

## Chapter 3

### SENSATION, REPRESENTATION, AND EVIDENCE: LEVINAS' REEVALUATION OF HUSSERL

#### 1 Introduction

We showed in the previous chapter that, according to Levinas, Husserl's Cartesian reduction of Ideas I, with its perhaps overdrawn intellectualist focus on consciousness and the cognitive operations of representational thought worked out in the context of the challenge posed to philosophy by the natural sciences, lacked a resolution for the "how" of intersubjective world-constitution. It also lacked recognition of the concrete, personal, and communal dimensions of the existential situation of human being as Levinas argued in The Theory of Intuition. What we will propose in this chapter is that Husserl's later formulation of the approach to the transcendental through the reduction found in The Crisis, which takes as its starting point, as if in response to Levinas' challenge, the "lived-world" and Psychology, is meant to compensate for what was lacking in the earlier Cartesian model. The question is, will this be sufficient to overcome Levinas' charge of the idealistic intellectualism pervading Husserl's work? In order to answer this and to show that Levinas modified his earlier position in regard to Husserl, although certainly without a complete abandonment, it will be necessary to look more closely at the specific notions of sensation, representation, and evidence which are of central importance to the whole methodological question we have been

dealing with as well as the question of subjectivity and intersubjectivity — questions which have a direct bearing on Levinas' formulation of the priority of responsibility in his own philosophy. Let us begin, then, by looking more closely at Husserl's new formulation of the epokhe in The Crisis and Levinas' response to this in his work published after The Theory of Intuition.

## 2 Husserl's New Versions of the Reduction

### 2.1 The Rejection of the Cartesian epokhe

Contrary to those who would argue that in The Crisis there is no real change in Husserl's position between his earlier and later work, let us point out that Husserl himself criticizes his earlier "Cartesian approach" to the reduction, admitting that "it leads to the transcendental ego in one leap, as it were, it brings this ego into view as explication; so one is at a loss, at first, to know what has been gained by it, much less how, starting with this, a completely new sort of fundamental science, decisive for philosophy, has been attained."<sup>1</sup> Despite Husserl's own critique, however, the earlier version of the reduction worked out in the context of his desire to establish philosophy as a rigorous science of eidetic intuition over and against the model of the natural sciences, is of benefit in that it brings to light for the first time the basic problems of developing a method for achieving the phenomenological attitude, problems which would be addressed again in the Cartesian Meditations, and, finally re-thought and extended in The Crisis.

### 2.2 The Reduction from the 'Lived World'

In contrast with the Cartesian version of the epokhe, it is our view that the phenomenological reduction found in The Crisis has more of a practical, ethical, and spiritual orientation than the "scientifically rigorous" renderings of Ideas I and the Logical Investigations. These tentative and self-critical probings into the new region achieved through the reduction are propaedeutic to what appears in its maturity in The Crisis. One might argue, of course, that the reduction is the reduction and that it really does not change. And there is, indeed, a certain truth to this. But in the Cartesian formulation, the achievement of presuppositionless can easily be interpreted, as Levinas did in The Theory of Intuition, as a striving for scientific objectivity or a freedom from the bias of naturalistic constraints — depending on how one interprets Husserl's understanding of the term 'science' — and the structural aspects of intentional analysis and constitution are certainly over-emphasized and depersonalized. This leads to a concept of subjectivity that is merely formal and abstracted from what Heidegger calls "being-in-the-world," although later, from the perspective of his own philosophy, Levinas will place both Husserl and Heidegger together as the target of a new and even more sweeping critique. There is, to be sure, a sameness about the reduction that is found in its incipient form in the Logical Investigations and other early works, the Cartesian reduction of Ideas I, and the reductions from the lived-world and from Psychology found in The Crisis. This should not, however, mislead us concerning the clear differences that separate the earlier from the later epokhe. In the final analysis, Husserl's thinking itself must be understood according to its own principle as a perpetual beginning anew,<sup>2</sup> a "constant becoming through a constant intentionality of development," a point which, in The Theory of Intuition, Levinas seems to have forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

In The Crisis Husserl does not call the reader to the stark and formal reduction that is found in the ruminations of Ideas I but to a radically personal self-transformation. We are not merely called to a new way of seeing, to a certain perception of a new region of being, but to a new way of being. In fact, Husserl goes so far as to describe the initial shock of the reduction in The Crisis as comparable to a religious conversion:

Perhaps it will become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epokhe belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such.<sup>4</sup>

What does Husserl mean by saying that the full, universal epokhe is comparable to a religious conversion? We must read this keeping in mind that he explicitly warns against misinterpreting transcendental phenomenology as any kind of mystical or supermundane "transcendentalism," while at the same time recalling that he does not for a moment deny that phenomenology, as a philosophical way of life, is a thoroughly spiritual process with a "spiritual heritage" and a "spiritual unity" in which it is the task of the individual philosopher "to carry forward ... the self-reflection of his forebears ... the chain of thinkers, the social interrelation of their thinking, the community of their thought, and transform it into a living present for us...."<sup>5</sup> The emphasis that Husserl places here on the "spiritual" dimension of phenomenology is too often overlooked by those who also fail to see the practical dimension of the epokhe. If the methodology worked out by Husserl was initially bent on clarifying epistemological questions, which necessarily brought with it a new understanding of ontology and consequently a new understanding of truth, as Levinas argues in The Theory of Intuition, it could not escape a

new understanding of the subject as well. In Levinas' philosophy this will center squarely on the notion of responsibility and its priority. But should Husserl be criticized for not carrying out his project to its completion, as if this were possible? Is not Husserl saying here that the project must be carried on rather than carried out to completion, even if he himself was occasionally tempted by such absolutism? Levinas' critique of Husserl, and Hegel also in this regard, as well as the whole history of transcendental idealism, seems to be in need of some qualification, as we shall endeavor to show.<sup>6</sup>

