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NIETZSCHE AND LEVINAS ON THE ETHICS OF SUBJECTIVITY

**NIETZSCHE AND LEVINAS ON THE ETHICS OF
SUBJECTIVITY**

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2014

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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PhD

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SUMMARY

My project is an exploration of the ethics of subjectivity as proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas, and it evolved from the question of whether subjectivity is experienced essentially as an unfolding of the will to power from within one's own being to act on the outside, or whether it is primarily a formation based on an intrinsically passive exposure to exteriority.

In the first part I descriptively laid out Nietzsche's and Levinas's conceptions of subjectivity. I began with portraying Nietzsche's naturalistic account in which the human subject is basically an organism which functions based on its inherent will to power to interpret, shape and dominate its environment. Levinas's interpretation of the human subject, on the other hand, is unapologetically anthropocentric and fundamentally inter-subjective, according to which the subject gains its identity by responding to the Other without expecting reciprocity. Levinas provocatively refers to the religiosity of the human soul by emphasizing that it is only through sociality that one truly realises one's moral capacity.

In the second part, I critiqued the two philosophers' accounts from each other's view points. I posed a Levinasian criticism of Nietzsche based on the ethical validity of the latter's notion of the subject for being too self-sufficient and hence indifferent to the suffering of others. Lastly, I presented a Nietzschean challenge to Levinas by rejecting the universalizing aspect of the latter's philosophy from the former's notion of perspectivism. I suggested that Levinas promotes a notion of subjectivity which has a stifling effect upon the creativity and flourishing of the free spirit who wants to cultivate her character.

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in this project emerged as I sensed a stimulating contrast between the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas, as both philosophers reveal the same worry about the meaning of the human subject and the constitution of agency after the end of theodicy – in the former's case this notion relates to the death of God whereas for the latter, it concerns proposing an ethical response to evil. As this project explores the meaning of subjectivity in terms of ethics, my research evolves from the question of whether subjectivity is experienced essentially as a manifestation of an unfolding of the will to power from within one's own being to shape and interpret the outside; or a formation based primarily on responding to the (human) other, accompanied with the primordial sense of inhibition and obsession. After delineating the positions of both philosophers, I dispute them from each other's viewpoints. I argue that Levinas would reject Nietzsche's conception of subjectivity because of its unintermittable self-sufficiency; whereas the latter would criticise the former's notion of the subject for lacking the genuine complexity of a character.

Nietzsche's account of subjectivity offers an extraordinary mode of naturalism. On the one hand, he asserts humans are wild beasts which basically act on their primal instinct to dominate and exploit their environment, according to which any human activity leading to civilization grows from this unique source of exerting its innate force outwards. The will to power reveals itself most crudely upon human relationships as shaping and manipulating social groups: the stronger clan learns to command and subjugate the weaker party. In return, based on profound misinterpretations of their bodies – diverse inner drives and affects – the weaker party invents morality to exert its force upon the stronger party. As language serves as the contract, morality functions to maintain order within human society. Thus the invention of the causal correlation between guilt and punishment leads to the establishment of the moral subject accountable for one's legal responsibilities.

Notwithstanding his unromantic outline, which predominantly focuses on the pragmatic manipulation of power, Nietzsche strongly argues that there is more to man than the mere confused animal that learns to make promises. Nietzsche is captivated by the idea of human greatness which can come forth by creating values. In his regard, values are continuous with the essential drive of life; the will to power resides within every organism, whose aim is not only to adapt to its environment and merely survive via

procreation but to affect its surroundings by creating beyond itself: this means to shape, change, interpret, renew and reinterpret whatever comes its way.

Thus, whenever we interpret, we create, at both the conscious and unconscious level – at the atomic and subatomic level our cells are physiologically constituted by our inner urges and drives over which we have only limited control. Since by essence interpretation is evaluative, Nietzsche defends that, among all human endeavours, art is the most explicitly evaluative one as it directly stimulates our creative powers. For this reason, in spite of being a plain brute, man also seems to have a transcendental capacity of overcoming the limiting frame of morality by creating values which signifies moving beyond *ressentiment*, and thinking beyond good and evil. Man can be a free spirit, a self-commanding individual who knows how to organise his drives for an overall purpose and attain a remarkable level of self-synthesis. In this respect, the Overman can be the justification of mankind.

On the other side, Levinas's interpretation of the human subject is fundamentally inter-subjective according to which the subject gains its identity by responding to the human other without expecting reciprocity. Levinas's notion of responsibility can best be understood in terms of the essentially asymmetrical relationship in which the Other is always one's moral superior. In spite of her physical fragility, what endows the Other this moral superiority is her relation to the Good beyond Being, which is the trace one glimpses in service to the Other.

In his phenomenological description of the ethical moment, Levinas employs prominent expressions such as obsession, persecution and hostage which always connote, implicitly or explicitly, a sense of suffering for the Other. Yet it must be noted that, in Levinas's depiction, the obsession by the Other is simultaneously an obsession with the Good beyond Being, which is memorably expressed by Levinas as he refers to the condition of being a hostage as a "divine discomfort." Levinas provocatively refers to the religiosity of human soul by emphasizing that it is only through sociality that one realises her moral capacity and generosity. Thus, prior to being creatures of nature, in Levinas's philosophy humans irrupt into Being with the ethical capacity that no other creature has. Contrary to Nietzsche, Levinas's account of subjectivity is not naturalistic but primarily anthropocentric and humanistic.

It is important to remark that Levinas does not intend to re-introduce another version of the "is" versus "ought" dichotomy in a renewed, disguised form. By asserting the primordially of the face as the beginning of ethics, language and peace, he does not

convey that one *must* serve the Other but suggests that one is always already obsessed by the Other even if one ignores the Other. Levinas neither provides us with any rational arguments to convince us as to why we must serve the Other, nor does he tell us to stay away from evil – perhaps such arguments would not convince us after the death of God either. There is no divine reward if we are good; and, likewise, no punishment if we are bad. The relationship with the Other is a phenomenon beyond reward or punishment, and the suffering we undergo along the way will always be useless.

In Levinas's account, ethics is not a branch of philosophy among others, but *is* the first philosophy. All the other human activities such as sciences, politics or arts gain significance only after realising the epiphany of the face. That is why social and political philosophies, even theories of justice, can only have meaning as one learns to obey the moral authority inscribed on the face. Even language comes forth as a way to respond and relate to the Other; so, rather than articulating persuasive theoretical statements, it is by acknowledging the humanism of the other person that ethics may have significance.

My project consists of two parts: part one is mainly descriptive and part two is more argumentative. Since all of my chapters are quite lengthy, I provide brief introductory and concluding parts for each chapter, for guidance. Yet here I would like to also succinctly outline the structure of my project.

In part one, the first chapter is on Nietzsche, called "Nietzsche on the Self." Its purpose is to lay out the ground upon which Nietzsche's conception of subjectivity emerges. In order to best reflect this, it is divided into three sections which deal with Nietzsche's conception of naturalism, his critique of the moral subject, and the emergence of the self as the outcome of the will to power, subsequently. Because of the descriptive nature of this chapter, I mainly intend to cover the most relevant grounds for understanding Nietzsche's idiosyncratic position on naturalism, morality and the situation of the human subject.

