

... the for-the-other characteristic of the subject can be interpreted neither as a guilt complex (which supposes an *initial* freedom), nor as a natural benevolence or divine 'instinct', nor as some love or some tendency to sacrifice of which I know not what.<sup>1</sup>

## **Chapter 8**

### **Subjectivity and Tertiality:**

#### ***Il y a* and Illeity**

Beginning with a discussion of the question of the approach to the Saying, this chapter suggests that the Saying is to be understood as an approach which continually interrupts the unidirectional temporality of the play of Said and the unsaid. The ethical materiality of Saying is an affectivity which lies beyond the intentional structures of signification, but which is necessarily translated or conveyed in the Said. With the notion of the Saying beyond the Said, Levinas is not pointing to an original ground, but to a discontinuity and an excess which is effaced in the Said. This introduces an irreducible duality of the Saying and the Said, which recognises the ethical and ontological moments in the production of meaning. Levinas' introduction of the third must be read from this two-fold perspective, such that tertiality is both the ontological moment of the betrayal of the Saying in the Said, the third person, and the ethical impossibility of the negation of an absolute susceptibility: "illeity".

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<sup>1</sup> OTB 124/AE 160 (translation modified).

Illeity does not name a being, or non-being, but is an excessive exposure which does not disappear. A discussion of the ambiguous relation of *il y a* and illeity juxtaposes a confrontation with death to that of a futurity that cannot be thought in terms of my own nothingness, either as possibility or impossibility. The return of *il y a* corresponds to an impossibility that harbours an affirmation of a future beyond the inevitable closure of the subject's confrontation with the alterity of death. This victory over death does not offer consolation, is not a victory for a subject, but a demand to speak, not because "there is" nothing else, but for the Other, for a future and a humanity beyond being where the absurd itself has an ethical signification, exposed to the question of its justice.

### **i) Ethical Amphibology**

*Totality and Infinity* began its approach to the meaning of sensibility by contrasting enjoyment with intentionality and reached a point in which subjectivity encounters the Other. In *Otherwise than Being*, by contrast, the question of affectivity is introduced into Levinas' critique of Heidegger by linking the essencing of being to an affectivity, or lived sensibility (which Husserl had explored as the fundamental, pre-predicative level of judgement). Although Levinas might have originally relied on Heidegger's "ontology" of affective life to question the limits of the Husserlian lived body, he now questions the "formalism" of Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, standing in the clearing of being, *exposed* to the essencing of being. Levinas thereby suggests that Heidegger reduces the sensible to a correlate of the Said. The exposedness to being admits no sense of the material vulnerability of embodied subjectivity. For Levinas, only an ethical Saying can be the source of right, without which justice reverts to a law that cannot recognise the human.

The introduction of the ethical Saying presents the final form of Levinas' project of the renewal of the question of the meaning of being, announced in

1935. But, while Levinas' original concern was expressed in terms of the sufficiency of being with regard to transcendence, the question now concerns the ethics of being's justice. The Saying, however, does not merely state the fact that the determination of the meaning of a being is always accompanied by its "undoing", by the silent essencing of being. As the previous chapter has attempted to clarify this silent essencing refers to the amphibology of being, or the coming to be and passing away of being in the Said. For Levinas, on the other hand, the Saying corresponds to a realm of affectivity beyond the Said.

The previous chapter ended with the suggestion that the Saying is neither the unsaid nor the expression of the essencing or presencing of being in beings. As Paul Davies suggests, such an account of the distinction between the Saying and the Said might point to a "pre-philosophical" concern that governs Levinas' work, but does not suffice to explain how the prephilosophical problematises the language in which it is exposed to the reader.<sup>2</sup> What Davies draws our attention to is the unavoidable question of method or approach, which accompanies any attempt to provide an account of the ethical Saying. In other words, any approach to the meaning of ethical Saying must address the "logo-centric recoils", involved in thematising that which is considered precisely beyond or an excess to, the thematising language expressing it.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to this question of method, Adriaan Peperzak suggests we can only begin to approach the Saying laterally by thinking back to it.<sup>4</sup> But given the arguments thus far, this is, at best, only a preliminary approach in so far as it would attempt to approach the Saying through a reduction which can only conceive of it as a kind of "intentionality", or in the language of *Otherwise than Being*, in terms of the Said.

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<sup>2</sup> P. Davies, "On Resorting to Ethical Language", p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> See editor's introduction in Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (eds.) *Re-Reading Levinas*, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> A. Peperzak, "From Intentionality to Responsibility: On Levinas's Philosophy of Language", in Dallery and Scott, (eds.) *The Question of the Other*, p. 218.

In an interview a few years after the publication of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas suggests that the ethical Saying is inherently concerned with the question and limits of the reductive method itself:

Ethics is like reduction in a certain language. In this it is more than adequate; but I would also say [*dirai*] that the To Say [*Dire*] must also be accompanied by a retraction/unsaid [*dedit*], and the unsaid [*dedit*] must also be unsaid [*dedit*] in turn and there is no stop; there is no definitive formulation. It is for this reason that I call the conclusion of my book, to which you refer, "otherwise Said".<sup>5</sup>

To suggest that the Saying must be necessarily accompanied by an unsaid is not to suggest that a Saying requires immediate negation or qualification, but as the previous chapter suggests, signifies that Saying turns into an unsaid, that is, in meaning-giving, becomes "teleologically turned toward the Said". That which is always unsaid, in turn requires a Saying which is not another Said but what might be called "the unsaid of the unsaid". This introduces a reductive process which has a specific relation to the infinite which cannot be characterised as an infinite regress. While Levinas claims there is no definitive formulation, neither is he suggesting a *reductio ad absurdum*, for it is precisely the ethical Saying which interrupts the interminable play of Said and unsaid, introducing another event. The unsaid is still within the closed economy of being, while the ethical Saying brings the human into play with what "there is". In other words, the reductive attempt to make the logic of humanity-beyond-being an absurdity, is already compromised by the ethical Saying.

Levinas describes the interruption effected in Saying, as an "inquietude" that the Said can neither eternalise nor internalise. As Davies points out, we cannot read this relationship of reduction-interruption as a simple step from

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<sup>5</sup> DVI 141 (my translation). Levinas adds: "I would also say that I do not know any more about it [method]. I do not believe that a transparency of method would be possible, nor that philosophy would be possible as transparency", DVI 143.

phenomenon to face, from ontology to a prephilosophical ethical concern. Rather the ethical, which "is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics",<sup>6</sup> should be described as the step from "from ... to".<sup>7</sup> The question remains how to think the relation of the two without reducing the Saying once again.

