

Chapter 6

REPRESENTATIONAL INTENTIONALITY AND METAPHYSICAL DESIRE

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we traced Levinas' analysis of the existent's achievement of separation in the hypostasis of self-assertion or individuality. Establishing the existent as a separate individual, wholly responsible for its own continuing 'creation' out of or over and against the undifferentiated anonymity of existence, is necessary for guaranteeing the freedom of the existent and for making possible authentic relation with other existents. In fact, the establishment of the inwardness or interiority of the separate individual is exactly what 'produces' exteriority, since authentic relation necessitates two separate individuals.

But the self-consciousness of hypostasis is not yet reflective consciousness of the world; it is a movement toward this. Contrary to Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's self-comprehension within the horizontal structure of Being, Levinas situates the existent in an affective stasis which involves a radical solitude. In Existence and Existents this hypostasis is accomplished in the instant of establishing a position through the effort of action; in Totality and Infinity, however, the analysis of separation will focus on the individuating impact of the home and labor, within the structure of the feminine and the enjoyment of the

elements of the world, an analysis which we will take up in the following chapter of our study. For now, what is important is to see that freedom, consciousness, knowledge, enjoyment, and otherness all require a being which locates in itself the self-assertive responsibility for itself, i.e., a free being. Thus, the analysis of hypostasis overcomes the threat of a determinism which would usurp the sovereign dignity of the individual. But this results in a concomitant problem. In establishing the radical separateness of the individual existent, Levinas is confronted with the threat of solipsism. If the existent is a radically free being, this freedom is also a prison of solitude.

In this chapter we will look at Levinas' analysis of how the existent attempts to deal with the existential solitude and suffering attendant upon its freedom and individuality in the search for salvation. According to Levinas, the existent attempts to evade the burden of its solitude and freedom, in general, in two ways: first, by reducing the Other to an object of knowledge, i.e., a representation, and, secondly, by reducing the Other to an object of enjoyment or use. Unfortunately, these two relations with the other fail to achieve a genuine transcendence toward the Other, and it is transcendence alone, in Levinas' view, that would satisfactorily overcome the existent's being stuck with itself in the immanent freedom of solitude.

It is presupposed by Levinas, as well as by other existentialist thinkers — and Levinas is certainly an 'existentialist' in this regard — that the solitude or separateness of freedom is something that the existent must somehow overcome. For Levinas, unlike Nietzsche and Heidegger, authenticity is not to be accomplished by the solitary individual. This is a presupposition that we will question in this present chapter and deal with more specifically later. But it is

Levinas' position that there is a desire for transcendence inherent in the individual and evidenced in everyday life, a desire to escape the solitude of freedom and consciousness through the evasions of knowledge and enjoyment; a desire for salvation.

We will approach the two inauthentic evasions of separateness through an analysis of Levinas' distinction between two kinds of intentionality: representational intentionality at the base of the knowledge relation with the object, and non-representational intentionality at the base of enjoyment. This will give rise to a distinction between two types of desire: first, desire understood as need, the desiring of which returns to itself in satiety, and, secondly, metaphysical desire which feeds infinitely on its own desiring. Of the two types, we will be more concerned with the non-representational intentionality of enjoyment because it is this that will ultimately lead to the metaphysical desire which constitutes the transcendent relation with the otherness of the Other, and thus the genuine escape from the suffering and solitude of separateness. This will require that we look more closely at the whole question of sensation and sensibility once again, which can be confusing in the development of Levinas' work and which is most important because it will be through an analysis of sensation and not knowledge that Levinas will approach his understanding of the intersubjective relation with the otherness of the Other, i.e., exteriority or alterity, which is the locus of transcendence and ethical responsibility. Finally, we will conclude this chapter by looking at the whole question of the interrelation among non-representational intentionality, sensibility, desire, and transcendence in terms of Levinas' distinction between the naked body and the clothed body in the context of a certain confusion that arises in the development of his

ethical philosophy from the earlier to the more recent texts.

2 Intentionality as Representation and Enjoyment

In Totality and Infinity, and elsewhere, Levinas distinguishes between two levels of intentionality: the intentionality of representation and the 'intentionality' of enjoyment.¹ We will investigate these separately beginning with the intentionality of representation.

2.1 Intelligibility and Light

The intentionality of representation is understood more or less in terms of what Levinas claims Husserl meant by this: "the thesis that every intentionality is either a representation or founded on a representation," a thesis which was "an obsession" in all of Husserl's work and which "served as the pretext to accuse Husserl of intellectualism (as though that were an accusation!)." ² Husserl, in Levinas' view, wanted to be a master of light, wanted to make all regions of being clear and distinct objects of knowledge, following the lead of Descartes. Representational intentionality, the production of noemata, designates the proper domain of intelligibility, Levinas says, whose relations with understanding are "reducible to those established by light," the clarifying light of the constitutive aspect of this intentionality. ³ In this idealistic conception of knowledge, the otherness of the empirical object is reduced to the absolute present of the representation of that object by a pure, spontaneous freedom of the mind which "involves no passivity." ⁴ Here, again, we see shades of

Levinas' critique of Husserl's notion of the absoluteness of consciousness. Thus, in representational intentionality, the 'production' of the intentional object allows for no experience of the otherness of the Other since all exteriority, in being represented (or 're-presented' since an element of the past is always brought to bear in the constitution of the presence of the representation — oriented toward a horizon of future possibility), is reduced to the interiority of noemata. This reduction to an immanent present, what Levinas calls the 'sameness' of representational intentionality, is what leads to the whole problem of intersubjectivity in Husserl as was pointed out in the second and third chapters.

