

Chapter 3

Enjoyment: Subject and World

This chapter discusses Levinas' notion of the subjective life of "enjoyment", suggesting that Levinas provides an account of the manner of subjective life in its separateness from the materiality of hypostasis. The elaboration of enjoyment is approached with regard to the question raised in the previous chapter of the relation and priority of being and entities. In the final sections of the chapter I respond to Rolland's critique of Levinas in this regard and I engage with Cathryn Vasseleu's reading of the light of enjoyment and the night of *il y a*. I will argue that in *Totality and Infinity*, enjoyment (light) does not effect an escape from *il y a* (night). This reading of enjoyment creates the context for a continuing discussion of the relation of being, subjectivity, *il y a* and world, in the following chapter.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that it is only in relation to a being whose primary relation to the world is one in which hunger and satisfaction are essential possibilities that the signification of the weight of being can be approached. In relation to this problematic Levinas' starting point is a critique of Husserl's intentionality, which Levinas regards as maintaining an implicit dualism of body and consciousness. Levinas attempts to describe the subject of enjoyment beyond the structures of Husserlian intentionality, while refusing the dual directionality of *Dasein's* effectivity as a duality of authentic and inauthentic Being of *Dasein*. With the notion of enjoyment Levinas attempts to define subjectivity in terms of an excess, in the sense of not being conceivable solely in terms of its relation to being or the world. Enjoyment points to a fundamental alienation, or separation from a world in which I realise my possibilities, but it also suggests that the relation to *il y a* in hypostasis, described in the previous

chapter, must also be approached from the point of view of an already accomplished separation.

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas links enjoyment not only to being, but also to light and knowledge. The significance of light is that it is the medium in which something is encountered across a distance. However, the relation to the object across the distance opened in light, in other words, the knowledge of the object, does not overcome the solitude of existing. The luminosity of enjoyment does not break the subjective attachment to being. Enjoyment describes the plenitude of subjective life. Accompanying this notion is the idea that a postponement has been effected which is not a possibility arising in the subjective attachment to being, that is, it is not equated with the duality of reflexive hypostasis.

i) Hunger and Thirst: The Salvation and Sincerity of Life

In *Time and the Other*, the notion of enjoyment is introduced as a salvation from the weight or materiality of hypostasis: the enchainment of self to itself. Enjoyment is linked to a notion of a separation of the subject from itself which occurs in "everyday existence, in the world".¹ In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas explains the significance of the introduction of enjoyment with regard to the Heideggerian notion of Being-in-the-world.

of nourishments.²

If we recall the discussion of Heidegger in the last chapter, then this move must be seen in the light of the question of the relation of the inauthentic and

¹ TO 62/TA 154.

² TO 63/TA 154-155.

authentic Being of *Dasein*. In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas explains that far from being a fall, the world "has its own equilibrium, harmony and positive ontological function: the possibility of extracting oneself from anonymous being", and that to "call it everyday and condemn it as inauthentic is to fail to recognise the sincerity of hunger and thirst".³

For Levinas, hunger and thirst and the essential possibility of their satisfaction, interrupt anonymous existence. In hypostasis, the subject is irremissibly tied to itself. However, in the world, "instead of a return to itself, there is a relationship with everything that is necessary for being".⁴ This manner of relation to the world, entails a separation of subjectivity from its irremissible attachment to the anonymity of *il y a*, and also contains an implicit reinterpretation of world as Heidegger conceives it.

Levinas conceives of separation as an "abnegation", which is not a negation but a first salvation.⁵ In other words, salvation from the initial materiality is not a matter for the soul, but for embodied subjectivity. In the world, an interval appears between the ego and the self which is reflected in existence, but this is not a separation of body and soul, nor is it a moment in which the irremissible attachment to being is broken.⁶ The apparent duality of the "biological life and metaphysical life", indicates an "original structure" of subjectivity, but this does not consist of two irreconcilably opposite essences, especially not the corporeal and the divine.⁷

For Levinas, the practical immersion of *Dasein* in the world, overlooks the fundamental value of world as nourishment. The absorption of the object in the sincerity of hunger and thirst is not a consequence of a concern for existence, but

³ EE 45/DE 69.

⁴ TO 63/TA 155-156.

⁵ TO 64/TA 156.

⁶ TO 64/TA 156.

⁷ E. Levinas, *The Ego and Totality*, CP 27.

makes up the content of our "whole being in the world".⁸ In other words, Levinas claims that the primary mode of being in the world has this structure in which "an object concords fully with a desire".⁹ Nevertheless, enjoyment is not unattached to the intentionality of the contemplative ego. For Levinas, enjoyment conceived of in terms of hunger and thirst, describes the "sincerity" of intentionality itself.¹⁰ In other words, the movement of appropriation and possession which describes an intention, is belied by the sincerity of an enjoyment of the world, such that intentionality is not grounded in a needy subject, but in a subject which finds everything necessary for its existence in the world.