In The Crisis the transformation of the whole person through practicing the epokhe becomes, as Husserl says, a "vocation," a "habit," a way of life, a practice that is taken up every day as an ongoing intersubjective self-transformation. And in a statement which seems to be a harbinger of Levinas' future work, particularly as we are focusing on it in this present study, Husserl says that this vocation is the "quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers, our inner personal vocation (which) bears within itself at the same time the responsibility for the true being of mankind."<sup>7</sup> Philosophers are to be "functionaries of mankind." Over and above its reflective aspects, there is an inherently practical orientation to phenomenology, an ethical dimension, involved in the practice of the epokhe.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Husserl claims that "together with the new task (of phenomenology) and its universal apodictic ground, the practical possibility of a new philosophy will prove itself: through its execution."<sup>9</sup> The radicality of this dimension of praxis, as ethical action, is that it is a process whose uniqueness rests in its being the ground of its own being, the result of the constitutive dimension of intentionality brought to reflective consciousness through the epokhe.<sup>10</sup> The constitutive operation of the

transcendental "ego" in The Crisis, unlike the solipsistic ego of Ideas I, involves the orchestration of a spiritual community which, through the practice of the epokhe, achieves the mature development of ontic validity in self-evident experience and which now begins taking "responsibility" for itself and all others in the world, as well as for the world itself which it is creating.<sup>11</sup> It is true, of course, that this "community" is a society of transcendental monads. But it is clear that Husserl's monads have "windows." For Levinas, however, windows will not be enough. His 'monads' will have windows and doors, as we will see in Chapter Seven.

In Husserl's later formulations regarding the phenomenological method, there seems to be at least a partial response, consciously or not, to the critique posed by Levinas in The Theory of Intuition. There is an increased cognizance of the situatedness of consciousness in concrete life, the spiritual and moral dimensions of the reduction are brought out, the problem of historicity is at least raised, as well as the communal or intersubjective functioning of the epokhe.<sup>12</sup> In order to see Levinas' response to these apparent advances, we must turn back to him once more to consider several additional studies written after The Theory of Intuition regarding these questions.

### 3 Levinas' Reevaluation of Husserl

#### 3.1 Representation and Intentionality

In Levinas' essay entitled "L'oeuvre d'Edmond Husserl," published in 1949, and contrary to Adriaan Peperzak's assessment in his article "Phenomenology -- Ontology — Metaphysics: Levinas' Perspective on Husserl and Heidegger," that Levinas "reaffirmed and deepened his former

"criticisms" here — although it is somewhat difficult to determine exactly what Peperzak's position is since he also says that Levinas' "attitude toward Husserl's work seems to be more positive and his criticisms milder" — we find significant alterations in "L'oeuvre" of the critique advanced in The Theory of Intuition.<sup>13</sup> For similar reasons, we also cannot accept Craig Vasey's judgement that "Levinas rejected the Husserlian characterization of intentionality from the beginning, finding it...too traditionally intellectualist," and that "from the outset, Levinas' own philosophical research has been oriented differently from Husserl's..." concerning "the meaning of intentionality."<sup>14</sup> Although there is some truth to these assertions, it should be noted that Levinas himself says in many places that, despite his disagreements with and extensions of Husserl's thought, his own philosophy has been oriented to Husserl's phenomenology all along. This indebtedness is announced in the very opening pages of The Theory of Intuition and is reiterated time and again throughout the entirety of Levinas' philosophical corpus up to his most recent work. In fact, in the closing pages of Otherwise Than Being, published in 1974, Levinas affirms that his "analyses claim to be in the spirit of Husserlian philosophy, whose letter has been the recall in our epoch of the permanent phenomenology, restored to its rank of being a method for all philosophy ...," and that his own work "remains faithful to intentional analysis...."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Vasey does not take into account a number of pertinent texts regarding Levinas' position on intentionality, most notably, "L'oeuvre," which is crucial to a thorough understanding of Levinas' ambivalent relationship with Husserl.

Concerning "L'oeuvre," it should be pointed out that here Levinas had available to him what are currently designated as parts I and II of The Crisis, published in 1936. Part III was still in stenographic form at

the time of Husserl's death in 1937 and was unavailable to Levinas at the time he wrote "L'oeuvre."<sup>16</sup> "L'oeuvre" represents a reinterpretation of Levinas' original understanding of the absoluteness of consciousness or transcendental intentionality in Husserl's system. This leads Levinas to explicitly retract his earlier judgement regarding Husserl's "intellectualism" and primacy of theoretical contemplation, and, in addition, to now view what had been indicated by this critique in a much more positive manner. Levinas' motive for this change revolves around, in the first place, a new understanding of the importance of meaning in Husserl's method, which is central to the workings of intentionality and the process of constitution, and, secondly, a new stress on the notion of freedom, as André Orianne points out, which goes to the very heart of the phenomenological reduction.<sup>17</sup> Let us look more closely at these developments.

