

GOD-IN-THE-WORLD:
THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ROOTS
OF A TRANSFORMATIVE THEOPOETICS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPUTO

FG – The Folly of God

WG – The Weakness of God

IG – The Insistence of God

RH – Radical Hermeneutics

RT – Radical Theology

ME – The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Philosophy

HUSSERL

LI – Logical Investigations

CM – Cartesian Meditations

Ids – Ideas I

C – The Crisis

HEIDEGGER

BT – Being and Time

(Include pertinent later poetic works....)

LEVINAS

ThI - *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Translated by André Orianne.

1973; reprint ed., Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985. *Théorie de l'intuition*

dans la phénoménologie de Husserl. 1930; reprint ed., Paris: J. Vrin, 1984.

EE - *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: H. Nijhoff,

1978. *De l'existence à l'existant*. 1947; reprint ed., Paris: J. Vrin, 1986.

INCOMPLETE

TO - *Time and the Other*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987. *Le temps et l'autre*. 1947; reprint ed., St. Clement, France: Fata Morgana, 1979.

DEHH - *En decouvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. 1949; reprint ed., Paris: J. Vrin, 1982.

TI - *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. 1969; reprint ed., Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985. *Totalite et Infini*. 1961; reprint ed., The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984.

HLH - *Humanisme de l'autre homme*. Paris: Fata Morgana, 1973. The essays in this text are translated by Alphonso Lingis in CPP.

OB - *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981. *Autrement qu'etre ou au-dela de l'essence*. 1974; reprint ed., The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986.

DDQV - *De Dieu qui Vient a l'idee*. 1982; reprint ed., Paris: J. Vrin, 1986.

EI - *Ethics and Infinity*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1985. *Ethique et Infini*. Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1982.

CPP - *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

N.B.: Where English translations exist and are used without modification, footnote citations will first give the page number or numbers of the English text with the page number or numbers for the French text immediately following the slash in the citation,

unless otherwise indicated. If no English translation exists or if the English translation is unsatisfactory, my own translation will be provided and will be so indicated in the note.

ABSTRACT

In *God-in-the-World* I trace the genealogy of a hermeneutical, transformative, theo-poetical approach to reading and responding to sacred texts, or any texts, contemplatively and therapeutically for spiritual development. In this hermeneutical practice of reading, the key is for the aspiring phenomenological hermeneut to assume a certain attitude of detached openness to be changed by the text in order to experience the spiritually transformative power of the theo-poetic reading, a practice that I find to be nascent in Husserl, emergent in Heidegger, almost fully developed in Levinas, and deployed explicitly by Caputo. To get a more informed perspective on Caputo's radical theological program, which is the progeny of philosophical parents and which has been nurtured on an avowedly deconstructionist formula, *God-in-the-World* will go back to a re-reading of the originary contribution of Levinas's phenomenology of exorbitant responsibility as he wrestles with Husserl, Heidegger, and others to establish a path to the way in which God comes into the world through the sensibility of corporal works of mercy given over completely to the good of the Other in a vulnerable, self-effacing attitude of exorbitant responsibility which will be a model for the version of theo-poetics presented here. In this exorbitant responsibility of the one-for-the-other, *God-in-the-World* will discover an undeconstructible theo-poetics fully decoupled from any positive, pragmatic, or academic-utilitarian analytic, but which, as with Caputo's more secular and relativistic, Derrida-driven model of theo-poetics, comes up short in the final analysis in terms of the impact of this on the developing spirituality of the hermeneutical aspirant approaching the reading of the sacred text with openness, hopeful trust, and willingness

to be changed, for which the scene of Saint Augustine's well-known conversion experience in the garden may function as an exemplar. Contrary, in some respects, to Caputo's theopoetics, the transformative theopoetics generated from the analysis of responsibility in Levinas's ethical phenomenology, along with substantial help from the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*, will be shown to indicate an affective, pre-discursive, interpenetrating attitude and posture toward (a kind of bodily incorporation of) the poetic text (and perhaps all texts are poetic), on the part of the hermeneutical reader/aspirant. Transformative theopoetics reinstates the moment of mystical 'excess' that gets excised from Caputo's deconstructionist approach to reading and, unhinged from secular constraints, is now free to be not only hermeneutical "all the way down" but hermeneutical "all the way up" as well, embodying 'in the flesh' the experiential event of immanence in transcendence and transcendence in immanence which cannot be grasped and represented thematically. Nothing short of a certain productive paradoxicality will suffice as the power-source for a spiritually transformative theopoetical approach to the reading of (and being read by) sacred inscriptions.

A Transformative Theopoetic Moment...

“...I flung myself down, how I do not know, under a certain fig tree, and gave free rein to my tears...and with most bitter contrition I wept within my heart. And lo, I heard from a nearby house, a voice like that of a boy or a girl, I know not which, chanting and repeating over and over, “Take up and read. Take up and read....” So, I hurried back to the spot where Alypius was sitting, for I had put there the volume of the apostle when I got up and left him. I snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.” No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so. Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away....”

Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Book 8, 12: 28-29.

INTRODUCTION

Launched informally, perhaps unwittingly, amid the so-called “theological turn” in contemporary French Phenomenology¹ these past few decades, the roots of a hermeneutical, transformative theopoetics that approaches the textuality of the text within the framework of a marginalized, circumscribed and affective *pathos*—a non-rational, poetic voice that insistently disrupts, overrides and surpasses the deductive, positivist, and totalitarian designs of any dominating *logos*—can be found in nascent form in Edmund Husserl’s failed (but successful in its failure) bid for an apodictic transcendental phenomenology. Because of its foundational importance to the development of transformative theopoetics, Husserl’s construction and development of the *epoché* will be re-investigated in some detail in the first part of *God-in-the-World*. It is well-known that Husserl’s assault on the citadel of epistemological certitude was taken-up in Martin Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein, an incomplete project which, as the result of his well-known *Kehre*, boiled over and was distilled into his later poetic and somewhat mystical philosophy² where the poetic nature of language is first advanced as an originary hermeneutical opening that is of central interest to the present study. Heidegger’s groundbreaking existential phenomenology was carried forward and transformed into the exorbitant phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. It is

¹ Janicaud, Dominique. (2000). *The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press.

² Caputo, John D. (1986) *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Philosophy*. (New York: Fordham University Press, Revised ed.).

with Levinas that the poetic alterity of the “otherwise-than-being” reaches inexorably toward expressing the inexpressible event of God-in-the-world in the language of an originary *proto*-theopoetics, a theopoetics that is not yet trying to be a theopoetics. More recently, an explicit framing of the theopoetic reading modality has been deployed in the deconstructionist hermeneutics of John Caputo’s radical phenomenological trilogy of theological works: *The Weakness of God*; *The Insistence of God*; and *The Folly of God*. Although Caputo takes the development of phenomenological theology to new and daring levels in the “softer, gentler” radicality of what he dubs a “weak” approach to the textuality of the sacred text, the theopoetics he unleashes as an alternative to onto-theological metaphysics gets caught up in its own relativistic, deconstructive abandon that ultimately constrains his analysis from effectively digging down into the deepest, albeit ‘messy’, sensuous, and often conflictual bodily roots of philosophical poetics and theopoetical reading and writing, a location from which Levinas’s analysis of the ontogenesis of God-in-the-world begins. It is exactly at the juncture of Caputo’s radical assimilation of contemporary phenomenological theology into the thoroughgoing critique of so-called traditional or “high and mighty” theology that the present text cautiously and humbly ventures forth these few thoughts into the conversation.

Caputo’s version of theopoetics is cultured by Derrida’s deconstructionist program with the aim of disrupting classical theology and running a “protect and defend” interference pattern on behalf of the supposed vulnerability of a “weak” God-in-the-world. It retains the form of a traditional hermeneutic technique deployed at arm’s length to render the truth from the text, even if this truth can only be rendered poetically.

Caputo: “Let me say here at the start that by a poetics I mean a collection of metaphors, metonyms, narratives, allegories, songs, poems, and parables, indeed an assembling of all the *rhetorical strategies* we can summon, in order to address the event.” (emphasis added)

Caputo: “Theopoetics seeks to find a figurative means to express what is happening to us under the name of God. What is happening is in fact what is meant by the “kingdom of God,”

Caputo: “A theopoetics is a discourse tailored to the unconditional, cut to fit the event that takes place in the name (of) “God.”³

Aimed in this predominantly heuristic manner, I believe that Caputo’s rendering of theopoetics does not fully incorporate its most radical potential for actualizing a personal, affective, and spiritual *therapeia* in the service of a whole-person transformation or ‘change of heart’, a *metanoia* of the whole person such as Augustine must have experienced on that fine afternoon in the garden with Alypius which alone would allow the ‘God’ who comes to the idea an opening into the very personal world of the theopoetic aspirant in his garden in Milan and thereby transform the life of the aspirant reader. In Caputo’s modeling, theopoetics remains a sophisticated and insight-producing hermeneutical gesture of linguistic analysis and revelation, situated at the level of a *meditatio*, a rumination, and, to that extent, is, as he says, radically innovative and helpful to move beyond the ontotheological metaphysics of presence with its postulation of a Supreme Being who is beyond being. But Caputo’s theopoetics does

³ Caputo, John D. (2016). *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional*, Chapter 9. Polebridge Press. Kindle Edition.

not go far enough, does not go all the way down into the loam. It does not surrender to the text. It remains at the intellectualist level of an abstract intuitive methodology or epistemic way of dealing with the subject matter at arm's length for an academic audience, looking backward to disrupt what is thought to be a sedimented, overworked, hopelessly transcendental classical theological set of metaphors, devoid of any explicit commitment to the spiritual growth and development of the flesh and blood theopoetic aspirant seeking an encounter with the divine in the sacred text, which seems to me to be the heart and soul of the transformative theopoetic reading experience.

To get a more informed perspective on Caputo's radical theological program, which is the progeny of philosophical parents and which has been nurtured on an avowedly deconstructionist formula laced with a subtle and nuanced metaphysical positivism, perhaps despite itself, *God-in-the-World* will go back to a re-reading of the originary contribution of Levinas's phenomenology of exorbitant responsibility as he wrestles with Husserl, Heidegger, and others to establish the way in which God comes into the world through a certain pre-conscious responsiveness in the sensibility of corporal works of mercy given over completely to the good of the Other in a proximity to the approach of the infinite otherness of the Other. In Levinas's philosophy, *God-in-the-World* will discover an undeconstructible theopoetics fully decoupled from any positive, pragmatic, or academic-utilitarian analytic, but which, as with Caputo's more secular and relativistic Derrida-driven model, comes up short in Levinas's philosophical work in terms of the impact of this on the developing spirituality of the hermeneutical aspirant approaching a reading of the sacred text, for which the scene of Augustine's well-known conversion' in the garden, presented in the epigraph, will function as an exemplar. All

the elements of a theopoetic approach to the sacred text are embodied in this striking episode from *The Confessions*. **MORE??...** Contrary, to some degree, to Caputo's theopoetics, the theopoetical orientation generated from the analysis of responsibility in Levinas's ethical phenomenology, rather than merely defensively deferring and deconstructing the positivity of any offending definiendum at the intellectualist level of *meditatio*, will be shown to indicate an affective, pre-discursive, interpenetrating attitude and posture toward (a kind of bodily incorporation of) the poetic text on the part of the hermeneutical reader/aspirant that reinstates the moment of mystical 'excess' that is excised by Caputo's deconstructionist, relativistic and de-mystified approach to the reading of and being read by the sacred Word of God, and is now free to be not only hermeneutical "all the way down," but hermeneutical "all the way up" as well, embodying in the flesh the experiential immanence of transcendence and the transcendence of immanence which cannot be grasped and represented thematically. Nothing short of the utterly paradoxical will suffice as the radical power-source for a transformative theopoetical reading.

In the context of Levinas's theory of exorbitant responsibility, *God-in-the-World* unveils a contemplative, theopoetic hermeneutics that reaches beyond the said of language to the "infinite" of a saying-otherwise in the face-to-face, ethical, interpersonal relation—an infinite or absolute otherness where God comes into the world—in the form of a contemplative, mystical, personally transformative prayerful *contemplatio*. Caputo's rendering of theopoetics relies predominantly on Derrida's anti-Hegelian, anti-absolutist, deconstructionist approach to knowledge. Under the influence of Derrida's slippery notion of "unconditionality," Caputo ventures close to the edge or

possibly falls headlong into a kind of *theo-relativism of deferral* as a solution to the so-called Supreme Being ‘problem’ inherited from a “high and mighty” classical theology. But the Derridean notion of the “Unconditioned” that Caputo champions is wholly impersonal, didactic, and, in a self-limiting manner, not at all prayer-motivating, that is to say, not at all “in” God. It is hard to find the aspiring hermeneutical reader in the flesh in Caputo’s work. *God-in-the-world* will show that an originary, hermeneutical theopoetics is already a kind of spiritual, intimate, and personal mode of transformative, contemplative prayer in the manner of *lectio divina*—an ancient, contemplative, meditative, affective, non-rational, non-theoretical, mystical, poetic, very personal, and, of central importance to the current study, *transformative* approach to a prayerful, life-changing ‘style’ of reading or attitude which alone makes possible the freeing up of the event of ‘presence’ of the indescribable or the unsayable voice ‘calling’ from within the described absence or said of the text as a paradoxical ‘*presence of an absence*’.

Duncan Robertson’s insightful work, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (2011) has been especially informative in abetting the description of what will come to appear as the beating heart of transformative theopoetics and which coincides with the tradition of *lectio divina*.⁴

>>>> MORE LEXIO DIVINA EXPLANATION HERE.....>>>>

As a phenomenological, hermeneutical and philosophical-poetic study, *God-in-the-World* takes as its starting point for the trek to find the locus of the apparition of divinity in the everydayness of social life, Levinas’s argument for the ontological priority

⁴ Robertson, Duncan. (2011). *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*. Volume 238 (Cistercian Studies). Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition.

of an ethical responsibility interpreted as a pre-conscious responsiveness to the exteriority or otherness of the Other which, ultimately, will claim to allow or 'produce' the epiphany of God-in-the-world at the core of that preconceptual responsiveness. *God-in-the-World* intends to advance the conversation on the most fulsome approach to the reading and interpretation of sacred texts, a reflection which too often focuses either exclusively on the text itself or on the theoretical hermeneutical mechanics by which the interpretation of the text will be rendered, while inevitably leaving out of the picture almost entirely (except for the obvious requirement that any reading certainly presupposes a reader) the circumstantial, subjective reality of the hermeneutical aspirant who personally approaches the text that calls to her. In that context, what I want to accomplish, within the general framework and intentionality of Caputo's radical hermeneutic theology, is to track the trace of Levinas's venturing toward the epiphany of God-in-the-world as he winds his way cautiously through the tangled undergrowth of *sensibilité*, *socialité* and *responsabilité* within human consciousness and whatever is 'given' prior to or beyond consciousness... track this all the way to the fulfillment of a transformational theopoetic 'reading' and 'writing' of the sacred text—and perhaps to all texts since all texts, indeed, the inscription of all language may aspire to the sacred. The analysis of *sensibilité*, *socialité* and *responsabilité*, among other forms of exteriority, as the origin and ground of such a 'heavenly' theopoetics is worked out within the context of a critique of Husserl, Heidegger and the entire 'onto-theological' tradition of Western philosophy, an analysis that is conditioned heavily by the ever-present, spectral memory of the Holocaust that haunts Levinas's post-World War Two philosophical work. The net outcome of this retrospective exposition is the claim that

Levinas—while he constructs the conditions by which a theopoetics might operate effectively within the fog-shrouded outskirts of the language of presence and which will provide a clarifying alternative perspective to Caputo’s Derridean, panentheistic orientation—was nevertheless unable to follow out the full spiritual, personal, therapeutic and affective transformational implications of his proto-theopoetic, radical, phenomenological theology. Reading is not merely the application of a tool or a mental power that I direct hermeneutically. Reading must be envisioned as something more than a mechanistic, neuronic decoding of ciphers that can be done by AI.

Transformative, hermeneutical reading entails the whole person: body, mind, soul and spirit. Nothing must be left out of the picture. Thus, it will be essential in approaching theopoetics theoretically as it transforms into a process of real-life personal growth and development, to consider closely the understanding of the nature of subjectivity in Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, and Caputo as it is thought to appear at the scene of reading, and which will unfold as a productive subtext on subjectivity throughout the present work. So much talk of subjectivity has forgotten the existing subject.

The theopoetic aspirations of both Levinas and Caputo remain framed by a limiting intellectualist conformation of descriptions and vectors of influence which are provocative in themselves but devoid of any clear and effective development of a *personally transformational praxis* that arises in the heart and mind and being of the aspiring theopoetical hermeneut incorporating, as if consuming them gastronomically, the fullness of what theopoetics has to offer. A theopoetic reading of Levinas’s notion of an exorbitant ethical responsibility at the core of what it means to be human, motivated in large part by his critical reaction to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and

Heidegger's Dasein-ology, will reveal, in a newly revised understanding and extension of Husserl's quasi-religious development and application of the practice of the phenomenological *epoché*, a foreshadowing of what I will designate as the *theopoetic attitude* required of the hermeneutical aspirant who would interpret and be forever changed by the sacred texts and, ultimately, perhaps, the very 'textuality' of God herself.

Here is how I will proceed in *God-in-the-World* toward the goal of tracking the trace of a transformative hermeneutical theopoetics. Chapter 1 introduces some of the basic issues that arise in trying to articulate the nature of a hermeneutical theopoetics and how these issues are reflected in Caputo's deployment of a theopoetic modality. This chapter presents a first consideration of the theopoetic strategy, especially from the perspective of certain linguistic ambiguities that arise within the distinction between the saying and the said in the attempt to assay the scope of philosophical theopoetics; problems of predication, problems that arise in trying to say what theopoetics is. Theopoetical reading has numerous similarities to the *lectio divina* approach to a meditative and, hopefully, contemplative reading of sacred texts ... makes it clear that a special type of language is necessary to describe the experience adequately, a poetic language that distinguishes itself from discursive, representational language.....

Chapter 2 looks at Husserl's development of the *epoché* through various formulations from his earlier to his later work. This exposition shows the fundamental aspects of the *epoché* that will be incorporated into Heidegger's poetics and Levinas's approach to exteriority and, finally, my understanding of transformative theopoetics. The practice of the *epoché* is central to theopoetics. It is transformed into a

hermeneutic approach to reading borrowed from the tradition of *lectio divina* and is shown to have all four elements of the practice of *lectio divina*: *lectio*, *oratio*, *meditatio*, and (most importantly) *contemplatio*....

Chapter 3 ... looks more closely at the epoché and L's critique of the earlier versions of it and works out his critique of Husserl...focusing on H's intellectualism.

Chapter 4... presents L's re-consideration of the epoché and in clarifying his position with Husserl, he prepares his own original vision at the heart of his own philosophy. The epoché will be transformed into response-ability.

(CONSOLIDATE 3 & 4????).

Chapter 5...the general notion of responsibility as a circumcision of the virility of consciousness is introduced against the backdrop of a Nietzschean challenge. L uses the analysis of the ambiguity of sensation to support his depiction of R. A conflict between Levinas's deployment of the feminine and the masculine element arises here and will be worked out in more detail in the following two chapters.

Chapter 6... Chapters 6 and 7 focus on L's deployment of the terms feminine and masculine ... critique of L's appraisal, especially with the masculine element, but also the feminine. Better not to use these terms??? Or is sexual difference something that should not be swept under the rug in the consideration of reading for spiritual enlightenment?

Chapter 7... See above. Combine overview of Chaps 6 and 7 ...

(CONSOLIDATE 6 & 7????)

Chapter 8 looks at Levinas's complex relationship with Heidegger. L first worshipped H but then Heidegger's association with the Nazis led to Levinas rejecting Heidegger's ontological philosophy and developing his own unique philosophy of exorbitant responsibility where ethics, not ontology, is first philosophy. Levinas's use of the philosophical poetic method is similar to the development of Heidegger's poetic orientation in his later works, which L thinks is of little account. Heidegger is nevertheless a big influence on L, despite L's critique.

Chapter 9 traces L's depiction of the development of the existent emerging as a master of being, a somebody, against the anonymity of the *il y a* by making a beginning requiring effort over and against the drag of laziness and fatigue ... the achievement of being a master of being and the attendant solitude that comes with this freedom of spontaneity is presented in detail. The existent will look to escape its solitude which leads to a responsiveness to the other in the vulnerability of sociality.

Chapter 10 introduces the distinction between representational and non-representational intentionality or metaphysical desire...the distinction between desire and need...and describes how the existent tries to evade the solitude that comes along with being a separate individual...wants to transcend, connect with the infinite transcendence of the other, but knowledge and enjoyment don't allow for authentic transcendence to the other. Only the attitude of responsiveness to the Other in the face-to-face relationship of response-ability will make proximity, a kind of being "in" the other or having the other "in" you, possible. This is similar to what is required of the phenomenological hermeneut approaching the reading of sacred scripture theopoetically, an entering vitally into the textuality of the text interpersonally...

Chapter 11 traces the development of sociality as the only ethical 'escape' from existential solitude, in the face-to-face relation generated by the approach of the Other from an ethical height and my response to this ethical challenge, response-ability, which is then understood as the very locus of God coming into the world through the performance of corporal works of mercy. God appears in the world through my merciful, hospitable welcome, the fine risk of response to the poor and marginalized powerless stranger who comes knocking at my door late at night.

The primary concern of chapter 12 is to show how Levinas justifies his argument for describing the priority of responsibility as the locus of the epiphany of God-in-the-world, as well as the foundation of subjectivity and the beating heart of transformative theopoetics, based on his phenomenological analyses of language, being, time, and sensation expressed as proximity and substitution, discussions that are like building blocks for a description of transformative theopoetics. Transformative theopoetics differs from other hermeneutical, poetic approaches to the text in that for transformative theopoetics the focus is primarily on the personal spiritual transformation undergone by the reader in the theopoetic attitude in relation to the call coming from the text that the reader approaches, for which the scene of Augustine's conversion in the garden after reading a sacred text may be an exemplar.

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CHAPTER 1

Anarchical Metaphysics

1. Introduction

A basic premise underlying *God-in-the-World* is that the reading of any text (especially sacred texts) that is not spiritually and therapeutically transformative for the aspirant hermeneutical reader is due either to the text itself lacking a poetic dimension or to the lack of a poetic attitude in the posture of the reader herself or himself. The poetic dimension of the text or the poetic word, and the poetic attitude of you, the reader or aspirant to an experience of the meaning or sense of the text, as if spoken by the text, are the north and south poles of this present exposition. A lack in either case and a genuinely poetic approach to the text will remain veiled. To read poetically requires you to be *genuinely* open and receptive to the text with a definitively felt personal vulnerability to the poetic resounding or rending of the word (again, especially the ‘word of God’, the *call* of God’s word⁵) beyond the mere inscription on the page, beyond what is said, unto the deepest saying or gifting of the given in my encounter with the text. The poetic word is not so much a word that *you grasp* and comprehend or understand as it is a word that *grasps you* in the seduction of an impertinent, insistent, and persistent ‘call’ that is the silent appeal of the text, a *pathos* tugging at your heart,

⁵ Duncan, *Lectio Divina*, cite page...

perhaps, or pestering you, luring you into the dark unknown of its secret meditations and lifting you into contemplations with only the thinnest promise and hope of ultimate sense-making. Only the lover of what is under consideration in the text will risk hearing and responding to the peal of this call from between the lines of the text. But all of us, lovers-of-more that we are, will have already responded one way or another before we know it, anyway.

God-in-the-world intends to push the idea of a philosophical poetics to the limits of reason and beyond, into the realm of a non-rational playfulness where it reaches unthinkingly and inexorably to enact a poetic communion with the heart of the matter, in the flesh, as it were. This interest seemed to be a part of the motivating force behind Caputo's radical or "weak" aspirations articulated in *The Folly of God*.⁶ Caputo's clearly stated intention is to bring the "high and mighty" Supreme Being conception of God that has been created and deployed by "classical," "traditional," or "high and mighty" theology, down a notch or two, down a little closer to where Caputo is getting his fingernails dirty scratching around in the rich, hermeneutic loam of the earth, down to the everyday reality where God is de-conceptualized as a "weak force" appearing like an apparition in the eyes of the bedraggled beggar pleading with you for a coin. The Kingdom of God is not somewhere off in never-never land, Caputo claims. It is right here on earth to be found in the corporal works of mercy and doesn't need any high and mighty God or high and mighty theology for it to work effectively as a religion without religion, something that is also reflected in Richard Kearney's confabulation of coming

⁶ Caputo, John D. *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional*. Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2016.

to God after God that he designates with the term “anatheism,” an idea that is reflected in the literary tradition as well as in the lives of dedicated, saintly helpers like Dorothy Day, foundress of the Catholic Worker Movement.⁷ Let’s have a Kingdom of Heaven without God, Caputo earnestly suggests, without the old, stuffy Supreme Being of a God threatening compliance with fire and brimstone and guilt. In this counterintuitive view, God, who is ‘weak’ in terms of the sociocultural worlding of institutional power, *needs us* to be God in the first place. I worry that this is edging dangerously toward the tarpit of a relativistic pantheism that leaves my personal longing for the infinite out in the cold....

Caputo’s theopoetic critique of traditional theology and promotion of what he glancingly calls “*theopraxis*” will be considered more fully in other chapters of this text, but let me briefly indicate here the problem I have with his rendition of theopoetics since that is a primary motivating factor for the present text and indicates how a Levinasian orientation to language, responsibility, and the Other leads to a fuller depiction of a transformational theopoetics in which the theo-poet is *personally* called to a metanoia, a change of heart, a radical and real-world change of life and not just the lip-syncing of a radical but stubbornly intellectualist theology as a way of getting closer to God-in-the-world. The basic problem that I have with Caputo’s theopoetic reformation aimed at traditional Christian absolutist and dogmatic theology, where a soft and gentle theopoetics will be substituted for a hard-nosed, ontotheological metaphysics, is that it remains at exactly the same abstract, conceptual, reflective level of the “classical” metaphysical theology it criticizes. Caputo merely changes the metaphors. He seems to think that if you change the metaphors, you change what the metaphors are waxing

⁷ Kearney, Richard. *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010

metaphorical about. This reveals the unabashed influence of Derrida on Caputo's radical theological philosophy, which Caputo acknowledges, and, as an intended or simply necessary outcome of that deconstructionist influence, his incomplete conception of theo-poetics—indeed, of philosophical poetics entirely—regarding it only as an advanced hermeneutical strategy for wringing reluctant, ephemeral meaning from the passive, hapless text. As Duncan points out, this hermeneutical relativism serves to return the text to the status of an inanimate, scientific object similar to the status of the text in the objectivist, single-meaning, absolutist framework against which Derrida's critique was launched.⁸ The text is now seen as a radically non-authorial locus of intentions brought by each and every reader who thus produce re-creative readings of the text, which is fine as far as it goes and I am in agreement with Caputo's Derridean approach except for the fact that it leaves the transformative value for the creative, aspirant reader out of the picture. Contrary to that view of theo-poetics where the reader is missing, the version of theo-poetics that I am presenting here will show that Caputo's deconstructionist approach to theo-poetics, while arguably advancing the theory and practice of a hermeneutical poetics generally, would have been more broadly effective and revelatory if he had grounded it in Levinas's pursuit of an ever-elusive, infinite exteriority and personal, transformative responsiveness to the otherness of the other rather than to have gone off into the endless play of deferral served up by the deconstructionists. As I will show below, in the concepts or non-concepts of *sensibilité*, *responsabilité*, and the *socialité* of the one-for-the-other, along with the distinction between the saying of the letter and the said of the essay, there will be revealed in

⁸ Duncan, *Lectio Divina*, argument contra Derrida cite page....

Levinas's ethical phenomenology the mystical stirrings of a poetic word hearkening and responding to the call of the infinite Other emanating from between the lines of the text.

2. The Essay and the Letter

An essay—even in the hands of a master essayist such as Emmanuel Levinas—becomes vulnerable to self-refutation in asserting that "truth is produced only in veritable conversation." Levinas makes this assertion, not in a conversation, but in an "*essai sur l'exteriorité*," the subtitle of *Totalité et Infini*, his first major philosophical work.⁹ If the proposition that "truth is produced only in veritable conversation" is true, as it is doubtlessly intended, then, either it is also untrue, given its essay-origin, or what *appears* to be the essay in which the proposition is found is not an essay at all but a linguistic, essay-mask or Nietzschean skin perhaps, revealing the concealment of a hermeneutical poetic dimension to Levinas's work. Such an interpretation would account for the important qualifier "veritable" in Levinas's assertion. Levinas's problem of trying to communicate in an *essai* how the discursive or polemical word is intrinsically inadequate in its representation of fundamental ethical truths, involves the same problem of self-refutation that troubles skepticism: the infamous *circulus vitiosus*. It is a hermeneutic and linguistic concern that weaves its way through the phenomenological approach to truth and the seemingly endless critique of the metaphysics of presence in the phenomenological project (if there is such a thing) and will be crucial in the present study for establishing the possibility of a genuinely transformational theopoetics.

⁹ Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 71; hereafter 'TI'.

The hermeneutic question of language, interpretation, and meaning takes a new turn in Levinas's ethical 'metaphysics' as he strives to bring the poetics of the otherwise into view. Going beyond Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein, where interpretation is understood as a mode of "being-in-the-world," Levinas will argue that language is primarily a being-with or being-for the Other. Being-with-the-Other Levinas calls "proximity," a pre-thematic 'contact' or "sociality" with the Other to the extreme point of being substituted for the Other, a taking of the Other's place, a being held hostage by the Other. Being-for-the-Other, in the context of proximity, prior to any choice on my part, is Levinas's basic meaning of the term "responsibility," a pre-conscious responding or response-ability to the vulnerability encountered in the face of the Other which we will look at theopoetically in later chapters of this text. *God-in-the-World* sets as its task the process of explicating the radical hermeneutic relationship between Levinas's carefully nuanced conception of ethical responsibility and the fullest meaning of a theopoetics of the impossible understood as a spiritual, transformational experience of the trace of God-in-the-world brought to life in the cradle of a pre-conscious responsiveness that is nothing else but the font of a pure and absolutely unconditional love.

Keeping in mind Nietzsche's advice to callow lovers who would go rushing in to grasp the truth by the scruff of the neck and drag her home, *God-in-the-World* takes an oblique approach to Levinas's ethical rendition of the relation between response-ability and language understood theopoetically. This incalculable nexus will be recognized as the beating heart of a mystical, prayerful, transformative theopoetics glimpsed below through a brief reflection on the difference between the essay and the letter, a grammatological rumination which will serve two purposes: (1) it will provide a bridge to

an understanding of the main thrust or style of Levinas's ethical metaphysics as it opens up and reveals the rudiments of a personally transformative theo-poetical possibility, and (2) it will illustrate a nagging methodological 'problem' stemming from the influence of Husserl in Levinas's philosophy for which the antidote of an epistolary hermeneutical theo-poetics will be tentatively suggested as a prophylactic therapeutic regimen.

An essay differs from a letter in that an essay is an attempt to assay what is essential, to grasp the weight and measure of something and to represent what is thus assessed in language that is objectively equivalent to it. Such assaying is, however, in Levinas's view, altogether impossible when that "something" is the weighing and measuring by which the weighing and measuring is itself weighed and measured—a hearkening back to Aristotle's productive problem of the intellect's inability to grasp the origin and nature of its own activity or agency. Levinas would view Aristotle's apparent 'failure' as a 'success,' just as the inherent 'failure' of the essay to make the Being of beings appear once and for all in its absolute self-coincidence, in person, as it were, is the inherent success of the unconditional openness of the letter. The essay is derivative of the philosophy of consciousness and the metaphysics of presence, of which Levinas is critical, if it is not enlightened to its own representational limitations, if it does not see its intrinsic inability to bring into view that which is beyond the ground of the essential, what is even beyond every conception of the beyond and which can be accessed only by the pure, poetic word illuminating the heart of the contemplative, vulnerable, and open to risk-taking reader. Access to the unconditioned does not come without its own conditions for the aspirant.

To be able to 'hear' with your 'inner ear' ("Let those who have ears to hear...") that which is beyond the mere informative statement of a theme, beyond the "said" of language, there is the necessity, Levinas argues, of "abusing" or "deconstructing" the pretensions of conceptual representations in the hermeneutical procedure of *apophasis* or negative positing—an abuse of language, a violence which attempts to say that which properly speaking cannot be said. This self-conscious abuse of language, foreshadowed by Descartes's methodological doubt and Husserl's phenomenological *epoché*, this negative moment—Levinas points to the "in" of infinity in us that so fascinated Descartes—is the making-present of that which nevertheless is prior to language and presence. But what is the measure by which we can measure this making-present of that which is prior to presence? In Levinas's philosophy the "measure" of the measure is understood poetically as *the trace*, the very lifeblood of the poetic word, the appearance that is somehow there yet never fully appears, the burning bush that never burns out. The trace is, as Levinas puts it, "a presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, which is always past" and which, therefore, can be 'measured' only by and as *a going toward another*, which will describe a *fundamental existential feature of human being*.¹⁰

Levinas's "essay on exteriority," therefore, given the exposition worked out under the aegis of this subtitle, is a contradiction in terms, but a purposefully productive contradiction. Exteriority, in the context of Levinas's understanding of the trace, is precisely that which would not permit the inscription of exteriority within the interiority of

¹⁰ Levinas, Emmanuel. "La Trace De L'Autre," in *En Découvrant L'Existence Avec Husserl Et Heidegger* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), pp. 201-02. My translation, emphasis added.

the essay. *Totality and Infinity* is an "essay" on the overcoming of the ethical inadequacy of the essay. Levinas's essay exposes the presumption of the essay to make being appear as an absolute totality. This presumption is a will-to-power which results in a domination of the language of responsibility that joins me to the Other, and a false reduction of this originary ethical language to the ontological or representational language of the Same. As with Nietzsche, language never absolutely gives what it promises: it is a skin, a mask, a porous surface, an exteriority. But how then can Levinas justify his own *assaying* of this problem after recognizing the trace structure of all signifiers—including his own? Only the pursuit of justice in the world, the problematic extension of the theme of responsibility into the everyday social world of flesh and blood persons who desire justice, justifies, for Levinas, this necessary 'abuse' of language, this poetic saying or singing of what properly speaking cannot be said and yet which appears passingly in the wake of this unknowing like ghostly footprints in the sand from all eternity.

The essay, particularly one that puffs itself up with the pretense of being a treatise set forever in authorial type and written in the third person, aspires to the same completeness of the thief who wishes to commit the perfect crime by eliminating every trace of his or her passing, leaving everything undisturbed and appearing as if it had always and will always be that way, just as it is, intact, complete, definitive, clear and distinct, authoritarian. Of course, the perfect crime, or essay, is an impossibility since every elimination of a trace of one's passing also leaves a trace, as Derrida has made clear. All inscription leaves fingerprints, even if they are the fingerprints of an author or thief busily wiping away his or her own fingerprints or signature from the inscription. But

the letter, to the contrary, exploits the presence-in-absence structure that is the hallmark of the trace. A letter is not merely a substitute for presence, but a recognition and humble admission of its impossibility, starting out always from the distance of separation across which the letter is aimed. Every sign is a trace. But in addition to the "signification proper to a sign" there is also, in a letter, understood as a trace, the exposure of a signifyingness unsuspected by the essay, a signifyingness which is "the passing of him who delivered the sign." This signifyingness, Levinas claims, "resides for a letter, for example, in the writing and the style of that letter, in everything which makes it possible that simultaneously with the transmission of the message, we pick up, starting from the language of that letter and its sincerity, someone passing purely and simply."¹¹ It is exactly this argument that the present text will interpret to be extended to signifying the presence of God inhabiting the textuality of the sacred text and revealed in a theopoetic reading.

A letter involves the veritable conjuring of the other to whom the letter is addressed, conjuring their felt-presence into the revelatory but impossible experience of the presence-of-an-absence. When you get a letter from someone and sit down to read it, the signatory seems to come to life or come to presence in her words as you read them, as if you can almost hear the voice of the letter writer rising from the signage on the page. You can almost feel the warmth of your beloved interlocutor as you read. Your heart beats faster. Similarly, when I sit down to write a letter to a friend, it is as if this very act of intending to speak directly and exclusively to them with no expectation of any return from this unconditional donation of myself, brings about a conjuring or joining

¹¹ Levinas, E. "La Trace de L'Autre," p. 200.

up with (*con-jurare*) the presencing of my friend, a felt sense of them being impossibly physically present nearby, attentive to the writer somehow. The essay, on the other hand, is addressed anonymously. It is the expression of a neutral philosophy which is always in danger of becoming a treatise on the subject, the loathsome, authoritarian, 'final word', the Hegelian dance that is so perfect it ends all dancing in-and-for-itself once and for all. Genuine transformational philosophical poetic discourse, however, discourse in which one surrenders to the discourse and risks being transformed by the discourse, in Levinas's view, must, therefore, be "an intersubjective movement" if it would avoid being violent and naive.¹² There is no individual salvation. Discourse, illuminating conversation, must be an interpenetrating, meaningful involvement between or among people who have assumed a certain poetic attitude for the purpose of allowing the truth to show herself, not being willing to accept a mere confabulation of new and titillating metaphors that can lead the humble reader astray into self-deluded sophistry. The fullest flowering of discourse, the unimpeded *overflowing* of reading and writing, speaking and listening, must be a deeply spiritual practice for which you are ready to sacrifice your hold on an exclusionary, rational, purposeful, ready-made life. That is exactly the structure of the traditional practice of *lectio divina* understood as an approach to physically entering into the scene of a transformational theopoetic reading of the Word of God.

.....ADD BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BASIC MOVEMENTS OF LECTIO DIVINA
HERE.....

¹² Levinas, E. *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 20; hereafter 'OB'.

3. Ethical Expression and Anarchical Metaphysics

In a note to one of his commentaries on Levinas's philosophy, Derrida points out that one must be cautious in speaking about Levinas's work "because Levinas's writing, which would merit an entire separate study itself, and in which stylistic gestures (especially in *Totality and Infinity*) can less than ever be distinguished from intention, forbids the prosaic disembodiment into conceptual frameworks that is the first violence of all commentary."¹³ It is in this resistance to "prosaic disembodiment" that the ethical metaphysics developed by Levinas, is inextricably connected to his understanding of discourse, language, speech, signification, and expression. In any utterance, Levinas explains, what is said cannot be understood apart from the Saying from which the said is said. "Saying," for Levinas, is a pre-thematic and pre-conscious event of expression that seeks our being-with-the-Other, a "signification" or signifyingness which is not yet syntactical speech but which, from a certain desire, gives rise to an intention that results in a statement, a "said." A key dimension of saying is that it is fundamentally intersubjective in that it only occurs in relation to and in speaking with another. Perhaps language is essentially epistolary. A letter written to no one is contradictory. In Levinas's view, saying would be itself that intersubjective relation that is enacted in a letter. Every said thus involves a kind of betrayal of the saying from which it condenses. Within the context of this necessary violence, and with all humility on the part of the violator, this betrayal is perpetrated within the structure of responsibility, not by foregoing the said in favor of quietude (in truth, a worse violence, as Heidegger

¹³ Derrida, Jacques. "Violence and metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 84, n.7.

realized) but by taking on this violence first and foremost within oneself, within the body of the sayer, or, hermeneutically, the reader, or, spiritually speaking, the aspirant.¹⁴ As Levinas succinctly puts it, "the face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation" (TI 201). Saying, the very possibility of language, obligates because language is first and foremost an ethical relation. It is a being-*for-the-other*, a willingness to express myself to another in an exposure without calculation, an already-expressing-myself before I know it. This necessarily puts my identity into question.

If the face-to-face relation is manifested as a saying or expression, it is yet necessary that this saying never congeal into a dogmatic thematizing of the Other. It is not that the face-to-face relation requires a new form of speaking. Understood as a trace, it is *already* a new form of speaking which would be undone by the imposition of the noesis/ noema structure of representational language. Here is how Levinas expresses the relation between the face (as a trace) and saying (Language) in the form of approach: "A face as a trace, trace of itself, trace expelled in a trace, does not signify an indeterminate phenomenon; its ambiguity is not an indetermination of a noema, but an invitation to the fine risk of approach qua approach, to the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of exposure, saying. *In the approach of a face the flesh becomes word, the caress a saying.* The thematization of the face undoes the face and undoes the approach" (OB 94, emphasis added). The being of being-*for-the-other*, which establishes the ethical relationship as a fundamental responsibility, a pre-conscious responsiveness to the otherness of the Other, is a

¹⁴ Cite Robertson, D. *Lectio Divina* here. Must also include the pray-er and look closer at the connection between reading silently vs reading aloud. Also, memorizing the text, ingestion, gastro etc.

communication of oneself in the sense of expression or giving oneself with "total gratuity," a speaking which undoes every representational structure through a renunciation of the need for absolute and final certitude or Hegelian totality—to the extreme point that one would not know whether one had actually accomplished this renunciation or not. Indeed, to think that you had accomplished this radical undoing of representational intentionality would be a sure sign that you had not achieved it, an insight whose origin is to be found in the *epoché* of Husserl, which we will consider in the following chapter. For the command to be responsible for the Other, Levinas argues, comes "from I know not where" (OB 150), "like a thief" (OB 148), which "has meaning only negatively, by its non-sense" (OB 137), a command which is "prior to any movement of the will" (OB 110), an "anarchy" which "escapes any principle" (OB 101) where I might know what I am doing.

Pre-conscious responsibility, as vulnerability and openness to the approach of the Other, as sensibility and the capacity to be wounded, to be sub-jected, as suffering and persecution, i.e., as a "passivity more passive than any passivity," is something which happens to me through or as an "election," an "assignation," an imperative which commands me to obey before I could ever have any concept of this command or this obedience. An "obedience to the order to go," Levinas says, "without understanding the order, this obedience prior to all representation, this allegiance before any oath, *this responsibility prior to commitment is precisely the other in the same, inspiration and prophecy, the passing itself of the Infinite*" (OB 150, emphasis added). It is within the framework of such an originary responsiveness to the soft and gentle but persistent call of the Other from beyond concepts and representational knowing, a call that inspires

and affectively, passionately moves me, that the subtle, revelatory power of the theopoetic reading will show itself in a word that can transform my heart, my will, my consciousness of my life-world, and re-create me as a new man.

4. Language and the Problem of Method

The first violence of language is not the wrenching of predication from the universality of Being, not, as Nietzsche realized, the clumsy, straightforward seduction of truth ... supposing truth to be a woman. No, the first violence of language is not the constitution of linguistic objects within a system of knowable and graspable signs. Rather, the first violence of language is the relinquishing of that egoism and dogmatism on the part of the speaker, reader, or writer which presupposes that language, as a pragmatic, utilitarian manipulation of signs, is merely a systematic, hermeneutical tool with which one labors instrumentally to construct a system of knowledge or utility that grasps and conquers the otherness of the world, while maintaining itself at a 'safe' distance behind those signs. In the same way that it is impossible to "understand" Husserl's *epoché* without actually undertaking it, so also one cannot grasp Levinas's notion of the ethical outside of the personal ethical relationship in which it is produced, in an objectification represented by a language which has not undergone the purgation of representation in the 'reduction' to the face-to-face relationship. To do this, in my view, would be to miss the most potent aspect of Levinas's phenomenology. If the purity of the language Levinas desires is an actual impossibility given the finite, historical situation of the human speaker, it is yet a purity which is infinitely and helplessly desired, thereby producing—not the pure language itself—but a language that

maintains within itself a constant tension between the silence of the taut bow and the violent inscription of the plucked bowstring.

Levinas's language is productively anarchical. It undoes itself at every turn because it seeks to express that which refuses to be expressed. It is given over to a saying which can only be said, as Levinas says, in the "alternating rhythm of the said and the unsaid, and the unsaid being unsaid in its turn." Levinas, like Nietzsche and Socrates, desires not to speak about the ethical but to speak ethically.¹⁵ The violence done lovingly to the ordinary word must be undertaken if there is to be philosophy, if there is to be justice and peace in the world. Yet one must always be on guard, as Husserl warned, against slipping back into the "natural attitude." This stubborn, hermeneutical problem haunts Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* and is addressed time and again, not unlike Husserl's repeated performance of the phenomenological reduction throughout his various "introductory" works, and Caputo's slipping into a positivist metaphysical orientation when it suits his narrative. It might be understood as *the* methodological problem for Levinas: how to say that which infinitely surpasses or overflows the said without permitting this saying to collapse into the static categories of ontology, a 'problem' that will drive him into the arms, first, of a philosophical poetic language and, ultimately, into the embrace of a hermeneutical theopoetics ardently becoming a theopraxis. This ethical-linguistic problem of method, encountered throughout the description of the relations between the Same and the Other, understood in the tropes of *responsabilité* in *Totality and Infinity*, becomes the primary problematic of

¹⁵ Levinas, Emmanuel. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis (Dordrecht/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 173.

Otherwise Than Being. In this text Levinas formulates the co-relation of the said and the saying as follows:

We have been seeking the otherwise than being from the beginning, and as soon as it is conveyed before us it is betrayed in the said that dominates the saying which states it. A methodological problem arises here, whether the pre-original element of saying (the anarchical, the non-original, as we designate it) can be led to betray itself by showing itself in a theme (if an an-archeology is possible), and whether this betrayal can be reduced; whether one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks which thematization leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology. (OB7)

The betrayal of language is necessary if the Being of beings is to be allowed to show itself, to come into the clearing where peace and justice are to be accomplished for all others in the world.

In Levinas's world, the ethical is not a system of moral prescriptions but a being-for-the-other, a proximity or pre-conscious "contact" with the other in the face-to-face relation which already defines what it means to be human and which, in the responsibility demanded by this proximity, is always prior to contracts and prescriptions concerning it. Thus, the epiphany of the face is seen as the origin of the ethical (TI 199). As Max Scheler also argued, to be truly human is to be one-for-the-other. It is not, however, as if the human already exists and is consequently in need of the pragmatic guidance of the ethical as something added to it which would then ensure its genuine humanity, as if, prior to the ethical, the human could be conceived as a neutral entity

distinct from the categorical imperative of intersubjective sociality. Rather, Levinas says, "the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity" (TI 213). The Nietzschean construct of the "Sovereign Individual" is an Enlightenment myth.

The ethical relation grounded in sociality is prior to the distinction between Being and beings. Metaphysics precedes ontology from an ethical perspective. And if, in order for Being to appear as this or that being, the metaphysical must be inscribed within the ontological, i.e., if the saying of language can only become known within the said, within the space of the structure established by the ontological difference, it is thus inscribed, for Levinas, only as a "non-indifference" to the other (OB 97), yet another face of response-ability in tandem with the poetic. This keeps the ethical inscription from becoming hypostasized as merely the noematic correlate of an intentional noesis, the *cogitatum* of a *cogitatio*—a false reduction, which, for Levinas, is tantamount to the violence of the fratricidal Cain. The solution must be otherwise. Since the methodological problem that arises in the context of the analysis of saying and the said and which will bedevil the exposition of the one-for-the-Other, finds its origin and possible solution in Husserl's development of the phenomenological *epoché*, it will be helpful to see how this problem arose in Husserl's work and how he attempted to resolve it using the *epoché* which, ultimately, will be shown to be the doorway to experiencing the fullness of theopoetical reading and writing, and a natural element of the attitude required by *lectio divina*.

CHAPTER 2

Epoché: Gateway to the Philosophical Poetic

"We wish to proceed here by beginning anew"¹⁶

Edmund Husserl

1. Introduction: the *Epoché* as a Lived Method

Edmund Husserl's development of the "bracketing" or suspension of naïve, conventional consciousness in favor of the phenomenologically "reduced" point of view is of central importance to the practice of what has come to be known as "the phenomenological method" and will be a key factor for understanding the necessary presuppositionlessness of the aspirant attitude in the full revelation of a spiritually transformative, hermeneutical theopoetics.¹⁷ Husserl's *epoché* opens the bare possibility of such a transformative theopoetics, but it will be more fully—although also incompletely from the perspective of the present text—realized by Heidegger, Levinas, and Caputo. One of things I want to show by returning yet again to a re-consideration of the trailblazing work of Husserl, is that it is necessary, in the final analysis, to follow the perpetual, performative necessity of the *epoché* beyond its deployment as a mere

¹⁶ Husserl, Edmund. (1970) *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Trans. David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, III A, Sect. 43, p. 154; hereafter 'C'.