The world of consciousness is a lit-up world. Intelligibility is a "seeing" that takes place in the light, across an intentional distance. Light, whether it be from the actual or intelligible sun, illuminates a distance across which objects, actual or intelligible, can be appropriated as objects. The very "intentionality of intentions," Levinas claims, is that they possess at a distance, while "keeping one's hands free."⁵ The grasping hand follows the light of an intention which has "no searchlight preceding it," that is, which itself opens up the lit-up distance necessary for objectification.⁶ In this understanding of light, the knowing consciousness grasps the other across an intentional distance and appropriates it by reducing it to an intelligible object grasped by consciousness as a known object, a noema. Knowledge and consciousness, which always operate in the sphere of light, thus reduce the otherness of the Other to a presence, a property of the same (in the original sense of the word "ousia" which meant one's personal belongings and which Levinas understands as "meubles," furniture, as opposed to Heidegger's "Zeuge," tools), an identification or representation that is

mine. Thus, in Levinas' view, the light of representational knowledge cannot be a way for the existent to escape from the solitude of its existence since the otherness of the Other is destroyed in representational intentionality.

It should be noted, however, that Levinas makes it clear again here that he is in no way denouncing the intellectualism of representational intentionality, but is only concerned to show "its very strict development...."⁷ His basic point is that knowledge reduces the otherness of the Other to the sameness of an identity, so that the other disappears as an other, making genuine intersubjectivity, and thus an escape from solitude, impossible. Levinas calls the knowledge relation a reduction to "'the same' because in representation the I precisely loses its opposition to its object; the opposition fades, bringing out the identity of the I despite the multiplicity of its objects, that is, precisely the unalterable character of the I."⁸ In conscious knowledge, the 'I' remains shut up in its solitude. This is an important premise.

In the face of this analysis, what Levinas wants to argue is that this representational intentionality is "bound to a very different 'intentionality'," one which is not just a matter of "obscure thought" either, since even obscure thoughts would be aimed at some object. This 'intentionality' is "'wholly other'" than the light process of intelligibility.⁹ This knowing occurs in the body, the locus of sensation, as a kind of affectivity (not emotion) which is of an order different than that of the clarity of intelligibility, with its own form of 'intentionality' and its own peculiar 'light'.¹⁰

2.2 Nourishment and Sincerity

The second form of 'intentionality' Levinas distinguishes is the

"intentionality of enjoyment," which is not a positing of the world, but a taking up of a position by the existent which founds its world, accomplished by or as the body. Bodily or corporeal 'intentionality' must be understood differently than the intentionality of consciousness, although Levinas makes it clear that the intentionality of sensation is nevertheless a kind of 'luminosity' and 'knowing'.¹¹ In order to understand what Levinas is describing here it will be helpful to distinguish his understanding of sensation from that of Heidegger.

For Heidegger, the world in which Dasein finds itself is a world ordered by the comprehension of Being. It is a sensible world, to be sure. But sensibility here must be understood within the horizon of the nothingness which Dasein faces in taking up the task of self-appropriation. Heidegger saw that there was both an active and passive dimension to Dasein. In the context of a passive sensibility to the burden of Being, Dasein projects itself toward its future possibilities, takes what it is given and, over and against the resistance and weight of objectivity, actualizes itself and thereby fulfills the destiny of its individual being as well as the Being of the world. This staking out of its own possibilities for being, geared toward the future, is primarily a seeing, a comprehension as well as a leave-taking, a projection, an ex-stasis. Dasein ex-ists in a com-prehension of the Being of its being. It may be that the possibilities represented do not come about, but the task itself is understood as a thinking of Being.

This task is taken up in the context of anxiety because Dasein is essentially a temporal being, where temporality is understood as a finitude whose present is made up of past history integrated into future possibilities. Finitude is the manifestation of Dasein's temporal being,

understood within the horizon of the nothingness of death toward which Dasein is inevitably and inextricably thrown. But the possibilities for the future cannot be reduced to a representation of what is to come in the sense of a rehearsal. Dasein projects itself into an unknown future about which it is anxiously concerned. Being, for Heidegger, is that which is present, but which can never be separated from the essential absence which surrounds, threatens, and yet makes possible the lit-up space, the clearing in which ens is grasped as prae-ens. As Alphonso Lingis points out, this presencing is situated at the distance of an intentional consciousness which Heidegger understood as an exposure to the nothingness of Being. Commenting on Heidegger, Lingis puts it this way: "In boredom and anxiety nothingness nihilates; in antagonism, rebuke, failure, prohibition, privation, nothingness nihilates; in all distance, including all separateness by which things take their stand about us, nothingness nihilates."¹² Here is an important element of the tragic world view, the many-headed dragon at the gate of knowledge.

