

... humanity is, perhaps, the putting in question of the good conscience of being which perseveres in being.¹

Introduction

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas writes that:

Modern antihumanism, which denies the primacy that the human person, free and for itself, would have for the signification of being, is true over and beyond the reasons it gives itself.²

While accepting an anti-humanist position which questions the primacy of free will and the security of an attachment to a pregiven universal reason, Levinas adds that humanism does not have to be denounced because of the failure of freedom, but because it is "not sufficiently human".³ It is impossible to overlook a reference to Heidegger in these lines, who, in his 1947 *Letter on Humanism*, claimed that humanism must be rejected for not thinking the *humanitas* of man high enough.⁴ For Heidegger, the failure to understand the signification of the human, stems from an unavoidable forgetting of Being. To think out of an affirmative relation to this forgetting is to take on the task of a more originary thinking of the truth of Being which Heidegger aligns with "originary ethics".⁵

¹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (DVI), (Paris: Vrin, 1992), p. 11. (my translation).

² E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (OTB), trans. A. Lingis, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publications, 1991), p.127/128. (AE), (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p.163.

³ OTB 128/AE 164.

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, (Frankfurt a. Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1947), p. 19. "Letter on Humanism", trans. D.F. Krell in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, (London: Routledge, 1978), p.210.

⁵ Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, p. 41/235. See also Robert Bernasconi's discussion of Heidegger and the question of humanism, ontology and ethics, in R. Bernasconi, *Heidegger in Question: The Art of Existing*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), especially Chapter 3, "Justice and the Twilight Zone of Morality", pp. 40-55 and Chapter 12, "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Ethics:

Levinas' relation to an antihumanist perspective cannot avoid the question of his relation to Heidegger.⁶ Levinas' concern is not to reinvent a moral system but to explore the meaning of ethics itself. He approaches this question out of a direct concern for the relation of the individual and social and political totalities. The question of the meaning of Being in Levinas' work is explored in terms of its value for these social realities. The meaning of alterity or the Other [*Autrui*] is to be approached in this context.⁷ The search for a meaning for ethics and the human beyond being arises from Levinas' belief that human brutality is not a consequence of a lack of Reason, or a consequence of a failure to think *humanitas* in terms of a more original thinking which only postpones the question of the Other indefinitely, but a fact of the "*elemental Evil* into which we can be lead by logic".⁸ This is to suggest that logic functions in the service of social totalities founded on an impersonal universal, entailing the subordination of the human in subjectivity to inhuman principles, and is not merely a reference to the idea that we can be swayed by rhetoric to commit acts of brutality. A reason or logic which can recognise the human, must first awaken to the original act of violence in any appeal to an impersonal universal.

In his early work on Husserl, Levinas turns to Heidegger to overcome an intellectualism which reduces the lived content of life to its value in a transcendental system of meaning production. Levinas' 1935 essay, , reveals the extent of his interest in Heidegger, focusing on an analysis of the concrete event of a subjective attachment to being, and already relating this to the question of the relation of the individual and the social whole. In this essay,

Reiterating the 'Letter on Humanism"', p. 211-224.

⁶ See P. Atterton, "Levinas's Skeptical Critique of Metaphysics and *Anti-Humanism*", *Philosophy Today* 41/4 (Winter, 1997), p. 491-506, for a lengthier discussion of Levinas' relation to the anti-humanist perspective.

⁷ In the following I will write 'the Other' when referring to *Autrui* or *autrui*, both of which I consider refer to human alterity.

⁸ Prefatory note to the republication of Levinas' 1934 essay "Quelques reflexions sur le *Espirit* 2/26 (November, 1934), p. 199-208. In English translation: "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", trans. S. Hand, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Autumn, 1990), p. 63.

Levinas implicitly suggests that the Heideggerian analysis of *Dasein* does not adequately explore the reality and signification of one's enchainment to being.

