a later publication, Levinas observes,

Kant's critique, in its rigorous distinction between intuition, the pure form of which is time and in which nature is given, and reason, which possesses the idea of the infinite but cannot get a firm grip on being, sets up the finite and the infinite in a new way. As opposed to the Cartesian tradition, the finite, in Kant, is no longer understood in light of the infinite. Integrating the teachings of empiricism, Kant relates the appearing of Nature to human sensibility, which is the condition of a finite being, whose only way of relating to the Real is by being affected, impressed, receptive. Appearing nature thus bears the mark of the subject's finitude.⁴⁰

Along the same lines, Levinas continues, with reference to the model of reason and the idea of infinity in Kant,

The finite — temporal — way of apprehending the real thus belongs to the objectivity or reality of the real. The infinite, a regulative idea, does not constitute

³⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 136.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Infinity’, in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. 71.

the datum. The infinity of the idea is only actualized at the price of an illusion called transcendental appearance, Reason illicitly leaping over time. The motives that guide reason toward the infinite do not depend on the function of the understanding, which assures, according to the schema of time, the synthesis necessary for the unification of the sensible and the apprehension of the datum.⁴¹

As a result of Kant's critique, then, a new attitude emerges within philosophy. This attitude holds that finite experience can be understood on its own terms, without giving recourse to infinity, thus maintaining that it is only possible to experience infinity as an idea of reason and not as an object impressed on human sensibility. Under these circumstances, any concrete experience of the infinite is seen as impossible. The famous Kantian transcendental deduction from the finiteness of our human experience to the regulative idea of the infinity of reflection on our experiences is testimony to *the finiteness* of that human being's knowledge-claims, not to the actual existence of any infinite object or to the very existence of the Other. In this respect, to truly follow Kant, one must accept his stance that 'the finite is not related to the infinite', as Levinas puts it.⁴²

Two thinkers who accept Kant's stance on this particular issue are Husserl and Heidegger. This remains the case despite the many differences contained within Husserl and Heidegger's respective versions of phenomenology. Building on this detail, Levinas notes,

In Husserlian phenomenology, we find the Kantian way of describing the finite independently of the infinite, and the thesis that each form of objectivity has its own finite modes of apprehension, which mark the very objectivity of the objects. The idea in the Kantian sense of the term, i.e., the Kantian infinite as a regulative idea, not realizable in being — a non-actual infinite — guides, in that phenomenology, which is mainly idealist in this, the constitution of the object on the basis of the finite datum: it illuminates the infinite horizon on which the datum appears, and the infinite horizon of horizons.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

Here, Levinas emphasises that Husserl follows Kant's lead by preserving the stance that the infinite only 'appears' as a 'regulative idea' for thought and that it is 'not realisable in being', which is to say, that infinity is 'non-actual' within Husserlian phenomenology. It rather corresponds to the ability of consciousness to reflect upon 'the stream of experience' given to it through perceptual acts *ad infinitum* which, as Husserl remarks, 'cannot begin and end' as opposed to the actual living of those experiences, which can and do begin and end. In other words, as McDonnell clarifies, within Husserl's famous transcendental reduction, 'we can justifiably deduce from the very finiteness of the knowledge of an experience, immanently perceived, the idea of the unity, totality and infinity of reflection on the existence of such experiences (if, and when they exist) for possible knowledge-claims'.⁴⁴ For Husserl, then, the ability of consciousness to reflect infinitely upon its own stream of experience is not realisable in being itself. On the contrary, it is rather seized upon 'in the [same] manner of an idea in the Kantian sense', as Husserl explains in *Ideas I*.⁴⁵

This stance becomes radicalised by Heidegger in his version of phenomenology as fundamental ontology. The reason for this radicalisation stems from Heidegger's complete exclusion of any reflection on the infinite from philosophy as such. In Heidegger, as Levinas comments,

The finitude of being is not the equivalent of a negation of the infinite. On the contrary, it is on the basis of positive structures of existence — being-in-the-world, care and being-toward-death — that finitude is described.⁴⁶

In this respect, for Heidegger, the idea of the infinite becomes irrelevant for understanding the meaning of Being, seeing as the concrete basis for understanding

⁴⁴ Cyril McDonnell, 'The Task and Significance of Philosophical Reflection on the Relation of the Finite to the Infinite after Kant, in Husserl, Heidegger, and Schleiermacher', in *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society*, ed. by Julia Hynes (Dublin: Irish Philosophical Society, 2011), pp. 93-116 (p. 100).

⁴⁵ Husserl, *Ideas I*, §83, 'Seizing Upon the Unitary Stream of Mental Processes as "Idea"', pp. 197-199/166-167.

⁴⁶ Levinas, 'Infinity', p. 73.

finitude lies within the existential structure of *Dasein* itself through its ‘being-in-the-world’, ‘care’, and ‘being-toward-death’. Confirming this stance in *Being and Time*, whilst referring to the temporality of *Dasein* in which such an understanding of Being resides, Heidegger writes,

In such Being-towards-its-end, *Dasein* exists in a way which is authentically whole as that entity which it can be when ‘thrown into death’. This entity does not have an end at which it just stops, but it exists finitely. The authentic future is temporalized primarily by that temporality which makes up the meaning of anticipatory resoluteness: it thus reveals itself as finite [...] In our thesis that temporality is primordially finite, we are not disputing that ‘time goes on’; we are simply holding fast to the phenomenal character of primordial temporality — a character which shows itself in what is projected in *Dasein*’s primordial existential projecting.⁴⁷

In the same vein as Husserl’s stance above, Heidegger maintains his commitment to the finitude of actual experience on the basis of its ‘phenomenal character’. For Husserl, this ‘phenomenal character’ of finite experience rests upon the various objects appearing to intentional consciousness, of which there can be no possible object for the infinite; for Heidegger, it is found in the ‘primordial existential projecting’ of *Dasein* itself as found in the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*), including the world, myself, and my fellow human beings. ‘Nothing is so radically opposed to ontology as the idea of an infinite being’, as far as Heidegger is concerned.⁴⁸ As a result, both Husserl and Heidegger reject the infinite as an aspect of concrete life on the basis that it is not a phenomenological given of our actual experiences.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas challenges this view. He does so by demonstrating that, even though it *does not* and *cannot* appear as an object of intentional consciousness, the experience of infinity nevertheless transpires as a lived event in concrete life. This lived event becomes evident owing to the breach of totality

⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 378-379/329-330.

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. by James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 254. Levinas also highlights this passage from Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* with regard to the issue at hand. See, Levinas, ‘Infinity’, p. 73.

which, subsequently, leads thought back to its transcendental condition, namely, the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. This concrete event, for Levinas, is the experiential source of the idea of infinity. By considering the idea of infinity in this way, Levinas adheres to Kant's starting point in philosophy, which claims that all knowledge claims must find their basis in experience, whilst, simultaneously, avoiding any Husserlian critiques regarding the legitimacy of his own phenomenological approach. The reason for this avoidance stems from the fact that Levinas agrees with Husserl that infinity does not and cannot correspond to an object appearing to intentional consciousness since, to do so, would mean negating its 'very *infiniton*'. The experience of infinity, rather, concerns a *lived event* in concrete life as the encounter with the face of the Other. With the evidence for this concrete encounter resting upon lived experience, and not that which appears to intentional consciousness, Levinas aligns himself with Heidegger's hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research, once again. Just as the understanding of Being does not appear as an object of perceptual experience but, instead, reveals itself as implicit in *Dasein*'s lived experience owing to the hermeneutic retrieval of specific meanings deposited and expressed in language, the evidence for the concrete encounter with infinity rests upon the hermeneutic retrieval of the necessary recognition of the face of the Other occurring prior to thought, yet presupposed in all thought hitherto. The potential for such an investigation always resided within Heidegger's version of phenomenology to begin with since, as the passage from *Being and Time* quoted above confirms, Heidegger does not dispute that 'time goes on' outside of *Dasein*'s understanding of time as 'primordially finite'. He merely has little or no interest in addressing this philosophical problem. In contrast, Levinas takes this problem up explicitly in *Totality and Infinity* and installs it as his central interest in philosophy and the main topic for his research in

phenomenology. Furthermore, by doing so, Levinas does not simply demonstrate that the experience of infinity is a valid topic for phenomenological research. He also shows that the hermeneutic retrieval of the concrete encounter with the face of the Other radically calls into question the fundamentality of Heideggerian ontology, that is to say, it reveals the philosophical limits of the understanding of Being in *Dasein* and the ethical problems of reducing time exclusively to its basis in finitude. One must be careful, therefore, when reading Levinas's claim toward the end of the Preface in *Totality and Infinity* that his philosophical project is 'made possible' thanks to 'Husserlian phenomenology'.⁴⁹ Indeed, Husserl guides Levinas toward concrete life as the ground from which all philosophical reflection must find its legitimacy. It is Heidegger's hermeneutic approach toward phenomenology, however, that displays the potential for retrieving the experience of the infinite in concrete life — an experience fundamental to Levinas's 'passage from ethics to metaphysical exteriority' — despite Heidegger's inability to either identify or expand upon this passage himself.⁵⁰

§4.1.6 *Subjectivity Founded on the Idea of Infinity*

As the 'Preface' of *Totality and Infinity* draws to a close, Levinas explicitly states the thesis statement for his philosophical investigations. He announces that his position is a 'defence of subjectivity' before continuing to advance this position as one that does not emerge 'at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality (*contra* Husserl) nor in its anguish before death' (*contra* Heidegger).⁵¹ Quite the opposite, *Totality and*

⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 29/15.

⁵⁰ It is thus not Heidegger's approach toward phenomenological research that leads to the ignorance and exclusion of the Other in his thinking. It is, rather, Heidegger's philosophical presupposition that the meaning of Being must always reside upon *my* understanding of Being which blinds him to the alterity of the Other. Just as Heidegger objects to Husserl's version of phenomenology for its Cartesian presupposition that consciousness is the starting point for all thinking, Levinas objects to Heidegger on the basis of his own philosophical presuppositions. See, Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 318.

⁵¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 26/11.

Infinity defends subjectivity ‘as founded on the idea of infinity’.⁵² In this respect, Levinas does not dismiss Husserl or Heidegger’s conceptions of subjectivity as invalid. He simply claims that the temporal duration and ecstatic temporality, which constitute such forms of subjectivity, rest upon a prior encounter with the face of the Other thus founding subjectivity on the idea of infinity corresponding to a lived event in concrete life and not on the innate idea of infinity characteristic of pre-Kantian philosophy. *Totality and Infinity*, therefore, aims to ‘distinguish between the idea of totality and the idea of infinity’, without denouncing either, whilst, simultaneously, ‘affirming the philosophical primacy of the idea of infinity’.⁵³ It does so by forwarding a phenomenological analysis of the concrete encounter with the face of the Other and demonstrates the manner in which all philosophical reflection presupposes this fundamental event of human life. As a result of this approach, Levinas can stay true to Kant’s starting point in philosophy, circumvent any objections regarding his commitment to phenomenology, and still forward an immanent critique of both Husserl and Heidegger’s respective prioritisations of ‘intentional consciousness’ and human ‘existence’ in *Dasein* by retrieving ‘a forgotten experience’ presupposed by ‘objectifying thought’ and ‘the understanding of Being’.⁵⁴ This forgotten experience is the concrete encounter with the face of the Other.

§4.2 ‘THE SAME AND THE OTHER’

The first part of *Totality and Infinity* describes what happens in the face-to-face relation. In the wake of this concrete event, which is a fundamental aspect of human life, as far

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 28/14. Again, by formulating the encounter with the face of the Other as a ‘forgotten’ experience which can be retrieved by thought today, Levinas echoes the approach of Heidegger’s hermeneutic task within phenomenology of retrieving the forgotten question of the meaning of Being and making it relevant for thought today.

as Levinas is concerned, elemental reality gives way for an ontological separation between two distinct but related terms: the same and the other. These terms refer to the newly established subject, born out of the face-to-face relation, and the Other, who has called into question the work of existing belonging to the lived body of that subject. This section examines the details of the face-to-face relation in order to highlight the manner in which it transforms the prevailing understanding of Post-Kantian ontology within phenomenology.

§4.2.1 *Metaphysical Desire*

The idea of infinity, which grounds human subjectivity, results from the necessary recognition of the face of the Other as it occurs prior to thought. This fundamental event of human life denotes the concrete encounter from which Levinas finds the evidence for his phenomenological descriptions. It also indicates his commitment to the Kantian standpoint in philosophy. Hitherto, Levinas simply confirms the necessary recognition of the face of the Other based upon the concrete fact that human beings already find themselves in the spiritual order of language and reason. Nevertheless, in the first section of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas builds upon this position by claiming that there is something unique about human experience since, unlike other existents in existence, human beings are *receptive* to the idea of infinity. This receptivity is evident because the recognition of the face of the Other, which grants human beings with the ability to reflect upon and express themselves in language, happens necessarily in concrete life. It discloses a human experience that is *sui generis*.

The human receptivity to the idea of infinity, as that which establishes the necessity of the concrete recognition of the face of the Other, stems from, what Levinas refers to as, ‘metaphysical desire’. By recognising the face of the Other, a ‘movement’

transpires in relation to the human being. This movement begins from the material responsibility of bodily immanence and proceeds toward the ‘absolutely other’ as necessarily recognised in the face of the Other. Elaborating on this notion, Levinas remarks,

The term of this movement, the elsewhere or the other [*l'autre*], is called *other* [*autre*] in an eminent sense. No journey, no change of climate or of scenery could satisfy the desire bent toward it. The other [*l'autre*] metaphysically desired is not ‘other’ [*n'est pas autre*] like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself for myself, this ‘I’, that ‘other’ [*cet autre*]. I can ‘feed’ on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their alterity [*altérité*] is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends toward something else entirely, toward the *absolutely other* [*l'absolument autre*].⁵⁵

Whilst the lived body can achieve satisfaction by feeding on external realities in an adequate response to its own materiality, the fact that human beings ultimately transcend this state of immanence to reach the spiritual order of language and reason confirms that such satisfaction is inadequate.⁵⁶ This inadequacy originates from a metaphysical desire which, to use Levinas’s phrase, ‘cannot be satisfied’.⁵⁷ In this respect, metaphysical desire encompasses ‘the need to escape from oneself’, which is central to human experience since ‘it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it’.⁵⁸ Developing this point further, Levinas continues,

Desire is desire for the absolutely other [*l'absolument autre*]. Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, and the sense one allays, metaphysics desires the other [*l'autre*] beyond satisfactions, where no gesture by the body to diminish the aspiration is possible, where it is not possible to sketch out any known caress nor invent any new caress. A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other [*entend l'éloignement, l'altérité et l'extériorité de l'autre*]. For Desire this alterity [*cette altérité*], non-adequate to the idea, *has a meaning* [*a un sens*]. It is understood as the alterity of the Other [*altérité d'Autrui*] and of the Most-High. The very dimension of height is opened up by metaphysical Desire.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 33/21.

