

Chapter 1

Dasein and Human Subjectivity

This chapter explores the critical relation to Heideggerian ontology in Levinas' essays of the 1930s and early 1940s. These early works centre around the question of subjectivity as finite being, and the manner of *Dasein's* relation to Being. Levinas sees Heidegger's existential analysis of *Dasein*, or "hermeneutics of facticity", as offering a solution to the problem of intellectualism, especially in relation to Husserl's philosophy and thereby as having radical repercussions for the questions of the meaning of the human and its relation to the infinite.¹

While being instrumental in bringing the radical perspective of Heidegger's work to the attention of French intellectuals in his 1932 paper, *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, in his essay, _____, published in 1935, Levinas is already implicitly critical of Heidegger's account of human existence.² This critique and Levinas' renewal of the question of the meaning of Being, which he announces in _____, reflect an underlying concern for the socio-political consequences of the crisis of values confronting the Enlightenment tradition of European Idealism. In _____, Levinas juxtaposes a hope for an overcoming of the present crisis of value, with the ontological impossibility of

¹ The importance of Heidegger for Levinas' reading of Husserl is explicitly acknowledged by Levinas in his introduction to *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (1930), trans. A. Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. xxxiii. In a paper published years later, Levinas writes that "intellectualism", "whether rationalist or empiricist, idealist or realist", relies on a notion of meaning, that is based in a fundamental intuition or perception, and which language will always only approximate, such that "meanings conveyed by language have to be justified in a reflection on the consciousness that aims at them", E. Levinas, "Meaning and Sense" in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (CP), trans. A. Lingis, (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), p. 76. Levinas suggests that while Husserl in a certain sense marks the end of this notion of meaning, he nevertheless continues the intellectualist tradition insofar as he "accounts for meanings by a return to the given", CP 78.

² E. Levinas, _____ (EV), (Fata Morgana, 1982), p. 74. In the following, I suggest that Levinas juxtapose 'the human' with *Dasein* without considering the 'human' as a type of being. In other words without resorting to a pre-Heideggerian concept of human being. All translations of _____ are my own.

escape through a return to the transcendence of neo-Kantianism. Using the perspective opened by Heidegger, he applies an ontological analysis to alternative representations of the human suggesting there might be an alternative manner in which to approach the meaning of our attachment to being. This chapter explores the meaning of this attachment, suggesting that Levinas' early preoccupation with the relation of human finitude and transcendence is informed by a concern for the relation of the individual and the social totality.

i) The Renewal of the Question

In the paper *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, Levinas finds the significance of Heidegger's thinking to be his critique of the neo-Kantian preoccupation with the problem of knowledge which formulates the question of transcendence in terms of the subject-object relation.³ Heidegger, he claims, is critical of the implication that the subject can take leave of itself to attain the true essence of the object. According to Levinas, Heidegger not only reveals the presuppositions regarding the concept of the subject as thinking substance, but uncovers the latent intellectualism of the idealist position. Levinas writes that the idealist position "seeks to know man, but it means to do so through the *concept* of man, leaving aside the *effectivity* of human existence and the sense of this effectivity".⁴ For Levinas, effectivity, or facticity, refers to the manner of being

³ While this chapter primarily refers to *Being and Time*, it should be noted that in his 1932 paper, *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, Levinas cites Heidegger's 'main works' as including: *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (1929), *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929), and *Was ist Metaphysik?* (1930); E. Levinas, *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, trans. by the Committee for Public Safety, *Diacritics* (26.1, 1996), p. 11/395. Note: the translation refers to the original publication of *Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie* in the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger*, CXIII (Janvier a June, 1932), p. 395-431. A re-edited version was published by Levinas in 1949, which tones down the original praise of Heidegger, and in certain places adds a subtle hint of critique (as will be demonstrated later in this chapter). For this reason I refer to the original piece except when pointing out the changes in Levinas' perspective which occur in E. Levinas, "Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie", in *En Decouvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (DEHH), (Paris: Vrin, 1949). In referencing Levinas' essays, I shall write the English title and page number followed by a slash (/) and the page number of the French equivalent.

⁴ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 31/430. "Effectivity" is Levinas' preferred term for Heidegger's facticity [], see also *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 24/417. Levinas

of subjective being. In other words, it refers to the manner of *Dasein's* engagement with its own existence, which Levinas describes as *Dasein's* being "riveted to its possibilities".⁵ He adds:

ontological description of 'fact'.⁶

Levinas links the Heideggerian project with a rethinking of the "fact of man", in the sense of re-thinking the meaning of human factuality. He claims that the product of this re-thinking, the concept of individuality that holds the meaning of the "fact of man", escapes both the empiricist and rationalist philosophies which Heidegger was addressing in *Being and Time*. He finds that both these philosophies begin with an objectification of the subject due to the lack of a notion of understanding as an existential event.

On the basis of his fundamental agreement with Heidegger's critique of previous concepts of human being, Levinas begins, in *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, to explore the notion of *Dasein* that is developed in *Being and Time*. Levinas explains Heidegger's distinction between a subject understood as a being [] and the manner of its being [].⁷ For Heidegger, *Dasein* does not describe the essence of an entity, but its existence, or its mode of being []. *Dasein* is a fundamental event of being. Levinas adds that this focus on *Dasein* is not a mere preliminary to ontology, but is already ontology as the study of the being of the human. The human, conceived as *Dasein*, is the event of the revelation of being:

also uses such terms as "concrete existence", and "accomplishment", which will appear regularly throughout his later works.

⁵ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 24/417.

⁶ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 24/417.

⁷ The Committee for Public Safety translates [] as "being right there" and opposes it to [] as "a be-ing right there", *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 17/405.