¹⁷ Herbert Spiegelberg, e.g., claims that the *epoché* is "not indispensable" and can even become "hazardous and...falsify the approach to the phenomena...." *The Phenomenological Movement*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), pp. 710-11.

instrumental, hermeneutical means or linguistic technique or strategy, to its fulfillment in the praxis of a transformative spiritual growth and development that is encountered in and by a lived-through incorporation of the reading experience with the text, a primary example of which is Augustine's conversion in the garden as reported in *The Confessions* and excerpted in the epigraph of the present text. The fundamental difficulty in the conceptual characterization of Husserl's phenomenological "method" is not so much its intrinsic complexity or subtlety, but its irreducibility in practice to a mere *instrumental* means without losing access to the poetic dimension that motivates the hermeneutical aspirant's poetic, perhaps mystical, relationship with the text. For, while the *epoché* is, indeed, a means, I will show it to be simultaneously (and paradoxically) itself the end toward which it is a means: presuppositionlessness or detachment as a veritable lifestyle and permanent way of life; a theopoetic, bodily realization of 'apodictic' self-knowledge understood as a lived and living inter-relational, responsiveness cultured through a sociality-with and for-others, a state of perpetual, responsive thanksgiving rather than a grasping objectification of the Other, however beneficent. To treat Husserl's phenomenological reduction as merely an instrumental method for grasping and presenting the absolute essence of truth is already to have missed the more subtle dimensions of both method and truth in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. *These subtle dimensions involve an essential transformation of the investigating consciousness and not some purely objective, intellectualist or theoretical manipulation or representation of the phenomenal object, in a Kantian sense.* It is that process of subjective, spiritual transformation which will be focused on here using an arbitrary historical procedure to show the various phases of the *epoché's* development in

Husserl's work: its incipient formulation in his early writing, the so-called "Cartesian" formulation of *Ideas I*, and finally the reductions from the "life-world" and from psychology described in *The Crisis*. What did Husserl get right, and what did he get almost right? But, there is a difficulty with that question right off.

The difficulty with which one is faced at the beginning of an investigation of Husserl's *epoché* is that to *adequately* describe what the *epoché* "is" it would be necessary to have already achieved the "radical" perspective to which the *epoché*, as a propaedeutic, phenomenological methodology, leads. The *epoché* cannot be grasped from the perspective of the "natural attitude" because it is precisely that which the *epoché* was designed to overcome. This is not merely an epistemological problem of "perspective," of getting the "right" interpretative *slant* on the *epoché*, but a "problem" of the fundamental difference between the unreflective, objectivistic, positivistic, dogmatic, 'scientific' orientation of the natural attitude, and the absolute freedom from bias that is to be achieved by virtue of the transcendental reduction, the "disinterested" attitude of the "full" *epoché*. Therefore, to make the *epoché* itself an "*object*" of investigation standing "over and against" the investigating consciousness, as a possibility of being grasped and described as it *really* is, is to remain ensnared in exactly those presuppositions which, according to Husserl, render any possible approach to philosophical apodicticity impossible, and thus bar the road to the fulfillment of a more advanced, transformative theopoetics.

From *Ideas I* on, Husserl relentlessly confronts his own "slipping back" into the natural attitude after the *epoché* is thought to have been performed, criticizing, for instance, his use of *spatial* metaphors to describe various aspects of the transcendental

sphere, terms such as "above," "stratum," and "component." These metaphors, Husserl says, "taken from the sphere of the natural world . . . are dangerous" and, if they are to be used, a "necessary transformation of their sense must be noticed" (C, III A, 51, p.174). This is a point that will come up again in Caputo's use of binary terms in his critique of "high and mighty" theology. Caputo depicts his radical theology as "weak," for example, as opposed to the "strong" classical theology he criticizes, and whereas traditional theology looks for God in the absolutist clouds *above* in Caputo's view, he will risk dirty fingernails to go digging for God in the loamy earth *below*. As with Husserl, Caputo occasionally falls back into the natural attitude of the argumentative realist, wanting to demonstrate by force of argument something is *this way* and not *that*, insisting that his "radical" interpretation will finally set the record straight which, as I will show in a later chapter of this book, locks Caputo into an intellectualist debate *about* poetics rather than a straightforward demonstration of poetical showing itself, despite his yeomanly efforts to transform the worldly sense of these terms. This transformation of sense that Husserl refers to is the linguistic equivalent of the transformation of consciousness brought about by the *epoché* itself. Language thus becomes here a "transcendental problem" or "region" whose true nature will only be uncovered through further transcendental analyses (C, III A, 55, p.188). The *epoché* is not merely a *device* or *technique* that can be used to "adequately" excavate self-evident truth, not an "instrument" in the Heideggerian sense of "equipment." The *epoché* is not a tool that is at hand. The only "tool" of transcendental phenomenology is the subjective experience of the phenomenological aspirant himself or herself. And the only "technique" employed is an actual self-transformation leading to the achievement of a new, let's say

cautiously, enlightened *reflective* "naïveté," a fundamental change-of-attitude or change of heart, a *metanoia* that is a *lived posture* for the aspiring, hermeneutical theopoet, the investigating consciousness (C, III A, 40, p.150). In short, as I will show is also true of theopoetics and its actual practice, one cannot fully understand or practice the *epoché* without first undertaking it and being transformed by it, and not partially or occasionally when it suits us, but perpetually. We are thus led to the question, "What is the meaning of the *epoché*, precisely *from* the transcendental perspective of the *epoché* itself?"

2. Historicity, Historicism and the *Epoché*

Thinking from a theopoetical perspective, it is possible to trace the little *histoire* of Husserl's development of the *epoché* from its emergence in his earlier works, where it first appears in seminal form, to what I think of as its 'maturity' in his later, unfinished *The Crisis*. In his *Logical Investigations* (1900), for instance, Husserl discusses the essential principle of his phenomenological investigation of the ground of universal knowledge as a certain "thinking over" which is a "freedom from presuppositions" (LI, II, 7, 263-64).¹⁸ Husserl amplifies this principle of presuppositionlessness by saying that it is more of a "shedding of light" than factual explanation: "Its aim is not to *explain* knowledge in the psychological or psychophysical sense as a *factual* occurrence in objective nature, but to *shed light* on the *Idea* of knowledge in its constitutive elements and laws." (LI, II, 7, 265). Once the constitutive dimension of the "mind" is recognized, "adequate" or "fulfilled" knowledge can no longer be deduced from principles or objects which somehow exist "in-themselves," independent of the mind in the Kantian sense; a

¹⁸ Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., trans. J.N. Findlay (Halle, 1900; New York: Humanities Press, 1970); hereafter 'LI'.

new "freedom" is now required to detach the phenomenological consciousness of the theo-poetical aspirant from the "prejudice" of objectivity and the unquestioned bias of naïve empiricism. This will open the door to the practical, embodied, lived self-transformation of the theo-poetical aspirant who would venture to interpret the textuality of the sacred text.

The above theme of the *epoché* is reiterated with greater specificity in Husserl's "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" (1911) in terms of a freedom from "historicism"—the bias which assumes that history can be made into an "object" to be grasped independently of the *historical subject* who is always already involved in that process, always already immersed in the ongoingness of history.¹⁹ Insofar as subjective self-consciousness is itself historical ("historicity"), the objectification of the historical will always fail to arrive at the true, or fully "valid" essence of history itself. Rather, what is needed, Husserl asserts, is an "entering vitally into an historically reconstructed spiritual formation" through "philosophical intuition" and "the phenomenological grasp of essences" (PRS 128, 147). But this is not merely a methodological or theoretical problem. It is rather a response to a "spiritual need" which "afflicts us, a need that leaves no point of our lives untouched" (PRS 140). To overcome these thoroughgoing difficulties that are virtually ignored by empiricism, naturalism, and historicism, a radically new "science" is needed. Far from avoiding the historical content of the philosophical tradition, this radically new procedure must "penetrate the soul" of the tradition's words and theories. History, as language, thus becomes a "region" of

¹⁹ Husserl, E. "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" in *Phenomenology and the Crises of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); hereafter, 'PRS'.}

phenomenological analysis; the meaning of history demands an intentional analysis itself, an analysis of the *essence* of history (its "fundamental structures") as the constituted correlate (what will become the *noema*) of historical self-consciousness. History is not simply "there" for us, like a rock is "there" for empirical science. Rather, we *make* history. Thus, no definitive answers to historical problems, the positional truths of "*Weltanschauungen*," the "particular" sciences, can ever be final, apodictic answers. A universal, "scientific" philosophy is needed which, Husserl says, "for the sake of time" must not "sacrifice eternity" (PRS, 141). It is necessary to uncover the essential origin of "historical" making (*poiesis*) itself—a pursuit that will lead Husserl to seek a "face-to-face" encounter with the transcendental as such in *The Crisis*, where nothing less will do.

Consideration of history, then, leads to the necessity of an intentional analysis of the essence of history itself by way of a bracketing or *epoché* of the prejudice of historicism and the realization of history as a lived and living process brought to "conceptual distinctness and clarity" (PRS, 144). It is exactly through the *epoché* that, Husserl believes, this "scientific clarity" can be achieved. Like history itself, however, the *epoché* cannot be *grasped* as a scientific "object." It is a process of self-transformation, "rising from below" (PRS, 147) Husserl says, a "living" methodology which is non-conceptualizable as such. One cannot merely "think" one's way through the "universal" *epoché*. The *epoché*, as a continual approach to the origin of its own being, is always a *doing again*, always already a beginning anew. "Philosophy," Husserl says, "is essentially a science of true beginning" (PRS, 146). Perhaps that is why Husserl himself returned to the *epoché* again and again—not because of any

inherent defect or failure of earlier attempts to formulate it, or because he did not yet have the 'procedure' worked out "right," but because this "beginning again," as Merleau-Ponty also realized, is, *itself*, the true essence of phenomenological philosophy.

Perhaps, also, that is why Husserl's *Ideas*, *Cartesian Meditations*, and *The Crisis* are all subtitled "Introductions" to phenomenological philosophy. Had Husserl lived longer, one wonders how many more "introductions" there might have been from him....

3. Husserl's Three Formulations of the *Epoché*

Concerning the so-called "Cartesian" reduction, it will be helpful to keep in mind from the outset Husserl's own later assessment of this earlier approach to the *epoché*. In *The Crisis*, Husserl criticizes the "Cartesian" approach to the reduction as having "a great shortcoming" in that it prematurely achieves the transcendental "in one leap," and consequently finds itself involved with a transcendental "ego" that is "empty of content"—merely the bare universal which has not yet been fully explicated (C, III A, 43, 155). This is the *epoché* we discover in *Ideas I*.²⁰ What is helpful about it is that it brings to light for the first time in Husserl's work, the fundamental technical problems of transcendental phenomenology, problems that will be carried over, re-thought and expanded in *The Crisis*. The "Cartesian" reduction lacks a resolution for the "how" of intersubjective world-constitution (which is exactly what Levinas will set out to 'correct' in his ethical phenomenology under the banner of *Socialité*) as well as recognition of the essentially personal, lived, and communal dimensions of the later formulations of the transcendental *epoché* that will be introduced below.

²⁰ Husserl, E. *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, vol. I, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (1913; New York: Collier Books, 1962); hereafter, 'Ids'.

Husserl's groundwork for the phenomenological reduction in *Ideas I*, if not the actual undertaking of it itself, is laid out in a series of stages in the first four chapters of the text. This development has a rather sudden and unexpected culmination at the end of Section 46 of the text where Husserl declares without reservation that his inquiry has already "reached its climax" insofar as he has now achieved that peculiar kind of knowledge which is the foundational outcome of the *epoché* posture and attitude and which, consequently, will allow for "the detachability in principle of the whole natural world from the domain of consciousness" This knowledge is the work of "the region of pure consciousness" in the ego's immanent reflection upon *intentional* experience (*Erlebnis*) (Ids, I, 46, 131-32). It should be noted that in *The Crisis*, 'experience' is referred to primarily and consistently as "*Erfahrung*," whereas in *Ideas I* both *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* are used, sometimes interchangeably.²¹

Husserl seems well aware of the fact that the very possibility of the reduction is wholly dependent upon the fundamental distinction between experienced things or objects, which are "transcendent," and the essentially different type of reality which is experience (*Erlebnis*) given through immanent reflection: the first—although pre-delineated in a manner which is *apparently* complete—is necessarily perspectival, *spatial*, always inadequate to its object and, at best, only able to be adumbrated or sketched out in a partial and contingent way. The latter, however, is not a spatial object, not "presented" at all; it has no sides as such; it can be perceived "immanently" (through "immanent reflection," described below) and *only* immanently and is therefore

²¹ Kohak, Erazim. *Idea and Experience: Edmund Husserl's Project of Phenomenology in 'Ideas*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 156-58.

"given" indubitably and absolutely. It will be helpful right here to look more closely at this critical distinction, for it is a distinction upon which the establishment of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy as a "pure science" will either rise or fall.

Husserl establishes that, indeed, all transcendent being is "analogous" to the perception of a thing: they both—because they are in the process of "becoming" within a spatial framework—can only be given through "*Abschattungen*," shadings or perspectives (Ids, I, 44, 125-26). Thus, what is given transcendentally through such "perspectival sketches" cannot possibly be given immanently. In other words, transcendent being is *only* given within a horizontal structure, while immanent being is *only* grasped non-horizontally or immanently. The physical thing is given by adumbrations but these adumbrations themselves—*qua* mental representations, i.e., inner, subjective experiences—are not, in turn, given to *reflective*, phenomenological consciousness of the aspirant through further sensual adumbrations. Rather, as non-spatial "experiences," they do not have various "sides" which might offer differing perspectives, but, like a feeling, say, or a pain or an intuition, are "given" all-at-once or "absolutely" in their immanent "presentation." And where, for instance, the presentation of a physical thing may be canceled or superseded at some future time (e.g., an illusion) as the result of further empirical evidence, the reflective "presentation" of the adumbrations themselves, the experiences (*Erlebnisse*) of these *in the subject*, are always grasped in the immediate present of their phenomenal manifestation with absolute certitude. Thus, Husserl prematurely claimed to have discovered the true *fulfillment* of the "certitude" of the Cartesian cogito in his phenomenological project.

Although a mental process, that is, an inner experience, is given *absolutely* in its "presentation," nevertheless, "in respect to its essence" it is a part of the whole stream of mental life and consequently can never be grasped in "its full unity" or completeness. But *that* "incompleteness" of the essence of an experience in its connection to the whole stream of experiences, is *essentially* different, Husserl contends, from the incompleteness of the perception of a *physical* thing, which is always transcendent, and is restricted, therefore, not only in terms of possible future perceptions, but also in terms of the perspectival limitations of the sensual perception of the thing within any given perceptual "now." There is some similarity between these incompletenesses, Husserl allows, but a radical, essential difference in their transcendent and immanent potential to be grasped. In any "now" of any immediate, given experience, there is a full, adequate and absolute apprehension of the essence of *that* now. Not so with transcendent, spatial objects. In other words, there is a fundamental *difference in kind* between the always incomplete adumbrations of a physical thing and the "relative clarity or obscurity" of a "pregnant" presentation—by virtue of the difference between transcendent objects and immanent contents: the "presentation" of the latter are given absolutely and no adumbrations are necessary or possible.

Thus, Husserl claims, *Erlebnisse*, the *inner* experience of the subject, can be directly and immediately perceived in a primordial or originative ("*als originare*") way through *reflection* or "immanent insight." This reflective insight has the "remarkable peculiarity" that it is able to reveal to itself that there is a kind of *preparedness* about cognitive experience, a *tendency-to-be-made-conscious*. The perception of any object in the foreground requires and includes a certain half-perceived, but always present,

background. Therefore, Husserl concludes: "*Alles Erlebnisse sind bewusst!*" ("All experiences are conscious!"). Before these experiences become fully conscious, however, they remain in the background in a manner *analogous to the marginal, pre-thematic contents of perceptual experience, which are already a part of consciousness insofar as reflective self-consciousness includes both the perceived figure and the marginal background against which this figure is seen and upon which its capacity-to-be-seen rests. But although (mental) experiences do indeed have this kind of temporal flow within the sphere of reflection, nevertheless, this should not be equated with the necessary, intrinsic, horizontal inadequacy of Abschattungen.*

Thus, Husserl takes his argument one step further toward establishing the *absoluteness of a pure region of consciousness*. It is not merely the immediate, marginal background, Husserl tells us, that is a part of the perceptual field of the thing, but, beyond this (we learn from reflective consciousness), there are other fields of possibility in which other objects could also arise in connection with the present perceptual field, continuously and harmoniously, in terms of what is meaningfully possible...all joined together in "concatenations" to form my "noticeable field" which, in turn, gives rise to the particular object that is there at this moment "for me." In other words, the immediate background of the object does not constitute the whole field of the object perceived because this background or any part of it could, at any moment, become the object of another field, and so on, throughout the whole realm of the possible universe or universes. It is exactly these infinitely possible "concatenations" that allow the object which I perceive to be perceived as such. The key here is that this concatenation of fields within the field of possible universes, which supports or

constitutes the perceived object, must be interconnected in a *continuous* and *harmonious* manner and within the logic of possibility inherent in the object. But it is exactly this horizon-structure of the *transcendent* thing which precludes any full and adequate grasp of it through any single "sketch" or shading (*Abschattung*). And the existence of other perceiving subjects does not alter this situation since, as transcendent objects themselves (for me), they would merely be included in my perceptual world and I in theirs by virtue of being connected through those harmonious motivational concatenations which give rise to my current sphere of perception in the first place. Just as all possible "worlds" would be included in any given perceptual sketch—grounded in harmony with my present sphere—so too all possible perceiving subjects. This initial handling of intersubjectivity will be developed by Husserl to the inevitable and well-known conclusion of the transcendental ego as a "community of monads" in *Cartesian Meditations* and, as will be shown below, will be brought to a more passionate, personal, intersubjective and far-reaching realization in *The Crisis*.

Consciousness of inner experience, as we learn in Sect. 46 of *Ideas I*, is given self-evidently in a primordial and absolute way. The content of that consciousness of mental experience may be fictitious, but the immanent perception of the experience itself is always beyond doubt. Therefore, as the locus of immanent reflection, I can say for sure that *I exist*, that I *am*, because I think or reflect—regardless of whether the content of that reflection is real or illusionary (the "*epoché*" has already "guaranteed" this in its claim of being able to "bracket" in the first place). But, as Husserl demonstrated, the consciousness of perceptual *things* is never given absolutely. It is always subject to change by virtue of possible further perspectives of the thing, or

through movement into a new perceptual experience which overturns the "validity" of the old perceptions. Object-knowledge is always contingent. Consequently, I can *only* know the thing-world as contingent. But I can know, through immanent reflection, the experience of this thing-perception itself, absolutely and totally. Thus, my personal experience, in its immanent actuality, is absolute "reality" (*Wirklichkeit*). The "I" or the ego, is given indubitably, while the world is always and only given contingently. Experiences of the *world*, which may always turn out to be illusions, inherently involve the possibility of non-being. But the pure consciousness of mental experiences (transcendental consciousness achieved through the *epoché*) operates always and only under the infallible law of being given absolutely.

It is this radical distinction between what we might call first order perception of the thing and second order perception of the intentional unity of those first order perceptions, "given" through the pure reflective consciousness of the ego-subject inhabiting an absolute "vantage point," that will permit all subsequent determinations of phenomenology to be called "pure" science, in Husserl's hopeful estimation. The movement into this distinction, then, is itself the *accomplishment* of the phenomenological reduction. Thus, four chapters into *Ideas I*, Husserl makes the pronouncement: "We have won the knowledge we needed" (*Ids, I, 46, 131-32*). This new knowledge will culminate in the discovery—toward the end of *Ideas I*—of the *constitutive function* of the transcendental ego, to which I would like to now turn because of its phenomenological significance for establishing the transformative/developmental modality of the theopoetical experience.

In Section 97 of *Ideas I*, Husserl attempts to account for the nature of perception insofar as this is not a process of seeing an object "out there," independent of consciousness—as it is thought to be by the subject in the natural attitude. For, clearly, I may perceive an object which, through further perceptions, turns out to be not what I thought it was at all. What I think I see, may, at the very next moment, turn out to have been an illusion or a hallucination—a point which Husserl makes in Section 88 where he first introduces the concept of "the noema." And yet, before I realized that it was an illusion, I did, indeed, have an experience of it *as what I believed it to be*.

Consequently, perceptual experiences cannot be dependent upon some static, self-same object purportedly "out there" in space, independent of consciousness.

Nevertheless, I certainly *did* have a perception of *something*, no doubt about that, and thus my inner perception "as such" did have a certain reality. But if it was not the result of photons careening off some independent material object and blasting the optic nerves with hyletic sense data necessary for representation, or the result of the quasi-mystical action of a thing-in-itself, then how did my perception come about and what is its nature? Husserl's claim is that the perception was constituted through an intentional process which in-formed the raw, hyletic sense data with a certain "gift of meaning" (*Ideas I*, 97, 262).

Husserl's claim is that the noema, the intentional object or the object-as-meant, as the "correlate" of the intentional act, is not a real (*reelle*) constituent of the perceptual experience (*Wahrnehmungserlebnis*) as such. Rather, what is "real" in the perception are the "varying perspectives," the hyletic phases, the sensory data or "stuff" (the material elements) that are given a certain "apprehension" (*Auffassung*) or are

"animated" by the noetic process. The hyletic material is shaped (*Auffassungen*) or given, as a sort-of "*gift*," a meaning (Cf. Sect. 85) through the intentional act of the noetic phase. Thus, the real (*reelles*) components of the perceptual *Erlebnis*, as the experience of the really existing subject, are composed of these hyletic elements, the raw sensory data, in-formed through a certain bestowal of sense or meaning in the noetic "moment." Husserl illustrates this process through the well-known example of the perception of a tree.

You see a tree in the garden. Now you look at it from one point of view, now from another. Throughout these perspectival variations, you say that you see the *same* "tree." The "tree" that remains "the same," despite what the phenomenologist realizes are variations in sense data, is the "tree" that is *meant* or *intended*. This intentional object is the *cogitatum*, the noema. It is not an integral part of our perceptual experience "as such," however, since the perceptual experience is really composed of the continually varying stream of sense data (*hyle*). Obviously, the tree that I perceive is not the same throughout the continually changing stream of sensory variations, and yet I do, in fact, refer to it as "the same." Consequently, through the reduction and in what Husserl calls the immanent or transcendental perception of the phenomenologically reduced point of view, I am able to realize, in a moment of poetic enlightenment, that the "tree" which remains the same, is merely the noema, the intentional tree, which, as was pointed out, is the phenomenal "correlate" of a meaningful construal of hyletic data in the noetic phase. Husserl's claim is that this "'unity' and 'variety' belong to *totally different dimensions*"—a crucial distinction upon which Husserl's theory of constitution and the possibility of achieving a "pure science" of

phenomenology is based. Once I have effectuated this "transcendental reduction" it is possible to perform a descriptive analysis of the "real" elements of the intentional process. Through such an intentional analysis we discover that there is a correspondence between what is *given* "objectively" in perception (the noematic moments) and the hyletic, noetic moments: the former "'exhibits'" itself as a unity through a multiplicity of perspectival variations, whereas the latter *constitutes the concrete multiplicity itself*. Thus, the hyletic and noetic 'phases' can be seen to be the real ("*reelles*") moments of perceptual experience, and the noema can be seen to be merely the meant or intended object that is constituted by this intentional process.

What this phenomenological analysis establishes for Husserl is "an absolute sphere of materials and noetic forms" which, supposedly, can be grasped and described in their absolute purity by the aspirant phenomenologist as the real truth of the perceptual process, an "ultimate source" that Husserl believes offers "the only conceivable solution of the deepest problems of knowledge" because the intentional analysis of the real components of perception, as these have been established in this section, provide—if Husserl is correct—"objectively valid knowledge" (Ids, I, 97, 263). In other words, given the claim of the phenomenological reduction, the *epoché*, to secure an absolute vantage point, together with the present claim regarding the constitutive nature of hyletic intentionality—the constitutive function of the transcendental ego—the world of transcendent objects supposedly "out there" is now understood to be wholly phenomenal or "irreal," and the underlying truth or real (*reelle*) process of perception can now be grasped through the employment of the *epoché*, transcendental reflection, intentional and variational analysis, and pure phenomenological description ... what has

come to be called "the phenomenological method," which is something of a misnomer since it is more of a *practice* than slavish adherence to a set of instructions for grasping truth.

In contrast with this Cartesian variation of the *epoché*, the phenomenological reduction as it is described in *The Crisis* has more of a practical (ethical) and "spiritual" orientation than the "scientifically rigorous" renderings of *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*. These early probes into the "new region" achieved through the reduction are propaedeutic to what appears in its maturity in *The Crisis*. It is true, to a certain extent, that the reduction is one and the same throughout Husserl's oeuvre. But this "sameness" does not diminish the important *differences* that separate the "earlier" from the "later" Husserl. Husserl's thinking, in keeping with his theory, must be understood as "a constant becoming through a constant intentionality of development" (C, Appdx IV, 338). In *The Crisis*, for instance, Husserl becomes more aware of the connection between language and thought, an awareness which is revealed in "The Origin of Geometry," an essay from the same period.²² Husserl's theory of linguistic signification in this late text views language as a "linguistic living body (*Sprachleib*)," a "linguistic embodiment" (OG, 161) of origivative meaning which can be repeatedly re-lived and thus continued by others (OG, 164). A similar appreciation of language can be found in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, especially the chapter entitled "Language."²³ The problem here is that there is a "seduction of language" to become

²² Husserl, E. "The Origin of Geometry," in Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (1939; New York: Nicholas Hays, Ltd., 1978), pp. 157-180; hereafter 'OG'.

²³ Cf. Walsh, R. (1984). "An Organism of Words: Ruminations on the Philosophical-Poetics of Merleau-Ponty," *KINESIS*, 14, No.1, 13-33.

sedimented in the form of persisting linguistic acquisitions, so that the self-evident structures of "originally intuited life" must be repeatedly taken up and given new life (OG, 165). This is the task of the phenomenological philosopher working within the context of the *epoché* and is the forerunner of a requisite posture for the aspiring hermeneutical phenomenologist. Language is being pushed here "beyond" the limiting horizon of the world, beyond second order, sedimented, purely "functional" language into the "life-world," the lived-world, the pre-reflective world of everyday inter-subjective self-consciousness brought to light in *The Crisis*.

In Husserl's *The Crisis*, the hermeneutical phenomenologist not called to the stark methodological manipulation of the "object" 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" ourselves. The so-called transcendental "ego" is really a misnomer here. This "ego", this individual "I" haunting the pages of *The Crisis* is already a *plurality*, a "we", a community which gives rise to a pre-given "life-world." In short, we are *called* in *The Crisis* to a new way of life, which is exactly the door that the theopoetical aspirant approaching the sacred text must pass through, the narrow gate which will require a lightening of the perceptual load. For philosophers, this call is construed in terms of the whole of mankind.²⁴ Philosophers are called to be humanity's most essential self-reflection (C, Appdx IV, 335-41). Our primary philosophical concern will no longer be the "what" of the metaphysical question, a centuries-old preoccupation, but the "how" of

²⁴ Cf. Caputo, J. (2016) *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional*. Polebridge Press. See Chapter 8: "The Folly of the Call" KINDLE ed. "The insistence of God means that the name of God is not the name of a Supreme Being, but the name of a call, to which we may or may not respond."

it. The humanistic motivation of the *epoché* takes precedence here over the already resolved technical problems. We are instructed now to *practice* the *epoché* and live it "as a *habitual attitude* which we resolve to take up once and for all" (C, III A, 40, 150, emphasis added). At one point in *The Crisis*, Husserl goes so far as to describe this initial recognition and acceptance of the "call" to the *epoché*, the "vocation" of philosophy, as *comparable to a religious experience*, a surprising declaration from Husserl that I will carry over into a transformative theo-poetical hermeneutics. "Perhaps it will become manifest," Husserl says, "that the total phenomenological attitude and the *epoché* 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" (C, III A, 35, 137).

What does it mean that the full, "universal" *epoché* is thought by Husserl to be "comparable" in the beginning to a "religious conversion"? We must read this keeping in mind that Husserl has explicitly warned against misinterpreting his 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 . . ."

(C, II, 15, 74). The *epoché* has now taken on the monumental proportions of world/soul transformation.

By the time of *The Crisis*, the concept of the transcendental has come to include all self-conscious beings, even, Husserl suggests, animals, plants and "all living beings insofar as they have, even indirectly but still verifiably, something like "life," and even communal life in the spiritual (*geistige*) sense" (C, III A, 55, 188). This primordial communion has a collectively pre-given world-horizon within which "objects" are experienced in their immanent, intentional givenness, i.e., intuitively, as "objects." Husserl is clearly less interested here in the ontological status of these "objects," whether or to what extent they are "real"—the "scientific" point of departure of the "Cartesian" reduction—and more interested in the *lived* experience of the existential subject, the experience that is more primary than the superficial activity of an objectifying consciousness in the natural attitude. Here, "through the *epoché* a new way of experiencing, of thinking, of theorizing, is opened up" in which the philosopher "forbids himself to ask questions which rest upon the ground of the world at hand, questions of being, questions of value, practical questions, questions about being or not-being, about being valuable, being useful, being beautiful, being good, etc." (C, III A, 41, 152). Asking "about" is always an asking from *within* the horizon of the world. But what Husserl is interested in here is the "pure" subject as a constituting, transcendental intentionality which, through the releasement of the *epoché*, has achieved the "perspective" of a groundless ground "above" and beyond the world where "all natural interests are put out of play" (C, III A, 41, 152).

In Section 47 of *The Crisis*, having just discussed the "universal a priori of correlation" and the attendant problems of validation and adequacy in terms of transcendental co-constitution with other transcendental egos, Husserl describes how the attitude achieved by the reduction is not an isolated one, and hence is defensible against the charge of solipsism (initially worked out in *Cartesian Meditations*) for "in our continuously flowing world-perceiving we are not isolated but rather have within it, contact with other human beings [and] *in living with one another* each one can take part in the life of the others" (C, III A, 47, 163). This fundamentally *communal nature* of the transcendental "ego" is, if not a "new" development, certainly an advancement over the earlier formulation found in the fifth Cartesian Meditation. Whereas the horizontal/vertical approach to the transcendental in *The Crisis* is preeminently personal, intersubjective, world-oriented and historical, the earlier Cartesian approach is skewed toward the positivistic, analytic and the "scientific," and thus results in an isolated, "empty" transcendental ego that is *purely* vertical, and thus lacking the horizontal transcendence toward the "other" which emerges in the posture of the *epoché* in *The Crisis*. There can be no question then, that the Cartesian *epoché* is, according to Husserl's own assessment in *The Crisis*, phenomenologically inadequate (C, III A, 43, 155).

In *The Crisis* the transformation of the whole person through the *practicing* of the *epoché*, becomes a "vocation" (*vocāre*, to call or invoke), a "habit," a way of life, something which must be lived through every day as an *ongoing*, intersubjective self-transformation. If *Ideas I* laid out the bare possibility (*theoria*) of the *epoché* as method and goal, *The Crisis* depicts the *reality* of this earlier, more abstract *epoché* as *actually*

being accomplished in the context of lived and living praxis, which makes this version of the *epoché* more amenable to the theopoetic attitude required of the aspirant who would read and hear the word of God. The vocation of the *epoché* is "the quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers," Husserl says, "our inner personal vocation [which] bears within itself at the same time the responsibility for the true being of mankind." Philosophers are thus "*functionaries of mankind*;" there is an *inherently practical* and proto-ethical orientation to Husserl's phenomenology, an axiological dimension—in the broadest sense—involved in, not the mere reflection upon, but the *practice* of the *epoché*. 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" (C, I, 7, 17-18). 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. Although Husserl is not willing to go much further with the language of religion than to assert that "the enigma of creation and that of God himself . . . contain a necessary theoretical question," nevertheless, his characterization of phenomenology as being *its own ground* indicates an essentially simple or spiritual nature:

In the *epoché* neither logic nor any a priori nor any philosophical demonstration in the venerable old style can provide us with artillery. Rather, like all objective-scientific disciplines, they are naïve and are themselves to be subjected to the *epoché*. On the other hand, what is peculiarly proper to the essence of the incipient philosophy of this phenomenological-transcendental radicalism is that, as we have said

before, rather than having a ground of things taken for granted and ready in advance, as does objective philosophy, it excludes in principle a ground of this or any other sort. Thus it must begin without any underlying ground. But immediately it achieves the possibility of creating a ground for itself through its own powers, namely, in mastering, through original self-reflection, the naïve world as transformed into a phenomenon or rather a universe of phenomena. (C, III A, 53, 181)

Given this radical definition of the sphere achieved in the "full" *epoché*, one must ask how it is possible to trace the development of the phenomenological reduction as a process of self-transformation, or, communally speaking, as a process of world-transformation, since, as Richard Cobb-Stevens points out, "the auto-constitution of the ego cannot be thematically displayed but only obliquely disclosed."²⁵

Husserl's answer to this question in *The Crisis* is given in his new version of the *epoché*, concerning which, sounding a bit like Nietzsche, he will "lead" but not "instruct" us (C, I, 7, 18). In response to our personal/transcendental "call," we take up and practice the *epoché*; the core responsibility of this "vocation" is found in the directive to abstain from the conventional thesis of the perceptual world. We must withdraw from all worldly interests and influences and become "disinterested spectators," participant-observers looking on at our own looking-on (C, III A, 41, 151). But at the same time, we must not forget that we are also and always (by virtue of the primordially of our embodiment) immersed in the pre-given life-world as ensouled bodies or embodied

²⁵ Cobb-Stevens, Richard. (1983) "*Transcendental and Empirical Dimensions in Husserl's Phenomenology*," in *Continental Philosophy in America*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman, et al. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. press), p. 31.

souls, beings-in-the-world, *creatures* in a "world" we ourselves are at the same time constitutively "creating." We are thus *worldly* beings, beings who always *have* a world, a world which we are making from the 'world' that is "given." "The philosopher within the *epoché*," Husserl says, "must also 'naturally live through' the natural life; yet the *epoché* effects an immense difference in that it changes the entire manner of investigation and, furthermore, reshapes the goal of knowledge in the whole of its ontic meaning" (C, III A, 52, 176).

Although he characterizes the achievement of the full reduction as a "position above" the finite manifestations of the transcendental, Husserl nevertheless admits that there are problems of language here which may result in one's being misled: "to be sure, words taken from the sphere of the natural world . . . are dangerous, and the necessary transformation of their sense must therefore be noticed" (C, III A, 51, 174). This necessary transformation of sense elevates these spatiotemporal signs to the transcendental sphere where there is no space and a radically different notion of time. The *epoché* in *The Crisis* is clearly Husserl's answer to the problem, not only between philosophy and science, but to the larger "spiritual" crisis of the Western world as itself a collectively *constituted* phenomenon. World-transformation is called for through self-transformation, accomplished in and through the practice of the *epoché*. The constitutive operation of the transcendental "ego" in *The Crisis*, involves the orchestration of a spiritual community which, through the practice of the *epoché*, achieves the mature development of ontic validity in self-evident experience and which now begins taking "*responsibility*" for itself. This accomplishment of what might be called transcendental "conscience," (Husserl does not use this term) as with the

"lesser" but still transcendental accomplishment of the *epoché* in *Ideas I*, has no reason to probe beyond itself. In the transcendental attitude achieved through the *epoché*, there "is" no "beyond" because the hermeneut practicing the *epoché* will have finally achieved interpenetration with the horizon of all horizons, or so Husserl hoped. Even though Husserl's apodictic expectations for the *epoché* went unmet, the possibility of an impossible, transformative theopoetics begins to emerge at exactly the point of the phenomenological method where Husserl points to the proper attitude necessary for doing phenomenological hermeneutics that is achieved through the *epoché*.

The themes of the reduction from the "*Lebenswelt*" are continued in Husserl's third formulation of the *epoché* employing a reduction from psychology where it is asserted that "what is essentially proper to the soul includes all intentionalities, the experiences of the type called 'perception,' for example, considered precisely as those performed by the person serving as an example and exactly in the way he accomplishes them; and always [one must take care] that nothing is brought in which goes beyond the person's or the 'soul's' own essence" (C, III B, 69, 236). It is the "soul" itself that is the "object" of correlation here and the manner in which experience is given to this soul. Epistemological concern for the ontological status of the objective world has been superseded by a concern for the manner in which the individual experiences that world. Thus, for Husserl, "whether the perceived [object] exists or not, whether the perceiving person is mistaken about this or not, and also whether I, the psychologist, who in my empathetic understanding of the person unhesitatingly concur in the belief in about the perceived [object], am mistaken about it or not—this must remain irrelevant for me as a psychologist" (C, III B, 69, 236). These things must not interfere with the

pure psychological description of the perception. What is of central importance here from the perspective of the theopoetic approach to reading that we are pursuing is Husserl's focus on the existing individual. "For Psychology is, after all, supposed to be the universal science of souls, the parallel to the universal science of bodies; and just as the latter is from the start a science through a *universal 'epoché'*, through a habitual, vocational attitude established in advance in order to investigate abstractively only the corporeal in its own essential interrelations, so also for psychology" (C, III B, 69, 239). Thus, the "residuum" of the transcendental reduction in *The Crisis* is a personalized ego-subject within an intersubjective community, whereas the subjective "residuum" of *Ideas I* is described using individualistic terms such as an "absolute uniqueness" (I, I, 33, 102).

Husserl's formulation of the reduction from psychology in *The Crisis* offers a clear picture of the kind of radical self-transformation required of the phenomenological aspirant or reader by the "full" *epoché*. First of all, Husserl says, "the *epoché* [from psychology] must be actually universally carried out." It must not be merely a shallow, critical *epoché*, or a universal critique of experience offering the possibility of knowing truths-in-themselves, or a "skeptical, agnostic *epoché*." The *full epoché* will be none of these. These false *epochés* all succumb to the omnipresent temptation of the natural attitude; they are "positional," Husserl says, they want to dance the dance that will end the need for all further dancing. I don't think so. "But the psychologist as such in his inquiry must, we repeat, take and have no position." And, we might add, the same is true for the phenomenological philosopher. It is only through this prejudice-free, spiritually detached, transcendental "posture" that the psychologist or theopoetical

aspirant will achieve full intentional unity, full realization of the "absolutely self-enclosed 'internal' world of . . . [conscious] subjects," that is, for the phenomenological psychologist, the "total unity of the intentional life as his horizon of work" (C, III B, 69, 240). A central and vital "therapeutic" dimension of the *epoché* is revealed here that I will bring to light with greater specificity in a later chapter of this text. The achievement of the attitude of the 'disinterested spectator' ("disinterest" as a non-positional "position" requires further analysis), is both the prerequisite *and* the goal of the practice of the *epoché*. And, like the transcendental itself, this ("infinitely" interested) "disinterest" takes itself to be its own ground. Both the psychologist *and* the subject, as co-habitants of a single, created world, already co-penetrate the transcendental realm in a manner that reflects the relation between the "sub-community" of philosophers in its relationship to "mankind" as mankind's self-reflection. Co-constitution of the collective life-world is a communal theopoetics in action.²⁶

As the reduction from the *lebenswelt* can be understood as an advance over the "Cartesian" reduction, so the development of the reduction from psychology can be understood as an "advancement" over the reduction from the "life-world." The reduction from psychology represents an extension of the *personalization* of the transcendental "commune" through the further elaboration of the question of the "other" which will become a central feature in the work of Husserl's student, Emmanuel Levinas.

²⁶ Walsh, R. (2005). "Beyond Therapy: Levinas and Ethical Therapeutics," *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counseling, and Health*, March-June 2005; 7(1-2): 29-35.

4. Conclusion

A key difference between the "Cartesian" and the "life-world" reductions is that the latter is originally established out of the context of the pre-given world-horizon, that horizon within which particular experiences arise and to which they are inextricably bound in terms of the logic of possibility of the object and the unity of the "inner" and "outer" horizon of the thing. This is "the lived world" in which we are always already immersed and which always exceeds our ability to comprehend or fully express it, as in Gestalt psychology where the whole always exceeds the sum of its parts. Here the transcendental is revealed primarily as my subjective "lived" experience. The "Cartesian" reduction, on the contrary, attends to the object in terms of the continuous and harmonious correlation of a possible world of objects, but this world is generated from the structure of the *object* as such rather than from the pre-thematic "being there" in the world of the *subject*.

This confirms the general difference in tone between these two approaches to the reduction: where the "Cartesian" reduction, with which Husserl is too often identified, is abstract and technical, the reduction from the *lebenswelt* is personal, communal, and bound to the spiritual, ethical, social, political, and psychological dimensions of lived life in-the-world. It is because the "Cartesian" reduction lacks an experiential ground in the lived-world that Husserl came to see it as "empty" and as thus contributing to the slippage of the investigating, phenomenological consciousness back into the realist mire of the natural attitude, a slippage or derailment which requires the phenomenologist to consciously work to get back into the posture of the *epoché*, to begin anew, to initiate a fresh introduction to that process of phenomenological philosophy which is itself, in the

beginning and the end, always a "science" of introductions. The willingness to start anew is also intrinsic to the practice of *lectio divina*, for which repetition is the lifeblood. As Merleau-Ponty realized, the final lesson of the epoché is that no final lesson is possible. Despite the differences between earlier and later forms of the reduction in Husserl's philosophy, despite the fact that the *epoché* is inconceivable as such, that it presents a perpetual challenge to the claim to supremacy of representational thinking ... despite that, it should be clear that the *epoché* is, and always was, for Husserl, an indispensable aspect of the 'spiritual' praxis that is the so-called phenomenological method and, in its fullness, the guarantor of this 'method's' end: transcendence-in-immanence personally embodied in the poetic, contemplative, surrendered attitude of the aspirant theo-poetical reader of sacred texts.

MAYBE CONSOLIDATE CHAPS 2 & 3 ????

Improve transition to Chap 3....?

'apodicticity' as an ethical way of life ...?

spiritual transformation growth and development

where apodicticity is the certainty you experience in your response to the call as this is manifested in the face of the widow, orphan and disenfranchised stranger.

The epoché is the doorway to experiencing the fullness of theo-poetical reading and writing, it is the letting-go, the detachment from the material world that is so necessary, the sense world as such, rather than the world as I create and experience it

CHAPTER 3

The Critique of Husserl's Intellectualism

1. Introduction

Although the apparent interest of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* involved the foundation of logic, it soon became clear, according to Levinas, that the method Husserl began contemplating in that text was "the soul of the phenomenological movement." Indeed, Levinas's first major publication, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* can be read as a sustained critical reflection on Husserl's phenomenological 'method', a method which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was developed to distinguish philosophical investigation as a *fundamental* "science" from that of the natural sciences.²⁷ It was Levinas's contention that Husserl's understanding of phenomenological intuition was at the heart of the whole question of method and that the question of method in Husserl's hands necessarily led to ontological considerations. "Our problem here," Levinas says in the Introduction to *The Theory of Intuition*, "is to study intuitionism in Husserl's phenomenology, so we cannot separate in our presentation of the theory of intuition as a *philosophical method* from what may be called Husserl's ontology" (ThI 12-13).

²⁷ Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 2nd ed. (Northwestern University Press, 1995), p. 11; hereafter ThI

In Levinas's view, intuition, i.e., immediate, sensible contact with determinate being, is an essential element of the phenomenological method Husserl was developing. For this reason, an adequate understanding of intuition cannot be separated from the general question of Husserl's methodology. And because the method of a science necessarily presupposes a certain ontology, Husserl's new method also involved, according to Levinas, under Heidegger's influence, a new understanding of being and truth as well. But as the result of his bias toward theory and his claim of the absoluteness of consciousness as the necessary prerequisite for apodicticity, Husserl, according to Levinas, failed to recognize the ontological implications of the method he was developing, implications which Levinas believed Heidegger had taken up in a more fundamental manner. Keep in mind that at the time Levinas was working on *The Theory of Intuition* in Freiburg (1928-29), Husserl had already resigned from his teaching post, although he continued giving seminars. But Heidegger had been catapulted to notoriety after the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927. Husserl was the old master, but Heidegger was the rising star.

It is not so much Husserl's work itself that interests me in this chapter as it is Levinas's response to Husserl's formulation of the *epoché* in the manner depicted in the previous chapter. Having established the general movement of Husserl's early methodological formulations focusing on the crucial value of the *epoché*, it will now be helpful to look more closely at Levinas's critical response to this development in Husserl. In general, the primary goal of the analysis of Levinas's response to Husserl's phenomenological methodology, due to the central importance of this for the whole of the present study, will be to determine how Levinas's initial contact with Husserl's

phenomenology established the basic methodological and substantive perspective that would ultimately lead to, in Levinas's own philosophy, the notion of exorbitant responsibility and its priority, which will become the basic building blocks for the articulation of the personally transformative theopoetics being pursued here. My position in this regard is that Levinas's ethical philosophy cannot be adequately understood without a firm grasp of the manner in which its roots are deeply embedded in the fertile soil of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy grounded in the *epoché* and the reduction. And nowhere do these roots plunge more deeply than regarding the question of the so-called phenomenological method itself, with all its ancillary tendrils of thought.

2. Levinas's Critique of the Cartesian Reduction

It was Levinas's general contention that whereas Husserl developed a methodology which overcomes the naturalistic presuppositions of philosophy understood as "theory of knowledge," he nevertheless was unable to fully extricate himself from its influence. The *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas* "explicitly present a theory of knowledge," Levinas asserts, "and, if only as an unconscious tribute to the prevalent attitude of the time, Husserl turns this into a central preoccupation." In other words, misled by the very 'spirit of the times' against which he was reacting, Husserl, in Levinas's view, was unable to intuit the deeper intentions of his own thought and thus did not adequately recognize that "in the guise of epistemology" he was actually pursuing "interests that are essentially ontological," the implications of which were pursued even more directly by Heidegger and would form the veritable backbone of Heidegger's philosophical poetics in the later works and which would become an emergent theopoetics in Levinas's work (ThI 178).

Levinas's criticism of Husserl is perhaps more stringent than is necessary here, particularly following upon his own presentation of Husserl's theory of intuition. In the same passage from which the above citations were taken, for example, Levinas cites several excerpts from the second volume of the *Logical Investigations* where Husserl is pointing out the problems inherent in the notion that knowledge transcends itself in the apprehension of natural objects. And then Levinas asks: "Is it just a question of understanding how the laws of thought and the real course of things manifest a rigorous correspondence?" (ThI 178) Levinas thinks that Husserl remains stuck in a modernist, scientific mindset, especially in his earlier work. It was the purpose, or one of the purposes of Levinas's presentation of the notion of intuition in Husserl's phenomenology to show that precisely what Husserl has done by virtue of this idea is to debunk the classical correspondence theory of truth and to replace it with an alternative, more idealistic phenomenological theory. The central tenet of the naturalistic approach to knowledge, the scientific approach, is that truth equals an adequation between thought and being. However, says Levinas, "we believe that this idea of 'adequation' is the source of all the difficulties and problems" (ThI, 127). But is the notion of adequation in Husserl's philosophy the same as that of the substantialist notion underlying the correspondence theory of truth? To answer this and to get the proper perspective of Levinas's critique of Husserl, let us look more closely at Husserl's understanding of the key notion of *intentionality*.

3. The Theory of Intentionality

Intentionality, from the phenomenological perspective, as we have already indicated, is the well-known idea that all consciousness is directed toward an object,

and that all *Erlebnisse*, immanent experiences, are always conscious. It may seem, at first, that the notion of intentionality "appears to be concerning itself with what is obvious," Husserl says, that every consciousness is consciousness of something.²⁸ But insofar as intentionality raises the whole question of understanding the being of that which is presented to consciousness, grasping the "clear-cut separation between the real (*reeller*) portions of one's whole experience which belong to the experiencing itself, and those which belong to the noema," is of fundamental importance for phenomenology, is indeed quite decisive for its proper grounding.²⁹

The theory of intentionality is exactly what overcomes the old epistemological problem of the knowledge relation between subject and object: How is it that a separate subject can grasp and absorb the essence of a distinct object? In so doing, it goes to the very heart of Husserl's new understanding of the subject. It is not as if a subject first exists and then *has* experience. Rather "intentionality is what makes up the very subjectivity of subjects."³⁰ The subject is a *subject*, that is to say, conscious and self-conscious, insofar as the subject constitutes noemata through intentional noeses. Therefore, the objective reality or existence of the world is not the question for Husserl. It is not that the world is thought to be merely phenomenal in a skeptical or idealist sense, but, through the *epoché*, the whole question is simply put out of play. This was a key point on which Husserl was often misunderstood. What remains over when the whole world is bracketed by the *epoché*, i.e., when all the theses concerning the substantial existence of the world are put out of play, is the pure being of

²⁸ Husserl, E. *Ideas*, p.108. Hereafter "Ids"

²⁹ Ids, 96, pp. 257-258.

³⁰ ThI, 41-42 / 70-71.

consciousness, the pure subjectivity of the subject, which then can become itself "the field of a new science—the science of Phenomenology."³¹ Now Levinas's problem here is that he thinks Husserl saw the possibility for this but never adequately pushed ahead and carried it out. Husserl established the theory, but he never actually undertook the full practice of it. It was Heidegger, in Levinas's view at this time, who undertook, in an exciting and innovative way, the actual practice of phenomenology in the formulation of his existential analyses in *Being and Time*. Nevertheless, it was Husserl who worked out the masterplan for the phenomenological program, the keystone of which was the phenomenological reduction. But the heart of the reduction is the theory of intentionality and constitution in which it is intuition that puts us in contact with or makes present "in flesh and bones," "in person," as noema, the experienced object. Thus, truth is no longer understood as the correspondence between thought and external reality but, rather, it is the correspondence between reflection and intuition. Husserl was looking for the primary phenomenon of truth and reason, and he found it in intuition understood as an intentionality which reaches being. Thus, it is perhaps something of an overstatement on Levinas's part to assert that Husserl's "central preoccupation" was the theory of knowledge. In establishing a new ground for the possibility of knowledge against the empiricism, rationalism, positivism, and psychologism of his day, it was necessary for Husserl to thoroughly investigate the underlying presuppositions of these theories in order to fully work out his own. One must achieve a more general view of a theory before criticizing the initial steps toward it. Furthermore, exactly what Husserl

³¹ *Ideas*, 31, p. 102.

means by "knowledge," *since he clearly does not mean what the natural sciences mean by this*, will have to be examined more closely.