Fifty years later, Levinas will link this notion of enchainment to a "great weariness of Europe".⁹ Europe, understood as the "humanity within us", confronts a crisis of value which concerns the humanity of subjectivity. Levinas does not consider that the crisis can be resolved by the declaration of the death of the Subject, Man or God. The crisis goes beyond Heidegger's notion of the end of man and philosophy. It lies in the awakening of conscience to the Other in the full awareness of this history of brutality, violence and Evil perpetuated in the very name of the human. Levinas asks whether we could not find in this awakening of consciousness, conscience and "guilt", a positive signification of humanity itself, rather than the necessity to abandon it altogether. Most importantly, this alternative sense explicitly acknowledges the paradoxes involved in the attempt to overcome the human once and for all. This perspective on Levinas' work, which finds it to be concerned with the rehabilitation of humanity, suggests that we can neither condemn nor pardon humanity, but can explore the significance of this awakening to the Other, who arrives at the sick bed of the modern subject to open the self to an earth inhabited by the plurality of humanity and not to offer consolations. This rehabilitation of humanity, should be understood first of all as a semantic and philosophical task, which does not reduce the idea to a mere word, but turns a mere idea into a living event of the intersubjective relation.¹⁰ This thesis will discuss Levinas' rethinking of the meaning and value of the human - of human subjectivity - through an exploration of the relation of being, ethics and

⁹ E. Levinas, "Peace and Proximity", trans. S. Critchley and P. Atterton, in A. Peperzak, S. Critchley and R. Bernasconi, (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas. Basic Philosophical Writings*(BW) (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 163.

¹⁰ Both Simon Critchley and John Llewelyn suggest that Levinas is involved in a semantic renewal which cannot be conceived as the affirmation of old values. S. Critchley, "Prolegomena to any Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity", in S. Critchley and P. Dews (eds.) *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 43. J. Llewelyn, "Amen" in A. Peperzak, (ed.) *Ethics as First Philosophy. The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 208.

justice in his work.¹¹

Towards the end of his paper, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, Levinas claims that the question of being is "not the ontology of that extraordinary verb, but the ethics of its justice".¹² In so doing he expresses the importance of making the distinction between a semantic renewal that is purely theoretical and one that opens the concept to the living present, or in Levinas' terms, opens the question of signification to the question of ethics and justice:¹³

The ego is the very crisis of the being of beings [] in the human domain. A crisis of being, not because the sense of this verb might still need to be understood in its semantic secret and might call on the powers of ontology, but because I begin to ask myself if my being is justified, if the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of somebody else's place.¹⁴

In this quote Levinas makes a distinction between two questions or two approaches to the meaning of justice and ethics. On the one hand, he introduces the question of being's justice. This is an ontological question of the meaning of justice to be considered in the light of Heidegger's original thinking of the truth of Being which is significant as an attempt to think the meaning of justice without reducing it to its signification within moral, juridical or natural spheres. This thesis suggests that Levinas conceives of the significations in this realm of justice to be linked to an impersonal tertiality or thirdness. On the other hand, in this quote Levinas introduces the question of justice as a question concerning the

¹¹ In the following I use "Being", when referring to the Heideggerian notion of existence [*Sein*] which is not thinkable as the highest being or one kind of being. I have not followed this usage when translating Levinas'. While Levinas does not capitalise , it is juxtaposed to an entity []. Where the context is ambiguous I will include the French in square brackets.

¹² E. Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", in S. Hand, (trans) *The Levinas Reader*, (Oxford:

Justifications de l'ethique

¹³ Levinas, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, p. 87/ , p. 51.

¹⁴ Levinas, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, p.86/ , p.50-51.

meaning and value of subjective being. This is a moment in which an impersonal justice confronts the question of the singularity of subjectivity. Subjective being is redefined as a node in which the impersonal and the personal come face to face. This thesis argues that this ontology opens to an ethical moment in which the apparent two-sidedness of being and subjective being, of the ambiguous play of the impersonal and the personal, is found to have an ethical signification beyond the meaning derived in the confrontation with being.

This distinction between an ethical and an ontological justice, is crucial to an understanding of Levinas' work.¹⁵ I suggest that it recognises that there are two elements to Levinas' renewal of the question of being and not just an opposition of the ethical to the ontological. The early oppositional formulation of the relation of ethics and ontology in which justice appears synonymous with ethics, and freedom synonymous with being, can be seen as reflecting Levinas' early concern for the ethical dimension of justice which he argues is subordinated to truth, and the freedom of the "I". It would not be surprising then, that Levinas' first task is to explain the ethical dimension. However, it would be incorrect to suppose that this task merely involves the completion of a reversal of truth and justice, or more controversially the subordination of the freedom of the "I" to another and a renewal of asceticism. The reversal is only the first step in a complex reconfiguration and revaluation of ethics, justice and being.