⁵⁶ Levinas highlights this point in *On Escape* by demonstrating the manner in which the simple pursuit of pleasure in human life always ends in disappointment. See, §1.3.3.

⁵⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 34/22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34/23, my emphasis. For Albert Camus, man, by nature, desires an eternal life of happiness with God. But God does not exist. Therefore, the kind of striving and meaning of life that man searches

Here, Levinas marks a clear distinction between material needs and metaphysical desire. Need is that which I can ‘sink my teeth into’ and thereby ‘satisfy myself in assimilating the other’; whilst, as Levinas comments, desire aims toward ‘an uncharted future’, the unknown, the absolutely other which can never be assimilated.⁶⁰ The self always returns to itself through need. For instance, by consuming food, the self leaves itself only to reaffirm itself. In contrast, ‘the metaphysical desire does not long to return, for it is desire for a land not of our birth’, as Levinas comments using metaphorical language, ‘for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves’.⁶¹ Despite this inability of assimilation, human beings *still* desire that which they can never possess. In doing so, they implicitly ‘understand’ the ‘remoteness’, ‘alterity’, and ‘exteriority’ of the ‘absolutely other’ as retaining ‘a meaning’. Human beings, therefore, possess an implicit ‘understanding’ that there is more to life than merely satisfying one’s own material needs. This ‘understanding’ results from the metaphysical desire that leads to the recognition of a

for is absurd (or a ‘useless passion’, as Sartre put it). See, Joseph McBride, *Albert Camus: Philosopher and Litterateur* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1992), p. 7. Levinas seems to be countering this atheistic-existentialist position by affirming the natural desire for the other, in the first instance, as the very cause of the striving for meaning. Without the actual existence of the other, then, there would be no striving for the meaning that is characteristic of human life, which both Camus and Sartre presuppose as central to the human condition, that is, of concrete individual human existence.

⁶⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 117/121.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34/22. This metaphorical language comes from the Old Testament in relation to the ‘exiled’ human being in its own land here on Earth and the longing for a return to ‘the Kingdom of God’. Augustine uses such images to argue that, *contra* Aristotle, who thinks that man by nature desires to know, man actually desires happiness. Furthermore, this happiness can only be achieved when man comes to understand and be reconciled with God. Making this point whilst talking to God, Augustine writes: ‘For thou hast created us for thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in thee’. Augustine, *Confessions*, Vol. 1, trans. by William Watts (London: William Heinemann, 1912), p. 3. In contrast, Levinas uses such images to argue that the human being desires the other, as evident through the necessary recognition of the face of the Other in concrete life, and that the human being can achieve peace through the free acknowledgement of the face of the Other in thought. Levinas thus finds the meaning of such metaphorical language through post-Kantian phenomenological descriptions as opposed to pre-Kantian theological concepts. See, for more on the relationship between Levinas and Augustine, Thomas J. J. Altizer, ‘Ethics and Predestination in Augustine and Levinas’, in *Levinas and the Ancients*, ed. by Brian Schroeder & Silvia Benso (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 230-242. See also, 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 & Marty Fairbarn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. 24-34.

‘dimension of height’ beyond the simple perseverance of one’s own existence. According to Levinas, this ‘height’ should ‘no longer’ be regarded in line with ‘the heavens’ of traditional theological speculations; rather, it corresponds to the ‘nobility’ of the ‘invisible’ as it is concretely encountered in the face of the Other.⁶²

§4.2.2 *The Other as the Invisible*

By identifying the invisible in line with the absolutely other, which metaphysical desire aims toward and which retains a meaning of its own, Levinas once again demonstrates the difference between his own phenomenological approach to that of Husserl. For Husserl, an object must appear to intentional consciousness in order to have any meaning whatsoever. In this respect, as Levinas stresses, ‘vision is an adequation of the idea with the thing’ or ‘a comprehension that encompasses’.⁶³ Under these circumstances, a thing is only known when it finds its evidence in that which has already appeared as an object to intentional consciousness. According to Levinas, however, ‘non-adequation does not denote a simple negation or an obscurity of the idea’; on the contrary, it demonstrates ‘the inordinateness of [metaphysical] Desire’.⁶⁴ There is an order of meaning beyond mere appearances and ‘the knowledge measuring beings’, as far as Levinas is concerned.⁶⁵ It is thanks to the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research that Levinas discovers this kind of meaning outside of the domain of what can or cannot be brought to perceptual givenness (in its narrow sense of what is or can be visibly seen as well as the broader sense of a self-evident knowable

⁶² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 35/23.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 34/22-23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34/23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

truth of reason) precisely because it rests upon a latent and implicit meaning requiring articulation that has been previously understood or sensed through affectivity.⁶⁶

Heidegger utilises affectivity to highlight the fundamental ‘openness’ of *Dasein* to the whole of the meaning of Being prior to that which appears as disclosed through the expression of the understanding of Being. At no stage in Heidegger’s formulation of this position does he resort to the order of the merely or purely seen. In fact, Heidegger explicitly associates ‘seeing’ with a constitution of being as ‘curiosity’ belonging to ‘everydayness’, ‘idle chatter’, and thus an inauthentic understanding of the meaning of Being.⁶⁷ In this respect, it is impossible to understand the meaning of Being, as it has been deposited and expressed in *Dasein*, from the viewpoint of that which is seen. Whilst agreeing with Heidegger’s assessment that there is meaning beyond what is seen, Levinas nevertheless disagrees that such meaning always rests on the understanding of Being in *Dasein*. The lived body, for Levinas, as retrieved in the instant of sensation prior to ecstatic temporality, constitutes a concrete position ‘underneath’ *Dasein*. From this position, the existent is exposed to the exterior as evident through the experience of need. It is laid bare or, to use Levinas’s terminology, ‘indigent’ and ‘naked’. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas develops this position to show that the exposure of the lived body is also evident in metaphysical desire through its essential receptivity to the unseen, which retains a meaning all of its own. In this experience, ‘invisibility’, then, ‘does not denote an absence of relation’, as Levinas comments; rather, ‘it implies relations with what is not given’ to sight and ‘of which there is no idea’ in thought.⁶⁸ There are more intentional relations in concrete life than those simply pertaining to sight and thought.

⁶⁶ See also, *supra*, n. 28.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §36, ‘Curiosity’, p. 214-217/170-173.

⁶⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 34/22.

To be in a relation with the absolutely other, that is to say, the invisible, which is not given to perceptual experience and of which there is no corresponding idea, means to be in a relation with the Other concretely through the necessary recognition of their face as it occurs prior to thought from the exposed position of the lived body. In this respect, as Levinas clarifies, ‘the absolutely other is the Other’.⁶⁹ Furthermore, by conceiving of the Other in this way, Levinas suggests that only a very specific experience relates to the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. The reason for this specificity originates from the fact that other people are naturally seen as objects of experience and understood through a common conceptual framework. For instance, on the level of thought, I *see* another person as an object given to intentional consciousness through their body and I *grasp* them under particular categories such as gender, race, nationality, sexuality, etc. According to Levinas, to consider another person in this way means placing them within a horizon of knowledge and thus forget that the Other exists independently from my understanding of Being as ‘absolutely other’. As such, Levinas maintains that only an encounter with the Stranger (*l’Etranger*) can resemble the experience corresponding to the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. Expanding on this point, Levinas writes,

Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger, the Stranger who disturbs my being at home with oneself. But Stranger also means the free one. Over him I have no power. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal. He is not wholly in my site.⁷⁰

The Stranger is the Other of whom I cannot make sense of through my understanding of Being. They are not reducible to the unity of class membership or to the unity of intended objects of perception or to the nominal unity of a heap of stones or the natural unity of a herd. The Stranger, rather, ‘disturbs’ my being at home with myself and

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 39/28: ‘L’absolument Autre, c’est Autrui’.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

brings something ‘other’ to my experience. Moreover, I have no power over the Stranger due to the fact that I cannot simply dismiss this disturbance. Even if I freely choose *not* to acknowledge them and commit an act of murder, after necessarily recognising their face, the sense (*le sens*) of alterity that they have already brought to my experience remains. In this regard, the Stranger enters into my experience, whilst, simultaneously, always remaining beyond that experience.

Prior to encountering the Stranger, my experience of ‘otherness’ corresponds to an elemental reality ‘other’ than me — the *il y a*. Nevertheless, this reality ‘other’ than me is a ‘faceless’ otherness of which I can conquer through hypostasis, that is to say, I can master the anonymity of ‘Being in general’ and take up my own position in existence.⁷¹ Once achieved, this position in existence must be sustained. The lived body does so by responding to the elemental demands constitutive of its own materiality thus transforming its specific position into a ‘home’. On this particular subject, Levinas writes,

It [the lived body] finds in the world a site and a home. Dwelling is the very mode of *maintaining oneself* [*se tenir*], not as the famous serpent grasping itself by biting onto its tail, but as the body that, on the earth exterior to it, holds *itself* up [*se tient*] and *can*. The ‘at home’ [*le ‘chez-soi’*] is not a container but a site where I *can*, where, dependent on a reality that is other, I am despite this dependence or thanks to it, free [...]. The site, a medium, affords means. Everything is here, everything belonging to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is com-prehended (*com-pris*).⁷²

From this passage, it is clear that Levinas means for this ‘site’ to be understood on the level of sensation by referring to it as ‘the body’ since, for him, the body is not merely something that I *have*; it is rather something that I *am*.⁷³ The body is my point of departure, that is to say, a base from which I can sustain myself having successfully taken up my own position in existence. In this respect, Levinas is describing life *prior*

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 190/207-208.

⁷² Ibid., p. 37-38/26-27.

⁷³ See, §2.1.3.

to the concrete encounter with the face of the Other and thus *prior* to thought. The comprehension that Levinas alludes to at the end of the passage is ‘primordial’. In other words, it is a comprehension of which I am not aware. I do not choose to comprehend everything that I encounter from this position. On this purely sensible level of existence, the body impulsively transforms the world around it into a home.⁷⁴ Everything is at my disposal from this position and can be used as a means to sustain my existence. Here, all is taken together (*com-pris*). The reality ‘other’ than me, then, from which I sustain my position in existence, is not really ‘foreign’ or ‘hostile’.⁷⁵ On the contrary, ‘the way of the I against the “other” of the world consists in sojourning’, as Levinas puts it, that is to say, ‘in identifying oneself by existing here *at home with oneself [chez soi]*’.⁷⁶

The home of the lived body is called into question through the encounter with the Stranger. In the moment of the face-to-face relation, the lived body recognises, necessarily, a sense of otherness that resists possession and whose alterity cannot be suspended. ‘The other with which the metaphysician is in relationship and *which he recognises as other* is not simply another locality’, to quote Levinas.⁷⁷ In this respect, the Stranger is not encountered as merely belonging to another site, an empirical other of perception; rather, the Stranger expresses their presence in my site, that is to say, in my home. Nevertheless, they always remain exterior to my home in the process of becoming present considering that, at no stage, can the self possess or suspend their alterity. Whilst being in my site, as Levinas notes, ‘[the Stranger] is not wholly in my

⁷⁴ This impulsivity of the body Levinas relates to the *conatus essendi*, that is, the basic elemental effort to exist. See, Ch. 3, n. 60. Levinas often refers to the Russian writer Vasily Grossman to illustrate this point who uses the example of a forest, where one tree will overgrow another in order to gain sunlight, as a way to describe the basic perseverance in existence. See, Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans. by Robert Chandler (New York: Random House, 2011), p. 391.

⁷⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 37/26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39/27-28, my emphasis.

site'.⁷⁸ They emerge from 'no place' and, ultimately, resist my place. As a result of the necessary recognition of the face of the Other, then, a fundamental 'separation' between the lived body and the Stranger is established. The relation to the Stranger, in other words, is a unity of inter-dependence that calls my 'place in the sun'⁷⁹ into question within this equation.⁸⁰

§4.2.3 *The Separation of the Same and the Other*

The fundamental separation between the lived body and the Other is produced through the face-to-face relation since it demonstrates the impossibility of reducing the Stranger to my site. Out of this concrete encounter the lived body and the Other establish themselves as two separate terms: the same and the other. Prior to this separation, the lived body exists in a state of solitude. This solitude is a different type of existence than that of separation in the mind of Levinas. It corresponds to the concrete fact that the lived body has arisen as a distinct existent in existence. Owing to the event of hypostasis, the lived body becomes a point of departure as its own position in existence. From this site, the lived body can commence with its commerce of existing. It does so by responding to the material needs to which it is exposed. Confirming this point, Levinas notes, 'to be cold, hungry, thirsty, naked, to seek shelter — all these dependencies with regard to the world, having become needs, save the instinctive being from anonymous menaces and constitute a being independent of the world, a variable

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 39/28.

⁷⁹ Levinas often uses this phrase, borrowed from Pascal, to refer to a distinct existents position in existence which is called into question by the face of the Other. '[...] "that is my place in the sun". Here is how the usurpation of the whole world began'. See, the second unnumbered untitled page of, Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*.

⁸⁰ This position is a stark contrast to Camus's view of the Stranger that cannot call my place in the sun into question in his philosophical novel *L'Étranger* (1947). Whilst failing to mention Camus explicitly in any of his works, Levinas would have, undoubtedly, been aware of Camus from the French intellectual scene at the time. Cohen also finds evidence of Levinas engaging with Camus on the topic of suicide, as stated in a footnote to his English translation of *Time and the Other*. See, Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 50, n. 24. See also, for more on Levinas's relation to Camus, Tal Sessler, *Levinas and Camus: Humanism for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Continuum, 2008).

subject capable of ensuring the satisfaction of its needs, which are recognised as material, that is, as admitting satisfaction'.⁸¹ Once the lived body adequately responds to these needs, it becomes satisfied and affirms its place in existence. It feels at home. Nevertheless, since these needs are material, they require continuous satisfaction. This is why the lived body must work to sustain its position in existence.

