

Chapter 5

Ethos: Beyond the Opposition of Eros and Agape

Levinas' critique and rethinking of subjectivity has been the dominant framework for the discussion so far. The purpose of this discussion has been to establish a signification for subjectivity outside the meanings it takes on for both Husserlian intentionality and Heideggerian ontology. On the basis of Levinas' reconfiguration of being, subjectivity and world, this chapter turns to a discussion of the development of the notion of alterity as a new approach to the meaning of transcendence. To this end I examine the significations and transformations of *eros* in Levinas' work which is unavoidably tied to the question of the feminine and sexual difference.¹ In adopting this approach I share the opinion of those who find that an understanding of the relation of the feminine and *eros* is integral to an understanding of the development of Levinas' notion of difference.

i) Feminine Alterity: from *Eros* to *Ethos*

In the preceding chapter it was argued that dwelling describes a primary sociality of subjective identity. Sexual difference is essential for this account of a subjectivity that refuses to be defined in terms of biological or sociological

¹ The issue of the concept of the feminine in Levinas' work is discussed by the following: L. Totality and Infinity, Section IV/B, "The Phenomenology of Eros", trans. C. Burke, in R.A. Cohen, (ed.) *Face to Face with Levinas*,

Re- Reading Levinas; T. Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*; p. 203-207; Chanter, "Antigone's Dilemma", p. 133-135; S. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, (Oxford: Blackwell,

Bernasconi and S. Critchley, (eds.) *Re- Reading Levinas*; Llewelyn *The Genealogy of Ethics*; C. Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine", in R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley, (eds.) *Re- Reading Levinas*; R. Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); R. Diprose, *What is (Feminist) Philosophy?* paper presented at Women in Philosophy Conference, Macquarie University, 13-15 July, 1998.

categories, but rather has itself a "categorial signification".² This notion that sexual difference, and specifically femininity, is a difference unlike any other difference, is also a pivotal starting point for Levinas' thinking of "alterity" in the works preceding *Totality and Infinity*.³ Specifically, the feminine is thought in the context of a critique of a Platonic notion of *eros*, which as Tina Chanter points out, is already motivated by Levinas' concern for the ethical.⁴

As Chanter suggests, this concern for the ethical is tied around the question of the third party.⁵ The difference between *eros* and ethics lies in the exclusion of the third from the erotic relation. Demands of justice which arise out of the ethical relation itself are not heeded by the lovers in the erotic relation. In the following, I am in agreement with Chanter's suggestion that the move away from *eros* and the alterity of the feminine in *Totality and Infinity* is a consequence of Levinas questioning of the sociality of two as a suitable model for ethics. Furthermore, the linking of the question of justice to the ethical is fundamental to this move. However, unlike Chanter, I suggest that this does not necessarily reduce the erotic to the status of a productive teleology. Chanter suggests that unlike the face to face relation, lovers are only interrupted by outsiders, and the signification of *eros* is reduced to the child, as the product of this relation.⁶ I suggest firstly, that Levinas does not look for an alternative notion of the ethical relation because only lovers are interrupted by outsiders. I agree that outsiders are not recognised in the erotic. However, this has a positive signification in itself. The erotic relation exhibits a dynamism in the present which is blind to the advent of the third. This has consequences for how we think the signification of the child

² In *Judaism and the Feminine*, Levinas claims that we must seek the categorial value of the feminine and not reduce 'woman' to an ancillary status. In this paper Levinas seems to be suggesting that masculinity and femininity testify to two moments of the 'human', E. Levinas, "Judaism and the Feminine", in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (DF), trans. S. Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p. 32-33. I will discuss this further below.

³ TO 85/TA 183.

⁴ Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, p. 201.

⁵ Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, p. 206.

⁶ Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, p. 207.

and fecundity. In other words, with regard to the child, I suggest that insofar as the erotic relation cannot recognise the third, the child cannot be thought as a third.⁷ Voluptuousity and fecundity, unlike other conceptions of love, *agape* for example, describe precisely the dynamism of the present in *eros*, produced prior to being known. In other words, the dimension of fecundity in voluptuousity, is the dimension in which the signification of the child should be thought and not the other way round. The latter, the thinking of fecundity in terms of the child, is for Levinas, to be found at the beginnings of the western philosophical quest, in Plato's account of *Eros*. This Platonic notion of *eros*, is the original object of Levinas' critique in *Time and the Other* when he first introduces the erotic as a relation to alterity.

As we shall see in the following, there is no doubt that Levinas is critical of all relations that cannot recognise a violence done to a third in the dynamism of the present. However, this critique is primarily concerned with moving away from a morality of good intention and a notion of intersubjectivity which is blind to the damage done to the stranger in its overt care for the neighbour. In other words, he is critical of these relations with regard to their moral pretensions and not necessarily condemning certain forms of social interaction. The critique of love to be found in *The Ego and the Totality*, which will be discussed below, does not explicitly discuss the erotic relation but does implicitly suggest that it cannot be the plane of ethics insofar as it has no concern for the third. However, unlike his rejection of *agape* in this paper, a specific role is reserved for *eros* in *Totality and Infinity*.

In other words, the well known move away from *eros*, in *Totality and Infinity*, is not a consequence of a revulsion for the voluptuous, nor a shift from *eros* to ethics, in which the latter is understood as an uncritical adoption of a

⁷ Thus, I also question Irigaray's reading of fecundity and the child, suggesting that Levinas is closer than Irigaray is prepared to admit when she writes of "that ecstasy which is our child, prior to any child". *Questions to Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 111.

notion of *agape*.⁸ As Levinas insists in an interview years later, the introduction of the alterity of the face in *Totality and Infinity*, does not renounce the alterity of the feminine, nor the unique alterity of the erotic relation.