For Heidegger, the understanding of being is not a purely theoretical act but, as we will see, a fundamental event where one's entire destiny is at issue; and consequently, the difference between these modes of explicit and implicit understanding is not simply that between clear and obscure knowledge, but is a difference which reaches unto the very being of man.⁸

This is not to reduce ontology to a philosophy of subjectivity, for Levinas recognises that while it is the "*ontological* analysis of the subject" that provides the starting point, this analysis is logically subsequent to and "entirely dictated by his fundamental ontological preoccupation, which consists in determining the meaning of the word 'being'".⁹

In Heideggerian terms, Levinas recognises both the ontical and the ontological priority of the question of being and the ontico-ontological priority of *Dasein*. With regard to the former, the question of being is ontologically prior to the question of the ontologies of specific ontic sciences. While the latter examine "entities of such and such a type", the former "ascertains the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences", but also for those ontologies which are prior to these sciences and provide their foundation.¹⁰ In other words ontology precedes both epistemology and certain regional ontologies which work out the logic of a specific realm of beings.¹¹

With regard to the second claim, that *Dasein* has an ontic-ontological priority, Heidegger claims that we can only begin the inquiry into the meaning of Being by beginning with that being which "in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it".¹² The signification of this claim is under constant examination in

⁸ Martin Heidegger *and Ontology*, p. 16/403.

⁹ Martin Heidegger *and Ontology*, p. 15/403.

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 31. The page numbers cited are those of the translation.

¹¹ Heidegger is referring to Kant in the latter case, who he claims does not offer us a 'theory' of knowledge as such but "a working out of what belongs to any Nature whatsoever", and thus an "*a priori* logic for the subject-matter of that area of Being called Nature", Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 31.

¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32

Levinas' work. *Dasein* is that being which, for Heidegger, is "ontically distinctive in that it is ontological".¹³ In other words, *Dasein* is not "a being", but has "existence" as its essence and is in this sense ontico-ontologically prior. As Levinas points out, it is to Aristotle's phrase: "[m]an's soul is, in a certain way, all existing things", that Heidegger turns to point to the ontical priority of *Dasein*.¹⁴ It is the "certain way", which for Heidegger, has yet to be *ontologically* clarified. Thus, the "existential" analysis of *Dasein* (the ontological as opposed to existentiell or ontic), is governed by fundamental ontology: the question of the meaning of Being.

The nature of Levinas' interest in Heidegger's ontology, expressed in his paper *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, already shows an inclination toward the question of the meaning of the "effectivity" of human existence as an alternative to the intellectualist reduction of subjectivity to thinking substance. Levinas is most interested in the manner of *Dasein's* attachment to being and the meaning of Heidegger's claim that *Dasein* is that being who has an understanding of Being as its mode of Being. In the essay *Martin Heidegger and Ontology* Levinas explores the manner in which Heidegger reinterprets subjective affects in terms of *Dasein's* effectivity, revealing a double-sidedness to human intentionality which will be discussed in detail below.¹⁵ Before turning to this however, the following links Levinas interest in the Heideggerian perspective to a broader crisis of values.

The context of Levinas' engagement with Heidegger is greatly expanded in a paper published two years after *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, in which Levinas links the Heideggerian critique of intellectualism to a wider crisis of value confronting the idealist and humanist traditions underlying European civilisation. In this paper, *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, Levinas

¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32.

¹⁴ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 15/402.

¹⁵ This duality is a constant theme in the following discussion and in the following chapters.

discusses the rise of National Socialism in the context a broader crisis of European liberalism.¹⁶

The notion that the fundamental ideals of liberal idealism are not merely under threat from National Socialism, but take their most degenerate form in the notions of blood and race, is informed by Levinas' belief that Heidegger had triumphed over neo-Kantianism in his confrontation with Ernst Cassirer, and thus showed there was no simple return to idealism.¹⁷ This leads Levinas to see the rise of Hitler as the expression of the crisis of European liberalism and not a mere aberration of reason.¹⁸ National Socialist ideology is linked to a philosophy that is not specific to Hitler and his followers, but already poses a challenge to the universal values of the idealist tradition which underlie European liberalism: truth, freedom, and the universal ideal of humanity. According to Levinas, the "philosophy of Hitlerism goes beyond the philosophy of Hitlerians. It questions the very principles of a civilisation".¹⁹ In other words, the rise of Hitler is an expression of the crisis of value confronting European liberalism. It does not so much participate in the critique and destruction of idealism, as reflect a society that has lost touch with its "true ideal of freedom" and thus accepts degenerate forms of the ideal.²⁰

Levinas provides a dense account of the various stages in the critique of idealism, suggesting that one of the significant elements of this critique is that it accords the "body" an importance "with which the Western spirit has never

¹⁶ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 63.

¹⁷ Levinas was present at the 1929 Davos conference in which this confrontation took place. Levinas suggests that after this historic confrontation the thinking inspired by Kant and the heritage of the Enlightenment represented by Cassirer, disappeared in Germany. E. Levinas, "Entretien avec Roger-Pol Droit", in E. Levinas, *Levinas*, (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1992), p. 209.

¹⁸ Jacques Rolland draws attention to a paper written in 1935 for *Paix et droit*, the journal of

Jewish becomes a fatality. One can flee it no more. The Jew is ineluctably riveted to his Judaism", E. Levinas, "L'inspiration religieuse de l'Alliance" *Paix et Droit* 15/8 (October, 1935), p. 4.

¹⁹ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 64.