Levinas' early works focuses particularly on the relation of subjectivity and being, introducing alterity as a moment of the questioning of the possibility of complacency and significations in the subject's relation to being as *il y a*.¹⁶ The Other is not introduced as a salvation from this enchainment but opens a new direction to the act of meaning giving. The signification of alterity cannot be

¹⁵ Critchley describes this distinction as a difference between a political and an ethical notion of justice, suggesting that in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas is concerned with the ethical dimension of justice and only addresses the political dimension in his second major work *Otherwise than Being*.

Liberal?", *European Journal of Philosophy* 2/1 (1994), p. 13.

¹⁶ I will write "there is" in the original French *il y a* throughout this thesis without the use of a definite pronoun.

considered independently of the question of the production of meaning. However, I argue that this is not to read the ethical relation as the new foundation of truth.

Levinas discusses the question of alterity in terms of justice and the third as early as 1954 in the paper *The Ego and the Totality*. I suggest that *Totality and Infinity* must be read in this context. In a second preface to *Totality and Infinity* in 1987, Levinas writes that there is as yet no distinction between "mercy" as the source of a right of the other *before me*, and justice as a source of a right of the other *before the third*, that is, another other.¹⁷ In an interview around this time Levinas claims that ethics and justice are "the same word, the same question, the same language".¹⁸

I suggest that making ethics and justice the "same language" does not ignore the two-sided event of the "face to face" encounter, but in fact introduces us to the question of tertiality and its relation to the face. As Levinas elaborates in another interview:

... the word "justice" applies much more to the relation with the third than the relation with the Other. But in reality the relation with the Other is never uniquely the relation with the Other: the third is always and already represented in the Other; in the very apparition of the Other I already regard [*me regard*] the third. And all this renders an extremely close connection [*rapproch*] between responsibility in regard to the Other [] and justice.¹⁹

By the time of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas is suggesting that it is in the *face to face* relation that the subject is called to justice. For Levinas, the question is not a

¹⁷ E. Levinas, " *Entre Nous*: (EN), (Paris: Grasset, 1991), p. 232. "Il n'y a, d'autre part, aucune difference terminologique dans

¹⁸ E. Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas", T. Wright, P. Hughes and A. Ainley, in R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (eds.) *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 171.

¹⁹ *Questions et Reponses*, DVI 133.

question *by* the already singular and unique subject, either as a first spontaneous utterance nor as a response to something or someone else. Rather, it constitutes the uniqueness of the subject itself. Levinas argues elsewhere that this is not a response, but a question, "there where there is no place for a response, there where a response does not suffice".²⁰ The question is neither 'by' nor 'of' the ontological subject, but marks the limits of the ontological relation and the advent of the ethical.

The "work" of justice distinguishes the face from a purely empirical object, and introduces a notion of "vision" suitable to ethics as opposed to ontology or epistemology.²¹ However, Levinas' linking of ethics and justice in *Totality and Infinity* not only redefines justice in terms of the other but also points to another dimension of the ethical itself which is most usually overlooked. What one sees in the face is not only the singular other but the whole of humanity. The meaning of this universal cannot be assumed but must also be investigated. It is to the infinity of humanity that I respond, but this response leads to the infinite which is beyond the two-fold alterity - of the finitude and infinitude of humanity - that is encountered in the face. The alterity of the face signifies the ethical impossibility of the other as aim, goal or finality.

The face to face encounter ruptures the ontological realm and leads to transformations of these modes of being before the other. The transformations that the subject undergoes before the face all point to Levinas' concern with how the rupture of the ontological effects subjective being. As regards the ethical relation I argue that Levinas is concerned to maintain a place for subjectivity in the face of the call to justice by the Other. Furthermore, I find that this relation is concerned with the question of the value and meaning of subjectivity with regard to the social whole and not just with describing a realm of personal relations from

²⁰ E. Levinas, *Questions et Reponses*, DVI 136.