Our affective states, our sensibility, in Heidegger's view, reveal to us the weight and the gravity of Being from which we try to escape in the various forms of inauthenticity. We sense the remoteness of Being in anxiety, behind the sensible world, as an ultimate incomprehensibility enshrouded by nothingness and given in the assurance of our mortality and death, that is, our finitude. It is exactly this challenge of projecting ourselves into the possible, in the context of the limit of the impossible, that constitutes the challenge of authenticity. Thus we are solicited by the sensible world, the world of things to be used, but this very equipmental interlocking of usable things ultimately refers back to Dasein's concern for its existing and the possibilities Dasein projects for itself. As Levinas puts it in the context of commenting on

Heidegger's understanding of Dasein, "In turning on a bathroom switch we open up the entire ontological problem."¹³

For Levinas, however, the sensible world, as we have already seen, is not given in the horizon of a comprehension of Being and nothingness. The sensible world is not primarily a world of usable things. Beneath this it is basically a sensual plenum of light, color, sound, tastes, etc.; a plenum of enjoyment. And the initial orientation to this world does not come from a comprehending intentionality but from a bodily 'intentionality'. Bodily or corporeal 'intentionality' must be understood differently than the intentionality of representational thought, although Levinas does say that the 'intentionality' of sensation is still a kind of luminosity and knowing — but not that of intellectual representation; in fact, it involves a reversal of that intentionality.¹⁴ This bodily 'intentionality,' Levinas explains, "must be taken not in the neutralized and discarnate sense in which it figures in medieval philosophy and in Husserl, but in its ordinary meaning, with the sting of desire that animates it."¹⁵ Thus it will be necessary to distinguish two levels of desire in Levinas' philosophy, which will correspond to two levels of sensibility or affectivity, what might be called a "sensuous" sensibility and a "sensitive" sensibility.¹⁶ This will lead us into the subject matter of the following chapter and will function as a prelude to the investigation of Levinas' notion of sociality which is at the root of his understanding of transcendence. But first it will be helpful if we achieve a preliminary indication of this distinction here in connection with bodily or affective 'intentionality'.

To have a body, or better, to be a body, according to Levinas, is, basically, to occupy a site, a position, to be here in the present. This is the accomplishment of inwardness in hypostasis, as we have already

seen. It is this interiority which eventually will have to come to terms with the exteriority it finds itself interior to. Among the first forms of exteriority, closely linked to the il y a, is the sensual plenum which, in the beginning stages of the hypostasis, is a kind of indefinite mixture of sensual texture and the il y a. It is most fundamentally conceived as a source of nourishment and sustenance, properly associated with food and alimentation.¹⁷ This level of sensibility is prior to representation in that what is other is appropriated as "for me," in a bodily sense, it is a "living from..." as Levinas calls it in Totality and Infinity:

the body naked and indigent is the very reverting, irreducible to thought, of representation into life, of the subjectivity that represents into life which is sustained¹⁸ by these representations and lives from them.

Since intersubjective time has not yet entered into the picture of precognitive enjoyment or corporeal 'intentionality', we come up against the problem of understanding how the ambivalent I/self of the initial 'phase' of hypostasis has one foot in the being of an existent and the other in the anonymity of the il y a, a confusion in Levinas' thought that we will deal with directly in the final section of this chapter. This is complicated by the fact that in the situation of hypostasis there are neither temporal nor spacial parameters. But the body is precisely what constitutes, for Levinas, the notion of space; not yet time, however, which will come later in the context of the approach of the Other. As we have already seen, spatiality does not arise from my bodily relation to objects. The conditions are reversed. The possibility of relating to the objective world is grounded in my body. The objectification of the world and my bodily spacialization are conjoined in the same hermeneutical circle as sensing and the sensed. To assert

that a sense of space arises as the result of an existent's position to objects presupposes an already spacially existing existent representing both itself and the world to itself. But in the sensibility of enjoyment there is a reversal of this constitutive dimension of representation. Let us look at this more closely.

In the act of representation, the object is reduced to a noema that is wholly identical with itself. Thus it appears to reflective consciousness that it comes 'from me' and is completely present to me. Now, what Levinas wants to argue here is that a "reversal" takes place in enjoyment, in "living from" To be a body in the world, contrary to Heidegger, is not to be a thing among things.¹⁹ The body is what first defines the world as world. Consciousness is not located in some mysterious light process between our ears. The whole body is consciousness. When I feel a pain, for example, the pain does not exist 'in my head' but is always located somewhere in my body; it is 'in my left foot' or 'in my right arm'. The body itself is extended consciousness. It is the center of my world. Spatiality is thus defined by the body, and is not something added on to an already existing being. But whereas it is the body that gives me the world I perceive, the given world is also conditioned or constituted by the representation of that world, again, in a kind of hermeneutical circle of sensing and the sensed where the beginning is determined by the end while the end thus determined is already the condition for the possibility of this beginning.