²⁰ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 70.

wished to content itself".²¹ It rejects all dualisms of mind and body and redefines spirit's essence as enchainment to the body. The sufferings of embodied existence, as a consequence, do not signify the essentially evil nature of that existence, but reveal the absolute position of "the soul" and a new conception of man whose essence is not in freedom but enchainment. This presents a challenge to the idealist conception of the soul as a "noumenal nature that is protected from the attacks launched by a world in which concrete man nonetheless is placed".²² This new conception of man challenges the power of thinking being to withdraw into a realm in which man is free according to the universal principles of reason. The universal is compromised, and along with it, the universality of "humanity", which defines liberal Europe.²³

Levinas does not consider that National Socialism represents an overcoming of idealism. To overcome the insecurity of a world in which ideas are prey to the contingency of human existence, National Socialism finds a new truth in the absolute attachment to the body. Awakened a secret nostalgia for the "German soul", it "discovers" that one is already linked to a certain number of ideas as a consequence of one's birth. As such, the contingency of humanity is overcome in the conception of the Aryan race "anchored in [its] flesh and blood".²⁴ This recovery of a solid basis of existence in the body, does not express the evil inherent in any philosophy of embodied existence but rather, "the essential possibility of *elemental Evil* into which we can be led by logic".²⁵ While this quote is written years later in a new preface to the English publication, Levinas ends the paper itself with the claim that racism does not stand in opposition to liberal culture nor represent a particular dogma, but is the "very

²¹ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 69.

²² *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 66.

²³ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 71.

²⁴ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 70.

²⁵ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, Prefatory Note, 63.

humanity of man".²⁶ Thus Levinas insinuates that liberal humanism harbours a violent hatred of difference which takes its most degenerate form in Hitlerism.

Thus, Levinas makes clear that the attempted withdrawal from, or the negation of the notion of the embodied existence of human being is the most dangerous of responses insofar as it merely attempts to affirm an ideal of the human which is at best a fiction and at worst participates in the violent repression of difference. The question of how to affirm an embodied subjectivity without resorting to a relativist idealism, lies behind Levinas' interests in the Heideggerian perspective and perhaps explains his interest in the possibility of rethinking the meaning of the human without returning to intellectualist assumptions about the essence of human being.

At this stage, Levinas is convinced that any alternative to idealism must recognise embodied existence. The Heideggerian critique of intellectualism is fundamental to Levinas' approach, and the focus of Levinas' interpretation of Heideggerian ontology already reveals a concern for the meaning of the human in terms of its attachment to being. However, by 1935, it becomes clear that Levinas, rightly or wrongly, is not convinced that Heidegger's question of the meaning of Being adequately addresses the crisis confronting the value of human existence nor the apparent consequences of this crisis in the wider socio-political context:

to the heart of philosophy. It permits the renewal of the antique problem of being qua being ... [i]s it [being qua being] the foundation and limit of our preoccupations, as certain modern philosophers claim? Is it not on the contrary nothing but the mark of a certain civilisation, settled in the accomplished fact [*fait accompli*] of being and incapable of leaving it? ²⁷

²⁶ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 71.

²⁷ , p. 74. For discussion of this essay see R.J. Sheffler Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger: Emmanuel Levinas' Ethics as First Philosophy*, (Pittsburgh,

In the essay [redacted] Levinas implicitly suggests a certain dissatisfaction with Heideggerian ontology. However, he does not intend to return to a pre-ontological perspective, but announces a renewal of the question of Being, which Heidegger had raised less than ten years before in *Being and Time*.²⁸ In this work, Levinas recognises the risks involved in the suggestion that the crisis of idealism has not been overcome by the new preoccupation with the meaning of Being. This essay is a first attempt to come to terms with a philosophy which, for Levinas, is not a passing trend in thinking, but an unavoidable fact of modern European civilisation. He insists that:

It is a matter of leaving being in a new manner [redacted], at the risk of overturning certain notions that to the common sense and wisdom of the nations, seem most evident.²⁹

ii) Thrownness, Evasion and Enchainment

[redacted] might have carried the subtitle: "Concerning Impossibility", for the crucial aspect of the "need of evasion" [redacted] is the impossibility of its achievement. For Levinas, impossibility is the positive constitutive moment of the need of evasion, which points to an ambivalence inherent in *Dasein's* attachment to being. Levinas borrows the term, "evasion",

Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1993); J. Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*, (London: Routledge, 1995). See also Jacques Rolland's introduction to the new French publication of

existence chez le jeune Levinas", *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 80/4 (1982), 553-578.

²⁸ *Being and Time* was published in 1927, [redacted] in 1935. Ciaramelli suggests that while Levinas adopts the means opened up to him by the Heideggerian perspective, he avoids the results and consequences by taking as his starting point the "malaise lived by the human in the face of the totality of existence", Ciaramelli, [redacted], p. 562.

²⁹

suggested in the note above, Rolland adopts this phrase as the title of his introductory essay to the republished *De l'évasion* in 1982. I agree with Rolland that this phrase is an early expression of an exigency to think beyond the verbiage of being.

from contemporary circles of literary criticism, and finds it has a profound signification as a .³⁰ As Ciaramelli suggests, Levinas recognises a possible ontological signification in this experience of evasion, reflected in the literature of the time.³¹ This recognition not only has consequences for the direction of Levinas' questioning but also reflects an interest in the meaning of the suffering which this literary notion expresses.

For Levinas, the meaning of evasion is approached firstly in terms of the individual's experience of the social totality. The notion of evasion is linked to an epoch in which no one is left on the margins of life. "Life" is understood as the universal order, the social totality within which the autonomous, self-sufficient person resides. Within this order, the individual is assigned an identity in relation to all others and thereby takes up a position. One is posited, positioned within the functioning totality and may even feel a sense of power that comes from having conquered this position.³²

Nevertheless, Levinas insists that a sense of insecurity continues to haunt the individual. What menaces this order is not the uncertainty of the future nor the possibility of suffering, for both of these are contingencies that can be overcome by the powers inherent in the autonomous subject. Thus, Levinas finds that within the social totality the subject already has the means available to it to postpone this menace.³³ Introducing the ontological perspective, Levinas claims that the insecurity which plagues this self-sufficient subject arises from the fundamental discovery of the "elemental truth that there is being" [*il y a de*].³⁴ Rather than render displeasure by the threat of suffering, this 'presence' reveals the ground of suffering as the *impossibility of the interruption of it* and an "acute sense of being riveted".³⁵ In other words, there is a "permanence"

³⁰ EV 70.