However, this chapter does not include all the controversy pertaining to Nietzsche's thought. The notion of the Nietzschean individual gains further clarity in the coming chapters as I explore the significant themes of *amor fati*, the eternal recurrence of the same and perspectivism. These themes are reserved for the later chapters partly for the sake of avoiding repetition, and partly because those themes are the most controversial ideas to relate to Levinas.

The second chapter is entitled “Levinas on the Emergence of Subjectivity” and its main purpose is to describe Levinas’s main ideas on the emergence of the subject as responding to the Other. It is predominantly based on close readings of primary texts and some secondary literature to clarify Levinas’s ideas. Even though my main texts are *Totality and Infinity* and the “Substitution” section of *Otherwise than Being*, my primary sources are not limited to only these two masterpieces. I make use of some important essays both in this chapter and in the coming chapters to provide the most relevant grounds, partly to challenge Nietzsche and partly to be challenged by him. I also use at a very limited scale some of Levinas’s non-philosophical works and interviews (in chapter four as well) as I regard Levinas’s position from Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* arguments, such as philosophy as autobiography.

In this chapter, on the one hand, I explain the key ideas and concepts necessary to understand Levinas’s complex thought and, on the other hand, I intend to clarify certain aspects of Levinas’s philosophy which are open to misconceptions such as dissociating his philosophy from a conventional interpretation of religion and dissociating the notion of substitution from altruism. This chapter also introduces certain themes that will be examined in more detail in the last chapter, such as Levinas’s ambiguous relation to Judaism and his controversial conception of universalism. I clarify Levinas’s notions of interiority and exteriority – the face, the Other and the third party – which will all be relevant for the coming chapters. I present substitution as the essence of Levinas’s conception of subjectivity at the root of which lies the asymmetry between the self and the Other. Throughout my dissertation, when referring to words such as the infinite, other, desire, good, goodness and being, I capitalise the initial letter when the term is used in a strictly Levinasian sense rather than conventional use.

Part two is the place where I theoretically imagine Nietzsche and Levinas challenging and critiquing each other’s accounts of subjectivity. However, I do not imagine them face to face; that is, I avoid a straightforwardly symmetric style in which each responds to the other’s challenge as self-defence and counterattacks as if in a dialogue. Rather, this project is a humble attempt to lay out at least some of the most provocative ideas which not only confront the two philosophers’ thoughts, but also touch some important issues in the canon of Western philosophy.

I begin the third chapter, “A Levinasian Challenge to the Nietzschean Notion of the Self on Ethical Grounds,” with a hypothetical debate between Nietzsche and Levinas on ethics versus naturalism, which is the most apparent difference between their

approaches to philosophy and subjectivity. Without rejecting the invaluable insights of Nietzsche's observations pertaining to human psychology, in this section as a Levinasian critique I suggest that naturalism cannot provide us any ethical orientation. Ethical orientation can only emerge from exteriority which is itself already a breach in nature, not an interpretation of nature – no matter how objective or reasonable.

I continue with remarking the parallels between Nietzsche's conception of naturalism with his captivating theme of the aesthetic justification of life. At this stage I introduce Levinas's approach to arts and artworks and reveal their disturbing relation to the Levinasian notion of the *il y a*. I draw a connection between Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati* and Levinas's critique of the self-absorbed individual who cannot be challenged from outside.

I elaborate on the self-sufficiency of the Nietzschean subject who is determined to affirm his fate at the expense of a complete disregard of others' fates and sufferings. It is not implausible to argue that the Nietzschean individual affirms himself and his fate within a totality very reminiscent of the totality of an artwork – which is already notable in Nietzsche's proclamation that one must be the artist of one's life. I pursue the argument of the clustered individual which is crystallised by the Nietzschean theme of the eternal recurrence of the same to the point of suggesting that embodying stoicism, the Nietzschean individual is evocative of the ascetic priest.

The last chapter, titled "A Nietzschean Challenge to the Levinasian Notion of the Self," begins with calling into question the consistency of Levinas's arguments. Disputing Levinas's implicit convictions on the universalizing influence of his conception of subjectivity, I question Levinas's complacency regarding the Western identity which is itself never open to critique from any other (non-Western) direction. Levinas's undoubted belief in the Greek as the language of university; Judaism as the model for humanity and Plato as the reference point for philosophy becomes debated from Nietzsche's conception of perspectivism.

I elucidate that perspectivism refutes universalism because it rejects the idea of a single viewpoint. Similar to inner drives, perspectives need to compete with each other and promote constant challenge. That is why, Levinas's universalizing urge causes a stifling effect upon the activity of the free spirit who desires to flourish and cultivate her character. Lastly, I introduce Nietzsche's idea which suggests that ethics can best be manifest within one's character. It is not the works nor the words, but the character – the *ethos* – which reveals one's ethics.

Likewise, one's philosophy is one's own personification, manifesting one's character. Philosophies can compete only as far as their creators can; as the perspectives of diverse philosophers rival with each other akin to the ancient enlightened competitions, the agonistic contests. For this reason at least, after all, it can be worth investing some effort upon determining the conditions best suitable for one's own flourishing and cultivating one's character.

PART I

TWO DISTINCT APPROACHES TO SUBJECTIVITY

CHAPTER ONE

NIETZSCHE ON THE SELF

Introduction

This chapter defends a naturalistic interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of selfhood, central to which is the notion of the will to power. It will be argued that Nietzsche rejects traditional philosophical accounts of the self, especially in ethics, which he considers to be mere metaphysical constructs, consolidated through socio-political practices. The chapter consists of three sections; I begin by elucidating Nietzsche's apperception of naturalism and placing it in the context of the relevant current scholarship. Having explored the physiological aspects of the body such as the inner drives, instincts, unconscious desires and affects, I seek to show that Nietzsche's aim to "naturalize" man must be understood as a necessary bridge to comprehend his essential theme of the will to power.

In the second section, I present Nietzsche's critique of moral subjectivity. This is a dominant idea coming up in most of his middle works, but most rigorously examined in *On the Genealogy of the Morals* in the context of Nietzsche's criticisms of the notion of the free will and of the moral subject as inventions of legal and socio-political conventions rooted in the traditional and practical creditor-debtor dynamic. His key criticism of the moral subject is that it propagates the concepts of guilt, *ressentiment* and bad conscience.