At the time of my small book entitled *Time and the Other*, I thought that the feminine was non-in-difference to the other, irreducible to the formal alterity of terms in an ensemble. I think today that it is necessary to go back further and that the exposition and nudity and the "imperative demand" of the face of the other constitutes that modality that the feminine already supposes: the proximity of the neighbour is the non-formal alterity. The original meaning of the sensible (resides, from then on, in an obligation with me or "regards me".⁹

The role that *eros* comes to play with regard to the ethical and in particular how we understand the child and fecundity must be considered beginning with Levinas' rethinking of subjectivity and its relation to the social totality.

Before moving to a discussion of Levinas' critique of *eros* and the introduction of the question of the third party and justice, it might be asked what the consequences are for the feminine and sexual difference, with this move away from *eros* toward ethics? Levinas' thinking of human subjectivity changes in the period between *Existence and Existents* and *Totality and Infinity*, as the argument of the last chapter has already suggested. The notion of the dwelling undermines any attempt to think the subject of hypostasis as a new origin of light, representation and power such that the Other can no longer be thought simply in

⁸ See Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, for a discussion of the relation of *eros* and ethics, directed by the question of the feminine.

⁹ Both of these terms are in the accusative in French: "*me concerne*", "*me regarde*", J-C. Aeschlimann, 1989), "Interview", p.10 (my translation).

terms of an other to the subject of hypostasis. Thus, for Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity*, sexual difference becomes an example of alterity. Levinas claims that:

Sexuality supplies the example of this relation, accomplished before being reflected on: the other sex is an alterity borne by a being as an essence and not as the reverse [*envers*] of its identity; but it could not affect [*frapper*] an unsexed me [].¹⁰

Sexual difference is now an example of difference because alterity is borne as essence and not merely reverse of identity, and that despite this it could only affect a sexed me, just as I can only approach the Other "proceeding from myself".¹¹

Commenting on these issues in a later interview, Levinas remarks that in *Time and the Other* he thought that the feminine was another genus, in every sense of the word, that is, as not belonging to the same genus as the ego. All that remains from this idea in *Totality and Infinity* is that one must always think the Other, not formally, but with a specific content.¹² Further study of comments concerning the feminine suggest that, for Levinas, that the feminine is other to the genus of the ego, does not mean that the ego is masculine, but that the question of sexuality applies equally to the masculine, in so far as both are "specific contents". As the meaning of specific content, we should see this as the essentially dual nature of the relation to the Other, which is to say, that the Other is absolutely other, but can only be approached starting with "me".¹³ This is not because the feminine is only to be found at a secondary level of existence, but because for Levinas such differences remain existential and thus already entail a determination of alterity. Examples, are not flawed estimations of a more perfect

¹⁰ TaI 121/TeI 94 (translation modified).

¹¹ TaI 121/TeI 94.

¹² "Interview with Wolzogen", in E. Levinas, *Humanismus des anderen Menschen*, trans L. Wenzler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1989), p. 135.

¹³ TaI 121/TeI 94.

original, but they are moments of determination which must be continually made aware of an excess to this event. It is not simply that Levinas has become aware of the fixing of femininity as the other to a subjectivity which by definition becomes masculine, but due to the recognition that this notion of difference can only be a representation or example after the fact of an encounter which presupposes nothing about the identity of the Other.

Having said this we cannot avoid the question of Levinas' phenomenology of *eros* where Levinas speaks of the feminine face. In contrast to the face of the Other, "who expresses his eminence", the feminine face is an inversion, presupposing the face, and for this very fact "exhibits itself in immodesty".¹⁴ It could be asked how the feminine face could ever be more or less than the face of a woman. While this question is tied to the issue of Levinas' "hetero-masculinity",¹⁵ the present discussion focuses on the point that the feminine is integral to Levinas' ethics because it is essential for his genealogy of the human beyond being. In the following I suggest that the feminine is neither reducible to a functional precondition, nor a love object of a masculine ethical subject. Levinas' account of the erotic relation is precisely an attempt to undo the notion of objectification, insisting that it goes beyond the intentional objectification of the other.

The ambiguity of the feminine and *eros* lies precisely in not becoming this object, while at the same time this non-signifyingness is not the "stupid indifference of matter".¹⁶ The non-signifying ambiguity always refers to the face. The alterity of the feminine is not reduced to an object of "man's" desire, but is a relation refusing objectification, it opens a dimension of the not-yet, a future

¹⁴ TaI 262/TeI 240.

¹⁵ I understand this term to refer to the issue raised originally by de Beauvoir who suggested that Levinas' positioning of the feminine as the Other, involves an unacknowledged re-assertion of the primacy of masculine subjectivity. For a radical critique of Levinas' "hetero-masculinist" representations on the basis that they display a desire for domination, see S. Sandford, "Writing as a man: Levinas and the phenomenology of Eros", *Radical Philosophy* 87, (January/February, 1998), 6-17.

¹⁶ TaI 264/TeI 241.

of voluptuosity that does not appear as the threat of the anonymous void: "The voluptuous in voluptuosity is not the freedom of the other tamed, objectified, reified, but his freedom untamed".¹⁷ This linking of the feminine, the face and voluptuosity is unique to Levinas and has a positive signification.