³¹ Ciaramelli, , p. 561.

³² EV 70.

³³ This notion of a relation of individual and the totality and the possibility that there is another dimension to the human is a fundamental theme of this thesis.

³⁴ EV 70.

³⁵ EV 70.

[] in our attachment to being. This irremissible attachment does not signify a lack at the core of subjectivity, but introduces the notion of an insufficiency at the heart of subjective being, calling the conception of power and self-sufficiency itself into question.³⁶ Levinas links the literary notion of evasion to this attachment, and introduces a notion of passivity which insinuates itself in the relation of being and the human.³⁷

The need of evasion, Levinas explains, is neither a poetic fantasy of evading base reality, nor to be confused with the notion of breaking with the social conventions conceived as annihilating an individual's personality.³⁸ The need of evasion arises in the attachment of the human to being and expresses a desire for escape. However, while this desire for escape appears to be a veiled reference to the Heideggerian notion of the fleeing of *Dasein* into the everyday, the need of evasion cannot be equated with this fundamental characteristic of *Dasein*. As Sheffler Manning suggests, superficially it might appear that Levinas is describing *Dasein*'s fleeing from its authentic Being-in-the-world, however:

For Levinas, the self does not initially find in Being potentialities for itself either to actualise or to escape from. What the self finds in Being, according to Levinas, is the weight, the heaviness of Being that weighs upon the self and enchains the self to itself.³⁹

There is no doubt that Levinas finds that Heidegger's uncovering of the question of Being reveals the profound weight of existence. In other words, existence is not merely an accomplished fact, a being, but is a drama that

³⁶ EV 70.

³⁷ As Jacques Rolland suggests, it is passivity as a fundamental disposition, that Levinas inquires into in Rolland, , p. 20.

³⁸ EV 71.

³⁹ Sheffler Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, p. 31. Ciaramelli also draw our *philosophiques*, 1975. .According to Ciaramelli, Duval's paper states that the difference between Levinas and Heidegger at this stage is that for Levinas, being is not the question which calls, but the weight which crushes, Ciaramelli , p. 564.

dominates *Dasein*.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the need of evasion is not merely synonymous with fleeing, even in recognising that in fleeing, *Dasein* does not escape its thrownness. According to Heidegger, in Being-in-the-world, *Dasein* is always already thrown into its ownmost possibilities, but flees in the face of these. *Dasein's* fleeing is always a fleeing of its ownmost Being. The possibility it flees *not Being*, or its impossibility. For Levinas, however, evasion is not a fleeing from one's thrown attachment to Being and thus of the self from its ownmost potentiality of Being-toward-death, but is a desire to break the irremissible attachment to being itself. Although it is not explicitly articulated in _____, the notion of evasion is a first criticism of what Levinas sees as a superficial division of being and world, in which the duality of *Dasein's* being is conceived in terms, of a "double directionality" of affectivity.⁴¹ As Levinas explains in *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, every affective disposition is characterised in terms of a movement toward or attachment to the world [*Wovor*], and as a movement toward oneself as the one "for whom" [*Worum*] affectivity is disposed.⁴² As the discussion of anxiety below, and the following chapters suggest, Levinas does not give up on this notion of a double directionality, which he will call a "double intentionality" [*double "intention"*] in his republished version of *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, but continues to develop his critique of its dialectical structure and its originary status.⁴³

For Levinas, it is not death as a possibility that gives finitude its tragic and fearful expression, but the fact of the irremissible attachment to being and the inability to escape it. Fleeing, which is a fleeing into the world away from an attachment to death in authentic being, itself covers over a more fundamental event. While thrownness introduces a certain passivity with regard to *Dasein*, insofar as it has been abandoned to these possibilities, for Levinas, the weight of

⁴⁰ Ciaramelli, _____, p. 561.

⁴¹ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 29/426.

⁴² *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 29/426.

⁴³ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, DEHH 73.

the imposition arises in the attachment to being, and not the Being-toward-death of *Dasein*.

For Heidegger, in fleeing *Dasein* is pursued constantly by the "uncanniness" which lies in *Dasein* as thrown Being-in-the-world.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he insists that fleeing into the familiarity of the everyday is, from an existential-ontological point of view, merely a mode of *Dasein*'s uncanniness. In other words, "uncanniness", or thrown Being-in-the-world is the "primordial phenomenon", and fleeing is always in the face of the uncanny which is not overcome in the everyday but merely "dimmed".⁴⁵ Alternatively, for Levinas, this primordial phenomenon is conceived as a suffering of enchainment to being. While Heidegger points to the weight in terms of the imposition of possibilities for *Dasein*, for Levinas, it could be suggested, the subject of evasion, the human, reaches the "limit of the possible in suffering", an event covered over by the Heideggerian analyses.⁴⁶

The need of evasion is Levinas' first attempt to describe a duality of movement that recovers itself, without relying on a notion of world. Levinas suggests the outward movement of the human has no teleology, no object and no end. The movement is always a return and does not break its attachment to being. The need of evasion expresses a desire to leave being and the impossibility of such a desire finding fulfilment. As an impossible escape from being, it not only challenges a conception of finitude as a limit that can be transcended and along with this a conception of need conceived of as a lack in a finite being, but is a first question to Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* as that Being which has transcendence as its very mode of Being.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 233-234.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 234.