In the last section, I explore Nietzsche's notion of the will through the relationship between the self and the will to power. I suggest that the Nietzschean self is a manifestation of the relationship between the will to power and individuation, and this process is best exemplified by the Ancient Greek concept *agon*. Since the individual is a concept that undergoes constant change and individuation, what Nietzsche regards as self-overcoming is attained through the growth in activity, reminiscent of the spirit of agonistic contestation.

a) Nietzsche's Naturalism and the Self

There are no eternally enduring substances; matter is just another error as the God of Eleatics. But when shall we be at an end with our foresight and precaution! When will all these shadows of God cease to obscure us? When shall we have nature entirely

undeified! When shall we be permitted to *naturalise* ourselves by means of the pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?¹

Nietzsche's conception of naturalism is a highly controversial yet fruitful topic as it relates to an ethical realm hosting his notion of selfhood. This notion alludes to a space beyond causality and free will which challenges the convictions of the sciences, metaphysics and morality. In my attempt to clarify these ideas, I will present several accounts. I start with Brian Leiter who argues that Nietzsche must be considered a "methods continuity" naturalist. Keeping that account short, I offer Christopher Janaway's rejection of Leiter's view, which I regard as acceptable but inadequate as it treats naturalism too broadly, without touching the heart of the question about the realm of ethics for Nietzsche.

From the Leiter versus Janaway debate, I move on to Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick who argue that Nietzsche's notion of naturalism essentially points to the conflict between the will to truth and the will to knowledge. Even though I consider their view quite tenable, in my opinion it gains further significance with Christa Davis Acampora's position. Acampora proposes to resolve that conflict with what she calls an "artful appropriation" pointing at an understanding of naturalism which aims to overcome causality and teleology. After laying out these diverse versions of naturalisms, I propose that the essential aspect of the Nietzschean naturalism is the study of diverse power relations both at micro and macro level, all in relation to one another; within self, society, nature, biology and physiology. Without attempting to construct laws and formulations, this study emphasizes that truth lies not in the in-itself of nature but in these very relations themselves, and Nietzsche's notion of selfhood must be understood in these terms.

I start with Brian Leiter as he provides the most common notion of naturalism in general and checks whether and to what extent this broad notion applies to Nietzsche. Leiter argues that there are two main types of naturalists: "methodological naturalists" and "substantive naturalists." The former are the philosophers who assert that philosophical inquiry should be continuous with the empirical inquiry of the sciences. The latter party claims that since the only existing things are natural or physical beings, things outside of this substantive realm do not concern philosophy. He categorizes Nietzsche as a methodological naturalist and subcategorizes methodological naturalists further into the branches of "results continuity" and "methods continuity." In

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Thomas Common, New York: Dover Publications, 2006 [GS], III, 109.

this case, the former group argues that if a philosophical theory cannot be justified by the empirical sciences, it is a bad theory whereas the latter group argues that the result does not matter so long as the reasoning and the explanation of the theory are parallel to the sciences; which suffices for the theory to be valid.² Leiter claims that Nietzsche is the kind of methodological naturalist who thinks that philosophical reasoning emulates empirical sciences, through which we can know facts about human nature.³

It may be quite tempting to categorize Nietzsche this way when we consider his earnest criticisms of the transcendental metaphysical world view accompanied by his blatant disgust with the “bad air!” of Platonic-Judaeo-Christian-based Western philosophy. As a reasonable alternative, he embraces natural sciences. Yet his criticism of transcendental metaphysics and his keen interest in natural sciences – in particular, physics and biology – do not make him favour sheer scientism either. Nietzsche’s reserved attitude towards scientism is evident in his vehement critiques of the purely scientific world view. He is deeply doubtful of a purely scientific attitude because he regards the causality-based explanations of the sciences as the continuations of metaphysical reasoning. He rejects causality on the grounds that the so-called “laws” of nature actually are a hangover from teleological conditioning. He thinks that it has turned into a “psychological necessity” to explain everything causally, from the metaphysically biased scientific perspective.⁴

As stated in the opening quote of this section, Nietzsche emphasizes the rigidity of scientific reasoning by referring to matter as an error, just like the error in believing in God since both get their uncompromising firmness from our false belief in “eternally enduring substances.” Nietzsche refers to the ambition of the purely scientific route as “the shadows of God,” which according to him “deifies nature” as well, just like metaphysics. So, it is clear that Nietzsche’s conception of naturalism aims beyond the deification of nature regardless of its drive; be it metaphysical, religious or scientific. Nietzsche suggests that un-deifying nature will eventually lead to *naturalizing* man, which could be the first step not only to redeem nature but presumably also to attain genuine individualism.

² Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, London: Routledge, 2002, 2-3.

³ For the purposes of my project, this brief account should suffice to lead into the criticism of Leiter’s position.

⁴ Nietzsche states: “... the psychological necessity for a belief in causality lies in the inconceivability of an event divorced from intent; by which naturally nothing is said concerning truth or untruth (the justification of such a belief)! The belief in *causae* falls with the belief in tele.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage, 1968 [WTP], 627: 1885-1886).

In addition, Nietzsche regards a purely scientific world as devoid of meaning. The sciences cannot explain everything such as the aesthetic effect or the phenomenal experience of a piece of music. The mathematical formulas behind the notes cannot account for the effect. He expresses his concerns in the quote below:

But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially *meaningless* world! Supposing we valued the *worth* of a music with reference to how much it could be counted, calculated, or formulated – how absurd such a “scientific” estimate of music would be! What would one have apprehended, understood, or discerned in it! Nothing, absolutely nothing of what is really “music” in it!⁵

Converting music into formulations helps writing, circulating and working on it and so on but it cannot enable us to “comprehend” it. Formulations or calculations do not lead to understanding, evaluating or appreciating music. What makes determining the ramifications of Nietzsche’s naturalism so complicated is the fact that his worry over calculation and measuring is not limited merely to arts or music but also to language, morality and to the sciences.⁶ Moreover, Nietzsche seems to be quite aware of the definite dangers of a mechanical world view, especially its tendency to propagate a different version of the ascetic ideal.⁷ Changing its form, in modern times, asceticism may not necessarily manifest itself as seeking redemption through enduring severe suffering but by indulging in empty and pointless hedonism – as promised by technology.

One can turn away from life and from the ambition to create values by pursuing only the things that lead to immediate gratification such as alcohol or drug abuse, internet addiction, video games, consumerism and so on. One can be tempted to measure the worth of one’s life with reference solely to how much it can lead to entertainment, happiness and pleasure. This is also nihilism *per se*. Hedonism and asceticism have in common the drive to turn away from life and nature and losing the drive to create “values.” In my opinion, within Nietzsche’s depiction of the meaninglessness of the mechanical world, it is quite plausible to read into that quote this hedonistic world view as well.

Moving on from Nietzsche’s criticism of the mechanical world view, Christopher Janaway claims that Nietzsche could be regarded as a naturalist in a very broad sense

⁵ Nietzsche GS, V, “We Fearless Ones,” 373.

⁶ This quote exemplifies Nietzsche’s doubtful attitude towards the sciences: “*Against the physical atom.*— To comprehend the world, we have to be able to calculate it; to be able to calculate it, we have to have constant causes; because we find no such constant causes in actuality, we invent them for ourselves – the atoms. This is the origin of atomism.” (WTP, 624: 1883-1888).