The ambiguity of *eros* is essential to Levinas work and offers us elements of a critique of Platonic *eros* and Christian *agape*. Erotic response will always slip into the intimacy of voluptuosity.¹⁸ It is not therefore, evil. But neither is it the ground of the ethical (which furthermore, can never be simply equated with the Good). For Levinas, voluptuosity is not derivative, but before the face.¹⁹ It is, of itself, the plane of a love which is as strong as death.²⁰ This is not some ultimate reference to a final *ecstasis* which liberates us from death in the promise of an after-world. This is a victory over death understood in Heideggerian ontology, as the possibility of the impossibility of my own being.

The role of *eros* in *Totality and Infinity* lies in its overcoming of the inevitable return of existence as a moment of the negation of the ethical. This return to being in a non-dialectical event in which the ethical is not negated, becomes a crucial preoccupation of Levinas' later works (and will figure as a fundamental theme in the remaining chapters of this thesis). In other words, the relation of voluptuosity and fecundity introduces a model of "reproduction", which for the first time does not negate the ethical moment on the one hand, nor reduce the erotic to the production of the child on the other. The manner of production, of reproduction, is to be sought beginning with the ethical. This is not the reduction of the feminine to the container of "man's" future, but the

¹⁷ TaI 265/TeI 243.

¹⁸ TaI 265/TeI 242-243.

¹⁹ TaI 262/TeI 240.

²⁰ This is the level at which Levinas approaches *eros* in *Time and the Other*, where he says that in *eros*, "personal life can be constituted in the heart of the transcendent event, what I called above the 'victory over death'", TO 90/TA 190-191.

suspension of my projection of the future; a relation with a future that is "irreducible to the power over possibles".²¹

For Levinas, profanation, voluptuousness, need not be transformed into responsibility and justice in the wider community, through the production of the child. In other words, the move from *eros* to the face does not entail the negation, dialectical overcoming, or the sublimation of the sexual, for the sake of the ethical or the social good. Lovers need not become parents for the sake of the community.

Love is not reducible to knowledge mixed with affective elements which would open to it an unforeseen plane of being ... *Eros* is not accomplished as a subject fixes an object, nor as a pro-jection toward a possible.²²

Love grasps nothing and issues in no concept. The command to love, the law of the face, is not heard after the sublimation of *eros*, libidinal desire. Thus, Levinas says, *agape* is not derived from *eros*, nor *eros* from *agape*.

I am not a Freudian and consequently I do not think that *Agape* comes from *Eros*. But I do not deny that sexuality is also an important philosophical problem; the meaning of the division of the human into man and woman cannot be reduced to a biological problem. In the past I used to think that alterity commenced in the feminine. It is in effect a very strange alterity: woman is neither the contradictory nor the contrary of man, nor like other differences. It is not like the opposition light and darkness. A distinction that is not contingent, and it is necessary to look for the place of it with regard to love [*l'amour*]. I am not able to say more now; I think in any case *Eros* is not *Agape*, that *Agape* is not a derivation nor extinction of love-*Eros*. Before *Eros* there was the Face [*Visage*]. *Eros* itself is only possible between faces. The problem of *Eros*

²¹ TaI 267/TeI 245.

²² TaI 261/TeI 292.

is philosophical and concerns alterity. Thirty years ago I wrote *Time and the Other* - where I thought that the feminine was alterity itself; I do not renounce this, but I have never been a Freudian. In *Time and the Other* there is a chapter on *Eros* that describes it as love that becomes enjoyment, while of *Agape* I have a grave vision beginning with responsibility for the Other.²³

In his book *The Wisdom of Love*, Finkielkraut introduces the question of the way we should read the relation of *eros* and ethics in Levinas' work by recalling that *eros* marks the situation in which the Other's alterity appears for the first time in its pure form.²⁴ But the erotic, he claims, is "already an ethics".²⁵ The contradiction expressed by Finkielkraut, the situation of *eros* before and after the ethical is true of Levinas' work, at least up to and including *Totality and Infinity*. Finkielkraut continues, suggesting that what Levinas undertakes in these works, is a searching of "our commerce in the flesh for a higher communication, a way of being in society that could not be reduced to survival of the fittest or to erotic union".²⁶ This leads Finkielkraut to suggest that Levinas undertakes a reversal of *eros* and *agape* not looking for *eros* in *agape* but the shape of *agape* in *eros*.²⁷

The introduction of an opposition between *eros* and *agape*, and the suggestion that Levinas undertakes a reversal is in need of further exploration, for it is not certain that we can so easily fit the distinction and relation of *eros* and ethics in Levinas into the structure of an opposition. If *eros* is apparently replaced by the face to face relation in *Totality and Infinity*, this is not due to a mere reversal, but due to an increasingly complicated question concerning the social

²³ E. Levinas, "Philosophie, Justice et Amour", EN 123-124 (my translation).

²⁴ Alain Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love*, trans. K. O'Neill and D. Suchoff, (London & Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 47.

²⁵ Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love*, p. 47.

²⁶ Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love*, p. 47.

²⁷ Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love*, p. 47.

totality and the place of the ethical relation in regard to this totality. Love is not written out of this question, but comes to play a crucial role in a positive account of the relation of the ethical and the political realms.

ii) *Eros* and Plato's Social Totality

The question of the signification of the feminine and *eros* are integral to Levinas' early thinking of alterity as a notion of otherness which neither presupposes a common ground, nor could be conceived purely from the position of the subject. The linking of alterity, the feminine and *eros* first occurs in *Existence and Existents* and is followed by a more detailed discussion in *Time and the Other*. The "plane of *eros*", Levinas writes in *Existence and Existents* "allows us to see that the other par excellence is the feminine".²⁸ While in *Existence and Existents* Levinas suggests that this pairing of *eros* and the feminine entails a critique of the Platonic notion of *eros*, it is only in *Time and the Other* that he undertakes a critique of Platonic love, which he finds to be based in lack, presupposing the restorative power of a 'father', and founding a non-pluralistic social totality.²⁹ The plane of *eros* is associated with a relation of two, however Levinas claims that it is not a numerical duality.