When I am engaging my enemy in battle, for example, or when I am hammering raw metal into a shape, there is a tacit assumption in these negative acts, according to Levinas, that I am up against something that resists me, something exterior to me which I have not constituted, even

though I discover reflectively, that I am already involved in determining what I am here up against. "To assume exteriority," Levinas says, "is to enter into a relation with it such that the same determines the other while being determined by it."²⁰ The manner in which I am thus determined by what is other is precisely what Levinas means by the "living from ..." of enjoyment. It is as if, in performing the epokhe, in suspending the thesis of the natural world, Husserl forgot that it was exactly what was already there to be suspended that made the suspension possible. Without the body having already been in the world as that by which the world is given, there would be no thesis of the natural world to suspend in the epokhe. This is why Heidegger's understanding that the self and the world are always given together marks an advancement over Husserl. Levinas' problem with Heidegger's construal, however, is that Heidegger situates the relation of self and world within the horizon of comprehension and utility rather than in the more immediate process of enjoyment. For Levinas, "prior to being a system of tools," which refer to one another and ultimately to the care of Dasein for its existence, "the world is an ensemble of nourishments."²¹

Bodily contact with the world, what for Levinas would be the very worlding of the world, to use Heideggerian terminology, always overflows the reduction of the world to a noema, from which the existent nevertheless grasps the world as world. Eating, for example, Levinas says, "does not reduce itself to the set of gustative, olfactory, kinesthetic, and other sensations that would constitute the consciousness of eating."²² There is always a surplus of meaning which overflows the representation of the meant. Thus Levinas will conclude that "the body is a permanent contestation of the prerogative attributed to consciousness of 'giving meaning' to each thing; it lives as this contestation."²³ This

does not mean that in the satisfaction of need there is not a reduction of what is other than me to what becomes mine, and that in this the existent does not remain closed up in its solitude. But what is revealed in the surplus of enjoyment over the enjoyed is a disruption or reversal of the supposed primacy of constituting consciousness. And it is not merely that intelligibility finds itself confronted with the irrationality of the sensible, as if sensibility were confused thought, a position Levinas would ascribe to Kant. Here constituting consciousness finds itself to be the very condition of its own possibility, "as though the constitutive thought were stimulated by its own game, by its free play, as though freedom as a present absolute commencement found its condition in its own product, as though this product did not receive its meaning from a consciousness that ascribes meaning to being."²⁴ It is this reversal in the sensibility of enjoyment that will lead Levinas to locate in our bodily being in the world, the force of a responsibility that is prior to the freedom and responsibility that is determined after the world and the I have already been represented.

3 Interiority and Exteriority

In the context of his critique of Heidegger, we have been trying to establish in the present and previous chapters how Levinas orients the analysis which will lead to the establishment of the priority of responsibility. We have surveyed the first two movements of his orchestration, the escape from Being and the achievement of solitude, which, in fact, will eventually culminate, not only in the argument for the priority of responsibility, but in the very revelation of God in the

world as well.

The fact that the initial groping of Levinas' 'system' was jotted down in a Nazi stalag seems less insignificant at this point. We have seen in the analysis of hypostasis and sensation that it is in negative states that the preconceptual elements of positive states are revealed: laziness and fatigue reveal an original contract with existence; pain and suffering reveal the concrete immediacy of materiality. And in war, Levinas says in the "Preface" to Totality and Infinity, we see manifested the totalitarian visage of comprehension.²⁵ It was Levinas' face to face encounter with this horrible visage that inspired his agenda for an alternative to the priority of that intentionality which, in his mind, brought it about. But has he been able to fulfill the terms of his critique of Heidegger? Has Levinas been able to break with ontology, establish a new level of freedom, and demonstrate a meaningful alternative to Being and nothingness in his account of the genesis of the subject and his distinction between representational and non-representational intentionality? Perhaps it is premature to expect a full answer to these questions at this point of our study. But how much has Levinas been able to accomplish thus far?

It was suggested that Levinas' attempt to overcome the limitations of Husserl and Heidegger's understanding of intentionality could be described as a double escape: from "below" and from "above." In the present chapter, through the analysis of sensibility, we are completing the description of the first part of the escape from "below." This takes the form of two movements which we have looked at in detail. First of all, it involves an escape of the existent from the anonymity of existence and, secondly, the achievement of the solitude of separation which the existent seeks to overcome through the evasions of knowledge

and enjoyment. What we have learned from these first two movements can be characterized in terms of the relations of interiority and exteriority.

The formation of an interiority in the hypostasis of the existent was shown to be a response, not to nothingness, but to the anonymous exteriority of undifferentiated existence. The analyses of insomnia, laziness, and fatigue revealed a prior being-gripped-by existence. Levinas interpreted this 'what laziness is lazy about' as a prior 'contract' with existence by which the existent was thus held to be. Before we know it, we are compelled non-compulsively to life, as if in the very nature of existence there was a demand to be. This 'ought' is the very context in which the existent comes to exist. The experience of the il y a is like a constant reminder of this prior contract. But one is led to ask how there could be a contract enacted with the il y a — essential to Levinas' conception of it — in response to which the existent comes to exist, unless the existent already existed in order to be a party to the contract? Is not the idea of a prior contract a begging of the question? And how different is this really from Dasein's call to authenticity through the structure of finitude?

Here we come up against the paradox of beginning. The beginning in Levinas' phenomenological ontology, like the first aufgehoben of Hegel's dialectic, seems to involve a bit of sleight of hand, emerging ex nihilo and sui generis. The very first stirring of the existent already incorporates the contract with existence and it is the contract that motivates the very first stirring. Levinas is admittedly up against a mystery here that even the pre-objective probing of the phenomenologist cannot get at: how the negation of a negation produces a position. Of course, the existent is never a pure negation. The hypostatic 'I' is and

is not. Birth is a life-long process. But in his understanding of the genesis of the existent, is not Levinas caught in a circular reasoning — whether productive or vicious — which is essentially an appeal to what Heidegger recognized, particularly in his later works, as the mystery of being?