⁷ I will elaborate on asceticism in the next section, in my detailed reading of *On the Genealogy of Morals* [GM].

but he disagrees with Leiter's categorical approach to Nietzsche. He begins by stating that it is reasonable to view Nietzsche as a naturalist considering his opposition to transcendental metaphysics – notably of Plato, Christianity, Descartes, Kant and even of Schopenhauer. Janaway remarks that Nietzsche denounces the concepts of unities, ego, subject, soul, free will or self-transparent pure intellect. Instead he emphasizes the importance of the body by taking into account the instinctual animal nature of human beings and considering various conflicting drives, desires and affects.⁸ Janaway also notes that Nietzsche aims to establish a philosophy that welcomes senses, passions and extirpations as he thinks that resisting or denying senses (the foundation of Western morality) is against life.

Agreeing with Leiter *only* in a broad way, on the issue that there are no moral facts or values that can be proven scientifically, Janaway disagrees with Leiter's point that as a methodological naturalist, Nietzsche seeks congruency of his ideas with empirical sciences. Janaway comments that the claims Nietzsche makes in the *Genealogy* concerning the oppression of the masters and the *ressentiment* of the slaves; the establishment of the morality of pity which leads to the compassion ideal of Christian morality cannot be regarded in continuity with any empirical science. These ideas or historical speculations do not emulate the sciences in any remote way. Janaway argues that even if we push it very far and timidly suggest that Nietzsche might only be a methodological naturalist who does not care much about the results, that would still be too broad a claim; so broad that it could easily lose its meaning – because Nietzsche's premises do not reveal any signs of seeking justification from any sort of scientific reasoning either.

In addition, Janaway points to the rhetorical language Nietzsche uses in his books. Particularly in the *Genealogy*, his most argumentative work, Nietzsche does not imply any sympathetic collaboration with the sciences. Rather, Janaway contends that Nietzsche has always been critical of the cold, detached, impersonal or the so-called objective style employed in the scientific discourse. It is crucial to notice that Nietzsche's denouncement of subjectivity does not advocate impersonality. He views scientific impersonality with disfavour because underneath the detached tone, he senses the condescending metaphysical knowledge drive; disguised within the impersonal and quasi-religious authority of the allegedly "objective" scientist. Janaway thus suggests that Nietzsche's own personal tone of writing is the evidence which refutes Leiter's naturalistic reading of Nietzsche.

⁸ Christopher Janaway, "Naturalism and Genealogy," *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 337.

What I regard as misleading or incomplete in Janaway's account is that he misses Nietzsche's indifference to that very distinction between the serious scientific terminology and the flowery rhetoric of literature in the first place. Nietzsche disregards the separation between the rhetorical versus the non-rhetorical uses of language as he thinks language essentially is metaphorical; be it used in a scientific or a literary context.⁹ In his view, language is man's attempt at "grasping" – literally and metaphorically – reality by interpreting the world. So, in my opinion, Janaway's point that the rhetorical language used in Nietzsche's books undermines his affinities with the sciences is not genuinely valid.

As for the extraordinary arguments and reasoning of the *Genealogy*, it must be noted that the book essentially lays out a fascinating thought experiment to give an account of the birth of our moral psychology, rather than aiming to convey any accurate historical or biological information.¹⁰ Yet again, I think that the same criticism I brought up in relation to the artificial separation between the rhetorical versus the non-rhetorical language could be considered here as well. It is possible that Nietzsche does not see a genuine distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities. He praises both as long as they feed on the same "will" and condemns both when they make the same mistakes of falling into the trap of theology, teleology or the mechanical and deterministic world view.

Even though Leiter and Janaway raise interesting issues, both accounts fall short of giving a reasonable exposition of Nietzsche's naturalism. Where they arrive at an impasse, I think that Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick offer a solution. Clark and Dudrick also disagree with the idea that Nietzsche is a methodological naturalist because methodological naturalism only takes into account the will to truth but disregards the will to value. This is a problem because according to their interpretation of Nietzsche, the will to truth isolated from the will to value cannot lead to truth.¹¹

⁹ Nietzsche elaborates on the metaphorical nature of language in his influential early essay "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" (1873) [TLNS], in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale, New Jersey and London: Humanities Press International, 1979 [PT]. Christian J. Emden provides a rich account of Nietzsche's rejection of the rhetorical versus non-rhetorical distinction in his book *Nietzsche, Language, Consciousness and the Body*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.

¹⁰ I personally think that Nietzsche at times mocks both scientific rationality and philosophical reasoning in *GM*. It is such a humorous motive that could best explain his quasi-biologism and quasi-historicism. Away with seriousness, Nietzsche does not believe in a god who does not understand how to dance (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961 [TSZ], I, "Of Reading and Writing").

¹¹ Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick, "The Naturalisms of *Beyond Good and Evil*," in Pearson (ed.), 152.

Clark and Dudrick argue that Nietzsche emphasizes two main streams that let philosophy flourish: the will to truth and the will to value. Clark and Dudrick note that Nietzsche thinks that most philosophers until Kant followed the second route, the will to value – and Plato may be the chief example of such philosophers who aimed to create philosophy in their own image. However, this is what caused Western philosophy to be mainly dogmatic; pretending to seek truth in a purely a priori manner, neglecting empirical knowledge. It is this dogmatic attitude which over time fed the ascetic ideal in philosophers and turned philosophy into what Nietzsche regards as a quasi-theological dusty academic pursuit. The more objective it aspired to be; the more detached from life it became.¹²

Moreover, according to Clark and Dudrick's analysis of Nietzsche, the ascetic vein in metaphysics led to a devaluation of nature. Even if Nietzsche does not think that all philosophy or metaphysics devaluates nature, all metaphysics has an issue with "valuation" – ascribing value to the natural world.¹³ Clark and Dudrick remark that Nietzsche characterizes the conflict between the will to truth and the will to value in the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* as "the magnificent tension of the spirit." Yet while the truth drive tries to capture the truth about the world, the value drive does not aim for truth but rather aims to create the world in the philosopher's image.¹⁴

Overcoming the dogmatic attitude of metaphysics may pave the way for more genuine philosophy; the naturalist urge is crucial in terms of leading to empirical inquiry and giving an accurate account of the actual experience. However, Clark and Dudrick clearly emphasize that even though the will to truth and the will to value are separate, there are thoroughly interdependent.¹⁵ They draw attention to an expressive quote from Nietzsche from *The Gay Science*, drawing attention to the diversity of our drives. By giving an analogy of a tree as a striking metaphor from nature, Nietzsche suggests

¹² Nietzsche writes: "Formerly, the philosophers were afraid of the senses: have we, perhaps, been far too forgetful of this fear? We are at present all of us sensualists, we representatives of the present and of the future in philosophy, -- *not* according to theory, however, but in *praxis*, in practice ... These former philosophers, on the contrary, thought that the senses lured them out of *their* world, the cold realm of 'ideas', to a dangerous southern island, where they were afraid that their philosopher-virtues would melt away like snow in the sun. 'Wax in the ears' was then almost a condition of philosophizing; a genuine philosopher no longer listened to life, in so far as music, he *denied* the music of life – it is an old philosophical superstition that all music is Sirens' music." (GS, V, "We Fearless Ones," 372).