This idea should make the notion of the couple as distinct as possible from every purely numerical duality. The notion of the sociality of two ... emerges from sexual differences,

face says. Here is a significant ethical radiance within eroticism and the libido. Through

²⁸ EE 85/DE 145.

²⁹ TO 93/TA 195.

it humanity enters into the society of two and sustains it, authorises it, perhaps, at least putting into question the simplicity of contemporary paneroticism.³⁰

This passage, written as a new preface to the publication of *Time and the Other* in 1979, contains all the elements of Levinas' approach to the signification of alterity. The question of the other is not only a question of the origins of signification but also a question of how we think the realms and limits of society. As Levinas suggests, the importance of sexual difference is its association with a notion of sociality which does not conceive of the couple as a numerical duality.³¹ In *Time and the Other*, sexual difference, which he conceives as feminine alterity, challenges the Platonic dream of a social totality by undermining the assumption of the unity of being on which it is founded.

The Eleatic notion of being dominates Plato's philosophy, where multiplicity was subordinated to the one, and where the role of the feminine was thought within the categories of passivity and activity, and was reduced to matter. Plato did not grasp the feminine in its specifically erotic notion. In his philosophy of love he left to the feminine no other role than that of furnishing an example of the Idea, which alone can be the object of love.³²

The signification of *Eros* in the *Symposium* is associated with the movement of the soul from the physical to the spiritual realms, describing a movement of self-knowledge.³³ In other words, the meaning of *Eros* is subordinated to the Socratic interpretation of the Delphic injunction to know oneself.

³⁰ TO 36, Preface to 1979 edition of *Time and the Other*.

³¹ TO 36, Preface to 1979 edition of *Time and the Other*.

³² TO 92-93/TA 194-195.

³³ Plato, *Symposium* 209e/211a.

I've not yet succeeded in obeying the Delphic injunction to 'know myself', and it seems to me absurd to consider problems about other beings while I am still in ignorance about my own nature.³⁴

For Socrates, the injunction is understood as a demand to leave the other to themselves, thus failing to consider the possibility that the other is in this very refusal inscribed and fixed with regard to a certain economy, the economy of self knowledge. The moment of dismissal is also a first attempt at self-definition over and against this other: "I try to discover whether I am a more complicated and puffed-up sort of animal than Typho".³⁵ In this act of exclusion the signification of the other, in this case the mythological gods, is grasped in terms of the philosopher's quest for knowledge of the self.³⁶

The treatment of *Eros* in the *Symposium* can be read in terms of this subordination of the mythical to the philosophical economy. *Eros* is no longer a god, but the name of an allegorical figure who takes his place in a purposeful universe, leaving behind the non-teleological realm of theogony.³⁷ In the *Symposium*, *Eros* is born from the union of poverty and plenty.³⁸ *Eros* is not to be found in the moment of the encounter, but as the product. His parents are not lovers. Rather, his mother Poverty, desires a child. *Eros* is conceived on the basis of want and is the son who will compensate for the lack. Fathered by Plenty, compensation is guaranteed by the power of the father - who ensures that he will

³⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* 229.

³⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 230.

³⁶ See Luce Irigaray's reading of the *Symposium* in "Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato's Symposium, Diotima's Speech", trans. E.H. Kuykendall, *Hypatia* 3/3 (Winter 1989), p. 36. The following discussion draws on Irigaray's reading of Diotima's speech and implicitly suggests that Levinas' and Irigaray's critiques have much in common. A thorough discussion of Levinas and Irigaray on love is beyond the scope of the present thesis, although Irigaray's concerns and criticisms of Levinas figure in the background to this thesis. See also Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*; p. 214ff; E. Grosz *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989) and Vasseleu, *Textures of Light* for discussions of the relation of Irigaray and Levinas.

³⁷ Irigaray suggests that *Eros* is the very model of the "philosopher": the seeker of wisdom who recognises his impoverished state, Irigaray, *Sorcerer Love*, p. 36.

³⁸ Plato, *Symposium* 203b-204d.

not be without resources. *Eros* then, is the product of a relation that is driven by need but can take comfort in the gift of the father.³⁹

In Levinas' discussion of the Platonic notion of *Eros* it is quite clear that he has this parentage of *eros* by poverty and plenty in mind when he writes:

In Plato, Love, a child of need, retains the features of destitution. Its negativity is the simple "less" of need, and not the very movement unto alterity.⁴⁰

In this relation the feminine is reduced to the bearer of the child, who sees the child as a supplement which requires her subordination to the masculine. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas seeks to overcome this notion of the feminine and suggests that the erotic relation is neither a subordination of love to a social teleology, nor the feminine to the conditions of the production of this social totality in which difference is excluded.

For Levinas, the erotic relation is "swallowed up in a collective representation" when Plato constructs his Republic and the specificity of the relation between two has its signification reduced to the common ideal.⁴¹ Levinas looks for the signification of this relation outside this collectivity and conceives it as a relation to a future in which the subject, in relation with alterity, is not absorbed or lost in that other. *Eros* remains a play with the future, and a kind of pure intentionality according to Levinas, which opens a future in which the particularity of subjectivity is not lost, but somehow brought to its true presence in the midst of transcendence.⁴²

This presencing in transcendence is the crucial element which Levinas calls the victory over death; a victory which refers to "another mastery in the

³⁹ Plato, *Symposium* 203.