4. Husserl's 'Intellectualism'

The critical aspect of Levinas's response to Husserl in *The Theory of Intuition* has two parts. The first part focuses on the primacy of consciousness, theoretical reflection, and representational knowledge, all of which are intertwined with the problem of the absoluteness of consciousness. Levinas asks: "Is our main attitude toward reality that of theoretical contemplation?" And he answers himself with another rhetorical question that once again points out Heidegger's influence on this early text: "Is not the world presented in its very being as a center of action, as a field of activity or care—to speak the language of Martin Heidegger?"³² The opinion exposed in this rhetorical question will be retracted, or at least modified, by Levinas in his later and more heated disputes with Heidegger. The second part of Levinas's critique focuses on Husserl's failure to deal adequately with the question of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, a failure that is due again to the primacy accorded to consciousness and reflection in Husserl's Cartesian version of the *epoché*. In his discussion of the intentionality of consciousness in Husserl's thought, Levinas asserts that "in *Ideen* the ego remains an empty form, impossible to determine," although this criticism is softened by the suggestion that forthcoming works by Husserl will consider "the self in all its concrete aspects...." As I endeavored to show in Chapter 2, Husserl does begin to consider these "concrete aspects" of the subject in *The Crisis*.

³² ThI, 119 / 174.

But the core of both of these problems in Husserl's early work—the primacy of consciousness and the failure to account for intersubjectivity—in Levinas's view, is that Husserl's understanding of intuition and the role it plays in the approach to truth through the reduction is "tainted" by what Levinas characterizes as Husserl's "intellectualism." Although it is by intuition that we come into contact with the object in imagination, perception and memory, every object of an act of intuition is nevertheless grasped as existing through *a representation which posits the object as existing* and by which we say we know it exists. Regardless of the specific character of the intuitional feeling, value, will, desire, etc., they are all thought to exist by virtue of what Husserl calls a "doxic act," a positing of the intentional object as always already existing. But, in Levinas's view, this "doxic thesis" further reveals Husserl's unflinching commitment to the primacy of theory and representational knowledge, his intellectualist bias. "It is because each act of consciousness includes a doxic thesis," Levinas argues, "that the objects of these acts...exist," which shows that "the notion of existence remains for him tightly bound to the notion of theory, to the notion of knowledge, despite all the elements in his system which seem to lead us to a richer notion of existence than mere presence of an object to contemplative consciousness."³³ The fact that Husserl claims in his thesis of doxic positing that there is an act of representation or objectification that accompanies all intentionality, seems to Levinas not only to assert the primacy of theoretical consciousness but also to dogmatically disparage affective and axiological being: "Let us also note incidentally," Levinas says, "the dogmatism involved in juxtaposing, without justification, the theoretical, practical, and affective life, following a

³³ ThI, 134 / 192.

classification inherited from traditional anthropology and psychology."³⁴ What this means for Levinas is that Husserl's phenomenological reduction, despite the possibilities that are inherent in it, remains a mere intellectual exercise, different from the Cartesian methodical doubt, perhaps, but not unlike it in that it is employed as a formal procedure for intuiting essences and is not exploited by Husserl to get at the deepest meanings of the concrete life of the subject.

In Levinas's view, already at this early point in his career, a view which will later become an important part of his own philosophical thought, the practice of phenomenology is understood to require sustained personal effort. It is not an intellectual machination, not something that can be accomplished in the blink of an eye, "as if shot out of a pistol," as Hegel put it.³⁵ The understanding for the necessity of the reduction is not the actual accomplishment of it, as Levinas suspects Husserl believes in *Ideas*. This merely abstract and empty theoretical accomplishment involves a disconnection from the lived world: "For Husserl, philosophical intuition is a reflection on life considered in all its concrete fullness and wealth," Levinas asserts, "a life which is considered but no longer lived." Thus, in Husserl's phenomenology, Levinas concludes, "reflection upon life is divorced from life itself, and one cannot see its ties with the destiny and the metaphysical essence of man." The natural attitude is not purely contemplative. The world does not show itself fully when considered exclusively as an object of scientific investigation. "Yet," Levinas continues, "it seems that man suddenly

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B.Baille (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 89.

accomplishes the phenomenological reduction by a purely theoretical act of reflection on life. Husserl offers no explanation for this change of attitude and does not even consider it a problem. Husserl does not raise the metaphysical problem of the situation of the *Homo philosophus*.³⁶

In sum, it is Levinas's position that Husserl does not consider radically enough the ontological ramifications of his own method. In Levinas's analysis of the reduction which follows upon his critique of Husserl's priority of theoretical thought, Levinas was limited by his sources in *The Theory of Intuition* to Husserl's Cartesian reduction only. He sees, nevertheless, how it is that the *epoché* is of crucial importance to phenomenological investigation in that it produces access to transcendental consciousness: "it is not a psychological but a transcendental consciousness which is revealed to us in the phenomenological reduction." Thus, the *epoché* is not to be understood as a temporary condition like the Cartesian methodical doubt, but, on the contrary, "the reduction has an absolute value for Husserl" because he mistakenly wants it "to return to absolute being or life, the source of all being."³⁷

The purpose of the *epoché* and the reduction is to make it possible to reveal concrete life as it is, as it appears to reflective consciousness, to show us our genuine self, even if, in Husserl's handling of the *epoché*, it never quite makes it to that point. He was so intent on establishing the foundations for the absolute and universal dimension of consciousness, contra the positivists, that he perhaps lost sight of "inner intentionality," the existential constituting of hyletic data, "the meanderings of

³⁶ ThI, 142 / 203.

³⁷ ThI, 149 / 213.

phenomena" in all their manifold and concrete forms, which Levinas believed that only Heidegger dared to face deliberately. There seems to be a confusion on Husserl's part, according to Levinas, revealed in the abstractness of the reduction concerning Husserl's understanding of the relation between consciousness and the world. In Levinas's view, influenced by Heidegger at this point of his career, consciousness, understood as transcendental intentionality, cannot be thought without simultaneously thinking the world, a point which is reflected in the hyphenated title of the present work: *God-in-the-World*. In many texts, Levinas claims, Husserl suggests that "he does not think that the idea of pure immanence is contradictory and hence that consciousness could exist without the world," a point that Heidegger would also contest in *Being and Time*. It may be, Levinas concludes, precisely this "indecision" and "obscurity" on Husserl's part that has led to the idea of the reduction as a mere abstraction, a bit of intellectual gymnastics like Descartes' doubt. This opinion would change when Levinas considers the alterations to the *epoché* that Husserl would begin to articulate in *The Crisis*. The impact on Levinas's own philosophy of his re-evaluation of Husserl's *epoché* and the manner in which this will lead to the development of a theopoetic voice in his approach to exteriority will be the focus of the following chapter

5. Conclusion

Although Levinas is moved by the possibilities for doing philosophy opened up by Husserl's phenomenological reduction, possibilities which lie on the hither side of the natural attitude, he does not think that Husserl has gone far enough methodologically since these possibilities are presented to a purely contemplative and theoretical sight which considers life but is distinct from it. Besides being abstract and theoretical, the

thesis of the absoluteness of consciousness also leads to the problem of adequately understanding intersubjectivity, despite Husserl's yeomanly efforts to deal with this issue, since it indicates, as I have already pointed out, an ego that is self-sufficient and monadic. "The works of Husserl published so far make only very brief mentions of an intersubjective reduction," Levinas says, although he adds that "this intersubjective reduction and all the problems that arise from it have much preoccupied Husserl," a fact supported by certain "unpublished works" that Levinas heard about but which he could not use prior to their publication.³⁸ Perhaps Husserl had been discussing with his students his plans for *The Crisis*, which he apparently began writing shortly after the publication of Levinas's critical doctoral thesis under the title *Theory of Intuition*, further confirming my suspicion that Levinas's critique had a substantial influence on Husserl's later refinements of the *epoché*.

³⁸ ThI, 151 / 215

CHAPTER 4

Back to the *Epoché* After the *Epoché*

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I tried to push closer to an exposition of the exorbitant reach of a transformative theopoetics born out of Husserl's *epoché* and Levinas's critique of it. According to Levinas, Husserl's Cartesian reduction of *Ideas I*, with its perhaps overdrawn, modernist and 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. Given the blind alley of Husserlian monads without windows or doors that seems to follow from his transcendental phenomenology, how is solipsism to be avoided? Husserl's phenomenology also stands accused of lacking a recognition of the concrete, personal, and communal dimensions of the existential situation of human being, as Levinas argued in *The Theory of Intuition*.

This chapter focuses on Husserl's later formulations of the approach to the transcendental description of essences through the practice of the *epoché*. It is important to my understanding of the theopoetic attitude, which I am arguing is necessary for effectively reading sacred texts, to see that the reduction found in *The Crisis* clearly seems to take as its starting point, as if in response to Levinas's

challenge, the reductions from the "lived-world" and from psychology. It is meant to compensate for what was lacking in the earlier Cartesian model. The question is, will this be sufficient to overcome Levinas's charge of the idealistic intellectualism pervading Husserl's work? In order to answer this and to show that Levinas modified his earlier critical 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 are dealing with as well as the question of subjectivity and intersubjectivity—questions which will have a direct bearing on Levinas's formulation of the priority of responsibility in his own philosophy and which will thereby structure the theopoetical attitude of the hermeneutical aspirant as this attitude is formed in the practice of the *epoché*, a practice that first comes to light in Husserl's phenomenology and becomes the primacy of response-ability in Levinas's work.

2. The Necessity of the *Epoché*

Contrary to the argument that in *The Crisis*, there is no real change in Husserl's position between his earlier and later work, recall that Husserl himself criticized his earlier "Cartesian approach" to the reduction, as I showed previously, 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."³⁹ Despite Husserl's own critique, however, the earlier

³⁹ Husserl, E. *Crisis*, III, A, 43, p. 155.

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*. In contrast with the Cartesian version of the *epoché*, 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 probes into the new region achieved through the *epoché* 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. There is a certain truth to that. 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, as we will see. 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 by Husserl, the Cartesian reduction of *Ideas I*, and the reductions from the lived-world and from

Psychology found in *The Crisis*. This should not mislead us, however, concerning the clear differences that separate the earlier from the later *epoché*. In the final analysis, Husserl's thinking itself must be understood according to its own principle as a perpetual beginning anew, a "constant becoming through a constant intentionality of development," a point which, in *The Theory of Intuition*, Levinas seems to have overlooked in his critical haste.

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 *epoché* 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.⁴⁰

What does Husserl mean by saying that the full, universal *epoché* 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

⁴⁰ *Crisis*, III, A, 43, p. 154.

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."⁴¹ 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, indeed, spiritual dimension of the *epoché*. 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 argued in *The Theory of Intuition*, it could not escape a new understanding of the subject as well. In Levinas's 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 absolutist predilections? Levinas's critique of Husserl—and of Hegel also in this regard, a critique that Caputo reiterates provocatively in *The Folly of God*—as well as the whole history of transcendental idealism, seems to be in need of some therapeutic qualification and clarification, as I shall endeavor to show.⁴²

In *The Crisis*, the transformation of the whole person through practicing the *epoché* becomes, as Husserl says, a "vocation," a "habit," a way of life, a practice that is

⁴¹ C, II, 15, p. 74.

⁴² Regarding the Hegel critique, see Robert Bernasconi, "Levinas Face to Face – With Hegel," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*: 13 (1982): 267-76.

taken up every day as an ongoing intersubjective self-transformation. And in a statement which seems to be a harbinger of Levinas's future work, particularly as I am 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 whole being of mankind."⁴³ Philosophers are to be "functionaries of mankind." Over and above its reflective aspects, there is an inherently practical orientation to phenomenology, an ethical dimension whose origin and foundation is to be found in the practice of the *epoché*.⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵ 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 *epoché*. 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 *epoché*, 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. It is true, of course, that this "community" is a society of transcendental monads. But it is clear that Husserl's monads do, in fact, have

⁴³ C, I, 7, p. 17; emphasis added.

⁴⁴ C, I, 3, p. 9.

⁴⁵ C, I, 7, p. 18.

"windows." For Levinas, however, windows ... will not be enough. His 'monads' must have windows, doors, and perhaps also a guest room.

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 *epoché*. To understand Levinas's response to these apparent advances, we must turn back to him once more to consider several additional studies written after *The Theory of Intuition* that focus on these crucial questions.

3. Levinas's Reevaluation of Husserl

In Levinas's essay entitled "*L'oeuvre d'Edmond Husserl*," published in 1949—and contrary to Adriaan Peperzak's assessment in his article "Phenomenology - Ontology - Metaphysics: Levinas's 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's "attitude toward Husserl's work seems to be more positive and his criticisms milder"—I find significant alterations of the critique advanced in *The Theory of Intuition*.⁴⁶ For similar reasons, I am unable to accept Craig Vasey's judgment that "Levinas rejected the Husserlian characterization of intentionality from the beginning, finding it ... too

⁴⁶ Peperzak, Adriaan. "Phenomenology - Ontology - Metaphysics: Levinas's Perspective on Husserl and Heidegger," *Man and World* 16 (1983): 114.

traditionally intellectualist," and that "from the outset, Levinas's own philosophical research has been oriented differently from Husserl's..." concerning "the meaning of intentionality."⁴⁷ 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's philosophical corpus. 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." Furthermore, Vasey does not take into account a number of pertinent texts regarding Levinas's position on intentionality, most notably, "*L'oeuvre*," which is crucial to a thorough understanding of Levinas's complex and somewhat ambivalent, relationship with Husserl.

Concerning "*L'oeuvre*," 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 when he wrote "*L'oeuvre*." "*L'oeuvre*" represents a reinterpretation of Levinas's original understanding of the absoluteness of consciousness or transcendental intentionality in Husserl's system. This leads Levinas to explicitly retract his earlier judgment regarding

⁴⁷ Vasey, Craig R. "Emmanuel Levinas: from Intentionality to Proximity," *Philosophy Today* 25 (Fall 1981)180.

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's 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.⁴⁸

In *The Theory of Intuition*, Levinas 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."⁴⁹ In Levinas's view, this dogmatic and unjustified juxtaposition of the theoretical, practical, and affective life resulted from a primacy accorded to abstract contemplation that devalued the world as a center of action or field of activity. 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

⁴⁸ André Orianne's essay that forms the introduction to the English edition of Levinas's *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) has been helpful here.

⁴⁹ *ThI*, p. 132 / p. 190.

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, "has nothing to do with relations between real objects. It is an act of positing a meaning (*Sinngebung*)."⁵⁰ 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 from the perspective of 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.⁵¹

It may help to illustrate Levinas's 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 desired 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

⁵⁰ "*L'oeuvre*," in DEHH, p. 22; my translation.

⁵¹ "*L'oeuvre*," p. 22.

consciousness must be distinguished from its object. "Intentionality is not," Levinas asserts, "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."⁵² In the act of desiring its object, the desire *precedes* 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 that. And it is that intentional object to which empiricism mistakenly imputes the weight of material 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, 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.⁵³ 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

⁵² "*L'oeuvre*," pp.22-23.

⁵³ Levinas, Emmanuel. "*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*."

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."⁵⁴ This hermeneutic understanding will lead to the development of two distinct levels of intentionality in Levinas's work, representational and non-representational intentionality. It is the possibility of a non-representational 'intentionality' that is the ontological underpinning of Levinas's whole theory of the priority of responsibility and, consequently, the subsequent development of a hermeneutic theopoetics as I will endeavor to show, 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's later work. 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."⁵⁵

It would only be fair to the position taken by Peperzak, Vasey, and other commentators to admit 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

⁵⁴ "*Notes*," p. 241; my translation.

⁵⁵ "*L'oeuvre*," p. 23.

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....⁵⁶ Yet, even here there is a certain stuttering and hesitancy in these passages which inclines me to give the later texts, "*Notes*," *Otherwise Than Being*, etc., more credence in trying to ascertain the fullest understanding of this issue. My thinking is that should help to see Levinas's nuanced repurposing of this in his own work. But neither do I want to eradicate the "perhaps fecund" ambiguity that is at the heart of Levinas's response to Husserl, since this would be contrary to the whole spirit of phenomenology as well as to Levinas's thought in particular. Rather, what I would prefer is to penetrate more deeply into Husserl's ambiguity concerning representation and Levinas's ambivalence concerning Husserl. 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 I 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's philosophy as the justifying move for the establishment of a

⁵⁶ Levinas, Emmanuel. "*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.

transformative, hermeneutical, theopoetic approach to the reading of sacred texts, and, perhaps, the reading of all texts, reading and re-reading the textuality of those texts.

Husserl argued 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 is the synthesizing of a meant object from the raw materials or contents of sensation, as Husserl refers to them in the *Logical Investigations*, *hyle* as he calls them in *Ideas I*, discussed above. 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, particularly the passive synthesis, will become of central importance to Levinas's argument for a non-representational 'intentionality' as the ontological foundation of the priority of responsibility and, ultimately, I believe it will be shown to be the beating heart of a transformational theopoetics grounded in a phenomenology of sensibility.

Regarding sensual perceptions, Husserl distinguishes between the act of sensing (*Empfinden*) and the quality sensed (*Empfindenes*).⁵⁷ 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 idealistic tendencies 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

⁵⁷ LI, p. 574.

presupposes an objectively experienceable analogate, a situation that posed a problem for Husserl because it works against his attack against naturalism, the ground of empirical science from which he was trying to distinguish his phenomenological "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 1965.⁵⁸ 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.

Although Husserl always held to the distinction between hyletic contents as "psychical stuff," on the one hand, and "the quality or 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. 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, 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

⁵⁸ Levinas, Emmanuel. "*Intentionalité and Sensation*" in DEHH, pp.145-162.

circuit of sensing/sensed. Husserl called these curious states of sensing/sensed *Empfindnisse* in *Ideen II*.⁵⁹ "*Empfindnis*" is a difficult term to translate in its fullest and nuanced sense. Richard Cohen offers the rather colorful neologism: "a palpitation of self-sensing."⁶⁰ In "*Intentionalité*," Levinas suggests the interesting term "*sentance*," reminiscent of Derrida's "*differance*," as "expressing the diffuse character of this notion."⁶¹ Whatever you 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."⁶² In order to understand the relation of the *Urimpression* to sensation and intentionality, it is necessary to 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 *Urimpression*, the cauldron of lived experience that cooks up, so to speak, all consciousness as perceived; an original *passivity* that is at the same time the initial spontaneity of primary intentionality. 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

⁵⁹ Husserl, E. *Ideen II*, p. 153.

⁶⁰ Cohen, Richard. "Emmanuel Levinas: Happiness is a Sensational Time." *Philosophy Today* 25 (1981), p. 200.

⁶¹ "*Intentionalité*," p. 187, n. 1.

⁶² Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, ed. M. Heidegger, trans. J. S. Churchill (Indiana: Indiana U. Press, 1964), p. 148.

along a timeline. 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*."⁶³

The *Urimpression* does have duration, but it does so in the form of 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. The instant of the present moment, in Levinas's 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 naïve view of 'presence' as a sort of 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 *Urimpression* 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 an apodictic transcendental 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."⁶⁴ It is this paradoxical reciprocity at the ontological

⁶³ Levinas, Emmanuel. "*La ruine de la représentation*," in DEHH, p. 130.

⁶⁴ "*Ruine*," pp. 130-31.

level that will be the starting point for Levinas's initial understanding of subjectivity which, in turn, will be understood within the context of an exorbitant response-ability for the Other and, ultimately, in line with our purposes, will be the guiding impulse for a personally transformative, theopoetical hermeneutics, the ultimate aim of the hopeful trajectory of the present text.

Levinas's about-face 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. 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. Levinas asserts that the face-to-face relation of intersubjectivity is exactly where intentionality, as the foundation of all knowledge, will be superseded by the priority of responsibility or response-ability, which goes beyond the knowledge-relation of the subject 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 nuanced 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.

In *The Crisis* Husserl returns to the formulation espoused in antiquity by Socrates and Plato, that genuine knowledge, *episteme* 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."⁶⁵ The method for accomplishing this freedom is, of course, through the narrow gate of the *epoché*, the phenomenological reduction. The purpose of the *epoché*, in Husserl's view from the vantage point of *The Crisis*, is the accomplishment of a liberation from the narrow, objectivistic 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. The practice of bracketing the thesis of 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 *epoché* was designed to overcome.⁶⁶

The *epoché* 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

⁶⁵ Husserl, *Crisis*, I, 3, p. 8; hereafter 'C'

⁶⁶ C, III, A, 52, p. 178.

granted by those living in the natural attitude. Here is Husserl's description of the practice:

We perform the *epoché*—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, internal bond, namely, of the pre-giveness of the world.⁶⁷

Remember that it was Levinas's criticism in *The Theory of Intuition* that the phenomenological reduction is something more than a mere epistemological corrective, as he mistakenly believed, at that earlier 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."⁶⁸ But what does Husserl mean by "evidence"?

⁶⁷ C, III, A, 41, p. 151.

⁶⁸ "*L'oeuvre*," p. 43.

Evidence is Husserl's term for the relative fullness between a signifying intention and the accompanying intuition, which, as we saw above, is more or less the phenomenological definition of truth. What is important about the full adequation, or evidence of Husserl's understanding of the absoluteness of consciousness arrived at through the enactment of the transcendental *epoché*, is that this is the ultimate guarantor of phenomenology's claim to apodicticity, according to Husserl as he had already indicated in Section 46 of *Ideen*. 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, 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."⁶⁹ Evidence is intentionality in search of itself, a light always looking to illuminate its own illuminating, 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."⁷⁰ 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." It is the objective 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

⁶⁹ "L'oeuvre," p. 24.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; Cf. my paper "On the Intellect as Form and Light in the Philosophy of St. Thomas,"

of freedom."⁷¹ 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 exactly this freedom that Husserl is getting at when he says the *epoché* places us "above the pre-giveness of the validity of the world."⁷² But this "above" is not to assume a position of abstract, intellectualist contemplation, as Levinas originally thought in *The Theory of Intuition*. It is to be freed from the constraints of the naïveté 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." And it is through this liberation, achieved through the phenomenological reduction and practice of the *epoché*—where "science" is not equal to technique—that phenomenology is "at the same time the perfection of science," and the possible spiritual fulfillment of the interior life, as it is with *lectio divina*. 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."⁷³

The Husserlian understanding of "science," and the "Reason" underlying it, in no way means the direct grasp or theoretical manipulation of a representational object in

⁷¹ "L'oeuvre," p. 25.

⁷² C, III, A, 40, p. 150.

⁷³ "L'oeuvre," p. 45.

an abstract or positivistic sense. As Levinas points out, in another reflection on Husserl's philosophy, "*Reflexions sur la 'technique' phenomenologique*," published in 1959, "to do phenomenology—that is to denounce as naïve the direct vision of the object," even though Husserl's work was often misinterpreted as promoting this.⁷⁴ Phenomenology is not a purely deductive science, of course, like mathematics or logic. It is neither deduction nor induction. It is more a certain style of questioning than the slavish following of a set of fixed propositions. It is a method in the eminent sense of being an essential openness and receptivity to experience without prejudice, which is easier said than done; way easier. But there is a big payoff for the persistent aspiring phenomenological hermeneut. "The phenomenological reduction would open up," Levinas asserts, "behind the naïve vision of things, the ground of a radical experience, allowing reality, in its ultimate structure, to appear." Phenomenology must be understood in the sense of actively letting-appear, as Heidegger indicates with the term "*Gelassenheit*" and what Husserl means by the necessity for the aspirant to be open to perpetually starting or taking up anew the practice of the phenomenological reduction to achieve a clarity of vision.⁷⁵ Phenomenology "must be practiced," Levinas says in "*Reflexions*," "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."⁷⁶ 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

⁷⁴ "*Reflexions*," in DEHH, p. 114; my translation.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, Martin. *Gelassenheit*, (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959); *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. J. M. Anderson and E. H. Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966.)

⁷⁶ "*Reflexions*," p. 111.

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.⁷⁷⁶³

The practice of phenomenology, far from being a process of abstract, disembodied contemplation or lifeless argumentation, is a continual searching for the fullness of understanding beneath the presuppositions of a liquid culture which, while it makes quotidian intercourse possible, at the same time accomplishes this through the diminution and sacrifice of freedom and genuine self-fulfillment. Therefore, 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."⁷⁸

4. Preliminary Considerations

I have endeavored to show in these few chapters focusing on the genealogy of the *epoché* how key aspects of Husserl's phenomenological methodology should be seen as the birthplace of the hermeneutical theopoetics that I am seeking in the present text, and I have sifted through Levinas's critical but ever-changing response to it. I have shown how Husserl's position underwent various transformations regarding the nature and purpose of the phenomenological reduction and its relation to intentionality,

⁷⁷ C, I, 3, p. 9.

⁷⁸ "L'oeuvre," p. 49.

consciousness, sensation, freedom, and science, even if these alterations are nothing more than inflections of his realism/idealism ambivalence. Likewise, I have noted with much interest for my own therapeutic/hermeneutic project in *God-in-the-World*, Levinas's 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 certainly not been my purpose here. What has been unveiled in the analysis thus far is a 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 I have discovered from these few reflections on Husserl's *epoché* 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.

I have been focusing on the question of Husserl's phenomenological methodology as a propaedeutic investigation geared toward creating an opening into the corpus of Levinas's own original thought where the essential ingredients of a fully transformative theopoetics will become clearly, if only partially, visible, with significant

differences from Caputo's Derrida-derived theopoetics. At the very least, it should be clear at this point that you will never be able to achieve an adequate understanding of Levinas's philosophy of exorbitant responsibility 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 commentators, has contributed to much of the misinterpretation of his work. The fact of the matter is that throughout the entirety of his philosophical corpus 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 (perhaps despite himself). 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 have missed the trees as well.

In *The Theory of Intuition*, undoubtedly written under Heidegger's influence, the nature and purpose of the phenomenological reduction (indeed, of phenomenology as a whole), is thought to entail 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. To fully understand the implications of this—how Levinas will attempt a certain retrieval of a substantialist notion of being without getting caught up in positivism or objectivism—it will be necessary to turn to Levinas's ambivalent reaction to Heidegger's work in *Being and Time*. If Heidegger was the secret weapon behind Levinas's critique of Husserl in *The Theory of Intuition*, he will become the target in *Existence and Existents* and afterwards (particularly after 1940 due to Heidegger's association with

National Socialism), when Levinas begins working out his own ontological phenomenology.

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, 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.⁷⁹ 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 on a first-name basis. It is clear, however, for both Husserl and Levinas, that the phenomenological 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.

There are two notions of the subject in Levinas's work, both of which emerge from the Husserlian framework of sensation, temporality, and intentionality, and which

⁷⁹ C, III, A, 55, pp. 186-189.

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's 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's 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.

I 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 or contemplativeness 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 *epoché* requires, and still be effective in it? This same issue will arise again in Levinas's 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's work also where the ethical, understood as a perpetual challenge to the political, is more of a critical response or re-action than effective action itself. The issue of action and passion in the phenomenological hermeneut or theopoetic aspirant will be taken up in the following chapter.

It might be worthwhile pointing out here that there seems to be an ethical dimension to Husserl's philosophy, perhaps a proto-ethical dimension, 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 that 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 our 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 an innate responsibility that is the ground of all possible knowledge. All we need to do is to wake up to that, remember that is who we are. Consequently, it is also prior to the possibility of freedom and non-freedom. 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 me not leap too far ahead of my own narrative like a Nietzschean grasshopper of thought. In order to be fully open to an encounter with Levinas's radical variations on the theme of exorbitant responsibility—which arise for him, as I have endeavored to show in these first few chapters of *God-in-the-World*, squarely out of Husserl's phenomenological *epoché*—we must first look more closely at their ontological underpinning in the context of Levinas's tumultuous relation with Heidegger. Before advancing to that section of our mountainous trek to a transformative theopoetics, it will be helpful to introduce several themes from Levinas's philosophy and then to consider these through Levinas's treatment of the feminine and the masculine element. That should provide a well-informed basis for transitioning to a consideration of Heidegger's philosophical poetics.

.....**ADD TRANSITION 4 SENSE**

CHAPTER 5

Levinas's Circumcision of Consciousness

“God as merciful is God defined by maternity. A feminine element is stirred in the depth of this mercy. This maternal element in divine paternity is very remarkable, as is in Judaism the notion of a “virility” to which limits must be set and whose partial renouncement may be symbolized by circumcision, the exaltation of a certain weakness which would be devoid of cowardice. Perhaps maternity is sensitivity itself, of which so much ill is said among the Nietzscheans.” Emmanuel Levinas, "Damages Due to Fire"

“This relaxation of virility without cowardice is needed for the little cruelty our hands repudiate. That is the meaning that should be suggested by the formulas repeated in this book concerning the passivity more passive still than any passivity, the fission of the ego unto me, its consummation for the other such that from the ashes of this consummation no act could be reborn.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*

“Nothing is more unhealthy, amid all our unhealthy modernism, than Christian pity. To be doctors here, to be unmerciful here, to wield the knife here—all this is our business, all this is our sort of humanity, by this sign we are philosophers, we Hyperboreans!” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, F. *The Antichrist*. Trans. H. L. Mencken. New York: Knopf, 1923; p. 49. *Der Antichrist*, in *Götzendämmerung*. Ed. Alfred Baeumler. Stuttgart: Alfred Kroner, 1939, p. 196.

1. The Neighborliness of Religion and Philosophy

Like many of the key concepts found in Levinas's work, especially in *Otherwise Than Being*, the concept (or non-concept) of exorbitant responsibility, which I will investigate in some detail in the present and following chapters, is adopted by Levinas from a religious context but is employed in a special philosophical manner—without entirely shedding its original religious sense. Responsibility will reveal a glimpse of a certain mystically structured spirituality at the heart of the transformative theopoetics we are tracking. It is well-known, of course, that there is a certain neighborliness between religion and philosophy in Levinas's work.⁸¹ Although it is not my intention here to survey the ever-shifting boundaries of this neighborliness, these must not be forgotten if you want to appreciate the full radicalness of Levinas's philosophical understanding of exorbitant responsibility and how this idea is central to a new understanding of subjectivity that will function as a herald of the attitudinal posture required by a personally transformative theopoetics.

Speaking from the religious, i.e., the Jewish perspective, of his Talmudic commentary entitled "Damages Due to Fire," Levinas says that for him philosophy "derives (*dérive*) from religion. It is called into being by a religion adrift (*en dérive*), and

⁸¹ It seems virtually impossible to cleanly separate these two dimensions of Levinas's work, this "strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek," as Derrida puts it in "Violence and Metaphysics" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. p. 153. Levinas himself does not provide a great deal of help in clarifying this relation. In one of his interviews he says that "there is a very radical distinction between" his philosophical and religious writing, and then, in the very next breath, he also admits that "there is certainly a relationship between them" Bernasconi, R. and Wood, D. Eds. *The Provocation of Levinas*. London/New York: Routledge, 1988, pp. 173-74.

probably religion is always adrift."⁸² Religion is here viewed as being ontologically and temporally prior to philosophy. But *dérivée* also has the sense of indicating a 'diversion from'. Philosophy *diverges* from religion. Although religion is responsible for calling it into being, it is, paradoxically, both the skeptical and universalizing power of philosophy that functions as a kind of intellectual asceticism over and against the tendency toward errancy inherent in religion—as an antidote, perhaps, for the proclivity of a "thoughtless" religion to degenerate into idolatry. However, speaking from the "Greek" perspective of *Otherwise Than Being* Levinas says that there is revealed at the heart of the analysis of subjectivity worked out in this text a "plot" that he is tempted to call "religious," although he adds immediately—in a manner of Heidegger's denial of doing ethics—that he does not mean by this "religious plot" any kind of *positive* theology (OB, 174; AE, 185). The religious plot that is revealed by Levinas's philosophical thought, like the philosophical plot that is revealed for him in religion—indeed, which is *produced* by religion—focuses on his concept of exorbitant responsibility. Thus, the concept of responsibility can be understood as a kind of theopoetical bridge between the religious and the philosophical dimensions of Levinas's work. I will approach it in the present text from the context of this interpretation, showing how it emerges from a religious context in "Damages Due to Fire" and then tracing its development out of the analysis of sensation and *socialité* in *Otherwise Than Being* as it moves theopoetically between the religious and the secular to reveal the epiphany of God-in-the-world.

⁸² Levinas, E. "Damages Due to Fire," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*. Trans. Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 182; hereafter 'DD'

"Damages Due to Fire" is Levinas's commentary on a Talmudic text that is ostensibly concerned with the liability one would incur in setting loose the elemental force of fire. The oldest and opening lines of the Talmudic text read: "If someone brings on a fire which consumes wood, stones, or earth, he would be liable, as it is written (Exodus 22:5): 'If fire breaks out and catches in thorns so that the stack of corn, or the standing corn, or the field is consumed, he who starts the fire must make restitution.' But it is asked a little later, "Couldn't the Merciful One have written *field* and dispensed with all the rest?" No, the text responds, "The rest is necessary. If He had written only field, one might have thought that for the products of the field one owes reparation, but for other things not. That we are responsible also for all the rest, that is what we are meant to understand (DD,178-79). Before approaching the important content of this text, and the idea of exorbitant responsibility it theopoetically reveals at the heart of the Jewish tradition for Levinas, a moment's reflection on a hermeneutical point will be helpful to our reading.

Besides the distinction by historical periods of the texts contained in the Talmud, there are also two different types or levels of Talmudic text, *Halakhah* and *Aggadah*. *Halakic* texts deal with specific teachings, rules or laws governing particular behaviors, such as the liability one might incur for setting loose a wild ox or a fire; *aggadic* texts reveal the universal philosophical implications of the more mundane *halakic* teachings, especially through cryptic fables or poetic maxims requiring interpretation. The job of the Talmudic commentator, then, as Levinas sees it, is to "translate" the movement of thought from the *particular* teaching to its *universal* moral implications. An analogous hermeneutical strategy can be detected in Levinas's philosophical work. Specifically, it

is found in *Otherwise Than Being* in the phenomenological analysis that moves from an interpretation of sensation (the particular) to an exorbitant responsibility (the universal) that would define the very subjectivity of the subject as the theopoetic locus of the sacred in the world. God does not merely *appear* in the world. God reveals herself *to me* or *to you* or *to someone*, once again particularizing the universal undeconstructible 'in the flesh'. Even methodologically, it would seem, Levinas finds the philosophical to be derivative of the religious—yet critically guiding it. But the correlation between the movement of thought in "Damages Due to Fire" and *Otherwise Than Being* can be specified even more closely, beyond this hermeneutical neighborliness, from the perspective of an ethical/political reading of its content.

In "Damages Due to Fire," Levinas traces a movement of thought that he finds in the Talmudic text which goes from an initial *Halakhah*, a rule concerning the liability incurred for setting a fire, to an *Aggadah*, a moral philosophical perspective which extends this liability indefinitely, exorbitantly—for what is now no longer merely fire—and thus results in a new *Halakhah*, a new and radical teaching which, in this case, concerns the re-creation and infinite protection of Zion by the same "divine fire" that had destroyed it. This new teaching is not quite so mundane as the original. As philosophers, we recognize that this "divine fire" is the most ancient metaphor for intellect or consciousness, the ultimate source of which Plato found fit to represent the Good that is beyond being—a metaphor that fuels much of Levinas's own thinking. But, like a wild ox, fire can get out of hand. It can become the rapacious and exterminating disaster of holocaust, consuming its victims with the irrational rationality of that terrible dark angel found in Ezekiel who slaughters the just and the unjust alike. It can get out of

hand when it is guided only by its own spontaneous freedom, when it is not cut back and held in check by the benign circumcision of a firebreak that would celebrate the mercy of the uterus. Thus, the masculine and virile subjectivity of consciousness, uncircumcised by the feminine and sensitive subjectivity of responsibility, leads to the evil of Auschwitz—a horror that is never to be forgotten in any of Levinas's work and which, like the angel of extermination, is invoked directly several times in "Damages Due to Fire".

In the context of this same invocation, a similar movement in *Otherwise than Being*, complete with the same kind of "aggadic" moral twist found in "Damages Due to Fire," can be traced in Levinas's radical interpretation and extension of Husserl's phenomenological analysis of sensation into the realm of the ethical, an analysis which will be investigated in detail in the second part of this chapter. Here is a summary of the outcome of that discussion. The empiricist notion of sensation, of which Husserl, like Kant, is critical, is guided by a positivistic stimulus/response determinism which would support moral skepticism, as it does in Hume. Husserl's phenomenology, emphasizing intentionality, constitution, and the absoluteness or transcendence of consciousness in relation to the sensible, supports an ethic of autonomy and freedom in the Kantian tradition. Levinas's critical extension of Husserl, however, finds that a certain ambiguity inherent in the instant of sensation reveals an infinite co-responsence between the transcendental and the empirical (the philosophical and the religious; the moral/political and the ethical) that "produces" an exorbitant responsibility—a new and radical teaching which, Levinas says, exposes itself "imprudently to the reproach of utopianism ... if utopianism is a reproach" (OB, 184 / AE, 232). Zionism on the one hand, utopianism on

the other; from the particular to the universal, from the sensible to the ethical. But a utopia, although it is precisely that which cannot *be* anywhere, nevertheless would signify a certain ethical/political topography that is otherwise and better than being, a kind of on-going skeptical consummation or critique, an anarchy (*an-archē*) in which the very possibility of a pure, spontaneous act by the *ego cogito*—the citizen of the polis—is replaced by the necessity for me to respond. From the ‘particularity’ of the “Greek” to the ‘universality’ of the “Jew”.

But can Levinas philosophically justify this pre-philosophical notion of exorbitant responsibility that his religion calls into being through the gesture of a theopoetical attitude claiming to reach phenomenologically beyond being? In other words, if responsibility is to be a phenomenological description of what *is* the case with subjectivity, how is it possible to move from this to any prescriptive assertion about what *ought* to be done? And does not such an exorbitant responsibility, at any rate, place upon the individual hermeneutical aspirant an impossible burden? In the final analysis, can this exorbitant and impossible burden of responsibility be distinguished from a masochistic inversion of the virility of consciousness in the form of a self-inflicted victim-mentality that would be perhaps the very condition for the possibility of holocaust, the outcome of what Levinas calls “the exaltation of a certain weakness”—of which so much ill is said among the Nietzscheans? If this is the undesired outcome of Levinas’s circumcision of consciousness, it would, in keeping with the strictures of Levinas’s own philosophy, need a further corrective which I think is to be found in the personally transformative nature of the theopoetic attitude I am seeking to define. In order to approach these questions surrounding the notion of responsibility and the part it plays in

generating a transformative theopoetics, let us turn to the phenomenological analysis of sensation which is the philosophical bedrock from which a responsible theopoetics ultimately will emerge.

2. The Ambiguity of Sensation

In *Otherwise than Being* the phenomenological analyses brought forward to support the claim that an exorbitant responsibility, as Levinas says in one of his interviews, is "the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity,"⁸³ form a train of notions where "signification" is analyzed "as proximity, proximity as responsibility for the other, and responsibility for the other as substitution" (OB, 184 / AE, 232). This train of thought articulates relations between the duality (not dualism) of the Same and the Other. When "the third" person comes into the picture, these notions which describe a pre-conscious relation to the other understood as exorbitant responsibility will devolve into the question of justice. But not until then! And how this happens is curious. In fact, Levinas's entire analysis of exorbitant responsibility takes place prior to consciousness, although it seems more or less clear that he intends his analysis to fluctuate ambiguously and spill over from the transcendental domain into the empirical. But moral responsibility is a matter of a judgment pertaining *only* to beings that have the possibility of *acting*; and the "proof" that we are free (to act), as Kant understood, is revealed in the facticity of our moral action itself. Moral action can take place only where there is the consciousness of choice. And consciousness, like the very possibility of justice, *requires* the third (whereas the duality of the face-to-face relation is prior to consciousness). Therefore, it

⁸³ Levinas, E. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Phillippe Nemo*. Trans. Richard Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985, p.95. *Ethique et Infini* (Paris: Librairie Arthème et Radio France, 1982, p.91).

seems that Levinas's notion of responsibility is predicated (and not always clearly and distinctly) both in a pre-conscious and in a conscious sense. It is not always clear how Levinas accounts for this ambiguity, or whether it is vicious or productive. To understand this train of thought articulated in *Otherwise Than Being*, it is necessary to see all four of the basic terms which comprise it—signification, proximity, responsibility, substitution—in relation to the key move found in the analysis of sensation that is worked out from the perspective of temporality, language, and the coming-to-be of being. This, of course, is a point of departure that Levinas finds suggested in the pioneering work of Husserl.

As we saw in the previous chapter, what Levinas learned from Husserl's wrestling with the centrality of the *epoché* for the phenomenological investigator seeking the otherwise than being between the lines of the sacred text is that there is a temporal ambiguity in sensuous lived experience. In the midst of the apparent "flow" of experience from the future to the past, there is nevertheless the constancy of a present in which and as which sensible reality is immediately experienced. But not all experience of this presence, this consciousness of..., can be explained as the active synthesis of hyletic contents constituted or imbued with meaning by the intentionality of consciousness, an activity which would make those contents present to me as this or that experience; as if, in the act of desiring something, for example, there were simply a constituted object to which a feeling state had been added on afterward by an independently constituted, constituting consciousness. Rather, the object desired already would have been inhabited or animated by desire issuing from my whole being before it becomes present to me as the desired object. Something that is already there

for me, moves me. What is given to be constituted as desirable, paradoxically, is that which has already somehow been constituted as the given desirability of the desirable.⁸⁴ This ambiguous structuring of the immediate dimension of sensuous lived life, *as lived*, is more of a *modality* of being than a synthesized object present to consciousness. Although overlooked in the immediacy of naïve consciousness, the dynamics of this lived level of life can be approached poetically by the phenomenological hermeneut and theopoetical aspirant practicing the universal *epoché*.

Beneath the constitutive activity of consciousness, Husserl discovered that there is already a passive synthesis of the temporal flow in the automatically functioning modalities of retention and protention that are continually shading off from the present instant, as previously described. The present instant of inner time consciousness, the *Urimpression* or now point, from the perspective of sensibility, is not mere presence, or even a flow, but a continuous, repetitive, and creative circuit of sensing and the sensed, discussed above. Husserl referred to this ambiguous circuit by the term *Empfindnis*. The idea is that inner "experience" of the now-point in the dynamism of the temporal continuum (if the term *experience* can be used properly here) is an active/passivity which, paradoxically, is and is not; sensing both senses the object and simultaneously is, in a lived sense, the object it is sensing. Sensuous lived "experience," before it is represented consciously, is inherently ambiguous; "varying in its identity," Levinas says, "and identical in its difference," modifying "itself without altering its identity," it is a unity-

⁸⁴ In "*Notes sur le sens*" Levinas says, in tune with Kant, that "the notion of intentionality, understood correctly, signifies both that being orders the modes of access to being, and, beyond Kant, that being is in accordance with the intention of consciousness: it signifies an exteriority in immanence and the immanence of all exteriority". "*Notes sur le sens*" in *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*. Paris: Vrin, 1986, p.241; hereafter 'DDQ'.

in-difference (OB, 34 / AE, 43). Husserl, given the priority of intentionality, constitution, and the absoluteness of consciousness in his phenomenological program, aimed at overcoming the probabilistic skepticism of empiricism and psychologism, thought that the temporality of sensation, insofar as it was posited doxically as meaningful, had to be defined wholly by the intentionality or noetic activity of consciousness, thus making it possible for the sensible to be wholly recuperable or re-presentable to consciousness by the phenomenological investigator – his so-called "doxic thesis, as we saw in the previous chapter."⁸⁵ But, Levinas finds in this irreducible ambiguity an "antecedent doxa," the "hearsay" of a diachronic surging that opens out into the exteriority of an "anarchical" or "*immemorial* past," on the one hand, and a "*pure* future"⁸⁶ on the other, revealing, or "producing," the "infinite of the Infinite" in the world—the sensual/temporal heart of the "plot" that Levinas is tempted to call "religious," the epiphany of God-in-the-world, as we will see. It will all come down to whether Levinas can bring the absolute otherness of exteriority into some kind of view without doing violence to exactly what it is he hopes to see.

In *Totality and Infinity*, where he is concerned with "glimpsing" the infinite and invisible dimension of the otherness of the Other in order to establish the fundamentally ethical character of intersubjectivity, exteriority is thought by Levinas in the tropes and figures of enjoyment, separation, fecundity, and the ethical asymmetry of the face-to-face relation in an analysis emphasizing the "pure future" of temporality. In *Otherwise Than Being*, however, Levinas turns from a consideration of the otherness of the Other

⁸⁵ Husserl, E. *Ideas I*, §103, §105.

⁸⁶ OB, pp.35; 38 / AE, pp.45; 48. Cf. "Diachrony and Representation" in *Time and the Other*. Trans. Richard Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987, p.111 ff.

conceived as exteriority, to the subjectivity of the subject conceived as a being subjected rather than a subjecting being, emphasizing the "immemorial past" of temporality that would constitute proximity and the radical passivity of responsibility. Thus, the rather striking shift in terminology of this text is perhaps due as much, if not more so, to the matter under consideration as to Levinas's struggle to finally get free of the influence of binary metaphysical language, as if this were possible while still doing philosophy. The ethical disruption of the Same by the approach of the Other in *Totality and Infinity*—viewed from the perspective of the Other—is a loving, gentle, and benign disruption, the way the leisure of the Sabbath "disrupts" the work week. Here, the temporality of sensation is understood as *jouissance*, the ecstatic enjoyment of being immersed in the nurturing plenum of existence. But from the perspective of the subjectivity of the subject in *Otherwise Than Being*, the disruption of the priority of consciousness wrought by an exorbitant responsibility is understood as a vulnerability at the heart of consciousness, a suffering, an obsession, a being held hostage, a wounding invasion of my private parts against my will—a circumcision of virility. This is what *Otherwise Than Being* finds revealed in the radical passivity of temporality and the ambiguity of sensation, "a passivity more passive than any passivity," a passivity that might be thought of as the boundless exteriority of interiority, an exorbitant responsibility that reveals the trace of the Infinite in the world made available to the aspiring theopoetical reader through a prescribed approach to the text. Although Husserl's seminal phenomenology of sensation in the context of the *epoché* set the stage for this understanding of a nonrecuperable or immemorial temporality, Husserl was never able to realize the full implications of his work, according to Levinas, because he was still

under the influence of a desire for apodictic and adequate knowledge reminiscent of the very scientific empiricism of which he was critical (OB 65 / AE 82), as was described previously. The analysis of sensation makes it clear that the meaningful is not to be defined by consciousness. Albeit in an ambiguous manner, there is meaning prior to consciousness in the immersion of immediately lived life. But, because the meaningful is guided by articulation, this paradoxical (or "protodoxical") ambiguity in the temporality of sensation must also be understood in its connection to language and the coming-to-be of being.

To reduce the essential ambiguity of sensing and the sensed—the fact that, as Levinas puts it, "sensorial qualities are not only the sensed: as affective states, they are the sensing" as well—wholly to consciousness, is to have already placed consciousness within the limiting parameters of the said, to have identified predicative or propositional knowledge and being, as Husserl did. But before being is a *what* it is a *way*. Before the verb *to be* becomes nominalized into a being, it is already a gerund, a coming-to-be, a *manner* of being in the world, a how, a mode, a poetic exegesis, a sensuous immersion in the immediacy of living where what Socrates "is," as Levinas puts it, is "Socrates socratizing" (*Socrate socratise*) (OB, 41 / AE, 53). Before the palpitation of retention and protention in the *Urimpression* becomes instantiated as past, present, and future, the passing of the past is already the barely perceptible process of aging, of growing old in the wrinkling of flesh and the soreness of joints; and the futurity of the future is the unforeseeable, not-yet aspect of it which always comes as a surprise. It is this eminently concrete dimension of lived life that works most strongly against Husserl's rigid conception of the absoluteness or transcendence of consciousness, the focus of

Levinas's criticism in *The Theory of Intuition*, and which is succinctly reiterated in J. Claude Evans's insightful article "The Myth of Absolute Consciousness." Commenting on Levinas's focus on Husserl's notion of *Empfindnisse*, Evans says that "It is here that the analysis of time consciousness has to begin, not with the analysis of inner time consciousness but rather with a field that is not yet polarized in terms of the inner and the outer, a vital field. And it is here, I suggest, that we find a much more concrete mode of living in the present."⁸⁷ Before language synchronizes this resonating or responsive diachrony through the saying of a said, it will already have been, Levinas says, "the verbalness of the verb that resounds" in an *already said*, an *Urdoxa* which can, indeed, in being spoken, become correlative with a said but which, despite its saturation of the said, never is fully absorbed into it.⁸⁸ In short, what Levinas does in order to understand subjectivity as exorbitant responsibility, is to "go back to what is prior to this correlation" of the saying in the said to a "hearsay" evidence that is revealed in his analysis of the temporality of the sensible (OB, 39 / AE, 50). The immemorial passivity of the past and the pure futurity of the future that are the *residuum* of the phenomenological reduction of the temporality of sensation, thought in terms of the coming-to-be or subjectivity of the subject, thus constitute the primary justification for Levinas's construal of proximity as responsibility and responsibility as substitution.