The introduction of enjoyment must be understood as an attempt to rethink the primary relation to being as hypostasis. In *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, Levinas uses a notion of being in the world which entails a distance with regard to *il y a*, but is not conceived as a negation of this primary contracting of existence. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas continues to develop his notion of enjoyment, describing it in relation to intentional consciousness, with the aim of demonstrating that the "transcendence" of intentional consciousness does not effect the departure from being he is looking for because it does not overcome the primary attachment to being in hypostasis. Levinas suggests that "the transcendental pretension" of the representational act of intentional consciousness is "constantly belied by the life that is already implanted in the being representation claims to constitute".¹¹

The description of hypostasis in terms of the contraction of being, and enjoyment as a first separation, cannot be read as the overcoming of the impossibility inherent in the need of evasion. As the discussion above would

⁸ EE 44/DE 67.

⁹ EE 44/DE 67.

¹⁰ EE 45/DE 69.

¹¹ E. Levinas *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Tel), trans. A Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990), p. 169. Original French page numbers, from (Tel), (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), p.143.

already suggest, enjoyment cannot be conceived as Levinas' new way of leaving being. In enjoyment, although "emancipated from the anonymity of existing", the subject remains "riveted to itself through its identity as an existent (that is materialised)".¹²

ii) Enjoyment and Intentionality in *Totality and Infinity*

Similarly to the subjectivity discussed in *De l'évasion*, the subject of enjoyment is not lacking, but is nevertheless "insufficient".¹³ However, in *Totality and Infinity*, insufficiency is discussed in terms of the need and dependence of the subject of enjoyment on the world from which it lives.¹⁴ Unlike the early works, Levinas does not conceive of this subjectivity in terms of a withdrawal from the anonymity of *il y a*, but as a withdrawal and reversal of intentional consciousness which constitutes the world as other, on the basis of the "I" as a formal identity. The otherness or transcendence, of the intentional world, is found to be part of the immanent world of subjectivity in so far as it reverts incessantly to the subject of enjoyment. Levinas calls this aspect of subjective identity the "ipseity" of the formal identity of the "I".¹⁵

The relation of ipseity and formal identity, of enjoyment and intentionality, is not an oppositional or dialectical relation. Levinas aligns enjoyment with affectivity and sentiment.¹⁶ However, he insists that it does not fit into categories of activity and passivity. Enjoyment does not refer to the passivity of lived consciousness. At the same time it cannot be conceived as the ontological interpretation of an ontic affectivity. Levinas does refer to enjoyment as the accomplishment of ipseity and the concrete locus of identity and thus aligns

¹² TO 65/TA 157.

¹³ EV 70.

¹⁴ TaI 110-111/TeI 82-83.

¹⁵ TaI 115/TeI 88.

¹⁶ TaI 115/TeI 87.

enjoyment with a notion of effectivity or facticity. However, while the effectivity of enjoyment maintains the formal element of the dual directionality of facticity, Levinas insists enjoyment is neither reducible to an intention, nor definable in terms of its relation to being.

The discussion of enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity* starts with an examination of the relation of Husserlian intentional consciousness and lived embodiment. Behind Levinas' analysis is the belief that despite Husserl's notion of hyletic data, the structure of affective relations in Husserl's philosophy is always described in terms of its value for intentionality. This is what Levinas means when he claims that the "lived body" is subordinated to the logical structures of intentionality. As suggested in a later paper: "Husserl maintained to the very end that there was a logical stratum in all intentionality, even the non-theoretical sort".¹⁷

According to Levinas, this subordination of the signification of lived embodiment to the structures of the intentional relation, meant Husserl overlooked the possibility that subjectivity is produced prior to its being known (from the position of the intentional consciousness) and that the body of affects and sensibility could be anything more than the physical substratum of intentionality.

As suggested above, Levinas is well aware that for Husserl transcendence is a mode of immanence.¹⁸ Levinas interprets this to mean that the intentional relation is a relation to an outside, but an "outside" which is posited by thought, and thus interior to thought:

¹⁷ E. Levinas, "Beyond Intentionality", trans. K. McLaughlin, in A. Montefiore, (ed.) *Philosophy in France Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 105.

¹⁸ "Transcendence in every form is an immanent existential characteristic", E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*

... in representation the I precisely loses its opposition to its object; the opposition fades, bringing out the identity of the I despite the multiplicity of its objects.¹⁹

Levinas' use of "representation" in this context is not merely to be understood in terms of a predicative act, but includes the pre-predicative act of meaning-bestowing that describes intentionality as "consciousness of".²⁰ In this analysis of representation, exteriority or objectivity is understood as a product of the meaning-bestowing act and the distinction between interior and exterior is effaced.²¹ For Husserl, phenomenology "explores the universal Apriori ... the all embracing laws that prescribe for every factual statement ... the possible sense of that statement".²² Levinas argues that this notion of intentionality describes the instantiation of thought; the positing of a formal identity. He writes that to "be intelligible is to be represented and hence to be a priori".²³ In this instantiation, there is a total correspondence or adequation of the thinker with what is thought.²⁴ Following from this, the representational act is considered an act of identification, where the identification of objects in an external world is also a moment in the production of the identity of the "I" itself.²⁵ To represent is to reduce to *a presence* - the pure presence of the "I".²⁶

Thus, according to Levinas, the intentional relation might appear as a relation to the outside, but is in fact the reduction of exteriority to the instant of thought: "[t]o represent is ... to reduce to the instantaneousness of thought

¹⁹ TaI 126/TeI 99.