¹³ Clark and Dudrick, 150.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

that we are both oriented toward the heavens, the value; yet also firmly grounded to the earth by our roots – to solid empiricism.¹⁶

Like trees we grow – it's hard to understand, like all life! – not in one place, but everywhere; not in one direction, but upwards and outwards and downwards equally; our energy drives trunk, branches, and roots all at once; we are no longer free to do anything singly, to *be something single*.¹⁷

The quote above points to our innate forces at work by alluding to the multiple dynamics that constitute us; we are not single unities but bits and pieces scattered everywhere, striving to grow together. The expression “upwards” presumably evokes the heavens and metaphysics – the will to truth – whereas the expression “downwards” implies faithfulness to earth,¹⁸ as science intends to bind us to via the will to knowledge. Because of our conflicting yet intricately interdependent drives, we cannot be single “unities;” yet according to Nietzsche, any philosophy that grounds itself solely on either one of these drives – to truth or to value – is incomplete and misleading. If a philosophy puts heavy emphasis on the value, it loses its connectedness to the earth, and inevitably to nature. It evolves into an ascetic or quasi-religious dogma that attempts to revive the already dead God, which is predominantly the narcissistic reflection of its philosopher.

On the other hand, if a philosophy puts all emphasis on the truth drive, paradoxically it ends up sharing the common fate of the “value-driven” philosophy. Its complacent empiricism creates its own dogmas, and the “objective” scientists begin to act like dogmatic philosophers trying to make brands of their names; only in this case, for the sake of “scientific knowledge.” As it loses its organic connection to the earth and nature, within its cult of “objectivity” the blind admiration of scienticism embeds asceticism. It is ironic that even while starting from completely different paths, both the truth drive and the value drive end up in the same trap once they disconnect themselves from each other.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Nietzsche, GS, V, “We Fearless Ones,” 371.

¹⁸ Nietzsche’s naturalism also reveals itself in the theme of faithfulness to the earth. Even when it is the will to truth – with a hint of metaphysics – or the will to value, the criteria shall be the faithfulness to earth; by making everything intelligible; thinkable; sensible. Thus Nietzsche writes in *TSZ*: “God is a supposition: but I want your supposing to be bounded by conceivability. Could you *conceive* a god? -- But may the will to truth should mean this to you: that everything should be transformed into the humanly-conceivable, the humanly evident, the humanly-palpable. You should follow your own senses to the end! And you yourselves should create what you have hitherto called the World: the World should be formed in your image by your reason, your will, and your love! And truly, it will be to your happiness, you enlightened men!” (*TSZ*, II, “On the Blissful Islands”).

A good example to exemplify the tension between the will to truth and the will to value would be the appreciation of art; for instance in music, what is needed is not the scientific explanation of how the notes stimulate and satisfy our senses but the cultivation of value. Only someone with a cultivated ear can determine and presumably create good art. What some scientists often ignore in this case is the factor of “value” in art. However, the value needed to evaluate art, music or even morality is needed for philosophy as well. Clark and Dudrick argue that similar to the musicians or music critics who have trained their ears; gained knowledge, taste and thereby the authority to judge the value of a piece of music, philosophers should also train themselves to be more competent in appreciating and performing intellectual activities such as reasoning, making claims and drawing conclusions.¹⁹ It is important to note that values determine the quality and power of such intellectual activities and judgements as well.

Clark and Dudrick’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s naturalism is quite plausible in terms of pointing at the tension and the interdependence between the will to truth and the will to knowledge. They suggest resolving this conflict by introducing the idea of the notion of value which is best recognized in art. However, this recognition does not measure or articulate philosophical ideas in a scientific manner but rather points out that any explanation, scientific or intuitive is essentially an interpretation or an appropriation.

We have observed the relevance of art and its role in interpretation and appropriation of reality for understanding Nietzsche’s notion of naturalism and truth. I regard Clark and Dudrick’s contributions as significant in terms of clarifying those distinct but parallel drives. I also agree with their intimation of the essential role of art in determining value. But now, I would like to turn to another impressive account which elaborates on the issue of art – the very issue they hint at but leave out. I regard Christa Davis Acampora’s proposition in a way complementary to their analysis.

Acampora offers the notion of “artful appropriation” to solve two issues: firstly to resolve the tension between the will to truth and the will to knowledge by suggesting that the sciences can be made even more rigorous by incorporating the values of art. Secondly, she suggests that this way to approach (Nietzsche’s) naturalism also helps us see the connection Nietzsche builds between naturalism and selfhood. Rather than retreating to the dead end of having to choose between complete scepticism and exclusive humanities, the “artful appropriation” provides us with an alternative of emphasizing “the centrality of art in his (Nietzsche’s) critique and appropriation of

¹⁹ Clark and Dudrick, 162.

science.”²⁰ Acampora conveys that according to Nietzsche, integrating the aesthetic values and interests of art could actually improve the quality of scientific endeavours. While proposing scientific judgments, we often forget that our empirical enquiries are always already essentially anthropocentric; because any empirical perception or interpretation of information is also eventually the outcome of our (anthropocentric) organization of things.²¹

Nietzsche does not intend to make the sciences more artful or art-like but to the contrary, much more meticulous. The aesthetic values and interests we need to incorporate into the sciences enable us to employ our skills to evaluate, organize, reform, shape, in short to interpret and reinterpret much more effectively. So, in order to make science more powerful, rather than taking the more analytic or cognitive direction, we could make better use of art instead; as art enables us to make more use of our valuation capacity. Art requires the employment of our interpretation skills at a much more advanced level, and since we are nothing other than interpreters of phenomena, art can help the sciences understand and relate to reality in a more cohesive manner.²²

The artful naturalism Acampora suggests is closely linked to overcoming the teleological conception of nature and the idea of causality. Nietzsche conveys that causality is a fallacy that most natural scientists make because they confuse an explanation with an interpretation. He states this idea as he writes: “... one should use ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ only as pure concepts, that is to say, as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation and communication – *not* for explanation.”²³ Clearly, Nietzsche’s criticism of causality is similar to his criticism of the free will or the free agent since in both situations we isolate the act from the context. In order to build a cause and effect relationship between two separate things, we need to freeze and fix the constant flux of the ongoing process of Becoming and presuppose a rigid status of the world for the sake of having an “explanation” for something. Our interpretations are determined by the limits of our capacity for perception based on which we interpret and label phenomena as truth.²⁴

²⁰ Christa Davis Acampora, “Naturalism and Nietzsche’s Moral Psychology,” in Pearson (ed.), 317.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

²² *Ibid.*, 317.

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1966 [BGE], I, “Prejudices of Philosophers,” 21.

²⁴ Nietzsche elaborates on this idea: “Cause and effect: there is probably never any such duality; in fact there is a *continuum* before us, from which we isolate a few portions; -- just as we always observe a motion as isolated points, and therefore do not properly see it, but infer it.