As we saw above, in The Theory of Intuition Levinas had interpreted the objectifying act of intentionality, called variously by Husserl identification, the synthesis of an ideal object, presentation, and representation, as a primarily theoretical act on the part of consciousness. Apparently, at that time, Levinas understood by this term "theoretical" more or less what it means for the natural sciences: "We have seen that acts of valuing, willing, etc., in all their forms, are based on representation," a "preeminence of theory (that) has never been denounced by Husserl."<sup>18</sup> In Levinas' view, this dogmatic and unjustified juxtaposition of "the theoretical, practical, and affective life"<sup>19</sup> resulted from a primacy accorded to abstract contemplation that devalued the world "as a center of action, as a field of activity or of care...."<sup>20</sup> In these texts from The Theory of Intuition, the process of constitutive representation, the synthesis of intentionality, is understood as a

fundamentally reflective act of consciousness performed by a self-sufficient Ego removed from the concrete, lived world.

In "L'oeuvre," however, representation is reinterpreted in the context of the bestowal of meaning which Husserl calls "Sinngebung": "The relation of intentionality," Levinas says in this article, "has nothing to do with relations between real objects. It is an act of positing a meaning (Sinngebung)."<sup>21</sup> The act of positing meaning in the process of constitution, in which the whole inner life of the person participates, is not only an aspect of theoretical acts, but of all intentional acts of consciousness, since consciousness, in all its forms, understood as intentionality, is exactly the constitution of the meant or ideal object which takes place prior to reflection. In "L'oeuvre" Levinas puts it this way:

The act of positing the object—the objectifying act—is a synthesis of identification. Through this synthesis the whole of one's inner being (toute vie spirituelle) participates in representation; or again, through it Husserl determines, in the final analysis, the very notion of representation. Representation is not, therefore, a concept opposed to action or feeling. It is situated before these.<sup>22</sup>

It may help to illustrate Levinas' understanding here of the notion of representation using as an example a simple act of desire. In the act of desiring something, the desiring which desires the desirable object, the intentional component, involves a movement that is prior to the representation of the object to the contemplation of theoretical consciousness. It is this initial movement of desire that constitutes the desirable object as desirable, and not the other way around. The intentional act of consciousness must be distinguished from its object:

Intentionality is not, therefore, a portion of representative thought. All feeling is feeling of a felt, all desire, desire of a desired, etc. What is aimed at here is not an object of contemplation. The felt, the wished for, the desired,

are not things.<sup>23</sup>

To continue our example, in the act of desiring its object, the desire preceeds the objectification of the desired object and is thus prior to its appearance as an object for reflective thought; it is the intuitive ground for the possibility of this. It is this intentional object to which empiricism mistakenly imputes the weight of substance, wholly independent of thought, and which then finds itself in the cul de sac of needing a third criterion for judging the adequate correspondence between this being and its representational thought, such as ousia, Substance, Esse, etc., a problem which became Heidegger's starting point in Being and Time.

For phenomenology, however, the intuition of intentionality, as Levinas has shown, brings us into pre-thematic contact with the intentional object given to consciousness. That which appears as the desired object for thought was first approached or contacted straightaway in the aim of the desiring intention. The intentional object, Levinas argues in another article, "Notes sur le sens" (1979), is not co-extensive with the object of reflective thought.<sup>24</sup> Being conscious is the precondition for knowing reflectively that we exist consciously. It is not knowledge of our existence as consciousness that proves we are conscious, the Cartesian view; it is because we already exist consciously that we can know it. Thus in "Notes" Levinas says that "the notion of intentionality, understood correctly, signifies both that being orders the modes of access to being, and that being is in accordance with the intention of consciousness: it signifies an exteriority in immanence and the immanence of all exteriority."<sup>25</sup> This hermeneutic understanding will lead to the development of two distinct levels of intentionality in Levinas' work, representational and non-representational intentionality, which we will investigate in detail in Chapter Six. But for now let it

suffice to point out that, according to our analysis, it is the possibility of a non-representational 'intentionality' that is the ontological underpinning of Levinas' whole theory of the priority of responsibility, which is undoubtedly why he returns to this difficult issue over and over again from various perspectives throughout his philosophical corpus.

Although this reciprocal distinction between meaning and being is present in Husserl's thought, in The Crisis, for example, where he sees the ethical praxis of the reduction as the ground of its own being, it does become more focused and developed in Heidegger's ontology and in Levinas' later work.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in "L'oeuvre" Levinas concludes that in light of the central importance of these reconsiderations to a proper understanding of Husserl's phenomenology, and "which give to his work its unique countenance," as well as to the entire phenomenological movement, "it is perhaps unjust to qualify it as intellectualism."<sup>27</sup>

It would only be fair to the position taken by Peperzak, Vasey, and other commentators to admit, however, that one can also find texts where Levinas is apparently critical of Husserl on this same point. In "La Signification et le sens," for example, which was published prior to "Notes," where Levinas is discussing the positivist manner of reducing meaning to the contents of consciousness, he says that Husserl, "besides marking the end of this notion of signification, continues -- and it is one of the ambiguities (perhaps fecund) of his philosophy -- intellectualism." And this: "Is not Husserl's transcendental philosophy a species of positivism refitting every signification to his transcendental inventory? Hyletic given and the 'bestowal of meaning' are minutely inventoried, as if he were assessing a stock portfolio...."<sup>28</sup> Yet even here there is a certain stuttering and hesitancy in these passages which

inclines us to give the later texts, "Notes," Otherwise Than Being, etc., more credence in trying to determine Levinas' fullest understanding of this issue. But we do not wish to eradicate the "perhaps fecund" ambiguity that is at the heart of Levinas' response to Husserl, since this would be contrary to the whole spirit of phenomenology as well as to Levinas' thought in particular. Rather, we would prefer to penetrate more deeply into Husserl's ambiguity concerning representation and Levinas' ambivalence concerning Husserl. In our view the source of the confusion concerning the question of representation is directly related to the role that sensation, perception, and temporality play in Husserl's general theory, themes that also occupy Levinas throughout his own phenomenological work and to which we must briefly turn our attention here, although it will be necessary to address these crucial issues again in order to come to an adequate understanding of the priority of responsibility in Levinas' philosophy.