Whilst the lived body is independent, it is also *in*-dependence, or, perhaps, better stated, inter-dependent, since it ultimately exists *in a state of dependence*. Although it may have the freedom to satisfy its own needs, the lived body will never be free from these needs. In this respect, the 'freedom' of the lived body is based upon need. Furthermore, since 'need indicates void and lack in the needy one', that is to say, a 'dependence on the exterior', as Levinas notes, the lived body 'does not entirely possess its being and consequently is not strictly speaking separate'.⁸² Accordingly, only a being that has *control* over its own existence is truly free and, more to the point, to have control over one's own existence means to be separate. For this reason, unlike Sartre's view, 'existence is not in reality condemned to freedom', as Levinas puts it, 'but is invested as freedom'.⁸³ Such an investment only arises through the encounter with the face of the Other since it is this concrete event that bestows the self with language and reason thus establishing it as an ego with the ability to gain control over its body. The 'freedom' of the lived body, then, is arbitrary. It relates to a 'freedom' that the body did

⁸¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 116/120.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 102/105.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 84/83. In his well-known essay 'Existentialism is a Humanism', Sartre says that 'man is condemned to be free'. Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. by Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 29. By highlighting the notion that freedom is initially invested by the Other, Levinas seems to be directly challenging Sartre's position, of which he would have been well aware. On this topic, Kleinberg comments that, whereas Levinas sees the limitations of freedom as pointing to a more meaningful condition which calls into question the arbitrariness and violence of freedom, 'Sartre mistakes the uncovering of the arbitrary and violent nature of personal freedom for its limitations'. Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 275. It is because the Other resists my freedom that Sartre famously proclaims that 'Hell is other people'. Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit & Three Other Plays*, trans. by S. Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 45. In contrast, the Other's resistance to my freedom is precisely what constitutes their 'height' and 'goodness' in the mind of Levinas.

not or could not choose; yet, it is still a 'freedom' that constitutes the lived body. Furthermore, since this 'freedom' corresponds to the level of sensibility, the self is not even aware of the fact that it is leading an arbitrary existence. Under these circumstances, the existence that the lived body withstands as a solitary existent, prior to the encounter with the face of the Other, does not designate a proper identity. On the contrary, it merely describes the perseverance of a distinct existent caught up in the 'drama of existence', that is, elemental reality.⁸⁴ A proper identity means to be an 'I' since, as Levinas observes, 'to be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content'.⁸⁵ Only a self-aware being can have identity as one's own content. Such an awareness of one's self, as far as Levinas is concerned, results from the concrete encounter with the face of the Other.

Owing to the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, 'we are the same and the other', to use Levinas's phrase, with the conjunction 'and' here designating 'neither addition nor power of one term over the other'.⁸⁶ We are truly separate and free in the face-to-face relation. In this respect, no sooner than the lived body encounters the face of the Other in concrete life, thus establishing the relation between the same and the other, has it immediately absolves itself from that relation. In its newly found separation, the lived body becomes a subject. It achieves a sense of 'interiority'. Developing this point, Levinas remarks that,

The separation of the Same is produced in the form of an inner life, a psychism. The psychism constitutes an event in being; it concretises a conjuncture of terms which were not first defined as psychism and whose abstract formulation harbours a paradox. The original role of the psychism does not, in fact, consist in only reflecting being; it is already a way of being, resistance to the totality. Thought or the psychism opens the new dimension this way requires. The dimension of the

⁸⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 58/89.

⁸⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 36/25.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39/28.

psychism opens under the force of the resistance a being opposes to its totalisation; it is the feat of radical separation.⁸⁷

As a result of the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, an ego arises that can resist becoming integrated into the totality. ‘The I that thinks’, as Levinas notes, ‘harkens to itself thinking or takes fright before its depths and is to itself an other’.⁸⁸ Simply by thinking, then, the ego distinguishes itself from the lived body which endures purely on the level of sensibility.⁸⁹ In this respect, the ego opens up a new way of being for the existent through language and reason and allows it to know itself as a self. Nevertheless, ‘the difference [between the ego and the self] is not a difference’ since, to quote Levinas, ‘the I, as other, is not an ‘other’.⁹⁰ On the contrary, the ego is that which *knows* the self. Even if it chooses to oppose itself, the ego still thinks in relation to a self. Accordingly, ‘the I that repels the self, lived as repugnance’ and ‘the I riveted to itself, lived as ennui’ are both ‘modes of self-consciousness and rest on the unrendable identity of the I and the self’.⁹¹ The inability to differentiate the ego from the self, therefore, establishes their identity as the same.

§4.2.4 *Metaphysics Precedes Ontology*

Since the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, which initially produces the ‘psychism’ of interiority, occurs prior to self-thinking thought it becomes immediately ‘forgotten’ by the ego. A separated being that has forgotten the source of its own separation Levinas refers to as ‘atheist’. An atheist being is the ego who ‘posits itself as

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 54/46.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 36/25.

⁸⁹ In this regard, although the ego is distinct from the lived body, for Levinas, it is never *disembodied*. Indeed, the self transcends its bodily immanence through thought but it always remains chained to that body, even if at a distance. This is an important difference with respect to Levinas and Husserl’s thinking on the ego. See, §2.1.3, esp., n. 42.

⁹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 37/26: ‘La différence n’est pas un différence, le je, comme autre, n’est pas un « Autre »’.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the same and as I', whilst, simultaneously, 'maintaining itself in existence all by itself'.⁹² Under these circumstances, the same persists without acknowledging its relation to the other. 'The forgetting of transcendence', therefore, 'is not produced as an accident in a separated being', to quote Levinas, rather, 'the possibility of this forgetting is necessary for separation'.⁹³ By forgetting the other, a primacy of the same is established within thought. This primacy initiates 'a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle or neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being'.⁹⁴ Levinas calls this attitude 'ontology'.

Whilst the history of Western philosophy has most often been an ontology, as far as Levinas is concerned, it is with the arrival of the phenomenological movement that 'ontological imperialism' becomes 'more visible'.⁹⁵ Developing this point, Levinas writes,

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. But what commands the non-coinciding of thought with the existent — the Being of the existent, which guarantees the independence and the extraneity of the existent — is a phosphorescence, a luminosity, a generous effulgence. The existing of an existent is converted into intelligibility; its independence is surrendered in radiation. To broach an existent from Being is simultaneously to let it be and to comprehend it. Reason seizes upon an existent through the void and nothingness of existing — wholly light and phosphorescence. Approached from Being, the luminous horizon where it is has silhouette, but has lost its face, an existent is the very appeal that is addressed to comprehension.⁹⁶

Central to Husserl's version of phenomenology is the notion of a 'horizon' which establishes a 'space' from where things can appear to intentional consciousness through perceptual experience. Outside of this, there is only 'non-sense', as Husserl says. The 'space' from where things can appear, then, manifests as light, 'phosphorescence', or 'luminosity'. Under these circumstances, one does not see the light as an object of

⁹² Ibid., p. 58/52.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 181/197.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 43/33-34.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 44/35.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 44-45/35-36.

knowledge, rather, one sees the thing that *appears* in the light. Nevertheless, this light comes from intentional consciousness as a horizon. It belongs, therefore, to the personal experience of the ego. As such, anything that appears to intentional consciousness, including that of the Other, is ‘converted into intelligibility’ and thus comprehended *in some way*. This is why Husserl’s version of phenomenology cannot acknowledge the independent existence of the Other. Whilst Heidegger’s version of phenomenology shows no interest toward that which appears in the light of perceptual experience, it nevertheless follows a similar ontological approach to that of Husserl.

Elaborating on this detail, Levinas continues,

Being and Time has argued perhaps but one sole thesis: Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being (which unfolds as time); Being is already an appeal to subjectivity. The primacy of ontology for Heidegger does not rest on the truism: ‘to know an existent it is necessary to have comprehended the Being of existents’. To affirm the priority of Being over existents is already to decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation to someone, who is an 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. If freedom denotes the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other, knowledge, where the existent is given by interposition of impersonal Being, contains the ultimate sense of freedom. It would be to oppose justice, which involves obligations with regard to an existent that refuses to give itself, the Other, who in this sense would be an existent *par excellence*. In subordinating every relation with existents to the relation with Being the Heideggerian ontology affirms the primary of freedom over ethics.⁹⁷

For Heidegger, the meaning of Being (*der Sinn von Sein*) is inseparable from the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) as it is given in *Dasein*. In this regard, all beings, including that of the Other, must be disclosed with reference to the ‘existence’, as Heidegger understands that term, of *Dasein*. The understanding of Being, therefore, operates as a ‘horizon’ within Heidegger’s version of phenomenology since it ultimately allows for the comprehension of beings as such. This attitude also fails to acknowledge the independent existence of the Other. As a result, it prioritises the freedom of knowledge over and against justice for the Stranger who initially bestows the self with

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 45/36.

its very ability to know and comprehend through the face-to-face relation, only to be forgotten by an atheist being.

The freedom to know and comprehend defines the exercise of ontology, as far as Levinas is concerned. It consists in ‘neutralising the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it’.⁹⁸ In doing so, ontology maintains its-*self* against the Other, thus denying its fundamental relation to the other. ‘Such is the definition of freedom’, to quote Levinas.⁹⁹ This possibility, however, presupposes the original investment of freedom as donated in the face-to-face relation. Prior to the ability to know occurs the necessary recognition of the face of the Other in concrete life. In this respect, the necessary recognition of the face of the Other, which both occurs prior to thought and bestows the self with its freedom to think, calls into question the exercise of ontology. Formalising this position, Levinas remarks,

A calling into question of the same — which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same — is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge. As critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology.¹⁰⁰

Prior to post-Kantian phenomenological ontology, as the freedom to know and comprehend, there is ‘metaphysics’ as the movement of transcendence toward the other. This movement transpires concretely through the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. Levinas now refers to this fundamental relation to the Other as ‘ethics’ or ‘metaphysics’ and, subsequently, later upholds it as ‘first philosophy’.¹⁰¹ It is on this

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 45-46/36-37.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 46/37.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 43/33.

¹⁰¹ See, Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Ethics as First Philosophy’, trans. by S. Hand and M. Temple, in *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 75-87.

basis that Levinas can write that ‘metaphysics’ or ‘ethics’ precedes ontology, understood as the Kantian critique of dogmatism.¹⁰²

§4.2.5 *An Empirical or Transcendental Reading?*

At this stage, it is obligatory to address the different readings of *Totality and Infinity* that have been forwarded within popular scholarship. Following the lead of Bernasconi, these readings, broadly speaking, can be placed into two distinct categories. The first supports, what Bernasconi calls, the ‘transcendental reading’ of Levinas’s position in *Totality and Infinity*; the second refers to an ‘empirical reading’ of that same position.

Outlining this issue in more detail, Bernasconi comments,

The question is: what status is to be accorded the face-to-face relation? Here interpretations diverge. Some interpreters understand it as a concrete experience that we recognise in our lives. Other commentators have understood the face-to-face relation to be the condition for the possibility of ethics and indeed of all economic existence and knowledge. If the first interpretation arises from what might be called an empirical reading, the second might be referred to as a transcendental reading. The puzzle is that Levinas himself seems unable to decide between these two rival interpretations. Although in response to critics who have found his thought utopian he has insisted that the face-to-face relation can be experienced, he has also authorised the transcendental reading, as, for example, when in answer to a question put to him by the Dutch philosopher Theodore de Boer, he agreed that his thought was ‘a transcendentalism which starts with ethics’.¹⁰³

With this passage in mind, it may be asked to which reading does this study adhere?

Certainly, up until this point, this study has defended the notion that the face-to-face relation transpires as an encounter within concrete life. It would be impossible, for Levinas, to remain committed to phenomenology if he did or said otherwise. To be sure, in an interview with Kearney, Levinas reinforces this point by saying that ‘this

¹⁰² There are some commentators who claim that Levinas’s version of phenomenology simply creates ‘a new dogmatism’ in philosophy centred ‘around the Other rather than the self or ego’. See, Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 351. Such objections, however, truly fail to take into account the fact that Levinas does not begin his phenomenological descriptions by simply accepting the presence of the Other in existence. On the contrary, Levinas rather locates the encounter with the face of the Other in concrete life as the ontological event justifying the act of human transcendence.

¹⁰³ Robert Bernasconi, ‘Rereading Totality and Infinity’, in *Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers: Levinas, Vol. I, Phenomenology and His Critics*, pp. 32-44 (p. 32).

concern for the other remains utopian in the sense that it always remain “out of place” (*u-topos*) in this world, always other than the “ways of the world”, but there are many examples of it *in* the world’.¹⁰⁴ That there are many examples *in* the world would point to an ‘empirical’ reading of Levinas’s ‘face-to-face encounter’. Nevertheless, this study has also shown that the face-to-face relation operates as the transcendental condition for knowledge and the ego since, in Levinas own terms, it is ‘metaphysics’, which is to say, ‘ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge’. In this respect, the study at hand seeks to offer an argument where both the ‘empirical’ and ‘transcendental’ readings of *Totality and Infinity* have their place within Levinas’s philosophical project. Some caveats are required, however, in order to clarify this position.

Firstly, the term ‘empirical’ is misleading when it comes to describing the face-to-face relation. Empirical reality implies that there is already an established subject distinct from the objects of experience. Phenomenology seeks to overcome this erroneous account of experience by apprehending the original correlation between subject and object as the foundation for all that is given in experience. This method surmounts the abstract positing of subject and object in order to introduce a sense of the concrete into philosophy. Nevertheless, as previously noted, Levinas disagrees with the respective accounts of the concrete found in the works of Husserl and Heidegger. This is because Levinas discovers certain ordeals in the instant of sensation, as lived concretely through the body, that fail to appear to intentional consciousness through perceptual experience, *contra* Husserl, whilst, similarly, resisting the reduction of the meaning of Being to the understanding the Being in *Dasein*, *contra* Heidegger. The term ‘empirical’, then, if it is to be applied at all, cannot refer to its traditional usage or to the ontological reality that has been conceived thus far within phenomenology.

¹⁰⁴ Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 83, my emphasis.

Hitherto, phenomenological ontology has always been an ontology of light and intelligibility. It focuses on that which appears to intentional consciousness as well as that which is disclosed to *Dasein* in concrete life. Throughout his early work, however, Levinas develops an alternative version of ontology, namely, an ontology of darkness and indeterminacy. Following Moati, one may call this ‘the night of being’ as opposed to ‘the light of being’. Elaborating on this phrase, Moati remarks,

There is a series of events of being — properly *nocturnal events* — that ontological comprehension is, structurally, in no position to take up. These nocturnal events occur within a horizon beyond and other than those of comprehension and ontological unveiling. Thus Levinas does not claim in *Totality and Infinity* that we must pass from the register of being into that of ethics, but rather that fundamental ontology prevents the exhaustive elucidation of being from coming to full fruition. The latter requires that we take into consideration the revelation of the face as the ultimate event of being.¹⁰⁵

Within the darkness and indeterminacy of being, there are certain events that, whilst not appearing to intentional consciousness or disclosing themselves to *Dasein*, nevertheless transpire. These ‘nocturnal events’, such as the event of hypostasis and the encounter with the face of the Other, only become evident after they have already occurred within concrete life, that is, when thought seeks its foundation and when a justification for freedom is sought. Since they occur prior to thought, however, they can always be doubted, forgotten, and rejected by thought. Levinas says as much himself in the ‘Preface’ of *Totality and Infinity*, when he writes,

Consciousness then does not consist in equalling being with representation, in tending to the full light in which this adequation is to be sought, but rather *in overflowing this play of lights* — this phenomenology — and in *accomplishing events* whose ultimate signification (contrary to the Heideggerian concept) does not lie in disclosing. Philosophy does indeed dis-cover the signification of these events, but they are produced without discovery (or truth) being their destiny. No prior disclosure illuminates the production of these *essentially nocturnal events*. The welcoming of the face and the work of justice — which condition the birth of truth itself — are not interpretable in terms of disclosure.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, p. 13, my emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 27-28/13.