What Levinas wants to deduce from this hermeneutic dance of existence and the existent, is that the response to the pre-thematic contract to be reveals a "freedom of beginning" on the part of the existent. This freedom of beginning is a 'choice' between a fundamental "Yes" and a "No" to life. To become an existent is to say "Yes" in the face of the oppressive challenge of undifferentiated existence. But even if we were to say "No" we still would be responding to the challenge of the il y a. Response to the exteriority of the il y a is unavoidable. That is the point. Here we get a glimpse of the fundamental lineaments by which Levinas will argue for the priority of responsibility. But is not this really saying that we have no choice at all? Is Levinas not inevitably caught up in a squeeze between determinism and solipsism? Whether we take up the burden of our existence or not we are still responding to the challenge. This is a strange 'freedom'. Here is a freedom where even suicide is an act of responsibility.²⁶ What value can this 'freedom' have for life? Is this not really to place the genesis of the existent in an extreme passivity, a passivity which undermines the personal responsibility of the freedom of action?²⁷ Is there not in this extreme passivity already to be found a resounding "No" to life and a "Yes" to the beyond-life? In order to answer these questions we will have to look more closely at Levinas' understanding of sensibility.

The priority of responsibility is not only the end result of Levinas' metaphysical ontology, it is to be found at the beginning as

well. What Levinas would have us bear in mind, and what is revealed in this initial analysis of the genesis of the existent, is that this freedom and responsibility are not conscious; they are neither temporal nor spatial. They do not involve choice in the sense of free will. Rather they are integral to the dynamics of interiority and exteriority that play themselves out at every instant, dynamics that are pre-cognitive, non-objective and, properly speaking, unthematizable — except in the language of poetry. It is exactly this that generates the methodological problem. One would not be justified in making the move from this situation to any kind of moralizing critique or edifying philosophy. Ethical responsibility is not moral responsibility, although Levinas will argue that the former is the ground and foundation of the latter. Up to this point, however, all Levinas has argued for is the priority of a contract with existence by which the existent is challenged to take up the task of being an existent, by which the existent comes to be an existent. This is the general significance of the whole analysis of the hypostasis and enjoyment in Existence and Existents and Totality and Infinity.

Now, through this initial analysis, Levinas establishes a new level of 'intentionality' which results in a reevaluation of the relation between sensibility and intelligibility, between sensation and intentionality proper. This new level of 'intentionality' is lodged in the very instant of the existent coming to be an existent, in the materiality by which the existent is positionally, spacially composed as a "here" and which marks the spatial presence of the existent. But the present, the form of the instant, cannot be said, properly speaking, to exist. It is a point of pure departure. My body is not only the center of my world, it is that by which I have a world, by which the world is

given.

Before the world is an object of thought, it is a felt-world, a sensible world. Every objective form of the world in conscious perception is first ap-perceived affectively: color objects are harsh or soothing; sound objects are oppressive, frightening, or delightful; taste objects are pleasant or abhorrent, and so forth. The world is a sensual plenum before it is an intentional object, although this 'before' must be understood in the instant-aneous reciprocity of the present. The world that is given is in-formed by the consciousness to which it is given as if the intentional object were conditioned by the very object it intends. The exterior world aimed at by intentional consciousness is already interior to the very exteriority it constitutes. This is the forgotten lesson that Levinas wants to draw from Husserl's reduction. And it is what Levinas thinks Heidegger overlooks in establishing the relation between beings and Being as a relation of thought or comprehension, despite the later writings. For Levinas it is not in the thinking of Being that being is made present but in sensual ap-prehension, a presencing whose meaning always overflows the meant. In his analysis of sensation Levinas seems to have most effectively gone beyond his understanding of the ontological framework of Husserl and Heidegger, a point which is often overlooked by commentators who go directly to the metaphysical overcoming of intentionality in the face to face relationship. The ethical escape from "above" is derived from the sensational escape from "below."

Thus Levinas already concludes at this point that the sensibility of corporeality stands as a permanent contestation of the primacy of representational intentionality — a conclusion that will become the backbone of his fundamental ethics. Based on this new 'intentionality',

he distinguishes between two levels of sensibility. The first, Levinas argues, the sensual sensibility of enjoyment, reveals a reversal of the constitutive activity of representational intentionality. In representation, exteriority collapses into interiority; in the sensibility of enjoyment, interiority collapses into exteriority. But the exteriority of other human beings remains exterior to both thought and enjoyment since human beings can be reduced to neither objects of knowledge nor 'objects' of pleasure — without doing an essential violence to the otherness of the Other that makes genuine relationship impossible. The second type of sensibility, what we have referred to as "sensitivity," comes into play here. This is the sensibility of metaphysical desire which is irreducible to either a need or a knowledge and which is revealed in the analyses of time, eros, and the face to face relation of sociality which we will take up in the following chapter. Before venturing into these areas, however, it will be necessary to take a moment to clarify a certain confusion in Levinas' presentation of sensibility in order to see more clearly how this is the hinge of the escape from solitude as well as the crux of his critique of Heidegger.