Levinas emphasises the necessity of the assemblage of the Saying into a Said.<sup>8</sup> However, as has been argued above, he claims that this continual reduction is not achieved by the amphibology of being, but requires "diachronic expression", based in the notion that the Saying is both an affirmation and a retraction, of the Said.<sup>9</sup> Diachronic expression is a double movement between affirmation and retraction which Levinas links to a notion of an irrecuperable temporal lapse, that is, to an immemorial past. Levinas begins a discussion of this temporality by contrasting it to an ontological notion in which "the divergence of the identical from itself, is *essence*".<sup>10</sup> The ontological notion of divergence is a getting out of phase of the instant, which, according to Levinas allows for a recuperation in which nothing is lost.

There is not a pure distancing from the present, but precisely re-presentation, that is, a distancing in which the present of truth *is* already or *still is*; for a representation is a recommencement of the present which in its "first time" is for the second time; it is a retention and a protention, between forgetting and expecting, between memory and project. Time is reminiscence and reminiscence is time, the unity of consciousness and essence.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> OTB 120/AE 154. This is a paraphrase of Levinas comment that: "The ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics."

<sup>7</sup> Davies, *On Resorting to Ethical Language*, p. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> "It is not by chance, through foolishness or through usurpation that the order of truth and essence, which the present exposition itself claims to hold to, is at the first rank in Western philosophy," OTB 156-157/AE 199.

<sup>9</sup> OTB 44/AE 56.

<sup>10</sup> OTB 30/AE 38.

<sup>11</sup> OTB 29/AE 36.

Levinas juxtaposes the diachrony of Saying with the unity of consciousness and time mentioned above in relation to Heidegger.<sup>12</sup> He finds that essence, seen in this diachronous sense, is "more formal than *the silent decay of things which betrays their becoming*".<sup>13</sup> As such this can be read as a description of the becoming of things in decay where "decay" is the trace/betrayal of becoming. Essence, Levinas insists, is "more formal" than this decay. In other words, in being, there is a modification without alteration, a formality independent of all qualitative determination. In relation to this essence, "betrayal" has a double meaning as a conveying of something precisely through misrepresentation. The notion of decay betraying becoming, conveys through misrepresentation, the decaying materiality of things, or things "*already weighted down with matter*".<sup>14</sup> With this notion of betrayal, Levinas introduces a duality of perspective. Levinas claims that it is "only in the order of being that rectification, truth and error have meaning, and that the betrayal is lack of fidelity".<sup>15</sup> From the perspective of the Saying, betrayal is a moment in which the formality of essence is marked by a becoming in decay, which does not refer the production of value to a chaotic meaninglessness. As Levinas writes elsewhere, this introduces a new manner of approach to signification itself:

The transcendental method consists in always looking for the foundation ...

Consequently an idea is justified when it finds its foundation, when one has

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<sup>12</sup> It could be suggested that Levinas is confusing Husserl and Heidegger on temporality and overlooking the fundamental disturbance that haunts Heideggerian recuperation such that it is not possible to attribute any simple unity of consciousness and time to Heidegger. This issue cannot be addressed in detail here. However, in the light of the arguments above and those of the previous chapter it might be suggested that, for Levinas, the fact that "man" stands in the truth of Being, fulfils the sense of unity here. The rupture as suggested above, is a mere getting out of phase with oneself and not the interruption of the human beyond being.

<sup>13</sup> OTB 30/AE 37 (translation modified). Translated by Lingis as: "reveals their becoming", from the French "*la sourde usure des choses trahissant leur devenir*" where *usure* means, "wear and tear", or "decay", and "*trahir*" is better translated as "betrayal" or "misrepresentation".

<sup>14</sup> OTB 30/AE 37 (my italics).

<sup>15</sup> OTB 45/AE 57 (translation modified).

proceeding begins with the human and the approach of the human, of the human that is not simply that which *inhabits* the world, but also *grows old* in the world ... there is another manner of justification of an idea by the other: to pass from an idea to its superlative, up to its emphasis. It is here that a new idea - in no way implied in the first - follows or emanates from the overstatement.<sup>16</sup>

Reduction is not dissipation or explanation, but a doubling of discourse with the weight of materiality and the introduction of the human understood in terms of this materiality.<sup>17</sup> The "weight" exposes the already Said, which although already "exposed" to the silent essencing of being, is not weighted down with the material particularity of the ethical Saying. Understood in this context, this exposure at a second power, exposure of exposure, is the "approach" or "exposition to" the other of the ethical Saying.

Levinas writes that it is not enough to conceive of the ethical Saying as an exposure, since even in the suffering of this opening to otherness, exposure inverts into position and retires in a certain complaisancy. This would be to revert to an asceticism, to enjoy a suffering of suffering in the so-called passivity of exposure. Just as Heidegger warns of the forgetting of being, Levinas insists on the dangers of conceiving of this moment of exposure as an act. He claims it is necessary to expose this exposure through Saying, which is "Saying Saying Saying itself" without thematisation.<sup>18</sup>

This begins to sound like a hyperbolic play with language unless related back to the two realms of signification; that of the silent essencing of being and that of the silent decay betraying becoming, which has been named ethical materiality. Levinas is making a distinction between, on the one hand, an approach to the Other which covers over the affect of the Other on subjectivity and focuses on the reflexivity of one's own affectivity, and, on the other hand, a

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<sup>16</sup> DVI 141 (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> OTB 45/AE 57.

<sup>18</sup>

way of approaching the Other which exposes this exposure rather than remaining in it.<sup>19</sup>

Before discourse, I am covered in a form, I am where my being conceals me. To speak

What I have in mind here is to rediscover the *via eminentiae*. It is in any case the manner in which I pass from responsibility to substitution. Emphasis, this signifies at the same time; a rhetorical figure, an excess of expression, a manner of exaggeration and a manner of monstration. This is a very good word, like the word "hyperbole": there is some hyperbole where notions are transmuted. To describe this mutation, is also to do phenomenology. Exasperation as a philosophical method!<sup>20</sup>

As Llewelyn points out, *emphase* and phenomenology have the same Greek root - to show, bring to light. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two. The transmutation of emphasis does not lead to transparency, an appearance - "*parare*"; but ex-asperation or provocation, as Levinas suggests above. Rather than an answer we confront the question.

This is, above all, not a situation where *one* poses the question; it is the question that grasps you: it is your coming into question [*mise en question*].<sup>21</sup>

This is not a moment of inhabiting of the question nor an account of the transformations of the subject into an ethical being. Here Levinas insists, "exposure" necessarily undergoes a reversion or recuperation, and becomes activity.<sup>22</sup> The inevitable reversion and return of the passivity of Saying to activity is not in question with regard to its possibility which is precisely the

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<sup>19</sup> OTB 143/AE 182.