From this passage, it becomes clear as to why Levinas claims that the ‘real import’ of messianic eschatology, which philosophers tend to ‘distrust’ and, ultimately, relegate to the domain of ‘opinion’, due to its lack of ‘evidence’ in perceptual experience or the understanding of Being, ‘lies elsewhere’.¹⁰⁷ This ‘elsewhere’ refers to ‘the night of being’ and it is within this darkness and indeterminacy that the concrete encounter with the Other transpires through the expression of their face. As a result of this encounter, an ontology of light and intelligibility is provided to a newly separated ego that has been, seemingly, created out of nothing.¹⁰⁸ Least John’s gospel remind us that,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. *He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.*¹⁰⁹

In this sense, the expression of the face of the Other as it occurs in the night of being functions as the transcendental condition for light *qua* thought and freedom, whilst, simultaneously, always remaining beyond thought and freedom and hence constituting the ‘absolutely other’. The term ‘transcendental’, then, also has a very specific meaning in relation to Levinas’s argument in *Totality and Infinity*. Whilst operating as the very

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 22/7.

¹⁰⁸ The Judeo-Christian idea of creation *ex nihilo* holds particular significance, for Levinas, in this regard. Not as an explanation for the existence of the universe which, as a Post-Kantian thinker, holds no interest for him. But as an idea expressing a ‘multiplicity not united in a totality’ where ‘the creature is an existence which indeed does depend on another, but not as a part that is separated from it’. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 104/109. On the contrary, this creature is ‘a being outside of every system’. Ibid. It is only from this separated existence, this ego, where ‘freedom is possible’, as far as Levinas is concerned. Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ John 1:1-8, NRSV. To translate these pre-Kantian theological concepts into post-Kantian phenomenological descriptions, the messianic expression of the face of the Other comes before any free expression of the subject from which all things appear and acquire their meaning. The expression of the face of the Other arises in the night of being and is heard by that being which is receptive to it, namely, the human being. The name John, or *Yochanan* in Hebrew, is specifically relevant here considering that it derives from the roots *yo*, referring to God, and *chanan*, meaning ‘to be gracious’. In this sense, then, the name in question alludes to the being that recognises, necessarily, the other thus transcending the darkness of being. Consequently, the name John represents the human being as it is receptivity to the other as the Stranger. To necessarily recognise the alterity of the Other, for Levinas, is what it means ‘to be gracious’.

condition that underlies the exercise of thought and freedom, this condition nevertheless arises from an encounter with the face of the Other in concrete life. It is for this reason that, as Bernasconi duly observes, Levinas says that his approach only ‘resembles’ the transcendental method.¹¹⁰ In this respect, Levinas remains fully committed to the phenomenological method over the course of his various descriptions in *Totality and Infinity*. These descriptions aim to describe both the darkness and the light of being in conjunction.

§4.3 ‘INTERIORITY AND ECONOMY’

In the first part of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas addresses the issue of need specifically in relation to desire. Unlike desire, which can never be satisfied as it aims toward the absolutely other, need can achieve satisfaction through the consumption and assimilation of the other to the same. The second part of *Totality and Infinity* builds upon this account of need in order to describe life as it transpires in solitude and separation. It thus pertains to what happens *on this side* of the face-to-face-relation.¹¹¹ This section examines that which is called into question by the face of the Other.

§4.3.1 *The Enjoyment of Need*

By adequately responding to its needs, the lived body accomplishes a position in existence. This accomplishment corresponds to the event of hypostasis in which a distinct existent arises out of anonymous existence. The emergence of a distinct existent creates an ‘interval’ within existence which, subsequently, postpones the

¹¹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 25/10.

¹¹¹ Bernasconi correctly notes that many commenters seeking to defend Levinas’s position as an exclusively transcendental one tend to ignore the second part of *Totality and Infinity*. This is because it shows that there is indeed something to call into question by the face of the Other. If there were not, the rationality of the face-to-face relation would never get off the ground. See, Bernasconi, ‘Rereading Totality and Infinity’, p. 36.

immediate demands of existence, as felt through need, and allows for the lived body to feel at home in a world full of nourishments. From this solitary position, the lived body becomes a source of enjoyment. Whilst the satisfaction of needs may be essential for sustaining life, according to Levinas, ‘they are not lived as such’.¹¹² On the contrary, as nourishment, need becomes the ground from which the body ‘lives’. Elaborating on this point, Levinas argues that,

Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognised as other, recognised, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me. All enjoyment is in this sense alimentation. Hunger is need, is privation in the primal sense of the word, and thus precisely *living from...* is not a simple becoming conscious of what fills life. These contents are lived: they feed life.¹¹³

Since this description concerns the lived body, the ‘recognition’ that Levinas speaks of here is not deliberate. It stems rather from the material responsibility of the lived body which endeavours to satisfy its needs in order to sustain a place in existence. Furthermore, the ‘energy’ of the other, which it possesses as a distinct existent in its own right, becomes the self’s own ‘energy’ in the act of consumption. As a result, ‘living from’ refers to the material that feeds life. These materials, as needs, become the first contents of life, not in the sense that one becomes ‘aware’ of them as such, but in the manner that they are ‘lived’ as such.¹¹⁴ This is why Levinas maintains that, *contra* Heidegger’s conception of *Dasein*, ‘the bare fact of [human] existence’ is never bare at all.¹¹⁵

According to Levinas, the description of enjoyment uncovers an aspect of life more concrete than that which appears as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional

¹¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 111/113.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ In *Time and the Other*, Levinas notes that material responsibility is the ‘first morality’ that one must necessarily pass through. It is not the last morality which, for Levinas, refers to responsibility for the Other, but, certainly, it is the first. See, §2.2.3.

¹¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 111/114. For Heidegger, ‘the bare [fact] “that-it-is” in the “nothing” of the world’ is revealed to *Dasein* in the affective disposition of anxiety. Cf., Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 321/276-277. For Levinas, the structure of need reveals that the world is never ‘nothing’.

consciousness as well as that which is disclosed to *Dasein* in that being's understanding of Being. The reason for this stems from the fact that nourishments, from which the body lives, do not correspond to intentionality or handlability (*Zuhandenheit*). They are not 'objects of representation', *contra* Husserl, nor are they 'tools' that can be used in a specific way, *contra* Heidegger, as Levinas notes.¹¹⁶ Certainly, one could *see* food as a mere object of perception or *use* it in a particular manner. Nevertheless, these practices already presuppose a relation with food as nourishment. To use the words of Levinas,

One does not only exist one's pain and one's joy; one exists from pains and joys. Enjoyment is precisely this way the act nourishes its self with its own activity. To live from bread is therefore neither to represent bread to oneself nor to act on it nor to act by means of it. To be sure, it is necessary to earn one's bread, and it is necessary to nourish oneself in order to earn one's bread; thus the bread I eat is also that with which I earn my bread and my life. But if I eat my bread in order to labour and live, I live *from* my labour and *from* my bread.¹¹⁷

The lived body, for Levinas, constitutes the most concrete position since it is here where life is *lived from*. In this respect, enjoyment functions as the 'condition for activity' seeing that it underlies both the temporal duration and ecstatic temporality of the transcendental ego and *Dasein*.¹¹⁸ Levinas's description of need, therefore, offers a vastly different picture to the one commonly found within the philosophical tradition. In contrast to Plato, for instance, who views need as a lack thus pointing to dependence on the other, Levinas identifies need as a particular 'mastery' in which the 'dependency'

¹¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 110/112-113.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111/114.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113/117. According to Levinas, enjoyment and suffering go together as the condition for activity as such. On this point, Tanja Staehler notes that, '(F)or Levinas, it is not very helpful to ask about "enjoyment or suffering" as an alternative. Ontologically speaking, existence is both; it has both of these modes. The most important task is not to succumb to some kind of relativism where, depending on individual destiny, one person's life is enjoyment while another's is suffering. Levinas's ethics relies on the insight that life is enjoyment as well as suffering and that they can be distinguished but not separated'. Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-Side of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 56. As Levinas puts it later in his philosophical career, '(W)ithout egoism, complacent in itself, suffering would not have any sense'. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 73/93. Thus, Staehler concludes that '(S)uffering is based on the fundamental egoism of the enjoyment. Suffering and enjoyment belong together — even though in each individual moment, they seem to exclude each other'. Staehler, *Plato and Levinas*, p. 56.

of ‘living from’ turns into ‘sovereignty’.¹¹⁹ Need ‘is πενία [lack] as the source of πόρος [place]’, for Levinas.¹²⁰ This is why Levinas claims that ‘the independence of enjoyment’ is ‘the original pattern of all independence’.¹²¹

§4.3.2 *Need Presupposes Desire*

Whilst nourishment describes the enjoyment of responding to one’s material needs, it is important to remember that the body remains dependent on them despite its independence. For even when they have been duly satisfied and similarly enjoyed, the needs of the lived body will always return for further satisfaction. The body must work to sustain its place in existence. Levinas refers to need as a ‘happy dependence’ and equates its satisfaction with that of filling a ‘void’.¹²² Although it may be enjoyable to fill this void, the character of need nevertheless remains just that — a void. The work of existing, then, puts the lived body in touch with an infinite process. According to Levinas, this process ‘does not resemble the idea of infinite’ that is bestowed through the concrete encounter with the face of the Other.¹²³ On the contrary, it refers to a distinct existent that is ‘inscribed in the fathomless depth of the element’ and its work of existing as it is ‘losing itself in nothingness’.¹²⁴ This ‘nothingness’, Levinas remarks, constitutes ‘the bad infinite or the indefinite’, that is to say, ‘the apeiron’ or *il y a*.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the ‘materiality’ of this ‘elemental non-I’, to use Levinas’s terms, becomes evident through the material responsibility of the lived body, that is, its satisfaction of needs. Confirming this point, Levinas comments that ‘the way of access to the

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 114/117.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115/118.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110/113.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 115/118.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 159/171.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158/169-170.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158-159/170.

fathomless obscurity of matter is not the idea of infinity, but labour'.¹²⁶ It cannot be understood by 'thinking' or by the 'effect of a formula'.¹²⁷ This is the ontology of darkness and indeterminacy — the night of being.

The infinite process of responding to one's own materiality to which Levinas acknowledges runs the risk of reinforcing the Heideggerian care for one's own existence as the definitive meaning of Being itself. Levinas states this concern explicitly in the form of a rhetorical question: 'Will it be said that this accumulation [of one's place in existence] has as its condition the apperception of utility, reducible to the care of existence?'.¹²⁸ In response to this question, Levinas maintains that 'the care for nutriment is not bound to the care for existence'.¹²⁹ This is because, as enjoyment, need already goes beyond utility and teleology. The enjoyment of life constitutes a form of 'play' despite 'the finality and tension to live from something'.¹³⁰ Unlike the Heideggerian care, which completely negates the independent existence of the Other, life in the state of enjoyment is merely 'deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate — without ears, like a hungry stomach'.¹³¹ In the next section of this chapter, it will be shown how this situation changes when the lived body encounters the face of the Other and, subsequently, 'hears' its 'call'. Nevertheless, for now, it is enough to highlight the difference between the care for existence and the play of enjoyment. '*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry', to quote Levinas.¹³² A utilitarian

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 159/170.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 134/141.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 134/142.

¹³² Ibid. Indeed, for Levinas, it is precisely the lack of awareness in Heidegger's thinking to the sensibility of the lived body that contributes toward the neglect of the Other in fundamental ontology. On this point, Critchley observes: 'Ethics is not an obligation towards the Other mediated through the formal and procedural universalization of maxims or some appeal to good conscience; rather — and this is what is truly provocative about Levinas — ethics is lived as a corporeal obligation to the Other, an obligation whose form is sensibility. It is because the self is sensible — that is, vulnerable, passive, open to wounding, pain, and the movement of the erotic — that it is worthy of ethics. Ethics, for Levinas, is

view of nourishment, therefore, only applies to a self-sufficient philosophy that views the world as a source of exploitation for my understanding of Being.

Levinas goes even further in response to the question that he poses above by claiming that ‘human need already rests on [metaphysical] Desire’.¹³³ This is due to the fact that the body, which constitutes one’s place in existence, already directs itself toward the other through its work of existing. For a body that labours everything is not already accomplished, ‘already done’, as Levinas observes, ‘thus to be a body is to have time in the midst of facts, to be me through living in the other’.¹³⁴ The ‘time’ of the body here refers to the interval that is created as a result of the event of hypostasis.¹³⁵ It is not the time of temporal duration or ecstatic temporality which, for Levinas, presupposes an encounter with the face of the Other. It is metaphysical desire that grants the lived body this ‘time’ since the movement out of ‘pure nature by virtue of the human body raised upwards’ is already ‘committed in the direction of height’.¹³⁶ According to Levinas, the ‘I can’, which constitutes the achievement of the lived body and allows for its needs to be satisfied, ‘proceeds from this height’.¹³⁷ In other words, what motivates all bodily movement is desire for the other. Under these circumstances, the relation to the other, beginning with metaphysical desire and moving toward transcendence, is already ‘inscribed in the body’.¹³⁸ It is this ‘elevation’ that makes the

enacted at the level of skin’. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 180.

¹³³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 117/121.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ See, §2.2.3.

¹³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 117/121. It seems to me that one could reproach Levinas here for being unphenomenological since, instead of simply describing the life of our upright body, he is placing a certain interpretation on to the uprightness of that body. To be sure, Levinas even links this idea to ‘natural religion’, but only after quickly exclaiming that ‘there is no natural religion’. Ibid.