⁴⁶ In *Time and the Other*, Levinas writes that the subject "seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering", a phrase which is eminently applicable to this earlier analyses of evasion. E. Levinas, *Time and the Other* (TO), trans. R.A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 70-71. Original *Le temps et L'autre*, published in J. Wahl *Le Choix, Le Monde, L'existence* (TA), (Grenoble & Paris: Arthaud, 1947), p. 165.

The need of evasion can be conceived as a reinterpretation of thrownness. However, as Jacques Rolland suggests, this is a thrownness which paralyses all possibility of projecting and thus, also challenges the Heideggerian notion of the authentic [*eigentlich*] Being of *Dasein*.⁴⁷ In suggesting that Levinas is questioning the possibility of authenticity, Rolland does not claim that Levinas is concerned solely with the everyday or with the inauthentic dispersion into the "they". Rather, the "paralysis" which Rolland speaks of is a suspension of the authentic-inauthentic distinction.

But what is the significance of this distinction and the consequence of this suspension? I suggest that this attempted suspension is the first moment in which Levinas challenges Heidegger's rethinking of the concrete mode of Being. As a preliminary conclusion it could be suggested that Levinas is undertaking a "reduction" of the authentic-inauthentic distinction to the double structure of evasion. However, this "reduction" must not be understood as a working back to the unconditioned ground but rather to the point in which the conditions break down - the originary but insufficient relation to being. As we shall see below, Levinas reinterprets projection as an insatiable need - the need of evasion for the evasion of enchainment to being. This is not to return to being as essence but introduces a notion of the human as a "species of duality" and the "originary insufficiency" of being.

iii) Originary Insufficiency

In *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, Levinas discusses Heidegger's 'discovery' that transcendence is a movement of the subject toward being. Levinas explains that, for Heidegger, this movement of transcendence is a movement of *Dasein* from implicit to explicit comprehension of being. Levinas describes the Heideggerian movement of transcendence as a "leave-taking of

⁴⁷ Rolland,

, p. 22.

oneself" [] that constitutes oneself []. In the light of the notion of evasion, it can be suggested that for Levinas, there is no leave-taking in this movement, but rather a description of *Dasein* in its inescapably self-centred attachment to being. Levinas finds that we are required to look elsewhere for the ultimate meaning of transcendence.

In his later version of *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, Levinas writes with regard to the ontological meaning of transcendence, that:

The progress towards the eternal that the western conscience believes accomplished with the supratemporal point of view of the sciences, is not a victory won by the spirit over concrete and temporal existence, but a moment of the very drama of that existence. That leap towards the eternal does not transcend this drama to give a new birth to individuals, it does not transfigure them by an act of grace coming from the exterior. But on account of the integral element of existence, it is completely dominated by this drama.⁴⁸

According to Levinas, this reduction of time, of all that could be called supertemporal and of existence, of all that could be called 'relation', is the project of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Levinas characterises this as a transcendence of "*etant*" of a being, towards " ", being.⁴⁹ As suggested above, for Levinas, Heidegger discovers that transcendence is not something a subject achieves with regard to knowledge, but a movement that constitutes its being. To conceive of subjectivity in terms of *Dasein* is to understand identity as this "event", rather than as an entity, the former pointing to the more original meaning of "drama" itself.⁵⁰ However, while the starting point of is the notion of subjectivity as an event rather than an entity and the identity of the

⁴⁸ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, DEHH 70.

⁴⁹ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, DEHH 65.

⁵⁰ In his recent work, John Llewelyn suggests that the word "drama" is being used with its root *The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 13. Although I have called 'drama' an event, this is not equivalent to activity. The linking of being and drama opens the question of the meaning of action itself in terms of the meaning of the verblity of the verb 'to be'.

subject is also to be understood in its dramatic form,⁵¹ for Levinas, the interpretation of this original drama is still in question.

The passage from implicit and inauthentic understanding to explicit and authentic understanding, *with its hopes and its failures*, is the drama of human existence. To pass from implicit comprehension of being to explicit comprehension; this is to propose a task of mastery and domination in the midst of a naive familiarity with existence that will perhaps leap from the very security of that familiarity.⁵²

The second sentence of the quote above and the phrase in italics were added by Levinas when the essay was republished in 1949. In comparing the original 1932 passage in which Levinas talks of the fundamental drama of human existence and emphasises the radicality of this way of thinking of humanity in terms of this "primary characteristic" of "be-ing", it can be suggested that, for Levinas, what becomes crucial with regard to this drama is how one conceives of the leap out of the familiar and its ultimate effect on the possibility of mastery. As suggested above, for Heidegger, this leap is characterised as a return to the uncanny and authentic mode of Being. However, Levinas' conception of enchainment suggests that such a notion does not reflect the radical manner of the human attachment to being, its infinite hopes and its inevitable failures.

The necessary relation of enchainment and transcendence underlies the conception of a need of evasion. This need arises in the attachment to being, but marks the insufficiency of being as an infinite projection of possibility. *De* introduces a conception of "need" which insinuates itself "within" the unfolding drama of existence and reveals the originary tragedy, or the tragedy of origins, governing the drama of existence.

⁵¹ EV 73.