The link between subjectivity and causality and Nietzsche's criticism of both in terms of undermining morality and the scientific world view become evident in "The Four Great Errors" of *Twilight of the Idols*.²⁵ The birth of the subject is intricately connected with the conceptions of causality and free will according to which we presuppose that we can actively will or act on our wills. Our notion of agency is strongly associated; spiritually and psychologically reinforced with the idea of God and metaphysics. To reinforce the idea of causality, we had to reinforce the idea of the subject as well; it was like an equation which depended on the survival of both ends of the premises. Later on we strengthened this false equation by further consolidating and confirming it with the justification of the sciences. And we made this causality the measure of reality. As Nietzsche writes early in his career, in "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense,"²⁶ once we started lying we had to keep on lying; we had no other choice so as not to contradict ourselves. Because if we contradicted our "selves," our selves would collapse – as we still regard our "selves" as substances or organisms we need to protect.

The role of interpretation is also crucial for undermining causality;²⁷ as Acampora puts it, "we are the interpretations of these battles which define us."²⁸ Nietzsche's conception of the subject is that one is a constellation of diverse forces; in a nutshell, the self or the consciousness is a "perspective or perspectives of dominant forces."²⁹

The abruptness with which many effects take place leads us into error; it is however only an abruptness for us. There is an infinite multitude of processes in that abrupt moment which escape us. An intellect which could see cause and effect as a *continuum*, which could see the flux of events not according to our mode of perception, as things arbitrarily separated and broken – would throw aside the conception of cause and effect, and would deny all conditionality." (GS, III, 112).

²⁵ Nietzsche summarizes all these points in this striking quote: "*The error of a false causality ... We believed ourselves to be causal in the act of willing; we thought that here at least we caught causality in the act ... The conception of a consciousness ('spirit') as a cause, and later also that of the ego as cause (the 'subject'), are only afterbirths: first the causality of the will was firmly accepted as given, as empirical ... And what a fine abuse we had perpetrated with this 'empirical evidence'; we created the world on this basis as a world of causes, a world of will, a world of spirits. The most ancient and enduring psychology was at work here and did not do anything else: all that happened was considered a doing, all doing the effect of a will; the world became to it a multiplicity of doers; a doer (a 'subject') was slipped under all that happened ... The thing itself, to say it once more, the concept of thing is a mere reflex of the faith in the ego as cause. And even your atom, my dear mechanists and physicists – how much error, how much rudimentary psychology is still residual in your atom! Not to mention 'the-thing-in-itself', the *horrendum pudendum* of the metaphysicians! The error of the spirit as cause mistaken for reality! And made the very measure of reality! And called God!" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* [Twilight], in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, "The Four Great Errors," 3).*

²⁶ Nietzsche, *TLNS*, 1.

²⁷ Acampora, 321.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 318.

Since we are mainly creatures that interpret and appropriate, Acampora argues that the Nietzschean subject is beyond the polarity of the free versus the determined agent. In her interpretation, Nietzsche thinks that both Kant and Descartes misunderstood the nature of the human subject because trying to define it in terms of either free or determined is a false dilemma.³⁰

As will be clearer below, in Nietzschean thought, both the free subject and the determined subject refer to finalized positions. So regarding the subject within such a duality still pertains to thinking likewise in terms of considering an organism as a single point; from a single perspective – be it an end point or a starting point. Rather than speculating on the human being in a detached scientific or metaphysical manner, Nietzsche re-incorporates the body back into philosophy. We are bodily; so any philosophy which does not indicate our creaturely natures falls short of being genuinely valid. This emphasis on the body is the last issue I will bring up regarding Nietzsche's naturalism.

In order to illustrate the complexity and the multiplicity of our inner drives, Nietzsche mentions the "great reason in the body" which is better than one's best wisdom.³¹ However since we are complicated creatures, what we do may not always serve our best interests. For instance while describing the "pale criminal" in *TSZ*, Nietzsche depicts him as a despicable man who cannot bear the sight of his own deed and portrays his mind as "a knot of savage serpents that are seldom at peace with themselves,"³² suggesting that his case is an incident of the poor man (mis)interpreting the messages of his own body.

According to Nietzsche, the "self" is basically the arena in which the struggle of various drives plays itself out, and one's actions are the eventual outcome of that struggle. For example, within a body, one drive desires the beloved, yet another drive desires to

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Actually this passage seems to summarize many important aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy: "... The awakened, the enlightened man says: I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body. / The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman. / Your little intelligence, my brother, which you call 'spirit', is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and toy of your great intelligence... / What the sense feels, what the spirit perceives, is never an end in itself. But sense and spirit would like to persuade you that they are the end of all things: they are as vain as that. / Sense and spirit are instruments and toys: behind them still lies the Self. The Self seeks with the eyes of the sense, it listens too with the ears of the spirit. / The Self is always listening and seeking: it compares, subdues, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the Ego's ruler. / Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body. / There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows for what purpose your body requires precisely your best wisdom?" (*TSZ*, I, "Of the Despisers of the Body").

³² Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, "Of the Pale Criminal."

overcome that desire. The second drive complains about the first drive whereas a third drive desires to evaluate which one of the previous two desires is stronger, trying to determine which path to follow.³³ This is the drama of the self. So, the subject Nietzsche has in mind is a body which hosts diverse inner drives and conflicts. And when the second or third parties arrive, it becomes only more complicated.

The self is rather complicated; that is why, in our everyday dealings with the world, we intend to get over this complexity by pretending that there is an “I” which unifies all these fragmentations and inner diversity. We often tend to regard the self as a lofty term and associate it with the hygienic “mind,” ignoring our own creaturely bodies. In *TSZ*, Nietzsche expresses this situation thus: “You say ‘I’ and you are proud of this word. But greater than this – although you will not believe in it – is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say ‘I’ but performs ‘I.’”³⁴

In this passage Nietzsche addresses the so-called despisers of the body, who may be Platonists, religious people or the Cartesian Dualists. Nietzsche states that ironically, our bodies are actually far “smarter” than our feeble minds can ever be. Our bodies regulate us – rather than the other way around – at non-conscious level.³⁵ The body is a microcosmic level of the will to power which Nietzsche thinks is the essence of life. Thus it is my contention that Nietzsche’s conception of naturalism is closely linked to his “utmost” idea: the will to power.

However before moving onto the exploration of the will to power, it is crucial to evaluate the moral implications of Nietzsche’s naturalism and consider how his conception of naturalism challenges our moral conditioning and psychology. Even though we try hard to read our minds, feelings and senses to follow the trace of who or what it is in us that pulls the strings, the constant feedback through our senses and feelings does not promise that we can be in control of ourselves. To the contrary, paying close attention to our feelings can always delude and mislead us. Nietzsche is very critical of our overrated moral feelings and moral psychology which will be my main focus of inquiry in the next section of this paper. Since it is Nietzsche’s most complete and provocative work regarding his critique of morality, now I will probe into the *Genealogy*.

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. M. Clark and B. Leiter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [D], II, 109.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, “Of the Despisers of the Body.”