### 3.2 Sensation and Temporality

We have seen that Husserl argues that all experience is conscious, all consciousness is intentional, and that all intentionality is grounded in the constitutive act of representation guided by intuition. Representation, as we have shown above, is the synthesizing of a meant object from the raw materials or contents of sensations, as Husserl refers to them in the Logical Investigations, hyle as he calls them in Ideas I.<sup>29</sup> This constitutive animation of hyle in the representation of the intentional object is an active synthesis. But this active synthesis is grounded in a deeper, perceptual level of sensation, a passive synthesis. This distinction of Husserl's, according to our analysis, will become of central importance to Levinas' argument for a non-representational

intentionality as the ontological foundation of the priority of responsibility.

Regarding sensual perceptions, Husserl distinguishes between the act of sensing (Empfinden) and the quality sensed (Empfindenes).<sup>30</sup> In Ideas I, from which Levinas adopts his position in The Theory of Intuition and, to a lesser extent, in "L'oeuvre," this distinction focuses on the animation of the contents of consciousness (hyle), given in Abschattungen, and thus the idealism of Husserl's thought, whereas in considering the analogous nature of the relation between the act of sensing and the sensed object, the resemblance, which goes back to the Logical Investigations, there is more of a realistic emphasis upon sensual experience because the idea of analogy presupposes an objective analogate, a situation that posed a problem for Husserl because it works against his attack of naturalism, the ground of empirical science from which he was trying to distinguish his philosophical "science." Under the influence of Merleau-Ponty, however, and with a recognition of the important role of the body and its motility in understanding sensation, the analogous relation, rather than the constitutive role of animation, between sensing and the sensed is brought out in a more recent article by Levinas, "Intentionalité and Sensation," first published in 1965.<sup>31</sup> It is this tension between idealism and realism in Husserl's thought that has contributed to some of the difficulty in understanding the whole question of intentionality, even for Levinas.<sup>32</sup>

Although Husserl always held to the distinction between hyletic contents as "psychical stuff," on the one hand, and "the quality of objects attended to in transcendent intention" on the other, despite numerous texts which preserve the notion of resemblance in the experiential process of perceptual sensation, it seems as if, in the

process of sensing, there is a collapse between the act and its object, even if we know reflectively that there is not an identification.<sup>33</sup> From the perspective of the natural attitude, for example, the heft I feel while holding a dumbbell in my hand is improperly 'identified' with the object hefted. This imputation of the quality to the object is reflected in the ordinary statement that "The dumbbell is heavy," meaning the 'heaviness' is somehow in the dumbbell — when it is clearly my hand and my body that is feeling or sensing the heft. What leads to this mistaken impression of the natural attitude is the immediate experience of the sensible relation between my hand and the dumbbell as a continuous circuit of sensing/sensed. Husserl called these curious states of sensing/sensed Empfindnis in Ideen II.<sup>34</sup> "Empfindnis" is a difficult term to translate. Richard Cohen offers the rather colorful neologism: "a palpitation of self-sensing."<sup>35</sup> In "Intentionalité," Levinas suggests the interesting term "sentance," reminiscent of Derrida's "differance," as "expressing the diffuse character of this notion."<sup>36</sup> Whatever we call it, it is clear that this circuit of sensibility between sensing and the sensed always takes place in the instant of the present moment, which consequently brings into the picture the question of temporality. In Husserl's theory of time, this instant of sensible experience is the "Urimpression" or the "now-point."<sup>37</sup> In order to understand the relation of the Urimpression to sensation and intentionality, we must turn briefly to Husserl's understanding of temporality.

As is well known, Husserl distinguishes between "objective" time, constituted by past, present, and future, and "inner" or immanent time. Immanent time, although always situated within the automatically functioning horizons of retentions connected to the past, and protentions anticipating the future, takes place or happens in the eternal "now," the

Ur'impression, the cauldron of lived experience that cooks up, so to speak, all consciousness; an original passivity that is at the same time the initial spontaneity of primary intentionality.<sup>38</sup> The now-point, however, as the living or lived present, should not be thought of as a static duration of the same or a discreet point along a time line. It is a dynamic repetition or re-presentation in the etymological sense of this word, as Levinas points out in "La ruine de la représentation."<sup>39</sup>

The Ur'impression does have duration, but as repetition. It is a duration that never stands still, that overflows or surpasses every attempt to reduce it to a theme. It is the sensuous lived moment that is at the same time, as Levinas says, the "giver and the given."<sup>40</sup> The instant of the present moment, in Levinas' interpretation, is a diachronic surging or dissemination of life which overflows every intentional synthesis, and which distances the idea of representation in a phenomenological understanding from the naive view of 'presence' as a kind cross section of a flow, or a distinct point in a series of past, present, and future points. Here lies the ontological connection between sensual, bodily existence, and intentional consciousness. Being, taken in the context of the Ur'impression as a dehiscent sensibility of sensing and the sensed, undoes the proclivity of intentionality toward establishing a "sovereignty of representation," as this is mistakenly understood from the perspective of empiricism and realism. This undoing, issuing from "below," as it were, from an ontological dimension grounded in a phenomenological understanding of sensation, which was perhaps insufficiently considered by Husserl given his inclination toward idealism, is exactly what makes it nevertheless impossible to tag him with the epithet of an intellectualist bias. As Levinas points out in "La Ruine," "being is not only situated as correlative to thought but as

already founding the very thought which, meanwhile, constitutes it."<sup>41</sup> It is this paradoxical reciprocity at the ontological level that will be the starting point for Levinas' initial understanding of subjectivity which, in turn, will be understood within the context of responsibility.