4 Desire, Need, and Sensibility

4.1 The Naked Body and the Clothed Body

What Levinas has accomplished through his analysis of non-representational 'intentionality' is the distinction between two levels of desire and two corresponding levels of affectivity or sensibility. Let us look at these more closely through an apparent confusion in some of Levinas' texts regarding the question of how this

distinction impacts on his understanding of the existent, taking as our lead the difference between the naked body and the clothed body.

We saw above that in Totality and Infinity Levinas said that it is the "naked and indigent" body that already "lives from ..." the representations of which it is the ground and foundation. In Existence and Existents, however, Levinas had asserted that it is the clothed body which allows for the enjoyment of the world; the naked body is already a move out of being in the world as enjoyment since it has a disruptive effect on the smooth flow of social life carried on in the forms of propriety: "despite the nudity of existence," Levinas says in Time and the Other, "one must as far as possible be decently clothed."²⁸ The naked body and the eros it engenders already signifies the advent or approach of the Other, the exteriority of the Other which is not reducible to a noema. But exactly what makes the enjoyment of the world possible is that the Other has not yet disrupted the sincere and happy consumption of it. Thus it is that in the enjoyment and nourishment of the world the existent remains stuck in solitude. This is reflected, for example, in the impersonal and non-erotic manner in which doctors and military induction personnel treat the naked body of the patient or inductee, 'clothed' in the form of a neutrality such that the erotic and individualistic significance of the body remain concealed. For a similar reason Levinas points out that the nude statues of antiquity "are never really naked" because they are 'clothed' in the form of a universal or superlative beauty.²⁹ This difference between the naked and clothed body was dramatically (and politically) revealed in "streaking" which became popular during the turbulent Vietnam War era of the sixties in the United States. The sudden and unexpected flashing of naked bodies, particularly at otherwise orderly and rational events, was a form of protest against

the sedimented values of the establishment, a disruption of the smooth and unreflective enjoyment of life.

This difference between the naked and clothed body is further reflected in the French word "jouissance" which is the term that is translated as "enjoyment" in Levinas' texts. While it does mean the taking of pleasure in consuming the fruits of the earth, it also has a legal meaning -- as does the English word "enjoyment," although this legal sense is not generally heard in the connotations of everyday usage. Which of these meanings is derivative of the other is another question. In the legal sense, "jouissance" means to have free usage of something which does not belong to you, as in being granted free access across another person's property in order to get to your own. This free access or use, legally speaking, is an "enjoyment." In this sense, clothing can be understood as a kind of social contract which conceals our common, brute animality, allowing free access to the world in the same way that the above enjoyment of access, without a prior agreement, would be trespassing. Levinas' assertion, therefore, that it is the naked, indigent body which is involved in the "living from ..." of enjoyment, although he is undoubtedly referring to the non-concupiscent body as the locus of sensation and not the erotic body which disrupts the social world, brings up a certain confusion in this area which runs through his texts from Existence and Existents on and may have contributed to some of the misunderstanding of his notion of non-representational 'intentionality' as well as his reflections on sexuality.

On the one hand, Levinas wants to say that the inwardness of separation and solitude is not yet "consciousness of...", not yet representation since "to take up an instant through effort does not of

itself found the relationship between the I and the world" because "in the world we are dealing with objects. Whereas in taking up an instant we are committing ourselves irreparably to existing in a pure event which does not relate to any substantive...."³⁰ On the other hand, Levinas will say that "hypostasis," what the above citation describes, "an existent, is a consciousness."³¹ And in terms that can only be understood within the context of representational intentionality, he says that "light, knowing, and consciousness appeared to constitute the very event of a hypostasis."³² Again, in regard to the naked body, he says that "the relationship with nudity is the true experience of the otherness of the other..." whereas "social life in the world does not have that disturbing character that a being feels before another being, before alterity."³³ How are we to understand this? Is the separate being conscious or not, naked or clothed, in the world or out of it? Let us try to sort out Levinas' groping here.

The general sense of what Levinas wants to describe by the notion of "enjoyment" or "living from..." is the happy life of the master of Being who is nourished and sated by the sensational fruits of the earth, somewhat like how Nietzsche understood "the sovereign individual," but not without an admixture of the values of the herd; closer perhaps to what Husserl called the "natural attitude." In the hypostasis, the existent is wholly self-centered, egoistic, and its relationship with life is wholly "for-me." This is what Levinas means by "ipseity."³⁴ Hypostasis is a self-identity that is sated and content with itself. The existent of Existence and Existents is a 'subject' in the sense of being an "individual" who subjects the other to it, a master of anonymous being.³⁵ This sovereign individual is "at home" with itself.³⁶ But, for Levinas, the subject of the hypostasis is not yet a subject in the

fullest sense. To be a 'conscious' subject in the sense of enjoyment is to be 'unconscious' in terms of a subjectivity which is arrived at when the existent confronts the incomprehensible exteriority of the Other, as this is worked out in Totality and Infinity and radicalized in Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence. To be in the world as enjoyment is not yet to have an objective world, since the in-itselfness of the world is wholly "for-me." Enjoyment is a lived immediacy with the world: "the life I live and the fact of living it" here collapse.³⁷ The separated subject in enjoyment has not yet reflectively distanced itself from the world as a totality of objects; the world is still a plenum to be enjoyed: "it is not by being in the world that we can say what the world is."³⁸ It is exactly this that will be disrupted by the advent of the Other.