³⁵ I will return to the issue of consciousness in a confrontational manner with Levinas in Chapter Three.

b) Nietzsche's Rejection of the Moral Subject

The breeding of an animal which is *entitled to make promises* – is this not the paradoxical task which nature has set itself with respect to man?³⁶

The ramifications of Nietzsche's naturalism reveal themselves within his account of the formation of man's moral psychology. The ideas that "man is an animal" and "man is wholly nature"³⁷ are dominant themes of Nietzsche's philosophy which come up in all his books; beginning from his early career, throughout his middle and late works. This section's major focus is to understand the philosophical and ethical implications of these assertions which also manifest the core of my argument regarding Nietzsche's conception of selfhood.

Providing a detailed reading of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I will attempt to give an account of Nietzsche's rejection of the moral subject which Nietzsche regards as the outcome of a certain type of cultural degeneration. He criticizes Western Christian morality because of its life-negating values which detach man from nature and turn him into a "sick animal." Subjecting him to humiliating customs, social practices and traditions, man's psychology becomes "moralized" and is further consolidated with the dynamic of the creditor versus debtor relationship. As the notion of "debt" evolves into "guilt," its (false) moral implications become crystallized with the ascetic ideal – whose hangover Nietzsche thinks we still experience within our metaphysical beliefs regarding the sciences and our "virtues."

Nietzsche asserts that civilization begins with customs³⁸ which not only help social coherence but also propose moral interpretations of the world. These interpretations are largely determined by the power relationships between two dynamic moralities that Nietzsche calls as the master morality and the slave morality which have been shaping our collective psyches from immemorial times. In Nietzsche's thought experiment, civilization begins with the emergence of the concepts "good" and "bad," and "good"

³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [GM], II, 1.

³⁷ Nietzsche is deeply influenced by this theme throughout his career. The beginning of his essay "Homer's Contest" states this idea explicitly: "When one speaks of *humanity*, the idea is fundamental that this is something which separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality however, there is no such separation: 'natural' qualities and those called truly 'human' are inseparably grown together. Man, in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly nature and embodies its uncanny dual character. Those of his abilities which are terrifying and considered inhuman may even be the fertile soil out of which alone all humanity can grow in impulse, deed, and work." ("Homer's Contest" (1872) [HC], *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking, 1954 [PN], 32). Also, it is important to note that naturalism in this literal sense comes up so many times in this section as GM is full of allusions to nature, animals and health.

³⁸ Nietzsche states: "To strengthen the mighty proposition with which civilization begins: any custom is better than no custom." (D, I, 16).

and “evil” as introduced by these conflicting social clans – the masters and the slaves. Dissatisfied with the conventional (British) theories of his time which suggest that “good” evokes the unegoistic, selfless acts and altruism,³⁹ Nietzsche argues that it was that distinct noble clan, the masters, who initially determined the meaning of “good.”

The master’s notion of “good” is based on his self-affirmation, according to which “good” denoted “powerful,” “noble” and even “truthful.” Quite contrary to selflessness, in the master’s view, “good” pointed at himself and helped retain his identity through a “pathos of distance” from the slave caste. The slave caste is referred by the master as “bad;” meaning the common, the weak, the herd, the plebeian, the deceptive.⁴⁰ So, Nietzsche suggests that rather than altruism, the determining criteria of nobility is the pathos of distance which primordially established the difference between the “good” and “bad” – as determined by the master clan.⁴¹

On the other side, “good” has a different set of connotations for the slave. Rather than emphasizing self-affirmation and vitality, for him “good” refers to himself as he suffers from the cruel deeds of the master. But since he is weak, he cannot act on his feelings or manifest his anger directly at the master; instead, he begins to find peace in a moral fantasy, in an “imaginary revenge” as “compensation.”⁴² Nietzsche describes the moral psychology of the slave in the important quote below:

While all noble morality grows from a triumphant affirmation of itself, the slave morality from the outset says no to an ‘outside’, to an ‘other’, to a ‘non-self’: and *this* no is its creative act. The reversal of the evaluating gaze – this *necessary* orientation outwards rather than inwards to the self – belongs characteristically to *ressentiment*. In order to exist at all, slave morality from the outset always needs an opposing, outer world; in physiological terms, it needs external stimuli in order to act – its action is fundamentally reaction.⁴³

Nietzsche theorizes the notion of *ressentiment* as the slave’s negative affirmation. Different from the master who regards himself as the origin of acts and values, the slave depends on the external world for the source of any stimulus in order to act at all. He does not originate action, but only re-acts to what already is; to what is already brought forth by the master. Even though the master sees the slave as far below himself, he does not condescend to hate him. The slave, by contrast, feeds on his hatred towards the master, calls the master “evil,” and projects his frustration and

³⁹ In particular, Nietzsche targets his criticism towards Paul Rée (*GM*, Preface, 4), Herbert Spencer (I, 3) and chiefly Charles Darwin (Preface, 7). Nietzsche’s critique of Darwin will gain further clarity towards the end of this chapter.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, 9.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, 10.

hatred towards everything the master represents; the master himself, his life style, his attitude towards life, his joy – interestingly, this “joy” over the course of time evolves into joy in general, and as the joy of life it becomes denounced by the ascetic priest.

Nietzsche’s attitude towards these different clans is ambiguous. On the one hand, he seems in favour of the master clan and regards their exploitative nature as an evil necessity. He suggests in so many contexts what we consider wild or pertaining to animal nature may provide the best circumstances upon which immense production of work and human flourishing can occur. So, looking at the big picture, he implies that exploitation cannot be good or bad in itself. On the other hand, Nietzsche is thoroughly impressed by the complicated nature of the slave. He expresses his fascination by the slave as he states that “human history would be a much too stupid affair were it not for the intelligence introduced by the powerless.”⁴⁴ He notes that in spite of its remarkable confidence and productive virility, the master clan, the “bird of prey,” lacks the rich inner complexity of the slave. The master has only a few drives – the drive to rule, conquer and dominate – which makes him eventually a dull animal.

In a humorous and sarcastic tone, Nietzsche compares the oppression by the master of the slave to the relationship between the prey and predator within the animal kingdom. He intimates that the hard feelings the slave feels towards the master are just as absurd as the lamb to feel offended by the bird of prey – nothing personal. Nietzsche conveys this idea as he writes on behalf of the master about the slaves: “We bear them no ill-will at all, these good lambs – indeed, we love them: there is nothing tastier than a tender lamb.”⁴⁵

Just as the lion cannot be blamed for attacking the lamb as it is only manifesting its own nature, by analogy, Nietzsche suggests that the master is merely acting on his instincts - without conscious deliberation; intellectual rationalization or moral justification. Similarly, the master does not “choose” to be strong, he just “is” simply because he could not have been otherwise. His “evil” is a necessity; just like a lion, he cannot be tamed. As a result, Nietzsche asserts that it is implausible to moralize strength as “good” or “evil.” Far from representing the agent or the subject, strength only manifests itself through action. Nietzsche touches on this delicate matter in the quote below:

... popular morality distinguishes strength from expressions of strength, as if behind the strong individual there were an indifferent substratum which was at *liberty* to express or not to express strength. But no such substratum exists; there is no “being” behind

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 13.

doing, acting, becoming; “the doer” is merely fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything.⁴⁶

In Nietzsche’s view, the slave’s confusion arises at the point of looking for an agent or a doer responsible for what has been done to him. Consequently, he associates the deed of the master with the master himself. Rather than seeing the strength itself within the act, he blames the master as the actor. That is how “evil” gets a definite target within the slave’s psyche: the master.