<sup>20</sup> DVI 142 (my translation).

<sup>21</sup> *on* pose la question; c'est la question qui vous prend: il y a votre mise en question". DVI 137 (my translation).

<sup>22</sup> OTB 51/AE 66.

moment of necessary betrayal of Saying in the Said. However, the fundamental concern for Levinas is the possibility of an excess, an *inversion* in this *reversion*, which far from paralysing all action, refuses to succumb to the moment in which the subject would sink into its deed, as the origin of a work, as a good will. The "value" of an ethical excess of the Saying lies in the "excessiveness" to this good will. As a consequence the question of the value of the ethical Saying is not to be considered in terms of how it becomes action, but how it remains effective despite the inevitable reversion of passivity into action. In other words, how this moment of reversion is not only a moment of the negation of a passive receptivity which can no longer be thought in terms of an exposure of an I to another, but concerns the very limits of subjectivity which thinks itself only in terms of its possibilities.

The question of the betrayal of the Saying in the Said, should be read in this light, as a question not of the conditions of thought in the Said, but the question of the possibility and impossibility of significations in the Said. Impossibility is not the fact that all meaning is a moment in which the abyss of absurdity is held at a distance. Rather, the impossibility of the Said, lies in the necessary betrayal of the incomparable. This is not a betrayal of the infinite, understood as Being, God or physis, but the betrayal of the unique, of the "One" in its utter singularity; in its ethical materiality. Betrayal means that the Said is not a moment of reification. Between the return of the absurd and the unintended consequences of the postulation of a God behind the scenes which allows us to go on living in the face of this absurdity, or the reification of the other which already contains a violence to a third party, Levinas seeks a third way, by exploring the signification of tertiality itself. The interminable play of justice and injustice might be Being's gift, but it is in the notion of the tertiality of illeity that Levinas opens the absurdity of this play to an ethical sense, and introduces a new question concerning the possibility and impossibility of justice.

## ii) Human and Existential Matters

As we saw in Chapter Six, Levinas describes an "ethical language" in terms of the non-signifyingness of the face, as the anarchic origin of signification or sense. This was juxtaposed with a notion of language conceived as a system of signs referring to a signified and a signifier. In introducing an ethical dimension to language, Levinas must explain how it is possible to speak of this realm of non-theoretical significations without reducing its unique signification to another transcendental ground. The issue of justice, concerns itself with this question and Levinas' insistence that "language is justice", refuses to allow for the possibility of the ethical relation falling into the complacency, or shared pleasure, of two people cut off from the world, or one person engaged with singular and universal perspectives of the self, attempting to establish a closed economy at the expense of ethics. The ethical is from the first a demand to justify oneself before the Other *and* a response that attests to a universality that commences out of this unique relation. It is not a moment of the ascetic subordination of the I to the needs and desire of another. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas introduces the Saying beyond the Said, as that which can call into question being's justice (as described above) where the latter can now be conceived as a moment in which the non-reciprocal relation to the Other is reduced to, or interpreted as, a call to tolerance and non-violence which relies on the complacency of good will.<sup>23</sup>

The title of the first chapter of "The Exposition", "From Intentionality to Sense", outlines the directionality of Levinas' reduction, which he claims is the:

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but away from being and its difference from beings, from logos as correlation of saying and said, *to a saying that is without correlation* where language as house is opened beyond monadological closure and disclosure" (my italics), Llewelyn, *The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 162.

... reduction of the Said to the Saying beyond the logos ... to signification, to the one-for-the-other involved in responsibility (or more exactly in substitution), to the locus or non-lieu, locus and non-lieu, the utopia, of the human.<sup>24</sup>

The question of subjectivity, of the meaning of the human, is not thinkable as an entity or object, nor Levinas will add, can it be thought ontologically. Levinas speaks of the inversion of intentionality in the Saying to the Other, an inversion of intentionality into sensing or sensibility. While this recalls the relation of intentionality and enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity*, the interval of separation is not defined in terms of enjoyment. In the sensibility of subjectivity, the materiality is from the first an ethical signification. "Matter" is ethos. Ethos is both a non-site and a non-event of meaning opening to another sensibility.

One must show in Saying, qua approach, the very de-posing or desituating of the subject, which nonetheless remains an irreplaceable uniqueness, and is thus the subjectivity of the subject.<sup>25</sup>

While this correlation of matter and *ethos* seems to entail the redefining of matter in terms of the human body, it also entails an awakening to the understanding of matter as a history of the Said of matter. This history is not only a history of matter as the anonymous forces of nature, but also habitat, utensil, and nourishment. For Levinas, the two moments of body and history remain governed by the dialectical negation which would describe the essencing of "man" in and by being. Nature becomes utensil, food, habitat, in a process in which humanity and being become one. This anthropomorphisation of being comes at the expense of the very character [*ethos*] of the human which confronts the *il y a* as the representative of otherness. The notion of the human as an ethical materiality of

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<sup>24</sup> OTB 45/AE 58.

<sup>25</sup> OTB 47-48/AE 61.

the Saying beyond being, as the excessive concept of a singular universal, is as Rolland suggests, the ultimate metamorphoses of "evasion": "the ethical de-neutralisation of the *il y a* in the intrigue of the otherwise than being".<sup>26</sup>

As will be discussed below, ethical de-neutralisation is not the fact that being is Said, or that it is possible to stand in the clearing of being, nor is it the negation of the fact that as a being, the subject will have always already Said and unsaid being. The ethical de-neutralisation of *il y a* is the moment of the Saying of the Said to the other. It is the suspension of my being-in-act which by definition I cannot accomplish. If being is a gift, the human is an absolute ingratitude, despite oneself, with regard to that gift. One will give it to another, and not return to it immediately, later, or alone. Despite oneself one is for the other and not only for being.

### **iii) Tertiality: Illeity and the Third Party**

The question of the human beyond being, however, is not thereby resolved. The paradoxes and contradictions of Levinas' approach have been well commented on and criticised. The question of the possibility, necessity and value of the human beyond being is continually questioned. The task as some have written is not to return Levinas to Levinas but to send him elsewhere. Few have understood the passage to "elsewhere" as governed by a tertiality or necessity which does not permit a reduction of one to the other.<sup>27</sup> The remainder of this thesis attempts to address these issues of the reification of the beyond, the manner of approaching Levinas as a giving to the third, and the meaning of this tertiality.

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<sup>26</sup> Rolland, , p. 52.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Bernasconi points to a necessity which governs Derrida's reading of Levinas, which refuses the prioritisation of Heidegger over Levinas despite the fact that Derrida can be read as returning Levinas to Heidegger. I suggest that the notion of tertiality corresponds to the necessity Bernasconi mentions here. The return to the other is always with regard to this tertiality and thus cannot reduce one to the other. Bernasconi, *Heidegger in Question*, p. 220.