Consequently, Levinas concludes that Husserl's theory of intentionality, although helpful, is inadequate for understanding subjectivity or intersubjectivity. Rather than

⁸⁷ Evans, J. Claude. "The Myth of Absolute Consciousness," in *Crises in Continental Philosophy, Selected Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy 16*. Eds. Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, p.43.

⁸⁸ This anticipates what Jean-Luc Marion refers to as a *saturated phenomenon* in "The Saturated Phenomenon," *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 40, No.1, Spring 1996.

providing a solution, Heidegger's hermeneutic of Dasein, thought in the impersonal and neutral context of the ontological difference where Dasein goes off to work but never enjoys it, and Sartre's ontology of being and nothingness, where the responsibility of *pour-soi* refers primarily to itself in conflict with the other; as well as all sentimental and mystical philosophies of communion ... all of these, along with the whole metaphysical tradition of transcendental idealism, merely underscore the problem. For Levinas, there is more to being human than meets the eye. The identity of the representational intentionality of consciousness within the parameters of experience does not exhaust the signification of meaning. The passion of being sensitively disturbed by an "affective" susceptibility prior to all representational thought, emotion, or value, in the immediate, albeit equivocal, signification of lived-life, indicates a transcendence in which the Other is in the same, while the same and the Other yet remain distinct: separation *in* substitution. What cannot be represented in the identity of thought is nevertheless signified in the disturbance of a diachronous and unsynthesizable proximity to the other not yet measurable by a concept of distance. This would be a substitution for the Other, a being wounded by the Other, a persecution, a maternal obsession, a being held hostage, an extreme passivity where I am thoroughly vulnerable to the Other, and which thus obliges me to respond before any choice on my part. Before any possibility of choice, the subjectivity of the subject already would have been revealed as a pre-emptive "ethical" responsiveness to the Other, an exorbitant "response-ability" for which I myself am not responsible.

Thus understood, sensation would be the very locus of Levinas's an-archival metaphysics and the origin of his interpretation of subjectivity as responsibility, a

responsibility without limit that calls for the celebration of a certain feminine weakness through a circumcision of the presumptuous and irresponsible virility of consciousness, "a relaxation of virility to the second degree," as Levinas puts it—of which so much ill is said among the Nietzscheans and will be investigated further in the following two chapters.

3. The Disruption of Response-ability

Not counting myself among "the Nietzscheans"—a claim, at any rate, that would be as self-refuting as any positive assertion from a Pyrrhonian skeptic—yet wrestling with the dark (hidden) angel of Levinas's texts, I cannot help but wonder if the corrective called for and performed by his construal of subjectivity as exorbitant responsibility is not itself in need of a further corrective lest it circumvent its skeptical limits and—may the Merciful One forgive us—become a positive doctrine.

The exorbitant responsibility or responsiveness that Levinas finds in the ambiguity of sensation and the surplus of saying over the said, has not yet become *moral* responsibility. It is a phenomenological description of what supposedly "is" the case and not a prescription concerning what one should do. In fact, to say that "Responsibility is...anything" would already have been to say too much, since exorbitant responsibility is clearly prior to the whole order of being and possibility in any positive sense. It is a perpetual disruption or deconstruction of this positive order. It neither is nor is not. Any positive assertion about exorbitant response-ability is already self-negating. One cannot logically predicate anything meaningfully about what is prior to logic without necessarily distorting what is revealed by the predication. Yet this skeptical self-negating is what marks the positive aspect of exorbitant response-ability, according

to Levinas. It is precisely this positive skepticism at the heart of exorbitant response-ability that constitutes the ethical moment of Levinas's philosophy, a tireless, insomniac skepticism, a bad conscience which perpetually prevents the establishment of any final solution, any imperialist sleep—any position on anything, a deconstructionist deferral similar to that found in Caputo. This radical responsiveness at the heart of Levinas's notion of exorbitant response-ability, paradoxically, makes moral action—indeed, all action—impossible. Levinas's ethical response-ability is not yet moral responsibility, nor is it clear how it could become such without the arbitrary acrobatics of a metaphysical leap of faith.

Nevertheless, it is as if by magic, as if by sleight of hand, that freedom of choice, which is presupposed by morality, somehow simply comes into being for Levinas as or out of, preconscious responsiveness to the other. Keep your eye on the subtle shift in perspective here. This fundamental responsiveness or sensitivity to the Other, Levinas says, on the one hand, "is not a question of a subject assuming or escaping responsibilities, a subject constituted, posited in itself and for itself as a free identity."⁸⁹ Before the subjectivity of consciousness is established as freedom, its very ontogenesis is already in the grip of an exorbitant response-ability. But, on the other hand, this responsiveness *to* the Other prior to consciousness and being, would signify a fundamental *for* the Other as the very structure of that responsiveness according to Levinas's interpretation—a move which does, indeed, seem to take on the form, if not the content, of a moral imperative, an insistence that we ought or ought not do one thing

⁸⁹ Levinas, E. "No Identity," in *Collected Philosophical Works*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987, p.149.

rather than another, that responding is somehow *better* than being, and that we are in some sense liable for what we have not chosen, guilty already in our *being* a being.

The movement from preconscious, "ethical" response-ability to and for the exteriority or otherness of the Other, to the moral responsibility that would guide the workings of justice in the political domain, appears to be one of the weakest links of Levinas's analysis of subjectivity in *Otherwise Than Being*, and what is most in need of further corrective "translation" if it would support a personally transformative theopoetics.

At the very least, and against Hobbes, Levinas would draw from his phenomenology of ontogenic responsiveness an original and natural imperative against killing a being who has a face. But is the establishment of the "Thou shall not kill" the real problem of ethics? Rather, is it not *how* such an ethical imperative, or any imperative, for that matter, would arise and be practically inscribed amidst the concrete and conflicting exigencies of justice and the liquid flood of post-structural relativism? One might concede to Kant the rationality of his categorical imperative and yet strenuously object to some, or any, particular application of it. It is deciding between and ordering competing duties or responsibilities, i.e., justice, which is the perennial problem of ethical politics. How can an exorbitant response-ability which perpetually shears off from the synchronization of being in time, refusing thematization, have any bearing on justice except in a most general, abstract, and prejudicial manner? How can a prophetic call for compassion and charity be specified? And, lacking specification, is not such a "dangerous" *call* properly consigned to the edifying homiletics of the pulpit and the editorial page? Is that how we should understand Caputo's linguistic extravagances to express the sense of his radical theology? Is Levinas's philosophy of exorbitant

responsibility merely a new version of that old Platonic antidote for the moral amnesia of unbelievers of which so much ill is spoken among the Nietzscheans?

The celebration of a 'feminine' sensitivity in the circumcision of the 'masculine' virility of consciousness would be, Levinas says, the "deliverance into itself of an ego awakened from its imperialist dream," a call to remember from beyond memory that the apparent sovereignty of subjectivity issues from the womb of otherness and remains always indentured to the other, and to the other of the other—and thus, as if by magic, to all others—to the extent that no act could be free of this original passivity; no *action* is even possible. Indifference to the Other, however, is also impossible, but the *forgetfulness* of this is possible. The moral or critical value of Levinas's philosophy thus would be found in its bringing to consciousness this breakup of consciousness, disrupting the slumber of our forgetfulness and, in a Kantian fashion, limiting reason to make room for faith (OB, 164-65 / AE, 209-10). It is against the totalitarian presumption of consciousness, which holds that individuality is prior to the ethical relation to and for others that Levinas is arguing. It is this presumption, this hubris, this forgetfulness that lets the fire of consciousness get out of control that is in need of circumcision ... a rather painful ritual that will most assuredly wake you up. Levinas's philosophy itself, with its repetitive incantation of formulas resonating here and now from beyond being, would be the very enactment of this ritual of recollection, this celebration of the moment of maternal sensitivity inherent in consciousness.

Circumcision, the supposedly "hygienic" ritual that marks males as members of the Jewish community united under the patrilineal covenant, separating them from the pagan Greeks, is not born of natural necessity. It is, in fact, a supplement to and a

wounding of the natural. Consciousness forgetful of mercy, like fire, has a natural tendency to get out of hand. That the virile subjectivity of consciousness tends to forget or ignore its origin in responsiveness to the other, which is revealed in the analysis of sensation, would be the very condition for the possibility of evil in the world, the root of all unnatural suffering. This would not indicate the breakdown of a once perfect creation, as Nietzsche suspects in his glorification of the mythological Hyperboreans, but the incompleteness of its genesis in which we are all still involved. The ritual of circumcision, communal by its very nature—as all ritual is communal—would remind us, especially us men, of our unique and unavoidable responsibility for all others. The idea that responsible consciousness is inextricably connected to a preconscious responsibility for the Other thus situates the notion of community at the heart of Levinas's thought. But what the Nietzschean critique seems to assert is that it is possible for mercy in the form of pity to also get out of hand when it is forgetful of its need to be guided by a critical and practical philosophical consciousness of social/communal justice.

In Levinas's view, it is difficult, if possible, for goodness to be achieved by the isolated individual outside the community. Nietzsche's self-imposed monastic isolation would be perhaps the very origin of his madness. The very possibility of goodness, for Levinas, entails pluralistic sociality. Thus, in "Damages Due to Fire" Levinas reserves some of his strongest language for the self-righteous sanctimony of those Prometheans who would storm the gates of heaven on their own. It is against them that the dark angel of Ezekiel is first sent. "The texts of Ezekiel," Levinas says, "take aim at the impossibility of private righteousness." Private righteousness is the hubris of a virile consciousness

caught up in the individualistic ethics of self-actualization and authenticity as found in the Greek tradition of virtue, an ethic exalting *virtus* as virility, masculinity, power. Here is the point at which Levinas's thought diverges from its pagan derivation. The hierarchical ethics of nobility guided by an aesthetic of self-creation, unhinged from its primogeniture in an exorbitant response-ability to and for the other, naturally tends toward, Levinas believes, the private, elitist madness of Nietzschean individualism on the one hand, and the public, racist madness of Auschwitz on the other. Thus, Levinas would avoid the natural rapaciousness of *virtus*, as well as the charge of otherworldliness—of which so much ill is said among the Nietzscheans—by locating the moment of transcendence in the horizontal structure of an exorbitant response-ability for the other person within the economy of a worldly "Jewish" community whose membership requires that we remain wide-eyed and wakeful insomniacs, circumcised skeptics, resisting perpetually the private satisfaction of positioning ourselves in the slumber of foundationalism, with its nostalgic dreams of imperialism.

Is there not a certain supernaturalness to this philosophy of exorbitant responsibility that corresponds to the super-naturalness of circumcision? Must one either be a Jew or less than human? Must an occasional gift of "divine" consolation always involve the violence of transgression? In its legitimate and lofty concern to avoid the madness of Auschwitz and the madness of Nietzsche, does Levinas's thought, like that of the dutiful Kant and the virtuous Plato, not overlook or unnecessarily de-emphasize an equally legitimate aspect of human being for which the stark and absolute demand of exorbitant responsibility holds no reward free of guilt? Do we always act without entering into the promised land, that is, not *act* at all? Must all

responsible work be unappreciated? Must the satisfaction of lyric poetry be forever exiled from the synagogue? Is there no room for Alcibiades in Levinas's philosophy of love?

In the caress which, in Levinas's hands, never finds the fulfillment of its infinite surplus of desire; in the way sensing and the sensed or saying and the said never catch up with themselves; in the way the breakdown of communication in a love relationship is viewed by Levinas as "the positivity of the relationship";⁹⁰ in the way even the most tragic suffering reveals in its deferral of satisfaction the religious plot of transcendence by which the deferral would be rendered meaningful; in the very impossibility of the exorbitant responsibility Levinas recalls for us, is there not revealed a certain negative imbalance, a certain nihilism, regarding the concrete, everyday reality of the human situation? Is Levinas himself not the victim of a certain forgetfulness here, perhaps despite himself? In the final analysis, must not Levinas's exorbitant responsibility for the other be balanced against a responsibility for oneself grounded in a positive aesthetic and philosophy of nature that are lacking in Levinas's work? Without this equally legitimate concern for the sovereignty of a 'masculine' consciousness refusing to be circumcised, is there not the danger that the absolute and impossible responsibility that Levinas recalls for us—with its exaltation of a certain 'feminine' weakness and passivity—may inadvertently become the source of a victim mentality bent on suffering, the inverse of a fire raging out of control, and, despite every good intention, the

⁹⁰ Levinas, E. *Time and the Other*, p. 94; *Le temps et l'autre*. St. Clement, France: Fata Morgana, 1979, p.89.

accomplice condition for the very possibility of holocaust—of which so much ill is said among the Nietzscheans?⁹¹

⁹¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published under the title “Action, Passion, and Responsibility: Levinas’s Circumcision of Consciousness,” in *Selected Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, Volume 20: “*Reinterpreting the Political: Continental Philosophy and Political Theory.*” Edited by Stephen H. Watson and Lenore Langdorf. New York: SUNY Press, 1998): 93-1.

CHAPTER 6

The Equivocation of the Feminine

1. Eros and the Otherness of the Feminine

Contrary to the romantic notion that love is a fusion or communion with the Other, Levinas asserts toward the end of his early work, *Existence and Existents*, that eros is rather a "proximity" with the Other where discreteness is nevertheless maintained. Anticipating a later work in which he promises to focus his attention directly on the nature of the erotic, he already suggests at this early point that "the plane of eros allows us to see that the other par excellence is the feminine..." (EE 85; ExE 145). To understand what Levinas means by this, it is necessary to see it in the context of his descriptions of the ethical metaphysics of responsibility. Given Levinas's understanding of the feminine as essentially Other, the romantic notion of love conceived as a blissful union between equals becomes precisely contrary to his conception of eros. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that "what is presented as the failure of communication in love in fact constitutes the positive character of the relationship; the absence of the other is precisely his presence qua other" (EE 95; ExE 163). This blissful pathos which is made up of proximity rather than fusion is lost in the 'Greek' interpretation of eros, according to this early work. But Levinas intends to recover it as an aspect of his overall phenomenological task of establishing an exorbitant, intersubjective response-ability as the essential source of human subjectivity and the mysterious locus of the epiphany of

the God in the world, an event toward which our present tracking of the trace of a transformative theopoetics is directed.

The promised analysis of eros and the feminine is taken up by Levinas in *Time and the Other*, a series of lectures given in 1946-47 at Jean Wahl's *Collège Philosophique* which, in the spirit of openness after the Liberation, encouraged "'intellectual experimentation' and risky prospection," as Levinas points out in the later, 1979 Preface to the unedited republication of these lectures.⁹² Consistent with his thinking in *Existence and Existents*, however, in the lectures comprising *Time and the Other* the feminine is still associated directly with the otherness of the Other: "...the feminine," Levinas continues to assert, is "essentially other..." (TO 86; TA 78). The feminine, as the fundamental form of alterity, is precisely what cannot be reduced to the sameness of a conception. What is different about *Time and the Other* is the phenomenological analyses that are used to approach the description of exteriority. Levinas now focuses on voluptuousness, the caress, modesty, fecundity, and paternity—themes which announce his continuing and intensified interest in the question of sexual difference.

In a later rumination upon this lecture series, Levinas points out that there was a double purpose to his "risky prospection" regarding the feminine there. On the one hand, he was trying to understand the diachrony of time in the context of his continuing investigation of exteriority, through the incomprehensible equivocation of the feminine, and, thus, to establish a transcendent 'contact' with alterity without the obliteration of separation in this contact. This would provide a ground for Levinas's central thesis that

⁹² Levinas, E. 1979 Preface to *Time and the Other*, pp. 33-34; pp. 11-12.

intersubjectivity involves a pre-reflective, lived relation of exorbitant responsibility for the Other. On the other hand, he was also interested in understanding sexual difference itself from the perspective of this transcendence (EI 65-66; Etl 57-58). Did Levinas succeed in this double task? It would be difficult to find a criterion by which to measure such success. Because his understanding of the feminine goes to the very heart of his philosophical orientation, however, it is one of the most difficult aspects of his work to understand, if it can be under-stood at all. And from the very beginning, Levinas's "risky prospectations" gave rise to the voice of criticism.

The direct association of the feminine with the otherness of the Other in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* led to a critique of Levinas's construal of the feminine by Simone de Beauvoir, charging him with, perhaps unsuspected sexism.⁹³ To associate the feminine with the Other, to understand the feminine as passive, vulnerable, patient, sensitive, merely responsive to the masculine was interpreted as a prejudicial, subordination of women and a rendering of them as second-class citizens by a subjugating, oppressive patriarchal (male) consciousness. Although Levinas never explicitly says so, it was perhaps because of this critique that the analysis of the feminine in *Totality and Infinity* is somewhat different. This difference is also reflected in the 1979 Preface to *Time and the Other* where Levinas admits that his theses regarding the feminine in this early work "have not all been taken up later in their first form, that since then may have been revealed as inseparable from more complex and older problems, and as demanding a less improvised expression and especially a

⁹³ Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*, trans. H. Parshley, (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. xvi, n. 3. Cf. *Time and the Other*, p. 85, n. 69.

different thought."⁹⁴ This "less improvised expression" is worked out most completely in *Totality and Infinity*.

The feminine is encountered in two areas of *Totality and Infinity*. First, the feminine is understood in a rather abstract manner as the 'structure' of the home and the primary principle of individuation. Although Levinas distinguishes this notion of the feminine from any particular female, the relation with the feminine which structures the home as intimacy, welcome, and receptivity, is clearly understood as a relation of equality. This analysis in *Totality and Infinity*, however, can be interpreted as contradicting his view expressed in one of his Talmudic commentaries, "And God Created Woman," originally published in 1972, that in a marriage the male has been selected by God himself to be dominant and to lead his obedient wife. Marriage is not, politically, a relation of equality for Levinas, but one of subordination with equity. "There had to be a difference which did not affect equity," Levinas asserts in that text, "a sexual difference and, hence, a certain preeminence of man, a woman coming later, and as a woman, an appendage of the human.... What family scenes there would have been between the members of the first perfectly equal couple!"⁹⁵

This inequality, this necessity of dominance and subordination in the marital relation between the sexes that is summarily rejected by egalitarian feminism thought is nevertheless ensconced within the feminine structure of the home, a relation of *metaphysical* 'equality' where a female person need not even be present. The welcome

⁹⁴ Levinas, E. *Time and the Other*, p. 35; p. 13.

⁹⁵ Levinas, E. "And God Created Woman" in *Nine Talmudic Studies*, translated by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 173.

of the feminine home as a respite from labor (and thus making labor outside the home possible) is what will now be understood to bring about the individuation and separation of the existent, a necessary condition for the possibility of the face-to-face relation of sociality. In the context of the analysis of the feminine orientation of the individuating role played by the home, separation takes on a more positive aspect in *Totality and Infinity* than it had in the context of the interpretation of the feminine found in *Existence and Existents* or *Time and the Other*, where separation is identified more with pain and suffering than with leisure.

A second place where the feminine is encountered in *Totality and Infinity* is in Levinas's analysis of the erotic relationship. A specific ambiguity in his concept of the feminine will be revealed here. On the one hand, sensible contact with the feminine in the context of eros will revert to mere animal need. On the other hand, the feminine will lead to a transcendence beyond the face-to-face relation of sociality in the possibility inherent in fecundity. One resolution of the fundamental equivocation of the erotic feminine will issue concretely in the birth of the child.

In its dual role as both the structure of the home and the other of the erotic relation, as well as the ambiguous situation of the feminine within the erotic relation itself, the otherness of the feminine is revealed by Levinas to be both more and less than the alterity of the asymmetrical face-to-face relation at the basis of the ethical structure of intersubjectivity. As the structure of the home and the principle of individuation, therefore, the feminine is the prelude to the very possibility of sociality. As the erotic other, relation with the feminine is at once *beneath* sociality insofar as eros is a need, like hunger, (subject to the law of repetition), and *beyond* sociality insofar as the

erotic is a movement toward the infinite futurity of fecundity that materializes itself in the creation of the child (TI 264-265; Tel 242-243). The direct association of the feminine with the otherness of exteriority is conspicuously dropped in *Totality and Infinity*. Whereas *Time and the Other* approached exteriority from the vantage points of time, death, facing, and eros, *Totality and Infinity* will begin to view exteriority primarily from the perspective of language (as expression and signification), a theme which will become the focus of *Otherwise than Being*. But could there be an unsuspected sexism still at work behind these careful descriptions? To address that question, it will be necessary to look more closely at the metaphysical orientation of Levinas's construal of the feminine.

2. The Discreteness of the Feminine

Prior to the masculine logic of identity and non-contradiction;⁹⁶ prior to the grasping hand which conquers and dominates in its enjoyment of the elemental;⁹⁷ prior to the reduction of saying to the economy of the said; prior to comprehension, knowledge, and power, according to Levinas, is the disruptive undoing of the feminine. To reduce the feminine to that which can be inscribed in the coherence of a thought is already to have missed the otherness of the feminine entirely. What can be said about the feminine—as is true with all phenomena that are saturated with exteriority and thus able to be said only through the kind of radical unsaying that motivates the apophatic dissimulation of Levinas's philosophical-poetic method—is precisely what the feminine "is" not. The

⁹⁶ Levinas does not explicitly identify what he considers the totalitarian propensity of representation with "masculinity" but this conclusion would seem to follow as the natural counterpart of the "feminine" understood as exteriority.

⁹⁷ Levinas, E. "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in CPP, p. 50. Cf. TI, pp. 161 ff.; pp. 135 ff.

feminine discreetly escapes every predication that would make the feminine present, because the otherness of the feminine can only be 'given' in a way which infinitely surpasses any manner in which the feminine would be taken. "The feminine," Levinas says in *Totality and Infinity*, "is the face in which trouble surrounds and already invades clarity" (TI 262; Tel 240). The feminine is 'given' in the withdrawal of the feminine into the hiddenness of the discourse of modesty and allurements. Like the other forms of exteriority Levinas has described in his work, the 'presence' of the feminine is made conspicuous as an absence, a familiar formula for signifying the incommensurateness or absolute otherness of exteriority.

In Levinas's view, the space of this withdrawal, where intimacy first becomes possible and not possible, is signified in the interiority of the home. It is the pre-linguistic, pre-cognitive, *feminine* orientation of dwelling itself which subtends and makes possible the ethical relation with the Other as language and teaching. The self-dispossession required within the interrogative approach of the Other, the giving of my world to the Other in non-calculating expression of myself, in hospitality and welcome, what Levinas calls in *Otherwise than Being* the "vulnerability, exposure to outrage, to wounding, passivity more passive than all patience" (OB 15; AE 18), the giving of "one's own mouthful of bread" ... this already presupposes the primordial relationship with the feminine in the home. And it is the home, ultimately, which makes possible the transcendence of fecundity and the fulfillment of ethical responsibility in the birth of the child (OB 74; AE 93-94). The otherness of the feminine is at the heart of the ethical relationship. But Levinas adds several clarifications to this unusual metaphysical construal of the feminine.

In *Ethics and Infinity*, a dialogical commentary by Levinas on the general sweep of his thought, he remarks that "the feminine is other *for a masculine being...*" (EI 65; Etl 57; emphasis added). But will this mild disclaimer suffice? Feminists are rightly sensitive to any construal of a general category of the feminine represented as excessively passive and merely responsive to the active, masculine principle, what, in Beauvoir's view—inspired by Sartre's dualistic ontology of the conflictual power relations governing sexual difference which Levinas's rejects—is understood as "*second*." Is Levinas's disclaimer sufficient to rebuke this feminist critique?

What Levinas seems to be asserting in *Ethics and Infinity* is that *for a man* the feminine is the equivocal *par excellence*. Emmanuel Levinas can only speak as a man. Furthermore, Levinas claims that he does not intend to identify women with the feminine and men with the masculine, although an equivocation between the ontic and the ontological predication of the term 'feminine' comes into play here as it does with other of Levinas's descriptions of exteriority. By way of an androgynous addendum to his first disclaimer, in *Ethics and Infinity* Levinas also asserts that "all these allusions to the ontological differences between the masculine and the feminine would appear less archaic if, instead of dividing humanity into two species ... they would signify that the participation in the masculine and in the feminine were the attribute of every human being" (EI 68; Etl 60). Here Levinas seems to be aligning himself more closely with a liberal rather than a radical feminist perspective, although not without some reservations.

Is this double disclaimer against ontic contamination within the metaphysical situation of Levinas's construal of the feminine sufficient to rebuff the critique leveled by

Beauvoir? Tina Chanter's interesting analysis of the two readings of Levinas that are possible in this regard, one apparently contrary to the motives of "feminism" and the other synchronized with it, would seem to place Levinas, typically, in the position of straddling the fence.⁹⁸ Even if we tentatively accept Levinas's description of the equivocation of the feminine, there still remains, for the re-reader of Levinas, a question of whether this ambiguity is fecund or vicious. To maintain a perspective on the charge of sexism, one should bear in mind that Levinas's phenomenological analysis of the feminine, as with death, time, and the face-to-face relation, is geared primarily toward the establishment of exteriority as the ground of transcendence. The feminine structures the possibility of separation in the context of the home, making possible the relation of facing, and the move "beyond the face" through the fecundity or horizontal exteriority or the transcendence of the erotic relationship, and, ultimately, how this is connected to the fundamental priority of responsibility. But is this 'evidence' sufficient to exonerate Levinas from the charge of sexism? Perhaps, since Levinas claims that his entire analysis of exteriority is approached from outside the structures of formal logic and thus "is 'otherwise' than the knowledge which expresses it"?⁹⁹

The evidential importance of the feminine in Levinas's ethical metaphysics must be situated within the economy of enjoyment in the context of the home and the disruption of sociality which animates the ethical relation of responsibility between the Same and the Other. *Totality and Infinity* begins with the notion of a "metaphysical desire" that desires beyond everything that can simply complete it, a characteristic

⁹⁸ Chanter, Tina. "Feminism and the Other," in *The Provocation of Levinas*, pp. 32-56. See also, Chanter, T., *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2001).

⁹⁹ Levinas, E. *Autrement que savoir: Emmanuel Levinas*. Paris: Osiris, 1988, p. 90.

which, in Levinas's view, distinguishes desire from mere need. Desire can arise only in separate beings, beings who occupy "a site as existents standing out from the anonymity of existence, beings whose being constitutes "a way of being" ("*...une maniere d'etre*") which Levinas will refer to as the "psychism" or "inner life."¹⁰⁰ This interiority of the existent which subtends separation "institutes an order different from historical time in which totality is constituted, an order where everything is pending,"¹⁰¹ not yet, where the notion of possibility surpasses every idea of the possible so that, as Levinas says in *Existence and Existents*, every instant of "the present is the beginning of *a being*," a break from the anonymous nocturnal horror of being in general, the *il y a*.¹⁰² The feminine subtends separation. Created beings are separate beings, separate from their creator unto atheism. "One can call atheism this separation so complete," Levinas says, "that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated ... outside of God, at home with itself."¹⁰³ Separated being, the being of enjoyment of the elemental world, is a being which inhabits or dwells, a being which is able to be at home with itself. "The dwelling, inhabitation, belongs to the essence—to the egoism—of the I. Against the anonymous 'there is' (*il y a*) of Being—horror, trembling, vertigo, perturbation of the I that does not coincide with itself—the happiness of enjoyment affirms the I at home with itself...."¹⁰⁴

To exist as an existent which stands out from the horror of sheer existence, an existent which stands on its own, stands up and bears a name, is not merely to be

¹⁰⁰ TI, p. 54; p. 24.

¹⁰¹ TI, p. 55; p. 26.

¹⁰² EE, p. 98; p. 169

¹⁰³ TI, p. 58; p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ TI, p. 43; p.117.

thrown willy-nilly into existence in the manner of Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*. Rather, to be human is to inhabit. Levinas says that "to dwell is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality of a being cast into existence as a stone one casts behind oneself: it is recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome." Yet this "retreat home" to this "refuge," which is correlative to the economy of the elemental and the world of labor, and which makes these possible in making possible their suspension, is not a solipsistic retreat, as it appeared to be in Levinas's early works, but an *interiority* permeated by the intimacy of the familiar, and this "intimacy which familiarity already presupposes is an intimacy with someone. The interiority of recollection is a solitude in a world already human."¹⁰⁵ The home makes possible a withdrawal from the world of work and labor—what can be thought of as the negative moment of separation. The home is the positive moment of peaceful respite from the effort and work of individuation, like what the Sabbath is to the rest of the week.¹⁰⁶ In *Totality and Infinity*, it is through happiness and enjoyment, rather than suffering and struggle, that separation is accomplished. I become myself not so much in my work as in the enjoyment of the fruits of my work, in leisure: "The interiority of enjoyment is separation in itself," Levinas says. And interiority is being at home with oneself. And the home is structured by the welcome of the feminine. The other "whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ TI, p.155-156; p.128-129.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, E. *Transcendance et intelligibilité*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ TI, p.147-155; p. 121-128.

Thus, as an interiority that opens the possibility of contact with exteriority, the notion of "home" does not indicate a place of inactive withdrawal, a sedantary dwelling. It is a sojourning, a movement of wandering, a being at home with one's homelessness. The chosen home is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering (errance) which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other, metaphysics. Of course, there is always the possibility of being closed within one's home, within one's primitive egoism, of shutting out the Other from the supposed safety of one's separateness. In fact, it is exactly because this is possible that transcendence toward the infinite opened by the Other is also possible since "the possibility for the home to open to the Other is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and windows."¹⁰⁸ The home is the "place" from which relation with the other is both possible and not possible. The home is already the concrete anticipation of the social dimension of the monadic existent. Openness to the Other, the welcoming of the Other into my home—hospitality—is accomplished, Levinas argues, as language, as "contact across a distance, a relation with the non-touchable, across a void," in *saying*. I will pursue the linguistic angle to the question of responsibility in greater detail in the following chapter, giving here only the outlines of it as are necessary for our present discussion. My expression of myself without calculation is an offering of my world to the Other, a placing of my being at home with myself in the position of disposal and vulnerability, a

¹⁰⁸ TI, p.173; p.148.

giving of what I own, a dis-possession which takes the form of a "giving of signs, giving a sign of this giving of signs, expressing oneself."¹⁰⁹

The possibility of this contact across the distance of separation is first made possible by the feminine as the "essential interiority" of the home, a feminine interiority, prior to the presence or absence of any female person. The feminine, in the posture of unconditional surrender and welcome, is "the inhabitant that inhabits (the home) before every inhabitant." Because of this primordial habitation of the feminine within the intimacy and familiarity which structures being-at-home, Levinas says that "the feminine has been encountered in this analysis as one of the cardinal points of the horizon in which the inner life takes place," i.e., in which separation occurs and spirituality becomes possible. The notion of the feminine must not be confused here with "the human being of 'feminine sex,'" as was pointed out above. For, as I said, even in a home where no woman is present, "the dimension of femininity ... remains open there, as the very welcome of the dwelling."¹¹⁰ Levinas's understanding of the home here must also be distinguished from what is merely a house. It is the act of being *lived in* that transforms a house into a home. I invest myself into my home by living there, by decorating it with my possessions, taking on the home as a veritable extension of myself, or, more properly, as a contraction of myself into the interiority of a sheltering so that the exteriority of my abode marks an interior dwelling. The emphasis here is not so much on *building*, as in Heidegger, but on *inhabiting*. To be in the world as human is to inhabit or dwell knowingly. The difference between a house and a home is the welcome

¹⁰⁹ OB, pp. 14-15; pp. 17-18.

¹¹⁰ TI, p.158; p.131.

made possible by the feminine, the respite and solace the home provides from the cares of the world, the possibility of offering hospitality. The interiority of the separated being which places the elemental at a workable distance is coextensive with "*habitation in a dwelling* of a home," a living-in which makes familiarity with the world possible and not possible. This intimacy of the home is produced as a withdrawal of a presence which opens or makes room for the recollection of intimacy. The feminine presence in the home is discreetly an absence, a withdrawal which in withdrawing makes the welcome of the home possible. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the home and inhabitation. In the context of the home, then, relation with the feminine is a relation of equality, like Buber's "I/Thou" relation.¹¹¹ As Levinas will later describe it, the relation/non-relation with the feminine, in the context of eros, is profanation and voluptuousity, "an experience which does not pass into any concept," a relation that is "irreducible to intentionality, which is objectifying even in praxis."¹¹² Here the feminine is prior to every intentionality. Where intimacy with the feminine in the context of the structure of the home issues in the possibility of the dis-possession of welcome in openness to the Other, later, in the context of the erotic, relations with the feminine will resolve itself in the transcendence of fecundity and the more radical self-transformation or "trans-substantiation" involved in the engendering of the child. These two "moments" of the feminine are inseparable in terms of the larger notion of responsibility. To be responsible is to give myself or speak myself to my neighbor, to substitute myself for her in her suffering, to take that suffering on as my expression—mine only as it is for her. Likewise, in paternity, this giving of myself to a future beyond

¹¹¹ TI, p. 155; pp. 128-129.

¹¹² TI, p. 260; p. 238.

myself, this sacrifice without reserve, is maintained as insatiable desire, infinite desire engendering further desire and thus accomplishing goodness, the very "goal" of responsibility.

In the context of the home, relation with the feminine is pre-linguistic, "a language without teaching," Levinas says, "a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret."¹¹³ The dwelling of the feminine permits a respite from the world of labor and the possession of things, from the living-from of enjoyment which defines the separated being. This respite accomplished in consort with the feminine, however, is not a *withdrawal* from the world. Rather, withdrawing from the elemental world "implies a new event" where I am in relation to what I live with: "this event is the relation with the Other who welcomes me in the Home, the discreet presence of the Feminine. It is from this intimacy of the feminine that welcome of "the absolutely other" is possible. If the home is founded on labor and possession in the context of the feminine, as the place where I can withdraw from the world in recollection and intimacy, it is necessary—if I am to go beyond the life of labor and possession—to learn how to give away what I possess, a giving away which institutes my relation with the absolutely Other who comes to me from a height and who establishes the ethical in language and teaching. But in order that I be able to "free myself from the very possession that the welcome of the Home establishes, in order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know how to give

¹¹³ TI, p. 266-272; p. 244-250.

what I possess.... I welcome the Other who presents himself in my home by opening my home to him.¹¹⁴

In welcoming the Other into the openness of my home, I am called into question by him, a calling into question which, Levinas says, is "coextensive" with the manifestation of the face-to-face as language: "The calling in question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the Other in the face, we call language." Language is a welcoming of the Other which, because the Other approaches from a height, calls me into question. The Other approaches first and foremost as a teacher whose "fir~t- teaching teaches this very height, tantamount to its exteriority, the ethical. But in coming from this height the Other does not dominate and conquer; the Other questions the self-possession of my identity and 'teaches' the response-ability at the heart of alterity. As Levinas puts it. 11teaching is not a species of a genus called domination, a hegemony at work within a totality, but is the presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality.¹¹⁵

A tripartite movement toward the exposition of alterity is revealed here: (1) enjoyment, as the immediate consumption of the fruits of the earth, made possible by (2) the welcome of the feminine in the intimacy and familiarity of the home, and (3) the approach of the Other from a height which is possible only by virtue of the first two movements. The simple living from the spontaneous agreeableness of the elements is not yet habitation. But habitation is not yet the transcendence of language. The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not the you (*vous*) of the face that reveals itself in a

¹¹⁴ Cf. Kearney, R. (2009). *Anatheism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹¹⁵ p.170-171; p. 145-146.

dimension of height, but precisely the thou of familiarity: a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret. Contact with the feminine can thus be understood as the *sine qua non* of openness to the Other, an openness which, because of the feminine, can never achieve the absolute fullness of closure. It persists as a perpetual openness and overflowing of every idea of closing. The closure of pure language, of an absolute relation between the Same and the Other conceivable only at the end of history where there would no longer be a position from which such a conception would be possible—is forever undone by the dissimulation of the feminine.

The face-to-face relationship worked out in *Totality and Infinity* established for Levinas a new understanding of the subjectivity of the existent. Subjectivity thought in the trope of hypostasis, it will be remembered, was described as a mastering of the raw forces of Being. It was a subjection of the world to the "for-me" of the hypostatic individual. In this subjection to me of what is other than me, the freedom of spontaneity is established. However, the freedom and consciousness that defines this egoistic subjectivity bring with them an existential solitude that is the correlate of an inwardness or interiority that functions as the ground of the possibility for this freedom and consciousness, as we saw previously. The solitude of this individualistic subjectivity is 'overcome' by the invisible and pre-conscious sociality of the face-to-face relation. This results in a *new* understanding of subjectivity. In this conception, to be a subject, was shown to be responsive to the Other, a *being subjected by* the approach of the Other from a height, an approach whose very nature is a re-proach to the freedom of spontaneity and the sovereignty of consciousness.

Insofar as sociality is pre-objective and pre-thematic, it is ontologically more fundamental than the subjectivity of consciousness. The subjectivity of sociality is also temporally prior to the subjectivity of consciousness insofar as the temporality of the face-to-face relation is, in Levinas's view, the ground and foundation of historical time. The freedom of spontaneity is subsequent to the freedom of beginning and the freedom of responsibility which hearken back to an immemorial past and point toward a pure future. It is exactly in this that Levinas's notion of responsibility differs from that of Kant and Heidegger. It is neither from a duty based on a rational imperative nor from a concern grounded in a comprehension of Being that ethical responsibility arises. At least these are not the most fundamental levels. More fundamental than the law, and justifying the law, more fundamental than care for self and neighbor is the response-ability to the invisible exteriority of the Other which is the 'law' of love. Ontological responsibility here becomes ethical response-ability. This pre-conscious response to the Other does not do away with the moral responsibility attendant upon our freedom of spontaneity. We still must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But this rational exercise of freedom is politics, not ethics. It is closer to conventional morality rather than the fundamental ethics Levinas is talking about. It is not what Heidegger called "*ursprungliche*" ethics. But, in situating the ground of ethics in an extreme passivity is not Levinas removing some of the impact of the responsibility that devolves upon the rational being insofar as rationality defines the freedom of action? Levinas is not denouncing the importance of morality. He wants to show that prescriptive morality is already a thematizing of a more fundamental relationship with the Other, an ethical responding, that is, a response of love prior to consciousness and thought.

Morality is grounded in what Levinas calls sociality, not freedom. That is the point. It is prior to the whole dimension of activity/passivity, already a cognitive formulation within the moral responsibility of consciousness. That is why Levinas says that ethical responsibility is "a passivity more passive than all passivity."¹¹⁶ Like the exteriority of the face, the passivity of the subject is also infinite. It does not yet have any prescriptive force in terms of action. It does not yet say you should do this particular thing or not do that. As you will see in connection with the relation between language and responsibility, one does not *know about* one's response-ability except through retrospective and speculative analysis. The only force of an imperative is that one must not believe that the infinite dimension of the Other could be reduced, without essential violence, to a representation. The force of Levinas's imperative is wholly critical or skeptical. That is its positive content. This paradoxical presence of an absence is the very definition of the ethical dimension of the subject. It is not that the subject first appears as a subject and then relates to the Other in a way that both maintains and surpasses this subjectivity, although the seemingly historical analysis of the genesis of the subject in hypostasis could give this impression. It would seem as if we have been progressing along a linear path from the *il y a*, to hypostasis, to the feminine, home, child, face, sociality and the beyond. But this would be a misinterpretation of the metaphysical context of Levinas's phenomenological formulations. In the linear, spatial view, there would be the introduction of a temporality into hypostasis prior to the establishment of time in sociality. But the existent, qua response-ability, does not exist prior to the relationship with the Other. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas will turn from

¹¹⁶OB, pp. 15, 110; pp. 18, 140.

the approach of the Other to the establishment and explication of how it is *that subjectivity is to be understood as responsibility*.

The face-to-face relationship is the basis of the existent's historical being. It is in the face-to-face relationship with the Other, prior to consciousness that my being in truth is constituted. Constitution is produced in the very dynamics of facing, that is, in language understood as apology to the Other who approaches from an ethical height. Thus, insofar as I am in the face-to-face relationship I am in my being as truth and freedom. But this freedom "is neither the arbitrariness of an isolated being nor the conformity of an isolated being with a rational and universal law incumbent upon all." It is the freedom of the face-to-face relation, beneath the freedom of spontaneity. This can be understood as a freedom to speak for myself, to give myself to the Other in language. "My being is produced in producing itself before the others in discourse," Levinas says. "It is what it reveals of itself to the others, but while participating in, attending, its revelation." But what about after my death? Will the violence death introduces into this being make truth impossible? If this is not to be so, there must be some way of transcending death which also goes beyond the face-to-face relation of sociality and to which this relation points. Prior to death, and yet as a kind of death which subjectivity takes on voluntarily, there must be a way to transcend the face-to-face relation. Otherwise, after my death and the end of my possibility of having possibilities, the face-to-face relation, which is a break out of or escape from the "tyranny of reason," would result in an ultimate reduction of the alterity of the face-to-face relation to the sameness of history. That would be so, Levinas says, "unless, revolted by the violence of reason that reduces the apology to silence, the subjectivity could not only

accept to be silent, but could renounce itself by itself, renounce itself without violence, cease the apology for itself. This would not be a suicide nor a resignation, but would be love.¹¹⁷

At every level, even the most benign, reason—representational intentionality—brings an end to the diachrony of the face-to-face relationship. Whether this is while one is alive or after death, there would arise the whole positivistic problematic of reason which sociality undermines. The infinity that is revealed in the face-to-face relation, according to Levinas, points toward a time after my death, *and calls for a free renunciation of the hold on the world which death threatens*. Being-for-a-time-after-my-death is contrary to Heidegger's notion that Dasein's essence is being-toward-death. But how is the existence of the existent able to transcend death? And what does it mean to exist for such a "beyond"? What does this 'say' about the 'nature' of one's existing now?

3. The 'Resolution' of Feminine Ambiguity

Levinas argues that transcendence beyond the approach of the Other, beyond the face-to-face relation, made possible by the feminine dwelling of the home, is achieved in and by the erotic relationship and the birth of the child. It is through the erotic relationship and its possibility of *fecundity* that the existent may transcend death and overcome the total obliteration that death brings. Thus, the ultimate concrete manifestation of the transcendence of the face-to-face relationship conceived as love is the child. The alterity of the child marks the continuation of the existent beyond death. Later, in "*La*

¹¹⁷ TI, p. 253; p. 231.

Trace de l'autre" in fuller accordance with the Platonic formulation of the horizontal modes of immortality, Levinas will also include the genuine *Work*, which will be discussed in the final chapter of this text, as a self-transcendence beyond death.¹¹⁸ In both *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity* Levinas's examination of the love relationship comes after his analysis of the face-to-face relationship. The face-to-face relationship with the Other already has given Levinas an approach to exteriority that allows the existent to escape from its solitude without losing the integrity and autonomy of separation—except for the fact of death. The erotic relationship and the birth of the child is, on the other hand, that which will take the existent beyond corporeal death and beyond the empirical, historical synthesis of the face in a fulfillment and continuation of the exteriority encountered there; a transubstantiation of the flesh.

Among other things, what Levinas is interested in bringing into the light in *Totality and Infinity*, in a reversion to interests announced in *Time and the Other*, is to understand phenomenologically, to see it as it appears on its own merits, the ontological nature of sexual difference. The fact of gender, Levinas argues, is not merely a logical, specific difference within the Parmenidean unity of Being. Neither is it merely a contradiction in terms, nor a simple complementarity presupposing a previously existing whole, as might be concluded from a naive reading of Aristophanes's account of sexual difference in Plato's *Symposium*. Rather, eros brings to light an ambiguous relation with the Other. The erotic relationship does take place between two separate individuals, but at the same time it is also already an aspect of that which allows these individuals to

¹¹⁸ See Walsh, R. D. "Language and Responsibility in the Ethical Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Hermeneutics and the Tradition*, proceedings of the A.C.P.A., 1988, pp. 95-105.

be individuals in the fullest sense. The erotic relationship is both presupposed by and transcends the face-to-face relation. This is the ambivalence of the love relationship, the ambiguity where there is a "simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence, tangency of the avowable and the unavowable," which "constitutes the originality of the erotic" as "*the equivocal par excellence*" (TI 255; Tel 233). It is not only the ambiguity inherent in erotic love that can easily cause confusion and consternation among aspirants to an understanding of Levinas's nuanced analysis of the feminine. It is also the fact that, particularly in *Time and the Other*, the voluptuousness of erotic desire is employed by Levinas to establish the exteriority or otherness of the Other. Thus, voluptuousness, manifested in the caress, is seen to involve an insatiable desire. In *Totality and Infinity*, however, the erotic relation is given a new twist. It is now argued that voluptuousness occurs within a relationship that does not involve sociality at all. It is rather a "dual solitude" (TI 265; Tel 242). That is, the love relationship, in a profane sense, is a closed society, and yet an equivocal identity between two where "the other is me and separated from me." What is loved in the voluptuousness of eros is not the Other *per se*, which is impossible, but the infinite love that the other bears me; the infinity and hence the incomprehensibility of the Other and, ultimately, the locus of the epiphany of God in the world, the possibility of the impossible. As a "dual egoism," it is not in loving understood as a carnal need that the voluptuousness of love, as desire, will be satisfied. Carnal love, like hunger, always involves the repetition of perpetual return to itself. But insofar as voluptuousness also involves a transcendental move toward an infinite future, its proper outcome at the profane level of flesh and blood is the

engendering of the child, which is how the problematic is addressed in *Totality and Infinity*.

Levinas's thesis is that fecundity involves a transcendence of the parents in their offspring. It continues history without producing old age. My child is somehow me while at the same time wholly her own person. Here is the concrete, actual transcendence of my own being beyond my death; an elucidation of the wisdom of Diotima. We find immortality in our authentic works and our children. In our children, as in the textual flesh of genuine works, i.e., works given over to a future generation allowing no return to the authorial self, there occurs a 'transubstantiation' of our own flesh. Our relations with our literal and literary children thus involve a special kind of paradoxical exteriority. My child is me but not me. At eighteen months my daughter already is an individual. She is already "herself." Yet she is also my survival beyond death, my *re-naissance*, my infinite renewal. Fecundity and the voluptuousness of the caress aim beyond the face. Beyond the face opens the dimension of the infinite and the epiphany of God in the world. Situated at the very heart of this beyond is the ultimate foundation of responsibility understood as the fundamental subjectivity of the subject, the giving of oneself to the Other with no expectation of a return on your investment. This altruistic, asymmetrical dimension of height generated by the incommensurateness of the Other, is approached in *Otherwise Than Being* in an analysis of the relationship between language and responsibility, in the tropes of proximity, substitution, and the genuine work.

4. Further Considerations

To the extent that Levinas is critical of the supposedly 'masculine' attempt of consciousness and knowledge to dominate and control the approach of the Other, which I will focus on in the following chapter, he fits in with liberal feminist critique. But to the extent that he may be interpreted as suggesting that the proper place of the woman is in the home raising children, he is running against the tide of sentiment mounting in 1949 toward the flood of the women's liberation movement, since much of this revolved around the conflict between the role of the woman as mother and homemaker in a withdrawal from the world at large into the world of the home and children, and the possibility of her having a career outside of the home, competing with men. It would take us too far afield from my intention in *God-in-the-World* to explore the implications of these historical and sociopolitical developments here. I would reiterate Levinas's point that the feminine structure of the home remains, even if a woman is not present there. In Levinas's ethical phenomenology of the Same and the Other, the analysis of the erotic relationship and the definition of the feminine are employed as a kind of 'escape' from the sociality of the face-to-face relation beyond death in relation to the infinite exteriority of the child. In this analysis there is a call for the fulfillment of transcendence in a non-erotic parental love which is given over to a time after its time, a pure future—a kind of love that is perhaps the most concrete expression of what Levinas means by ethical responsibility.

In his analysis of erotic love and the self-sacrifice to which it leads, however, does not Levinas's description pass all too quickly from the caress, which never gets what it wants, to the birth of the child? Is there not something missing here? Between

the voluptuousness of foreplay and the transcendence of the child there is a large gap in Levinas's analysis, what I take to be a decency that is not overcome in the presuppositions regarding the nature or purpose of sexuality underlying the description of "profanation" and the consignment of sexual pleasure to the realm of reciprocating need, a "dual egoism," taking its place among all the other pleasures and joys of life (TI 266; Tel 244, TI 271; Tel 249). Is not the break-up of love into egoistic need and metaphysical desire embodied in the birth of the child already a false dichotomy? Does this not presume a *logos* that is derivative of the biological analysis that Levinas's interpretation would otherwise avoid? Without the production of the child or even this intention, is there nothing left to sexuality but profanation? Answers to these questions arising from the embodiment of the aspiring hermeneutic reader will be pertinent to the development of the transformative aspect of transformative theopoetics that is being aimed at in the present text¹¹⁹

The analysis of the feminine and the place it finds in Levinas's philosophy can be understood as the counterpart to and extension of his critique of the priority of consciousness and knowledge in the definition of what it means to be human. The relations between the receptivity and fecundity of the feminine, and the rapacious virility and heroism of masculine consciousness—not to be identified with woman and man, and yet not divorced from these either—are complex and highly charged notions about which there is little agreement.¹²⁰ One must be cautious to not oversimplify matters. It is interesting that these questions have no significant place in Levinas's work after *Totality*

¹¹⁹ An alternative to Levinas's traditional view of sexuality is presented by Julius Evola, *The Metaphysics of Sex*, (New York: Inner Traditions, 1983).