Levinas wants to show, on the one hand, how the subject of enjoyment is a solitude in relation to the world it enjoys, since it is absorbed into the world through sensation, returning to itself in the self-coincidence of satisfaction. On the other hand, he also wants to show how this same exteriority of the world, insofar as it reveals the radical separation of the existent, is the very condition for the possibility of relation with the Other. Separation is enjoyment and solitude. Correspondingly, there are two types of desire and two types of sensibility which go along with this twofold aspect of separation. The desire of enjoyment goes directly to its sensual 'object' prior to every representation, in a corporeal 'intentionality' or knowing which returns to itself in satiety, thus maintaining solitude, interiority, and inwardness, indeed, creating it. In the act of eating, e.g., eating "fully realizes its sincere intention ... where an object concords fully with a desire."³⁹ But in Totality and Infinity, Levinas will define desire differently. Here it will be understood metaphysically as that

which can never find satisfaction in its object and thus defines the exorbitant sensibility of exteriority. And in Otherwise than Being this will be extended to the idea that the subject is held hostage by the Other and 'forced' (non-compulsively) to substitute for him.

This ambivalence in the 'intentionality' of enjoyment and its attendant desire illustrates the positive and negative aspects of separation pointed out previously: how separation is at once freedom, light, and enjoyment, yet at the same time, a solitude where there is no genuine relation with the Other, although it is precisely this separation that is the necessary precondition for that relation. Or, one can look at knowledge and enjoyment, despite their positive aspects, as evasions of the solitude of separation, attempts to overcome it but which necessarily fail.⁴⁰ Levinas' depiction of the escape from this solitude of separation, what he will call "sociality," is the subject of the following chapter.

Let us conclude here by adding that there is a similar ambivalence in Levinas' understanding of the notion of consciousness at the level of hypostasis. Representational intentionality is not located in the world, which, according to Levinas, is exactly the lesson to be learned from Husserl's epokhe: "Its significance lies in the separation it indicates between the destiny of man in the world, where there are always objects given as being and works to be done, and the possible suspension (of) this 'thesis of the natural attitude' which begins a reflection that is genuinely philosophical, in which the meaning of the 'natural attitude' itself — that is, of the world — can be discovered."⁴¹ Thus Levinas concludes that the 'world' of the individual, the separate being, is not cognition and the use of equipment, but light and enjoyment.

Here again Levinas seems to want to emphasize the immediacy of the

existent's relation to the world, that the existent is immersed in the world pre-thematically since the establishment of this thesis is essential to his argument for the priority of responsibility. In enjoyment the subject is absorbed by the object; in knowledge the object is absorbed by the subject. In both cases there is a collapse of the distance necessary for genuine relation, the distance inherent in a transcending immanence. In the relation of the existent with death, as we will see in the following chapter, Levinas will find an insurmountable distance between the subject and the comprehension of death, but because of the nature of death, Levinas will argue that there is a complete obliteration of the subject in this relation, even though it more closely approximates the kind of exteriority he is looking for. To be in the world for Levinas, at this point, is a function of sensual sensibility, and not consciousness as this is understood in the context of the relation with the Other. But, on the other hand, enjoyment and knowledge are a kind of consciousness. Insofar as there is distance between the existent and the world, there is consciousness; insofar as there is a collapse of identity, there is not consciousness. Consciousness must be understood within the ambivalent and egoistic structure of the "for-me" which defines hypostasis.

Although Heidegger saw the distinction made possible by Husserl's epokhe, he nevertheless tried to formulate being-in-the-world within the ontological structure of a concern for existing, "but he has thereby failed to recognize the essentially secular nature of being in the world and the sincerity of intentions," Levinas argues, i.e., enjoyment.⁴² To understand objects as "material" to be used, as equipment in the system of references of usable things is to fail to see the preconceptual level of enjoyment which is more fundamental than the notion of equipment.

Food is not an object to be used by the hungry one but is simply the terminus of a desire to eat, a hunger which exists prior to any particular object that would satisfy it. A house is not merely "an implement for inhabitation" and in this context "the exceptional place that the home plays in the life of man" cannot be understood.⁴³ "To say that clothing exists for covering oneself up is not to see how clothing frees man from the humbleness of his naked state" and makes social life possible.⁴⁴

The "sincerity" of being in the world is doing what we are doing simply for its own sake. It is happy alimentation. In the satiety of this process there is always a return to oneself. This is positive insofar as it is satisfaction and freedom, but negative insofar as there is no genuine relation with the Other. This is illustrated in Levinas' distinction between eating and love. In eating it is possible to realize the sincere intention of the hunger. The same for other physical needs:

We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk. All that is not⁴⁵ for the sake of living; it is living. Life is sincerity.