In the language of the previous chapter, the entry of the third party corresponds to the advent of the ontological, the realm of justice, of reckoning. The entry of the third party, in the language of *The Ego and the Totality*:

... means that the ontological structure of the third party takes shape as a body: both as the will's "I can", lived body, and its vulnerability, physiological body. The simultaneity of these two moments, the "I can" turning into a thing, constitutes the mode of existence of the third party.<sup>28</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, this is the affectivity of subjectivity in the Said, of the Saying teleologically turned toward the Said. This body is not equivalent to the body of ethical materiality. This is not because the ethical subject does not remain incarnate, but because the ethical signification of embodiment lies in its exposure beyond the vulnerability of the physiological body.

The ethical, as Levinas discusses in *Totality and Infinity*, is a relation to death as impossibility. This is to be understood as the inevitable absence or passivity of subjectivity, the impossibility of possibility, rather than as the possibility of ontological annihilation. In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas writes that: "[m]ortality renders senseless any concern the ego would have for its existence and its destiny."<sup>29</sup> The notion of an ethical susceptibility is linked to a moment in which the absurdity that death introduces into life, has a sense conferred upon it. In other words, this is a moment of the conferring of sense on finite being through the affirmation of an infinite. This by no means signifies the overcoming of death, but signifies a disturbance in the ontological relation to death, such that life is "no longer measured by being".<sup>30</sup> The importance and controversy regarding the notion of the tertiality of illeity lies in its attempt to

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<sup>28</sup> *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 39.

<sup>29</sup> OTB 128-129/AE 165.

<sup>30</sup> OTB 129/AE 166.

describe such a victory over death as an affirmation of an infinite. In the following, I suggest that its importance lies in it describing an affirmation of life in face of, that is, without the negation of, the absurdity of being. As Levinas suggests, this possibility of conferring a sense on death does not take from death its sting. In other words, this sense is not to be thought as a consolative truth, or for that matter, a fiction.

Illeity names the absolute infinite and introduces a notion of the third [*le tiers*] which is defined as the grammatical third person. This is a "tertiarity" which orders me [*me ordonne*] to the Other. This should not be interpreted literally to mean that I am ordered to give my being to the Other in an act of ascetic denial of self, as I hope the previous arguments in this thesis have already made clear.<sup>31</sup> The tertiality of illeity addresses the question of the meaning of ordination or of the necessity which governs subjectivity in this moment. The first point to stress is that illeity is not another Other, but is to be understood in terms of the excluded middle [*tiers exclu*] which Levinas refers to as an absolute susceptibility.<sup>32</sup> In the following this is to be distinguished from the third understood as another other, the third party with whom justice begins.<sup>33</sup> The two however, are not unrelated.

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<sup>31</sup> See for example OTB 150/ AE 191: "The Infinite orders me [*m'ordonne*] the neighbour as a face without exposing to me". This is my translation of: "L'Infini m'ordonne le 'prochain' comme

expose itself to me as an order coming from behind the being confronting me in their embodied vulnerability, nor is it simply a moment of the exposure of the I which remains in its being, for this would mark the ultimate assumption of the I with regard to the Other and institute an asceticism which does not recognise the violence inflicted in the name of good conscience.

<sup>32</sup> OTB 128/AE 165.

<sup>33</sup> OTB 150/AE 191. Levinas makes a distinction in this passage which I believe Lingis misinterprets. Since this distinction is crucial to the following argument I will quote both in full

"It is in prophecy that the Infinite escapes the objectification of thematisation and of dialogue, and signifies as *illeity*, in the third person. This thirdness is different from that of the third man, *it is* the third party that interrupts the face to face of a welcome of the other man, interrupts the proximity or approach of the neighbour, it is the third man with which justice begins." OTB 150. My disagreement concerns Lingis' insertion of "it is" which suggests that the tertiality of illeity is that of the third man. This would contradict the claim that illeity escapes objectification and is different to the third man, all of which Lingis seems to translate correctly. In other words, third person and third man are not equivalent. Thus I suggest the passage should read: "It is in

In establishing the relation of the tertiality of illeity and the entry into the realm of justice which Levinas has claimed is essential, it is important to begin with the distinction Levinas makes between the tertiality of illeity and the third party with whom justice begins. Equally important is the necessity of distinguishing between the third party and the empirical fact of the appearance of a third person.

It is not that the entry of a third party would be an empirical fact, and that my responsibility for the other finds itself constrained to a calculus by the "force of things". In the proximity of the other [*l'autre*], all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

In the paragraph following the above, Levinas claims that it is thanks to God that I am another for the others.<sup>35</sup> The question that must be asked is how to reconcile three apparent conflicting claims: i) that illeity is to be distinguished from the third party, ii) that the third party is not an empirical moment, and iii) that it is thanks to illeity that I am an other to others. Assuming that we must hold to (i) then if the third party is not an empirical third person, neither is the thirdness of this party thinkable in terms of illeity. It would make more sense to think of the third party ontologically, and therefore distinct from the ethical ambiguity of illeity, without having to resort to naive realism. The entry of the third party, signifies not one ontological event amongst others but the advent of the ontological itself as the realm of justice:

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prophecy that the Infinite eludes the objectification of thematisation and dialogue, and signifies as *illeity*, as the third person; but this is according to a 'tertiality' which is different to that of the third

party with whom justice begins."

<sup>34</sup> OTB 158/AE 201.

<sup>35</sup> OTB 158/AE 201.

The entry of a third party is the very fact of consciousness, assembling into *being*, and at the same time, in being [     ], the suspension of being in possibility, the finitude of essence accessible to the abstraction of concepts, to the memory that assembles in presence, the reduction of being [     ] to the possible and the reckoning of possibles, the comparison of the incomparable.<sup>36</sup>

The entry of the third party, is thus the moment of subjective hypostasis, no longer thought out of the relation to *il y a*, but out of the relation to the infinite excess of ethical materiality.

The relationship with the third party is "an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face faces [*le visage se de-visage*]"<sup>37</sup> I have modified the translation of the phrase in brackets which Lingis translates as "the face is looked at", which I consider incorrect. In proximity, the face regards me, emerging invisibly from that "bit of absolutely decent skin", to recall Levinas' description of the face in *The Ego and the Totality*.<sup>38</sup> The entry of the third party corrects the asymmetry of proximity, introducing a symmetry - where the face "obsesses and shows itself, between transcendence and visibility/invisibility".<sup>39</sup> But what kind of symmetry is this? Am I reduced solely to a being amongst others? Is the moment of the entry into this relation, a moment when I am judged according to the necessity of being's justice? In other words, am I called to subordinate myself to the other?