This should not be taken to mean, however, that Husserl did not accord reflective thought and knowledge a central place in his philosophy, or that Levinas himself disparages reflection in any way.<sup>42</sup> Nor should this distinction be confused with the fact that in his analysis of intersubjectivity, as the face-to-face relation, Levinas also goes beyond intentionality, from "above," that is, ethically, since it is his contention that the face, in its "indiscernible otherness," cannot be reduced to the noesis/noema structure of intentionality without doing violence to the Other.<sup>43</sup> As we shall see in a later chapter of our study, Levinas will argue that the face-to-face relation of intersubjectivity is exactly where intentionality, as the foundation of all knowledge, will be superceded by the priority of responsibility, which goes beyond the knowledge-relation to the object. But this is not a deepened critique or wholesale rejection of Husserl, as Peperzak and Vasey seem to think. It is, as Levinas himself has certainly come to recognize, a continuation and extension of Husserl's phenomenological program. To truly follow a master, you must leave the master and become one yourself.

In the context of these new considerations, it is now possible to understand better the positive value of reflection and knowledge in Husserl's thought, where it is associated, clearly and vigorously in The Crisis, with freedom.

### 3.3 Freedom and Evidence

In The Crisis Husserl returns to the formulation espoused in antiquity by

Socrates and Plato, that genuine knowledge, epistemé as opposed to doxa, is morally liberating. "For this renewed 'Platonism,'" Husserl says, "this means not only that man should be changed ethically (but that) the whole human surrounding world, the political and social existence of mankind, must be fashioned anew through free reason, through the insights of a universal knowledge."<sup>44</sup> The method for accomplishing this freedom is, of course, the epokhe, the phenomenological reduction. The purpose of the epokhe, in Husserl's view in The Crisis, is the accomplishment of a liberation from the narrow view of knowledge held by the scientific thought of his day, a crisis which "indicates nothing less than that its genuine scientific character, the whole manner in which it has set its task and developed a methodology for it, has become questionable." And, he adds, philosophy itself has become caught up in this crisis insofar as it threatens to succumb to skepticism, irrationalism, and mysticism.<sup>45</sup> The practice of bracketing the thesis of the the natural world, with all of its taken-for-granted validities, assumptions, presuppositions, prejudices, and interests, is intended to make it possible for the phenomenologist to see how things really are — not that this could ever be held fast in "definitive statements," Husserl admits, which would be a capitulation to the very crisis that the epokhe was designed to overcome.<sup>46</sup>

The epokhe was considered by Husserl to be the only approach possible to truth because it involved a steadfast refusal to accept without question what was taken for granted by those living in the natural attitude:

We perform the epokhe -- we who are philosophizing in a new way — as a transformation of the attitude which precedes it not accidentally but essentially, namely, the attitude of natural human existence which, in its total historicity, in life and science, was never before interrupted. But it is necessary,

now, to make really transparent the fact that we are not left with a meaningless, habitual abstention; rather, it is through this abstention that the gaze of the philosopher in truth first becomes fully free: above all, free of the strongest and most universal, and at the same time most hidden, intergal bond, namely, of the pre-givenness of the world.<sup>47</sup>

Now it was Levinas' criticism in The Theory of Intuition that the phenomenological reduction is more than a mere epistemological corrective, as he believed, at that time, that Husserl understood it. According to Levinas, under Heidegger's influence, the phenomenological reduction opens up a genuine ontological dimension which Husserl apparently failed to see. But in "L'oeuvre" Levinas says that "The Crisis...underlines in a particularly clear manner the theme of freedom conceived on the model of evidence which seems to us to dominate all (of Husserl's) philosophy and which we have come to determine from his theory of intentionality, time, and the phenomenological reduction."<sup>48</sup> But what does Husserl mean by evidence?

Evidence is Husserl's term for the relative fullness between a signifying intention and the accompanying intuition, which, as we saw above, is the phenomenological definition of truth.<sup>49</sup> What is important about the full adequation, or evidence, of Husserl's understanding of the absoluteness of consciousness arrived at through the transcendental epokhe, is that this is the ultimate guarantor of phenomenology's claim to apodicticity, as Husserl had already indicated in Section 46 of Ideas. Evidence, however, for Husserl, is not a feeling. It is the adequation of thought to the presence of the intuited object, a process of synthesis or representation which, as we showed in the previous chapter, on the one hand, happens all at once, and on the other, is open-ended. "The process of identification can be infinite. But it achieves closure in evidence — in the presence of the object in person before consciousness."<sup>50</sup> Evidence is intentionality in search of itself, a light always looking to

illuminate itself, somewhat akin to Aristotle's or Aquinas' understanding of the Agent Intellect. Levinas points out that "to say that the foundation of every intention, even affective or relative ones, is grounded on representation, that is to conceive the whole interior life on the model of light."<sup>51</sup> Evidence is the phenomenological reduction at work, "a situation without example," Levinas says. "It is always active." "The relation between subject and object is not a simple presence of the one to the other but comprehension of the one by the other, intellection; and this intellection is evidence."<sup>52</sup> It is the very accomplishment of freedom. "The light of evidence is the only bond with being that puts us in a posture of being the origin of being, that is to say, in the posture of freedom."<sup>53</sup> This will not be sufficient, for Levinas, in terms of the intersubjective question, as was pointed out above, but up to that point he is in agreement with Husserl.