⁵² Compare *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 16/403-404 and DEHH 57(my italics).

subjectivity. In other words, the fact of being riveted does not point to a new ground of subjectivity in terms of a finite or infinite being understood as cause or origin. Rather, in introducing a "species of duality" into existence, enchainment would not distinguish the human as the "accomplishment", or concrete condition, of what we call "origins", but introduce the question of the possibility of any such accomplishment. As such, we are conducted to the heart of philosophy to renew the question of Being. The renewal of the question is necessary since:

... it seems to us incontestable that the nothing is the fact of a thought essentially turned towards being. But this does not resolve the problem which lies elsewhere: is being sufficient to itself? The problem of the origin of being is not the problem of its procession from nothing, but that of its sufficiency or insufficiency.⁵⁵

In other words, Levinas' apparent emphasis on the question of the manner of the human attachment to being, does not ignore the question of the meaning of Being. But he does suggest that the manner of Heidegger's approach already reveals a bias, or interest with regard to the meaning of Being. Levinas insists that the question of origins is a question of the sufficiency or insufficiency of being itself and not just a "banal finding that man by the order of his birth is engaged in an existence that he neither willed nor chose".⁵⁶ Thus, for Levinas, the question of Being is not only a question of the possibility or meaning of being as origin, but one of the sufficiency of being to overcome the need of evasion. In

Levinas is not only questioning the ability of the human to transcend itself but is attempting to show that it is in being itself that this impossibility lies. For Heidegger, at the outset of the questioning of origins the distinction between Being and *Dasein* is blurred. Levinas' introduction of the human as a "species of duality" does not avoid this problem of beginning with *Dasein* as that Being, for

⁵⁵ EV 95.

⁵⁶ EV 93.

whom "Being is an issue", but is concerned precisely with the manner of this relation and the distinction. As Levinas writes:

It is in being itself that commences and not in its relationship with its cause that the paradox of being that begins to be resides, that is to say, *the impossibility of disassociating in it what accepts the weight from the weight itself*. A difficulty that does not disappear with the death of the prejudice according to which being would have preceded from nothing.⁵⁷

According to Levinas, the origin of being, or being as origin, is not incomprehensible because it emerges from nothing: "for it is absurd to postulate amongst the conditions of being that of a work that supposes it already constituted".⁵⁸ Rather, the incomprehensibility or "dialectical impossibility" of conceiving of the origin lies in the impossibility of adequately distinguishing being from that which takes on the weight of being. This impossibility is not a problem that can be solved. Rather, for Levinas it becomes the mode in which being reveals itself. Being, in its impossible "purity", is revealed in its "impower" [*impuissance*]. Furthermore, this is not to define the essence of the human, but to describe the manner of its attachment to being.

While it could be argued that Heidegger already outlines the dramatic nature of duality when he conceives of *Dasein* as that Being which has the understanding of Being as its mode of Being, Levinas finds that there is a profound disturbance that is prior to this being-in-question with regard to the meaning of existence. Levinas' renewal of the question of Being implicitly opens a new dimension of meaning with regard to the human, which acknowledges an irremissible attachment to being but does not therefore reduce the signification of

⁵⁷ EV 94-95 (my italics).

⁵⁸ EV 94.

the human to being. The meaning of the human as a "species of duality" goes beyond a doubling of *Dasein* and Being.

For Levinas, as the following discussion suggests, the anxiety revealing the essential not-at-homeness of our Being-in-the-world reveals an essential rending of self and world but not the rending of the "here" of "Being" (the "*da*" of "*Sein*"). The question of Being is therefore conditioned by a more "profound need" which does not fit the categories of the existential analytic of *Dasein*. Implicit in Levinas' approach is the question whether the pre-ontological

*of which Dasein "is surely not a stranger"*⁵⁹

the condition of the question of Being or, whether the question only arises in the experience of being in its strangeness. In other words, it is with regard to the analysis of "strangeness" where we first note a divergence between Heidegger and Levinas. In _____, this divergence is expressed in terms of the difference between Heidegger's notion of the nothing that *was* in anxiety, and Levinas' notion of nausea as the "experience of pure being". Levinas' early reformulation of this relation in _____, which shall be discussed below in the remainder of this chapter, leads to the reinterpretation of the relation of subjectivity and being, and to the notion of an impossibility or impower in this relation. These are constant themes of the following chapters and a crucial element to Levinas' critique of subjectivity leading to the introduction of his notion of alterity.

iv) Pleasure: From Triumph to Shame

Evasion has been introduced as an essentially unsatisfiable need. However, Levinas must now demonstrate how this insufficiency does not merely point to a lack in the constitution of a finite human being. Levinas discusses the

⁵⁹ "Dasein is ontically 'closest' to itself and ontologically farthest; but pre-ontologically it is surely not a stranger", Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 16.

contrasting affective states of pleasure and suffering, with the aim of revealing the inadequation of pleasure to the satisfaction of the need of evasion. Insufficiency, he claims, is habitually interpreted as a lack or weakness in the human. Pleasure on the other hand is conceived as the restoration of a natural plenitude.⁶⁰ Levinas, on the other hand, suggests that the psychology of need, in which pleasure is conceived as the overcoming of need through the restoration of a natural plenitude, fails to recognise the insatiable quality of the need of evasion. This is an insatiability that is not dissipated in a moment in which a finite being momentarily overcomes its sense of lack or limitation through pleasure.

According to Levinas, the need of evasion becomes urgent when it becomes "malaise".⁶¹ This is the essentially dynamic state of being not at ease: " ", which literally means to be "sick of its ease/joy". This dynamic state, appears as an effort to leave an untenable situation and it is the *indetermination* of its goal that first proposes the departure.⁶² In other words, the desire for departure does not have any externally derived cause or aim, but is understood in its pure activity as an effort or endeavour to depart. For Levinas, this malaise does not indicate a lack of fulfilment. At the same time however, this fulfilment cannot be equated with satisfaction. In other words, satisfaction is possible, but it does not destroy the need of evasion.⁶³ For Levinas, there is a different exigency in the need of evasion than "need" understood as an exigency to the preservation of life. This former exigency is the weight of existence, that satisfaction, in the affective guise of pleasure, cannot overcome.

Pleasure is described as a movement that increases in intensity to the point of its own annihilation.⁶⁴ It is the feeling of being emptied of one's substance, becoming light in intoxication and dispersion. Levinas recognises in pleasure an abandon, loss of self, and an ecstasy beyond the self. This ecstasy is equal to a

⁶⁰ EV 77.