²⁰ This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven with regard to the relation of the Said and the Saying teleologically turned toward the Said.

²¹ TaI 124/TeI 96.

²² Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* .

²³ TaI 127/TeI 99.

²⁴ Levinas appears to be referring to passages such as the following: "Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being", Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*

²⁵ TaI 126/TeI 99.

²⁶ TaI 125/TeI 98.

everything that seems independent of it".²⁷ This reduction means that Husserl's intentional consciousness constitutes the very identity of the subject. In other words, the intentional relation claims to be an account of *concrete* conscious life.

The apriority of intentionality lies in the fact that "representation discovers, properly speaking, nothing before [*devant*] itself".²⁸ To "speak properly" is to understand representation as the very positing of identity in which "exterior being vanishes".²⁹ It could be suggested that Levinas' notion of intentionality as always representational is not spelled out clearly enough in this early work and this might jeopardise this whole juxtaposition of enjoyment and representation, and that the affectivity of enjoyment finds itself subordinated to the representational relation in precisely the manner of Husserl's primary affectivity. It is the question of how we think the relation of the two which with Levinas is concerned. Thus, while Levinas acknowledges that representational intentionality is an *a priori* relation to the world, he does not understand this in the sense that the representational act is the necessary pre-condition, or origin of all experience and knowledge of the 'external world'. While representation produces identity, the identity of the "I" of representation is not to be understood as the non-conditioned condition of truth. He suggests that "we are far from thinking that one starts with representation as a non-conditioned condition! Representation is bound to a very different intentionality, which we are endeavouring to approach throughout this analysis".³⁰

The identity of the "I" of representation is an idealist creation which remains "detached from the conditions of its latent birth".³¹ It conceals another order of events. The first step towards the uncovering of this order is the analysis

²⁷ TaI 127/TeI 100.

²⁸ TaI 125/TeI 97. It should be noted that Levinas uses the word *devant* meaning "in front of" rather than coming before. Thus, "before" should not be understood in the latter temporal sense.

²⁹ TaI 124/TeI 96.

³⁰ TaI 126/TeI 98.

³¹ TaI 126/TeI 99.

of enjoyment through which the latent birth or posteriority of intentional consciousness, is first made manifest. In other words, in contrasting enjoyment with representation, Levinas suggests that the concrete conditions of identity are not reducible to the structures of intentional consciousness. While the subject of representation is identical to itself, for Levinas, this is an abstract concept based on a negative relation. Enjoyment, on the other hand, posits this identity as a "life". This notion of enjoyment refers a formal subjective identity back to an elemental basis of subjectivity, in the notion of "living from..." [*vivre de...*].³² This notion of enjoyment, as I shall argue, is not reducible to a pre-Husserlian nor pre-Heideggerian notion of materiality and should not be considered in terms of a thing or substance.

iii) Enjoyment, World, Exteriority

The body indigent and naked is the very reverting, irreducible to a thought, of representation into life, of the subjectivity that represents, into a life which is sustained by these representations and *lives of them* ...³³

The main contrast between intentional representation and enjoyment is the distinction between a constitutive relation to the world and a non-constitutive relation: one is a "thinking about..." or "consciousness of...", while the other is a "living from...".³⁴ Levinas' use of the metaphor of nakedness is interesting here in the context of what he says in his earlier works about the susceptibility of the subject with regard to *il y a*. Linking the two through the metaphor of nakedness,

³² TaI 110ff./TeI 82ff.

³³ TaI 127/TeI 100 (translation modified).

³⁴ TaI 128/TeI 101.

it can be suggested that in this passage Levinas expresses the idea that in the midst of, or despite, an unavoidable attachment to being, the subject finds everything necessary for existence. In the language of the early works, the subject of enjoyment exhibits a sufficiency with regard to existence. As Levinas continues, this indigence and nakedness, or dependence, also converts into an independence. Thus, while the contrast with intentional consciousness suggests an abstraction from origins, Levinas' conception of the nakedness of the subject of enjoyment indicates his maintenance of an attachment to being and thereby is concerned precisely with the question of origins.

At the end of this analysis of enjoyment and intentionality, Levinas explicitly discusses the question of the relation of enjoyment and the hypostatic connectedness to *il y a*. He finds that enjoyment "holds on" [] to the exteriority intentional representation suspends.³⁵ Holding on is not equivalent to a grasping, which would be more characteristic of representation. Nor is it, "simply equivalent to affirming the world, *but [it] is to posit oneself in it corporeally*".³⁶ This positing is the advent of embodiment, it is the moment of incarnation. For Levinas, embodiment is not an attribute of a pre-existing thing but is the event in which there is an inversion of the constitutive moment of representation into a unique position of a singular life. Exteriority is thus not reducible to the exteriority of the object given. This is not a mere reversal of interiority and exteriority where the subject is found to have taken up a position outside itself and can now see itself as an object, 'out there', 'alongside' the objects of an external world. The exteriority of enjoyment is opposed to the exteriority of "formal identity", which reveals itself as an object, or a being, amongst others. Furthermore, with the notion of the exteriority of enjoyment Levinas refuses to define subjective life as a special class of object.