²¹ For a brief introduction to the question of the "work" of justice and the face, see E. Wyschograd, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 97-98.

which we can derive an ethics of good will that is transposed into a condition of peaceable and non-violent social totalities. The relation of ethics and justice complicates this question. Thus, while for Levinas, the ethical relation is linked integrally to justice, it is of utmost importance that the one is not reduced to the other. They are the same question in the sense expressed above. That is, as the question of the ethics of being's justice.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas links justice firmly to the realm of ontological significations which he calls "the Said" and insists on the necessity of this justice and the priority of significations in the Said. I will argue that, for Levinas, the play of significations in the Said, which are conceived by Heidegger in terms of the dispensation of justice, leaves the question of the necessity and sufficiency of justice itself to an assumed internal necessity which reveals the hidden relation to Being. Levinas considers this insufficiency positively as a "sign" of an impossibility inherent in justice itself and links this impossibility to the ethical realm as a unique affectivity or sensibility. Ethical sensibility is not thereby to be conceived as a new ground of meaning but rather, is the excessive moment of any meaning-giving act which refuses to let itself sink into the essences that it has thematised.²² The necessity of justice, of thematisation and the Said, is conceived out of the ethical perspective, expressed in *Otherwise than Being* as an ethical materiality of "the Saying".

Judgements of justice, political judgements - whether of a State or of an ego who must choose between the other and another other - need not be based on the interests of these totalities. Most would agree that a form of justice or impartiality is necessary, with regard to judgements between competing interests, whether on the part of a State or an individual. However, for Levinas, the disinterest required is not to be based on an impersonal justice, which remains a fiction and will ultimately belong to the State. For Levinas, the entry of the third party requires justice, but that moment of decision must be based in the face of the

²² OTB 163/AE 208.

other, not in political allegiances. To reject the interminable play of partialities is not to refer to an anonymous justice, but the violence inflicted on the other.

To those who wish to renounce universality, Levinas responds, not with the claim that they are wrong, but with the claim that it is impossible. This impossibility does not merely re-affirm the existence, behind the scenes, of an old universal, but recognises that the negation already contains the affirmation of a never present universal. The denial of God, understood as a universal concept of the singularity of subjectivity, is tantamount to the refusal of the impossibility of negating the dream of an absolute susceptibility to the Other, and cannot, according to Levinas, avoid the danger of reinstating the old God or creating a new one. As Levinas says, God "is always subject to repudiation and in permanent danger of turning into a protector of all the egoisms".²³

If, in his early work *De l'évasion*, Levinas sought a new way to leave being, in his later work he focuses on the question of how the beyond of ethical materiality remains effective in the ontological dimension. It is not a matter of leaving being but rather of how being remains susceptible to the ethical Saying. Justice is a necessity that entails a betrayal of the Saying. However, betrayal has a positive signification which does not leave the anonymous play of justice intact. This justice, and being in its perseverance, is ultimately in the service of the human, the excessive concept of a singular universal. If, for Heidegger, being needs the human, for Levinas, the human is a desire for a beyond being. The interruption of the human in the realm of signification does not negate the interminable play of justice and injustice, but interrupts in a radical new sense, so that the meaning of human subjectivity cannot be reduced to a relation to an oblivion.

Thesis Outline

²³ OTB 161/AE 205

The thesis traces the movement in Levinas' work, from a critical attempt to rethink the relation of human subjectivity and being, to a notion of the human as an excessive concept of a singular universal, beyond being. I intend to demonstrate that this notion of humanity evolves out of Levinas' attempt to think alterity beyond the ontic-ontological difference. Thus, Chapter One deals with the early encounter with Heidegger in which, heightened by the background of a political crisis for European humanism, Levinas announces the need for a renewal of the question of being in the essay . I argue that this essay is an attempt to insinuate an impossibility in the midst of human being's attachment to being and represents a first attempt to relocate the human in relation to being through its implicit critique of *Dasein*.