⁶¹ EV 78.

⁶² EV 78.

⁶³ EV 79.

⁶⁴ EV 82.

promise of evasion. In other words, pleasure is not a passive state, but paradoxically opens a dimension where malaise "catches sight" of evasion in a movement of the undoing [*denouement*] of malaise.⁶⁵ Pleasure is tantamount to a promise of evasion, however, it is not an act which fills the need announced in evasion. This failure of pleasure to fulfil evasion occurs because pleasure is an unending process of leaving being. Pleasure is an affectivity with pretensions to break the forms of being, without recognising its unending need for being. Thus Levinas writes that this pretension to breaking from being is a deception. The increase in the intensity of pleasure is described as:

... an increase in promises that become richer by the measure in which they attain paroxysm, but these promises are not kept.⁶⁶

In other words, the failure of pleasure is not due to its being conditioned by need but because deception is constitutive of its internal becoming. The moment of its triumph is also the moment of its annihilation or failure. This failure appears as "shame".⁶⁷

Levinas begins by distancing shame from its moral connotations. Rather than being a particular affective response to an act, shame is considered to have an ontological significance. The acuity of shame lies in the impossibility of *not* identifying with that being [] that is already strange to us - strange not simply because we do not comprehend its motives for action, but also because it is the very revelation of being in incomprehension. In other words, for Levinas, shame is linked to a moment in which a comprehending being confronts the limit of its understanding. This is not a moment of conscious recognition of the limits of the cognising subject, but is thought in relation to *Dasein*. Shame then, points to a limit in *Dasein's* transcendental trajectory. Levinas describes the strangeness of

⁶⁵ EV 83.

⁶⁶ EV 84.

⁶⁷ EV 84.

being, experienced in shame, in terms of nudity. Shame makes transparent the nudity of an existence incapable of concealing itself.⁶⁸ The nudity which induces shame does not concern our body as a material thing, but our body as "the irremissible presence of the ego to itself".⁶⁹ This presence is shameful not merely because of an incapacity to cover up this nudity, but because "[w]hat shame discovers is being that dis-covers itself".⁷⁰ Shame does not reveal a lack, but the inevitable return to oneself. In other words, the failure of evasion.

While the notion of shame and the metaphor of nudity appear in Levinas' later work with regard to a notion of a transcendence beyond being, in *De* , Levinas restricts his discussion to what he calls a specific kind of shame in "nausea", linking it to an experience of an impossibility in relation to being. It is in nausea that Levinas discovers a fundamental impower, or impossibility, in the human existent's manner of being. From this basis he implicitly questions the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein*.

v) Nausea and Anxiety

With the notion of nausea, Levinas returns to the question of the meaning of malaise, no longer having to juxtapose it with pleasure. As a form of malaise, nausea is characterised as a refusal which is itself a positive event. Levinas claims that it refers to the "effort to leave or depart" from the existential weight. This effort however is always and already in despair. In nausea, one discovers the impossibility of being what one is, while at the same time being riveted to oneself. This, Levinas claims, is "*the very experience of pure being*".⁷¹ It is the experience of an internal antagonism and an evasion that is *imposed*.⁷² This imposition differs fundamentally from Heidegger's notion of anxiety which

⁶⁸ EV 86.

⁶⁹ EV 87.

⁷⁰ EV 87.

⁷¹ EV 90.

⁷² EV 90 (my italics).

individualises *Dasein* in bringing it face to face with itself as Being-in-the-world. As Heidegger explains, as *Dasein* falls into the world it also draws back, familiarity collapses and "Being-in enters into the existential mode of the 'not-at-home'".⁷³ But while Levinas agrees that from "an existential-ontological point of view, the 'not-at-home' must be conceived of as the more primordial phenomenon",⁷⁴ this does not mean that the anguish of nausea can be reduced to Heideggerian anxiety.

Levinas explains anxiety as the comprehension of the indeterminacy, the *insignificance* of things, or in other words, as the nothing of things.⁷⁵ This insignificance is not merely a theoretical negation, but essentially anxiety:

Anxiety, in bringing existence back to itself, saves it from its dispersion into things, and reveals to it its possibility of existing in a particularly acute fashion as Being-in-the-world.⁷⁶

However, in _____, nausea is associated with the manner of attachment to being rather than an encounter with beings in their nothingness. In the event of nausea:

The pleasant joy of life loses its character of joy. Not because the suffering which menaces it renders it unpleasurable, but because the basis of suffering is the fact of the impossibility of interruption and an acute feeling of being riveted.⁷⁷

In other words, Heidegger's discovery of anxiety rescues us from dispersion and the loss of self in the world of things - from *Dasein's*

⁷³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 234.

⁷⁵ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 30/427.

⁷⁶ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 30/428. The Committee for Public Safety translates "*angoisse*" as "anguish" rather than following the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of Heideggerian "*Angst*" as "anxiety". I have substituted "anxiety" for "anguish".

⁷⁷ EV 70.

inauthenticity - and returns *Dasein* to "its isolation, to its initial possibility of being-in-the-world".⁷⁸ In other words, anxiety returns *Dasein* to authenticity. Levinas does not suggest that this is a release from the tragic finitude of being. In other words, he recognises that anxiety occurs in the face of thrownness and about our potentiality for Being-in-the-world (as thrown).⁷⁹ Anxiety individualises *Dasein* in Being-toward-death; death is the ownmost/authentic possibility of *Dasein*. As a possibility it is imposed and as always-already-beyond-itself, *Dasein* is always already projected towards it. However, as already suggested, for Levinas, anxiety in the face of death has already covered over the nausea and shame in the face of the bare fact of being: He finds that "[n]ausea as such, only discovers the nudity of being in its plenitude and in its irremissible presence".⁸⁰

For Levinas, Heidegger's analysis of anxiety points to the anonymity of being that haunts authentic existence itself. But Heidegger's analysis of the authentic mode of Being as the anxiety of Being-toward-death, and its juxtaposition with the inauthenticity of our affective relation to the world, ignores shame as the original form of nausea. As suggested earlier, Levinas acknowledges a double disposition of *Dasein*, but suggests in his analysis of nausea that Heidegger has overlooked another distinction in the relation of being and the human. Shame does not turn us toward the nothing, but to "the fact of having a body, of being there".⁸¹ The passivity of shame calls into question whether even my death is an ownmost possibility.