¹²⁰ See, for example, Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis: U. of Minn. Press, 1986) for a description of the tensions within feminist thought and between feminism and philosophy.

and Infinity. I agree with Alphonso Lingis that Levinas's analyses of subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* are worked out in the context of the "beyond the face" introduced in the investigation of the erotic in the last section of *Totality and Infinity*.¹²¹ In order to accomplish the radical and admittedly utopian response-ability described in *Otherwise than Being*, it would be necessary to have experienced a home in which the feminine in the guise of the stay-at-home-mom nurtured the possibility of sociality, and where sociality culminated in the movement through the dynamics of erotic femininity to the possibility of fecundity and the transcendence of the child. The importance of Levinas's considerations can be viewed in their disruption. If there is a lack of the kind of radical responsibility in our day that is called for by Levinas's analyses, can it perhaps be traced back to the breakdown of the stability of the home and the errant state of the erotic which presently threaten the future of human life on this planet as much as if not more so than the possibility of nuclear or ecological holocaust?

Without a circumcision of masculine consciousness in the approach of the otherness of the incomparable feminine, there is always the danger of the masculine element, like fire, getting out of hand and overriding or ignoring the supplication of the feminine in the welcome of the home and the engendering of the child. Is this a fair and thorough treatment of the masculine and the feminine? Does it make sense to use these binary terms at all amid the search for a nuanced revelation of the absolute and infinite otherness of exteriority, which will turn out to be the very engine of a transformative theopoetics? Does the treatment of the masculine element come off any better within Levinas's traditionalist framework of sexual difference?

¹²¹ @note{Alphonso Lingis, Trans. Intro., OB, pp. xvii-xviii.}

CHAPTER 7

Levinas-ism and the Masculine Element

God said to Abraham: For your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages. This is the covenant between me and you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin. That will be the sign of the covenant between you and me. New American Bible¹²²

Babies are born with perfectly designed genitalia, and no one has the right to inflict this unnecessary procedure [circumcision] on them as they grow – for any reason.... Medical authorities throughout the world consider [ritual] circumcision medically unnecessary and unethical. From “Doctors Opposing Circumcision”¹²³

1. Introduction

As was suggested in the previous chapter, Levinas’s approach to gender, sexual difference, and the relations of the masculine and the feminine in the erotic relationship

¹²² The New American Bible, Revised Edition. (2015). Washington, D.C.: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, p. 33.

¹²³ Doctors Opposing Circumcision. (2019). Retrieved August 1, 2019 from <https://www.doctorsopposingcircumcision.org/>

is inextricably connected to his fundamental thesis that an exorbitant responsibility is the intersubjective genesis of subjectivity and fundamental to the development of a transformative theopoetics. In the interweaving of these apparently disparate threads of thought, a certain complex of ambiguity arises among the following three pairs of terms: Same/Other; masculine/feminine; man/woman. The terms “feminine” and “woman”—sometimes capitalized—appear often in Levinas’s work. The corresponding terms “masculine” and “man” rarely, if ever, make a direct appearance in his philosophical text, although they seem to have the presence of an absence in what may amount to a form of a metaphysical denial or sleight-of-hand in Levinas’s phenomenological approach to the ethical dialectic of the Same and the Other. Could this circumspect scission of masculine consciousness signify a transcendental *praejudicatum* at the heart of Levinas’s analysis of subjectivity? But would not the infliction of such a scission be merely cosmetic? Would it substantially alter or undermine the exorbitant configuration of responsible subjectivity? Is subjectivity to be fundamentally subject to the impossible arbitration of sex and gender? To borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, we could ask: Supposing subjectivity to be a woman...what then? This chapter traces the genealogy of that suspected bias in favor of the feminine in Levinas’s ethical phenomenology and sketches the direction for an alternative approach to the politics of sexual difference from a liberated ‘masculinist’ perspective in an attempt to allow all voices—vices notwithstanding—to be heard, since this democratization of access to the text will be of fundamental importance to the therapeutic dimension of transformative theopoetical reading and writing.

2. The Ambiguous Dialectic of the Same and the Other

The terms “the Same” and “the Other” are used by Levinas primarily to indicate broad categories of being and quasi-being in a sense not unrelated to the context in which they are found in Plato’s *Sophist*, although Levinas adopts these terms with a metaphysical purpose in mind that is less ‘Greek’ than that of Plato.¹²⁴ According to Levinas’s construal, the concept of the Same refers generally to that which is identical with itself, such as the “I” or agent of self-conscious subjectivity. As such, it is absolutely separate and distinct from the “wholly Other.” Levinas will allow that the identity of the “I” with itself does involve a limited kind of otherness, following the course of a Hegelian dialectic where consciousness goes out of itself to differentiate itself from itself, but only to return to itself in a totalizing identity of the same-in-difference. This otherness within the Same involves a repetitive movement of temporal desire understood as *need* that can achieve only temporary satisfaction. Subjectively, it is impossible to ever ‘catch up’ with ourselves. Yet, ambiguously, we are always who we are, me-myself, identified identically with ourselves in a form of self-referential satisfaction, closure, and apparent completeness. But Levinas articulates another order of desire: metaphysical desire. Building on the Cartesian notion of the temporal priority of the infinite over the finite—an impossible thought that we impossibly find in us, a thought which thinks more than it thinks—metaphysical desire does not aim at what is other within the economy of the Same, but at what is *absolutely Other*. That which is absolutely or wholly Other refers precisely to what, intrinsically, cannot be reduced to the identity of the Same. It is what Derrida would call an undeconstructible. Thus,

¹²⁴ Walsh, R. “A Philosophical Poetic Interpretation of Plato’s *Sophist*”

metaphysical desire reveals or produces an infinite surplus of desiring over the desirable, forever exceeding the possibility of closure in satisfaction or returning to itself in the form of the same. Repetition here becomes “infinite.” Pure identity succumbs to the Levinasian *sentance* and the Derridean *differance*.

There are two vectors of probability inhabiting this fundamental ethical asymmetry. On the one hand, the Other “approaches” the Same from the superior, metaphysical height of an irreducible exteriority, and thereby poses a perpetual ethical challenge to the identity, or the totalizing, objectifying proclivities of the Same. On the other hand, this *ethical* ‘power’ of the Other over the Same is not yet, by definition, social or political power. In fact, the ethical power of the wholly Other is generated precisely by the absence of political power, which is why Levinas frequently uses the Biblical formula of “the widow, the orphan, and the stranger” to depict the worldly powerlessness or weakness of the wholly Other, underscoring Caputo’s depiction of what he calls “the weakness of God-in-the-world.”¹²⁵ The ethical relation between the Same and the Other operates within a framework of invisible “sociality” that is prior to consciousness and not yet within the visible world of political society. And how the move is made from the surplus of metaphysical desire to the everyday political realm is unclear in Levinas’s work, as I suggested in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, it seems to be assumed that the boundary between these two orders is a permeable membrane, like a skin, and thus they are not kept *entirely* separate. Herein lies the source of an important ambiguity in Levinas’s ethical phenomenology. The discourse of the Same and the Other operates ambiguously in a phenomenological gap between the

¹²⁵ Caputo, J. (2006) *The Weakness of God*. Indiana University Press

“infinite” of the transcendental order and the immanence of the empirical order, an immediacy that is given in the form of a lived or living *praxis*.

3. Masculinity, Femininity and the Transcendence of Fecundity

This metaphysical/empirical ambiguity in the ethical dialectic of the Same and the Other is further compounded by the fact that from the very beginning Levinas includes in his analysis the nomenclature of gender. It is the feminine that is often thought to best characterize the wholly Other for Levinas, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Specifically, the feminine is variously associated in Levinas’s work with an affective, pre-conscious invisibility, a pure future and an immemorial past, modesty, interiority, sheltering, the socializing and welcoming aspect of the home, fecundity, maternity, intimacy, generosity, sweetness, kindness, goodness, tenderness, mercy, love, mystery, and soul. This gendered litany of associations heightens the ambiguity between the metaphysical and the empirical. And there will be a further ambivalence within this already metaphysically ambiguous ascription of gender itself. As our analysis showed, the feminine, as wholly (holy) Other, is not *all* goodness and light. Having the peculiar presence of an absence, the feminine is also equivocation *par excellence*. Perpetually slipping away from the light, essentially hidden behind the veil of a passivity more passive than any patience, the feminine also inhabits the shadow world of non-identity, operating at a distance, “refractory to society,” especially at the level of erotic otherness (TI 265). In “Judaism and the Feminine Element,” Levinas goes so far as to say that “the feminine also reveals itself as the source of all decline.” A “charming weakness...at the verge of letting go....” “Woman,” Levinas intones, “is complete immodesty, down to the nakedness of her little finger. She displays herself, the

essentially turbulent, the essentially impure. Satan...was created with her. Her vocation of contemplativeness...is allied to all indiscretion" (JFE 37). The feminine brings the inevitability of death into paradise. Thus, the otherness of the feminine involves an ambiguity of religious origin operating within the philosophical ambiguity.

The complex of ambiguity that arises from this interweaving of metaphysical, ethical, empirical, political and religious voices is easily missed, oversimplified, or otherwise distorted by a myopic, critical focus on the association of the feminine with the wholly Other, such as the early critique by Simone de Beauvoir, or those of Catherine Chalier and Tina Chanter. What is entirely overlooked or taken for granted by such commentaries; what, among the proliferation of sensitive and careful philosophical language devoted to an oblique and modest glimpsing of the multi-faceted equivocation of the salvific feminine, had even, perhaps, already become invisible to Levinas himself, is the presumptive association of the masculine and the man with the identity of the Same. For reasons which would follow from the metaphysical agenda of Levinas's *philosophical* text—reasons involving convoluted traces of authorial sexual identity, non-identity, and parenthood at work behind the scenes—which Derrida has traced to the very gravesite of the faulty text—the masculine, as such, never makes a direct appearance in Levinas's philosophical writing, as if it had already been placed under erasure by the ethical as the very condition for the possibility of this strange conversation about the exteriority of the feminine Other. Nevertheless, outside of the philosophical corpus, a more direct confrontation with the masculine is to be found.

In "Judaism and the Feminine Element," the aspiring hermeneut is told that prior to the masculine conversion from action to responsibility by the approach of the

feminine Other, the fact that “Grain and flax are wrenched from nature by the work of man,” shows that the masculine in its virility marks the break with the spontaneous and instinctive life “buried in the immediacy of nature, the given” (JFE, p. 33). This break by the masculine with the natural feminine marks the opening of the “hard and cruel” world of reason and spirit, an “inhuman” world guided by impersonal calculation, “the anonymous realm of the economy that proceeds according to knowledgeable plans which cannot prevent though they can prepare disasters.” Levinas’s description of masculinity in this text sounds alarmingly close to his notion of *Il y a*, the anonymous and perpetually threatening abyss of the sheer *there is*, raw being:

There it is—spirit in its masculine existence. It lives outdoors, exposed to the fiery sun which blinds and to the winds of the open sea which beat it and blow it down—on an earth without inner recesses, removed from its homeland, solitary and wandering, and even as such alienated by the products that it has created which rise up untamed and hostile. (JFE, p. 33)

The taming of this untamed and hostile “masculinity of the universal and conquering *logos*” with its warehouses full of impersonal merchandise, will be accomplished, as we saw, by the feminine, the “one who does not conquer,” through the conjugal bond which is also the social bond. The naturally irresponsible wealth of the Same/masculine/man must be socialized or *ethicalized* by the Other/feminine/woman; impersonal grain must be turned into personal bread; impersonal flax into personal clothing. The promiscuous errantry of the masculine/male consciousness must again be circumcised before entering the new covenant. Conquering consciousness must be enticed from the hardness of an inhuman world into the “the strange failure of sweetness” of the feminine

home by which he will be made human. For “*without woman man knows neither good, nor succor, nor joy, nor blessing, nor pardon.*’ *Nothing of what would be required for a soul!*” (Ibid. emphasis added)

This metaphysical socialization process of the masculine/man, which will place a new limit on his virility and soften the edge of his hardness and coldness, leaving him domesticated, human, and ethical, will also leave him, according to Levinas’s once again ambiguous description, in the position of a certain spiritual preeminence over the woman within the feminine home. In one of his Talmudic commentaries, where he is discussing the proper political structure of family life from a Biblical perspective, Levinas argues that there had to be “a sexual difference and, hence, a certain preeminence of man, a woman coming later, and as a woman, an appendage of the human.... What family scenes there would have been between the members of the first perfectly equal couple!” This preeminence of the masculine occurs, however, only *after* the conjugal domestication or circumcision of the conquering masculine *logos*.

Whereas the feminine soul of the woman, which is continuous with the natural, is, in itself, the wholly Other, and, in this sense, the source of the ethical and the very possibility of goodness, it nevertheless has the dark side of bringing a certain malevolent equivocation into the world as well. Therefore, the feminine is in need of the conjugal bond and the submission to the masculine rule of domesticated divine reason. On the other hand, whereas the masculine spirit of the man is in itself the identity of the Same and thus the site of the spirited violence which breaks with the equivocating dissolution of the natural, it finds itself out in the cold until it is softened and warmed by submission to the sheltering tenderness of the feminine. It is only within the reciprocity

of the conjugal bond that the feminine soul and the masculine spirit will find their mutual fulfillment, and the fulfillment of the larger requirement of the ethical responsibility which transcends the conjugal relationship. This does not seem like “two totalities” completing one another, as Levinas would have it. Rather, it seems more like to incompletenesses that will never be totally whole. According to Levinas, the specific point at which the conjugal bond of the feminine soul and masculine spirit enters most fully into the larger economy of ethical responsibility, is the narrow door of the erotic relationship. This will add a new ambiguity to the picture. The erotic relationship is both presupposed by and transcends the ethical relationship. Understood as a dual egoism in which the profane and voluptuous touching of sexual love takes its place among all the other pleasures of life, eros is seen by Levinas to presuppose the ethical relation, which thus subtends genuine erotic love. The voluptuous caressing of erotic love at the profane level involves a return to oneself, without accomplishing transcendence, as with all other appetitive pleasures. Thus, the sensual dimension of the erotic relationship within the conjugal bond remains at the level of profane pleasure and would be unjustifiable for Levinas without the universalizing possibility inherent in fecundity and the birth of the child.

Fecundity is the condition for the possibility of transcendence *beyond* the face-to-face relation, according to Levinas. Insofar as voluptuousness involves any transcendental desire toward an infinite future, its only ultimate outcome can be the engendering of the child, as we saw previously. The engendering of the child, Levinas says, “continues history without producing old age” (TI 268; Tel 246). The parent-child relation involves a horizontal transcendence or existential immortality beyond death and

the possibility of the impossibility of the face-to-face relation. In the child, as in the textual flesh of genuine works given over to a future generation, there occurs a veritable transubstantiation of parental flesh involving a unique kind of exteriority. Paternity and maternity would be the most perfect concrete forms of fulfillment of the exorbitant, impossible demand of ethical responsibility, involving a perfect self-sacrifice to the point of death and beyond.

Although it is within the erotic relationship under the canopy of the conjugal bond, that the masculine/man and the feminine/woman come closest to the achievement of wholeness, nevertheless, even in this entanglement there remains an ecstatic, deconstructionist gap of Derridean *differance* between them. Having thoroughly sundered the feminine element and the masculine element, it will be as impossible for these “elements” ever to achieve a paradisiacal whole as it would be for Plato to get motion and rest back together. Once cast out of the garden, there can be no return. In his metaphysical analysis, Levinas, like Husserl before him, misses the truly human world. His religious commitment, like his mentor’s commitment to “science,” will not allow him to see the flesh and blood woman as a truly independent being with her own peculiar desires structuring her own economy of self-fulfillment; although he at least sees her as essentially human. But he does not see the flesh and blood man, in himself and with his own peculiar desires structuring his economy of self-fulfillment, as a human being at all, at least not without subjection to the economy of the circumcising exteriority of the feminine. From the very beginning, the masculine/male is prepared for this self-sacrifice under the yoke of an absolute and unremitting demand to be the responsible one. Within the messianic eschatology, this exorbitant responsibility would be the very

essence of masculinity. The ritualized mutilation of the penis in 'covenant' circumcision symbolizes the initial preparation of the sacrificial male in the same way gelding makes steer fit to be slaughtered for food. This command to self-sacrifice is perhaps reflected in the unfortunate statistic that at adolescence, when boys and girls first begin to act on the sex-role stereotypes transmitted to them by the cultural myths of masculinity and femininity, as represented by Levinas's analysis, "boys' suicide rate goes from slightly less than girls' to four times as great as girls'."¹²⁶

The the basic demand of Levinas's philosophy of exorbitant responsibility—if there is any demand attached to his phenomenological, poetic descriptions—is aimed primarily at the masculine element which has been absolutely separated from its feminine counterpart and is now absolutely in need of the feminine in order to become human. This is also reflected in the very choice of the otherworldly Platonic forms of the Same and the Other with which the philosophical argument is carried out. There can be no mixing or intermingling of these fundamental, elemental ontological categories without a resulting confusion of understanding, and, hence, a confusion of practice, the origin of which would be located in the dark side of the wholly (holy?) Other. The very essence of the Same bespeaks such an absolute separation. But it is a separation which leaves the Same/masculine/man out in the cold, inhospitable domain of a lofty and spiritualized reason, exiled and willing to strike any bargain to come in out of the rain, and where it would perhaps be condemned to remain were it not for the troubling, and yet warm and sheltering face of the wholly (holy) Other/feminine/woman calling the Same/masculine/man to its self-sacrifice in the name of an exorbitant responsibility

¹²⁶ Farrell, W. (1993/2017). *The Myth of Male Power*. KINDLE ed., p. 165

which leaves widows and orphans in the swirling smoke of its self-immolation. *All* may be victims of this extremism, but at least the widows and orphans are left standing after the masculine element bites the dust. When the absolute separation of these otherworldly Platonic forms is translated into the empirical order of flesh and blood men and women by way of the nomenclature of gender, there occurs a scission in the human species guided by the supposedly clear topography of a non-hermaphroditic sexual difference reinforced by the Biblical myths of Genesis. Separated by an absolute difference, neither man nor woman is seen to be whole in themselves, although the lack of wholeness of the man is greater than that of the woman. She, at least, has a soul in Levinas's construal, even if Satan is thought to lurk in its labyrinthian corridors and recesses. But the man without the woman is seen as a consciousness that is less than human, and in need of the woman to make him whole. And because he is made human by the woman and is thus utterly dependent on her for his ontological grounding, the man easily will be made willing to provide for and protect her—especially against other men—since, if anything were to happen to her, his very humanity would be jeopardized.

The subtle expectations attached to these mytho-religious dynamics will cause trouble for all those mere mortals among us who cannot fulfill the demands of exorbitant responsibility, even though Levinas might reject the implication that response-ability operates at the level of willful control allowing for rational, conscious control. Although men are just beginning to speak up—which, given *their* role in the oppressive patriarchy, is a more difficult task—nevertheless, it should not come as a surprise that men are dying an average of ten years sooner than women, and that a husband whose wife dies first is about ten times more likely to commit suicide than a wife whose

husband dies first (Farrell, p. 164). When the myths about men communicate that, in themselves, they are by nature merely cold-hearted calculating machines best suited to field work outside the nurturing home, they cannot help but understand themselves as *disposable* in comparison with the ethical necessity and goodness of the wholly (holy) Other/feminine/woman. The demand of an exorbitant responsibility, symbolized by the mutilation of the otherwise healthy and natural penis, levied by a jealous, interfering God who is helplessly in need of a sign that humans are holding up their end of the bargain that justifies this self-sacrifice, is only a more subtle version of the ideological myths of all imperialistic cultures which promise eternal glory to the suicidal warrior. The modern feminist critique of the supposed privilege of patriarchal male power and the infamous oppression of women that follows from it is myopic and misguided when directed against men as a class in their metaphysical foundations, and only exacerbates a deeper wound. Most men, like most women, are far from the thrones of any real worldly, political power. The male slaves of Abraham's household were forced to pay the price of what was a case of clear and simple ritual mutilation offered up for the continuity of their master's bloodline and the blessing of Sarah's belated fecundity, without benefitting themselves, unless one subscribes to a trickle-down theory of messianic economics. It is precisely the *myth* of patriarchal male power, whose obverse is an exorbitant, suicidal responsibility directed against and laid most heavily on the shoulders of men, that keeps men from seeing that *they* are being victimized by patriarchy as much as, if not more so than the women who have decided not to take it anymore.

Perhaps a larger class of both men *and* women is being victimized by a matriarchal patriarchy composed of not just the powerful men who supposedly rule, but also the perhaps more powerful women who rule these men by being the very source of their humanity. This ruling class of women and men is the origin of those religious, philosophical, nationalistic, and cultural myths or ideologies whose true aim is to keep the powerless in their powerless state while believing otherwise about themselves. Levinas has overlooked the unbracketed influence of these Biblical and secular presuppositions as they operate in and upon his work as a whole.

> SHORT TRANSITION TO THE HEIDEGGERIAN PROBLEMATIC ... FROM FEMININE, MASCULINE, TO PHILOSOPHICAL POETIC/ mythopoetic

What was the value of excursus into sexual difference?

What does it show?

The need for a clearer, more positive valuation of sexuality in terms of spiritual growth and development....

Sexuality and prayer, spiritual development... Does L miss the mark?

Explain ... use Song of Songs ... lectio divina, Medieval reading....

CHAPTER 8

Heidegger's Philosophical Poetics

1. The Problem of Method

Although it was Husserl's approach to phenomenological investigation that offered to Levinas the possibility of engaging in meaningful philosophical work, I have shown in previous chapters that there was a reluctance on Levinas's part to accept this methodology in a wholesale fashion. Levinas did not think that Husserl's phenomenological program accounted adequately for the deepest levels of the concrete life of the living subject. To overcome this limiting theoretical preoccupation of Husserl's work, Levinas turned to Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology which utilized analyses of the existential situation of human being as an opening into the ontological dimensions of the philosophical questioning that Husserl had not followed out.

This turn to Heidegger, however, was short-circuited by the intervention of World War II and Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism. That infamous situation created a deeply felt context which led Levinas from a posture of hero worship to a sometimes passionate critique of Heidegger's fundamental ontology and, ultimately, to the formulation of his own unique method of inquiry which was meant to compensate for the insufficiency that he now perceived, not only in the work of Husserl and Heidegger, but in the whole tradition of Western philosophy as well, a method which I am

endeavoring to show has an unrecognized theo-poetical orientation at its base. The impact of the Holocaust motivated Levinas to reject all philosophical systems where consciousness and freedom were held to be primary and which he believed were thus caught up in a will to power that was essentially egoistic and totalitarian and, ultimately, responsible for Auschwitz. Consequently, he began to formulate his own philosophical orientation in which the ethical and not the ontological would be considered most fundamental. This attempt to situate Ethics as First Philosophy, however, involved a serious problem of method, as we have seen above. Exactly how Levinas dealt with this problem, how he attempted to go beyond both Husserl and Heidegger's versions of the phenomenological method into what I am calling a transformative theo-poetics, will be the focus of the second part of this present chapter. In sum, what I want to accomplish here is, first, to show how the context of the Holocaust led Levinas to a thoroughgoing critique of Heidegger's ontology; secondly, to outline this critique in general terms in order to be able to, thirdly, show how this critique left Levinas with a difficult methodological problem that he resolved through the development of what I will characterize as his philosophical poetic method.

2. The Heidegger Controversy

In my investigation of Levinas's critique of Husserl, I pointed out and, of course, it is well known that his analysis had been influenced by Heidegger's work in *Being and Time*. Husserl had formulated the basic design and worked out the master plan for recapturing the ground philosophy had lost to positive science. But it was Heidegger, armed with Husserl's arsenal of phenomenological weapons, as well as with the canon of his own ontological distinction and ranks of existential analyses, who took phenomenology to the

trenches of Dasein's everyday life and who thus forged a major assault on the ancient citadel of Being. In the beginning, Levinas had been moved by Husserl, but he was enthralled by Heidegger, as were many others.

In 1932, a few years after the publication of *The Theory of Intuition*, Levinas published an article on Heidegger entitled "*Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie*" that was intended to form the first part of a book on Heidegger that Levinas was working on at the time.¹²⁷ In the article, Levinas dubbed Heidegger's philosophy "one of the high points of the phenomenological movement" because of its "brilliant originality and power of his effort," an effort for which "fame has not been mistaken and did not come too late." Thirteen years later, after having experienced the horror of World War II up close, Levinas would have a different opinion of Heidegger. In 1949 "*Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie*" would be republished in *En decouvrant l'existence avec Husserl and Heidegger*, but in a "modified and abridged" form where the earlier accolades had been excised.¹²⁸ And the book that this article had presaged was never brought to fruition. But other texts came in its place. The first of these was *Existence and Existents* (1947) where Levinas began delineating what John Wild would later call "one of the most basic attacks on the thought of Heidegger that has yet been formulated."¹²⁹

Despite the time and all the discussion, the questions involving Heidegger's association with Nazism will not be put to rest.¹³⁰ This situation is further complicated when trying to understand Levinas's philosophical relation to Heidegger because of the

¹²⁷ Levinas, E. "Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie," *Revue Philosophique* 57 (1932): 395-431

¹²⁸ Levinas, E. "Martin Heidegger and l'ontologie," in *DEHH*, pp. 53-76.

¹²⁹ Wild, John. Introduction to TI, p. 20.

¹³⁰ See, e.g., Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Heidegger et les Modernes* (Paris: Grasset, 1988); Pierre Bourdieu, *L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Minuit, 1988); Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple U. Press, 1989).

fact that Levinas was a Jew who was imprisoned in a Nazi prisoner of war camp during the war, which is where he first jotted down the text of *Existence and Existents*. Here is a situation where the life experiences of a thinker are so closely intertwined with the subject matter of his thought that a clear separation of the two is impossible. Regardless of what one may think about it, Heidegger the philosopher and Heidegger the Nazi were one and the same person. This unity of the philosopher and the work is true for Levinas, too, regarding his own life circumstances. Even under the influence of the purest *epoché*, Levinas, the philosopher, can no more be abstracted from his deep and abiding commitment to Judaism than Aquinas can be defrocked of his Catholicism in an 'objective' consideration of his philosophy or Plato and Aristotle meaningfully plucked out of the homosexual context of the Greek culture in which they thought and wrote. With a sense of irony and a tone of resentment that belies an obliviousness to such historical and cultural contextualism, Erazim Kobak has asked: "Why didn't Heidegger's profound insight warn him against national socialism?"¹³¹ Oddly enough, Levinas himself provides some answers to this rhetorical question. Perhaps, Levinas speculates, it was because Heidegger thought the world was going to pieces and that Hitler might be the answer; perhaps it was because Heidegger's wife was pro-Hitler from early on. Perhaps, we might add, it was because, as Heidegger himself would say later: "He who thinks greatly must err greatly."¹³² Whatever the reason, the fact remains. And it remains for Levinas as well. You certainly cannot expect an objective evaluation from him regarding Heidegger's associations and, in my view, you should not. But because

¹³¹ Kohak, Erazim. *Idea and Experience*, (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1978) p. 193.

¹³² Heidegger, Martin . "The Thinker as Poet," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), p. 9.

the Holocaust is an important context in Levinas's work, it must nevertheless be taken into account as an important context for understanding his philosophy. Levinas remarks in many places that he is unable and unwilling to forget the horror of the Holocaust and Heidegger's involvement with it. In "Signature," for example, he says that his biography "is dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror."¹³³ And in a particularly harsh reference to Heidegger, especially in light of Levinas understanding of forgiveness, in *Quatres Lectures Talmudique* he states that "one may forgive much of the German people but there are some Germans whom it is difficult to forgive. It is difficult to forgive Heidegger."¹³⁴ Although he maintains admiration and praise for *Being and Time*, he finds "much less convincing" the work done after 1940. He is quick to add that "I do not say this owing to Heidegger's political engagements, taken several years after *Being and Time*." But this disclaimer is immediately qualified by: "...even though I have never forgotten those engagements, and though Heidegger has never been exculpated in my eyes from his participation in National Socialism."¹³⁵

Such strong attitudes are not easily put aside when considering Levinas's 'purely' philosophical relation to Heidegger. Luk Bouckaert at least admits that it is an issue, and concludes that Levinas's critique of Heidegger "has undoubtedly been influenced by the experience of the war and by the attitude of the persecuted Jew towards the German," before consigning the whole issue to the margins of his own 'purely' philosophical reflections.¹³⁶ Steven Gans, on the other hand, seems a bit extreme in suggesting that

¹³³ Levinas, E. "Signature," p. 177.

¹³⁴ Levinas, E. *Quatres Lectures Talmudique*, Collection "Critique" Paris: Minuit, 1968), p. 56.

¹³⁵ Levinas, E. *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 41 / p. 32.

¹³⁶ Bouckaert, Luc. "Ontology and Ethics: Reflections on Levinas's Critique of Heidegger," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (Sept 1970): 402.

"if Levinas's philosophical analysis is correct then the link between Heideggerian philosophy and Nazi politics is established." And, in our view, his evaluation of Levinas's critique of Heidegger is as "exaggerated and unfounded" as he claims Levinas's "strictures against Heidegger" to be.¹³⁷ Let me point out that it is in no way my intention here to demonstrate a link between Heidegger's philosophy and the politics of National Socialism. Neither do I intend to judge Heidegger's actions nor Levinas's reactions. But insofar as I hold that phenomenological philosophy is a way of life and a living philosophy, I do not think that it can be separated from the personal, social, cultural, and political climate in which it was formed. Furthermore, I am in disagreement with some of Levinas's philosophical evaluations of Heidegger. Had it been possible for Levinas to be more open to the development of Heidegger's thought after *Being and Time*, even if it is understandable that he was not, he might have found that Heidegger did indeed have a change of heart regarding that early work, although he did not repudiate it. Heidegger does say that "the fundamental flaw of the book *Being and Time* is perhaps that I ventured forth too far too early."¹³⁸ The same might be said for his involvement with the Nazis. Heidegger's well-known "*Kehre*" that occurred after *Being and Time* revolved around the question of language, dialogue, and healing, and, in my humble estimation, brought his thinking closer to Levinas's ethical position than Levinas is willing to admit, despite the differences that remain, as I have argued in another place.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Gans, Stephen. "Ethics or Ontology: Levinas and Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* 16 (1972): 117-121.

¹³⁸ Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (1959; New York: Harper, 1971).

¹³⁹ Walsh, R. "The Healing Word: Language, Thinking, and Being in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger," *Philosophy Today*, 35:3 (Fall 1991): 228-238.

3. Levinas's Critique of Heidegger

Levinas's critique of Heidegger can be approached from the perspective of four main issues.¹⁴⁰ First, the question of the status of ontology, whether the interrogation of being qua being should be understood as "first" philosophy, a position it has held since the time of Aristotle because of its fundamental importance to all other philosophical investigation. Second, and following from the first question, whether freedom understood as free will and the priority of consciousness supporting this, ought to be the defining characteristic of subjectivity, particularly as this has been understood since Kant's so-called "Copernican revolution" and whether this can lead to an adequate account of intersubjectivity. Third, whether in Heidegger's philosophy there is a wholesale presupposition of the existential subject, understood as Dasein, without an adequate phenomenology of how it is that Dasein comes to be on the scene initially. Fourth, whether the question of the understanding of Being as nothingness in the Heideggerian ontology adequately accounts for the existential reality of the living subject. The delineation of these four categories is somewhat arbitrary and naturally there contain overlapping interests, particularly around the question of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The purpose these categories of investigation are intended to have here, as with our investigation of Levinas's relation to Husserl, is to show how it is that the foundation of Levinas's thought is grounded in both a critique and a hermeneutical, theopoetic extension of Heidegger's ontology.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. C. D. Keyes in "An Evaluation of Levinas's Critique of Heidegger," *Research in Phenomenology* (1972): 121-42.

Levinas argues that classical ontology will never be able to arrive at an adequate understanding of subjectivity and intersubjectivity because it remains within the realm of knowledge, consciousness, light, and truth. For Levinas, the human subject cannot be reduced to an intentional object and cannot be brought into the phenomenological light of consciousness. Human beings can be "approached" but not known fully or grasped in a representation. Thus, insofar as both Husserl and Heidegger (indeed, the entire history of Western metaphysical philosophy in Levinas's evaluation) situate cognitive knowledge as the highest goal of philosophy and understand ontology as the ground and foundation of all knowledge, they will be unable to approach the true meaning of human being. In earlier chapters, I endeavored to show that the type of knowledge Husserl was after was not of the same kind as the natural sciences. Thus, he may be exempt, at least somewhat, from Levinas's critique, although it is certainly possible to find texts where his desire for the apodicticity of pure and absolute knowledge can be easily interpreted as aiming at cognitive closure, while other texts mitigate against this conclusion. The same can be said of Heidegger. In *Being and Time* it is true that he wanted to formulate the question of Being explicitly and transparently. Yet, his thinking on the issue of thinking, knowledge, truth, and the Other underwent a transformation in his later work, which Levinas dismisses out of hand and does not take into account, or, to the extent that he does, believes there is no significant change from the earlier ontology. But, since it is primarily my concern here to show the development of Levinas's thought in relation to Heidegger, I will not dwell on a defense of Heidegger, but will rather focus on how Levinas's critique of Heidegger is integral to his theory of

the priority of responsibility and, hence, the development of an opening into the transformative, hermeneutical, theopoetic practice I am striving to elucidate.

A correlate which follows from Levinas's critique of the primacy of knowledge is that it leads to a conception of freedom understood as autonomous free will or the freedom of spontaneity, the possibility of having done otherwise, as an ultimate or elemental value. This has important ramifications for the understanding of both subjectivity and intersubjectivity. On the one hand, the sovereignty of freedom leaves the self-sufficient human subject isolated from other human beings in a prison of solitude with "no exit," which is the necessary guarantee of its freedom. On the other hand, and resulting from this fundamental solitude, relations with other human beings are reduced to a politics of "imperialist domination" and tyrannical control. "Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power," Levinas asserts, and, as a philosophy which does not call into question the sovereignty of freedom, it is also "a philosophy of injustice."¹⁴¹ In this situation no genuine relation with the Other, no transcendence, no love is possible since the reduction of the Other to a content of knowledge, to the representational categories of identity and sameness, results in the 'disappearance' of the Other. Genuine inter-relating with the Other necessitates that the Other remain truly *other*, since relating requires two distinct and separate terms which *can*, then (and only then), relate. But, at the same time, contact, approach, or transcendence across the distance of this separation, i.e., intersubjectivity, must also be possible without destroying the otherness of the Other. Here is the heart of what Levinas is trying to accomplish. And this is one of the primary reasons why Heidegger's notion of

¹⁴¹ TI, pp. 46-47; pp. 16-17.

"*Miteinandersein*," Martin Buber's "I-Thou," Sartre's "*Mitsein*," and all other philosophies of communion or fusion, are not acceptable in Levinas's view. Being-with is "an association of side by side, around something," Levinas argues, "around a common term and, more precisely, for Heidegger, around the truth."¹⁴² The problem of this "with" association around a third term, the way ordinary conversation between two persons, for example, always revolves around the third term of a subject matter to be thought, that is, reduced to a common noema for each of the two interlocutors—the way "a neighbor is an accomplice"—the problem with this is that there is no real transcendence out of this autonomous 'freedom' of solitude. Levinas states this succinctly: "sociality in Heidegger is found in the subject alone." Consequently, since this dialectic is not dialogue, Levinas will replace the "with" of intellectual communion, where "the thinking subjects are obscure multiple points" and "empirically antagonistic," with the "*for*" of a preconscious response-ability.¹⁴³

A third area of Levinas's disagreement with Heidegger is that in *Being and Time* he begins his study of the question of Being from the point of view of a Dasein that is already constituted in the horizon of the comprehension of Being and, although Heidegger attempts to clarify the nature and essence of Dasein, he does not ask after its origin or genesis. "The ontological significance of an entity in the general economy of Being, which Heidegger simply posits alongside of Being by a distinction," is exactly what Levinas intends to work out in his first long text, *Existence and Existents*.¹⁴⁴ Heidegger begins with an understanding of Dasein as a kind of being that

¹⁴² TO, pp. 40-41; pp.1 9-20. See also EE, p. 41; p. 61.

¹⁴³ Levinas, E. "Diachrony and Representation," in TO, pp. 100-101.

¹⁴⁴ EE, p. 83; p. 141.

is capable of questioning its own being, of asking the question "What is Being?" But, in Levinas's view, he does not ask the more fundamental question of how it is that this being *is* at all, how it comes to be a being. Dasein finds itself already situated within the horizon of Being, thrown into this economy and thus able to appear "only in an existence which precedes it, as though existence were independent of the existent and the existent that finds itself thrown there could never become master of existence."¹⁴⁵ Showing how it is that existence can be conceived separately from the existent and how the existent thus emerges as an existent in a seizure and domination of anonymous existence will be the primary problematic Levinas wrestles with in *Existence and Existents* and which will be investigated in detail in subsequent chapters.

The fourth area of disagreement, connected with the previous one, involves the ontological distinction itself. Whereas Levinas says that "the most profound thing about *Being and Time* ... is this Heideggerian distinction," at the same time he is critical of Heidegger's understanding of it. According to Levinas, Being in general is understood by Heidegger as nothingness, revealed in the experience of anxiety: "Anxiety, a comprehension of nothingness, is a comprehension of Being only inasmuch as Being itself is determined by nothingness."¹⁴⁶ In *Being and Time* Heidegger says that "the 'nothing' of readiness-to-hand is grounded in the most primordial 'something'—in the *world*." And, ontologically considered, the world "belongs essentially to Dasein's Being as Being-in-the-world," so that it is in the face of Being-in-the-world that anxiety is anxious. Anxiety is the revelation of Dasein 's potentiality for being, "its *Being-free for*

¹⁴⁵ TO, p. 45; p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ EE, pp. 19-20; p. 20. See also TO, p. 51; p. 29.

the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself.¹⁴⁷ But this potentiality must be understood in terms of Dasein's finitude as Being-toward-death, an 'ec-stasis' which is necessarily geared toward the nothingness at the end, and which, consequently, Levinas argues, "situates the tragic element in existence in this finitude and this nothingness into which man is thrown insofar as he exists." In short, "the dialectic of being and nothingness continues to dominate Heideggerian ontology."¹⁴⁸ In *Existence and Existents* Levinas will suggest a third possibility that is neither being nor nothingness, a possibility not situated within the horizon of a comprehension of Being, but in a sensible, embodied experience of it. There is an agenda behind the critique that Levinas has leveled at Heidegger and Husserl, as well as at Nietzsche, Hegel, Kant, Leibniz, and the entire metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy, a history that culminated, in one sense, in "the civilization of transcendental idealism." Within this horizon of the Holocaust, Levinas's agenda will be to establish a new understanding of human being where the ethical takes precedence over the ontological, where intersubjectivity is more fundamental than the subjectivity of the sovereign individual, and where the responsibility for justice is to be found in a sensible palpitation that is prior to freedom and consciousness. But that agenda and the critique it has promoted creates once again with Heidegger another problem of method beyond the problem of Husserl's intellectualism. What this problem of method is and the manner in which Levinas deals with it are crucial to understanding not only Levinas's unusual

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, p. 232.

¹⁴⁸ EE, pp. 19-2; pp. 20-21.

philosophical poetic style of philosophy, but also how this style is inextricably connected to the theopoetic content it seeks to express.

4. The Method of Philosophical Poetics

The methodological problem Levinas is left with after his critique of Husserl and Heidegger, as well as his summary critique of Western philosophical thought, is this: while employing Husserl's phenomenological method, as Levinas claims he does, how can he establish the primacy of the ethical relation of responsibility over the knowledge relation of consciousness with a method geared toward the production of knowledge, as Husserl's method is? Is not Levinas caught in his own critique the moment he writes a lucid sentence? The phenomenological method, particularly as this is understood without grasping the difficulties surrounding Husserl's supposed intellectualism understood as a *purely* cognitive, epistemic technique, cannot be used to show the inadequacy of phenomenology without involving a contradiction. Philip Lawton points out this self-referential problem in his article on the notion of the "*il y a*," Levinas's alternative to Heidegger's notion of Being understood as nothingness. If he is to go beyond the intellectualist orientation of phenomenology, Levinas must go beyond the method too. That is exactly what he does, although not entirely. "Phenomenological description," Levinas says, "which by definition cannot leave the sphere of light, that is, man alone shut up in his solitude, anxiety and death as an end ... will not suffice. In order to bring the primacy of the ethical at least into the sensible twilight, "a method is called for such that thought is invited to go beyond intuition."¹⁴⁹ Levinas will do this

¹⁴⁹ Levinas, E. *EE*, p. 66; p. 112.

through a new and radical, poetic understanding of intentionality, as I have already suggested. To what extent he is able to go beyond the light of knowledge into the sensuous affectivity of pre-conscious responsiveness and still claim to be doing philosophy is another question. Levinas does indeed employ the phenomenological method but, *at the same time*, he clearly goes beyond the intellectualist view of Husserl's understanding of it, but without leaving it behind entirely. Thus, he avoids the *reductio ad absurdum* of Lawton's analysis. The problem is that Levinas wants to approach pre-cognitive situations that cannot be formally thematized in a representational format. And he wants to do this with language that is more or less intellectually comprehensible even as it ventures into the realm of the poetic. This can be possible only if not all language is necessarily thematizing, in a formal, representational sense—which it is not. I have already given some indication of how Levinas will handle this problem in the discussion of sensation and intentionality. Instead of focusing on the already synthesized or represented object proper to Husserl's understanding of intentionality, Levinas will attempt to suggest, point toward, indicate, and approach the pre-cognitive, sensible 'object' that is the palpitation, the "*sentance*" (Husserl's "*Empfindnisse*") and about which he was ambivalent in regard to whether this was experienceable or not since phenomenology is limited by the 'experienceability' of the object. *Emefindnisse* are the greenhouses of thought 'located' in the instant of the *Urimpression*. The reason why Husserl was ambivalent about this, as I have already suggested, has to do with his own agenda. To allow pre-cognitive sensation to be in some manner intentional, and thus experienceable, would mitigate against the constitutive dimension of intentionality, the noetic process of producing noemata, and

open his analysis to an empiricism from which he was trying to escape. Husserl never rectified the problem of the status of the *Empfindnis* with the theory of constitution. It is exactly in the virgule of this ambivalence, this "fecund ambiguity," that Levinas situates his own rendition of the phenomenological method.

Instead of trying to *grasp* the unimpressionistic matter under investigation, such as the *il y a*, to take Lawton's example, Levinas will try to tease it out obliquely by approaching in a traditional phenomenological manner the essence of other, more concrete phenomena from everyday experience to articulate what relentlessly escapes articulation. This is a move he undoubtedly picked up from Heidegger's hermeneutic approach to the existential analysis of Dasein. This new, poetic method involves Levinas in a three-step process. First, there must be a basic intuition of a problematic situation, such as Levinas's contention that Heidegger's ontological distinction results in a comprehension of Being in general that is equal to nothingness, a situation which is unsatisfactory to Levinas because it does not adequately account for the ontogenesis of existents in the world, or for intersubjectivity. That is the problem. Performing the phenomenological reduction, the second step, Levinas finds that Being in general is not any *thing*, but not nothingness either. What is 'it'? To answer this, Levinas analyzes, within the framework of the *epoché*, other, more tangible experiences such as insomnia, modern art, laziness, etc. Then, thirdly, these essences are predicated analogically to illuminate the unknown term, the *il y a* in the present example. In insomnia we are held awake by an 'it' which keeps us awake against our will. Levinas calls this experience "wakefulness." Thus, Levinas will argue analogically that *the* 'experience' of the *il y a* is to insomnia as insomnia is to wakefulness. The more difficult question is whether this is

a true or merely figurative, poetic analogy aimed at persuasiveness rather than reasoning. Are figurative analogies productive of knowledge or merely suggestive. Is any knowledge, properly speaking, possible outside of the principle of identity and non-contradiction? Perhaps it will depend on how “knowledge” is understood. It is a primary motivating perspective of this book that a philosophical, poetic thinking, reading, and writing that is thought all the way to the interpretation of the sacred in a transformative theopoetics does, in fact, generate a sensible, experiencable kind of authentic, mystical ‘knowing’ that goes beyond any discursive, representational epistemology—not in an act of grasping, com-prehending, and representing the essence of the object, but in the fine risk of opening oneself to being transformed by the shining forth or revelation of that which nevertheless always remains discreetly but absolutely other.

5. Philosophical Poetics

There is another tack to Levinas’s approach to the otherness of exteriority which seems to be intended to circumvent this logical difficulty of the status of analogical argument and is an aspect of Levinas’s extension of the phenomenological method which is often overlooked. It will not be a matter of merely *grasping* the phenomenologically reduced essences of everyday experiences, or what it is that is analogically pointed at through them, but of actually *putting oneself into the very experience* that is revealed through these analyses in the manner in which the appreciation of poetry is as much, if not more so, a sensual as an intellectual experience. The “unnameable,” Levinas says, “can only appear in poetry.”¹⁵⁰ Poetic language does not thematize what it aims at in the same

¹⁵⁰ EE, p. 57; p. 91.

manner as representational cognition. Rather, poetry creates sensible 'vibrations' or resonances in the body and the mind of the reader. That is why it is best to read poetry aloud and why this is a recommended modality of *lectio divina*, although that is not necessary since even silent reading is a kind of interior reading aloud. The 'representation' of poetic language, as both the "later" Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty realized, involves a non-conceptual, non-representational 'intentionality'. It is only sensual eunuchs—like Merleau-Ponty's unfortunate Schneider in *The Phenomenology of Perception*—who have lost touch with this pre-conscious dimension of immediate sensual experience and who would deny its existence. Levinas employs a species of what I have described elsewhere a "philosophical-poetic method."¹⁵¹ In the context of discussing how it is that fatigue reveals not only a negative weariness of self and others, but, in that very weariness itself, a positive contract with existence (*il y a*), a profound and pre-cognitive commitment to life from which the weariness shrinks, Levinas says that to get at this deeper, positive dimension, the "philosopher has to put himself in the instant of fatigue and discover the way it comes about." This does not mean trying to grasp it in respect to a system of references but experiencing it just as it happens bodily in the instant, in progress. But the "instant" will turn out to be exactly what Husserl meant by the "now-point," the *Urimpression*, not yet objectifiable but approachable in the dynamics of the sensible. "To scrutinize the instant," Levinas says, "to look for the dialectic which takes place in a hitherto unsuspected dimension, is the essential principle of the method which we have adopted."¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Walsh, R.D. "An Organism of Words: Ruminations on the Philosophical Poetics of Merleau-Ponty," *Kinesis* 14 (1984): 13-41.

¹⁵² Levinas, E. EE, p. 30 / P• 42.

It is precisely in the break-up of cognition, the disruption of the thematizing process, that the unnamable palpitation of the *event* under consideration can be approached experientially. It seems that Lawton does not appreciate the fullest meaning of "event" as opposed to cognitive experience. Contrary to his analysis, "events" *are* lived through even though they cannot be reduced to a cognitive representation without violating the event structure of the event.¹⁵³ This is precisely what Levinas is indicating with the term "sentance." It sounds the same as the French word "sentence" (a maxim, or a judgement handed down by a court), but the *visual* impact of changing the 'e' to an 'a' disrupts the attempt to "see" intellectual closure, just as *Empfindnis* stubbornly refuses to be reduced to a noema or intentional object. What Levinas, and also Caputo in this respect, are trying to do is to bring "events" to the 'light' of conscious experienceability which are, by definition, pre-cognitive, that is, outside of the light and the sight of the intellect alone, and which thus cannot be reduced to conceptual, representational closure in comprehension.¹⁵⁴ The language Levinas uses, always bordering on the poetic, strives to catch the dynamism of the event in its process of becoming an intentional, represented object, but before it gets there. Levinas calls this ambiguous process "amphibology." In his discussion of the "I" in *Existence and Existents*, for example, before the "I" has become an identity, a self with a name, he says that "the 'I' has to be grasped in its, amphibological mutation from an event into an 'entity', and not in its objectivity."¹⁵⁵ But this amphibological mutation is what is created

¹⁵³ Lawton, "'There Is'" p. 69; Cf. TO, p. 74 / pp. 62-63.

¹⁵⁴ Levinas, E. "*Intentionalité*" in DEHH, p. 157, n. 1; Cf. EE, p. 31; p. 44. Cf. Caputo, J. (2006). *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Indiana University Press, for a good discussion of what Levinas would call the infinity or absolute exteriority of the event, where experience devolves perhaps into proximity.

