

Conclusion

Levinas' early encounter with Heidegger involves an attempt to demonstrate an impossibility inherent in the human being's attachment to being and thereby relocate the 'human' in relation to being. In Chapter One, I have argued that this early work reflects an underlying concern for the socio-political consequences of the crisis of values confronting the Enlightenment tradition of European Idealism in the 1930's. This concern led to the search for an alternative manner in which to approach the meaning of the 'weight' of Being, and the consequences for the relation of human finitude, transcendence, and the social totality.

The examination of Levinas' attempt to rehabilitate humanity from both its Enlightenment model and the irrationalist rejection of this model begins in Chapter Two, where the notion of "there is" [*il y a*] is shown to be the primary mode of externality in relation to which Levinas locates the origins of signification in a moment of the postponement of anonymity. Levinas is shown to undermine any notion of the subject's having any inherent capacity for signification or meaning giving, in its attachment to being.

Levinas' phenomenology of enjoyment is a first attempt to think the 'materiality' of this subjectivity beyond its attachment to anonymous being, but without reducing it to a purely physical substratum. The notion of the materiality of enjoyment is based in a rethinking of the manner of the subject's relation to the 'world', beyond the Heideggerian modes of "being-in" and thus begins his development of a notion of subjectivity which is not conceivable solely in terms of an inherently meaning giving relation to the world.

Levinas' notion of "the dwelling" is an alternative account of 'place', which affirms the notion of a primary alienation or separation from the 'world'. This subjectivity is not beyond being, but is a being who maintains a very different

relation to being than that described by Heidegger. The Other is introduced in terms of a feminine alterity, not to explain the possibility of an overcoming of an original alienation from the world by the reassertion of a more primordial connection, but to link sexual identity to the ambiguous 'unicity' of the self which is now conceived beyond the subject of intentionality and beyond the modes of being attributed to *Dasein*, but nevertheless in the realm of ontology. I have shown that this rethinking of subjectivity has consequences for the question of the production of meaning and leads to the introduction of the Other beyond the being of the subject.

Focusing on the question of alterity in terms of *eros* and sexual difference, I have argued that Levinas' critique of Platonic *eros* attempts to conceive of sexual difference beyond the confines of a social teleology in which each subject is defined in terms of their value for the social totality. However, this does not yet point to a beyond being, but describes the ambiguity of subjective existence itself. Levinas introduces alterity with a critique of love as a relation of two which is unable to recognise the injustice done to the third. I find that Levinas' move away from *eros*, and sexual difference as the relation to alterity, reflects a concern for justice, where justice is linked to a realm which is not only defined ontologically but corresponds to the ontological 'world', where the mode of existing is essentially as a third. I have found that this critique of love does not discount the possibility of an ethics of *eros*, but recognises that a rethinking of the relation of the ethical and ontological dimensions is needed.

Thus, I have suggested that the ethical relation must be read in terms of the concern for justice. The relation to the Other does not occur in a world detached from the conditions of the social totality, but in fact redefines the bases of these relations, without relying on a pre-given universal. In the ethical relation, the subject, before the Other, discovers the contingency of its freedom, and is called to justice. The response to this call is not only an awakening to the

otherness of the particular, to the Other. Levinas suggests that the unique demand of the Other calls me to attest to the whole of humanity.

The inevitable return of death, of the finitude of subjectivity, of the ontological, lead Levinas to ask if there is not another way in which one can conceive the end of the apology and still affirm the Other. In *Totality and Infinity* the possibility is conceived in terms of a victory over death, which is reserved for eros. In his later work however, Levinas reconfigures ethics, justice and being, to address this problem without reducing the erotic to a metaphor of generation. These issues are discussed in relation to Heidegger's analysis of the Anaximander fragment. I have argued that Levinas' account of the Said in *Otherwise than Being*, has Heidegger's connection of being and justice in mind in claiming that "Being qua Being is a function of justice" and that Levinas finds that the moment of passing away of being is a moment of the unsaid or Saying teleologically turned toward the Said, which has already effaced a difference and an exigency coming from elsewhere. The difference between the unsaid and the non-teleological Saying were then discussed in relation to language and affectivity.

The concluding chapter began by addressing the impossibility of any direct approach to the Saying. Levinas is concerned with how, despite the betrayal in the Said, the Saying is not reduced to an ontological event. Despite the betrayal, Levinas claims that there remains a *trace* of proximity in the Said. Illeity names the trace of an absolute infinite and introduces a notion of the third which is defined as the grammatical third person. This tertiality is distinguished from the ontological third and introduces the question of the relation of justice and illeity. The relation of these two realm is discussed in terms of the distinction between the *il* of *il y a* and the *il* of illeity. While *il y a* refuses the subjective attempt to sink into essence, it does not challenge the subject's ultimate pretension to being the sole source of signification. "Illeity" describes the absolute susceptibility of my being to the human beyond being, and incessantly interrupts or undoes, the play of significations in the realm of ontology. This is a humanism

which is concerned with the affirmation of life beyond my own pretensions to locate its meanings, and does not begin with a presupposition regarding a common essence of the human.

In this thesis I hope to have demonstrated that Levinas' rethinking of the value of the human is not concerned to reinvent a moral asceticism which ultimately relies on a presupposed notion of good will. In contrast to the widely held view that the feminine, *eros* and sexual difference in Levinas' thought are subordinated to a dominatory ontology which cannot recognise difference, I have argued that Levinas' ethics and the face to face relation, entail the incessant interruption of the reification of meaning in being. This questioning of the finality of representation does not rely on a neutral third term but refers us continually to the unicity and unique life of the Other. I believe this reading of Levinas offers a basis for a rethinking of the relation of the individual and the social whole. Ultimately, I suggest that this non-oppositional thinking of self and Other, might provide a basis for a new approach to thinking the manner of the generation, adoption and criticism of values across these two traditionally opposed domains.

Levinas' thought undermines any pretensions of a subject to peacefully inhabit the space of good conscience. The ultimate violence and act of appropriation lies in the moment one attempts to take up a position with regard to the Other. It is the Other who incessantly reminds good conscience itself of this appropriative intention and calls the subject to affirm a suffering and a death which refuses final consolations. This is not a task we can take on, but a Yes to the life that we are already living.

To be without a choice can seem to be a violence only to an abusive or hasty and imprudent reflection, for it precedes the freedom non-freedom couple, but thereby sets up a vocation that goes beyond the limited and egoist fate of him who is only for-himself, and washes his hands of the faults and misfortunes that do not begin in his own

freedom or in his present. It is a setting up of a being that is not for itself, but is for all, is both being and disinterestedness. The for itself signifies self-consciousness; the for all, responsibility for the others, support of the universe.¹

¹ OTB 116/AE 148.