⁴⁰ EE 85/DE 145.

⁴¹ TO 93/TA 195.

⁴² TO 90/TA 190.

human other than the virility of grasping the possible".⁴³ This is a clue as to why Levinas does not equate *eros* with the face to face in his later work. While it is clear that the mastery of which Levinas speaks is a kind of passive responsiveness to the other Levinas does seem to be attempting to invest it with a certain redemptive power, an ethical capacity. He does not yet see the other in its alterity as calling this subjectivity into question. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the victory over death *eros* effects is utilised to explain the possibility of a non-violent relation of the face and the social totality, as opposed to a non-violent relation of the subject and the face.

The critique of the Platonic notion of *eros* suggests that the ambiguity of love in Levinas cannot be understood in terms of the ambiguous product that is *Eros* himself, child of poverty and plenty. The ambiguity of *Eros*, then, is not that he is born of poverty and plenty, but that love has a relation to the future already in the dynamism of the present. This future is one of a multiplicity of those who refer to the whole of humanity - the community of faces. In other words, *eros* is not alienation, and a threat to society but the present of its production as voluptuousness and fecundity. Another way of putting this is that for Levinas, the construction of *eros* in Plato, is not in fact the coupling of love and fecundity, but the subordination of voluptuousness to the child who conceives of himself as the product of a union based on need, which furthermore, subordinates the feminine, and maternity to the production of this first philosopher.

The notion of an infinite desire for the other cannot be equated to the notion of power inherent in the father which is spontaneously given to the son - *eros*. Thus, it could be suggested that the notion of love to which Levinas gestures is not a disembodied response to the command of his God, but a gesture towards the vulnerability of desire that was written out of the union of poverty and plenty when the first philosopher - *Eros* - referred to them as his parents. For Levinas, the world of voluptuousness is not a world of charm and grace, which

⁴³ TO 81-82/TA 180.

can coexist with a religious civilisation (and even be spiritualised by it, as in the cult of the Virgin in medieval Christianity)".⁴⁴ Furthermore, "[t]his is not due to prudish timidity," but rather because the messianic perspective is opened in the relation to the other and does not rely on any God behind the scenes.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, for Levinas this relation to the future goes beyond even the person loved, and thus opens a future to a subject which would seem to conceive of the lover as an accomplice to this adventure of the subject. It is as though love contains a dynamism taking it beyond the moment. However, if it appears to leave the feminine behind, this would only be the case if the relation was conceived as a moment of becoming divine of the masculine subject. There is another way of understanding this moment as the awakening to the face of the other in the erotic relation. This would be a moment in which the lovers become "parents". This is not through the actual bearing or production of the child. Paternity (and maternity) describes the ethical moment of the erotic relation, as an awakening to a dimension beyond the pure presence of the other.⁴⁶

Speaking of conjugal love, Levinas insists that the crucial element of love is its refusal to be subordinated to a means of procreation, or as prefiguring its fulfilments.⁴⁷ The ultimate end of the family is the 'actual meaning and the joy

⁴⁴ *Judaism and the Feminine*, DF 37.

⁴⁵ *Judaism and the Feminine*, DF 37.

⁴⁶ I do not want to suggest that there is not another moment in Levinas in which fecundity and paternity are elided. We cannot overlook the fact that even if fecundity might be synonymous with maternity, Levinas does not consider this possibility here. Nevertheless, Levinas' later work suggests that maternity might also have this messianic quality, which is a product of the erotic relation and not the other way around. As early as 1960, Levinas writes that the feminine does not take on the aspect of the Divine in the Christian sense of the spiritualisation of the Virgin, or the romanticisation of woman as the Eternal Feminine. Levinas insists that the refusal of these moments does not lead to the absence of the feminine from the human, but to a location with regard to the production of the Divine and to a participation in the messianic, *Judaism and the Feminine*, DF 37.

⁴⁷ In his discussion of the relation of the sexes in *Judaism and the Feminine*, Levinas attempts to describe a relation that is neither purely sensuous nor purely teleological, in the sense of being an act of procreation. The separation of these, he claims only occurs after the couple's expulsion from Paradise. In other words, the purity of Paradise includes voluptuousness, and the generation of the child. Rather than read this literally, it stands metaphorically as an expression of the originary nature and signification of generation and eroticism. The child has no teleological value, and can thus be read as the excessive generation of a non-teleological eroticism, *Judaism and the Feminine*, DF 36.

of this present' and not its figuring as the origin of a social totality.⁴⁸ The participation of the present in the future is a dynamism of love leading it beyond the present instant.

Nevertheless, there remains the question whether this shift from a notion of loftiness, to a notion of intimacy, in the refusal of the divine, has little or no effect on the subordination of the feminine to the masculine. I have tried to argue in the previous chapter that we can see in Levinas' notion of the home, an attempt to mark the moment of production with the ambiguity of sexual difference, but insisted that this is not yet the ethical relation. The discussion of love follows a similar trajectory to that of the moment of work in the dwelling in suggesting that love is a dynamic relation with the future, with the future of fecundity. Both introduce an ambiguity into the moment of aesthetic reproduction.