³⁵ TaI 127/TeI 100.

³⁶ TaI 127/TeI 100 (my italics).

There is an implicit critique of Heidegger in these lines, in so far as he conceives of Being-in-the-world as always already alongside things, ready and present to hand. To live from something is neither to act on it in an everyday immersion in the world, nor to act by means of it utilising the world as tool or implement.³⁷ Rather "living from..." describes a relation to the world as that which nourishes. The sense or signification of "nourishment" must be distinguished from any teleological meaning it might acquire, whereby the world provides nourishment purposefully.³⁸ All action, including thinking, is nourished by the world, but this is accidental for the subject.³⁹ Levinas here makes a distinction between being, or what he calls "bare existence", and "life".⁴⁰ Life as "living from..." is not equivalent to the will to be which reduces existence to that which is undertaken within a pre-determined system. The reality of life as "living from..." is beyond such a closed system.⁴¹ "Living from..." does not constitute an objective world, nor a "subject" as a singular *entity* in this world.

As discussed above, ipseity, or the exteriority of enjoyment, means that individuality is conceived as an event of withdrawal from a world in which identity is determined as a "meaning ascribed" in a system of finality. Outside or other than an entity participating in a system of ends and means, the "I" of enjoyment "remains outside the distinction of the individual and the general" in which the subject is made meaningful in so far as it is bounded by generality.⁴²

³⁷ TaI 111/TeI 83.

³⁸ I use "sense" here to make a connection to the French terms "*un sens*" which can signify both directionality and meaning. This notion, that the signifyingness of thought is also constituted by directionality, for example, "toward oneself" or "toward the other", plays an important role in Levinas argument. As Ziarek writes: "It is a direction [*un sens*] that 'makes sense' par excellence", K. Ziarek, *Inflected Language: Toward A Hermeneutic of Nearness*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 79.

³⁹ This distinction is indicated by the dots "...".

⁴⁰ It is not clear whether "bare existence" should be conceived as a reference to anonymous being in general or the notion of being in the world, although it could be suggested that enjoyment is to be contrasted with both. I will discuss this further below.

⁴¹ TaI 112/TeI 84.

⁴² TaI 118/TeI 90.

The world I enjoy is not the represented flux of materiality, but is the 'contents' of life. These contents are not things or actions, but are expressed with the infinitive verb: "to think, to eat, to sleep, to read, to work, to warm oneself in the sun".⁴³ Levinas has a very specific notion of activity in mind when he claims that enjoyment is not an activity. He suggests that:

If "living from..." is not simply a representation of something, "living from..." also does not fit into the categories of activity and potency determinative of Aristotelian ontology. The Aristotelian act was equivalent to being. Placed within a system of ends and means, man actualised himself in exceeding his apparent limits *by action*. Like every other nature, human nature accomplished itself, that is, became entirely itself, by functioning, by entering into relations.⁴⁴

In enjoyment, one is not merely thinking, that is, thinking is not merely a mode of being. In other words, in enjoyment, "to eat" marks a separation from the anonymity of the "to be". Furthermore, this manner of separation need not be read as negating the primary verbality which resounds in being.

The event of embodiment accomplished in enjoyment, *conditions* representation in the sense that it accompanies each moment in which the world is thought as an object, or represented, by 'contenting' itself with this thought. Levinas writes: "The aliment conditions the very thought that would think it as a condition".⁴⁵ He attempts to describe the conditions by which representation relies on the priority of enjoyment when he suggests that the "represented, the

⁴³ TaI 112/TeI 84. I have modified the translation in accordance with the Levinas' use of the infinitive verb in the original. Lingis translates these infinitives as "thinking", "eating", "sleeping" etc, which obscures the distinction Levinas wishes to make between activity and enjoyment, and between being and enjoyment. While "thinking" can still be conceived as a way of being - "I am thinking" - the infinitive has a different relation to being. "To think" is in some sense "to be" otherwise than merely being, but as a verb does not negate the verbality which being names.

⁴⁴ TaI 112/TeI 84.

⁴⁵ TaI 128/TeI 101.

present, is a *fact* [*est fait*], already belonging to the past".⁴⁶ Beyond our attempts to recall and re-present, this past nevertheless accompanies each and every representation as its *unique* 'origin'. This is a notion that the language of intentional consciousness, in its universality, will always obscure. As Levinas writes:

The world I live from is not simply constituted at a second level after representation would have spread before us a backdrop of a reality simply given.⁴⁷

The mistake is to reduce the body to a given, which is to constitute it as a non-thinking being or entity, which precedes thought. The exteriority of enjoyment is not a sphere of "physical nature" that has meaning or value conferred on it after the fact. In this sense enjoyment is the positive origin of value as a locus of power, rather than as a physical body or thinking mind. However, it has also been suggested that this does not reduce it to the pre-condition of the predicative act. The power inherent in the subject of enjoyment is the capacity of the separated life to satisfy its needs. For Levinas, this does not necessarily point to the ego as a dominating force, since need, or indigence remains the state of this body. Indigence or lack is to be understood in terms of an insufficiency which does not point to a negation at the heart of its being. Instead, he finds that it points to the incessant reversion of the world into this life.⁴⁸ That is, the body is motivated by incessant need because it demands acquisition at the level of enjoyment, not because it is lacking meaning or requires power for its own sake.