Having suggested that the tertiality of the third party is to be understood as the advent of the ontological necessity of justice, how are we to understand the claim that it is thanks to God that I am another to the others? Leaving aside the

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<sup>36</sup> OTB 158/AE 201 (my translation). I have added Levinas' italics, which are not translated into the English. I have also changed, "in a being" and "of a being", to "in being" and "of being" respectively. I understand Levinas to be referring to the amphibology of being in this quote where the entry into being is not just the moment of reckoning of possibility but an entry into the giving reck of being, which will involve the reckoning of possibles in the coming to be and passing away of beings, according to the necessity (*to chreon* or dispensation) governing justice.

<sup>37</sup> OTB 158/AE 201. I have modified the translation as is discussed in the following.

<sup>38</sup> *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 41/EN 42. See section (i) The Other and Social Justice, of Chapter Six of this thesis.

<sup>39</sup> OTB 158/AE 201.

translation of            as "thanks" - a term Levinas discusses at length earlier with regard to the infinite - the tertiality of illeity cannot be read as the condition which leads to my entry into the universal, but is in fact that which does not accede to the moment of my reduction to one amongst others in an ontological sense. If the entry of the third person corrects the asymmetry of the relation to the face, and thus, betrays the relation to illeity, Levinas insists that this does not involve a negation but a "new relation with it".<sup>40</sup> This is a crucial passage which must be quoted in full.

There is betrayal of my anarchic relation with *illeity*, but also a new relationship with it [*elle*]: it is only *thanks* approached as other like the others, that is, 'for myself'. 'Thanks to God', I am other [*Autrui*] for the others. God is not involved [*en cause*] as an alleged interlocutor: the reciprocal correlation binds me to the other man in the trace of transcendence, in *illeity*. The 'passage' of God of which I can speak in no other way than by reference to this aid or grace, is precisely the reversion of incomparable subjectivity into a member of society.<sup>41</sup>

The tertiality of illeity does and does not turn me into an other like all others. It does not reduce me and all others to the ontological ambiguity of vulnerable bodies. Rather, the tertiality of illeity is the possibility that I too am a face [*Autrui*] to others, and not just a subject appearing in a realm in which subjectivity signifies in the synchrony of the Said. As Levinas says earlier, God is not a value among values, but "the impossibility of slipping away, absolute susceptibility".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> OTB 158/AE 201.

<sup>41</sup> OTB 158/AE 201-202 (translation modified). The French reads: "Trahison de ma relation anarchique avec            mais aussi une relation nouvelle avec elle: c'est

dans la trace de la transcendence, dans l'            . Le 'passage' de Dieu dont je ne peux parler

<sup>42</sup> OTB 128/AE165.

This impossibility of slipping away is the impossibility of the I sinking into the essence it thematises in which it attempts to identify itself with those representations. Thus illeity opposes my slipping into a relation to essence in which vulnerability is reduced to the futurity of my own death, ontological vulnerability. This means that I am an other like the others as a unique one, as the face, and not that I fall into the trace of a God, of whom I become a representative amongst equals.

The relation to illeity signifies that I cannot be reduced to one amongst others, something every being would desire most with regard to infinite responsibility. Thus, while the tertiality of the third party makes me a producer, a will like other wills in an economy of justice, the tertiality of illeity in its excess, means that I am a face like the others. I am a member of society as a face and not only as a will. The consequences of this is that my infinite responsibility is not overcome, limited or negated by becoming an other like the others, and furthermore, the face no longer belongs to one other but to all others. The face is a singular universal, and in "the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me".<sup>43</sup> Justice is necessary not to save me from the infinite responsibility to one other but for the sake of judging in the presence of the whole of humanity, in each face.

But justice can be established only if I, *always evaded* from the concept of the ego, always desituated and divested of being, always in non-reciprocatable relationship with the other [*l'Autre*], always for the other [*pour-Autruï*], can become an other like the others.<sup>44</sup>

It is crucial to acknowledge the essential ambiguity of illeity, to avoid a reading of the infinite in which it is again reduced to a thought, a being, or the

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<sup>43</sup> OTB 159/AE 202.

<sup>44</sup> OTB 160-161/AE 204-205 (my italics).

essencing of being as such, as discussed above. Critchley claims that "the passage to *le tiers*, to justice and humanity as a whole, is also a passage to ... the commonness of the divine father in a community of brothers".<sup>45</sup> However, I suggest that it is far from certain that this is the case in *Otherwise than Being*. There is no doubt that Levinas' discussion of illeity concerns itself with the question of the relation of the infinite and the finite. Furthermore, illeity is related to a notion of fecundity, which was earlier coupled with paternity. However, the commonness or universality of illeity is not that of a pregiven universal, of a divine "father" understood as the divine essence of each of His products, as the "father of us all". I suggest that illeity is Levinas' final word on/for fecundity, where fecundity describes a non-teleological process of generation. This is a notion of tertiality which is not thought in terms of an end product, nor a single producer. This is a notion of tertiality which refers to an irreducible ambiguity and is itself not reducible to the product of relation nor presupposed by it.<sup>46</sup> Tertiality is an absolute susceptibility which is not reducible to my relation to being. It names the opening to a beyond being, which is not a moment of becoming divine of the subject. It is not an awakening to a God inhabiting the world behind the scenes, but the name of a vulnerability and susceptibility to the unique presence of another - the human beyond being, which also concerns me.

Critchley interprets the role of illeity as the trace, or excluded middle, which cannot be regarded as a common essence. However, what seems to be missing from this interpretation, and leads once again to an oppositional account of the relation of the ethical and the ontological, is the moment in which

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<sup>45</sup> Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 228.

<sup>46</sup> Critchley, no doubt with Derrida's questions to Levinas regarding the masculinity of the 'il' in mind, also suggests that the "Il" of illeity "reveals Levinas' constant subordination of sexual difference to ethical difference and the feminine to the masculine", Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 227-228. As I have argued in Chapter Five, since Levinas locates sexual difference at the ontological level, the question of 'subordination' depends on the nature of the relation of the ethical and the ontological which is the topic of the present discussion. While the choice of *il* over *elle* can be challenged at the level of the politics of representation, it is the refusal of the finality of such political representations which Levinas argues against. Derrida is right to point out the paradoxes of Levinas' representations, but who should change the *il* to *elle*, or *e.l*. Emmanuel Levinas?