The implicit critique of *Dasein* becomes explicit in Levinas' post-war writings *Existence and Existents*, and *Time and the Other*, leading to the detailed formulation of *Totality and Infinity*. In the essays, Levinas attempts a reformulation of the meaning of Being, focusing on the impossible instant of the subject's (the existent's) attachment to existence. Chapter Two deals with the notion of "there is" [*il y a*] as a primary mode of externality, suggesting that Levinas locates the origins of signification in a moment of the postponement of the anonymity of being which describes an originary hypostasis. While the existent appears as the instant of the effectuation of postponement, Levinas questions whether we should conceive of this as spontaneous self-positing which attributes certain powers to the existent, or whether the possibility of a singular instant arising from the anonymity of being might not point to a new event, beyond this initial attachment of existence and the existent. Levinas thereby attempts to undermine any notion of the subject's having any inherent capacity for signification or meaning-giving, in its attachment to being. Nevertheless, this impersonal attachment to being as *il y a* is not to be conceived as a negative moment that will be overcome in a dialectic of being and alterity.

In relation to the denial of such an inherent capacity, I will be examining

the elaboration of the notion of subjectivity and separation which Levinas undertakes in *Totality and Infinity*. In Chapter Three, I examine Levinas' phenomenology of enjoyment as both a critique of Husserlian intentional consciousness, and also as a first attempt to think the materiality of this subjectivity, beyond its attachment to anonymous being without reducing it to a purely physical substratum. Levinas attempts to rethink the manner of the subject's relation to the world, beyond the Heideggerian modes of "being-in-the-world" 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.

In Chapter Four, I discuss Levinas' notion of "the dwelling" as 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 as dwelling by Heidegger. For Levinas, the subjectivity of dwelling is a reconfiguration of the ordinary hypostasis such that this has a signification with regard to an encounter with another, and not only with regard to being. This signification is explored in terms of the encounter with feminine alterity. I find that the feminine is not introduced to explain the possibility of an overcoming of an original alienation from the world by the reassertion of a more primordial connection. Rather, the introduction of sexual difference in dwelling rejects the neutrality of *Dasein* and ontology, and links sexual identity to the ambiguous 'unicity' of the self. This self is now conceived of as beyond the subject of intentionality and beyond the modes of being attributed to *Dasein*, but nevertheless remains within the realm of ontology. This reading suggests that, while the introduction of the feminine undermines the virility of being, it does not do this by ascribing a feminine passivity to an active masculine subjectivity as the basis for a possible ethicality in such a subject.

The rethinking of the being 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. Chapter Five, in broadening the question of the role of the feminine in the subject's relation to alterity, begins with a discussion of Levinas' conception of alterity in terms of *eros* and sexual difference. I argue 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, in accordance with the previous chapter, I shall argue that this critique does not yet articulate a subjective existence beyond being, but describes the ambiguity of subjective existence itself. While Levinas' account of the alterity of *eros* introduces a notion of sexual difference distinct from a notion founded on an oppositional logic which relies on a pre-determined universal, or totality, it must immediately confront the question of the nature of its relation to this totality. Levinas discusses these issues in *The Ego and the Totality*, beginning with a critique of love, considered as either *eros* or *agape*, as a relation of two. I suggest that Levinas does not reject this relation because it conceives of the social whole, in the form of the third party, as a threat, but because the love of the couple does not function or have its value determined solely with regard to this totality.

Contrary to subordinating *eros* to an ethics derived from the broader demands of the social totality, Levinas opens a unique position for *eros*. Erotic fecundity is not to be thought in terms of a teleology of social production - the child is not a third party. Thus, Levinas' move away from *eros* and away from sexual difference as a model of alterity can be seen to reflect a concern for the question of the signification of tertiality. In this context, I explore the notion of the child and of fecundity in a reading that does not push the question of the erotic and love to the sidelines, but suggests that Levinas is continually concerned with the possibility of an the ethical signification of *eros* without reducing it to a relation which provides the carnal foundations of a social totality.