¹³⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 117/121.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

‘transformation’ of ‘enjoyment into consciousness’ possible, as far as Levinas is concerned.¹³⁹

§4.3.3 *The Enjoyment of Separation*

Even after the concrete encounter with the face of the Other transpires, which elevates the lived body to the spiritual order of language and reason, enjoyment still functions as the basis for life. It is, after all, such a version of enjoyment that leads to the forgetting of the concrete event responsible for the separation of the same and the other, namely, the face-to-face relation. Accordingly, Levinas makes a distinction between ‘terrestrial’ and ‘celestial’ nourishments.¹⁴⁰ Terrestrial nourishments correspond to those material needs that allow the body to consummate its own position in existence. In contrast, celestial nourishments relate to the various activities of the ego which, subsequently, transform the basic position of the lived body into a meaningful dwelling.¹⁴¹ This is the work of separation or the very egoism of the ego. As a result of celestial enjoyment, the life of the subject ‘continually and essentially becomes its own content’, as Levinas notes, despite the reality that ‘the life that I live [as an ego] and the fact of living it [from the body] nonetheless remain distinct’.¹⁴² With this point in mind, it is important to emphasise that terrestrial enjoyment does not cease after the necessary recognition of the face of the Other. On the contrary, it continues to endure as the foundation of the ego and grants a life that the ego makes into its own. This is the concrete meaning of the duality of the subject.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 114/118.

¹⁴¹ Irrespective of this difference, both terrestrial and celestial nourishments belong to the life of the same. Levinas encapsulates both under the phrases, ‘the economy of being’ and ‘the economy of the same’.

¹⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 122/127.

On a purely sensible level of existence, the body cannot make life its own content. This is because the lived body does not have control over itself. It is simply exposed. Elaborating on this point, Levinas comments,

Boutroux says somewhere that possession prolongs the body. But the body as naked body is not the first possession; it is still outside of having and not having. We dispose of our body inasmuch as we have already suspended the being of the element that bathes us, by inhabiting.¹⁴³

It is only with the advent of the ego that the lived body can gain control over itself and thus make life its own content. In doing so, the ego transforms anonymous existence into a personal understanding of Being, that is to say, it begins to shed *light* on the initial *darkness* of being. This transformation establishes a meaningful dwelling for the subject where, as Levinas highlights, ‘the uncertain future of the element is suspended’ considering that ‘the element is [now] fixed between the four walls of a home, [and] is claimed in possession’.¹⁴⁴ To have life as one’s own content means to ‘possess’ being in a certain way. Thus, to possess being denotes neutralising this being since ‘as property the thing is an existent that has lost its being’, to quote Levinas.¹⁴⁵ As a result, the forgetting of the thing itself, that is to say, the face of the Other, befalls precisely due to the work of separation or the egoism of the ego, which presupposes the face-to-face relation, since this activity corresponds to the possession of being or the reduction of the other to the same.

Levinas outlines two different forms of possession that relate to the work of separation. These forms are ‘representation’ and ‘recollection’, which, as Levinas comments, ‘are produced concretely as habitation in a dwelling’.¹⁴⁶ The term ‘representation’ corresponds to the activity of the ego as ascertained within Husserl’s version of phenomenology. Affirming this point, Levinas stresses,

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 162/174.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 158/169.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 158/169-170.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 150/161.

The Husserlian thesis of the primacy of the objectifying act — in which was seen Husserl's excessive attachment to theoretical consciousness, and which served as the pretext to accuse Husserl of intellectualism (as though that were an accusation!) — leads to transcendental philosophy, to the affirmation (so surprising after the realist themes the idea of intentionality *seemed to approach*) that the object of consciousness, while distinct from consciousness, is as it were a product of consciousness, being a 'meaning' endowed by consciousness, the result of *Sinngebung*.¹⁴⁷

For Husserl, the appearance of objects to consciousness always results from the objectifying acts of consciousness (hence so surprising to those, but not to Husserl, believing the intentionality of consciousness to be a realist position pointing to what is external to consciousness). Whilst the object of consciousness, then, remains distinct from the act of consciousness allowing for it to appear in the first place, this object nevertheless acquires its meaning only in relation to the sense-bestowing activity (*Sinngebung*) of consciousness. In this respect, the object of consciousness resides within the ego itself since, as Levinas puts it, 'despite its [the object's] independence it falls under the power of thought'.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, Levinas claims that the 'structure of representation' denotes 'a non-reciprocal determination of the other by the same' which, subsequently, allows 'the same to be present and for the other to be present to the same'.¹⁴⁹ In other words, through representation, the ego becomes present as the source of a meaningful world of objects that appear *to* it.

In a similar fashion, the term 'recollection', for Levinas, refers to the customs and practices of the subject from within its particular habitat. Such activities correspond to the notion of 'existence' as it is elaborated in Heidegger's version of phenomenology. Furthermore, this situation is presupposed by the theoretical approach of Husserl, which contemplates objects in a disinterested manner. To quote Levinas on this point,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 123/128, my emphasis.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 126/132.

Contemplation, with its pretension to constitute, after the event, the dwelling itself, assuredly evinces separation, or, better yet, is an indispensable moment of its production. But the dwelling cannot be forgotten among the conditions of representation, even if representation is a privileged condition, absorbing its condition. For it absorbs only after the event, *a posteriori*. Hence the subject contemplating the world presupposes the event of dwelling, the withdrawal from the elements (that is, from immediate enjoyment, already uneasy about the morrow), recollection in the intimacy of the home.¹⁵⁰

Underlying the life of the ego, which contemplates the world as it appears, resides ‘the dwelling itself’ that the ego ‘absorbs’ when objects start appearing to it as the source of experience. Despite this absorption, nevertheless, the intimacy of the dwelling endures through recollection as evident in the customs and practices of the subject. Heidegger elaborates on this point by analysing the engagement with tools in this dwelling and, likewise, Levinas uses this idea to make his point. Referring to the hand which ‘takes and comprehends’ tools in a particular way, Levinas writes,

The hand comprehends the thing not because it touches it on all sides at the same time (it does not touch it throughout), but because it is no longer a sense-organ, pure enjoyment, pure sensibility, but is a mastery, domination, disposition — which do not belong to the order of the sensible. An organ for taking, for acquisition, it gathers the fruit but holds it far from the lips, keeps it, puts it in reserve, possess it in a home.¹⁵¹

There are several points worth highlighting in this passage. Firstly, Levinas confirms that the comprehension of a tool is not the same as the representation of that tool. The former refers to the manner in which the subject uses the tool, whereas, the latter relates to the contemplation of that tool, which examines the object from all sides. When using a tool, despite possessing it, the subject never ‘touches’ the tool in itself since its meaning is merely an extension of the understanding of Being within a certain environment. The second point worth noting is that, whilst locating recollection prior to representation, Levinas maintains ‘pure sensibility’ as the foundation of all givenness. Before the home exists as a dwelling, therefore, it endures as the lived body. This body

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 153/163-164.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 161/173-174.

does not master, dominate, or possess anything since it does not have the power to do so. It merely persists in an exposed condition as a distinct existent in existence. This is why Levinas says that ‘to be a body is on the one hand to stand, to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the other, and thus to be encumbered by one’s body’.¹⁵²

§4.3.4 *The Lesson of the Face*

The enjoyment of one’s own dwelling mirrors the concern for one’s own being characteristic of *Dasein* in Heidegger’s version of phenomenology. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is a being (*ein Seiendes*) that is *distinguished from other beings* by the very fact that its Being (*Sein*) is defined through that being’s concern for *its own* Being (*in seinem Sein*).¹⁵³ This Being (*dieses Sein*), then, ‘is what is at stake for every such being’.¹⁵⁴ In this regard, ‘*Dasein* has in each case mineness’ (*Jemeinigkeit*), to use Heidegger’s term, which means that the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) in *Dasein* is always personal, or, more accurately stated, the personal possessive of me (*le moi*).¹⁵⁵ *Dasein* is only concerned, therefore, with its own understanding of Being and nothing else. Furthermore, it can own or dis-own that understanding of Being, which is to say, that *Dasein* can exist authentically or inauthentically — either way, however, mineness is the very condition for the possibility of both authenticity and inauthenticity. All of this occurs in the dwelling where *Dasein* ‘comports itself toward its Being as *its own most possibility*’.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 164/177.

¹⁵³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32/12: ‘Das Dasein ist ein Seiendes, das nicht nur unter anderem Seienden vorkommt. Es ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht.’

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 67/42, trans. mod: ‘Das Sein ist es, darum es diesem Seienden je selbst geht.’

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 68/42.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., my emphasis.

According to Levinas, this concern for one's own understanding of Being in *Dasein* merely functions as another version of the basic perseverance of a distinct existent in existence. During his later work, Levinas formalises this idea in line with the *conatus essendi* as made famous by Spinoza. 'In the *conatus essendi*, which is the effort to exist', as Levinas notes, 'existence is the supreme law'.¹⁵⁷ All of an existent's efforts must respond to the demands being placed upon it in order to preserve its place in existence. In this sense, the existent is indifferent (*in-différent*, non-different) to anything other than itself. This indifference persists in *Dasein*'s concern for its own understanding of Being. Levinas identifies a problem with Heidegger's thought on this issue since the very ability to cultivate an understanding of Being, and thus a dwelling of one's own, already presupposes the necessary recognition of the face of the Other in concrete life *outside of the mineness of one's own understanding of Being*. It is the necessary recognition of the face of the Other that calls the indifferent work of existing as commenced by the lived body into question and lifts the subject from a life of pure sensibility to the spiritual order of language, reason, and sociability. These latter aspects are what constitute human subjectivity. Thus, 'with the appearance of the face on the inter-personal level', as Levinas comments, 'the commandment "Thou shalt not Kill" emerges as the limitation of the *conatus essendi*'.¹⁵⁸

The work of separation or the egoism of the ego isolates the subject from the other thus forgetting the movement of transcendence that made such an activity possible. Levinas equates this activity with the figure of Gyges from Plato's Republic, who uses a magic ring to make himself invisible when it is in his own interest as well as to preserve his own being at all costs *and* not to be held accountable for his immoral actions against others. Elaborating on this comparison, Levinas remarks,

¹⁵⁷ Levinas, 'The Paradox of Morality', p. 175.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Gyges's ring symbolises separation. Gyges plays a double game, a presence to others and an absence, speaking to 'others' and evading speech; Gyges is the very condition of man, the possibility of radical injustice and egoism, the possibility of accepting the rules of the game, but cheating.¹⁵⁹

When he is invisible, others are *still* present to Gyges. Nevertheless, since he is invisible, Gyges does not speak with others. He does not acknowledge them in their own right, that is to say, as independent existents. Others are merely there for his benefit. This state of affairs also describes the life of separation through dwelling. In dwelling, others either belong to my world or I dismiss them from my world. Either way, they are not acknowledged as independent from me. Such a possibility is what Levinas refers to above as 'cheating' since the very ability to cultivate a dwelling or to dismiss something in thought presupposes the gift of language and reason endowed by the Other through the face-to-face relation. On this issue, Levinas explains,

Transcendence is not a vision of the Other, but a primordial donation. Language does not exteriorise a representation preexisting in me: it puts in common a world hitherto mine. Language effectuates the entry of things into a new ether in which they receive a name and become concepts.¹⁶⁰

From the very start, the 'rules of the game' include the Other through the 'primordial donation' of language. We are in it together before we are in it individually. The meaningful dwelling of the subject, therefore, presupposes a relation to the Other due to the language that gives it meaning. In this sense, to exclude the Other from one's world is to cheat at the game of life.

It is possible for the ego to come to its senses and stop cheating in the game of life. This possibility arises when the egoism of the ego is called into question by that which resists possession, namely, the face of the Other. 'The Other — absolutely other — paralyses possession', as Levinas comments, 'which he [the Other] contests by his

¹⁵⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 173/188.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174/189.

epiphany in the face'.¹⁶¹ If possession means to do violence to the other by integrating it into the same, that is to say, the dwelling, then the Other shows the futility of such violence since, as Levinas notes, '[they] come to me concretely in the ethical impossibility of committing this murder'.¹⁶² This reality, once again, confirms the 'height' of the Other since the Other is not on equal grounds with me as simply another will fighting for dominance. On the contrary, the Other is above this violent order. 'He can contest my possession only because he approaches me not from the outside but from above', to use Levinas words.¹⁶³ From above, the Other speaks to me through their face. Building on this point, Levinas writes,

This voice coming from another shore teaches transcendence itself. Teaching signifies the whole infinity of exteriority. And the whole infinity of exteriority is not first produced to then teach; teaching is its very production. This teaching teaches this very height, tantamount to its exteriority, the ethical.¹⁶⁴

It is because of the alterity of the Other that human beings need to educate each other both young and old. When confronted with the face of the Other, then, the subject is taught that there is more to life than just the basic perseverance in being against an inhumane and hostile environment or for the purposes of the survival of the fittest and the continued existence of the species. This lesson initially comes through the necessary recognition of the face of the Other which, subsequently, establishes the ego and allows it to create a meaningful world for itself. In the process of creating this

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 171/185.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 171/186. This asymmetrical relation between the Other and me is what differentiates Levinas's dialogical approach from that of Buber. On this point, Levinas remarks: 'The principle thing that separates us is what I call the asymmetry of the I-Thou relation. For Buber the relation between the I and the Thou is straightaway experienced as reciprocity. My point of departure is in [...] the feeling that the I owes everything to the Thou, that its responsibility for the Other is gratitude, and that the Other has always, and rightfully, a right over me'. Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 72. At no stage in his thinking does Levinas deny the possibility of reaching a mutual understanding or symmetrical relation with another person. His main point rather is that such a mutual understanding or symmetrical relation presupposes the initial encounter with the face of the Other which cannot be integrated into a totalising understanding of Being. In this respect, any symmetrical relation between the I and the Thou rests upon an original asymmetrical relation.

meaningful world, however, the subject forgets the lesson of the face of the Other as it gets caught up in its own egoism. The egoism of the ego acquires possessions by reducing everything that is other into the same. Nevertheless, as the Stranger, the Other can, once again, call this practice into question. In doing so, the Other reminds the subject that it is fundamentally responsible *to* the Other and gives it the opportunity to assume its responsibility *for* the Other. Thus, the concrete encounter with the face of the Other is not a singular event. Indeed, as the transcendental condition for thought it is singular and *sui generis*. Nevertheless, the face of the Other becomes present whenever those marginalised by the same confront the egoism of the ego. This is why, for Levinas, the Other is always the biblical other — the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the destitute — since these individuals reside outside of the dominant social order and thus have the potential to re-open our eyes and re-orientate our activities from egoism to responsibility for the Other.¹⁶⁵ Contrary to previous accounts of the interpersonal dimension in terms of the master and the slave within the philosophical tradition, Levinas conceives of the Other and the self as a teacher and a student in *discourse* with each other in search of the truth.¹⁶⁶

§4.4 ‘EXTERIORITY AND THE FACE’

The third part of *Totality and Infinity* outlines the manner in which the Other presents themselves from *the other side* of the face-to-face relation. Far from appearing as an object of perception or through what is said in the understanding of Being, the face of the Other reveals itself as the very source of expression and language. This section

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 77 & p. 213/74 & 234.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), esp., Section B, ‘Self Consciousness’, No. 4, ‘The Truth of Self Certainty’, Pt A, ‘Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage’; and, Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), esp., Pt 3, ‘Being-for-others’.

demonstrates that, for Levinas, the more one *listens* to the call of the Other, as opposed to ‘what one says’ themselves in language, the more one *hears* the expression of the face of the Other thus acknowledging their independent existence. In doing so, a passage is opened up for the subject to assume its responsibility for the Other.