This is by no means a secondary or derivative moment of the production of meaning. However, it requires another moment, to avoid the inevitable fixing of meaning in the product itself, which would then in turn become the ultimate meaning of the originary event. This in any case seems to be what Levinas argues in his paper, *The Ego and the Totality*, which continues his critique of love, no longer merely as a critique of Platonic *eros*, but as a critique of the Christian notion of *agape* in the form of love of the neighbour. The notion of fecundity is crucial for Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* as it opens a positive relation between the ethical and the realm of social justice.

Time and the Other is principally concerned with the liberation of the ego from its enchainment to being, leading to the notion of a duality and a relation that does not fall into oppositional structures.⁴⁹ Levinas' intention is to 'invent' such a possibility, as evidenced by the claim that sexuality "introduces a duality into existence, a duality concerns the very existing of each subject".⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Judaism and the Feminine*, DF 36.

⁴⁹ TO 92/TA 194.

⁵⁰ TO 92/TA 194.

Levinas' notion of the alterity of *eros* expresses a concern for ethics, and might explain our preference for charity over justice, "even when, from the point of view of justice, no preference is any longer possible".⁵¹ But inadvertently, Levinas has expressed a paradox that will haunt his attempts to give value to the ethical relation over the coming decades. Justice is the moment in which the non-reciprocity of the relation to alterity is subordinated to a principle of equality. While Levinas has discovered a relation in which the unique singularity of subjectivity is in a relation to a transcendence which does not entail the loss of subjectivity, he now confronts the problem of how it is possible that this subject can show itself in a society of equals.

iii) From *Eros* to the Face

Earthly morality invites one into the difficult detour that leads to third parties that have remained outside of love. Justice alone satisfies its need for purity. In a sense this amounts to saying that dialogue is called upon to play a privileged role in the work of social justice. But it cannot resemble the intimate society, and it is not the emotion of love that constitutes it. The law has priority over charity. Man is also in this sense a political animal.⁵²

The discussion of the relation to alterity in *Time and the Other* corresponds in certain aspects to the dwelling and *eros* in *Totality and Infinity*. As the discussion of the dwelling demonstrated, the relation to feminine alterity is always marked by a return to the self. Equally, the discussion of *eros* in *Totality and Infinity* concerns itself with the "victory over death" and a futurity without which the ethical relation would be negated by the inevitable and unavoidable confrontation with death. In other words, without the futurity of *eros* Levinas

⁵¹ TO 84/TA 182.

⁵² E. Levinas, *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 33/ , EN 33.

cannot overcome the inevitable betrayal of the ethical in the socio-historical realm within which we all live.

This problem is approached in the work following *Time and the Other* in terms of a critique of love. In the following I argue that the erotic relation to feminine alterity as Levinas discusses it in his critique of Platonic *eros* is not replaced in this later work, but supplemented by the relation to the face. Without this supplement, the essential ambiguity of both *eros*, in the earlier work, and dwelling in the later work, would be compromised. The temporality given in dwelling permits a certain way of life and promotes a certain morality. However, without the ethical supplement this would become a moral economy demanding piety and love which does violence to another other, or the third. The introduction of the face is thus not only a question of the relation of the interior life to the other, but, due to this relation being supplemented by reference to the third, concerns itself with the possibility of justice.

In his essay, *The Ego and the Totality*, Levinas discusses the question of the relation of the singular subject and the economy in which everything has its value determined in terms of its relation to everything else.⁵³ This economy is not the economy of dwelling, but the realm of social justice, and equality. The problem of the ego in relation to this economy, according to Levinas, is how it is possible that the ego is "simultaneously a position in the totality, and a reserve with respect to it or a separation".⁵⁴ Thus, instead of attempting to undermine the notion of social collectivity in terms of the plurality of the relation to alterity, Levinas begins with this social collectivity and asks how it is that a unique subject show itself without being reduced to its appearance. In other words, he asks if it is possible for the subject to remain distinct from this totality, in the sense of it having a value that is not derived from its relation to the totality.

⁵³ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 28/EN 26.

⁵⁴ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 27/EN 25.

These issues are also the subject of the more comprehensive analyses of enjoyment and dwelling in *Totality and Infinity*. However, in *The Ego and the Totality*, the direction of Levinas' thinking is sketched out and can be used as a rough framework for an understanding of the move from dwelling and *eros*, to the face in *Totality and Infinity*. In the earlier work, Levinas describes the thinking ego who is part of a totality, distinguishing and defining itself with respect to other parts, and contrasts this to the ego as a being who has an identity outside this totality.⁵⁵ This possibility of participation and non-participation, of a being that identifies itself in relation to others but does not exhaust its singularity in this identity, does not depend on the division of the social world into the public and the private. For Levinas, it presupposes a society of those who speak and face one another, and remain separate in this relation.⁵⁶ This society, Levinas claims, provides the "moral conditions" of thought itself.⁵⁷ But what kind of "morality"? According to Levinas, the morality which arises from this society does not take place behind closed doors, or outside history. The moral conditions for thought, he claims, are realised in "the work of economic justice".⁵⁸

The relation between the encounter with the face and the wider realm of social justice is uppermost in Levinas' approach to the face in *The Ego and the Totality*. He is especially concerned with the relation of "morality" and economic justice and the meaning of the "realisation" of the moral conditions for thought.⁵⁹ Levinas begins his discussion of this issue by introducing the notion of the third person and undertaking a critique of love and moralism.⁶⁰ Before exploring the meaning of justice, Levinas explains why we can no longer see love as the moral condition of society. This critique of love is not restricted to *eros*. Secondly, this

⁵⁵ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 28/EN 26.

⁵⁶ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 28/EN 26.