It is this freedom that Husserl is getting at when he says the epokhe places us "above the pre-givenness of the validity of the world."<sup>54</sup> But this "above" is not to assume a position of abstract contemplation, as Levinas originally thought in The Theory of Intuition. It is to be freed from the constraints of the naivete of the common, substantialist view of the world so that we can see things as they appear within the horizon of our constituting them as meaningful. Thus, Levinas says, "evidence and reason (understood phenomenologically) are, above all, the very manifestations of freedom."<sup>55</sup> And it is through this liberation, achieved through the phenomenological reduction — where "science" is not equal to technique — that phenomenology is "at the same time the perfection of science and the genuine interior life."<sup>56</sup> Phenomenology, Levinas says, is not simply a supplement to science. The basic impulse of phenomenology is not defined by that of science. On the contrary, it is the function of the destiny of spirit and its mode of existence that gives

birth to science itself. It is the manifestation of the dignity of the spirit, which is freedom."<sup>57</sup>

The Husserlian understanding of "science," and the "Reason" underlying it, in no way means the direct grasp or theoretical manipulation of an empirical object in an abstract or positivistic sense. As Levinas points out, in another reflection on Husserl's philosophy, "Réflexions sur la 'technique' phénoménologique," published in 1959, "to do phenomenology — that is to denounce as naive the direct vision of the object," even though Husserl's work was often misinterpreted as promoting this.<sup>58</sup> Phenomenology is not a deductive science, like mathematics or logic; it is "neither deduction nor induction."<sup>59</sup> It is more of a certain style of questioning than the following of a rigidly fixed set of propositions. It is a method in the eminent sense of being an essential openness and receptivity to experience without prejudice. "The phenomenological reduction would open up," Levinas asserts, "behind the naive vision of things, the ground of a radical experience, allowing reality, in its ultimate structure, to appear."<sup>60</sup> Phenomenology must be understood in this sense of actively letting-appear, as Heidegger indicates with the term "Gelassenheit"<sup>61</sup> and what Husserl means by the necessity for perpetually renewing the practice of the phenomenological reduction. Phenomenology "must be practiced," Levinas says in "Réflexions," "among the most varied domains" such as mathematics, psychoanalysis and Marxism. "It is necessary to do a phenomenology of the sciences, of Kantism, of Socialism, even a phenomenology of phenomenology itself."<sup>62</sup> Phenomenology, in Husserl's view, is a science whose truth involves a notion of Reason which hearkens back to the Greeks where the True, the Good, and the Beautiful were still unified in their distinctiveness, and where understanding and ethical action went hand-in-hand. These were then all considered to be necessary members of a

single body. But, as Husserl says, positivism has decapitated philosophy.<sup>63</sup>

The practice of phenomenology, far from being a process of abstract contemplation or lifeless argumentation, is a continual searching for the fullness of understanding beneath the presuppositions of a culture which, while it makes quotidian intercourse possible, at the same time accomplishes this through the diminution and sacrifice of freedom and self-fulfillment. It is the task of the phenomenological philosopher, in Husserl's view, living and practicing the epoché, to stand against this diminution and sacrifice. "The phenomenology of Husserl is," Levinas says, "in the final analysis, a philosophy of freedom, of freedom accomplished as and defined through consciousness; of freedom which not only characterizes the activity of being, but which places itself before being and in relation to which being is constituted."<sup>64</sup> As we shall see, however, in developing his notion of the priority of responsibility, Levinas will come to view this conception of freedom as not only derivative of a more fundamental situation, but as ethically dangerous.

#### 4 Preliminary Conclusions

We have investigated the phenomenological method developed by Husserl, and evaluated Levinas' critical response to it. We have shown how Husserl's position underwent various transformations from his earlier to his later works, particularly in regard to the nature and purpose of the phenomenological reduction and its relation to intentionality, consciousness, sensation, freedom, and science, even if these alterations are nothing more than inflections of his realism/idealism ambivalence.

Likewise, we have noted Levinas' reevaluation of some of the objections he raised in The Theory of Intuition concerning Husserl's "intellectualism," primacy of theory, and failure to deal with affective and ethical domains, together with the ramifications of these new interpretations for achieving a better understanding of the general significance of Husserlian phenomenology.