§4.4.1 *Levinas’s Critique of Perceptual Experience*

In commencing with his description of the manner in which the Other presents themselves during the face-to-face relation, Levinas proceeds negatively, as he often does, in order to reinforce how *not* to consider this fundamental event of human life. The main attitude that Levinas takes issue with on this matter is the scientific approach toward phenomenological research as advanced by Husserl. In his famous reduction of the natural attitude to the transcendental-phenomenological attitude, Husserl begins with the assumption that the meaning of anything can only be determined through perception thus his concrete descriptions begin from the point of view of one’s own actual acts of outer-perceptual-sense experience. The intentionality of this relation to the object, as it is intuitively given to consciousness, holds a privileged place in Husserl’s version of phenomenology since it is from this ‘primary givenness’ that all other intentional relations to the object find their basis. This approach toward describing concrete life, for Levinas, ‘compromises the idea of sensation’ as it is lived in the instant of the body considering that it removes ‘the character of being a concrete datum’ characteristically lived in sensation that is ‘foreign to all [perceptually-founded acts of] objectification’.¹⁶⁷ Since sensation is ultimately graspable by introspection, for Husserl, it already corresponds to the perceptual experience of an ego’s temporal duration. Explaining this point, whilst alluding to Husserl, Levinas comments,

¹⁶⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 187/204.

It was said that we always find ourselves among things: colour is always extended and objective, the colour of a dress, the lawn, a wall; sound is a noise of a passing car, or a voice of someone speaking. In fact nothing psychological would correspond to the simplicity of the physiological definition of sensation. Sensation as a simple quality floating in the air or in our soul represents an abstraction because, without the object to which it refers, quality can have the signification of being a quality only in a relative sense: by turning over the painting we can see the colours of the objects painted as colours in themselves — but in fact already as colours of the canvass that bears them.¹⁶⁸

In descriptive psychology, sensation always pertains to the quality of an object that appears to intentional consciousness. Even if one formulates an abstract idea of such qualities in and of themselves — for instance, the colour of ‘red’ or the sound of ‘pitch’ — these qualities still only make sense relative to objects that bear them, i.e. the red flag or the pitch of the singer.

According to Levinas, this account of sensation fails to recognise its affective meaning in the instant of enjoyment. In such instants, the lived body does not perceive the qualities of a particular object. On the contrary, the lived body is simply *affected* by the object to the point where the distinction between subject and object dissolves.

Clarifying this point, Levinas notes,

Sensibility is not a fumbling objectification. Enjoyment, by essence satisfied, characterises all sensations whose representational content dissolves into their affective content. The very distinction between representational and affective content is tantamount to a recognition that enjoyment is endowed with a dynamism other than that to perception.¹⁶⁹

Also relevant in this respect is the affective content of ‘suffering’, which, as far as Levinas is concerned, also belongs to the life of ‘pure sensation’.¹⁷⁰ When grasped in the instant of enjoyment or suffering, pure sensation recovers a reality ‘anterior’ to ‘the subjective counterpart of objective qualities’ and the ‘crystallisation of consciousness, I

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 187/203.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 187/204.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. See also, *supra*, n. 112.

and non-I, into subject and object', to use Levinas's words.¹⁷¹ This realisation leads Levinas to say the following,

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 (and for each qualitative specificity in its own mode); *a priori* formal structures of the non-I are not necessarily structures of objectivity. The specificity of each sensation reduced precisely to that 'quality without support or extension' the sensationists sought in it designates a structure not necessarily reducible to the schema of the object endowed with qualities. The senses have a meaning that is not predetermined as objectification.¹⁷²

Sensation has a transcendental function due to the fact that it is from the position of the lived body that the subject gains access to an independent reality without a corresponding object but nevertheless encountered within concrete life.¹⁷³ Under these circumstances, Levinas recovers the idea of pure sensation from the tradition of empiricism, which recognises the quality of sensibility devoid of extension, without failing back into a naturalistic standpoint that could undermine his own phenomenological approach. An experience of reality that does not presuppose an understanding of Being thus becomes a possibility within phenomenology.

Husserl misses this possibility due to the privileged position that he affords to vision in his version of phenomenology. The object is seen clearly, for Husserl, that is to say, known, either through perceptual experience after it has been purified of all naturalistic interpretations and reduced to the objectifying acts of intentional consciousness or as a result of eidetic ideation.¹⁷⁴ Following Heidegger's critique of

¹⁷¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 188/204.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Drabinski also notes this point by saying that 'the constitutive function of sensibility' allows Levinas to approach 'experience without concept'. Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity*, p. 83. Such experiences without corresponding concepts are the brute fact of being itself as in Levinas's earliest works and, more significantly, the face of the Other in *Totality and Infinity*.

¹⁷⁴ Indeed, the German word for 'perception' is 'Wahrnehmung', literally meaning, 'truth' (*Wahr*) and 'grasping' (*Nehmung*). Perception, like knowledge, then, is always true by definition.

Husserl's favouring of vision for describing the concrete (which, incidentally, stems from the work of Augustine),¹⁷⁵ Levinas informs,

We use the term vision indifferently for every experience, even when it involves other senses than sight. And we also use the grasp in this privileged sense. Idea and concept cover the whole of experience.¹⁷⁶

When an object is grasped properly, whether through perceptual experience or conceptuality, it is 'seen' and when an object is 'seen' it is 'known' in a particular way. Vision, therefore, places the other in the hands of the same as based upon a personal understanding of Being. Whether perceptual or eidetic, it cannot respect the individuality of what appears. This leads Levinas to conclude the following,

Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings, exercises power over them. A thing is given, offers itself to me. In gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same.¹⁷⁷

The face of the Other, however, cannot be dominated as it incessantly refuses my power of possession. In this respect, the face of the Other is not given to perceptual experience in any analogous fashion of thing-perception as suggested by Husserl. Similarly, it cannot also be known since it overflows any concept that would seek to grasp it. This is its infinity. Nevertheless, the face of the Other is encountered within concrete life and thus experienced *in some way*. Elaborating on this point, Levinas writes,

The face is present in its refusal to be contained. *In this sense* it cannot be comprehended, that is encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched — for in visual or tactile sensation [perceptual experience] the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content [of intentional consciousness].¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ In his *Confessions*, Augustine warns against 'a certain vain and curious itch' in the human being 'which is masked under the title of knowledge'. Augustine, *Confessions*, Vol. 2, p. 175. This 'appetite of knowing' holds the eyes to be 'the principal of all the senses' to the point that 'we apply the word seeing to other senses also, whenever we employ them towards knowing'. Ibid. This detail leads Augustine to conclude that 'the general experience of the senses therefore it is, (as was said before) which is called the lust of the eyes: for that the office of seeing, wherein the eyes hold the prerogative, do the other senses by way of similitude usurp unto themselves, whensoever they make search after any knowledge'. Ibid., p. 177. Heidegger uses this argument as the basis for his critique of Husserl's privileging of sight and knowledge in *Being and Time*. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 215-216/171-172. Similarly, Levinas also uses this argument against Husserl on the same point in *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 188/205.

¹⁷⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 188/205.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 194/211.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., my emphasis.

‘The face is present in its refusal to be contained’. This refusal to become integrated into the same by possession does not transpire through perceptual experience. On the contrary, it reveals itself as language through the expression ‘You Shall Not Kill’ as it is produced in the ‘epiphany’ of the face of the Other which, subsequently, ‘appeals to me’ and asks me to break from my solitary existence.¹⁷⁹

§4.4.2 *The Revelation of the Face*

The face of the Other expresses itself *as* language prior to articulating itself *in* language. Such an event is possible as the face of the Other is encountered on the level of sensibility. Prior to the encounter with the face of the Other, the lived body assimilates all otherness through consumption and possession. In the hearing of the face of the Other, the work of the lived body is challenged since, as Levinas comments, ‘in its epiphany’, ‘in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp’.¹⁸⁰ This change in the structure of sensibility, from the total compliance of others when assimilated to the total resistance of the face when encountered, opens up a ‘new dimension’ in existence, namely, an ‘ethical’ dimension.

By resisting the work of the lived body, the face of the Other imparts ‘the primordial expression’ or ‘the first word’: ‘you shall not commit murder’.¹⁸¹ According to Levinas, murder is the ‘total negation’ of another being. This can never be a possibility for the lived body prior to the expression of the face of the Other since the assimilation of others through consumption and possession only constitutes a ‘partial’ negation. In such instances, as Levinas notes, ‘the grasp that contests the independence

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 194/211-212.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 197/215.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 199/217: ‘Cet infini, plus fort que le meurtre, nous résiste déjà dans son visage, est son visage, est l’expression originelle, est le premier mot: « tu ne commettras pas de meurtre ».’

of the thing preserves it “for me”¹⁸². In other words, the thing endures as an aspect of my being. Since the face can never become an aspect of my being, it points to the impossibility of assimilating the alterity of the Other through the perceptual or knowing grasp. Even if I choose to kill the Other, their independence escapes my power. Reaffirming this point, Levinas comments,

To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique ‘matter’ possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyses the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.¹⁸³

I can *wish* to kill the Other but, in actual fact, I cannot because, in the event of murder, I admit that their absolute independent existence exceeds my power. This is because when I kill the Other, I do not dominate or possess them. I simply annihilate the Other thus consolidating them beyond my grasp. Furthermore, this power to kill only arises in the presence of the face. The Other, therefore, gives me the freedom to kill which, subsequently, means that the encounter with the face does not do ‘violence’ to me. On the contrary, by resisting the powers of the subject and gifting it the freedom to kill, the structure of the face-to-face relation is fundamentally ‘ethical’.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 198/216.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 197/215. Derrida argues that with the arrival of the ethical question of the third party, the Other commits a certain violence on to the subject. Making this point in his eulogy following Levinas’s death, Derrida comments: ‘The third does not wait; its illeity calls from as early as the epiphany of the face in the face to face. For the absence of the third would threaten with violence the purity of ethics in the absolute immediacy of the face to face with the unique. Levinas does not say it in exactly this way, but what is he doing when, beyond or through the dual of the face to face between two “uniques”, he appeals to justice, affirming and reaffirming that justice “is necessary”, that the third “is necessary”? Is he not trying to take into account this hypothesis of a violence in the pure and immediate ethics of the face to face? A violence potentially unleashed in the experience of the neighbour and of absolute unicity?’ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 32-33. It seems to me, however, that one can only regard the resistance of the face of the Other to the powers of the subject as ‘violent’ if one upholds their own experience and understanding of Being as the main priority in life. This self-sufficient attitude is what leads to imperialism in the mind of Levinas. Thus, as soon as one recognises a plurality in being, the resistance of the face of the Other can be acknowledged in its ethical dimension.

§4.4.3 *Language as Discourse*

Within the depths of sensibility and prior to vision or the understanding of Being supporting that vision, the lived body hears the call of the Other through their face.¹⁸⁵

This call or ‘speech’, as Levinas observes, ‘proceeds from absolute difference’ since it cannot be reduced to my experience.¹⁸⁶ The relation to the other (*l’autre*) as the Other (*l’autrui*), then, manifests itself as language. Expanding on this point, Levinas remarks,

Absolute difference, inconceivable in terms of formal logic, is established only by language. Language accomplishes a relation between terms that breaks up the unity of a genus. The terms, the interlocutors, absolve themselves from the relation, or remain absolute within relationship. Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history.¹⁸⁷

When the face speaks, the Other asserts itself as an independent being and establishes an ontological separation between the same and the other. These terms maintain their independence whilst being in relation as interlocutors. Even if the same refuses to acknowledge the other freely in thought, it still recognises the face of the Other necessarily through the use of language. As Levinas says,

To the one the other can indeed present himself as a theme, but his presence is not reabsorbed in his status as a theme. The word that bears on the Other as a theme seems to contain the Other. But already it is said to the Other who, as interlocutor, has quit the theme that encompassed him, and upsurges inevitably behind the said. Words are said, be it only by the silence kept, whose weight acknowledges this evasion of the Other. The knowledge that absorbs the Other is forthwith situated within the discourse I address to him. Speaking, rather than ‘letting be’, solicits the Other.¹⁸⁸

Indeed, one can do violence to the Other by placing them under a concept that they do not accept themselves. Nevertheless, in doing so, that is to say, in claiming that the

¹⁸⁵ Caputo notes that Heidegger overcomes the prioritisation of critical (scientific) consciousness within phenomenology by keeping his ‘hermeneutic ear close to the ground of [concrete] life, pressed against the breast of lived experience’. John D. Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information* (London: Penguin, 2018), p 32. Levinas does the same. Nevertheless, whereas the ground of concrete life and the breast of lived experience, for Heidegger, is the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, for Levinas, it is the lived body in the instant of sensation.

¹⁸⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 194/211-212.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 195/212.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Other belongs to the experience of the same through language, one already recognises that the Other is beyond the grasp of the same by speaking to or of them. As a result, Levinas identifies that primary function as language to be ‘discourse’.

Heidegger, especially the later Heidegger, is often regarded and hailed as the upholder of the priority of language as ‘the house of Being’ in his articulation of phenomenology, but this is one point where Levinas differs significantly from Heidegger.¹⁸⁹ To be sure, both Heidegger and Levinas adhere to an expressive understanding of language as the constitutive source of meaning common to the hermeneutic tradition. Nevertheless, they differ radically when it comes to what expression itself constitutes. For Heidegger, the primary function of language is disclosure. The meaning of Being is implicitly disclosed to *Dasein* as it expresses itself in everyday statements such as ‘I *am* happy’ and ‘the sky *is* blue’. Heidegger’s philosophical aim is to hermeneutically retrieve this ‘unsaid saying’ of the meaning of Being from within language itself in order to make relevant again *today* the question of the meaning of Being, which has been forgotten by the philosophical tradition.¹⁹⁰ The approach here bears similarities to the biblical hermeneutic approach of Post-

¹⁸⁹ In his ‘Letter on “Humanism”’, Heidegger mentions that ‘language is the house of being in which the human being ek-sists by dwelling’. Martin Heidegger, ‘Letter on “Humanism”’, trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, pp. 239-276 (p. 254). What Heidegger means by this is that the meaning of Being only discloses itself in language as expressed by *Dasein* through its ‘existence’, in Heidegger’s sense of both of those terms. Levinas does not disagree with Heidegger on this point since, as De Boer notes, ‘language is a showing of something, a *logos* relating to the phenomenon, phenomeno-logy’. De Boer, *Rationality of Transcendence*, p. 67. The point that Levinas is trying to make is that, even if language is considered to ‘the house of being’, in which the human being dwells, it is a house that was built by the Other. Heidegger admits that he cannot supply an answer to the question, who built the house of Being? He simply upholds ‘the original origin of language’ as a ‘mystery’. ‘Der ursprüngliche Ursprung der Sprache als des Wesensgrundes des menschlichen Daseins bleibt aber ein Geheimnis’. Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein”*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 39, ed. by Susanne Ziegler (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), p. 75.