¹⁵⁵ Levinas, EE, p. 35; p. 51 and pp. 79-80; p. 136.

in the instant: the dynamic of the perpetual birth of the 'I' in the present that will become the central feature and focus of the transformative theopoetical attitude.¹⁵⁶

I have been trying to show from the beginning how the phenomenological method in the hands of Levinas and, later, in the radical phenomenological theology of Caputo, differs significantly from the rationalistic understanding of method in the natural sciences. There is a democratic aspect of the scientific method which hearkens back to the Enlightenment understanding of reason, which is brought out well by Hans-Georg Gadamer in contrasting philosophical reason with that of contemporary science.¹⁵⁷

Given the foundation of the scientific method in Enlightenment rationalism, it is supposed that any rational being ought to be able to apply it, if the rules are meticulously followed, achieving the same results as any other rational being, like constructing and analyzing syllogisms. The scientific method is an objective technique. *But the phenomenological method, unlike the scientific method, is intimately connected to the specific person who is employing it, like playing the cello, to this specific person's abilities, talents, life-experiences, etc.* The phenomenological method is by its very nature not a democratic method. Not everyone can employ it with equal felicity. It is, indeed, more like learning to play a musical instrument, also not democratic, than memorizing and applying the rules of a logical system with technical accuracy. No artificially intelligent algorithm will ever be able to perform phenomenological analyses. In this respect, Levinas is close to Nietzsche and (the 'later') Heidegger in their understanding of language. Of course, I immediately recognize that this raises the entire

¹⁵⁶ The nature of the "event structure" of experience is discussed in detail in John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

¹⁵⁷ Walsh, R. D. (F 1984) "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Reason in the Age of Science," *Auslegung II*: 417-424.

question of the relation between art and skill in philosophy, as well as that ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, as Plato pointed out, which I think is merely a lover's quarrel and have investigated elsewhere and will continue to unpack in the following chapters of the present text.¹⁵⁸ The subtlety and nuance of Levinas's language, as is also true with Nietzsche and Heidegger, may be baffling to those of a more democratic, scientific methodological leaning. Levinas's language works in the dark, so to speak, in the blink of an eye. He is trying to say in sentences, or "sentances," what is happening all at once, in the indescribable nano-flicker of an instant. This can be befuddling to those who can digest nothing but clear and distinct ideas and who feel ill at ease until they have reduced all poetic thinking to the principle of identity and non-contradiction. Levinas's philosophy, and certainly his poetically generated theory of the priority of responsibility, 'takes place' precisely "in" this mutation of the instant, the methodological principle of which involves a scrutinizing of the panting and the palpitation of that instant. It involves scrutinizing the naked event before it has become conscious of its nudity, before it has "washed, wiped away the night, and the traces of its instinctual permanence" from its face, before it becomes "clean and abstract" and puts on the formal clothing of objectivity which would hide its humble origin and make it presentable to the world.

Rather than merely talking about Levinas's scrutiny of the instant, which always confronts the commentator with the problem of reducing a living thought to a carapace

¹⁵⁸ See, Walsh, R.D. (1984). "Speaking the Unspeakable: A Philosophical Poetic Interpretation of Plato's Sophist," an unpublished manuscript presented at The Ninth Annual Meeting of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature, Iowa State University, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 3-5 May, 1984, available at www.rdwalsh.net

of clarity, let us move toward Levinas's actual employment of it, since, as he himself says, his "investigations will bring the necessary clarifications of this principle by the applications they shall make of it."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ EE, p. 30 / p. 42.

CHAPTER 9

From Existence to the Existent

1. Introduction: The Amphibology of Being

The task Levinas set for himself in *Existence and Existents* was to show how it is that a human "existent" comes to be understood as an existent over and against being in general or "existence." In describing this ontological genesis, a development Heidegger did not concern himself with in *Being and Time*, Levinas will also need to deal with the question of the meaning of the being of the existent, the existential analysis which, of course, Heidegger did take up. Although Levinas begins his analysis from a consideration of Heidegger's ontological distinction, the existential analysis of Dasein and its heuristic deployment as a preliminary, hermeneutic study for approaching the ontological question of the meaning of being in general, becomes the critical target of *Existence and Existents*. Levinas renders Heidegger's ontological distinction between Being and beings as "existence" and "existents" for the sake of euphony, he claims, but there is undoubtedly a more concrete and subjective tone to Levinas's terms in keeping with his desire to work from an experiential or ontic foundation in the development of his phenomenological 'ontology'. Levinas is interested in seeing how it is that the existent comes to be or can be understood as a definite or separate being through a movement out of, or over and against, sheer or brute existence. One wonders if the French title of this text, *De l'existence à l'existant*, would not be better translated as "From Existence to

the Existent” since that is precisely the amphibology Levinas intends to scrutinize in this early text.

Through phenomenological analyses of insomnia, modern art, laziness, effort, action and fatigue, Levinas establishes that existence is not just an abstract notion by which beings are understood, but, rather, is a tangible force, a gravity, a weight that is experienced as oppressive and against which the existent must take up the task of existing at every instant through the effort of action, the task of distinguishing itself as a separate, autonomous, conscious individual. This is a constant task of perpetual birth and cannot be accomplished once and for all. It takes continual effort for me to posit myself as an identity against the regressive forces that would overcome me and keep me from standing up and becoming a *somebody*. Effort takes the form of action, a surplus of energy over the stasis of merely being. Action, then, at every instant, would be the taking up of a position within the positionless 'night' of sheer existence. Through the production of a kind of hesitation, a fold in the uniform being of existence, the establishment of a position in the present instant through the effort of action, there occurs a suspension of the anonymity of existence in an existent, which is no longer anonymous but who now has a name. The existent is now a *somebody*. This is the first movement of consciousness, a movement of enlightenment and knowledge grounding consciousness. Levinas approaches the poetic dimension of this emergence of consciousness through an analysis of sleep, since sleep is understood as an interruption of the vigilant wakefulness of insomnia. It is a positing of myself in a place, the taking up of a bodily position in the here and now. Positioning and being a body are coextensive. Sleep is also a kind of positioning in Levinas's view, associated with the

realist, conventional consciousness of the natural attitude. It is in the taking up of a position through the effort of action in the instant that the existent takes charge of his or her existence, takes it on, as it were, and in so doing *becomes* an existent. The existent, at this point, is thus understood to be a "master of Being," in many respects similar to what Nietzsche understood as the sovereign individual. But, for Levinas, this will be just a stop along the way of response-ability, whereas for Nietzsche it was the end of the line. This is the positive side of the ambiguous amphibology that demarcates the move from existence to the existent.

The existent, having become somebody, has now accomplished, in all sincerity, the enjoyment of the world and the power of consciousness and knowledge in the freedom of spontaneity. But there is also a negative aspect to this aspect of the amphibology. In achieving separateness, the existent also finds herself in a radical solitude, as if this were the price to be paid for being a somebody. The existent attempts to evade this burdensome solitude of separateness in two ways: through the knowledge relation with what is other and through the relation of enjoyment of what is other. However, these evasions fail to overcome and provide an escape from the radical solitude of separateness. In escaping from the clutches of anonymous Being, the existent seems to have been inadvertently caught in a Sartrean cul-de-sac from which there is no exit. How this solipsistic problem will be dealt with by Levinas and the philosophical difficulties it poses, will be the focus of the following chapter. It will be helpful to our overall aim at this point to take a closer look at the inscrutable nexus of the ontogenic escape of the existent from the anonymity of existence into the solipsistic solitude of the separate individual.

2. The Residue of the Reduction: "*il y a*"

In the contemporary anxiety about the end of the world framed within the constant threat of a nuclear holocaust; in the complaints of the lack of meaning to life which follow from the suspicion of the nothingness at the root of it all; in the despair of which Kierkegaard, Sartre and the existentialists have made us so acutely aware...in all of this there is an important lesson to be learned. And it is not the lesson of infinite resignation or the necessity for a blind leap of faith. What is to be learned from this timeless obsession with the end of the world is that it is not so much a fear of life's ultimate failure or meaninglessness that generates the despair. Rather, it is a fear of our potential for a successful life, a *fear of being* before which we tremble and hold back.

If we perform the *epoché*, if we contemplate the idea of the end of the world, the annihilation of all beings and existents, what we are left with is not an absolute void or nothingness, as Heidegger supposed, or some 'pure, transcendental ego', as Husserl thought, but, according to Levinas, what is leftover is an anonymous state which is a 'something' that is no-thing, an impersonal 'field of forces' of existing. Levinas designates this brute Being, raw existence without existents, by the term "*il y a*."¹⁶⁰ The *il y a* is the sheer facticity of Being, not *what* it is, but *that* it is. It is the experience—if the term "experience" were not inapplicable to a situation which involves the total exclusion of light—of that which is not a something yet is not nothing either. It is something more than the flux that Heraclitus saw in the rushing river where one could not bathe twice. In Levinas' view, it is closer to the interpretation Cratylus gives to the Heraclitean river,

¹⁶⁰ Levinas, E. EE, p. 21; pp. 25-26. This section of EE was published separately as "*il y a*" in *Deucalion (Cahiers de Philosophie)* 1 (1946): 141-154. See also, TO, p. 46.

where one cannot even bathe once. It is the indefinite, par excellence, like Anaximander's *apeiron*. But it is not pure absence. It is not Heidegger's nothingness. Rather, it is the presence of an absence, as is signified in the reference to a spurned love that "you don't know what you've got until it's gone." Here is the presence of an absence that can return with a vengeance. The *il y a* is a 'presence' which can "appear later as a content," Levinas says, "but originally is the impersonal, non-substantive event of the night." As with all the forms of exteriority that Levinas will uncover, the *il y a* involves a certain paradoxical situation:

Darkness, as the presence of absence, is not a purely present content. There is not a "something" that remains.... It is like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence. There is nothing, but there is being, like a field of forces. Darkness is the very play of existence which would play itself out even if there were nothing. It is to express just this paradoxical existence that we have introduced the term "there is (*il y a*)."¹⁶¹

In its immediacy, in the pre-conceptual, sensible palpitation of the *Empfindnis* where we are in contact with the *il y a*, 'it' always slips away deconstructively from the attempt to grasp it in a theme as *an* experience, but it should not thereby be understood as an experience of nothingness or non-experience, whatever that might mean. If it resists thematization because it embraces and dominates its contradictory, it can nevertheless be glimpsed in some well-known although not well-understood experiences from everyday life. We come into 'contact' with the anonymous density of existence without existents in the enforced "vigilance" of insomnia, for example, a

¹⁶¹ EE, pp. 63-64; p. 104.

vigilance which Levinas distinguishes from "attention" in that vigilance is not directed to any object. Furthermore, attention presupposes the freedom of the ego which directs it. But "the vigilance of insomnia which keeps our eyes open has no subject." It is an anonymous vigilance, a faceless and oppressive weight standing in opposition to possibilities of sleep, relaxation, drowsiness, absence. The *il y a* is the gravity of existence, the lassitude of existence against which I must struggle, despite myself, to become an existent. And there is no way to escape this gravitational weight which lurks just beneath the surface of our every effort of action, although we may try to evade it, just as we cannot avoid insomnia when 'it' comes, an unavoidability which is exactly what makes it be what it is. Insomnia is not merely being unable to fall asleep, for sleep is akin to the taking up of a position, by Levinas, and is thus associated with consciousness. It is a repose within being, a positioning or posture within consciousness. Unconsciousness, which is not the repression of consciousness, is understood as a moment of the *il y a*. In insomnia there is a positive being held to wakefulness, a condemnation to being awake, so to speak, an unwanted vigilance. We have no choice about it. It is exactly our freedom of choice which has been overcome since insomnia is experienced against our will. Insomnia confronts us with the raw and oppressive fact of being present, not *to* anything, just being present. One watches on, Levinas says, when there is nothing to watch and despite the absence of any reason for remaining watchful. The bare fact of presence is oppressive; one is held by being, held to be. One is detached from any object, any content, yet there is presence. Insomnia is a "vigilance" despite myself. In this vigilance, there is no inside or outside. What we get

a glimpse of here is the "indefectibility" of being, where the work of being never lets up, an impossibility of taking up the position of sleep in a permanent deconstructive attitude.

The *il y a* is neither consciousness nor unconscious; it is perpetually pre-conscious. Levinas uses a phenomenological analysis of the relation between sleep and insomnia here to provide an experiential basis for his argument from which he wants to draw an analogy to the relationship between consciousness and existence in general. Insomnia is understood as contact with the *il y a* insofar as sleep is to insomnia what consciousness is to the *il y a*. To overcome the gravity of the *il y a*, consciousness must posit itself in the same way that insomnia stops when one is able to take up the position of sleep. Thus, insomnia is understood by Levinas as "wakefulness," a generic state in which consciousness participates, but against its will, as it were, despite itself. The wakefulness of insomnia, however, is not consciousness since consciousness is always directed at an object. In wakefulness, Being is putting pressure on us to be. Wakefulness would turn into consciousness if, in the face of insomnia, we were to make the effort to get out of bed and to do something—an effective practical remedy for this unfortunate affliction. But to hold to Levinas's analogy here, sleep, understood as consciousness, is precisely what has not yet occurred in the vigilance or wakefulness of insomnia, a vigilance which is like a rude and enforced sobriety:

We are, thus, introducing into the impersonal event of the *there is* not the notion of consciousness, but of wakefulness, in which consciousness participates, affirming itself as a consciousness because it only participates in it. Consciousness is a part of wakefulness, which means that it has already torn into it. It contains a shelter from that being with which, depersonalized, we make contact in insomnia, that

being which is not to be lost nor duped nor forgotten, which is, if we may hazard the expression, completely sobered up.¹⁶²

Consciousness "tears" into wakefulness the way sleep can tear into insomnia, bringing the horror of it to an end. But insomnia, understood as a kind of call or command to wake up from the *il y a* (which is being asleep), is a limit situation, happening against our will, a situation which is also approximated in "certain awakenings of delirium, in certain paradoxes of madness...." It is an irreverent sobriety and thus a radical depersonalization which must not be overlooked as the background against which the existent becomes an existent. The *il y a* is Levinas's first step toward establishing the priority of responsibility insofar as it is his first approach to a descriptive analysis of the ambiguities and otherness of *exteriority*, although certainly not his last. The analysis and the establishment of the incommensurability of exteriority is of central importance to the whole of Levinas's philosophical work. The attempt to articulate the absolute exteriority of exteriority, to bring the invisible somehow into view, the unspeakable into a poetic saying ... that is the path of the track we are tracing. It is the basis upon which will rest the claim of the intersubjective nature of subjectivity, sociality, the priority of responsibility and, ultimately, an approach to God-in-the-world through a the transformative theopoetics whose proper attitude is being sought in these pages.

The disruption of sleep and consciousness that is the constant force of the *il y a*, can be seen reflected in an "ultramateriality" in modern art resulting from a break-up of the expected form, "the preference for broken lines, the scorning of perspective and of the 'real' proportions between things," a "break-up of continuity" which reveals, not

¹⁶² EE, pp. 63-67 / pp. 104-112.

nothingness, but an "unnameable" which, linguistically, "can only appear in poetry.... Matter as defined by mechanistic laws which sum up its whole essence and render it intelligible is the farthest removed from the materiality in certain forms of modern art. For here materiality is thickness, coarseness, massivity, wretchedness. It is what has consistency, weight, is absurd, is a brute but impassive presence; it is also what is humble, bare and ugly."¹⁶³ That notion of materiality entails what has not yet become an object, and thus cannot, properly speaking, be seen or articulated. Yet, in a disturbing manner, it can be experienced in a pre-conscious, i.e., pre-visual, *contact* or proximity—a sensing or sensibility (*Empfindnis*) that is prior to the representation of an intentional object. To be revealed visually, this brute but impassive presence of an absence would need the clothing of forms and the intentional parameters or categories of perspective, such as inhere, for example, in the notion of a landscape. The objectification of a landscape already involves the visual comprehension of the scene, making it into a scene, whereas the elements of the pre-thematic ultramateriality Levinas is pointing at have already been en-scaped, so to speak, in the frame of a form and thus formed into what can be neatly and coherently framed. The ultramateriality revealed in modern art, through which we can glimpse the anonymity of the *il y a*, is a scapeless, formless *apeiron* that overflows its frame—a situation which is suggested, perhaps, in the disregard for the parameters of the frame found in some modern artworks, as if the artist were trying to represent that which overflows the comprehending restrictions of the frame yet the controlling framework, what has not yet been set into Heidegger's equipmental system of usefulness and meaning.

¹⁶³ EE, p. 57; p. 91.

Being naked, pure proliferation, ultramateriality is an event of exteriority that cannot be comprehended by the interiority of consciousness; it is precisely what disrupts this and leaves us speechless. The *il y a* is pure exteriority contacted in the instant of an *Empfindnis* in which there is not yet the distinction between inside and outside. "A material object," Levinas suggests, "in being destined for a use, in forming part of a setting, is thereby clothed with a form which conceals its nakedness. The discovery of the materiality of being is not a discovery of a new quality, but of its formless proliferation. Behind the luminosity of forms, by which being already relates to our "inside," matter is the very fact of the *there is*...."¹⁶⁴

The *il y a* is prior to, not only the ontological distinction at the foundation of consciousness and thought, but the distinction between being and non-being as well. It is the ultramaterial ground of the possibility of the appearance of beings, the ground of the understanding of matter as substance and presence; a kind of primary matter. It is the darkness which makes the light of representation, consciousness, and knowledge possible; it is the palpitation, the scission of the *Urimpression*. It is the anonymity of the "It" in "It is raining." The "*il y a*" is what keeps returning after the negation of all being, the surplus of the negation's facticity where the disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear, the sheer facticity of being in which one participates, whether one wants to or not, without having taken the initiative, anonymously. In his depiction of the *il y a*, Levinas's non-representational, poetic renderings of ultramateriality are trying to get at an understanding of matter before it has become a concept grasped in a representation. Although this cannot be directly comprehended as

¹⁶⁴ EE, p. 57 lp. 91.

an object of thought, it can be glimpsed obliquely in certain quasi-experiences, what I would call poetic disturbances or vibrations, non-representational, poetic intentionalities that we will trace to the very heart of a transformative theopoetic attitude in relation to the sacred text. The *il y a* engages the existent prior to consciousness of it as an 'it'. The emerging existent participates in the *il y a* prior to any choice, the way one participates in insomnia. It is this aspect of the *il y a* that is the horror of being, the slipping away from being which in this horror simultaneously delivers me over to being, the way insomnia delivers one over to the raw fact of a vigilant presence, inescapably, by the anonymous 'it' which keeps me awake. This depiction of the *il y a* is a challenge to Heidegger's ontological analysis of Being understood as nothingness from the point of view of Dasein's comprehension of Being revealed in anxiety. The *il y a* is in no way comprehended. The existent participates in the *il y a*, senses it, experiences it, not as a "this" or a "that" which would already entail a comprehension of Being, but precisely as an experience of the *inexperienceability* of it, a disruption of com-prehension. The existent is in contact with the *il y a*, not as grasping of it but as a being grasped by it, as is the case in the poetic approach to what Caputo would call the "event structure" of exteriority or the event structure of the name of God.¹⁶⁵

The horror of the anonymity of being, which is not the Heideggerian anxiety of nothingness but the wearisomeness of the task of separating myself from the gravity of sheer existence—a task which must repetitively be taken up at every instant—is glimpsed in other forms besides the night and insomnia and the ultramateriality revealed in some modern art. Every force which works against becoming conscious, against

¹⁶⁵ Caputo, J. (2015) *The Folly of God*

becoming a "master of being" and thereby "already a name in the anonymity of the night" is a revelation of the *il y a*. To wake up, to become conscious, to establish oneself as a self, to become somebody, is a task which one takes up as a struggle requiring an effort, a work of dealing with the facelessness and the regressive pull of the *il y a*. It involves an effort on the part of the budding existent against the oppressive weight of laziness, fatigue, insomnia, depression (a refusal to act), madness, and horror. Above all, the *il y a* is horrible because the essence of horror is "a movement which will strip consciousness of its very 'subjectivity' ... not in lulling it into unconsciousness, but in throwing it into an impersonal vigilance, a *participation* in the sense that Levy-Bruhl gives to that term."¹⁶⁶ Levy-Bruhl showed that the 'consciousness' of some primitive peoples had not yet reached the level of the subject/object distinction, i.e., what psychoanalysis, especially that of Carl Jung, refers to as "individuation."¹⁶⁷ Their existence was governed by a "participation mystique" that was still lodged in the unity of being.¹⁶⁸ But how does the existent strive to break free of the grip of the *il y a*?

3. The Escape from Anonymity

What is necessary to break free of the grip of the anonymity of existence is, quite simply, the establishment of a beginning. This will take the form of a kind of hesitation or a halt in the anonymous rustling of existence, a beginning which always takes place in the instant as a present, a positing of oneself here and now, a taking up of a position in the face of the play of absence of the *il y a* in which there is no time, no instants, no

¹⁶⁶ EE, p. 60; p. 9. Cf. p. 84 / p. 143.

¹⁶⁷ Jung, Carl. (1956) "Symbols of Transformation," Collected Works (New York: Bollingen Foundation), Vol. V; see also, Levinas, CW, p. 127.

¹⁶⁸ Levy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1985) *How Natives Think*, trans. L.A. Clare (1910; Princeton: Princeton University Press).

present. The emergence of the existent over and against the *il y a*, the first moment of the existent's relation to its own existence wherein it becomes an existent, the birth of consciousness... is what Levinas designates by the term "hypostasis." "Consciousness, position, the present, the 'I', are not initially—although they are finally—existents," Levinas says. They are events by which the unnameable verb *to be* turns into substantives: hypostasis. Levinas adopts the term "hypostasis" from the history of philosophy, going back to the emanationism of Plotinus, although Levinas applies this term in an original way. What he means by hypostasis is the coming-to-be of an existent, the existent's appearance in existence, not as a substance, but as the instantiating movement of a substantive self or 'I', a movement which shows "the amphibolous character of the 'I'," an 'I' in progress rather than a substantial object.¹⁶⁹ Levinas uses a grammatical image to explicate this. The function of a verb, he argues, is not the naming of an action, as if it were a noun. Its movement is the very production of language, the "bringing forth of the seeds of poetry" to be nominalized. Hypostasis is the event of a substantive emerging in the anonymous verbality of being. "We are looking for the very apparition of the substantive," Levinas says. "To designate this apparition we have taken up the term hypostasis which, in the history of philosophy, designated the event by which the act expressed by a verb became a being designated by a substantive. Hypostasis ... is not only the apparition of a new grammatical category; it signifies the suspension of the anonymous *there is*, the apparition of a private domain, of a noun." Hypostasis is a rupturing movement which requires effort, a movement that cannot be grasped directly but can be viewed obliquely, that is,

¹⁶⁹ TO p. 53; p. 33.

poetically (as is necessary for viewing all forms of exteriority, infinity, otherness, and other undeconstructibles) in the refusal to make this effort, namely, in laziness.¹⁷⁰

We experience the regressive pull of the *il y a* in laziness as a refusal to take up the task of our existence; a recoil or a hesitation to act, a forfeiture which goes to the very essence of our being. Indolence is a refusal to take up the burden of our existence, to take on the task of standing up, of becoming an individual differentiated from the anonymous rustling of the undifferentiated, indeterminate, sheer bruteness of being. Laziness is the refusal to make the effort of beginning, it is a "recoil before action," a hesitation before existence, an indolence about existing itself. It is a remaining supine, prostrate, preferring the pleasure of spending the morning in bed. Levinas cites William James's well-known example, saying that laziness, as a refusal to be, lies somewhere "between the clear duty of getting up and the putting of the foot down off the bed." In refusing to make a beginning, to take on the "job" or work of becoming someone, caught up in a weariness of everyone and everything, a weariness which is an "evasion without an itinerary," a freedom with no content, a refusal to "do something ... to aspire after and undertake," the ego refuses to become a self, refuses the possibility inherent in the ever-renewing instant of birth. "The trouble in acting from which the indolent one holds back," Levinas says, "is not some psychological content of pain, but a refusal to undertake, to possess, to take charge. Indolence is an impotent and joyless aversion to the burden of existence itself. It is a being afraid to live which is nevertheless a life, in

¹⁷⁰ EE, p. 73 ; pp.124-125; TO, p. 52; p. 31.

which the fear of the unaccustomed, adventure, the unknown is a repugnance devolving from the aversion for the enterprise of existence.¹⁷¹

But even in this refusing to make an effort, there is a positive moment which necessarily affirms existence since the very refusal of laziness is always a refusal to take up the challenge of existence which is thus presupposed. The "bitter essence" of indolence is due to the fact that it is "a desertion which attests to the contract sealed with existence," an attestation referred to in the "weary present" of the indolent one. In the same manner, Levinas will assert that even suicide, in a most negative manner, paradoxically affirms life and shows the ultimate value of life, even in death, perhaps especially in death. The very struggle of the existent to become an existent signifies a prior contract with existence that is unavoidable. In the regressive gravity of the *il y a* revealed in the experience of laziness, it is as if the existent is being called or challenged to do something, to *do* anything, to wake up and get out of bed.

This challenge and the work that becoming an existent entails and which is caught sight of in the refusal that is laziness, the refusal to shoulder the burden of existence, a burden which is located in the reflexivity of existence, for "existence drags behind it a weight—if only itself—which complicates the trip it takes," Levinas says, so that "its movement of existence ... is bent and caught up with itself, showing that the verb to be is a reflexive verb." It is in the face of the burden of this reflexivity, this doubling back on oneself in order to be oneself, that indolence is indolent. Likewise, fatigue is understood by Levinas as a lag between a being and itself which "constitutes the advent of consciousness, that is, a power to 'suspend' being by sleep and

¹⁷¹ EE, pp. 24-29; pp. 32-39.

unconsciousness," a power located in the instant of effort by which all beginnings are made.¹⁷² And there is nothing magical about beginnings. Magic happens all at once, at the stroke of the wand, where the magician is not involved in the instant in which the work of magic is really effected but follows it from a distance. The effort of human labor is different from the work of magic in that "human labor and effort are a way of following the work being done step by step." Kant may have been awakened from his dogmatic slumber in an illuminating moment while reading Hume, but it took him the rest of his life and a great deal of effort to tell us about it. And Kant would not have had his instant of awakening at all if he had not first made the effort to read Hume. Indeed, Levinas asserts, "effort is the very effecting of an instant." And, recursively, it is in the work of the instant that the existent comes to be an existent.

Action, and the effort it requires is, essentially, "subjection and servitude," Levinas claims, but it is also "the first manifestation, or the very constitution, of an existent, a someone that *is*. The existent becomes an existent standing out from the anonymity of the *il y a*, by a beginning, a taking-up and doing, an action. As action, in the context of the regressive pull of anonymous Being, beginnings require effort. In the case of the existent, an effort is required to overcome the lethargy and the wearisomeness of existence, to break out of the gravity of indolence in a movement directed toward a goal, a movement which defines all action as purposeful, teleological. Effort is already a teleological judgement, an a priori intentionality or aim formed *ex nihilo*, a spontaneous effort to take up the burden of folding one's existence back on itself in the doubling of an "inwardness" or reflective self-knowledge. We experience the

¹⁷² EE, p. 28-30; p. 38-43.

il y a when we feel that weariness which is a weariness of everything and everyone, and above all a weariness of oneself. It is the desire to escape our existence, to get away from it all. But even in these states there is already an attitude that is taken up *toward* our existence. They already presuppose a demand for action that is incumbent on us and which is thereby revealed in its refusal. Thus, "in weariness existence is like the reminder of a commitment to exist, with all the seriousness and the harshness of an unrevokable contract." We must do something.

This burden that Levinas finds being to be is not what is meant by the Darwinian notion of "the struggle for life" because this presupposes an already existing being in its effort to prolong its life, a presuppositional problem that Levinas also finds with Heidegger's positing of Dasein as if from nowhere. But what Levinas is trying to show is exactly how it is that an existent comes to be through the effort of making a beginning, as if *ex nihilo*, in the dynamism of the instant. It is not that we first get to be and then take up or refuse our relation to existence. Rather, it is happening in a non-identifiable simultaneity. Following the reversal of the Cartesian cogito we saw that in Husserl's understanding of intentionality and inner-time consciousness, it is precisely in our existing that we already find ourselves in relation to this existence. In these states which recoil against the unflagging obligation to exist, we are able to have an experiential glimpse of that inertia against which we must struggle in order to become someone. Being is a drag for Levinas, it "is essentially alien and strikes against us. There is a pain in Being."¹⁷³ But the fearful hesitation experienced in anxiety is not so much a recoil against the intimation of non-existence and the possible nothingness of death, as

¹⁷³ EE, pp. 21-34; pp. 29-49

Heidegger thought. It is a recoil against life, against existing, against the effort that is already demanded of us to take up the task and the burden of life to which we have committed ourselves in an ontological contract that is prior to every other, which lies in the very instantiation, or instantiating, of our existence itself.

4. Solitude and the Master of Being

In extracting itself from the grip of the *il y a*, the existent becomes a "master" of being. This mastery of existence, which creates a kind of fold or crease in the plenum of existing, Levinas calls variously "inwardness," "interiority," "the inner life" and "solitude."¹⁷⁴ In *Totality and Infinity*, where it occupies a major portion of the text and is approached differently than in *Existence and Existents*, he refers to it as "separation."¹⁷⁵ Hypostasis, at this level of self-presence, is a mastery involving the achievement of a certain level of freedom and the exercise of a certain virility and sovereignty over existing. At first it is not the freedom of free will, although it becomes that. It is better described as the freedom of beginning, Levinas says, the "freedom of the existent in its very grip on existing."¹⁷⁶ It is a freedom where one possesses existence, but is also possessed by it. It is the difference between being free to go where you will and the freedom to will where you go, or what might be understood as the negative and positive aspects of the freedom of spontaneity.

At both these 'levels' of freedom, however, there is a passive aspect of separation in which the existent is gripped by existence as much, if not more, than

¹⁷⁴ EE, p. 12; p. 124. Cf. TI, p. 54; p. 24; TO, p. 54 / p. 35.

¹⁷⁵ TI, pp. 53ff; p. 23ff

¹⁷⁶ TO, p. 54; p. 34.

existence is grasped. There is an ambivalence about hypostasis in that, on the one hand, it is merely a relationship between the 'I' and itself, an inwardness which does not yet have a reference to anything outside itself. It is a process of becoming, a relation of me to myself. Yet it is exactly the production of this inwardness or interiority that will make possible the relation with an exterior world. Here the interiority of the existent is understood more in the traditional sense of the subject who is a subject precisely insofar as she or he subjects that which is exterior to her or him to the category of objectivity. In this ambivalence of hypostasis, Levinas affirms the absolute separateness of the existent which alone would make freedom possible and, at the same time, a participation with existence whereby the existent is affected by what is exterior to it but without compromising its separateness. This ambiguity is not clearly expressed in *Existence and Existents*, although Levinas does confront it there, but it becomes clearer throughout his later texts. Part of the problem seems to involve Levinas's continued wrestling with Husserl's ambivalence between realism and idealism reflected in the difference between his early and later works, as presented in earlier chapters of our present text. In *Existence and Existents* and other early texts, such as "*L'oeuvre*," the manner in which Husserl's ambivalence is reflected in Levinas's work is particularly evident. Levinas will situate the crux of his own phenomenology of exorbitant responsibility in the virgule of this ambivalence. On the one hand, Levinas will argue for the constitutive power of the existent, that the existent is the creative center of itself and its world, a position consonant with Husserl's more idealistic formulations of the transcendental ego found in *Ideas* and *The Crisis*. On the other hand, Levinas will also attempt to recuperate a realism which nevertheless is not permitted to become the

empiricism of the natural sciences. The existent will be shown to be sensibly affected by exactly that which it constitutes and, at the same time, to constitute that by which it is affected, based on the paradoxical relation of sensing and the sensed as we saw revealed in Husserl's understanding of the *Urimpression*. This is a crucial point for Levinas's development of the notion of responsibility and I will return to it later when I arrive more directly at a poetic description of the transformative, theopoetic attitude that is the primary goal of my efforts here.

In the space of the interiority of separation there is the formation of an identity, a relation of the ego or 'I' with itself which is both a departure from itself and a return to itself. It is thus, as Levinas says, "an enchainment to itself" where the "free being is already no longer free, because it is responsible for itself." Just as this is a first level of freedom, it is also a first level of responsibility, a responsibility for self. Here, Levinas says, "I am forever stuck with myself." In its new-found relation with itself, the existent is separating itself from the anonymity of existence in general, but only to find itself alone with itself in the solitude of an interiority. Solitude, Levinas says, "is the very unity of the existent," the fact that there is something in existing starting from which existence occurs. The subject is alone because it is one. The existent is here, properly speaking, an individual, despite its true origin in the otherness of the Other, as will become clear. But it is precisely its solitude, the actuality of the existence of the existent, which is "the price paid" for its very existing. Thus, Levinas concludes, the amphibolous separation of the existent in the hypostasis "is not only a despair and an abandonment, but also a virility, a pride and a sovereignty."¹⁷⁷ The separation of the existent from the anonymity

¹⁷⁷ TO, p. 55; p. 35.

of the *il y a*, however, is not yet an objective consciousness of the world. To take up an instant through effort “does not of itself found the relationship between the I and the world,” Levinas says.¹⁷⁸ The separation achieved in hypostasis through the effort of action, by assuming a position, is like sleep or unconsciousness, both of which take place within consciousness, but which themselves are not yet consciousness in the objective sense of “intentionality, consciousness of..., simultaneously proximity and distance.”¹⁷⁹ But this will also eventually come about. Hypostasis is an ambivalent and paradoxical situation. Insofar as the existent of the hypostasis has taken up a position in the present, there is not yet a conscious relation to the world because the present of an instant has no duration as such. Time has not yet entered the instantaneous dynamics of hypostasis. Hypostasis is the immediacy of presence-to-self before you know it, not as if by magic but as if by your own hand. The present is the way for an instant to be.¹⁸⁰ The instant, however, understood as a commencement, is dynamic as well as paradoxical. “What begins to be does not exist before having begun,” Levinas asserts, “and yet it is what does not exist that must through its beginning give birth to itself, without coming from anywhere. Such is the paradoxical character of beginning. A beginning does not start out of the instant that precedes the beginning; its point of departure is contained in its point of arrival, like a rebound movement.”¹⁸¹ On the one hand, the instant of the present does not exist at all. Like the *Urimpression*, it is always a modality of “about to be” or “has just been”—protention or retention. Levinas refers to this as an “ontological schema” where the existent does not exist; but it is an event of

¹⁷⁸ EE, p. 37; p. 55.

¹⁷⁹ TI p. 109; p. 81.

¹⁸⁰ EE, p. 73; p. 125.

¹⁸¹ EE, p 76; pp. 130-131.

existing through which something comes to start out from itself. Thus, on the other hand, although it is an *event* that must be expressed by a verb, it is nevertheless already a something, already an existent.

The present instant never stands still. If it did, it would have to have necessarily received its endurance from something that preceded it. But the present instant "is something that comes from itself." This is what Levinas means by the "amphibolous" character of the 'I'. It is not a substance, nevertheless it is preeminently an existent."¹⁸² To try to predicate anything about the 'I', that is, to define it by spiritual or psychological properties, would turn it into a substance that is bearing properties. It would perhaps be more proper to say that the 'I' is a *mode* of existence rather than a being. It is the identity of a relation with itself without reference to *anything* outside itself; a pure spontaneity of folding back on itself, a returning to itself without ever having left, coming from nowhere and going nowhere. But this is merely to define it as alone. It is like a pure potentiality which cannot be experienced and thus cannot be approached by phenomenology. But this relation with self that marks the emergence of the existent does not occur in thin air. The actual existence of the 'I' is manifested as materiality or being-a-body.

The folding back of the 'I' into itself, manifested as bodily being, is where you can see the further development of the positive and negative aspects of hypostasis more clearly. Initially the positive and negative dimensions of hypostasis involve the tension of action and effort, on the one hand, and fatigue and laziness on the other. In the context of the materiality of the 'I', however, the positive and negative aspects of hypostasis will

¹⁸² TO, pp. 52-53; pp. 32-33.

be viewed in terms of the world. The positive aspect here is the power and virility of the 'I' over the elements of the world; the negative aspect is the very encumbrance of the body, a being stuck with oneself, being alone within one's skin. In the present, the 'I' is burdened with itself. This burden is precisely its materiality. The upsurge of the 'I' is associated with its material, corporeal emergence into existence. To be is to be a body. It is only through reflection that we can distinguish between the existence of the 'I' and its bodily existence. Thus, for Levinas, the materiality of the body, because it is both the condition for the possibility of the virility and freedom of the existent, as well as its encumbrance, does not represent merely a fall into a tomb or prison, as Plato thought. The body is the price paid for the sovereignty and freedom of the existent. The first freedom that is resultant from the fact that "in anonymous existing an existent arises," includes as its price "the very finality of the I riveted to itself. This finality of the existent, which constitutes the tragedy of solitude, *is* materiality."¹⁸³ The 'I' is caught up with its power and freedom and materiality from which it looks to the world for 'salvation'. This evasion in search of salvation from the encumbrance of the body takes two forms: (1) the intentionality of representation (intelligibility and light), and (2) the 'intentionality' of enjoyment (nourishment and sincerity), which I will focus on in the following chapter.

5. Preliminary Conclusions

To summarize briefly, I have endeavored to show in this chapter how, in Levinas's analysis, a particular being, an existent, comes to be a particular being over and against the anonymity of sheer existence through the effort of action. This is not a struggle

¹⁸³ TO, p. 57; p. 38.

against the anxiety of nothingness, finitude, mortality, or death, but a struggle in the face of the anonymous character of undifferentiated existence experienced in a glimpsing way in insomnia, laziness, fatigue, and other forms of exteriority. Thus, from the beginning, Levinas attempts to situate the ontogenesis of a responsible subjectivity in a non-empirical experience of alterity or otherness which functions as a kind of prod or demand for the existent to be, a pre-conceptual contract with existence inherent in existing from which the existent cannot escape. The establishment of the separateness of the existent in a hypostatic, reflexive folding back on itself, a halting of the anonymous rustling of existence as the taking up of a position in the present instant, is not yet consciousness but is its ground and foundation. This separateness is realized as being a material body. But separateness, individuation, hypostasis, interiority, being a body, being a *one* which nevertheless relates reflexively to itself...this is to be, existentially, alone. The separateness necessary for mastering the *il y a* results in the existent being stuck with itself. The freedom of hypostasis thus involves both the accomplishment of the power and virility of consciousness as well as the condemnation to solitude in a Sartrean sense. But let us not abandon the existent whose joyful mastery has led to a bleak solitude. Instead, in the following chapter we will turn to Levinas's understanding of how the existent attempts to evade and, ultimately, to overcome the burden of its new-found freedom in a sociality of the one for the Other, an exorbitant responsibility that will show itself as the very locus of the possibility of God-in-the-world.

CHAPTER 10

Representational Intentionality and Metaphysical Desire

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I traced Levinas's 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, as we saw in previous chapters. Freedom, consciousness, knowledge, enjoyment, and otherness all require a

being who locates in itself the self-assertive responsibility for itself, i.e., a *free* being. Thus, the singularity 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, the perennial existential dilemma.

This chapter interrogates Levinas's 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 two ways: first, by reducing the otherness of the Other to an object of knowledge, i.e., a representation. Secondly, by reducing the otherness of the Other to an object of enjoyment or use. These two relations fail to achieve a genuine transcendence toward the Other, and it is transcendence alone, in Levinas's view, that would satisfactorily overcome the existent's being stuck with itself in the immanence of the solitude of freedom. Here, again, it seems to be presupposed by Levinas that the solitude and separateness of freedom is something that the existent must somehow overcome. For Levinas, unlike Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and other existentialist thinkers, authenticity is not to be accomplished by the solitary individual alone. Salvation is not a solo adventure. There will be an opportunity to question this presupposition in the present chapter and deal with it more specifically later. It is Levinas's position that there is a desire for transcendence inherent in the individual that is 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 that will find itself frustrated in these evasions of response-ability.

Here is a brief summary of these two inauthentic attempts to evade the unhappy solitude of separateness through an analysis of Levinas's 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 desires to return to itself in satiety; and, secondly, metaphysical desire which feeds infinitely on its own desiring the possibility of the impossible. Of the two types, I am more interested in the non-representational intentionality of enjoyment because it will be this that ultimately leads to the metaphysical desire which constitutes the transcendent relation with the otherness of the Other, and thus the *genuine* escape from the solitude of separateness in the immanent but transcendent epiphany of God-in-the-world that is the mystical goal of a *lectio divina*, as well as fulfillment through corporal acts of mercy, and the Levinasian approach to theopoetics. The investigation of non-representational intentionality will require further elaboration of the amphibolous dynamics of sensation and sensibility 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 very locus of transcendence toward the Other, ethical responsibility, and the experience of the sacred in the secular, transcendence in immanence. Finally, we will conclude this chapter by looking at the whole question of the interrelation that holds among non-representational intentionality, sensibility, desire, and transcendence in relation to

Levinas's distinction between the naked body and the clothed body, as a precursor to understanding the inner workings of a self-consciously transformative theopoetics which will be the subject of the following chapter.

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.¹⁸⁴ 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!)" (TI, 122-23; 95). Husserl, in Levinas's 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 whose relations with understanding are "reducible to those established by light," the clarifying light of the constitutive aspect of this intentionality. 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" (TI, pp. 124-125 / pp. 96-98). Here, again, there are shades of Levinas's critique of Husserl's notion of the absoluteness of consciousness. Thus, in representational intentionality, the 'production' of the intentional object allows for no

¹⁸⁴ 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.

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, 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.

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" (EE, p. 46 / p. 72). 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 (TI, p. 124 / p. 96). In this understanding of light, the knowing consciousness grasps what is other across an intentional distance and appropriates it by reducing it to an intelligible object grasped by consciousness in a representation, 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 always *mine*. Thus, in Levinas's view, the light of representational knowledge and consciousness cannot provide a way for the existent to escape from the solipsistic solitude of its existence imposed upon itself as a master of being since the

very otherness of the Other—the life blood of exteriority—is destroyed in representational intentionality.

Levinas makes it clear again at this point that he is not denouncing the intellectualism of representational intentionality. He is only concerned to show "its very strict development..." (TI, p. 109 / p. 81). His basic point is that the knowledge relation reduces the otherness of the Other to the sameness of an identity, so that the other disappears *qua* 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" loses its opposition to its object and 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" (TI, p. 126 / P• 99). In conscious knowledge, the 'I' remains shut up in its solitude. This is an important premise. In the face of this analysis, Levinas claims that representational intentionality is connected to and more fundamentally bound up with "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 non-representational 'intentionality' is "'wholly other'" than the light process of intelligibility (TI, p. 126 / p. 98; p. 122 / pp. 94-95) and will be shown to be what I am designating as a philosophical poetic sensibility at this point and, ultimately, a transformative theopoetics. This wholly affective, carnal 'knowing' occurs in the body, the locus of sensation, as a kind of touch (not emotion), a touching event which is of an

order wholly different than that of the clarity of intelligibility, with its own form of 'intentionality' and its own peculiar 'light'.¹⁸⁵

The other attempt at an escape from the solitude of separation that 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'.¹⁸⁶ 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 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 'ownmost' 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.

¹⁸⁵ Concerning Levinas's distinction between the two types of affectivity, see, Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in CPP, p. 158, no. 8.

¹⁸⁶ "Diachrony and Representation." in 'IU, p. 106.

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 that 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 presence-ing 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."¹⁸⁷ This 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, our finitude. It is exactly the challenge of projecting ourselves into the possible, in the context of the limit of the impossible, the

¹⁸⁷ Lingis, Alphonso. "The Sensuality and the Sensitivity" in *Face To Face*, op. cit., p. 228.

possibility of the impossible, as Caputo puts it, that constitutes the challenge of authenticity.¹⁸⁸ We are solicited by the sensible world, the world of things to be used, but this 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" (IU, pp. 62-63 / pp. 45-46. 13).

For Levinas, 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 level of use, the sensible world is a sensual plenum of light, color, sound, tastes, etc., a plenum of *enjoyment*. The initial orientation to the world as enjoyed 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 the 'intentionality' of sensation is nevertheless a kind of luminosity and knowing, as Levinas claims, but not that of intellectual representation; in fact, it involves a reversal of that intentionality (IU 63 / 46). 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" (EE 37 / 15. TI 122 / 95). Thus, it is necessary, as I suggested above, to distinguish two levels of desire in Levinas' philosophy, which will correspond to two levels of sensibility or

¹⁸⁸ Caputo, J. the possibility of the impossible *Folly of God*, pp. ??

affectivity, what might be called a "sensuous" sensibility and a "sensitive" sensibility.¹⁸⁹

This will anticipate the subject matter of the following chapter and will function as a prelude to the investigation of Levinas's all-important notion of Sociality which is at the very root of his understanding of the transcendence in immanence of exteriority and, hence, at the root of the transformative theopoetics we are seeking. It will be helpful to provide a preliminary indication of this bodily or affective 'intentionality' here.

To have a body, or to be a body is, basically, to occupy a site, a position, to be *here* in the present. This is the accomplishment of the inwardness created 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 (TI, 128 / 101). This level of sensibility is prior to representation. What is other is always already 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 sustained by these representations and *lives from them*" (TI, 127 / 100). Since intersubjective time has not yet entered into the picture of precognitive enjoyment or corporeal 'intentionality', 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

¹⁸⁹ Lingis, A. "The Sensuality," p. 227.

confusion in Levinas' thought that I will consider in the final section of this chapter. This is complicated by the fact that in the situation of hypostasis there are neither temporal nor spatial parameters. The body is precisely what constitutes 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 spatialization 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 spatially 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.

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. But 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. The body is what first defines the world as a world. Consciousness is not located in some mysterious light process between our ears. The whole body is itself consciousness. When I feel a pain, for example, the pain does not exist 'in my head' but is always located somewhere *in my body*, 'in my left foot' or 'in my right arm'. The body itself is extended consciousness.¹⁹⁰ It is the center of my world. Spatiality is defined by

¹⁹⁰ See Clark, A. and Chalmers, D. "The Extended Mind". Accessed 12/2/2020 at <https://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/concepts/clark.html>

the body and is not something added on to an already existing being or plugged into an already existing world. 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 in a paradoxical 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 that 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 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" (TI,128-129 / 101). 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 *epoché*, 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 *epoché*. That is why Heidegger's understanding that the self and the world are always given together, just as I am arguing in this text that God and the world are always given together as God-in-the-world, marks an advancement over Husserl. Levinas's basic problem with Heidegger's construal is that he thinks his old hero, Heidegger situated 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" (TO 63 / 45).

Bodily contact with the world, what would be the very *worlding of the world* from a Heideggerian perspective, 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." 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" 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." (TI 128-129 / 101). 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

response-ability 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, I have been endeavoring to establish in the present and previous chapters how Levinas orients the analysis which will lead to the establishment of the priority of responsibility and, therefrom, the genesis of a transformative theopoetics. I surveyed the first two movements of what I have called the escape from the anonymity of Being and the achievement of solitude in separation as a master of being, 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 revealed in the transformative, hermeneutical theopoetics we are tracking. The fact that the initial groping of Levinas's 'system' was jotted down in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp seems less insignificant at this point. In the analysis of hypostasis and sensation 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 *com-prehension* (TI, p. 21 / p. IX). It was Levinas's 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 the amphiboly of 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 theopoetic study.

The attempt to overcome the limitations of Husserl and Heidegger's understanding of intentionality could be described as a double escape of its own: from "below" and from "above." In the present chapter, through the analysis of sensibility, I am completing the description of the first part of the escape from "below." This takes the form of two movements which I have already looked at in detail. First, 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. The outcome of 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 in the formless form of *il y a*. 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 live our life, as if in the very nature of existence there was a demand or a command to be. This *ought* would be 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 how could there be a "contract" enacted with the *il y a* 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 appeal to 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 the paradox of beginning comes into the clearing. The beginning in Levinas's 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 most sensitive, surrendered, and vulnerable pre-objective, poetic 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' paradoxically is and is not. Being born, like dying, is a life-long process. Still, 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? I would answer this train of questions in the affirmative.

What Levinas wants to deduce from his depiction of the 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 and the epiphany of God-in-the-world. 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 you *take up* the burden of your existence or not, you are still responding to the challenge. This is a strange 'freedom'. Here is a freedom where even suicide is an act of responsibility (TO 50-51 / 28-29). 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?¹⁹¹ Is there not in this extreme passivity already to be found a "Yes" to the beyond-life structured by an otherworldly metaphysics? Responses to these questions will be found in the understanding of the dialectic of sensibility. The priority of responsibility is not only the end result of Levinas's metaphysical ontology of the ethical subject, it is to be found right 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 freedom and responsibility are not conscious. They are neither temporal nor spatial. They do not involve choice in the sense of an action 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 a poetic phenomenological. 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 response-ability is not yet normative moral responsibility, although Levinas will argue that the former is the ground and foundation of the latter. Up to this point, what has been argued for is the priority of a contract with existence by which the existent is

¹⁹¹ For a critical assessment of passivity in Levinas' philosophy, see, Etienne Feron, "*Respiration et action chez Levinas*," *Etudes Phenomenologique*, 5-6 (1987): 200ff.

challenged to take up the task of being an existent, a task, paradoxically, by which the existent comes to be an existent.