In *The Ego and the Totality*, Levinas discusses of the question of tertiality in terms of justice and the face of the Other. Chapter Six addresses Levinas'

account of the face to face relation in *Totality and Infinity*, reading this relation in the context of Levinas' expression of a concern for justice and the meaning of tertiality in *The Ego and the Totality*. In this paper, Levinas explores the ambiguity of the relation of the face and the third, describing the apparition of the face as the breaking through the form of the appearance of the other as a third party. Read in this context, the alignment of ethics and justice that occurs in *Totality and Infinity* reflects the concern that 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 pregiven universal. Two questions emerge from this alignment of ethics and justice: the question of the relation of the subject to the Other, and the question of the relation of this relation to the social whole. In *Totality and Infinity*, the first takes form as a question of the subject in the ethical relation, who before the other, discovers the contingency of its freedom, and is called to justice. The response to this call is not described as a moment of the subordination of oneself to another in an act of ascetic self-denial - the call is to speak. Thus, Levinas suggests that the unique demand of the Other calls me to attest to the whole of humanity. This does not entail a new capacity on the part of the subject, but reveals that the universal generated in the response exceeds any intentions I have with regard to the world and with regard to the Other. Being just, which is to say, responding ethically, would thus seem to entail a negation of the Other, rather than a negation of all the others, including myself. Levinas discusses this problem in terms of the necessity of "ceasing the apology" to the Other without thereby negating the initial demand to speak. The inevitable return of death, of the finitude of subjectivity and of the ontological, leads 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 of affirming the Other is conceived of as a victory over death thought of in terms of *eros* and fecundity. I suggest that, in his later work, Levinas reconfigures ethics, justice and being to address the

question of the possibility of a victory over death, which is to say, of an affirmation of life and the human beyond being, which neither takes from death its sting, nor reduces the erotic to a metaphor for production. Chapter Seven discusses Levinas' rethinking of justice and ethics, introducing the discussion with Heidegger's analysis of the Anaximander fragment. In this paper, Heidegger makes a connection between being and justice which Levinas has in mind when he claims: "Being qua Being is a function of justice", in his account of the Said in *Otherwise than Being*.²⁴ In Levinas' understanding of Heidegger, an interminable play of justice and injustice calls the violence and persistence of the present into question. However, Levinas finds the coming to be and passing away of being to belong to the essential amphibology of being in the Said. I find that his analyses suggest that the moment of passing away is a moment of the "unsaid" or the "Saying teleologically turned toward the Said", where such a moment has already effaced a difference and an exigency coming from elsewhere. A further difference, between the unsaid and the Saying, is then introduced through a discussion of the relation of language and affectivity. This discussion suggests that Levinas points to a notion of affectivity open to a dimension of signification beyond the subjective relation to being and the play of meaning in the Said.

Chapter Eight addresses the question of this subjectivity of the Saying, revealing the impossibility in any direct approach in the methodological excess of the Saying itself. I suggest that Levinas' concern in *Totality and Infinity* to explain how the apology does not negate the demand of the Other, now becomes a question of the Saying, and how, despite the betrayal in the Said, Saying is not reduced to an ontological event. This discussion is linked to Levinas' thinking of tertiality in *Otherwise than Being* in its ontological and ethical significations. Despite the betrayal, Levinas claims that there remains a trace of proximity in the Said. "Illeity" names an absolute susceptibility of subjectivity, the trace of an absolute infinite and introduces a notion of the third that is defined as the

²⁴ OTB 162/AE 207.

grammatical third person. This form of "tertiality" is further distinguished from the ontological third, where the latter is understood as another other who interrupts the infinite susceptibility of the subject's relation to the singular other, thereby introducing the question of justice. In a concluding discussion of the relation of the "il" of *il y a*, or the anonymity of being, and the "il" of illeity, I suggest that illeity cannot be thought as another other, nor the otherness of the Other. Naming neither the "God" of onto-theology nor the neutrality of Being of Heideggerian ontology, illeity names the excessive concept of a singular universal which is based an absolute susceptibility of my being to the human beyond being.

This interpretation of Levinas suggests that the ethical realm cannot be juxtaposed to the social whole in an opposition of the passivity of good with the active power of evil. Levinas' reconfiguration of being, ethics and justice, leads to a notion of power conceived in terms of an essence which remains open to its *ethos*. This is an openness and non-indifference in which the foundations of good conscience are shaken.

... there is question of the Said and being only because Saying or responsibility require justice. Only in this manner will justice be done to being. Only in this manner will the affirmation be understood - strange taken literally - that through injustice "all the foundations of the earth are shaken". Only in this way the terrain of disinterestedness will be given to truth, allowing for the separation of truth and ideology.²⁵

²⁵ OTB 45/AE 58 (translation modified).