reciprocity occurs is not a moment in which justice is guaranteed by the commonness of illeity, which would thus appear as a tertiality presupposed by the social whole. Illeity marks the constant refusal of this totality and reciprocity, which fails to recognise the violence inflicted in the name of justice. For Levinas then, what defines sociality is a binding separation in which I judge on the basis of the face. This is what Levinas means when he writes that: "the contemporaneous of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of two".<sup>47</sup> As suggested above, the question of justice arises as a consequence of the advent of another other and not illeity. However, the notion of illeity means that the arrival of a third party does not negate the uniqueness of the face. The ontological fact of the third does stand opposed to, or overcome, by an absolute susceptibility to the unicity of the Other, to a beyond of my being, but this means that I have to make a judgement between faces. I must compare the incomparable. The failure to recognise this distinction leads to interpretations in which the advent of the third is conceived as a relieving limit to the infinite excesses of my responsibility to the Other. My existence now appears as the postponement of an infinite responsibility and an assigning of it to God. Levinas writes that "Thanks to God I am another for the others", however, this is not the moment in which a God behind the scenes relieves me of my responsibilities but when, in the midst of a reciprocal relation to another, I recognise that "the equality of all is borne by my inequality".<sup>48</sup>

In no way is justice a degradation of obsession, a degeneration of the for-the-other, a diminution, a limitation of anarchic responsibility, a neutralisation of the glory of the Infinite, a degeneration that would be produced in the measure that for empirical reasons the initial duo would become a trio.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> OTB 159/AE 203.

<sup>48</sup> OTB 159/AE 203.

<sup>49</sup> OTB 159/AE 203.

Illeity names a non-relation of subjectivity, finite being and the infinite, which does not sustain the realm of justice but rather is that which insists that justice must always remain open to the face. Levinas claims that God is not a value among values but the impossibility of escaping one's absolute susceptibility, even when a third party leads to the birth of thought and consciousness.<sup>50</sup> The tertiality of God is an excluded middle, and not a presupposed universal binding a social totality.

Levinas claims that there is an ambivalence of the relation of subjectivity (absolute finitude) and the infinite. This is expressed in the Said in terms of a dilemma: does the relation to the infinite in responsibility confer upon me the identity of a unique and chosen one, or "does this election reduce me to the status of an articulation in its [infinite] divine economy"?<sup>51</sup> Levinas argues that this dilemma in the Said expresses the "enigma of a God speaking in man and of man not counting on any God".<sup>52</sup> This remains a dilemma only if one remains in the Said "where one passes, successively, without being able to stop, from the affirmation of the Infinite to its negation in me".<sup>53</sup> Levinas suggests that the question mark of this dilemma points to an ambivalence in the signification the Saying beyond the dilemma expressed in the Said. Illeity names this ambiguity which is not reducible to enigma. "Illeity overflows both cognition and the enigma through which the Infinite leaves a trace in cognition".<sup>54</sup> Illeity is "diachrony", "extra-ordinary", the other side or the beyond of, the enigma expressed in the dilemma.<sup>55</sup> Illeity would be the ethical signification of the "enigma", the ambiguity of enigma, an exposure of the subject which dissolves the borders of individuation, but paradoxically is a moment of an affirmation of the unique identity of the self. As Levinas says in *The Ego and Totality*, this is

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<sup>50</sup> OTB 128/AE 165.

<sup>51</sup> OTB 153/AE 195.

<sup>52</sup> OTB 154/AE 196.

<sup>53</sup> OTB 154/AE 196.

<sup>54</sup> OTB 162/AE 206.

<sup>55</sup> OTB 154/AE 196.

not a moment in which I am called to bow down before the other in humiliating subordination of myself, but the moment in which the other commands me to command. The Other commands a work from me, that is commands me to speak.<sup>56</sup> In *Otherwise and Being* this is a moment in which "subjectivity is expelled outside of being into itself ... the otherwise than being and the *disinterestedness from essence*".<sup>57</sup>

#### **iv) Why Alterity is Ethical**

With the notion of tertiality beyond being, which cannot be thought in terms of being, Levinas introduces us to a notion of the beyond of ontological difference, which furthermore, cannot be thought negatively, or starting from being or the difference. Tertiality is a category beyond being, thinkable neither in terms of being nor the subject, nor their relation. Reduced to being it appears as the exigency for justice between entities. For Levinas, tertiality is a principle beyond being and the possibility that the face refers to the whole of humanity and not just the one other in a relation of two, independent of the rest of the social whole. Tertiality it could be argued refers to a non-teleological production. The generative productivity of the unique relation to the other.

This thesis has insisted on the importance of this association of the face and its importance for a rethinking not of the ground of good behaviour but the condition of social totalities. In the Said, in ontology, the existence of the third party, might appear to release me from my unique susceptibility to the other. However, the inversion effected in the Saying is not negated. I am now called to take on the more difficult task of judging and comparing between the plurality of unique faces which signify the whole of humanity. The ontological fact of the

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<sup>56</sup> *The Ego and the Totality*, CP 43/EN 45-46.

<sup>57</sup> OTB 154/AE 196. I have added the italics in accordance with the original.

existence of the third demands that I make a decision - to judge. However, tertiality is the possibility of judging on the basis that the face refers to the whole of humanity, or to the humanity of every one. In other words, justice must be determined on the basis of the offence done to the "face" and not to an inhuman principle of justice.

In a recent book, John Caputo has suggested that Levinas is more Heideggerian here than he thinks, and while once upon a time he defended the ethical against the Greek *logos*, he now places too much emphasis on the Greek, because he accepts that everything shows itself in being for justice.<sup>58</sup> Caputo seems to be suggesting that Levinas recognises that truth, unconcealment, is a consequence of the interminable play of justice. However, in the light of the arguments above, the question is whether Levinas' return to *logos* involves anything less than a renewal of it. For, while everything shows itself in being for justice and this is a necessity which cannot be overcome, it is no longer possible to avoid the cry that echoes beyond being's play. Thus, while for Heidegger, the Greek *logos* is reduced to an aesthetic reproduction of value with no power in the world, Levinas explores the ethics of its productivity - a productivity in the service of life, understood in terms of the singular face of the other which takes on a certain universality in the tertiality of illeity.

The meaning of this tertiality and Levinas' insistence that it points to the human and the ethical rather than to the inhuman or a neutral tertiality, or being's justice, is a major point of discussion in Levinas scholarship. Recently Simon Critchley has taken up this discussion in the form of a debate between Blanchot and Levinas with regard to the signification of the "il" of illeity and its relation to the "il" of *il y a*.