Thus, Levinas understands "need" as pointing to the "indigent body", which is not a thing, but the place/space of satisfaction. The "I" of enjoyment is

⁴⁶ TaI 130/TeI 103.

⁴⁷ TaI 130/TeI 103.

⁴⁸ TaI 127/TeI 100.

pure positivity rather than a substance or entity.⁴⁹ Positivity here is outside the opposition of affirmation/negation, and refers to the event of *positing*. The affirmation, or power, lies in a positing of oneself in the world prior to all systematic attempts to make it meaningful, rather than in an acknowledgment or ability to grasp the world suspended in representation. Thereby, the world is "affirmed as non-constituted prior to all affirmation" and the subject affirms its existence in this world prior to its own self-conceptualisation.⁵⁰ This paradoxical structure of indigence and satisfaction, points to the fact that enjoyment is a separation from, but not a negation of, the materiality of hypostasis.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas discusses this relation of indigence and satisfaction in terms of the dependence and independence of the subject of enjoyment in relation to the "elemental". In enjoyment one posits oneself, and is therefore independent of the world. However, the world "I live from" is the elemental world, which is essentially non-possessable: "the earth, the sea, the sun, the city".⁵¹ Even in making a place for myself here, in becoming independent, I remain dependent on the elemental. Levinas tells us much earlier, "living from...", understood as the event of positing, is a consummation of the world. Consummation affirms the elemental not by making it its own but by positing itself in it, producing a life distinct from it. While it lives from the world, it is completely self-sufficient. As such the consummation of the world exhibits an "extraterritoriality".⁵² Enjoyment does not describe a "cleavage [*une coupure*] in

⁴⁹ TaI 113/TeI 85.

⁵⁰ TaI 127/TeI 100.

⁵¹ TaI 131/TeI 104. It is interesting to note that Levinas includes the city [*la ville*] which would not usually be regarded as one of the four elements of earth, sea, fire and water and thus suggests firstly that we cannot read Levinas' notion of the elemental in the traditional sense. I suggest that the placement of the city amongst the 'elements' acknowledges the very close connection between enjoyment and dwelling. While the present discussion focuses on enjoyment, Levinas' analysis of dwelling and possession is the theme of the following Chapter.

⁵² TaI 131/TeI 104.

the abstract, but the existence at home with itself of an autochthonous I".⁵³ Thus, Levinas writes, exteriority is affirmed through consummation, not effaced through a negation: "*Living from...* is the dependency that turns into sovereignty,

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The notion of enjoyment has been distinguished from the Heideggerian notion but must also be distinguished from the pre-Heideggerian conceptions of the self positing of identity in idealist conceptions of 'particular subjectivity' or individuality. The distinction between enjoyment and representation cannot be reduced to a subject - object polarity, nor in terms of an acting and a consciousness of acting which more accurately describes the idealist opposition.⁵⁵ If we read the notion of enjoyment in the light of Levinas' earlier works, it is quite clear that Levinas' concern is a critique of notions of subjectivity which posit finite subjectivity on the basis of a negation, and where this finitude is subsequently overcome with the advent of reason. The notion of enjoyment rejects the possibility of an originary negation. This is because the need of enjoyment, like the need of evasion, is not based on lack, but on the surplus of satisfaction. Insufficiency or indigence, is "experienced" only in the midst of this excess.

The development of the notion of enjoyment can thus also be considered as a more general critique of the subject of the idealist tradition which maintains the priority of the freedom of the cogito despite its attempt to think the difference between consciousness and self-consciousness, or between individuality and subjectivity.⁵⁶ For Levinas, the conception of a spontaneous and pre-reflective positing of consciousness as the unconditioned condition of the "I think", while

⁵³ Tal 115/TeI 88.

⁵⁴ Tal 114/TeI 87.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Manfred Frank's article "Subjectivity and Individuality: Survey of a *Figuring the Self. Subject, Absolute, and Others in Classical German Philosophy*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 5ff.

⁵⁶ Frank, *Subjectivity and Individuality*, p. 5.

introducing a dynamic concept of identity (the identity of identity and non-identity), only serves to re-establish the priority of the cogito.⁵⁷ The pre-reflective event might be an act preceding a reflective consciousness of the act, but it merely describes the place where the multiplicity of the given can be brought into the present of "being-in-act".⁵⁸ This leads ultimately to a subject-object polarity of self-consciousness which although dynamic, is caught in a circularity of identity where I=I.⁵⁹