⁷⁸ *Martin Heidegger and Ontology*, p. 31/429. Levinas appears to be referring to Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233: "Anxiety individualises Dasein and thus discloses it as a '*solus ipse*'. But this existential 'solipsism' is so far from the displacement of putting an isolated subject-Thing into the innocuous emptiness of a worldless occurring, that in an extreme sense what it does is precisely to bring Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring it face to face with itself as Being-in-the-world".

⁷⁹ This is a paraphrase of Heidegger's claim: "that in the face of which we have anxiety is thrown Being-in-the-world; that which we have anxiety about is our potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world"; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 235.

⁸⁰ EV 90.

⁸¹ EV 91.

While in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will challenge Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death directly, in *De l'evasion*, Levinas is merely pointing to a relation to being which is not to be found in the existential analytic of *Dasein*.⁸² But does this mean that Levinas is concerned solely with the existentiel or pre-ontological 'comprehension' of Being? There is a sense in which nausea could be understood as the *existentiel* expression of the pre-ontological understanding of Being. However, this would not mean that Levinas wishes to overturn the priority of the question of Being. Rather he suggests that question of Being, which governs the consequent analytic of *Dasein* as that being which has the understanding of Being as its very mode of Being, is also and always already governed by an impossibility. The passage from implicit to explicit comprehension, despite and perhaps because of its anti-intellectualism, reveals transcendence as a movement that only ever recovers itself. In other words, *Dasein's* ecstatic projection, in which it is open to its ownmost possibilities for Being, is not belied by *Dasein's* inevitable death but by the very manner of this being's attachment to being.

At the end of his analysis of nausea Levinas asks:

Is not nausea a fact of consciousness that the self recognises as one of its states? Is it existence itself or only an existant?⁸³

In other words is nausea merely a state of consciousness or the manner of the existent's attachment to existence as such? Levinas will claim that:

... nausea reveals to us the presence of being in all its impower [*impuissance*] ...⁸⁴

⁸² In the later work, Levinas claims that being-towards-death is a "supreme lucidity and hence a supreme virility" of *Dasein* in its authentic existence. Death is the possibility of impossibility which "precisely makes possible all other possibilities", TO 70/TA 165.

⁸³ EV 91.

⁸⁴ EV 92.

Thus, there is no leave-taking of being or of oneself in the passage to explicit comprehension. Rather, Levinas suggests that it is in the utter passivity of shame that there is hope for the presence of the other as an exteriority that is not reducible to the ex-stasis of ontological transcendence. This is Levinas' first mention of another person [*autrui*]:

The presence of the other person is even hoped for to a certain extent, because it permits the reduction [*ravalier*] of the scandal of nausea to the rank of an illness [*maladie*]; to a normal social fact that one can treat; and consequently, with regard to which one can take an objective attitude.⁸⁵

According to Levinas, this hope is in itself not enough to accomplish the escape, nor is it another way of thinking the relation to being, that he has been pursuing throughout the essay. *De l'évasion* announces that a new way of leaving being must be pursued. But it must be pursued beginning with the affirmation of the impossibility inherent in the relation to being. It is on the basis of recognising that in our attachment to being we find something more distressing than the finitude of our existence, that this new way of thinking transcendence is to be approached. Nausea and the impossibility of evasion can be read as Levinas' first attempt to awaken the sense of a passivity and a suffering in the midst of the relation to being which cannot be assumed by a being, and which refuses to leave *Dasein* to itself.

The only way that is open consequently ... is to measure without fear, all the weight of being and its universality, to recognise the inanity of the act and the thought that cannot hold a place for the event that, in the very accomplishment of existence, shatters that

⁸⁵ EV 91.

existence, act and thought, that should not consequently mask the originality of evasion.⁸⁶

Impossibility is not conceived as a negation of being as such, but rather, it introduces a conception of being as insufficient, and only in this sense, always already in question in the experience of nausea. But what is the basis of Levinas' assertion that it is being itself that is "experienced" in nausea, and not just some subjective event of consciousness? does not yet provide an answer or a reason for this reconfiguration of Being and *Dasein* but does suggest that the way out of being concerns the meaning and value of humanity itself.

In conclusion, let me recall the discussion in *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, where Levinas sees National Socialism as a response to the new philosophy of embodied existence and liberal idealism as incapable of providing a response. In this essay, Levinas claims that blood and race have become the new bases of "freedom" and the "rights of man", which have been perverted by the new ideal of "the expansion of force".⁸⁷ This notion of force is perhaps reflected in Levinas' description of impossibility and impower. However, impossibility and the utter failure of the need of evasion, should not be read as an impotence.

Commenting on years later, Levinas implicitly recognises the problem that this association of being and impower raised:

In the original text, written in 1935 one is able to distinguish the anxiety of war that was approaching and all of the "fatigue/tiredness of being" the state of the soul of that period. A mistrust with regard to being, which under another form continued in what ... in its entirety was the foreboding of the imminent Hitlerism everywhere.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ EV 99.

⁸⁷ *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, p. 70.

⁸⁸

Manufacture,1987), p. 82-83.

In the experience of nausea, ontological impossibility does not bow to absolute power, but begins to look for another way of thinking the meaning of the human out of, but beyond its the relation to being.