¹⁹⁰ Contrary to the popular view that Heidegger only tends to uphold language as the house of Being in his later thought, McDonnell shows that through his appropriation of Dilthey’s hermeneutic manner of thinking into his own thought, during the early 1920s, as a way to overcome the prioritisation of perceptual experience in Husserl’s version of phenomenology, Heidegger always recognised language as the essential aspect for understanding the meaning of Being. See, McDonnell, *Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology*, esp., § 2.8, ‘Heidegger’s Re-Interpretation of Husserl’s Account of Intuition and Expression’, pp. 135-143.

Reformationist thinkers, who question the traditional objective reading of the bible in order to make relevant again *today* the subjective meaning of the word of God for the actual life of the person of faith.¹⁹¹ Levinas also wants to make the meaning of the word of the Other, which the subject has forgotten, relevant again for philosophy *today*. Unlike Heidegger, however, Levinas does not think that the ‘unsaid saying’ of language resides within language itself. On the contrary, for Levinas, it comes from the very source of the expression of language, i.e., the face of the Other, which in the act of saying language always remains exterior to what is said *in* language. By focusing on what is said *in* language through disclosure, and how it is relevant for raising anew the question of the meaning of Being in *Dasein*, Heidegger forgets the primary function of language as discourse. Nothing would be said *in* language at all without the initial saying *of* language by the face of the Other. It is this ignorance in Heidegger’s philosophy that results in the ethical indifference of fundamental ontology and the aprioristic constriction of the task of hearing the call of the face of the Other in hermeneutic phenomenology.

§4.4.4 *The Escape from Oneself*

Levinas’s philosophical project began with the aim of describing the concreteness of human transcendence. This act of ‘excedence’, to use Levinas’s term, is corroborated by the necessary recognition of the face of the Other since, by expressing itself as the first word, it demands an obligatory response thus lifting the subject from its initial state

¹⁹¹ Ibid., esp., Ch. 4, ‘Heidegger’s Appropriation of Biblical Hermeneutics into the Formulation of the Question of the Meaning of Being’. Levinas would have been susceptible to this approach within phenomenology as a possibility for his own phenomenological research on account of his education in Judaism, which also prioritises *hearing* when it comes to receiving the divine *word* of God. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Levinas often refers to Psalm 95, verse 7 over the course of his writings: ‘*Today*, if ye will *hear* his *voice*’. See, Levinas, ‘Messianic Texts’, in *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 59-96 (p. 71), my emphasis.

of bodily immanence to the spiritual order of language and reason. The receptivity of the human being to this movement encapsulates the need to escape which defines us as such. Nevertheless, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas also shows that the fact of human transcendence can be freely denied, after occurring as a concrete event, when the ego prioritises the understanding of Being within the economy of the same through the enjoyment of separation. In denying its fundamental relation to the other as its obligatory response to the call of the face of the Other, the same closes itself off to alterity in order to defend its own *spiritual* immanence.

There is no greater example of this practice, for Levinas, than in Heidegger's version of phenomenology, where the call (*der Ruf*) of conscience 'summons *Dasein*'s Self from its lostness in the "they", the crowd (*das Man*), or, other people, so as to seize its ownmost 'potentiality-for-Being-itself'.¹⁹² In other words, the call that *Dasein* hears in Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is from the authentic self to the inauthentic self with the aim of reaching an understanding of Being *qua* temporality. This voice of the self from within the self is what Heidegger calls 'conscience' and the more one listens and responds to it, for him, the more one becomes 'authentic'. In contrast, for Levinas, it would be impossible for the self to call itself into question, immanently, if it had not already been called into question, externally, in the face-to-face relation.¹⁹³ Outlining this position, Levinas notes,

If we call a situation where my freedom is called into question conscience, association or the welcoming of the Other [through the necessary recognition of the

¹⁹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 319/274.

¹⁹³ Michael J. Hyde notes that, for both Heidegger and Levinas, 'if we want to know what conscience is, we must first attend carefully to the way in which it calls. The act of listening is as important to the truth of conscience as is its own evocative voice; the call of conscience is consummated only in the hearing and understanding of what it has to say'. Michael J. Hyde, *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and Levinas: Rhetoric and the Euthanasia Debate* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), p. 8. Here, Hyde correctly recognises the hermeneutic approach with reference to both thinkers without explicitly using the term himself. Nevertheless, Hyde also argues that Levinas's position 'presupposes' Heidegger's thinking on conscience. In this sense, Hyde does not recognise the validity of Levinas's critique of Heidegger's description of the concrete which shows that the call of the face of the Other precedes the call of authenticity in *Dasein*.

face] is conscience. [...] The increase of my exigencies with regard to myself aggravates the judgement that is borne upon me, increases my responsibility. [...] My freedom does not have the last word; I am not alone. [...] Conscience and desire are not modalities of consciousness among others, but its condition. Concretely they are the welcoming the Other [through the necessary recognition of the face] across his judgment.¹⁹⁴

My conscience originates from the face of the Other that calls me to responsibility for their suffering which I have already recognised necessarily in the face-to-face relation. Following this concrete event, I am free to ignore the call of the Other but, in doing so, I simply consolidate a totality which can be called into question again and again. This is why Levinas says that the more I increase my exigencies with regard to myself, the more I find myself responsible for the suffering of the Other. By ignoring the face of the Other, I am complicit in their suffering thus opening myself up to further questioning by them. The interpretative retrieval of the significance of what is 'heard' in 'the call of the Other' through one's own actual experience of conscience, then, is Levinas's radical contribution to the development of hermeneutic phenomenology overlooked in both Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenological research.

The more I listen to the face of the Other, the more I find myself responsible for their suffering.¹⁹⁵ In this respect, my conscience offers me a path to assume my responsibility for the Other and to escape from the questioning of my spiritual immanence thus achieving peace with the Other. Nevertheless, there is more to being responsible for the Other than simply acknowledging their face freely within thought. It also involves easing the suffering of the Other, the third party, the marginalised, through my actions. Levinas often encapsulates this idea by quoting the old Jewish proverb:

¹⁹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 100-101/103-104.

¹⁹⁵ Levinas often refers to a quote from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky to make this point: 'Every one of us is guilty in relation to all, for all, and for everything, and I more so than all the others'. Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?*, p. 153. What this means is that if I hear the call of the Other and listen to their face, I recognise their suffering and their exclusion from the same. Whether intentional or not, this exclusion affirms my guilt. Nevertheless, by necessarily recognising the face, 'I am chosen', to quote Levinas, that is to say, I have been given the opportunity to assume *my* responsibility for the suffering of the Other in the name of justice. Ibid.

‘The Other’s material needs are my spiritual needs’.¹⁹⁶ To be responsible for the Other, therefore, *literally* means responding to the materiality of the Other over and against my own. Indeed, ‘the interhuman perspective of my responsibility for the other [*l’autrui*], without concern for reciprocity’ is what Levinas refers to as ‘useless suffering’.¹⁹⁷ By taking the food out of my own mouth to give to the hungry, by opening my own home to someone without one, and by giving time and assistance to the lonely and the frail, I uproot myself from ‘my place in the sun’ thus causing a certain degree of material suffering to myself.¹⁹⁸ This is the radicality of Levinas’s ethics. When asked whether or not this situation is intolerable for the subject in question, Levinas responds: ‘I don’t know if this situation is intolerable. It is not what you would call agreeable, surely; it is not pleasant, but it is *the good*’.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Useless Suffering’, in *Entre Nous*, pp. 91-101 (p. 101).

¹⁹⁸ It is on this point where Levinas differs vastly from other thinkers in moral philosophy. Aristotle, for instance, maintains that doing ‘the good’ should lead one to happiness or *Eudaimonia*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle remarks: ‘If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us’. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.7, 1177a12-14, trans. by W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, pp. 1729-1867 (p. 1860). In this sense, Levinas is more in line with Kant who maintains that if doing ‘the good’ makes you feel happy, then you are not being moral. As Kant himself notes whilst outlining his moral theory: ‘But the principle of one’s own happiness is the most objectionable. Such is the case not merely because this principle is false and because experience contradicts the supposition that well-being is always proportional to doing-well, nor yet merely because this principle contributes nothing to the establishment of morality, inasmuch as making a man happy is quite different from making him good and making him prudent and sharp-sighted for his own advantage quite different from making him virtuous’. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), p. 46.

¹⁹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Dialogue on Thinking-of-the-Other’, in *Entre Nous*, pp. 201-206 (p. 203), my emphasis.

CONCLUSION

Following the publication of *Totality and Infinity* in 1961, Levinas became known as the ‘anti Heidegger’ throughout France due to the radical nature of his critique of Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology in deference to the concrete relation with the face of the Other as ‘first philosophy’.¹ This opinion persisted despite the fact that Levinas was one of the first scholars to introduce Heidegger’s work into France and remained in dialogue with Heidegger all the way through the various articulations and expositions of his own philosophy.² In a similar fashion, as his reputation began to grow within the English-speaking world, Levinas generally became regarded as a ‘religious thinker’ on account of the specific vocabulary used to expound his descriptions of concrete life. According to David Boothroyd, for instance, it is not possible to make a ‘strict distinction’ between Levinas’s philosophy and his religious inclinations toward Judaism.³ Thus, for this commentator, Levinas merely seeks to work out ‘the metaphysical foundations of *his* religious experience’.⁴ In my estimation,

¹ De Boer, ‘Ontological Difference (Heidegger) and Ontological Separation (Levinas)’, in *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 115-132 (p. 115).

² In two of his lecture courses at the University of Paris, Sorbonne during the academic year of 1975/1976, entitled ‘Death and Time’ and ‘God and Onto-theo-logy’, which were later published under the title of *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas still begins with Heidegger when presenting his own philosophy. Furthermore, these lectures occur at a point when Levinas’s thinking was fully developed, nearly two years after the publication of his second and final major work *Otherwise than Being*. Whilst being completely against the overall implications of Heidegger’s philosophy, Levinas continues to acknowledge the necessity of starting with Heidegger for his own thinking in order to challenge those implications. Levinas, nonetheless, does not engage with the later work of Heidegger, viewing Heidegger’s earlier position articulated in *Being and Time* as both ‘more significant and profound than any of Heidegger’s later works’ and as what ‘represents the fruition and flowering of Husserlian [transcendental] phenomenology’. Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 67.

³ David Boothroyd, ‘Responding to Levinas’, in *The Provocation of Levinas*, pp. 15-31 (p. 15).

⁴ *Ibid.*, my emphasis. Abi Doukhan gives a useful account of similar objections raised against Levinas. See, Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas: A Philosophy of Exile* (London: A & C Black, 2012), ‘The problem of Levinas’s Jewish source’, pp. 13-15. For Doukhan, such objections fail to truly grasp what Levinas is attempting to do in philosophy, namely, to give a new ‘inspiration’ for thought other than that of knowledge and thus ‘violence’, as Levinas understands that term. Such an inspiration is the ethical relation and its call to responsibility for the Other. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Whilst it is certainly the case that this inspiration gives rise to the very idea of religion as well as the diverse readings of the Bible as the main source expressing that idea within history, for Levinas, ‘the ethical truth is common’ to humanity as a whole. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 115. Levinas’s philosophy, therefore, does not simply endorse one particular type of ‘religious experience’.

it is entirely unhelpful to reduce Levinas's contribution to philosophy and phenomenology on the basis of him being a 'religious thinker' or the 'anti Heidegger'. This is because, firstly, Levinas has a very specific understanding of the term 'religion' as well as the way in which religious concepts emerge from concrete life and, secondly, the relationship of Levinas's thought with that of Heidegger is much more nuanced than simply establishing a contrary philosophical standpoint as the term 'anti' would suggest. It is, rather, a critical engagement in the constructive sense considering that Levinas's philosophy attempts to produce better descriptions of concrete life than the ones provided by Heidegger and Husserl in their respective elaborations of phenomenology.

Levinas is a committed post-Kantian philosopher, 'post' in the obvious historical sense of philosophising after Kant, but, also, 'post' in the philosophical sense of accepting Kant's critique of transcendent metaphysics and his starting point of actual experience in philosophy. 'Kant is all you need', as Levinas used to say to his students in the *École Normale Israélite Orientale*, before remarking, 'think of him as your Bible'.⁵ This means that any questions or arguments concerned with proving (or disproving) the existence of God hold no philosophical relevance, as far as Levinas is concerned. To be sure, echoing Kant during his interview with Kearney, Levinas confirms this point by saying that God 'cannot be defined or proved by means of logical predications and attributions'.⁶ On the contrary, it is only through the ethical relation

⁵ Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 93. Levinas became the director of this private Jewish school in 1947, after he returned to Paris from fighting in World War II. Speaking about taking up this position, Levinas comments: 'After Auschwitz, I had the impression that in taking on the directorship of the *École Normale Israélite Orientale* I was responding to a historical calling. It was my little secret [...] Probably the naiveté of a young man. I am still mindful and proud of it today'. Ibid., p. 84. Levinas remained director here until 1980; even after his appointments as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Poitiers in 1964 and the University of Paris-Nanterre in 1967, his appointment as a visiting professorship at the University of Fribourg in 1970, and his appointment as Professor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1973. Simon Critchley, 'A disparate inventory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, pp. xx-xxvi.