Levinas claims that Kant's notion of the "original unity of apperception", is the superlative expression of "being-in-act" and is admired by Hegel as one the deepest insights of the critique of reason.⁶⁰ As Levinas continues, this is not to suggest that the soul, or the unknown and singular essence of the subject, is to be henceforth understood as the original unity of apperception, but rather it is this original unity itself which first lets the soul appear. The transcendental unity of apperception is not merely spontaneous psychological activity, but rather, is the "actuality" of the present. Spontaneous imagination derives from this atemporal actuality, and comes to have a grasp of the given in its temporal form. The atemporal exercise of this actuality is the originary positing of the "I". According to Levinas, this describes precisely the *a priori* "I" of classical humanism, which Fichte, as heir to the transcendental tradition, maintains in the notion of the sovereign activity of the self positing "I".⁶¹ Everything posited in consciousness

⁵⁷ E. Levinas, Preface to *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, (Paris: Fata Morgana, Livre de Poche, edition 1972), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Levinas, Preface to *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ As Manfred Frank suggests with regard to Kant, the "I think" is an indissoluble doubling of "perception in general" and thinking that perceives itself, which Frank calls the "autoreflexivity of representing", Frank, *Subjectivity and Individuality*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Levinas quotes Hegel in this regard: the essence of the concept is recognised in the "originary-synthetic unity of apperception, as the unity of 'I think' or self consciousness", Levinas, Preface to *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, p. 8. Levinas quotes from G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, (Hg.) Georg Lasson, (Leipzig, 1923), p. 221.

⁶¹ Levinas, Preface to *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, p.8-9.

is posited by consciousness understood as this originary positing. The non-"I" will also be posited here as the objective pole of being-in-act.⁶²

For Levinas, thought not only knows things through the power of logical or theoretical reduction and deduction, but in this very process produces a subjectivity distant from itself, as though its *origin* were still to come - the autochthonous origin in the world. This does not lead to a notion of subjectivity as open to its own end in death, nor as uprooted from the conditions of existence in its self-representation. It leads to the notion of a subjectivity that contents itself to "live from...", and does not cease to live from thought itself, but through thought reproduces its origin incessantly. For Levinas, this is the tragedy of existence - not the possibility of not-being, of death, but that we cannot escape our own being and the impossibility of our own death.

iv) The Subject of Enjoyment and *Il y a*

While enjoyment can be conceived of as a moment of the consummation of need it must be conceived in terms of the polarity of satisfaction and need, rather than be situated on one side or the other of this opposition. But how does this possibility of satisfaction stand in relation to the impossible attachment to being? Levinas' notion of the elemental as the plenitude of being in which the "I" bathes is no doubt tied up with his concern to begin his meditation with a being that lacks nothing, but again, what is the relation of the elemental and the *il y a*?

Unlike the need of evasion, the need of enjoyment does not appear to lead to the experience of nausea. The need of enjoyment is akin to the pleasure-seeking subject of evasion. Thus, it would seem that in an attempt to overcome the impossible restrictions posed by *il y a* in relation to the "I", Levinas elaborates on the pure plenitude of the autochthonous "I" in enjoyment in order to

⁶² Levinas, Preface to *Humanisme de l' autre homme*, p. 8-9.

overcome the restrictions that the notion of evasion has on the possibility of an affirmative conception of subjectivity.

In relation to this move, Jacques Rolland claims that in providing for the possibility of satisfaction of needs, Levinas describes the "I" as evasion in-itself, which as Levinas had already demonstrated in *Enfance*, is impossible.⁶³ Quoting Levinas, Rolland suggests that by conceiving of enjoyment in this manner, as a "beyond being", the "I", is assured of its escape from the horror of *il y a* in the mastery of its own existence:

... one becomes a subject of being, not by assuming being but in enjoying happiness, by the interiorisation of enjoyment which is also an exaltation, an "above being."⁶⁴

In enjoyment, the "I" has identity as its content, finding its identity, across all that happens to it, to be the same - not relatively, but absolutely. According to Rolland, the limit of *Totality and Infinity* lies in this account of the existent as the possibility of mastery in enjoyment.⁶⁵ As a consequence, Levinas fails in his ambition to provide an alternative account of subjective life to that of Heidegger. Rolland finds that Levinas does not go beyond the ontological difference, but only effects an inversion of the terms, Being and being, privileging being over Being.

We have now returned to the question posed in the first section of this chapter concerning the relation of the moment of hypostasis and the subjectivity of enjoyment. Is enjoyment to be understood as evasion? Rolland makes two claims which must be distinguished. On one hand is the claim that, with the notion of enjoyment, Levinas describes the possibility of evasion, which he had earlier tried to show was impossible. On the other hand is the claim that with the notion of enjoyment, Levinas merely effects a reversal of the ontological

⁶³ Rolland, *Levinas et la question de l'Autre*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ TaI 119/TeI 92.

⁶⁵ Rolland, *Levinas et la question de l'Autre*, p. 49.

difference. Putting them together, Rolland claims, quoting Levinas' later work, that the latter does not yet see that in subjectivity there is "an exception putting out of order the conjunction of essence, entities and the "difference".⁶⁶ As we shall see in the following chapters, while in *Totality and Infinity* it might be argued that Levinas does not yet see subjectivity as putting the conjunction of essence (Being), entities (beings) and the ontological difference out of order, the subject's relation to the alterity of the face certainly calls it into question. I suggest that a final decision on the question of whether enjoyment effects an impossible evasion should be made after investigating the relation of the exteriority of enjoyment to the exteriority of the face.⁶⁷ This will be addressed through a reading of dwelling, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

For the moment I suggest that enjoyment does not effect the evasion but corresponds more accurately to Levinas discussion of pleasure in . In the discussion in section one of this chapter it was suggested that for Levinas in *Existence and Existents*, enjoyment is that way of being in the world which does not negate the singular moment in which the "I" contracts existence, and finds itself bearing the weight of being. It does however, effect a distancing, and thus appears beyond being, understood as *il y a*.