Levinas describes 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 urimpressionistic 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 as my world. Before the world is an object of thought, it is a felt-world, a sensible world, a world of enjoyment. Every objective form of the world in conscious perception is first apperceived 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 instantaneous 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, out from which we set forth tracking the trace of the theopoetic. It is what Levinas thinks Heidegger overlooks in establishing the relation between beings and Being as a relation of thought or comprehension, despite Heidegger's later writings. For Levinas it is not in the thinking of Being that being is

made present but in sensual ap-prehension, a *presencing* the meaning of which always overflows the meant. In the analysis of sensation, Levinas seems to have most effectively gone beyond 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."

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 and drive the “transformative” dimension of transformative theopoetics. Based on this new 'intentionality', he distinguishes between two levels of sensibility. The first, 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 violence to the otherness of the Other that makes genuine relationship impossible. The second type of sensibility, what I have preferred to designate as sensitivity, comes into play here. This is the sensibility or sensitivity of metaphysical desire which is irreducible to either a need or an item of knowledge. Levinas sees it revealed in the analyses of time, eros, and the face-to-face relation of sociality which we will take up in the following chapter.

4. Desire, Need and Sensibility

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. The significance of these distinctions is reflected in the analysis of the naked body and the clothed body. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas says 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, one must as far as possible be decently clothed." (TO, p. 60 / p. 41). 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. Exactly what makes the enjoyment of the world possible is that the Other has not yet disrupted the sincere and happy consumption of it. But, 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 naked 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 (EE, p. 40 / p. 61). 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.

The difference between the naked and clothed body is further reflected in the French word "*jouissance*" that Levinas uses to designate *enjoyment*, 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. In the legal sense, "*jouissance*" would indicate the free usage of something that does not belong to the user, as in being granted access across another person's property to get to your own. This free access or use, legally speaking, would be 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's 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 can so disrupt the social world, brings up a certain confusion in this area which runs through his texts from *Existence and Existents* 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 asserts that the inwardness of separation and solitude is not yet any consciousness of..., not yet a representational intentionality because 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..." (EE 37 / 53). On the other hand, Levinas will say that "hypostasis," what the above citation describes, "an existent, is a consciousness" (EE, p. 83 / p. 141). 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" (EE, p. 51 / p. 80). 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. (EE, p. 40 / p. 61). How are we to understand this? Is the separate being conscious or not, naked or clothed, in the world or out of it? Let me try to sort out how I see Levinas's groping here, if I can.

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, again, somewhat as Nietzsche understood "the sovereign individual," but not without an admixture of the values of the herd; closer perhaps to what Russell called the "natural attitude." In the hypostasis of existence, the existent is wholly self-centered, egoistic, and its relationship with life is wholly "for-me." This is what Levinas means by "ipseity." 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. This

sovereign individual is "at home" with itself. 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 or is approached by the incomprehensible exteriority of the Other, as this is worked out in *Totality and Infinity* and radicalized in *Otherwise Than Being*. To be in the world as enjoyment is not yet to have an objective world, since the in-itself-ness of the world is wholly the "for-me" of enjoyment. Enjoyment is a lived immediacy with the world. The life I live and the fact of living it here collapse. 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. As Levinas puts it, "it is not by being in the world that we can say what the world is" (EE, p. 42 / p. 64). It is exactly this that will be disrupted by the advent of the Other. Levinas has shown, 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 satiety, fullness, 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 accords fully with a desire. (EE, p.

44 / p. 67). But in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will define desire differently. Here it will be understood, as I indicated earlier, 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 her. 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 it is also 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 you 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. (TO, p. 41 / p. 19) Levinas's depiction of the only possible escape from the solitude of separation, what he will designate by the term "Sociality," is the subject of the following chapter.

Representational intentionality is not located in the world, which, according to Levinas, is exactly the lesson to be learned from Husserl's *epoché*: "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" (EE, p. 42 / pp. 66-67). 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 also a kind of consciousness. Insofar as there is distance between the existent and the world, there is consciousness; insofar as there is a collapse into identity, there is not consciousness. Consciousness must be understood within the ambivalent and egoistic structure of the "for-me" that defines hypostasis.

Although Heidegger saw the distinction made possible by Husserl's *epoché*, he nevertheless tried to formulate being-in-the-world within the ontological structure of a concern for existing, but, Levinas objects, "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. 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 and nourishment 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 natural 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," as we saw in Levinas's construal of the feminine. 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 (EE, p. 43 / p. 65. Cf. TI, pp. 152ff. / pp. 125ff).

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 not for the sake of living; it *is* living. Life is sincerity. You might wonder why love is not included in this litany of pleasures. Here is Levinas's reason: "what characterizes love is an essential and insatiable hunger," the second form of desire described above. Love 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 because it 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 biological *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." (EE, p. 43 / p. 65). 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

The analysis of representational intentionality and metaphysical desire shows that neither the relation of knowledge nor the relation of enjoyment makes possible a relation of genuine 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 a hypostatic individuality 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., an 'intentionality' that '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 the 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's view, a transcendence toward the Other that will ultimately be understood as the ethical relation of responsibility where God is theopoetically revealed in the world.

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? Does Levinas unwittingly 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 and reveal the beating heart of a transformative theopoetics are the subject matter of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 11

The Exteriority of God-in-the-World

1. The Argument to Exteriority

Alterity, the exteriority or otherness of what nevertheless remains resolutely Other, is, by virtue of its otherness, unable to enter into the economy of the Same under the *logos* banner of identity and non-contradiction and can thus only be approached experientially in and by a poetic reading. The necessary incorporation of a poetic moment into phenomenological descriptions of exteriority allows Levinas to reach toward a saying of what would otherwise remain essentially unsayable. He does this with an effective, perhaps inadvertently transformative, poetic word that immediately releases the stasis of its inscription from any positivity or position-taking through a built-in unsaying or deconstructive strategy that inhabits the said of the descriptions preventing the desired closure. The poetic word is irreducible to the thought that would think it. The goal I am working toward in the present text is to show that the aspiring hermeneutic reader must enter into the vibrational resounding of the poetic word in its originary appearance in order to experience first-hand the infinity or *infinition* of signification in a non-cognitive bodily resonance constituting a transformative, theopoetical, non-representational 'knowing experience', of which the conversion experience of Augustine in the garden is a shining example. A similar pattern arises in the analysis of the ontogenesis of subjectivity within an originary responsiveness to

the gravity and anonymity of 'raw or sheer existence' which Levinas names *il y a*, the anonymous "there is" of being we looked at earlier.

This chapter presents a rendition of the transitions in Levinas's thought from his understanding of the solitude of the separate individual caught up in the evasions of knowledge and enjoyment, to the relation of the existent with exteriority in response to the approach of the Other—a fundamental "*sociality*" in which the transcendence of the Infinite is thought to be revealed in a transformative, therapeutic, grammatological immanence of proximity. This will reveal the inner workings of the power train that I am depicting in the present text as the epiphany of God-in-the-world, an exteriority that is accessible effectively, I believe, only through a transformative theopoetics. In Levinas's view, the face-to-face relation of sociality, i.e., pre-conscious intersubjectivity, entails an ontological response-ability on the part of the Same, the knowing consciousness, as we have seen; a kind of autonomic or obsessive responding to the approach of the Other, like exhaling without inhaling, prior to any free commitment; a sensitive, pre-conscious response which gives rise to the meaning of authentic subjectivity as ethical response-ability and the locus of the *transformative* dimension of theopoetics. The "ethical" dimension of ethical responsibility, and, hence, its *priority*, must be understood as a fundamental ethics and not any prescriptive morality, approximating what Heidegger reluctantly referred to as "*ursprungliche Ethik*" in his *Letter on Humanism*.¹⁹²

Levinas's argument for the transcendence-in-immanence of sociality will rest squarely on his establishment of the reality of exteriority, the very otherness of the Other

¹⁹² Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p. 235.

that is irreducible to a concept of otherness, through the 'evidence' of phenomenological analyses of suffering and death, time, the visible and the invisible, and the face-to-face relation. What Levinas means by the term 'responsibility' is not the same as that which would be determined by a measure of my freedom or non-freedom. Metaphysical response-ability, like all other forms of exteriority, has the 'structure' of an *event* which is prior to and the ground of the subject for whom freedom would be possible or not possible. In focusing on the dynamics of exteriority in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas wishes to establish how it is that the approach of the Other instigates a *fundamental* responding in what appears to consciousness as the identity of the Same, and that, in a *fundamental* sense, this responding is ethical. Later, we will see how *Otherwise than Being* works to establish the priority of this responding over the identity that responds, a return to that moment of hypostasis where the existent is on the way to the identity of a being for whom freedom is first possible and not possible but has not yet arrived. My understanding of transformative theopoetics, and philosophical poetics in general, as it is being developed in the present text, involves a return to the centrality of the existential spiritual development of the actual person who is the only "identity that responds" from the perspective of phenomenological analysis.

Through suffering the individual existent comes to know the futurity of death and its limitation of the possibilities for being. When this suffering reaches a certain intensity, a "crispation" of the intransigence of the sovereign subject occurs, a softening of the narcissistic autonomy which makes possible the approach of the Other and the break-up of autonomy into pluralistic heteronomy.¹⁹³ For Heidegger, the temporality of Dasein

¹⁹³ Levinas, E. *TO*, p. 76; p. 64. *CPP*, p. 59.

is situated precisely in the comprehension of finitude revealed in the ultimate nothingness of death toward which the whole of its being is inevitably thrust. But, for Levinas, temporality has a more fundamental foundation. For the individual existent there is not yet time in the most fundamental sense. Beneath the futurity revealed by the reality of death, beneath the synchrony of clock-time, the very foundation of time is established by the diachrony of the face-to-face relation. In the relationship of facing, Levinas will locate the transcendence of exteriority as a disruption of the visible by the invisible. Still, the fact of death cannot be ignored since its actuality marks the termination of the face-to-face relation of sociality, ultimately consigning it to the representational synthesis of history, the objective view of the third party. Levinas argues against this possibility of historical closure of the transcendence opened by the face-to-face relation in his rehashing of the Platonic argument that death is overcome in the erotic relationship, or, rather, in the fecundity that is the positive outcome of the erotic relationship, the child.

The analysis of the existent's move from immanence to transcendence found in Levinas's early work, which begins negatively with reflections on suffering and death, is tempered by a more positive perspective of individuation found in *Totality and Infinity*. What accounts for this difference? The focus of *Totality and Infinity* is on the dynamics of the Other understood as exteriority. Later, in *Otherwise than Being*, the focus returns once again to a consideration of subjectivity in the dynamics of the Same understood as responsibility. Here the negative aspects of transcendence once again come to the fore. Levinas's depiction of transcendence is positive or negative depending on his perspective, whether he is looking at it from an analysis of the dynamics of the Same or

the Other. In keeping with the Neoplatonic influence on Levinas's thought, there is a similar ambivalence in Plotinus's view of embodiment, at once an entombment or fall but also the source of the experience of beauty (and, thus, of Beauty) which begins the transcending trek back to the homeland of the One through virtuous practice, a mystical vector of influence that will be resurrected in the embodiment of sacred reading that is peculiar to transformative theopoetics. In *Totality and Infinity* it will be not so much the process of pain and suffering that brings about the individualistic subjectivity of the subject, as the more gentle and tender play of intimacy and the possibility of recollection within the feminine welcome of the home, as we saw in Chapter 6. The home and inhabitation, understood in the context of the gentleness and decency of the feminine, are at the base of separation as well as the first movement out of separation toward sociality and the Good. As we saw previously, inhabitation and the intimacy of the dwelling which make the separation and autonomy of the human being possible thus imply a first revelation of the Other.

2. From Solitude to Sociality to God (*A-Dieu*)

Although Levinas recognizes the ambivalence of separation, in the context of his attempt to establish the incomprehensible exteriority of the Other, he emphasizes the negative aspects, the burden and painfulness of solitude. Pain and sorrow are the phenomena to which the solitude of the lonely existent is finally reduced. In the context of *Time and the Other*, however, the activity of the existent in its everyday life represents an attempt to escape the "profound unhappiness" of materiality and its consequent solitude. "Everyday life," Levinas argues, "is a preoccupation with salvation" from solitude. This preoccupation is reflected in the seriousness and sincerity of the

individual's pursuit of knowledge and pleasure. Whereas Nietzsche derided the "spirit of seriousness" as a mark of the member of the herd, and Sartre saw in this the 'condemnation' to be free that plagues "*pour-soi*", Levinas sees in everyday life a sincere, though frustrated, desire on the part of the existent to transcend the burden of materiality and individuality. As an evasion of authentic transcendence, however, the pursuit of knowledge and pleasure necessarily fails to overcome the misery of solitude. And nowhere does this failure to evade the burden of being a separate individuality become more evident, in Levinas' view, than in the pain of suffering and the reality of death.

In suffering, particularly in physical suffering, the inescapable oppressiveness of materiality is violently thrust back upon the existent. One is backed up against the material wall of one's being in suffering where there is an absence of all refuge. Suffering does not signify a confrontation with nothingness for Levinas, as it does for Heidegger, but the very "impossibility of nothingness," like the vigilance of insomnia. The pain of suffering is the acute awareness of one's materiality from which there is no exit. Furthermore, the inescapability of pain, the fact that it rivets us helplessly to our materiality in a solitude that is a universe of pain, includes in it the additional foreboding that this pain is not the worst that could happen. The pain of suffering, forcing a recognition of the susceptibility of materiality, includes an intimation of death. The painfulness of pain is that it is precisely a foreboding of an unknowable 'something', a mysterious threat which cannot be brought into the light. "The unknown of death," Levinas says, "which is not given straight off as nothingness but is correlative to an experience of the impossibility of nothingness, signifies not that death is a region from

which no one has returned and consequently remains unknown as a matter of fact; the unknown of death signifies that the very relationship with death cannot take place in the light, that the subject is in relationship with what does not come from itself." One might say it is in relationship with mystery. In pain we find ourselves gripped by the mysterious specter of death which we cannot grasp. The specter of death is the foreboding of an ultimate solitude which overrides any choice on my part. For Levinas, contrary to Heidegger's analysis, death marks the complete effacement of the power and virility of the subject, the ultimate indignity of materiality. When death is, I am not; when I am, death is not. This wisdom from Epicurus, although in Levinas's view it misses the paradoxicality of death because "it effaces our relationship with death," nevertheless indicates the poetically grounded relation with the futurity and mysteriousness of death. Death never takes place in the now; it obliterates the now. The now, the present instant, as we have seen, is the point of departure of the existent, the position from which it exercises its mastery and freedom. Levinas disagrees with Heidegger here because for Heidegger the assumption of one's death is at the same time the assumption of the uttermost possibility of experience. "Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom."¹⁹⁴

Against Heidegger, Levinas argues that "my mastery, my virility, my heroism as a subject can be neither virility nor heroism in relation to death" because, although in the *now* I am the "master of grasping the possible," nevertheless "when death is here I am unable to grasp." For Heidegger, to accept one's mortality and finitude as being-toward-death is to make possible every action in the world, to make possible the fulfillment of

¹⁹⁴ TO, pp. 69-70; pp. 56-57.

one's authenticity. Clearly, the actuality of death brings possibility to an end. But Levinas does not make it apparent why the intimation of our mortality should also accomplish this radical inactivity. The point he wants to make is that death is ungraspable, that it always remains exterior to representation in the now. Thus, he concludes that "in the nearness of death" there is a "reversal of the subject's activity into passivity." The intimation of death in pain and suffering is not merely a matter of being backed up against our materiality. It results in a complete breakdown of our virility into "the crying and sobbing toward which suffering is inverted." The analysis of death is a key issue of Levinas's disagreement with Heidegger, one which hearkens back to the problem of ontology and freedom discussed previously.

My death is unknowable. Unknowableness, Levinas argues, is the very structure of the future. The future is not what I can represent to myself in the present as a possible, as Levinas claims Heidegger thought. The future is exactly what is beyond every reduction to a representation in the present. The future always comes unannounced like an uninvited guest to a party, whether received with welcome at that point or not. The futurity of death is that the day and the hour of our death remains unknowable. The future is always surprising. In this surprisingness, the activity of light is reduced to the darkness of a complete passivity. This is not merely a passivity that would in its turn feed an activity, as in the relation of sensation to knowledge within a sense-data epistemology, but an *extreme* passivity where all activity and the possibility of activity is obliterated. The absolute inability to know my death in advance results in a complete shut-down of my active power of representation. But for Heidegger, it is exactly the heroic acceptance of this ultimate undoing that makes all doing possible.

Freedom from the threat of death, the assuming of my death as a limit of the possible, opens up the whole world of the possible.¹⁹⁵

To enter into the solitude of materiality as a limited and mortal being is to choose mastery and freedom over cowering in tears. It would be to practice death as Plato taught.¹⁹⁶ Philosophy, in Plato's view, as well as for Heidegger and Nietzsche, is precisely this practice of death, an authentic acceptance of our mortality in a noble and courageous turning away from every inauthentic evasion in the everydayness of enjoyment and the idle chatter of the herd. The philosophical life, the truly authentic, ethical life, is both tragic and noble. But, in a Levinasian rendition, the response one has to death in the radical return to oneself of extreme suffering is "crying and sobbing," and finally to a breakdown to a "state of irresponsibility."¹⁹⁷ Thus it seems odd that Levinas turns to an analysis of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* where, in the face of inevitable doom, the tragic hero nevertheless plunges headlong into battle. This is curious because it shows exactly that the tragic hero does *not* break down and cry. Levinas's evidence here seems to support the Platonic/Nietzschean/Heideggerian thesis. Levinas argues that the futurity of death disrupts the "*ipseity*," the identity of the existent, since one's death can never be represented as an actuality. Furthermore, this mysterious unknowability places the subject in a position of extreme passivity. He cites Macbeth's initial unwillingness to fight MacDuff toward the end of the play as evidence of this passivity. But is this not merely a moment's hesitation from which the very heroism of

¹⁹⁵ TO, pp. 70-72, n. 43; pp. 57-64, n. 5. Levinas says: "Death in Heidegger is not ... 'the impossibility of possibility,' but 'the possibility of impossibility.' See also, CPP, p. 51.

¹⁹⁶ Plato: "true philosophers make dying their profession...." *Phaedo*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1982), 67e, p. 50.

¹⁹⁷ TO, p. 72; p. 60.

the tragic hero is born? With courage but without hope Macbeth does ultimately throw himself into futile battle. Levinas is right to say that this is not an assumption of death in the sense of suicide or surrender of will, even though death is seen clearly to be inevitable. It is, in fact, a futile assumption, tragic in the sense of taking up a struggle one knows one cannot win, hoping against all hope for a last-minute reprieve while knowing it will not come. It is precisely an active response against the passivity to which the inevitability of death would reduce the tragic hero. Levinas's preference for passivity comes to the fore here. Crying and sobbing is but one response to the extreme of pain that would loosen our hold on ourselves by riveting us to ourselves, but it is not the only one. Do we not yet have an admiration for the stalwart perseverance of the tragic hero against all odds? Has the errant posture of the erotic in our day—hence, in Levinas's terms, the posture of the feminine—so blinded us with its darkness that there is nothing left for us to do but cower in the corner sobbing and weeping? I think we must inquire more deeply into Levinas's attitude toward the solitude of separation, for this posturing will generate the whole aim and thrust of his argument concerning responsibility and, ultimately, the epiphany of God-in-the-world that we are seeking through the narrow gate of a transformative theopoetical attitude.

Levinas begins his analysis of the escape *from* the solitude of freedom *to* the sociality of the Other from the position that solitude is predominantly, though not exclusively, a negative aspect of determinate being. Solitude, defined by the materiality of the body, is understood as an oppression and a weight. But what is this problem that seems to be intrinsic to the material basis of individuality? And how are we to account for the experiences of those who choose solitude? Is not the life of knowledge

necessarily a life of solitude, even if carried out in community? It is not the community who confronts the text to be interpreted and understood or the blank page awaiting inscription at the beginning of a beginning that has already begun of a new work. All truly creative work is carried out in solitude. And what about the anchorites, monks, and hermits who had and have a craving for solitude, who can never get enough of it, and all those who strive for perfection in whatever form this might take? Can God be found other than in solitude, a solitude that is only possible because it is a negation of the social world? To excel at something, is this not to separate oneself, to choose solitude, to become one with oneself? Is not the "loneliness at the top" an inevitable aspect of all mastery? Beyond his admitted ambivalence, Levinas views solitude predominantly as a negative. The separation of solitude is not completely negative, to be sure. To be one, to have an identity, such as it is, is to distinguish oneself from anonymity. Distinction is necessary for transcendence, and all distinguishing of oneself thereby involves the separation of solitude. But, for Levinas, a commitment to this enchainment to one's self in a deferral of the genuine salvation of transcendence is an egoistic narcissism (already involving a negative judgment), a deferral of the 'genuine deferral' of being-for-the-Other. Is Levinas's position merely a matter of emphasizing one aspect of the human situation over the other? Can a priority of transcendence over immanence be demonstrated? This will be no simple discernment since the entire investigation of the transcending exteriority of the Other in *Totality and Infinity*, and the responsible subjectivity of the Same in *Otherwise than Being*, is geared toward establishing this.

There is a stubborn tension in Levinas's philosophy between sociality and solitude, between being for-the-other and being a master. Nietzsche's philosophy also

focuses on this dialectic, but with an emphasis on the nobility of mastery. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* can be understood as a kind of 'alternative' handbook for those who would choose the life of solitude, the philosophical life of mastery and virility in the face of death. But is there no final solution to the question of whether solitude is a blessing or a curse? In Levinas's view, solitude is certainly a deprivation, as if there were a state of perfect sociality in some Neoplatonic otherworldliness from which solitude would represent a fall. I want to escape the deprivation of my solitude, yet it is necessary for the achievement and deployment of the power and freedom of individuality, the effacement or circumcision of which would be the very pre-requisite of sociality. The burden of solitude is like an unfortunate side-effect of the achievement of power. If you want power, consciousness, knowledge, the freedom of spontaneity—you must be willing to accept the painful, lonely life of solitude, the solitude of the long-distance runner. This is the curse and the blessing of materiality, the amphibolous goodness and evil of being.

From the very beginning, 'to be' is not a pure good for Levinas. It is a mixed blessing. The amount of solitude that one can manage will determine the amount of mastery that one will be able to achieve. But how can a genuine desire for solitude be possible for Levinas? Levinas is looking for a way beyond death and the vulgarity of this world. He has flunked the 'love of life' test of Nietzsche's "Eternal Return" of the same, a determination based on one's willingness to live one's life over and over again *ad infinitum* exactly as it had been in every detail. Although Levinas subscribes to Nietzsche's understanding of what it means to be a "philosopher of the future," as he makes clear in his article "Meaning and Sense"—at least when the German

philosopher's words come from the mouth of Leon Blum—he does not seem to accept Nietzsche's connection between this understanding of philosophy and the love of life that goes with it. Looking to the beyond, Levinas says that "there is a vulgarity and a baseness in an action that is conceived only for the immediate, that is, in the last analysis, for our life."¹⁹⁸ In another article, "Transcendence and Evil" (1978), which focuses on a text by Philippe Nemo that approaches the question of suffering and death through a phenomenological exegesis of the Biblical story of Job,¹⁹⁹ Levinas distinguishes the "beyond" of his philosophy—in apparent contrast to that critiqued by Nietzsche—as one which "is conceived neither by negation nor by the anxiety the philosophers of existence speak of," i.e., neither as a denial of life nor as a "nostalgia" for absolute being. The horror of evil, ultimately, the tireless anxiety of death, is manifested physically and is not merely a state of mind or an emotion. "Sickness," Levinas asserts, "evil in living, aging, corruptible flesh, perishing and rotting, would be the modalities of anxiety itself; through them and in them dying is as it were lived, and the truth of this death is unforgettable, unimpeachable, irremissible." The evil of physical suffering awakens in the existent, who seems *sought out* by it, "an expectation of the Good, of God...." But this expectation, Levinas says, in the context of "the Nietzschean warning against the spirit of resentment," would not be merely the anticipation of eternal pleasure, "a repayment for evil or vengeance." As Levinas puts it, "the soul which, awakened by evil, is found to be in a relationship with the beyond of the world does not amount to the make-up of a being-in-the-world, an empirical or transcendental consciousness equal to its objects, adequate to being, equal to the world

¹⁹⁸ Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," in CPP, p. 93.

¹⁹⁹ Nemo, Philippe. (1978) *Job et l'exces du Mal* (Paris: Grasset).

in its desires promised to *satisfaction*. The soul beyond satisfaction and recompense expects an awaited that infinitely surpasses expectancy.” In the malignancy and carnal anxiety of concrete suffering, witnessed in the extreme in the horror of the Holocaust, there is revealed "a breakthrough of the Good which is not a simple inversion of Evil, but an elevation."²⁰⁰ Levinas will also find this "elevation" revealed in the face-to-face relation and played out in the transcendence of fecundity. In the infinite and superlative aspect of this beyond, Levinas would free it from a mere sublimation of vengeance. But despite the "infinite" of Levinas's incalculable beyond, is there not yet a denial of life secretly concealed here? In order to gain a clearer understanding of Levinas's deployment of the beyond we must turn to his analysis of temporality in the context of the face-to-face relation, since the status of the beyond found there will be determined by his understanding of the infinite dimension of exteriority.

3. Preliminary Considerations

Death is an ultimate solitude in Levinas's reckoning. It marks the complete effacement of the power and virility of the subject. When death is, I am not; when I am, death is not. Death never takes place in the now. The now, the present, is the point of departure of the self. It is the locus of mastery and solitude. Death is always yet to come. It is an absolute unknown. It is what can never be brought into the light, a darkness of ignorance that cannot be reduced to the illumination of knowledge. Death is unknowable. Unknowability is the very structure of the future. What can be anticipated in the present, the not-yet, is not the future. The future is the ungraspable. It is what is

²⁰⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Evil" in CPP, pp. 178-183.

always a surprise. It is in this sense, that death surprises us, that the time and the hour and the place of our death is unknown to us. That is the futurity of death. In the thoroughness of death, the activity of light is reduced to an absolute passivity. Not merely a passivity that would feed an activity, like the passive dimension of knowledge, but an extreme passivity where all activity and the possibility of activity is overcome. For Heidegger, the acceptance of this ultimate undoing is exactly what made all doing possible. To choose mastery is to necessitate solitude, a little practice of death, as Plato taught. Philosophy itself would be this final practice. It is only in the practice of death that the most complete fulfillment of the self is possible. The more solitude one can endure, the more mastery one can achieve, the more power one can attain. The ultimate solitude is death. To practice death, to have already died to worldly attachments, thought to be illusory from this perspective, would be to have achieved an ultimate power that is not a power struggle within a hierarchy of power but the power of self-mastery that opens the door to every possibility. To have no fear of death makes everything possible. Impossibility is the ground of possibility. But for Levinas, the impossibility of death marks the very end of the possible. The inevitability of one's death is not the challenge of the noble hero but "the limit of the subject's virility," where one is "no longer able to be able." Since the approach of death is unassumable, one's death remains wholly other. This is a disruption of my solitude which already shows a pluralistic dimension to existence. The approach of death shows that there are doors in the monads of Levinas's solitude. In the mystery of death, in its unknowability, Levinas wants to point to the fact that this unknowability shows that the other is not merely an alter ego in "an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy

through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery." The relationship with the other is a futural relationship, one that can never be wholly grasped in the present. Here we begin to see how the notion of time enters into the solitude of the existent: "It seems to me," Levinas says, "to be impossible to speak of time in a subject alone, or to speak of a purely personal duration. The present does not break out toward the future in an *ec-stasis* of possibility, as Heidegger believed. For Levinas, the future, temporality itself, will be constituted by the advent of the Other.

Although the relation of the existent with the otherness of death opens up a certain relationship with the future, death is not a futurity, not a form of exteriority, according to Levinas, that would free the existent from the solitude that follows from the mastery of being in hypostasis. Suffering and death bring an end to the power and the virility of the subject. If death "opens a way out of solitude," Levinas asks, "does it not simply come to crush this solitude, to crush subjectivity itself?"²⁰¹ The kind of alterity that Levinas is looking for is one where the otherness of the Other maintains a relationship with the existent without destroying the separateness of the existent. This is the basis of the whole problematic here. The importance of understanding the existent as radically separate, unto "atheism," is that separateness is the *sine qua non* of relationship. It is exactly in the fact that separateness is lost in the 'relations' of knowledge and enjoyment that precludes the possibility of genuine relationship.

Genuine relationship, inter-subjectivity, necessitates two separate terms. Yet relationship also calls for a connection that must be possible within or across the

²⁰¹ TO, pp. 70-77; pp. 62-65.

distance of separation without destroying the separation. Separation and transcendence must be maintained simultaneously. Ultimately, it will be the separateness of the existent, a withdrawal from the totality of being, which makes possible or is "creative of" or "produces" the relationship with the "infinite" or the exteriority of God-in-the-world, to the extreme extent that in this process, Levinas says, "man redeems creation."²⁰²

Here we come to the heart of the matter once again. But how can this be possible? For Sartre, such intersubjective transcendence was thought to be impossible. *Being and Nothingness* thus reduced love to romantic illusion, on the one hand, and the politics of power on the other. But, as Levinas says in "Diachrony and Representation" (1985), a reflection which shows the question of temporality and transcendence to be at the heart of his philosophy, *it is precisely love that names the transcendence in immanence of sociality with the Other.*²⁰³ That is why the futurity of death is insufficient for establishing genuine exteriority. In Levinas's analysis, it obliterates the present of the existent. But the futurity that will establish a genuine escape from solitude must be one which, while remaining future, is yet somehow present. Only in this way would the existent be able to maintain a relationship with the future without reducing the future to the present of sameness in representation—even as a possibility. As a pure future, the Other always comes as a surprise.

For Heidegger, of course, Dasein is preeminently a futural being. Representing the future would be the very definition of Dasein. The past and the present are always experienced in the context of the yet-to-be. In this sense, we never really live in the

²⁰² TI, p. 104; p. 77.

²⁰³ Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation." in TO, p.108 (emphasis added).

present. We are always caught up in an anxiety about what can become of what has been, of what is possible for us in the future given the limiting determination of what is no longer possible because of the past. Here the past and the present always refer to the future. This analysis is unacceptable for Levinas, however, because the determination of time as the possibility of the impossible is already to have situated time within the framework of knowledge and comprehension. For Levinas, the time of the solitary existent is the pure present. Thus, it is not death that will allow for a satisfactory escape from this pure present of solitude. The escape will come in the existent's relation to the surprising incomprehensibility of the Other. The "situation of the face-to-face," Levinas says in *Time and the Other*, "would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but of the intersubjective relationship."²⁰⁴ But the time instituted in relation with the Other is understood by Levinas to be more fundamental than historical or clock time, even more fundamental than Husserl's *immanent* or inner time.

In "Diachrony and Representation," Levinas focuses on the manner in which the approach of the Other establishes the temporality of intersubjectivity through an analysis of time utilizing the notions of "diachrony" and "synchrony," terms borrowed from linguistic analysis. In the act of representation, the otherness of the Other is reduced to sameness, to the immanent present of the knowledge relation, as we have already seen. This is basically what Levinas means by synchrony: "In thought understood as vision, knowledge, and intentionality, intelligibility thus signifies the reduction of the other (*Autre*) to the Same, synchrony as being in its egological

²⁰⁴ TO, p. 79; p. 69.

gathering." Levinas associates this with the outcome of Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception," the reduction of plurality to unity at the heart of the "I think."²⁰⁵

Synchrony, understood as objective time, is based on a more fundamental notion of time. Synchrony, is derivative of "Diachrony." Diachronous time is understood as precisely the break-up of synchrony, occurring in the approach of the Other. The face of the Other is that which cannot be reduced to an objectively temporal representation, true of all manifestations of exteriority. This is precisely what Levinas means by "sociality." Sociality is the approach of the Other in such a way that a dimension of the otherness of the Other always breaks out of the attempt of consciousness to reduce that Other to the synthesis of an object of thought. Exteriority cannot be a cognitive object. Its essence, perhaps one should say its *essance*, is precisely its non-objectifiability. That is true of the face, in general, as it is with all forms of exteriority which Levinas has uncovered, beginning with the *il y a*. The study of exteriority, which is the declared purpose of *Totality and Infinity*, is the search for those marginal levels of affective, poetic experience which reveal a dimension of a possible relation to the impossible otherness of the Other despite itself, and thus to the infinity or the very passing of infinity, and thus to God-in-the-world here and now ... an entrainment we have been tracking through the pages of this text. The Other cannot be reduced to an object without resuscitating a certain pre-emptive violence to the Other. Inherent in this impossibility, Levinas concludes, there lies the command: *Thou shalt not kill!* That is, thou shalt not reduce to an intentional object, synchronized in the immanent temporality of consciousness where it is possessed as *mine*, that otherness, alterity, or exteriority

²⁰⁵ "Diachrony," in TO, p. 99.

which can be thus reduced only in an act of arrogant violence which preemptively asserts that my right to be, the *conatus essendi* of Spinoza, takes precedence over that of the claim of the Other to be, a narcissistic egoism inherent in all totalitarianism. To the contrary, Levinas asserts, "the right of man is originally the right of the other man and does not coincide with the subtle calculus of totalitarianism."²⁰⁶ The imperative against intellectual and actual murder allows disobedience. But the indigenous imperative remains, not derived from a conception of an absolutely rational consciousness, but from a "shimmer of infinity" ("*ruissellement de l'infini*") that "gleams forth" from the face of the Other as "*la rationalité première*." What becomes visible here is the fundamental importance of separation as a *sine qua non* of theopoetically beholding the infinite dimension of God-in-the-world through the unparalleled horizon of human exteriority. It is precisely the accomplishment of separation that "opens upon the idea of Infinity" at the heart of transformative theopoetics.²⁰⁷

Naturally, in everyday social intercourse with others, a pragmatic objectification of the other is necessary. The everyday face is not the face of the Other. The everyday, visible face is already derivative of an invisible face which, Levinas says, can be "neither seen nor touched," a face that is the presence of an absence, an indecently superlative face.²⁰⁸ But in "everyday life," Levinas asserts, "the solitude and fundamental alterity of the other are already veiled by decency." Here the other is treated like an alter ego. This eradicates the otherness of the Other which makes the Other unique.²⁰⁹ If my

²⁰⁶ Guy Petitdemange et Jacques Rolland, *Autrement que savoir*, including a dialogue with E. Levinas (Paris: Osiris, 1988), p. 61; my translation.

²⁰⁷ TI, pp. 105, 207-208; pp. 78, 182-183.

²⁰⁸ TI, p. 194; p. 168. See also, 1979 Preface to TO, p. 32.

²⁰⁹ TO, p. 83; p. 75.

secretary does not show up for work, I can always arrange to have another secretary temporarily take her place. In the very reduction of the otherness of the Other to the category "secretary," the uniqueness of the Other is lost. Although the face may remain ostensibly naked, it can be 'clothed' by various masks by which its uniqueness, its otherness, is ef-faced. Any perceived face is thus already a mask, as Nietzsche realized. The mask of the visual allows for a certain reciprocity between one individual and another, an interchangeability which functions at the level of the synchrony or sameness of consciousness. The other is here an intentional object. But the kind of alterity Levinas has endeavored to demonstrate is one where alterity appears as a "non-reciprocal relationship," a going out to the Other without a return to oneself. In the sheer nudity of the invisible face, unveiled, purely and indigently open and forthright, vulnerable, without masks and without power—that is where Levinas locates the true alterity of the Other. The alterity revealed in the face-to-face relation with the Other is not graspable. "The face with which the Other turns to me," Levinas says, "is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face." It is precisely this immateriality, invisibility, incommensurateness, incomprehensibility, undeconstructibility ... that 'structures' the interpersonal as asymmetrical.²¹⁰ The "metaphysical" face is poor and indigent when measured by the capital of consciousness, which is basically how Caputo understands the weakness of God.²¹¹ The formula that Levinas often uses to express the radical exteriority or incomprehensibility of the otherness of the Other, and which involves a certain ambiguity, perhaps fecund, between the ontic and the ontological, the visible and the invisible—a tension carried over into the notion of responsibility and which

²¹⁰ TI, p. 215; p. 190.

²¹¹ Caputo, J. (2006). *The Weakness of God*

animates Levinas' work as a whole, as J.-F. Lyotard points out²¹²—ids that the Other is the weak, the poor, "the widow and the orphan," this latter being a formula found frequently in the Hebrew Bible.²¹³ The metaphysical face in which Levinas locates the transcendence of alterity is not that of the *actual* poor person, or the *actual* weak person, although Levinas does seem to shift surreptitiously in and out of such ontic references. It is crucial to Levinas's whole argument for transcendence in *Totality and Infinity* that it be the naked or invisible face of the Other, the face that is beneath every particular perceived form of a face, and not necessarily the face of *that* beggar in the street or *that* lonely widow over there, which disrupts the synchronizing consciousness of the Same. "The face of the Other," Levinas says, "under all the particular forms of expression where the Other, already in a character's skin, plays a role, is just as much pure expression, an extradition without defense or cover, precisely the extreme rectitude of a facing, which, in this nudity, is an exposure unto death: nudity, destitution, passivity, and pure vulnerability. Such is the face as the very mortality of the other person."²¹⁴ The nudity and the vulnerability of the face in its sheer facing, its impoverishment, vulnerability, widowhood... is contrasted with the visible face, whether of a rich or poor person, insofar as the visible face—regardless of the mask it wears—is the locus of the power and wealth of consciousness in its function of grasping and making present.

The distinction between the visible and the invisible, however, does not always seem to be maintained rigorously in Levinas's work. In the context of the responsibility

²¹² *Autrement que savoir*, p. 87.

²¹³ Cohen, R. in TO, p. 83, n. 64; p. 75.

²¹⁴ "Diachrony," in TO, p. 107.

at the heart of sociality, one feels as if one is called upon to act in some way differently than from the uncircumcised, spontaneous freedom of consciousness, but one is not exactly sure what to do about that. Levinas's philosophy seems to call for a change of behavior, but one wonders if, strictly within the bounds of his fundamental philosophy, it can even justify a change of heart. To what extent can the *ursprüngliche Ethik* of the metaphysical situation of pre-conscious contact with the invisible face of the Other be translated into praxis, into practical philosophy? It is exactly here that I dare to think that the conception of a transformative theopoetics that is being presented to you obliquely, dear reader, in these pages, goes beyond Levinas's careful phenomenological descriptions of exteriority to a praxis that will be understood as a personal, prayerful, contemplative spiritual development or metanoia along the lines of the traditional approach to *lectio divina*, that is at the heart of the hermeneutical attitude required toward the interpenetrating, transformative reading of sacred texts.

Despite the vulnerability and indigency which characterizes the otherness of the Other, what we understand as the invisibility of the face—or, perhaps, because of it—the Other, in Levinas's view, approaches the Same from a height, from an imperative position. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas says that it is a soft imperative, a non-violent disruption, a gentle categorical: "the Other precisely reveals himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness."²¹⁵ Later, however, in *Otherwise than Being*, the revelation of alterity is understood as a trauma: "the exposure to another is disinterestedness, proximity, obsession by the neighbor, an obsession despite oneself, that is, a pain." And again: "as a passivity in the paining of

²¹⁵ TI, p. 150; p. 124.

the pain felt, sensibility is a vulnerability, for pain comes to interrupt an enjoyment in its very isolation, and thus tears me from myself."²¹⁶ This difference in the depiction of contact with alterity is related to the fact that *Totality and Infinity* focuses on the dynamics of the Other as exteriority whereas *Otherwise than Being* focuses on the dynamics of the Same as responsibility. The Other approaches the Same from a height, but not from a position of power or force, i.e., necessity. The imperative "curvature of the space," as Levinas calls it, in which relation with the face of the Other is played out is not, as with Kant and other Natural Law proponents, an abstract dictum that would command dutiful obedience of all subjects equally to its neutered universality. In the relation of facing, we are not bound by the impersonal absoluteness of an a priori rational law that would command absolutely. The approach of the Other happens prior to the establishment of freedom and the rationality upon which it is based. It is precisely by means of the curvature of space between me and the other that response-ability is established as more fundamental than the relations of knowledge and pleasure. The imperative height of the Other is located in the poverty of the Other's incommensurateness. The Other "does not only appear in his face," Levinas says, "as a phenomenon subject to the action and domination of a freedom; infinitely distant from the very relation he enters, he presents himself there from the first as an absolute." It is precisely by virtue of this height of incommensurateness, born of a poverty in contrast to the wealth of consciousness and knowledge, that the approach of the Other obligates me. It is the orientation between the Same and the Other that produces the ethical situation of responsibility and not any psychological disposition I might or might not have

²¹⁶ OB, p. 55; pp. 70-71. See also, "Humanism and An-archy," in CPP, p. 133: "The other ... imputes ... responsibility ... as a traumatism...."

toward some particular person. Here is the whole thesis of *Totality and Infinity* in a nutshell: "The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it, (and which cannot arise without this orientation)" Levinas says, "summarizes the theses of the present work."²¹⁷ In the closing pages of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas encapsulates the central importance of this "curvature of intersubjective space," at the heart of the response-ability for-the-other (anticipating his future work) in his assertion that this epiphanic, disruptive approach of the Other "is, perhaps, the very presence of God" manifested in the mystical moment of the intersubjective relationship of response-ability and which will be shown to be the central purpose and accomplishment of transformative, theopoetical reading.²¹⁸

The metaphysical, ethical height from which the Other approaches me shows why Levinas does not mean by the notion of "face" the visualized, perceived, or empirically sensed face of the other. The face of the Other, in Levinas's metaphysical sense, is not something we can see, which would already place it in the realm of consciousness and the politics of power. Levinas's establishment of the possibility of a pre-cognitive, sensible contact with invisible exteriority in the face-to-face relation, necessarily infinite, is the ground and foundation of what he means by the ethical and, as such, is the advent or epiphany of God—the infinitely beyond, *par excellence*—in the world. Relationship with the invisible is relationship with an otherness irreducible to a concept of otherness. Invisible exteriority is thus already not merely a revelation of God

²¹⁷ TI, p. 215 / p. 190.

²¹⁸ TI, p. 291 / p. 267.

understood conceptually as the Absolutely Other, i.e., mistakenly, as a being, but precisely as "other than the other." In "God and Philosophy" Levinas puts it this way:

Ethics is not a moment of being; it is otherwise and better than being. In this ethical reversal ... God is drawn out of objectivity, presence and being. He is never an object or an interlocutor. His absolute remoteness, his transcendence, turns into my responsibility—non-erotic par excellence—for the other. And this analysis implies that God is not simply the "first other," the "other par excellence," or the "absolutely other," but other than the other (*autre qu'autrui*), other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical bond with another and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of possible confusion with the stirring of *there is*.²¹⁹

Perhaps we should speak of 'levels' of invisibility. Exteriority is invisibility in the sense that the Good, for Plato, is beyond being and nothingness. It is this trace aspect of the face which cannot be reduced to the visual, and which thus escapes every thematization. This is not merely a problem of the insufficiency of *Abschattungen*, the limitation of perspectives, but a hearkening back to the ground of *Erlebnisse* in the *Urimpression* where that which is sensed always overflows the sensing of it in the dynamics of the instant. This returns us to a consideration of time. The temporality of the face, however, must be understood more radically than Husserl's notion of protention and retention,²²⁰ more radically than what Bergson meant by "duration" or concrete time.²²¹ In the final analysis, Levinas is critical of the notion of concrete or lived

²¹⁹ Levinas, "God and Philosophy" in CPP. pp. 165-166.

²²⁰ "Diachrony," in TO, p. 102.

²²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Old and the New," in TO, p. 129.

time and time understood as duration because he finds that these are ultimately constituted within the framework of intentionality, although they do begin to indicate the more fundamental notion of time that Levinas finds revealed in the exteriority of the approach of the Other. Levinas makes it clear again here, however, that he is not "denouncing the intentional structure of thought" in opposing the diachrony of the face to the synchrony of thought. His argument is only meant to show that the temporality revealed in the face-to-face relation of sociality is *more fundamental* than the temporality that is a measurement of the movement between regular points.²²² This is a temporality which hearkens back to what Levinas calls an "immemorial" or an-archic past and which transcends itself toward a pure or infinite future, i.e., toward God.²²³ It is, in fact, both from God and toward God. This is the whole thesis, not only of the infinity of responsibility but also of its priority.

To summarize, the subject that we know is a visible or intentional object constituted 'from' the invisible dimension of the Other to which we are related before we know it. Metaphysics, in Levinas's view, deals with invisible or non-objective 'objects'; invisibility would be the very definition of infinity. The totality of being or the absoluteness of consciousness reaches a limit point in the approach of the invisible dimension of the Other, an approach which is a withdrawal, the presence of an absence, a 'that' whose 'thatness' is precisely the fact that it will not become a this or a that. Here is relation with the infinite exteriority of the Other, a sensitive responding to the command expressed in the invisible exteriority of the Other not to kill, even though

²²² "Old and New" in TO, pp. 129-30.

²²³ "Diachrony," in TO, pp. 111-116.

every thematization involves a little death, a violence to the purity of the invisible object, an overpowering of diachrony by synchrony, unless an indigenous poetic moment would be possible. The primordial temporality revealed in the face-to-face relation with the Other who faces me, breaks through the solitude of the separate being, coming from a height, while yet not obliterating that solitude, thus coming from a poverty by posing a challenge to the synthesizing process that is at the heart of separation and its freedom. The incomprehensibility of the face of the Other reveals itself as a desire that cannot be fulfilled, a desire which, unlike a need, cannot return to the existent in the immanence of *satisfaction*.²²⁴ This is the very structure of response-ability. Having established that the exteriority of the Other necessarily poses a challenge to the sameness of representation, Levinas then moves to the argument that this response-ability is fundamentally ethical. It is ethical insofar as it disrupts, critiques, or challenges the tendency toward absolutism, dogmatism, and totalitarianism which Levinas sees inherent in conscious, positive thought itself. The invisible, *de facto*, poses a challenge to the visible, its very invisibility marking the limit of the visible. The invisible is beyond every essence. Thus, it is the very invisible exteriority of exteriority that bespeaks the "Thou shalt not kill." That human being is more fundamentally an ethical being than a knowing, representing being, follows from the establishment of this invisible dimension revealed in the face of the Other who approaches me. But is the invisible the proper domain of philosophy, where philosophy is understood in the context of light and illumination?

²²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Transcendence et intelligibilité*, (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1984), pp. 14-15.

4. Conclusion

The possibility of escape from solitude, if, indeed, it is something from which escape is necessary or possible, is situated in the extreme passivity of the subject as a separate being. The incarnate individuality of separation, understood as sensual materiality, involves not only mastery and action, but also passion and being acted upon. The sovereign subject is undone by the 'enslaved' subject in a dialectical movement not unlike that of Hegel's master/slave analysis, with its unexpected reversal. And yet this undoing is a response on the part of the Same. It is from this perspective that responsibility is understood as response-ability. It is a sensitivity prior to every thought, and upon which thought arises. It is this by virtue of the very nature of the invisibility of the face of the Other. But this is an invisibility which leaves traces of itself in passing, so that one can see 'it' through an oblique, phenomenological-poetic analysis.

The face-to-face relation is ethical since, by its very nature, the invisible poses a challenge, a limit situation, for the visible. The revelation of the invisible in the face-to-face relation is thus a revelation of the infinite. And since God is the infinitely other or "other otherwise," it is a revelation of God. Such is the ontological force of the invisible. Philosophy here becomes a phenomenological theology and, out of the impetus of Levinas's work, will give rise to what has been called the theological turn in French Phenomenology.²²⁵ Response-ability is thus understood as a responding to this infinite dimension, this absolute unknowability of the Other, this presence of an absence. And

²²⁵ *Transcendance et intelligibilité*, p. 25.

this responding to the Other, prior to any thought or any choice on my part, is ethical to the extent that, by the very nature of the situation, totalizing, representational thought confronts its limit. The referencing and realization of this limit defines the ethical. The ethical dimension of invisibility is that it inherently involves a skeptical critique of the totalitarian pretensions inherent in thought. But is not the extreme passivity that Levinas locates in the paradoxical instant of beginning as well as that of response-ability, fundamentally equivocal and ambiguous, like the feminine, an active passivity that is a passive activity? In pointing to the prior contract of the hypostasis and the reversal of bodily 'intentionality' as the seeds of a contestation to the prerogative of representation, is Levinas not already involved in a wholesale begging of the question at the base of his analysis, as I have suggested previously? Is there not a problem of evidence here? Are Levinas's analyses anything more than poetry passing in the guise of philosophy, and is this a problem or the possibility of a new beginning? Can the poetic be philosophical? Is not philosophy properly situated in the light of day, whereas the poetic would have us see what cannot be seen? Is the 'freedom of beginning' at the basis of responsibility merely the initial stirring of a utopian, poetic philosophy that would be a call for peace and justice in a world where all the evidence is to the contrary? Has Levinas proven anything or is this merely an impassioned plea to hammer the weapons of war into ploughshares of peace? Is Levinas doing anything more than bringing out the other side of the Nietzschean/Heideggerian position? For Nietzsche, as for Heidegger and Sartre, the escape from solitude is a fall into the everydayness of the herd and its inauthenticity. For Levinas, solitude is something we want to escape from. Is this not already the position of the slave? What distinguishes the noble from the slave is exactly the

difference in their relation to solitude. Is this not also the difference between what Christianity would call the average person and the saint? By contesting Levinas's weighting of the negative aspects of separation and solitude, however, I have tried to offset the tendency to interpret the ethical situation as a greater power than the epistemological or ontological situation. The ethical situation Levinas is describing is prior to the distinctions and judgments of power. Worldly power is a category of the political, and hence of normative morality. In a sense, the ethical situation Levinas describes has no force. In fact, as a preconscious event, it never takes place or happens at all. Its essence is always already a deconstructionist deferral. Its power lies in its lack of power. This is the way of the feminine. The understanding of responsibility at this level must be distinguished from the responsibility implied in the rational use of freedom. The responsibility established by the face-to-face relation is a response-ability. That is all Levinas really needs to establish, since it would follow from the strictures of invisibility that this response-ability is, *in a fundamental sense*, ethical. There is always a danger of allowing the perception of this peculiar pre-thematic situation to slip into categories and representations and then to turn these representations into moral prescriptions. But this would not follow from what Levinas has established here. The ethical would stand over and against the moral as its origin, to the degree that the moral is a category of the same, a representation; whereas the very ethicality, if one may so speak, of the ethical is precisely the fact that it cannot become a representation. Levinas himself must struggle against the natural desire to be edifying. Or does he not follow this Hegelian dictum?