⁵⁷ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 29/EN 27.

⁵⁸ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 29/EN 27.

⁵⁹ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 29/EN 27.

⁶⁰ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 29/EN 27.

critique of love and its linking to the economy of dwelling, suggests that the reason why the other of the dwelling is not yet the face is not because this is not a relation to an other, but that this relation is not yet with regard to a third, understood at this stage as another other.⁶¹ In other words, the face to face relation is complicated from the first with the question of the "whole of humanity" who look at me through the eyes of the Other, and introduce the question of justice.

In a section entitled "The Third Man", Levinas discusses "friendship", "love of the neighbour", and "love of God".⁶² The critique of love is thus not an explicit critique of *eros*, which one might expect in an essay that lies chronologically between the analyses of alterity as *eros* and alterity as the face.⁶³ Nevertheless, it could be suggested that there is an implicit critique of *eros* insofar as it would also fall under a species of love, which Levinas calls here the "love of the couple".⁶⁴ At this stage, the problem with *eros* lies in the fact that: "All love - unless it becomes judgement and justice - is the love of the couple. The couple is a closed society".⁶⁵

Contrary to some interpretations, the problem that Levinas has with *eros* under this species of love without justice, is not that it lacks the universal law of *agape*, which would bring love out of the privacy of the home in the opening of the home to the neighbour. In his 1965 essay, *Phenomenon and Enigma*, Levinas

⁶¹ The final three chapters of this thesis argue that the third person, is not the sole signification of "tertiality" in Levinas work.

⁶² *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 29-35/EN 27-35.

⁶³ The feminine does appear much later in this paper as that which "filters through in friendly faces as soon as the relationship of mutual responsibility is suspended", *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 44/EN 46.

⁶⁴ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 32/EN 31.

⁶⁵ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 32/EN 31. Lingis suggests in a footnote that Levinas is arguing against Bergson who opposes "open" and "closed" society. Furthermore, Lingis adds that Bergson sees "love" as the deepest *elan* of creative evolution. Does this mean that Bergson equates love with an open society and Levinas is arguing the exact opposite? The following suggests that Levinas' notion of "duo-solitude" reflects Rosenzweig's analyses of the lover and the beloved in the *Star of Redemption*. For Rosenzweig, "love is speech", but does not hear the command necessary for a society of more than two - it is a duo-solitude, F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W.W. Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 203. This might explain why Levinas insists on the importance of judgement and justice.

notes his own reluctance to use the term "neighbour", in so far as it suggests a "community by neighbouring", which he conceives at this stage as "being alongside".⁶⁶ In such a community, the neighbour is merely welcomed into my economy in which I might share my possessions, but without having to give them up to the world. Love, whether *eros* or *agape*, is associated with "emotion", which is not aware of the necessity of social justice. Thus, Levinas rejects, both *eros* and love of the neighbour at this stage as inadequate accounts of the ethical, associating both with a moralism.

For Levinas, the love of the neighbour, as it is imposed by traditional religion, is blind to the existence of third parties.⁶⁷ Philosophically speaking, this is the fact that my actions exceed the realm of my intentions such that even in recognising a wrong in relation to one other, "even by my act of repentance", I can "injure a third person".⁶⁸ Levinas describes this relation as a dialogue between "I" and "you" [*toi*], in which the other liberates the "I" from the only remaining hindrance to its freedom, which is the existence of the other themselves: "Love is the ego [*moi*] satisfied by you [*toi*] apprehending in the other [*autrui*] the justification of its being".⁶⁹ In this intimate society, the other can absolve the "I" from the violence it has inflicted on it. This would be the meaning of "love".⁷⁰ Thus, love appears as the possibility of peace and freedom, and a necessary condition of society. Charity, love of the neighbour, philanthropy, assuage a guilty conscience, but only in a society closed to the third. Thus, while it makes a society of two possible, "love is not the beginning, but the negation of society" in so far as it cannot recognise the third.⁷¹

⁶⁶ *Enigma and Phenomena*, CP 65, note 7/DEHH 207, note 1.

⁶⁷ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 30/EN 29.

⁶⁸ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 30/EN 29

⁶⁹ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 31/EN 30.

⁷⁰ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 31/EN 29-30.

⁷¹ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 31/EN 30.

Levinas argues against the tradition of Christian morality and a specific interpretation of "love of the neighbour".⁷² As he writes elsewhere, the dangers inherent in the Christian exaltation of the transcendent God lie in the very

⁷³ Salvation by faith, cannot, in

the words of another philosopher, "avoid gazing on the suffering violently imposed by everything in the way of bloody fury and so-called charitable crimes that is conversely entailed in that same exaltation".⁷⁴ In other words, we are drawn to the awareness that faith in an ideal of humanity is no guarantee against violence and in fact might ultimately demand acts of inhuman cruelty for the sake of the ideal, which in turn justifies its own ends. But, without being carried away by Levinas' rhetoric, the significance of this critique lies in its concern for the social totality. The danger inherent in faith in a God inhabiting a world behind the scenes is the ultimate denigration of the social world.

It is for this reason that Levinas later rejects Buber's I-Thou relation. According to Levinas, Buber's notion of friendship in terms of the "I and Thou" relationship continues to conceive of the "public" world as a fall and a threat to the purity of the relation between self and thou.⁷⁵ Friendship is constructed in an opposition to the public realm. As Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*:

The I-Thou is an event (*Geschehen*), a shock, a comprehension, but does not enable us to account for (except as an aberration, a fall, or a sickness) a life other than friendship: economy, the search for happiness, the representational relation with things. They remain in a sort of disdainful spiritualism, unexplored and unexplained.⁷⁶

⁷² *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 32/EN 31.