This interchange between Husserl and Levinas should not be construed as an attempt to determine who is right and who is wrong, which has not been our purpose here. What we have unveiled in our analyses is thought-in-progress, the living thought of persons who sometimes woke up in the morning with a hail to the day, and sometimes with a headache. What we have discovered is the presumptuousness of reducing philosophical thought to categorical formulas. What is being written here is one perspective in a walk around Husserl's tree. It does not claim to be the final or absolute perspective. Nor should this be the goal of philosophy. Philosophy begins and ends with amazement, which is perhaps why Plato's dialogues leave the reader with more questions than answers. Aristotle, with his desire to put wonder to rest, would ruin "the walk under the noon-time sun" that philosophy is meant to be.<sup>65</sup>

Our general goal thus far has been to focus on the question of Husserl's phenomenological methodology as a propaedeutic study geared toward creating an opening into the corpus of Levinas' own original thought. At the very least, it should be clear at this point that one will never be able to achieve an adequate understanding of Levinas' philosophy without having a basic notion of his deep and nuanced connection to Husserl. The obvious lack of this, together with the oversimplification and acceptance of entrenched opinion on the part of some Levinasian commentators, has contributed to much of the

misinterpretation of his work. Throughout the entirety of his present philosophical thought Levinas returns to Husserl again and again, sometimes criticizing and surpassing him, sometimes falling back on him for inspiration and guidance, but always with him in mind. He has a similar relation to Heidegger and Descartes. It is always necessary to be cognizant of the larger picture in which Levinas is working. With Levinas, when you miss the forest for the trees, you necessarily miss the trees as well.

In the context of what we have learned from these methodological considerations, let us conclude this chapter by distilling from our reflections various themes announced in Levinas' relation to Husserl that will be of particular importance to the development of Levinas' notion of responsibility and its priority in his ethical philosophy.

#### 4.1 Ontology

In The Theory of Intuition, undoubtedly under Heidegger's influence, the nature and purpose of the phenomenological reduction, of phenomenology as a whole, entails certain ontological ramifications. The method of a science implies a theory of being. The ontology of substance, presupposed by the positive sciences, is put into question in the process of bracketing the thesis of the natural world. In order to fully understand the implications of this, how Levinas will attempt a certain retrieval of a substantivist notion of being without getting caught up in objectivism, it will be necessary to turn to Levinas' ambivalent reaction to Heidegger's work in Being and Time. If Heidegger was the secret weapon behind Levinas' critique of Husserl in The Theory of Intuition, he will himself become the target in Existence and Existents and afterwards (particularly after 1940), when Levinas begins working out his own

ontological phenomenology. This will be an aspect of our general concern in the following chapter.

#### 4.2 Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Included in any theory of Being, and perhaps central to it, is an understanding of human being. Already in Husserl's work, inherent in his understanding of intentionality, constitution, and the epoché, there is a new understanding of subjectivity which was never adequately followed out by Husserl. He does wrestle with this problem in the Cartesian Meditations and The Crisis, where he talks about community, as we saw, but this is a community of monads which leads to problems, for instance, regarding children, the insane, and animals in the context of intersubjectivity and "the correction principle" by which communal monads are supposed to keep one another on the right path.<sup>66</sup> In our view, the problem here seems to be that Husserl remains stuck within the theory of intentionality, which is an effective approach to understanding the relations between subject and object, but not for understanding concrete human relations.

It is clear, however, for both Husserl and Levinas, that the subject is not merely the passive recipient of external stimuli, as in the understanding of empirical science. The subject constitutes the thought of being and, at the same time, in its own being, is that which is constituted by that thought. This creative potential of the subject, in essence, is Husserl's answer to the crisis that he believed was threatening Western civilization in the form of an unreflective and manifold techne which had lost its unity of self-understanding and was unwittingly bent on its own self-destruction.

We will see that there are two notions of the subject in Levinas' work, both of which emerge from the Husserlian framework of sensation,

temporality, and intentionality, and which also go beyond it. They will both constitute an attack, not so much on Husserl, as on the notion of subjectivity identified with a purely idealistic ontology of being — one attack from "below," and the other from "above." Levinas' first notion of subjectivity will arise from "below," out of the instant, the Urimpression, as a dynamic, self-creating freedom separated from the anonymity of mere animal being, i.e., the simple enjoyment of the world; innocence. This subject, eternally recommencing its being at every instant — the hopeful promise and the potentiality of being, intrinsic to being itself, the self-justification of being — will be understood as a mastering of being and achieving the sovereign freedom of consciousness Husserl envisioned in The Crisis. The second understanding of subjectivity in Levinas' philosophy will be defined by the concept of ethical responsibility, surpassing intentionality, consciousness, and knowledge, as well as the understanding of subjectivity as freedom, from "above," that is, ethically. Here subjectivity will be a being-subjected-to rather than a subjecting mastery, as we will see.

#### 4.3 Active/Passive

One cannot help but wonder, however, despite the epistemological and ontological value of the theory of intentionality and the phenomenological reduction, if the withdrawal required by the bracketing of the thesis of the natural world — although the natural world must certainly still be lived through, as Husserl points out — does not result in a passivity in the subject that works against effective action in the socio-political domain. There is an active dimension to the subject, as we saw in Husserl's work, in terms of the process of constitution and evidence, but how is one to take a position "above" the world, as the epokhe requires,

and still be effective in it? This same issue will arise again in Levinas philosophy insofar as responsibility will be understood as a "passivity more passive than any passivity," a "donation" of oneself to the other that stands in sharp contrast to Hobbes' "war of all against all." Although it was Levinas who charged Husserl with assigning first place to a contemplatio aloof from action, we will see that this tension will arise again in Levinas' work where the ethical, understood as a perpetual challenge to the political, is more of a critical re-action than effective action itself.