⁶ Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 82. In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant denies the possibility of knowledge concerning the existence of God, along with that of freedom and the immortality of the soul, precisely because these ideas apply to 'what cannot

that the very 'idea of God' first 'comes to mind'.⁷ Whenever God is spoken of in speculative terms, then, and as soon as religious concepts are abstracted from the concrete experiences in which they arise, such concepts become philosophically meaningless in the mind of Levinas. The very meaning of the term 'religion', for Levinas, relates to the necessary recognition of the face of the Other which, subsequently, establishes the essential 'bond' between the same and the other.⁸ It has far more to do with its Latin roots, etymologically speaking, than with any particular religious faith or religiously inspired form of natural theology.⁹ This is why Levinas always insists on the following: 'I [Levinas] am not a particularly Jewish thinker. I [Levinas] am just a thinker'.¹⁰

This decision to preserve the starting point for reflection on 'the concrete', that is to say, one's life as it is actually lived prior to thought, out of which and back to which all of our ideas must necessarily return, demonstrates Levinas's commitment to phenomenology as a method of philosophising. Furthermore, since the ultimate aim of phenomenology is to describe life in its most concrete aspect, for Levinas, it is Heidegger who comes to epitomise the discipline as a whole. The reason for this classification stems from the fact that Levinas agrees with Heidegger's critique of Husserlian phenomenology since it maintains that there is something *more* concrete in life than that which appears on account of my actual objectifying acts of intentional consciousness. Heidegger discovers this idea thanks to his appeal of the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) which does not appear as an object of perception but which

be an object of experience'. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 'Preface to the second edition', pp. 106-124 (p. 117).

⁷ Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 76.

⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 40/30: 'We propose to call "religion" the bond that is established between the same and the other *without constituting a totality*', my emphasis.

⁹ See, §3.2, n. 55.

¹⁰ Michael Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. xi.

is disclosed, rather, through the expression of language in *Dasein*. Nevertheless, Levinas makes a similar philosophical move against Heidegger by discovering something *more* concrete in life than my actual understanding of Being in *Dasein*. This is the feeling of need as it is lived in the instant of sensation from the concrete position of the body. Yet, despite uncovering an aspect of life *more* concrete than the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, Levinas continues to adhere to Heidegger's way of describing the concrete. This is because the tactic of affectivity, which is central to Levinas's own philosophy, derives from the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research as advanced by Heidegger. Before all else, for Levinas, it is affectivity that characterises life in its concrete aspect as evident from the overriding themes of disruption and interruption highlighted throughout his work. This is also the case for Heidegger, who maintains that affectivity discloses the particular manner in which *Dasein*'s world is experienced. It is for this reason, then, that Levinas *still* does not hesitate to write forty years after having worked out and published his own version of phenomenology that 'all philosophy must pass through' Heidegger's thinking.¹¹ Levinas, therefore, is not 'anti Heidegger' in terms of method. On the contrary, Levinas's objection to Heidegger relates to the latter's particular description of the concrete since it ignores the encounter with absolute alterity in the face of the Other, which facilitates the act of transcendence and aprioristically excludes the idea of infinity as a fundamental element of human life.

In order to rescue the idea of infinity within phenomenology, Levinas has to go beyond the phenomenological ontology of light and intelligibility common to both

¹¹ Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 117. Cohen is also correct to mention that 'we must not forget that these carefully considered words of praise for Heidegger's philosophy were said in the teeth of Levinas's fundamental and uncompromising criticism of Heidegger's personal commitment to Nazism'. Ibid. Levinas also confirms this necessity of confronting Heidegger's philosophy in his interview series with Nemo by saying: 'In what concerns Heidegger, one cannot, in fact, ignore fundamental ontology and its problematic'. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 43.

Husserl and Heidegger. This is because as soon as an object appears to intentional consciousness, either as a result of its objectifying and sense-bestowing acts (Husserl), or becomes disclosed to *Dasein* in the understanding of Being, through the affective disposition of anxiety or the handability of tools (Heidegger), it is comprehended by the subject *in some way*, irrespective of the adequacy or authenticity of that comprehension. Furthermore, anything ‘outside’ of this horizon of comprehension is considered to be ‘nonsense’ from the respective phenomenological standpoints of Husserl and Heidegger precisely because it resides *beyond* the concrete experience of the subject in question. The object thus belongs to the temporal duration or ecstatic temporality of the subject for both Husserl and Heidegger which, subsequently, renders any talk of ‘radical exteriority’ or ‘the infinite’ as insignificant for understanding the concrete life of the human being within their respective versions of phenomenology.

Levinas’s solution to this problem demonstrates that there is indeed an experience proportionate to the idea of infinity that becomes evident when concrete life is reduced to the instant of sensation from the position of the lived body. Since this position endures prior to that which appears as a result of the objectifying and sense-bestowing acts of intentional consciousness as well as that which is disclosed via the understanding of Being in *Dasein*, it corresponds to an ontology of darkness and indeterminacy. Nothing is presented to the lived body in this ontology of darkness. It is simply affected by indeterminate ‘nocturnal events’. In this respect, Levinas goes even further than Heidegger in relation to the latter’s critique of Western metaphysics as the philosophy of presence since, as Levinas observes, ‘Heidegger never really escaped from the Greek language of intelligibility and presence’.¹² Elaborating on this point, Levinas continues,

¹² Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 71.

Even though he [Heidegger] spent much of his philosophical career struggling against certain metaphysical notions of presence — in particular the objectifying notion of presence as *Vorhandenheit*, which expresses itself in our scientific and technological categorisation of the world — he [Heidegger] ultimately seems to espouse another, more subtle and complex, notion of presence as *Anwesen*, that is, the coming-into-presence of Being. Thus, while Heidegger heralds the end of the metaphysics of presence, he [Heidegger] continues to think of Being as a coming-into-presence; he [Heidegger] seems unable to break away from the hegemony of presence which he denounces.¹³

Unlike Heidegger, Levinas uncovers a notion of absence within concrete life thus escaping the hegemonic decree of presence as handed down throughout the metaphysical tradition. This manoeuvre is essential for Levinas's thinking overall since it is the dark and indeterminate setting of the lived body in the instant of sensation that unlocks the possibility of an encounter with absolute alterity in the face of the Other. Without this concrete setting, Levinas would not be able to address the topic of the face of the Other in phenomenology.

The revelation of the face speaks from the dark indeterminacy and affects the lived body to the point of donating it with language and the ability to think. At the same time, the face of the Other absconds itself from the light and intelligibility constitutive of the experience relating to the newly established ego thus remaining exterior to its powers of comprehension and possession. This concrete event is the necessary recognition of the face of the Other, as it has been designated over the course of this study. What it confirms, for Levinas, is an original 'multiplicity' in existence since, as Jeffery Dudiak correctly observes, it is only possible for the ethical relation to initially

¹³ Ibid. According to Levinas, this implicit commitment to the metaphysics of presence in Heidegger is no more evident than in the interpretation of our Being-in-the-world as history. As Levinas notes: 'The ultimate and most authentic mission of existence or *Dasein* is to recollect and totalise its temporal dispersal into the past, present, and future. *Dasein* is its history to the extent that it can interpret and narrate its existence as a finite and contemporaneous story, a totalising copresence of past, present, and future'. Ibid. Thus, when *Dasein* achieves an authentic understanding of Being and glimpses its own structural unity, the meaning of Being *qua* temporality becomes present to it in history. In addition, for the later Heidegger, *Dasein* can only respond to the historical donations of epochal meanings of Being. It thus becomes a puppet to those historical meanings.

take place if the Other and the lived body exist ‘independently’ from each other.¹⁴ Furthermore, the necessary recognition of the face of the Other also establishes a ‘plurality’ with respect to the meaning of Being, now comprehensible in the wake of the ‘separation’ of the same and the other. Thus, even if one understands the meaning of Being as the concern for one’s own existence, this still *presupposes* the ‘goodness proceeding from me to the other’, as it has previously occurred in the face-to-face relation.¹⁵ The concern for one’s own existence that is characteristic of an authentic understanding of Being in Heidegger’s version of phenomenology, then, does not confer *either* the first *or* last word in relation to the meaning of Being. On the contrary, there are different ways ‘to be’ within being, such as, for instance, the way of goodness, hospitality, and peace as revealed through the initial welcoming of and receptivity to the face of the Other in concrete life.

The concrete movement of transcendence described in Levinas’s version of phenomenology begins from the dark indeterminacy of the lived body. In his earliest works as an independent thinker, Levinas analyses the immanent condition of the lived body in order to demonstrate that the need to escape from oneself commences in revolt against the fatalistic determinism of this ontological situation. Nevertheless, this novel ontological underpinning is problematic for Levinas’s overall philosophical project because, in the very act of describing the life of the body as it exists prior to intelligibility, Levinas transforms the darkness into light. In other words, by articulating the nocturnal events of hypostasis and the face-to-face relation *in language*, Levinas encapsulates both within a diurnal understanding of Being. It seems to be the case, therefore, that no sooner than Levinas’s thinking gets off the ground is it immediately brought back down to that which it seeks to overcome, namely, the phenomenological

¹⁴ Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 59.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 305-306/342.

ontology of light and intelligibility. This problem within Levinas's thinking is the crux of Derrida's objection to *Totality and Infinity*, as explicated in his lengthy essay 'Violence and Metaphysics' (1964).¹⁶ Outlining the basic premise of this objection, De Boer comments,

Its [the darkness's] speaking immediately introduces a theme, an object of reflection. And so the metaphysical dimension, which can never become a theme, is encapsulated in ontology. As Derrida says, it looks as if Levinas's entire philosophical enterprise rest on an inner antinomy. It would discuss a realm beyond [the light of] being in a language which can be used to describe [the intelligibility of] being only.¹⁷

It seems to me that this problem arises as a result of the specific manner in which Levinas expresses, to use De Boer's phrase, 'the rationality of transcendence' in his early works. By conceiving of transcendence as a 'movement toward the exterior', Levinas presupposes *somewhere to move from* thus creating the phenomenological necessity of describing that place so as to ensure its validity in concrete life. Although this somewhere does not correspond to a sense of interiority, since that only emerges in the wake of the face-to-face relation, it nevertheless refers to the ontological setting of the dark indeterminacy of the lived body.¹⁸

This difficulty contained within Levinas's philosophy leads him to reformulate the problem of human transcendence in his later works. Levinas presents his solution to this problem as well as to the difficulties originating from his initial expression of

¹⁶ Despite the severity of this objection, Derrida still speaks very highly of Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics' and deems *Totality and Infinity* to be a 'great book'. Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', p. 104.

¹⁷ De Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁸ Dan Zahavi also correctly notes that Levinas's thinking presupposes a somewhere to move from. For Zahavi, however, this somewhere is the 'very stream of consciousness' to be found in the 'first-personal givenness of our experience'. Dan Zahavi, 'Alterity in self', in *Iipseity and Alterity*, ed. by Shaun Gallagher, Stephen Watson, Philippe Brun, Philippe Romansk (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 2004), pp. 137-152 (p. 137). As a result, Zahavi maintains that Levinas presupposes Husserl's version of phenomenology thus failing to see and appreciate Levinas's respective critiques of the concrete according to Husserl and Heidegger. Levinas's description of the concrete uncovers an aspect of life before that which appears as a result of the objectifying acts of intentional conscious as well as that which is disclosed to *Dasein* in the understanding of Being, namely, the material responsibility of the lived body. It is the description of this supposedly dark and indeterminate ontological setting that causes problems for Levinas's philosophical project.

transcendence in *Otherwise than Being* (1974). Rather than describing transcendence as a movement toward the exterior by way of the concrete encounter with the face of the Other, that is to say, as a ‘linear exposition’, this work describes transcendence as an incessant disturbance of self-interest that occurs as a result of the ‘trace’ of the other persisting at the very heart of subjectivity.¹⁹ Instead of the movement *outward* that is characteristic of *Totality and Infinity*, *Otherwise than Being* goes *inward* to find that the subject has always already been affected by the Other prior to any act of freedom. In *Totality and Infinity*, for instance, Levinas states that metaphysical desire results from the concrete encounter with the face of the Other; whilst, simultaneously, maintaining that our initial receptivity to the face of the Other, which leads to its necessary recognition thus accomplishing the ontological separation between the same and the other, occurs thanks to metaphysical desire. This contradiction is addressed by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being* through the notion of ‘substitution’, which describes the self in a state of ‘passivity’ to the other (*l’autre*) *prior to* its ‘receptivity’ to the Other (*l’autrui*).²⁰ To put it in Levinas’s own words,

The more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, wilful, imperialist subject, the more I discover myself to be responsible; the more I just am, the more guilty I am. I am ‘in myself’ through the others.²¹

In this respect, Levinas’s later works do not simply think of the other in its radical separation from the same. They also attempt to think of the other as the very foundation

¹⁹ Stauffer makes the point that in his later work, Levinas moves away from a linear description of human transcendence to a movement of continuous self-overcoming as brought about by the disturbance of the Other. She writes: ‘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’. Jill Stauffer, ‘The Imperfect: Levinas, Nietzsche, and the Autonomous Subject’, in *Nietzsche and Levinas*, pp. 33-47 (p. 41).

²⁰ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 121/155: ‘La passivité d’en deça de l’alternative: passivité-activité, plus passive que toute inertie, se décrit par les termes éthique, accusation, persécution, responsabilité pour les autres’.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112/143.

of the same. Here, then, there is a concentrated effort to think of the other *in* the same without reducing the other *to* the same, along the same lines as Derrida.²² Irrespective of this change of tactic, Levinas still adheres to the hermeneutic approach toward phenomenological research precisely because the reformulation of the problem of transcendence in *Otherwise than Being* advances as a way to acknowledge the ethical expression or ‘saying’ of the Other without reducing it to the ontological articulations or ‘said’ of the subject. Confirming this point to Kearney, Levinas remarks,

Saying is ethical sincerity insofar as it is exposition. As such, this saying is irreducible to the ontological definability of the said. Saying is what makes self-exposure of sincerity possible; it is a way of giving everything, of not keeping anything for oneself. Insofar as ontology equates truth with the intelligibility of total presence [i.e. light], it reduces the pure exposure of saying to the totalising closure of the said. [...] Language as saying is an ethical openness to the Other; as that which is said — reduced to a fixed identity or synchronised presence — is an ontological closure of the Other.²³

In the later works of Levinas, then, the ethical encounter with the Other becomes *even more* rooted in the experience of language than in his earlier works. It is for this reason that Levinas remains committed to the development of hermeneutic phenomenology for the entire duration of his philosophical career.

²² See, Bettina Bergo, “‘When I opened, he had gone’: Levinas’s Substitution in light of Husserl and Heidegger”, in *Discipline Filosofiche*, 1 (2014), 1-26.

²³ Kearney, *Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 80.

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This bibliography is divided into two main sections. Section (A) contains a list of selected texts by the three main thinkers of this study, namely, (i) Emmanuel Levinas, (ii) Edmund Husserl, and (iii) Martin Heidegger. These texts are classified in chronological order with respect to their original composition or publication. The English title and publication information is given first in relation to each entry with the original language title and publication information directly following it. Section (B) contains a selection of secondary literature on (i) Levinas's philosophy and (ii) general works relating to the development of phenomenology as well as some other works in philosophy relevant to the topic of this study.

SECTION (A)

(i) Emmanuel Levinas

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