⁷³ E. Levinas, *Being a Westerner*, DF 49.

⁷⁴ Brunschvicg, as quoted by Levinas, *Being a Westerner*, DF 48.

⁷⁵ TaI 68-69/TeI 40.

⁷⁶ TaI 69/TeI 40.

Levinas suggests, furthermore, that the relation of the couple withdraws from the world and attempts to sustain itself over and against it. The problem, he seems to be suggesting here, is that the closed society does not recognise the "economy of justice".⁷⁷ The first step to overcoming the notion of economy as a disdainful spiritualism is to recognise that even friendship, understood in terms of the I-thou, is governed by an economy of the ego.

Levinas finds that the difference between these two economies occurs in the fact that one economy has pretensions to a certain purity and non-violence, while the other, the economy of justice, seems to be driven by inhuman forces. Overcoming this interpretation of the difference underlies Levinas' concern in his discussion of the inevitable violence of the relation that he refers to as the "love of the couple".⁷⁸ This violence occurs because of the egoist concerns which energise this relation to the other such as the desire for pardon, freedom and a release from the dependence on the other. Love is directed towards the beloved and requires the maintenance of an ignorance of the third. The analysis of dwelling in *Totality and Infinity* demonstrated the ambiguity of the autochthonous ego which is at "the same time an attribute of sovereignty and submission".⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the negotiations of ego and other in dwelling remain by definition, self centred. The welcome of the other is the model of I-Thou relations, in which the "I" responds to the presence of the other by sharing the world it brings through the door as possessions. But it would be deceiving itself to think that the ego did not do this for its own sake and not just for the sake of the other. The "I" is not called into question by the peaceable welcome offered by the friend, but given the space to participate in a dialogue, which is blind to the damage done to a third.

⁷⁷ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 29/EN 27.

⁷⁸ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 32/EN 31.

⁷⁹ TaI 164/TeI 138.

Love makes blind the respect which is impossible without blindness toward the third person and is only a pious intention oblivious of the real evil.⁸⁰

Thus, friendship understood in terms of the I-Thou relation, the relation to the other as the welcome presupposed in dwelling, offers an account of a peaceable relation and ushers in a certain morality, but is not yet a morality that can found a society in which not only the neighbour, but the stranger participates. As Levinas insists, this is not to say that "love of the couple" does not include all the possibilities of the transcendent relationship with the Other,⁸¹ but only that it is, in itself, not the condition of society, as it does not yet "put into question the world possessed".⁸² It is questionable therefore that we can even call the dwelling or *eros* the pre-ethical condition of ethics. While there is no doubt, that it is pre-ethical, it in no way functions as a condition. In other words, it is questionable whether the "pre" corresponds to priority at all, or whether perhaps this welcome is already a consequence of another event.

In conclusion it can be suggested that Levinas' phenomenology of *eros* in *Totality and Infinity*, and the rethinking of ethics and *eros*, is a first attempt at a reconfiguration of the relation of love and law, in terms of ethics and justice. In *Totality and Infinity* love is not "the ethical relation". Sexual difference furnishes an example of alterity, but cannot be the ethical. The alterity of the feminine is not the other *par excellence*. It might be argued that sexual difference might more readily awaken us to a notion of radical alterity. However, for Levinas, not even the ontological difference of the sexes will of themselves provoke an ethical response. It is as the face that the Other speaks from behind the mask of their differences. This is a mask which I can always use as a barrier, or as a reason for my own miscomprehension, my own abuse, or my own pity. To hear the voice of

⁸⁰ *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 31/EN 31

⁸¹ TaI 155/TeI 129.

⁸² TaI 173/TeI 148.

the Other, is to recognise the radical singularity of the Other's difference in the midst of a society which inscribes meanings and sentences. The Other awakens me to this alienation, and it is with regard to this Other, that I take up a position from which these meanings will be evaluated.

Levinas reveals the intellectualist assumptions common to traditional interpretations of both *eros* and *agape*, leading to an attempt to rethink the erotic in relation to the ethical toward the end of *Totality and Infinity*. This is also an attempt to rethink the relation of the affectivity of enjoyment and the vulnerability of subjectivity in the ethical relation. *Eros* is in fact the child of a union not driven by the production of the son but by another love, a voluptuousness and a desire without teleology.

Levinas rejects the principle of the neutrality of ontology, but at the same time, does not merely divide the human into two sexes. In other words, he does not replace a singular essence with two essences without challenging the essentialism common to both of these positions. The notion of sexual difference for Levinas has an exemplary value, which does not entail a devaluation of sexual difference, but is the first attempt to locate its ethical signification as a concrete example of a "species" of duality which defines the human itself. The exemplary, or ethical, signification of sexual difference lies in the refusal of a reduction of the Other to an image or Idea produced by myself, for myself.

As the discussion of the next chapter suggests, in *Totality and Infinity* *eros* is no longer conceived of as the face to face relation, but comes to play an important role in the preservation of the question, and possibility, of social justice. Levinas considers *eros* before and beyond the face.⁸³ It is before the face, since it does not yet recognise the third as an end in itself, but beyond, insofar as it will have already done so, opening eventually to the possibility of a love that recognises the exigencies of social justice, as shall be discussed in further chapters. In his later work Levinas will call this a love without concupiscence.

⁸³ TaI 254/TeI 232.

This is not a victory of *agape* over *eros*, but develops out of a radical rethinking of the meaning of ethics, justice and their relation.