#### 4.4 Ethics and Freedom

We have seen that there is an ethical dimension to Husserl's philosophy involving a liberation based on the ideal of scientific knowledge as prescribed by certain Greek thought: to know the Good is to do the Good. But Levinas will reverse the terms here since, based on his notion of responsibility, we are already doing the Good before we know it, although in what sense this is true will have to be clarified. Responsibility, in the fullest sense, according to Levinas, is not something that results from a clear idea of what I should do, i.e., from my freedom. In the ontological order, we are called, commanded to be responsible without being asked, prior to the freedom of choice. It is not a matter of Hamlet's "To be or not to be?" where responsibility is concerned. That is not the question for Levinas. To be, it will be argued, is already to be responsible. For Husserl, knowledge is primary because it is liberating; for Levinas, we are already 'liberated' by a responsibility that is the ground of all possible knowledge. Consequently, it is also prior to the possibility of freedom and non-freedom, as we will see. It is not that we must act responsibly because we are free. Contrary to

Heidegger, Sartre, and Hobbes, Levinas will argue that the ground of human being is neither being-toward-death, nothingness, nor "a war of all against all." It is a "being-for-the-other," i.e., responsibility, which makes genuine freedom both possible and not possible.

But let us not leap too far ahead of ourselves here. In order to fully understand Levinas' radical variations on the theme of responsibility, which arise for him, as we have tried to show, in the context of Husserl's phenomenology, we must first look more closely at their ontological underpinning in the context of Levinas' tumultuous relation with Heidegger which is the subject of the following chapter.

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1. C, III, A, 43, p. 155.
  2. C, III, A, 43, p. 154.
  3. C, Appndx., N, p. 338.
  4. C, III, A, 43, p. 154.
  5. C, II, 15, p. 74.
  6. Regarding Hegel. see Robert Bernasconi, "Levinas Face to Face — With Hegel," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology 13 (1982): 267-76.
  7. C, I, 7, p. 17; emphasis added.
  8. C, I, 3, p. 9.
  9. C, I, 7, p. 18.
  10. C, III, A, 53, p. 181.
  11. C, III, A, 47, p. 163-164.
  12. C, III, 55, p. 188
  13. Adriaan Peperzak, "Phenomenology — Ontology — Metaphysics: Levinas' Perspective on Husserl and Heidegger," Man and World 16 (1983): 114.
  14. Craig R. Vasey, Emmanuel Levinas: from Intentionality to Proximity, "Philosophy Today" 25 (Fall 1981): 180.
  15. OBBE, p. 183.
  16. C, Trans. Intro., pp. xvi-xviii.
  17. André Orianne's brief introductory essay to ThI has been most helpful here.
  18. ThI, p. 132 / p. 190.
  19. ThI, p. 134 / p. 193.
  20. ThI, p. 119 / p. 174.
  21. "L'oeuvre," in DERN, p. 22; my translation.
  22. "L'oeuvre," p. 22.
  23. "L'oeuvre," pp. 22-23.
  24. Levinas, "Notes sur le sens," in DDQV, p. 231; see also, "Beyond Intentionality," trans. K.McLaughlin, in A. Montefiore, ed., Philosophy in France Today (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1983), pp. 100-15, a

shorter version of "Notes" but the translation was unacceptable for our purposes.

25. "Notes," p. 241; my translation.
26. "L'oeuvre," p. 51.
27. "L'oeuvre," p. 23.
28. Emmanuel Levinas, "La Signification et le sens," Revue de Metaphysique Morale, 2 (1964): 126; "Meaning and Sense," in Collected Papers, trans. A. Lingis (The Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1987), p. 76; my translation.
29. Ids, 85, p. 226.
30. LI, p. 574.
31. Emmanuel Levinas, "Intentionalité and Sensation" in DEHH, pp. 145-162.
32. Orianne, Trans. Intro. p. xviii.
33. "Intentionalité," in DEHH, p. 149; my translation.
34. Husserl, Ideen II, p. 153.
35. Richard Cohen, "Emmanuel Levinas: Happiness is a Sensational Time," Philosophy Today 25 (1981): 200.
36. "Intentionalité," p. 157, n. 1.
37. Edmund Husserl, The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness, ed. M. Heidegger, trans. J. S. Churchill (Indiana: Indiana U. Press, 1964), p. 148.
38. "L'oeuvre," p. 41.
39. Emmanuel Levinas, "La ruine de la représentation," in DEHH, p. 130.
40. "Ruine," p. 132.
41. "Ruine," pp. 130-31.
42. "L'oeuvre," p. 50.
43. "Notes," p. 242.
44. C, I, 3, p. 8.
45. C, I, 1, p. 3.
46. C, III, A, 52, p. 178.
47. C, III, A, 41, p. 151.
48. "L'oeuvre," p. 43.

49. ThI, pp. 75-78 / pp. 114-119.
50. "L'oeuvre," p. 24.
51. Ibid.; see also my paper "On the Intellect as Form and Light in the Philosophy of St. Thomas," presented at the 22nd Intl. Cong. on Medieval Studies, U. of Western Mich., Kalamazoo, MI, May 7-10, 1987.
52. Ibid.
53. "L'oeuvre," p. 25.
54. C, III, A, 40, p. 150.
55. "L'oeuvre," p. 43.
56. Emphasis added.
57. "L'oeuvre," p. 45.
58. "Réflexions," in DEHH, p. 114; my translation.
59. "Réflexions," p. 112.
60. "Réflexions," pp. 111-112.
61. Martin Heidegger, Gelassenheit, (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959); Discourse On Thinking, trans. J.M. Anderson and E.H. Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966.)
62. "Réflexions," p. 111.
63. C, I, 3, p. 9.
64. "L'oeuvre," p. 49.
65. Emmanuel Levinas, "Questions et reponses," Le Nouveau Commerce 36-37 (1977): 75.
66. C, III, A, 55, pp. 186-189.