However, as Levinas argues in *Totality and Infinity*, this "distancing from", is not a transcendence of being. On the contrary, the notion of enjoyment is the basis of Levinas' notion of the "I" as absolute separation, which far from being a moment of transcendence, describes the absolute immanence of identity. Nevertheless, this moment begs the question of whether enjoyment has taken the place of the indolence associated with the materiality of being. However, in this

⁶⁶ Rolland uses this quotation which comes from Levinas' preliminary note to *Otherwise Than Being*, p. xli. It is important to add that Levinas says this when describing the project of *Otherwise than Being* and does not suggest anything with regard to his early works. It could be argued that Rolland does imply by this that he is expressing a concern that Levinas addresses only in his later work, *Otherwise than Being*.

⁶⁷ I shall suggest in the next chapter that this question concerns the status of the subject of dwelling, and the manner in which the face appears to this subjectivity. The dwelling is both an account of the non-dialectical manner of the subject's relation to *il y a*, and is necessary for the encounter with the exteriority of the face.

regard, it could be argued that enjoyment is not opposed to nausea, indolence or the weight of being, in *Totality and Infinity*, but describes what Levinas, in his earlier works, called the essential satisfaction of the "I".

While the "I" is nevertheless insufficient with regard to transcendence, as we saw above, the subject of enjoyment is independent in the midst of a vast dependence. However, the fact that the horror of *il y a* - the fact that there is being - troubles the "fundamental security"⁶⁸ of enjoyment, but does not precede it, ensures the possibility of encountering being (conceived of as *il y a*) without this bringing the "sovereignty of the I to naught".⁶⁹ This would seem to secure the subject of enjoyment from the weight of anonymity which had previously marked its advent. The "I" is to a certain extent freed from the "fatality of anonymous existence".⁷⁰ However, the "I" discovers this is not a freedom it secures for itself. As Levinas writes at the end of *Existence and Existents*:

In position, in the relationship which it effects with a place, in the *here*, we will find the event by which existence in general, anonymous and inexorable, opens to leave room for a private domain, an inwardness, the unconscious, sleep and oblivion, which consciousness, always wakefulness, recall and reflection, is back to back with.⁷¹

Enjoyment, back to back with intentionality, is the fact of this opening of anonymity to the inwardness of a private and singular being. Enjoyment is the turning of "bare existence" into a life. This relation neither entails a negation of *il y a*, nor the subject of enjoyment. Thus, Levinas argues that if enjoyment is an evasion then it is a fleeing into life, and not the possibility of transcending

⁶⁸ TaI 149/TeI 123.

⁶⁹ TaI 149/TeI 123.

⁷⁰ EE 99/DE 171.

⁷¹ EE 99/DE 171.

being.⁷² That the subject maintains a relation to this realm of anonymous existence, of *il y a*, across a separation and a distance, points to a new event.

v) Enjoyment: Light and Distance

In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas suggests that the distance across which the subject approaches an object, is due to a withdrawal of the subject at the moment of its tending toward the object. For Levinas, this possibility, of a relation and a withdrawal is discussed in terms of the "miracle of light".⁷³ In *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* he does not link this 'miracle' to a new event in subjective life but suggest that it is effected in the sincerity of enjoyment itself.⁷⁴

absorption of the object, but also distance with regard to it.⁷⁵

In *Totality and Infinity* there has been a transformation of the notion of enjoyment as it was understood in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*. This distinction can be seen most clearly in terms of Levinas' association of enjoyment and light in the earlier works and the transformations of this medium in *Totality and Infinity*. The transition is emphasised by Cathryn Vasseleu who discusses the manner in which Levinas, in his early works, starts to rethink "light" in terms of the sensuousness of enjoyment.⁷⁶ This linking of the metaphors of light to the sensuous medium of the subject's immediate relation to

⁷² TaI 149/TeI 123.

⁷³ EE 48/DE 76.

⁷⁴ This will not be the case in *Totality and Infinity* in which Levinas will rethink light through a radically different "optics" which he calls ethics.

⁷⁵ TO 63/TA 155.

⁷⁶ C. Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 78-79.

the world is crucial to Levinas' critique of knowledge. Vasseleu suggests that in *Existence and Existents*, light is to be understood as the medium of our substantial immersion in life. The ego of intentionality is to be rethought in terms of its relation to this world of sensuous light which is associated with a postponement of the night of *il y a*. Levinas' analyses in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, do suggest such an interpretation. As such, these works cannot avoid the question of a re-establishing of a subject of mastery, in an oppositional relation between the night of *il y a* and the light of sensuous enjoyment. However, the relation of the ego of enjoyment, of intentional consciousness and *il y a*, in *Totality and Infinity*, do not correspond to those of the early works.