CHAPTER 12

Of God Who Comes to Being-for-the-Other

1. Introduction: Levinas and the Tradition

As I have endeavored to show throughout previous chapters, Levinas is critical of philosophies that define the subject by recourse to freedom, knowledge, or self-consciousness. His primary reason for this sweeping critique is that it leads to the insurmountable problem of accounting for intersubjectivity otherwise than through the politics of power, domination, and self-interest. This is undoubtedly the fulcrum of his critique of the entire history of Western philosophy and what leads him to assert that it was the civilization of transcendental idealism that led to the horror of the Holocaust.²²⁶

Whereas it is certainly true, as Kant pointed out in his second Critique, that freedom is the necessary postulate for the possibility of conscious moral behavior, it is this same primacy of freedom, in Levinas's view, that mitigates against genuine transcendence toward the Other, as we have seen. The issue of solipsism is not only a problem for understanding interpersonal human relations, but for understanding the relation of the human to the divine as well. What sense would it make to assert that God is “in” me or that I am “in” God—where “in” references a paradoxical, unthematizable proximity or transcendence-in-immanence—within anything other than a theopoetic frame of reference? It becomes manifestly clear, for example, in Sartre's a-

²²⁶ Poirié, François. (1987) *Emmanuel Levinas: Qui êtes-vous?* Lyon: La Manufacture, p. 84.

theistic, phenomenological ontology, where subjectivity is defined as radical freedom and intersubjectivity is thus reduced to mutual manipulation and a power struggle for domination between beings who are fundamentally for-themselves. With that set of sovereign presuppositions, any genuine *relation* with a transcendent God is consequently out of the question. From the perspective of the problem of intersubjectivity, Sartre's ontology of being and nothingness can be understood as the existential culmination of the tradition of transcendental idealism. Robert Solomon makes such a claim in *Continental Philosophy Since 1750*.²²⁷ Solomon views the tradition of transcendental idealism as a sustained preoccupation with the self, a preoccupation with the "rise and fall of the self." Focusing on the interaction of Enlightenment rationalism and romantic intuitionism joined by their humanistic concern for the individual, Solomon characterizes the 'Self'-preoccupation of the idealistic tradition as an egocentric "transcendental pretense" that began with Rousseau's solitary walks in the woods, was elaborated systematically by Kant, reached an apotheosis with Hegel, was reinterpreted phenomenologically by Husserl, Heidegger, and the French existentialists, and which is currently under attack by the relativistic back-lash of 'post-modern' thinkers such as Levinas, Foucault, Derrida, Caputo, and others. "Fully developed," Solomon says, "the transcendental pretense has two central components: first, the remarkable inner richness and expanse of the self, ultimately encompassing everything; and secondly, the consequent right to project from the subjective structures of one's own mind, and ascertain the nature of humanity as such," resulting in a "cosmic

²²⁷ Solomon, Robert C. (1988) *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, in *A History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 173.

self-righteousness."²²⁸ The tone of Solomon's critical text clearly suggests that he thinks this focus on the self involves an arrogant, male-dominated, egoistic, patriarchal phallocentrism which we are better off being done with. Except for a "Supplement" that outlines the post-modern attack on the transcendental pretense, Solomon gives the last word in his text to Simone de Beauvoir who, he says, "starts to move beyond Sartre ... in her keen awareness of the importance of caring for others and respecting their freedom."²²⁹ But, from the perspective of Levinas's analysis, it is clear that even in this call for equal respect and concern among free individuals, Beauvoir is still operating within Sartre's ontology of being and nothingness and is thus inevitably *promoting* the transcendental pretense, albeit in a feminized version.

Levinas is not even mentioned in Solomon's book. This is an unfortunate oversight because Levinas's theory of subjectivity involves a unique and thoroughgoing critique of the transcendental pretense Solomon has identified. Levinas should be situated with one foot in and the other beyond Solomon's "Supplement." His critique of the Absolute Self or the Transcendental Ego of idealism is post-modern in the sense that it involves a deflection and deferral of the egocentricity of universalizing the self, but it is radically different from the relativistic orientation of other post-modern thinkers in that Levinas's de-positioning of the transcendental pretense is accomplished through an ethical orientation, the one-for-the-Other by which subjectivity is defined, as we have seen. Levinas thus goes beyond the mere call for tolerance of and equality with the Other as this is found in the concept of intersubjectivity of thinkers such as Buber,

²²⁸ Solomon, pp. 1-2; p. 41.

²²⁹ Solomon, p. 193.

Marcel, and de Beauvoir and reflected in Solomon. Their work represents a healthy move toward deflating any arrogance that may haunt the transcendental pretense but, in Levinas's view, these thinkers do not go far enough.

It is not merely a matter of one freedom respecting another freedom. For Levinas, this is a secondary, political matter derivative of a more fundamental ethical situation where I am called to be responsible for every other freedom with no claim that any other should be responsible for me, as we have seen. The fact that Levinas's critique of the transcendental pretense is completely overlooked by Solomon shows how inadequately the thoroughgoing radicality of Levinas's thought is currently understood, as Professor Levinas himself pointed out to me in a personal conversation at his home in Paris in 1989.²³⁰ It is not only the thought but, more importantly, the practice that counts. The subjectivity of the subject is defined by an inexhaustible and non-thematizable responsibility for the Other, for all Others, prior to any consciousness of my responsibility consequent upon the establishment of my freedom. In *Otherwise than Being* the phenomenological analyses brought forward to support this claim constellate around the notions of "proximity" and "substitution, notions developed from a radical interpretation of "sensibility" understood as a non-thematizable "vulnerability" indigenous to embodiment or incarnation: "a passivity more passive still than any passivity," to use one of Levinas's favorite formulas for expressing his radical understanding of the exteriority of subjectivity (OB, p. 72 / p. 91). Levinas arrives at his highly original interpretation of sensation from a phenomenological analysis of the interaction binding together language, time, and being—an interaction to which we were

²³⁰ Walsh, R. "A personal interview with Emmanuel Levinas," Paris, France, 26 March 1989.

introduced in our review of his description of the hypostasis in *Existence and Existents*. The linguistic turn to this argument first arises in *Totality and Infinity* where response to the Other is understood as "expression" and "signification," the giving of myself to the Other without calculation. This leads to the important distinction worked out in *Otherwise than Being* between "the said" ("*le dit*") and "the saying" ("*le dire*") or the "already said" ("*deja dit*") (OB, p. 37 / p. 47), discussed earlier. The response of uncalculating and unpremeditated expression is here understood as a *substitution* for the Other, a "being held hostage" by the Other, an "expiation" for the Other which accounts for the priority of responsibility. In sum, then, the primary concern of the present chapter is to show how Levinas justifies his argument for describing the priority of responsibility and epiphany of God-in-the-world as the foundation of subjectivity from his analysis of language, being, time, and sensation expressed as proximity and substitution.

There are two, not necessarily distinct, outcomes of Levinas's understanding of subjectivity as an *a priori* response-ability. The first involves a practical concern for the establishment of peace and justice in the world. In Levinas's view, how one understands subjectivity will make a difference as to how one approaches this task: "It is then not without importance to know if the egalitarian and just State in which man is to be fulfilled ... proceeds from a war of all against all, or from the irreducible responsibility of the one for all..." (OB 159 / 203). The second outcome is more theologically oriented: a concern for establishing the essential relationship between the human and the divine, as we have already seen indicated in our analysis of exteriority in previous chapters and which

is attested to by Levinas's later works, *De Dieu qui vient a l'idee*²³¹ and *Transcendance et intelligibilité*²³². In *De Dieu qui vient a l'idee*, Levinas says that to ask "if God can be expressed in a rational discourse which would be neither ontology nor faith is implicitly to doubt the formal opposition ... between the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, invoked in faith without philosophy, and the god of the philosophers. It is to doubt that this opposition constitutes an alternative."²³³ To understand subjectivity as a radically passive, theopoetic response to the infinity or impossible possibility of God revealed in the otherness of the Other, a responsiveness prior to consciousness or the possibility of free commitment, is to understand human intersubjective subjectivity as being held essentially in the theopoetic grip of the Go(o)d that Plato locates beyond Being, i.e., to understand human being fundamentally as *being-called-by-God* which, for some, is not radical enough.²³⁴ Response-ability, as I have strived to show in these pages, is thus a response-ability to an imperative *call* manifested as *the thought of the Infinite in us*—a notion Levinas adopts from Descartes' "Third Meditation" where it is brought forward as a proof for the existence of God since there could be no other explanation except an infinite or "omni" God for such a thought appearing in my consciousness, since I could not have put it there. The idea of the Infinite in us is a thought that thinks more than it thinks and, thus, a thought that could not have been generated out of our finitude.²³⁵ "It

²³¹ Levinas, E. (1986) *De Dieu qui vient a l'idee*. 1982; reprint ed., Paris: J. Vrin.

²³² Levinas, E. (1984) *Transcendance et intelligibilité*. Geneve: Labor et Fides.

²³³ "God and Philosophy," CPP 155 / DDQV 96-97.

²³⁴ Caputo, J. *The Folly of God*, p. the call...

²³⁵ "Transcendance et intelligibilité," pp. 23-24.

is then an idea signifying with a signifyingness prior to presence," Levinas says, "prior to every origin in consciousness and thus an-archic, accessible in its trace."²³⁶

Levinas's radical theory of the priority of responsibility establishes the one-for-the-Other as an an-archic 'non-foundation'. It is a movement prior to being by which a subject comes to be subject. It is a pre-thematic *call* from God which opens humanity. But a secondary sense of responsibility creeps into Levinas's work surreptitiously, one which comes after the establishment of freedom but is yet somehow ambiguously connected to the prior sense of responsibility. For example, in the same passage where Levinas says that responsibility is "a passivity more passive still than any passivity ... which is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat," he also says that "for this one has to first enjoy one's bread." The reason for this is not so that one would "have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart...?" A few paragraphs later, however, he says that "it is not a gift of the heart..."²³⁷ The ego of enjoyment is not yet the self, the "me" of responsibility but what is disrupted by the approach of the Other. It is precisely the ego of enjoyment that exercises the freedom of spontaneity. But Levinas wants to argue that ethical responsibility is prior to freedom, that it *founds* freedom, and yet it would seem that the ego of enjoyment precedes responsibility insofar as it is disrupted by it. How are we to understand this equivocation? Is it productive or does it render Levinas's theory meaningless, academic poetry rather than a genuine transformative theopoetics? Should Levinas be held to the principle of non-contradiction when it is precisely this that his work seeks to disrupt and undermine? Is it

²³⁶ "God and Philosophy," CPP, p. 161 / DDQV, p. 107.

²³⁷ OB, p. 37 / p. 47.

not clear, despite the poetic equivocation, what Levinas is doing, what his *message* is? And is this not the point of his whole work, that there is yet a 'clarity' beyond clarity, an ethical 'clarity' that is exactly the skeptical and illogical dissembling that thwarts by a kind of Derridean deferral the attempt of all logic to reduce it to a meaning that satisfies once and for all?

How is it possible that the "non-thematizable provocation" of responsibility, situated prior to consciousness, freedom, and knowledge as a radical, affective passivity, nevertheless has the power to impose a moral obligation that is conscious and thematizable. What is the cash value, as William James would say, of Levinas's understanding of the priority of responsibility as the subjectivity of the subject and the locus of God's appearance in the world? Does not the absolute passivity of responsibility preclude the possibility of meaningful action? Is Levinas' theory of responsibility merely another monstration of the eternal return of skepticism, a utopianism masquerading as fundamental ethics, a passionate call for recognition of the 'good woman' of affectivity as the silent and *a priori* foundation of the 'great man' of thought? If Levinas's analysis of responsibility involves a chiasmic ambivalence which, when looked at from one direction, appears as an incommensurable surplus of metaphysical desire and a passivity more passive than any past, but, when looked at from another direction, becomes an edifying sermon on hammering the weapons of war into the ploughshares of peace, on giving away all that is "mine" and following in the way of the Lord, can it be accepted as meaningful philosophy rather than passionate homiletics? Or is there a message in the very performance of Levinas's theory of

responsibility itself that demonstrates without demonstrating what is the proper task of philosophy?

2. The Primacy of Response-ability

Levinas's philosophical efforts can be viewed synthetically as a sustained and ever-deepening investigation into the nature, meaning and significance of subjectivity, the tracks of which we have been traced into the intersubjective origin of subjectivity as response-ability in Levinas's phenomenology and how a poetic language was necessary to articulate this radical and unprecedented redefining of what it means to be human, forged from a thinking-through of the history of Western philosophy under the influence and inspiration of the Biblical tradition of Judaism. It is impossible, however, as Levinas fully realizes, even to pose the question of the nature of subjectivity without presupposing within that question an understanding of essence and the ontological distinction between Being and beings in which essence is manifested, i.e as an understanding of exactly that which, in his approach to the meaning of subjectivity, Levinas is intent upon questioning beyond.²³⁸ Thus, in stating the saying of Levinas's said in my said, I immediately find myself faced with the tripartite problem of language, time, and being which, as I have tried to show from the beginning of this study, is a concern of central importance to Levinas's understanding of the priority of responsibility, and thus to subjectivity understood as responsibility, and thus to the epiphany of God-in-the-world and the formulation of a transformative theopoetics. Prior to the understanding of human being as freedom, consciousness, or the power to know—

²³⁸ In *Otherwise than Being* the term 'essence' (or 'essance') refers to the 'being' of the ontological distinction and not to quiddity. See Levinas's Introductory note at OB, p. xl / p. ix.

indeed, prior to the understanding of human being as *being*, reduced to the presence of a comprehensible term, i.e., a said—*to be human is to be for-the-Other*. That is the most basic, driving insight. In *Otherwise than Being*, recapitulating, but deepening, his earlier work, Levinas begins his argument for the priority of responsibility with an analysis of the relation joining language, being, and time to the understanding of subjectivity. This analysis is approached through the distinction between the saying and the said which hearkens back to the amphibological progression from the 'verbality' of the verb to the nominalization of the noun that we first came across in the discussion of hypostasis. Hypostasis indicates the amphibology or coming-to-be of the subject (but before it gets there), a process which Levinas compared to the 'verbality' of lived life becoming nominalized as experience.

The distinction between saying and the said focuses on how being is temporalized in language. According to Levinas's analysis, it is possible to find in this linguistic instantiation which constitutes experience properly so-called, an 'origin' or a past, on the "hither side" of the said, that is not recuperable by consciousness or representable in language and yet which is affectively 'experienceable' pre-thematically and is revealed as a poetic "resounding" as opposed to a "designation"—i.e., a saying which opens out into an "immemorial past" on the one hand and indicates a "pure future" on the other and which is 'located' at the living heart of subjectivity. Although this immemorial or unthematizable past can never be fully represented in language, it can be approached in the ambiguity of the non-representational 'intentionality' of "sensitivity" which Levinas describes in *Otherwise than Being* as a "proximity," a being inspired by the Other, an identity-in-difference, a "substitution" that is "the irreducible paradox of

intelligibility" or of the rationality which would define subjectivity. What Levinas is arguing is that subjectivity is grounded in a pre-conscious affectivity of intersubjectivity, where intersubjectivity is not understood as the interaction of two already existent beings but as the non-thematizable response of responsibility on the part of the Same to the invisible infinity or epiphany of God-in-the-world revealed in the alterity of the Other prior to the thematization of this alterity. In his analysis of language, being, and time, Levinas shows that sense is not exhausted by the meaning represented, i.e., made present in the said of language. This epistemological critique necessarily involves a critique of the nature of the knower as well. The production of meaning in or as language is a function of the ontological distinction by virtue of which the meaningful is instantiated as a said. This coming-to-presence has a temporal structure: the present of the presence of being's essence brought to light in the said is inscribed within a horizontal comprehension of the past and the future. Subjectivity, understood as thinking being, is thus defined within the parameters of this "amphibology" of the temporalization of being.

The Husserlian/Heideggerian conception of what is meaningful does not exhaust all the possibilities of meaning and is insufficient for understanding the deepest meaning of subjectivity. Subjectivity is more than a thinking being constituted in the context of the finitude which guides the manifestation of essence defining thought. "Does the fact of showing oneself," Levinas asks, "exhaust the sense of what does indeed show itself, but, being non-theoretical, does not function, does not signify as a monstration?"²³⁹ Levinas's answer is that the manifestation of essence in the said of language does not

²³⁹ OB 67 / 84.

exhaust itself in what is manifested. His argument for this critique is generated from an analysis of sensibility. In the ambiguity of sensibility, the unity in distinction of sensing and the sensed prior to thematization in the said, Levinas locates an "already said," a pre-thematic "saying" from which the said is constituted but which is never fully recuperable by the said, a language of signification prior to the signs which represent it: "It is through the *already said* that words, elements of a historically constituted vocabulary, will come to function as signs and acquire a usage, and bring about the proliferation of all the possibilities of vocabulary."²⁴⁰ All the possibilities of vocabulary do not exhaust the meaning of the human. "If a man were only a saying correlative with the logos, subjectivity could as well be understood as a function or as an argument of being. But the signification of saying goes beyond the said." In the said of language, being, an entity, is separated from its essence: *this* is understood as *that*, the basic structure of all thought and the production of meaning that Levinas calls "the amphibology in which being and entities can be understood," the light of knowledge made possible by the temporalization of time (OB 42 / 54). But, Levinas says, "the entity that appears identical in the light of time *is* its essence in the already said," not as a comprehensible synthesis, but as an identity in difference, a surplus of meaning that goes beyond the thought that would think it (OB, p. 37 *lp.* 48). Levinas's understanding of subjectivity is generated out of this understanding of the signifyingness of saying prior to its temporalization in language as a said. But how can a signification that is prior to the said itself be said? Only in the approach and response-able welcome of the Other.

²⁴⁰ OB 37 / 47.

Levinas's argument for the priority of responsibility begins with a critique of the assertion that the meaningful is limited to the coming to presence of being in propositional language. His basis for this is derived from an analysis of temporality not exhausted by the three moments thematizing time. To move beyond this strictly cognitive understanding of time he appeals to an interpretation of sensibility and, particularly, to the ambiguity of the lived experience of sensing and the sensed: "a thermal, gustative or olfactory sensation is not primarily a cognition of pain, a savor, or an odor." It is true that it can become a cognition "by losing its own sense, becoming an experience of..., a consciousness of.... But then it is already a saying correlative with and contemporary with a said" (OB 65 / 81-82). Before sensation becomes thematized in a representation it is a way of being in the world, is lived bodily before it is experienced or 'known' representationally. Although Husserl's pioneering work regarding the phenomenology of sensation set the stage for this understanding of a non-recuperable or immemorial temporality, Husserl was never able to realize the full implications of his work, according to Levinas, because he was still under the influence of a desire for pure knowledge reminiscent of the very scientific empiricism of which he was critical. All affectivity and axiological considerations were thought to be subject to the doxic thesis of theoretical consciousness—the basis of Levinas's charge of the primacy of theory in Husserl's phenomenology: "Despite the great contribution of Husserl's philosophy to the discovery, through the notion of non-theoretical intentionality, of significations other than those of appearing, and of the subjectivity as a source of significations, defined by this upsurge and connection of meanings, a fundamental analogy is constantly affirmed by Husserl between the cognitive

consciousness of..., on the one hand, and axiological or practical intentions, on the other." Thus, sensation, for Husserl, is thought to participate in the meaningful "only inasmuch as it is animated by intentionality, or constituted according to the schema of theoretical consciousness of..." (OB 65 / 82).

Wanting to support his theory of constitution, as presented in the early chapters of this text, sensation is understood by Husserl as an organizing receptivity. But Levinas argues that before sensation is an animation in the sense of an organizing receptivity, it is first a *vulnerability* to the Other, a passivity in the sense of a capability of being wounded, a capability of enjoyment, and "an exposure to wounding in enjoyment." This defines the "psyche," not as a synthesizing activity of apperception in the Kantian sense, but as "a peculiar dephasing, a loosening up or unclamping of identity" (OB 64-68 / 81-86). This animation by the Other is what Levinas means by proximity. Proximity is not spatial contiguity. It is a process of approach that is guided by no concept of proximity which could be represented in "the consciousness a being would have of another being that it would judge to be near inasmuch as the other would be under one's eyes or within one's reach, and inasmuch as it would be possible for one to take hold of that being, hold on to it or converse with it, in the reciprocity of handshakes, caresses, struggle, collaboration, commerce, conversation." Proximity is a vulnerability to the Other prior to this consciousness, where consciousness, which is consciousness of a possible, power, freedom, would then have already lost proximity properly so called..." (OB 83 / 104). Thus, Levinas says, "animation can be understood as an exposure to the other, the passivity of the for-the-other in vulnerability, which refers to maternity, which sensibility signifies." Sensibility, as vulnerability prior to receptivity,

signifies maternity in that maternity is "bearing par excellence," bearing "even responsibility for the persecuting of the persecutor." The psyche, as animation, is a giving over of oneself prior to the intentionality of giving. Animation, as sensibility, is non-cognitive signification in the form of being one-for-the-other in proximity and vulnerability; a passivity more passive than any knowledge of representation; it is vulnerability and exposure to outrage, pain and suffering for the Other prior to any thought about all of this (OB, 71-105 / 89-133). Thus understood, sensation would be the very locus of Levinas's an-archical metaphysics, as described in the first chapter of this study. It would be the very origin of his interpretation of subjectivity as responsibility and, ultimately, the living chiasm in and by which God can come into the world where the interests of a phenomenological hermeneutics or a phenomenological theology meet the interests of the contemplative approach to prayerful reading known as *lectio divina*, especially the subjective attitude and posture of the aspiring theopoetical hermeneut approaching the sacred text in hope of meeting God there, in hope of hearing the voice of God speaking personally to herd from between the lines of the text.

Consciousness then, in the context of Levinas's analysis of temporality and sensibility, is, so to speak, a play of representations where being is won and lost. Consciousness is the result of the process of representing or re-presenting being in a thought which purports to be equal to itself, a self-knowledge in the Hegelian sense of self-consciousness, a knowing of oneself that equals who one is, despite the fact that this thought in reality is never able to catch up with itself and is, rather, a "recurrence" or repetition, as Kierkegaard envisioned this. Nevertheless, the supposed identity of consciousness is employed as the measure of freedom. Understood as identity,

consciousness cannot be passive, and in not being passive, consciousness is defined as freedom, i.e., knowledge in the sense of that which is clear and distinct and thus as that which is reliable as a determination for freedom, but a reliability which, as the result of the domination and sublimation of its object inherent in representational knowledge, is in actuality a false security since this throws self-consciousness back upon itself as its own origin—Sartre's sense of being "condemned" to be free. Consciousness is the freedom of domination, a freedom which defines itself by its spontaneity and its not being dominated in return. For consciousness, responsibility is measured by how free one is, where responsibility does not extend beyond consciousness; it is limited to one's freedom, i.e., one's very consciousness of the extent and power of one's consciousness—self-consciousness. But the fact that the "oneself" that would be an identity is actually a recurrence or repetition guided by the temporalization of time, indicates a passivity in consciousness: "the oneself has not issued from its own initiative," Levinas concludes, "as it claims in the plays and figures of consciousness on the way to the unity of an Idea" (OB 105 / 133). And there could be no passivity in consciousness unless there were something other than consciousness to which consciousness could be passive.

The philosophy of consciousness and of freedom as defined from the equality with itself of conscious knowledge, fails to recognize the origin of consciousness in that which is other, absolutely other than itself. In failing to recognize the otherness of the Other it remains trapped, as Sartre put it, in-itself / for-itself. Consciousness and freedom cannot account for exteriority. Consciousness must be affected by 'something' that is given before forming an image of what is coming to it, affected in spite of itself

prior to itself. This being affected prior to the event of the consciousness of being affected is like a *persecution* in that it assaults us prior to or against our will. It is like an *obsession* in that it takes hold of me before there is a 'me' to resist. It is like a *substitution* for the Other in that I am inspired by the Other before I know it. "It is as though persecution by another were at the bottom of solidarity with another." Here there is an identity in duality that cannot be overcome by the Hegelian dialectic which would reduce subjectivity to substance. The "oneself," the identity of a subject, is never fully exposed in a theme, in a being or entity as essence; for the essence of essence is time, recurrence. The recurrence of the "oneself" in subjectivity is not presence, Levinas argues, but an "exile," an "explosion or fission." The *oneself* of consciousness does not constitute itself but is *hypostasized* as responsibility. Responsibility is thus understood as an *accusation* of the self by the Other, an "election" before commitment would be possible, an assignation where "the subject is accused in its skin" like a "sound that would be audible only in its echo" (OB 102-105 /130-133).

Being obsessed by the Other strips the self-centered, enjoying ego of its pride, its self-containment, its illusory equality with itself in the satisfaction-seeking play of consciousness, its freedom understood as spontaneity. The ego of enjoyment is an ego which admits of a responsibility that is merely the guarantee of its freedom, a limited responsibility which, in the egoism of its self-reference and its concern for stability, cancels or effaces itself as genuine responsibility that is a giving of oneself to the Other, being-for-the-Other. Obsession is to be under accusation by the Other for me to respond, to *do* something, to bring about justice in the relationship between all persons, which would be peace. The process that would lead to peace begins when the "ipseity"

of the self-conscious ego of enjoyment is shocked or traumatized into the realization that in its spontaneity and its dependence upon the objects which provide that enjoyment, its actions injure, take the bread from another's mouth, reduce the Other to an object of consciousness, an object of use. This objective reduction of the Other accomplished at arm's length prevents the objectifying consciousness itself from the metanoia that is authentic subjectivity, surrendering obediently to the *call* (emanating from the mystery of God-in-me) to responsibility and justice and the fulfillment of itself as a subject. Obsession is an openness to the Other, an openness which is a vulnerability, an exposure of one's defenses, an exposure of the jugular to the challenging teeth of the Other, turning the other cheek. It is exactly this hermeneutical openness and willingness to be changed by the text that obsesses me that is the beating heart of the transformative dimension of the theopoetic attitude, without which the full value of transformative reading is unachievable. Transformative theopoetics aims at real personal change through the encounter with the text, just as Augustine's life changed dramatically after he was moved to pick up, read, and respond to the sacred text.

From the point of view of the Other, obsession is a call to responsibility and justice. The Other is both the personal, sensible other and the Infinite Other, God, who is revealed through the faces of personal others as an historical, personal God who suffers along with historically suffering humanity. God is revealed, not as a vertical, transcendent Being making pronouncements from on high, what Caputo refers to as the "high and mighty" God,²⁴¹ but horizontally, as a God who comes to me in the flesh and

²⁴¹ Caputo, J. (2015). *The Folly of God*. Polebridge. p.

the blood of the Other. This perspective reflects the influence on Levinas's thought of Judaism, a perspective which would be understood somewhat differently within Christianity, although it seems to me that Levinas's fundamental ethics is not incompatible with Christian teaching. In a dialogue among theologians, for example, which took place after the presentation of "*Transcendance et intelligibilité*," Levinas admits that he says "the face of the Other as the Christian probably says the face of Christ...!"²⁴² This interfacing between Judaism and Christianity that arises at the very center of the thesis that subjectivity is an exorbitant responsibility for the Other where God appears in the world points toward a mystical element inhabiting the theopoetical approach to interfacing with the textuality of the text, a mystical revelation of the Word of God—and perhaps all words can be heard as the Word of God for those who 'have ears to hear'. You will know when you have heard the Word of God in your approach to the text because you will be forever transformed by that Word, forever 'saved' or reborn, and that will tell you all you need to know. From the point of view of the subject—the only real point of view possible in the one-way ethical relationship with the Other—obsession is an election and assignation prior to the possibility of choice. It shows the subject to be pure passivity, an interiority defined by the exteriority of the Other. This passivity is a radical passivity, a passivity that is more passive than any concept of passivity could reveal. Ultimately, this passivity is the dependence inherent in being a creature, a created being.

For Levinas, there is no choice regarding responsibility insofar as the assignation or election is compulsory, except perhaps that of suicide, which is forbidden. But even in

²⁴² "*Transcendance et intelligibilité*" p. 57

suicide there is an oblique affirmation of life's essential goodness, as we have already seen. To refuse suicide is to *ipso facto* shoulder the burden of responsibility. The first and perhaps only real 'choice' of subjectivity is the 'choice' between suicide and obedience. The 'choice' of obedience to the call from the Other, the exposure of oneself to being wounded by the Other, vulnerability, is a being cast out of one's identity, one's self-knowing. Obedience is not the result of a conscious choice based on a rational deduction from self-evident principles, but a fission, a diffusion, an obsession in which one no longer has the felt-security of knowing what one is doing or, perhaps, why. Because one gives oneself, or is given, immediately to the Other in obedience to the challenge and the call of the Other, responsibility can be understood as a substitution for the Other, a giving of my life in the service of the Other without the prior overcoming of the risk of this obedience in the false security of a representational knowledge guaranteeing the safety of my act. The "fine risk" of subjectivity is incommensurable with the philosophy of consciousness. In the former, one simply responds to the proximity of the Other, being hurt and motivated by the needs of the Other, before one knows what one is doing and despite oneself. In the latter, one seeks to bring about a synchronization or identity of thought and being by reducing subjectivity to substance and grasping the essence of this substance in a representation equal to itself. But even in this, consciousness is thwarted by "recurrence," the slipping-away of the subject from every concept that would represent it, the physical exposure of the body in respiration, exposure to what is exterior to it, what is other; the need to take up the representational play of consciousness and the themes by which it establishes itself over and over again,

a recurrence which insistently frustrates the teleological expectations of consciousness as the maintenance of an identity between who one is and who one thinks one is.

Authentic subjectivity, subjectivity in contrast with the separate ego of consciousness and the freedom of spontaneity, emerges from the break-up or dispersion of identity in obsession and substitution, a dispersion at the heart of what is gathered in thought. This recurrence, Levinas says, "would be the ultimate secret of the incarnation of the subject; prior to all reflection, prior to every positing, an indebtedness before any loan, not assumed, anarchical, subjectivity of a bottomless passivity; made out of assignation, like the echo of a sound that would precede the resonance of this sound. The active source of this passivity is not thematizable. It is the passivity of a trauma, but one that prevents its own representation..." (OB 111 / 141). The self is a subject, a "sub-jectum" insofar as it is subject to everything, responsible for all before all. Responsibility is a "having-the-other-in-one's-skin," before one even has a sense of self, a sense or signification which is itself grounded in obsession and substitution. "The ego is not just a being endowed with certain qualities called moral," Levinas says, "which it would bear as a substance bears attributes, or which it would take on as accidents in its becoming." Subjectivity is not to be an object in a world of objects, but the revelation of the trace of infinity in the face of the Other whom I approach in substitution; it is "a being divesting itself ... turning itself inside out" in an inversion, " ... neither nothingness nor a product of a transcendental imagination." The subject is "the fact of 'otherwise than being'". Substitution is not an act of an already conscious being, not the right thing to do on the part of an ego already constituted as an actor. Substitution is prior to the act/actor distinction, prior to all distinctions. It is first a way of

being that is not a potential for achieving some end, but a way of being "in obsession, a responsibility that rests on no free commitment. Subjectivity, always outside or otherwise than any conceptual representation of subjectivity, "is not an act; it is a passivity inconvertible into an act, the hither side of the act-passivity alternative, the exception that cannot be fitted into the grammatical categories of noun or verb, save in the said that thematizes them." The movement from the "strict bookkeeping" responsibility of the spontaneous ego of consciousness to the infinite or exorbitant responsibility in the pure freedom of election—a freedom which frees one from the presumptions and illusions of finite freedom, "from ennui, that is, from enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distraction of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out ... an anarchic liberation" which describes "the suffering and vulnerability of the sensible as *"the other in me,"* this "substitution for another is the trope of a sense that does not belong to the empirical order of psychological events.... " Responsibility is a one-way street. It is in this and not the freedom and identity of self-consciousness that the uniqueness of the subject, of 'me', is located. To require that the other substitute herself for me would be, Levinas says, "to preach human sacrifice." To require that the other substitute herself for me I must already have a concept of me and the other. But "there is no ipseity common to me and the others; 'me' is the exclusion from the possibility of comparison." It is not the ego of finite freedom that is chosen but the 'me', the self, the subject whose election to being held hostage, the subjection of the subject, is precisely what defines the subject in responsibility. Responsibility does not begin with the establishment of a stable ego capable of calculating the extent of its responsibility

according to the range of its freedom. Rather, the notion that subjectivity is persecution and passivity, obsession, and substitution, "reverses the position where the presence of the ego to itself appears as the beginning or as the conclusion of philosophy" (OB 116-127 / 147-163).

The first word of the mind is thus an unconditional and pre-thematic "Yes" that is not an immature assent to do whatever I please, but rather an "exposure to critique ... more ancient than any naïve spontaneity." Representational thought, conceptual thought, always arrives too late, is always a latecomer on the scene that has already taken place, which is why Hegel said that philosophy paints its "grey on grey." The Biblical Job stands accused and persecuted prior to any reason or justification for this accusation. But this unwarranted persecution is not merely an illustration of personal freedom, reducible to privation. It is "to be responsible over and beyond one's freedom." Responsibility as persecution in openness is "better than" any concepts arising from the starting point of finite freedom because responsibility arises in the anarchical passivity of a created being in relationship to the absolute otherness of the Go(o)d. "If ethical terms arise in our discourse, before the terms freedom and non-freedom, it is because before the bipolarity of good and evil presented to choice, the subject finds himself committed to the Good in the very passivity of supporting" (OB 122 / 157). Responsibility takes place in a time that cannot be represented in temporal thematization since it is an absolutely unrepresentable past. The distinction between freedom and non-freedom, which is a distinction of consciousness, a knowing in which the condition for the possibility of the distinction is already lost, cannot serve as the fulcrum upon which any understanding of the human subject would turn. Being passive,

that is, created, the human subject is called to the constitution of itself through an election issuing from the Creator, an election which is persecution and wounding in the approach of the Other. In the radical passivity of the subject as creature, there arises an openness of oneself to the Other in response to an unwarranted assignation. Openness, in the form of absolute responsibility for the Other, a responsibility whose *command* to obedience and *call* to justice is imposed on me from outside and is thus always more ancient than any theme that would attempt to present it, is a fundamental susceptibility to the Go(o)d which is beyond being and being's essence. Levinas puts it this way: "Has not the Good chosen the subject with an election recognizable in the responsibility of being a hostage, to which the subject is destined, which he cannot evade without denying himself, and by virtue of which he is unique? ... The Good is before all being." The Good is absolutely exterior to me. In the challenge of the face-to-face relation with the Other in which the secure originality, the security in the uniqueness of my freedom, is disrupted and thrown into question, the election of the Good is communicated to me, the election to responsibility. "The Good," Levinas says, "assigns the subject according to a susception that cannot be assumed, to approach the Other, the neighbor (OB 116-23 / 148-157).

Responsibility is the "desire for the non-desirable ... outside of concupiscence." In responsibility, the uniqueness of the subject as subject is understood as irreplaceable. The burden of all others is upon me and it is this burden which makes me be me. This burden—vulnerability, maternity, proximity, obsession, persecution, substitution—is an election, an assignation, a *call* that breaks-up my finite freedom in favor of the infinite freedom of responsibility, a *call* which sets me apart from all others.

"the uniqueness of the responsible ego is possible only *in* being obsessed by another, in the trauma suffered prior to any auto-identification, in an unrepresentable before."

Finite freedom, the freedom of spontaneity, thus cannot be a beginning for the establishment of the self; it is precisely in the breaking-up of this finite freedom through the challenging approach of the Other that "there can be disengaged an element of pure freedom.." This infinite freedom is revealed in witness and prophecy as the glory of God (OB 123 /158).

Witness and prophecy, understood as articulations of a theopoetic attitude, are the peculiar ways of speaking the manner in which the Infinite infinitely surpasses the finite, how the Infinite is signified without entering into a theme, without becoming the noesis of a noema, the cause of an effect, or the present representation of a remembered past or anticipated future. Rather, witness, in Levinas's view, is a saying that signifies a "plot" which "connects to what detaches itself absolutely, to the Absolute." Levinas calls this "detachment of the Infinite from the thought that seeks to thematize it and the language that tries to hold it in a said..." "*illegitimacy*," a plot that he admits he is tempted to call "religious" although it "does not rest on any positive theology." Witness and prophecy are signified in responsibility as the "Here I am!" of obedience to the call of the Infinite revealed in the approach of the Other, not as a choice made freely on my part, but as the dispossession of the very possibility of choice. It is the Infinite or the infinitude that is the event of God's passing that orders or commands me from the height of the invisible otherness of the Other to be responsible. But I do not know this responsibility in advance and then do it as an act of compassion or atonement. Rather, I first come to understand the order as an order in my response

to it—not unlike the way freedom is demonstrated in practical action for Kant whereas it cannot be demonstrated theoretically. "I find the order in my response itself," Levinas says, "which, as a sign given to the neighbor, as a 'here I am', brings me out of invisibility, out of the shadow in which my responsibility could have been evaded." (OB 150 / 191).

The response to the command to be responsible, to instigate an order of justice and peace, is a response which takes place before one knows what one is doing, because the order issues from a dimension of height which always escapes thematization the way the Infinite surpasses every attempt to state what the Infinite is. This surpassing quality of the command to justice which is enacted before it is known, this 'infinite' of the Infinite is the glory of the Infinite, the glorification of the glory of God. "Glory," Levinas says, "is but the other face of the passivity of the subject. Substituting itself for the other, a responsibility ordered to the first one on the scene, a responsibility for the neighbor inspired by the other, I, the same, am torn up from my beginning in myself, my equality with myself. The glory of the Infinite is glorified in this responsibility. It leaves no refuge in its secrecy that would protect it against being obsessed by the other, and cover over its evasion (OB 144 / 184). Response-ability, the subjectivity of the subject, is the obedient response to an order to be responsible before one knows what this order is, before one hears it.

What makes ethics primary; what ultimately constitutes or produces the priority of responsibility and the epiphany of God-in-the-world through the instantiation of the theopoetic word; and what makes language, as pre-thematic signification, irreducible to an instrumental means among other instrumental means, or to an act among other acts,

is the glory, the unsurpassable quality of the Infinite that is glorified in the one-for-the-Other of responsibility, a signification which in itself would be the very passing of the Infinite. Thus, Levinas says, before putting itself at the service of life as an exchange of information through a linguistic system, *saying is witness*, a sign given to the other. Sign of what? Of complicity? Of a complicity for nothing, a fraternity, a proximity that is possible only as an openness of self, an imprudent exposure to the other in welcome and hospitality, a passivity of welcome without reserve to the point of substitution."²⁴³

Only as response-able beings already do we enter into society and thereby constitute society as a possible order of peace and justice. Before there is the possibility of society and justice for all, relationship beyond the for-the-Other, there must first be the for-the-Other. Justice is analogous to responsibility: what responsibility is in the context of the dyad, justice is in the context of the third, the Other or neighbor of the Other. Whereas the relation of responsibility is pre-conscious and non-thematizable, the advent of the third is precisely the origin of consciousness: "consciousness," Levinas says, "is born as the presence of the third party." The coming on the scene of the third party in the demand for justice brings about an extension of responsibility as an "adventure that bears all the discourse of science and philosophy" and demands that responsibility become "a concern for justice, for the thematizing, the kerygmatic discourse bearing on the said, from the bottom of the saying without the said, saying as contact...." Such an extension of the assignation of responsibility as justice for all other beings is thus and thereby the very "spirit in society" (OB 160 / 204).

²⁴³ Kearney, R. (2009). *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*. Columbia U. Press

In his understanding of responsibility for the Other as the basis of society, Levinas thus places himself in sharp contrast to the social contract theory of Hobbes because, for Levinas, even if the social contract were to issue in peace and justice, this would be paid for at the price of sacrificing the dignity and essential goodness of the individual to the extent that the social contract is required because the original human situation is conceived as a war of all against all. But there is a more fundamental 'contract' in the affection of sensibility prior to every concept, a contract that is pure contact, proximity, substitution, responsibility. For Levinas, the 'noble savage' is the falsely accused who turns the other cheek, who returns love for hatred, atonement for persecution, in every respect the good Christian. It is in the context of the need for establishing peace and justice in the world that responsibility becomes a work to be done. But the work of responsibility, work done strictly from one's exorbitant duty of responsibility, is not an easy task.

3. The Work of a Responsible Theopoetics

The ethical Work reveals an important dimension of the transformative theopoetic attitude required of the aspirant hermeneutical reader approaching the theopoetic text (or approaching the text theopoetically) that makes incumbent upon the aspirant, an openness, vulnerability, and susceptibility to be changed, to be knocked off your high horse, as Caputo might put it, by the theopoetic call that would be the very Word of God emanating from between the lines of the sacred text, from the approach of the otherness of the text that disrupts the comprehension of the reader. In the notion of the Work, Levinas's ethical and linguistic theories are well-illustrated in action.

Responsibility involves the production of a kind of Work which must be rejected in one's

lifetime, a Work oriented to a future beyond the worker who must instantiate the work while simultaneously erasing the marks the instantiation would leave. Work, in the realm of language, becomes genuine only in the transcendence of a giving marked by the real or figurative death of the author. In his article, "*La Trace de L'Autre*," Levinas puts it this way: "the Work conceived radically is a movement of the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same"—a preference for the stark errantry of Abraham over the romantic return of Ulysses.²⁴⁴ For Levinas, there is a necessary inequality in the relation between the Same and the Other, an inequality which is the very possibility of there being Ethics. The face of the Other is a trace of God. The Other comes to me from a height, a "curvature of space," because the approach of the Other, in the incommensurableness of this approach, reveals itself to be a trace, a passing of the personal Other which, resounding to Infinity, reveals a trace or passing of the Infinite Other, the epiphany of God-in-the-World. Giving a cup of water to a stranger, opening your door in hospitality, letting go of worldly attachments ... these are events in which the passing of God may be glimpsed.

The ethical challenge posed by the intrinsic inequality of the face-to-face relation with the Other, in Levinas's view, takes the form of a call to generous and even complete self-sacrifice in the non-suicide of an unfulfillable responsibility for the Other. Thus, we are not fundamentally beings-toward-death as Heidegger thought, but beings-toward-a-time-after-our-death. This ethical formula is concretely illustrated in Levinas's understanding of the nature of the Work:

²⁴⁴Levinas, Emmanuel. "*La Trace De L' Autre*," p. 191; cf. "*La Signification et le sens*," *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale*, 2 (1964), pp. 139 ff.

A Work thought all the way through requires a radical generosity of the Same, which in a work goes toward the Other. It consequently requires an ingratitude of the Other; gratitude would be the return of the movement to its origin To be for a time that would be without me, to be for a time after my time, for a future beyond the celebrated "being-for-death, "to-be-for-after-my-death ... [this] is not an ordinary thought which extrapolates its own duration, but is the passage to the time of the Other.

Levinas names this totally gratuitous giving of one's self in the Work, without expectation of return, by the Greek term "Liturgy," a term used initially without religious significance, although Levinas adds that "*a certain idea of God should turn up as a trace at the end of our analysis.*"²⁴⁵ Liturgy, the celebration of the liturgy in our daily work, for Levinas, is a living of the practice of death as Socrates taught and is certainly consonant with the message of Jesus to get detached from the world, pick up your cross and follow him. That life re-dedication, as with Augustine in the garden, is the ethical sacrifice par excellence!²⁴⁶

So conceived, the transcendence of the work as "an eschatology without hope," must be prepared for in advance (in fact, is always in preparation) by taking-on the death by which the work is liberated for-the-other, without nihilism. The 'taking-on' of this detachment as a practice of dying toward what is beyond oneself, by renouncing "being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work," is precisely what makes the genuine theopoetical work possible, but without guaranteeing its success. The pre-donation of

²⁴⁵ Levinas, "La Trace," 191-92, emphasis added.

²⁴⁶ For a poetic rendition of this principle see Charles Bukowski's poem "love and courage" in *Dangling in the Tourne/ortia*, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), pp. 51-2.

my work is what allows my work to be done. Thus, only when my theopoetic work is no longer for-me but wholly for-the-Other can it genuinely be "mine."

Response-ability, as the practice of death in the Socratic sense, or the way of the Cross in a Christian sense, is thus, as Levinas puts it, "vulnerability, exposure to outrage, to wounding, passivity more passive than all patience, passivity of the accusative form, trauma of accusation suffered by a hostage to the point of persecution ... a defecting or defeat of the ego's identity" (OB 15). There is the greatest danger in formularizing this as a theoretical representation. Theory must be the self-reflection of a practice which is theory-in-action as I have described this elsewhere in the context of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics."²⁴⁷ But who would have the strength to take up the thankless task that is ordered by Levinas's ethical phenomenology? Who could accomplish such living in the open? Who could eschew the support and the security of the herd and the polis? For Levinas, it is only the one who is detached from the need for security, who has taken on the practice of death as a daily task of releasement and dispossession, who is radically given over to the work whose life and truth will come into being only for future generations. This radical work must necessarily be rejected, must be cast out of the polis; it will not be understood for a hundred years. It is the work that is wholly gift, wholly an act of responsibility toward the other. In short, it is the work of unconditional love. When Levinas says that "a breakdown of essence is needed," a "weakness," a "relaxation of virility without cowardice," I understand that without this orientation, this liturgy, it is impossible to live where "the substitution of the hostage discovers the trace" (OB 185). To accomplish this is in truth to die to one's self-interest,

²⁴⁷ Walsh, Robert D. "Reason in The Age of Science," AUSLEGUNG, 11 (1984), p. 421.

as in Kant and the Gospel of Jesus, and thus to fulfill in one's self the greatest achievement of love: the laying down of one's life for the other, without suicide, in a gesture of pure and unfettered altruism.

In its purity, Levinas's philosophy is for everyone and no one. It is unabashedly utopian, but in the true etymological sense of this abused Greek term: like Plato's Republic it is "no place" and it is not intended to be any place. Socrates would have been humorously astonished by Plotinus's nostalgic plans to build an actual city called "Platonopolis." The call to the kind of responsibility which Levinas describes demands the ultimate dispossession of the unity and the identity of the self and of the presupposition that such a unity and identity is possible. It is the pluralistic relinquishment and welcoming of all positions and non-positions, a welcoming hospitality to all. That a utopia, by definition, cannot be, that it is inherently self-contradictory, is exactly the point. Truth is produced only in veritable conversation.

To hear what Levinas is saying in his said requires what I have been calling the *transformative theopoetic attitude* which was anticipated by Levinas in his seeing at the heart of my bodily approach to the text "an exposure to the other without this exposure being assumed, an exposure without holding back ... " (OB 15), the relinquishment of the egoistic hold on the world which conceptualization would obtain. One will find nowhere to lay one's head in Levinas's thought, no security in the grasp of a final solution which will make a deep and refreshing sleep possible. Levinas is all wakefulness and insomnia. No one can avoid the relentless call of the Other. Even the escape of eternal sleep that suicide promises is "a self-defeating defection" and inadvertently an affirmation of life (TI 149). It is possible to close oneself off to the call of

the Other, to refuse to open your door to the stranger in the middle of the night, but it is not possible that there be no call, no approach. For, being closed-off is possible only within the context of already being open to the Other

CONCLUSION

Forthcoming.....working on it 😊

Theology, Theopoetics, Theopraxis

NB ... A big difference between Caputo's Derrida-derived theopoetics and my Levinas-derived theopoetics is that my version makes possible the inclusion of a mystical and transformative dimension for the hermeneut that is not present in Caputo's version, even though this may necessitate the complete crispation of the subject unto the priority of the Other, a kind of martyrdom....

2.

WORKS CITED

Forthcoming....