One wonders why love is not included in this litany of pleasures. Here is Levinas' reason: "what characterizes love is an essential and insatiable hunger," the second form of desire described above. Love, for Levinas, is like shaking hands in that shaking hands conveys that the essence of the expressed friendship is something inexpressible, something which, like the desire of love, cannot be reduced to a representation and always overflows or goes beyond such expression. In the voluptuousness of love there is always a surplus of meaning that overflows the meant, always something "more" which goes beyond the constitution of representation. Eating is a physical need; love is a metaphysical

desire. Thus, for Levinas, the positivity of desire is found in its negativity: "the burning bush that feeds the flames is not consumed."⁴⁶ It is exactly this that will present a challenge to the individuality of the separate existent, disrupting, although not destroying, its solitude of being in a lit-up world in the sincerity of enjoyment. Metaphysical desire will reveal a transcendence in immanence.

5 Conclusion

We have seen that in Levinas' view, neither the relation of knowledge nor the relation of enjoyment makes possible a relation of transcendence between the existent and the Other which would allow for the existent's escaping the solitude of separation while yet maintaining it. These evasive relations necessarily throw the existent back into the solitude of hypostasis since they involve a collapse of exteriority into interiority in the identity of, on the one hand, objective knowledge, and on the other, satiety. But in enjoyment Levinas nevertheless discerns a certain kind of 'knowing', and 'luminosity', i.e., 'intentionality', which is non-representational. This is grounded in his phenomenological understanding of the body, sensibility, and the relation of desire with the object of enjoyment.

The importance of this distinction between representational and non-representational intentionality, and hence two kinds of affectivity, sensibility, and desire, is that it allows for contact with the Other which, as non-synthesizable or non-objective, does not reduce to the sameness or identity of a noema or cogitatum. It involves a disruption or reversal of this reduction. Insofar as affective contact involves a

return to the self in fullness or satiety, as in eating, for example, it is like the intentionality of consciousness. Levinas understands this as need. But insofar as sensuous contact with the Other does not reduce to this sameness, as in love, non-representational sensibility or affectivity opens out into the realm of metaphysical desire and will make possible, in Levinas' view, a transcendence toward the Other that will ultimately be understood as the ethical relation of responsibility where God is revealed.

But how effective is this argument for establishing the exteriority of the Other? Is sensibility able to carry the burden Levinas asks of it? Is his argument not caught up in a circular reasoning that involves an essential ambiguity where the existent maintains the separation of interiority achieved in hypostasis while at the same time being able to establish a relation with what remains absolutely exterior, with alterity? Does Levinas not want to have his cake and eat it too?

As evidence for his argument Levinas puts forward three basic phenomenological analyses in the context of an original understanding of temporality: the relation with death, the face to face relation of sociality, and the erotic relation. These analyses which subtend the escape of the existent from the solitude of freedom and consciousness are the subject matter of the following chapter.

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1. TI, pp. 122-142 / pp. 94-114; EE, pp. 37-51 / pp. 55-80; TO, pp. 62-66 / pp. 45-49; OB, pp. 72-74 / pp. 91-94.
 2. TI, pp. 122-23 / p. 95.
 3. TI, p. 124 / p. 96.
 4. TI, p. 125 / p. 98.
 5. EE, p. 46 / p. 72.
 6. TI, p. 124 / p. 96.
 7. TI, p. 109 / p. 81.
 8. TI, p. 126 / p. 99.
 9. TI, p. 126 / p. 98; p. 122 / pp. 94-95.
 10. Concerning Levinas's distinction between the two types of affectivity, see, Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in CPP, p. 158, no. 8.
 11. "Diachrony and Representation" in TO, p. 106.
 12. Alphonso Lingis, "The Sensuality and the Sensitivity" in Face To Face, op. cit., p. 228.
 13. TO, pp. 62-63 / pp. 45-46.
 14. TO, p. 63 / p. 46.
 15. EE, p. 37 / p. 15; TI, p. 122 / p. 95.
 16. Lingis, "The Sensuality," p. 227.
 17. TI, p. 128 / p. 101.
 18. TI, p. 127 / p. 100.
 19. Ibid.
 20. TI, pp. 128-129 / p. 101.
 21. TO, p. 63 / p. 45.
 22. TI, pp. 128-129 / p. 101.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid.
 25. TI, p. 21 / p. IX.
 26. TO, pp. 50-51 / pp. 28-29.

27. For a critical assessment of passivity in Levinas' philosophy, see, Etienne Feron, "Respiration et action chez Levinas," Etudes Phénoménologique, 5-6 (1987): 200ff.

28. TO, p. 60 / p. 41.

29. EE, p. 40 / p. 61.

30. EE, p. 37 / p. 53.

31. EE, p. 83 / p. 141.

32. EE, p. 51 / p. 80.

33. EE, p. 40 / p. 61.

34. EE, p. 41 / p. 62.

35. Ibid.

36. TI, p. 143 / p. 116.

37. TI, p. 122 / p. 94.

38. EE, p. 42 / p. 64.

39. EE, p. 44 / p. 67.

40. TO, p. 41 / p. 19.

41. EE, p. 42 / pp. 66-67.

42. Ibid.

43. EE, p. 43 / p. 65; cf. TI, pp. 152ff. / pp. 125ff.

44. EE, p. 43 / p. 65.

45. EE, p. 44 / p. 67.

46. EE, p. 43 / p. 65.