Critchley suggests that for Blanchot, God and ethics are unnecessary additions to the primacy of the other [*Autrui*] in Levinas' work and end up

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<sup>58</sup> J. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida. Religion without Religion* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 25.

affirming a God inhabiting a world behind the scenes.<sup>59</sup> To rescue Levinas' notion of illeity from such a possibility, Critchley suggests that we might read Levinas through Blanchot's notion of the third genre [*rapport du troisieme genre*] - relation neutral [*rapport neutre*].<sup>60</sup> This is a relation with an anonymous neutrality of the "il". In a discussion of the relation of *il y a* and illeity Critchley suggests that they remain ambiguous, and suggests the value of Levinas' work lies in the affirmation of ambiguity. However, in a long note in passing, he suggests that Levinas attempts to control ambiguity by thematising it.<sup>61</sup> While Critchley's point is complex, his approach suggests that Levinas' notion of illeity in its "personality", as opposed to "neutrality", could be read as a possible fixing of ambiguity. I understand this to mean that with the notion of illeity, Levinas fixes the essence of the human and the ethical in terms of the Good.

Critchley does acknowledge that we should not read the relation of *il y a* and illeity in a linear fashion in which a bad experience of *il y a* leads to a good experience of illeity. In this he correctly claims that *il y a* is never surmounted by the advent of the ethical and suggests that the *il y a* thereby "functions like a standing reserve of non-sense from which Levinas will repeatedly draw the possibility of ethical significance".<sup>62</sup> Hent de Vries, makes a similar claim when he writes: "the *il y a* could be said to form and de-form the condition and the possibility of the trace of this".<sup>63</sup> He explains that the meaning of this lies in the fact that the *il y a* is that which does not permit the ethical turning into the worst violence. *Il y a*, he seems to suggest, haunts the ethical moment of illeity, which he suggests attempts to inhabit the place of good conscience. However, it could be suggested that *il y a* does not haunt illeity as evil or violence would haunt good conscience. Critchley seems to recognise this much in his refusal of

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<sup>59</sup> S. Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing. Death, Philosophy, Literature*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.80-83.

<sup>60</sup> Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, p. 77.

<sup>61</sup> Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, p. 79.

<sup>62</sup> Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, p. 77.

<sup>63</sup>

York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 218.

the notion of an opposition between good and evil in the terms illeity and *il y a*. Thereby Critchley seems to suggest that illeity is the ethical signification of the susceptibility encountered in relation to *il y a*, what Critchley calls a futurity without me.<sup>64</sup> While I agree with Critchley's claim that the "good" of the ethical is not pleasurable and is not to be contrasted to the horror and 'badness' of the *il y a*, I find that his notion of "atheist transcendence", in its affirmation of Blanchot's neutral third, misinterprets Levinas position. While Critchley wants to affirm the ethical dimension of the *il y a* when he says "death opens a relation to a future which is ungraspable" what he does is reduce the signification of the ethical to the ontological moment - interpreting death in terms of the possibility of my impossibility. As a consequence he thinks the death of the Other in terms of one's own death and reserves for the human the task of an aesthetic, atheist reproduction of value in which literature is conceived as a speech to another, responsive to the alterity of *il y a*, that is to the nothingness which he now wants to share with the Other. In the following I suggest that *il y a* does not permit the subject to sink into essence, and thus signifies as a limit of subjective being, who confronts the absurdity of being and in the attempt to locate itself comes up against the incessant play of being and non-being. This confrontation with *il y a* will thus be essential. However, I suggest that it is not *il y a* that haunts illeity, which furthermore is not synonymous with good conscience, but in fact the ethical moment of illeity which haunts the subjective attempt to create meaning in the face of absurdity. The tertiality of illeity is an absolute susceptibility which does not awaken good conscience but challenges the good conscience of a being who confronts the absurdity of being and says yes to death rather than life.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, p. 75. In a footnote Critchley makes reference to Levinas' essay *Meaning and Sense*, which I will return to below.

<sup>65</sup> de Vries goes so far as to suggest that *il y a* is beyond being and the Other, is "the other than the other, the otherwise than other, the otherwise than otherwise than being". de Vries, *Adieu*, p. 218. However, I suggest that he has described precisely the tertiality of illeity, who is never the Other but the excluded third, the other of the Other, the absolute susceptibility to the human beyond being.

While it could be argued that Critchley describes a relation to a "future without me", it remains based in a consolative fiction regarding my own possibilities. In other words, it remains concerned with a meaning for the present of one's own being. This is not a moment of the affirmation of life but the affirmation of the inevitability of one's own possibility of non-being. To see in this moment of the confrontation with *il y a* an atheism which harbours no consolation, I suggest it is necessary to affirm the ethical moment in which the victory over death is not a victory for the subject but an awakening to the anarchic origin of the incessant "*drive to speak*" of which Critchley himself writes.<sup>66</sup>

For Levinas, the necessity to speak is not a drive emanating from the neutrality of a tertiality conceived in terms of a common death. One speaks not only because there is nothing else, or to pass time, but for a future conceived as a humanity beyond being, to pass into time, rather than the nothingness of our

We are working *in* the present, not *for* the present. How many times in meetings with the people have I repeated and commented on Nietzsche's words: That the future and the things most remote be the rule of all the present days.<sup>67</sup>

Again, the question that underlies this discussion concerns the primacy and impossible possibility of humanity beyond being. But let us look finally at Levinas' own attempt to discuss the difference in terms of the "*il*" of illeity and the "*il*" of *il y a*.

For Levinas, in *Otherwise than Being*, *il y a* is the "non-sense in which essence turns, and in which thus turns the justice issued out of signification".<sup>68</sup> He claims that the ambiguity of sense in being, that it turns into non-sense and absurdity, the *il y a*, cannot be taken lightly. It seems that Critchley is wondering

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<sup>66</sup> Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, p. 88.

<sup>67</sup> CPP 93/HAH 46 (translation modified).

<sup>68</sup> OTB 163/AE 208.

whether this atheist confrontation with absurdity is the condition of an awakening to a sense of an alterity beyond being, a "future without me".<sup>69</sup> In the following I suggest that although Levinas claims that illeity "itself refers to the indefinite time of essence" this is not a reduction of diachrony to the Said, but an acknowledgment that Saying inevitably turns into a Said.<sup>70</sup> It is on the basis and from the point of view of the Saying that the *il y a* takes on a signification of a beyond being, of an alterity not reducible an aesthetics of the absurd, although equally, it will not negate absurdity, but open it to a dimension of signification beyond being.

For Levinas, *il y a* is not that which "remains" resistant to the system, but the *anonymity of the system* that resists the subjective attempt to "sink into the essence it thematises".<sup>71</sup> The subject then might find itself in essence, but not as a contented freedom. In other words, for Levinas, there is a fundamental disturbance to the sense of an ego that is already conceiving of itself in the Said as a being among beings attributes to itself. Levinas discusses this in terms of the overflowing of sense by non-sense. *Il y a* is this non-sense "in which essence turns".<sup>72</sup>

Levinas claims that it is the *il y a*, the overflowing of sense by non-sense, which is necessary for the ultimate *assumption* of the "I" to fail. For Levinas, one has to counteract the moment in which the affective materiality of Saying turns into affect in the Said. That is, the "I" attempts to place itself in the position of ethical subjectivity. It is not the *il y a* considered as another metaphysical concept which could have such attributes as anonymity, where this implies an order of chaos prior to human being that will not be subsumed by the ultimate attempt of the subject, the ego, to "sink into the essence it thematises". Rather, it is the thought of *il y a* taken to its extreme point in a process of thinking, in which the

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<sup>69</sup> Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, p. 77.