In *Totality and Infinity*, it can be argued, the light of enjoyment is a medium of warmth in which the ego bathes and not something emanating from it. This warmth is contrasted to the light which provides the illumination which permits an object, coming from without, to appear. It is no longer possible to suggest that the warmth of enjoyment is equivalent to the light which Levinas had earlier described as the miracle which is the essence of thought.

Furthermore, in *Totality and Infinity*, light is not contrasted to *il y a*, but is the "indeterminate density" of this void itself.⁷⁷ Thus, Levinas says that light does not arrest the incessant play of the *il y a*.⁷⁸ Vision in the light however, is the possibility of forgetting the inevitable return of this *apeiron*. This vision is a possibility of the subject of enjoyment, who, as we have already discussed, is not the origin of this void of light, nor a visible object situated in it, but a moment of postponement. It is as though the instant of evanescence does not occur in the moment of a blink of the eye, but in the moment of the eyes first opening. As Levinas suggests, one only has to open one's eyes to see the world.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ TaI 190/TaI 165.

⁷⁸ TaI 190/TaI 165.

⁷⁹ TaI 130/TaI 103.

Up until this point in Levinas' argument, he claims to have been guided by the notion that representation is not the work of "the look" itself.⁸⁰ The look or intentionality of consciousness, is essentially related to a sensible subjectivity. However, the relation of the subject of enjoyment and intentional consciousness is not understandable as a relation of a sensuous foundation and a thinking subject. The light associated with the ego of intentionality, is not the light in which the ego of enjoyment bathes. The confounding of the realm of warmth, with the realm of light in which the world appears, overlooks Levinas' critique in *Totality and Infinity*. The light which illuminates and is 'naturally' understood, does not emanate from the self, nor is it the medium which the ego inhabits. The contrast between the night of *il y a* and the light of the ego of enjoyment no longer holds. It is not *il y a* which reveals the limits of subjective identity in incarnation but the advent of a new "light". Levinas describes this as the face of the other, which awakens the phenomenal subject to a sensibility that can only be defined through a radically different "optics" which Levinas calls "ethics".⁸¹

The analyses in *Existence and Existents*, hint at this notion. Time is required to undo the knot that evanescence cannot undo. The existent who is described as a scintillation, does not break with the anonymous night but postpones it. This, Levinas claims, is not a possibility of the subject itself. Although it finds itself already in itself, it is not aware of the production of distance effectuated in its labour. *Il y a* threatens the subject of hypostasis, but it is precisely because this subject finds that it can postpone this moment that light turns into certainty, and *il y a* is reified into an anonymous night. The subject, in other words, does not call the clarity of light into question. Nor is light questioned by the continual murmuring of *il y a*, which threatens the subject with non-sense, but does not awaken it to the penury of its phenomenality. With the notion of the alterity of the face, Levinas presents an optics which rethinks the

⁸⁰ TaI 189/TaI 163.

⁸¹ TaI 23/TaI xii.

meaning of vision, breaking down the opposition between the sensuous light and the realm of knowledge, without conceiving the latter as a mere emanation of the former.⁸²

The danger in not making a clear distinction between sensuous light and the realm of knowledge in the early work leads to accusations that corporeality is, for Levinas, ultimately to be blamed for the fall into phenomenality and the inability to recover one's true self. Levinas attempts to explain that the inadequacy of the subject to its own phenomenality lies in the existence of others who continually call me into question, reveal to me a life beyond my world of possessions. According to this notion, I do not discover a lack but the arbitrary nature of my usurpation of the world. Rather than look to being to re-establish the necessity of my place, and the truth of my products, I am asked to speak for the first time.

Enjoyment does not effect an evasion or escape, but does this have consequences for Rolland's second claim that Levinas merely undertakes a reversal of Being and being and does not yet see in subjectivity an exception putting out of order the conjunction of essence, entities and the difference.⁸³ We would be pushing our reading too far to suggest that we can see this exception in the subjectivity of enjoyment. There is no doubt that with the notion of enjoyment Levinas is attempting to describe a subjectivity in relation to a world that does not fit into the ontological categories of *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world. The subject of enjoyment is *beyond* being in this sense, and it could be argued that a reversal of being and Being has been effected. However, is the inversion of being and Being the last moment of the description of subjectivity in *Totality and Infinity*? The moment of hypostasis in *Totality and Infinity* is not thinkable as negation.

⁸² TaI 188-189/TaI 162-163.

⁸³ Rolland, , p. 49.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas develops his own notion of being in the world, based on his rethinking of the primary relation to being as *il y a* in his early works. As we saw in the previous chapter, Levinas begins an analysis of the subjectivity of enjoyment by contrasting it with intentionality. However, this is only the first step in his rethinking of the identity of the intentional subject. As the analyses of the next chapter suggest, Levinas, with the introduction of "the dwelling" as an alternative account of being in the world, opposes the idea that the subjectivity of enjoyment is the forgotten origin of intentional consciousness, which effects a spontaneous self-positing that overcomes the horror of *il y a*.