<sup>70</sup> OTB 163/AE 208.

<sup>71</sup> OTB 163/AE 208.

<sup>72</sup> OTB 163/AE 208.

subject discovers the impossibility of thinking this being, of its absolute separation from any sense conferred upon it, where the thinker is continually thrown back onto the same "concept" of meaninglessness and its infinite historical predicates. For Levinas, furthermore, this surplus of non-sense over sense, cannot in turn be reduced to a subjective impression. There is a retraction, a withdrawal or contraction of receptivity, or the passivity of the I think; a moment in which there is the impossibility of turning a world into a pure ego.<sup>73</sup> However, the moment in which all attempts to give meaning to what there is [*il y a*] is thwarted, is not the ultimate deliverance into the openness of being, where I am "nothing at all", but in which "I am", I exist nevertheless, "in the equivalence of everything and nothing".<sup>74</sup> The refusal of ultimate synthesis in being, the retraction of subjectivity to a passivity unassumable by myself as a being, is the ethical beyond being. This is the moment of substitution in which it is recognised that all attempts to give meaning take place in a universe. This universe is not the universal openness of being, but the universe of infinite singularity, infinite faces, "the whole of humanity". In other words, as a being I recognise my meaning-giving acts are embedded in a world that infinitely exceeds my attempts to fix its meanings, reify and assemble it into a unified totality. This passing of infinity is a moment of passivity which necessarily exceeds the subjective being's attempt to fix it in the Said. It is beyond the moment in which it is remembered and thematised. Levinas insists that this is not a moment when the subject becomes the infinite, nor does the infinite become the subject. The subject is not reduced to the mouthpiece of the infinite, but is situated in the non-place of a testimony beyond the Said. The subject "exposing its exposure" to the other is a testimony to an infinite across an ambiguity and a difference that cannot be reduced.

This means that the relation to *il y a* cannot produce value alone. It cannot create anew, cannot renew, unless thought in its ethical signification. We must

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<sup>73</sup> OTB 164/AE 209.

<sup>74</sup> OTB 164/AE 209.

make an additional distinction between an interpretive pathos, which is primarily concerned with the production of value and an *ethos* of generative value. This in turn cannot be reduced to a distinction between being and *ethos*. The notion of an *ethos* of generative value is not concerned to rescue the ego from senselessness, by restoring to it an interpretive power. For Levinas, the affective or effective relation of *il y a* remains an interpretive pathos which, in its anonymous neutrality, is the realm in which the relation to the other signifies. In other words, it is the realm of justice, of the coming to be and passing away of being in the interminable play of justice and injustice. However, the ethical is a moment of generation that takes place before and beyond this pathos. The distance I have with regard to the essence I thematise, the postponement already assumed in my relation to *il y a*, points to an excessive event. Distance comes in the form of the stranger and not Heidegger's Heraclitean *daimon*, which would already be a reduction of the stranger, the alien, [*xenon*], a concept not unknown to the Greeks.<sup>75</sup>

The negation of this absurdity is not what is crucial in the relation to *il y a*, rather it is the possibility of judgement, of inserting into this inevitable neutralisation and anonymity of self, other, world and being, the human. This possibility rescues the individual from the inevitable absorption in history, institutions and judgements which refer only to the neutral. This is the decisive ethical moment of justice.

But does the subject escape the concept and essence, anxiety over death and horror of *il y a*, only in resignation and illusion, against which at the hour of truth or of the inevitable awakening, essence is stronger? Can one not understand the subjectivity of the subject beyond essence, as on the basis of a leaving of a concept, a forgetting of

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<sup>75</sup> For an excellent discussion of the notion of the stranger, in which topography is thought beginning with a notion of strangeness, or foreignness that is not thinkable in terms of the pathos of distance, see B. Waldenfels, *Fremden I*, (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1997).

being and non-being? Not of an unregulated forgetting, which still lies within the bipolarity of essence, between being and nothingness. But a forgetting that would be an ignorance in the sense that nobility ignores what is not noble.<sup>76</sup>

Levinas implicitly suggests that there is another meaning to the forgetting of being and the oblivion of the difference. For Levinas, this ignorance is an ignorance with open eyes, not so that one learns to heed the call of being, but in which one exhibits an indifference to essence: a forgetting of being and non-being, which positively expressed, I believe is an affirmation of life over death. This indifference does not translate into a violence or disgust, this is not a refusal of being, but signifies positively as a non-indifference to the Other. The human is brought about in the breaking up and "falling upwards" out of essence into the human.<sup>77</sup> This should not be undertaken as a repugnance toward being. After the death of a certain God behind the scenes, the human is not awakened "by the mysterious housekeeping of being's essence", of *to chreon*.<sup>78</sup> To recognise the human beyond being, to say "Yes" to life and affirm the suffering and death of the Other, and thereby become an accomplice in their death, is not an easy task, and it would seem, escapes those who would prefer to confront the absurdity of essence, by inventing a third of their own.<sup>79</sup> The creation of new values is not abhorrent to Levinas. But to guard against the inevitable idolatry, which would forget that in this confrontation with *il y a*, my freedom to create meanings cannot overcome the sting of death, there will be an undoing which is not the fact of my own unsaying in the confrontation with being, but my attesting to the Other, who

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<sup>76</sup> OTB 177/AE 223 (translation modified).

<sup>77</sup> OTB 184/AE 231.

<sup>78</sup> OTB 184/AE 231.

<sup>79</sup> As Levinas says as early as 1955 in *Is Ontology Fundamental?*: "One cannot oppose personal preference to the venerable tradition that Heidegger continues. One cannot *prefer* as the condition of ontology a relation with beings, over the fundamental thesis that every relation with being presupposes the intimacy or the forgetfulness of being", *Is Ontology Fundamental?*, BW 5. The meaning of the human is precisely this refusal of preference, this is the ultimate insult to the ego who seeks to be the ground, origin and author of itself.

questions my being, the value of my creations, and the violence done to the third party in the name of justice.

For the little humanity that adorns the earth, a relaxation of essence to the second degree is necessary:

*each instant because of this justice itself.*<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> OTB 185/AE 233 (italics in accordance with French edition, translation modified).