Nietzsche claims that the key aspect determining one’s encounter with another human being is the tendency to measure oneself against him, which is presumably a vital instinct descending from very early times in evolution. Nietzsche compares this situation to the way animals confronting each other take their guards and develop strategies either to attack or to flee. Just like the animals or the primates who estimate the risks of situations; evaluate potential dangers and act accordingly, human animals do the same, in arguably more sophisticated manners. In *GM*, Nietzsche notes that man is the measuring animal and suggests that even etymologically the word “man” comes from “manas” (in Veda Sanscrit, consciousness) and implies that it constructs our notion of the self as the “proud consciousness.”⁴⁷

Nietzsche contends that measuring constitutes our thinking habits; initially in terms of producing primitive impulses against wild animals or other hostile human clans. Over the course of time, this instinct to measure and evaluate evolves. In addition to detecting dangers and potential risks that can occur between conflicting parties, it also breeds the feeling of superiority. This pride and the privileged position which was previously held against animals - later on as the human groups evolved into clans or societies - began to be projected upon other inferior human clans. This is what determines that essential “pathos of distance” that Nietzsche presumes exists between the master and the slave – from the perspective of the master.

In addition to measuring, memory also contributed to the formation of man’s moral psychology. Nietzsche claims that the master is innocent because he is forgetful. This is a crucial difference from the slave caste since memory is a key factor in building the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Nietzsche writes: “Setting prices, estimating values, devising equivalents, making exchanges – this has preoccupied the very earliest thinking of man to such an extent that it, in a certain sense, constitutes *thinking as such*: it is here that the earliest form of astuteness was bred, here likewise, we might suppose, that human pride, man’s feeling of superiority over other animals originated. Perhaps our word ‘man/ (*manas* – in Veda Sanscrit, means ‘consciousness’) still reveals something of *this* very perception of the self: man designated himself as the being who estimates values, who evaluates and measures, as *the* ‘measuring animal.’” (*ibid.*, II, 8).

identity of the slave; his character and psychology; which is based on revenge and reactivity against the master. The slave has a strong memory because memory is branded on his skin. As the relationship between the master and the slave evolved into a creditor and debtor dynamic, the creditor – the master – began to measure the debt in terms of pain that could be inflicted upon the debtor – the slave. Consequently, memory became the most influential factor in slave morality and eventually took over the master caste as well with its pervasiveness because it propagated the notion of guilt.

Nietzsche conveys that the habit of measuring consolidated our thinking patterns in terms of causality and the free will. Moreover, our linguistic conventions also led us to associate the deed with the doer and overlook the act itself. As man's thinking patterns became firmly conditioned by the rules of grammar, the idea of the existence of a doer behind the deed became firmly established. Consequently, associating the deed with the doer gave way to the idea of the "possibility" of drawing correspondence between the deed and the doer. Thus the "effects" of the deed came to be associated with the doer. So it was thought that since the effects of the deed could be "calculated" or "measured" physically and objectively, the doer or the agent could be "measured" or "calculated" as well, based on the "effects" of what one "caused."

Nietzsche claims that this led to a double misinterpretation: to associate the deed with the doer (as its cause) is already one misinterpretation; and to build a correlation between the calculability of the effects of the deed and the doer is yet another. However no matter how misguided, this equation of the deed with the doer and one's responsibility upon the effects still turned out to establish a more or less coherent custom and some sort of group solidarity (and after all, any custom is better than no custom because man is a herd animal who wants to adhere to a custom).

Subsequently, the idea of "calculability" of man in terms of deeds gave way to the "culpability" of man in terms of cause and effect. Nietzsche thinks that this is how the notion of responsibility was born and hence, the conception of punishment. The human body was regarded as a means to compensate for the misfortune of a deed. Nietzsche indicates that in those prehistoric times, it was important to make a memory of the deed upon the human flesh in order to remember things, to maintain "order."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ To maintain this "order," it was necessary to "make memories;" and human flesh seemed like the most reasonable or appealing tablet on which to inscribe laws. Nietzsche writes of "*the technique for remembering things*": "Something is branded in, so that it stays in the memory: only that which *hurts* incessantly is remembered" – this is a central proposition of the oldest (and unfortunately the also the most enduring) psychology on earth." (*ibid.*, II, 3).

It is Nietzsche's contention that the linguistic self fallacy – the idea of the doer behind the deed –, the idea of measurability of the damage of the deed in terms of the human body as compensation, and the observation that the human psychology remembers what hurts; all incorporated into the dynamic of the creditor and debtor relationship, which over time gave birth to the legal subject. In Nietzsche's regard, this "order" or custom prevailed because it had obvious advantages for the society. As long as one promised to pay for the consequences of one's actions through "I shall"s and "I shall not"s, one got protected by the society. All the dealings and economic activities concerning exchange, buying or selling also got arranged accordingly. In Nietzsche's view, this situation at the same time points to the birth of justice. The human animal learned to make promises as the "word" got its authority and reason established its privileged position endowed with seriousness and mastery over emotions.⁴⁹

However, another remarkable aspect regarding making promises is its manifestation of the nature of language. In his early work, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," Nietzsche claims that language functions essentially as an invisible contract. In that respect, he suggests that lying is unacceptable not because it violates ethics but because it breaks the contract. As for Nietzsche, ascribing authority to valid statements based on the internal consistency of a socially constructed system is groundless.⁵⁰ Yet this groundlessness is thoroughly transparent as we live within the oblivion of it; the human animal has long forgotten the fact that language is essentially a contract to regulate the business of human affairs. Acts such as making promises or lying are the situations which clearly reveal this fact. Fulfilling a promise is rewarded and breaking a promise or lying is punished because of the value of keeping one's "word." On an individual basis, one gains the advantage and protection that comes with being part of a social community. At macro level, the "word" reinforces its power and authority, and laws become established. Nevertheless, the power and the authority associated with the "word" and the "law" go beyond the realm of the socio-political and extend into realm of the religious.

In Nietzsche's account, as the debt became associated with "guilt" and with suffering, the human animal began to think that whenever he suffered, he was owed something, even when there was no creditor. Through long ages of deliberate psychological

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Nietzsche also notes the human, all-too-human hypocrisy at work within the sacred and holy image of justice. He remarks that justice basically aims to take revenge and satisfy sadistic and voyeuristic urges and this is evident within the violent yet "festive" content of the way the punishment is executed (*ibid.*, II, 6).

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *TLNS*, 1. I will not pursue Nietzsche's ideas on language and truth in this paper further partly because I do not have sufficient space and partly because I do not use them in relation to Levinas's philosophy in the later chapters.

conditioning, he reinforced the association between suffering and debt. As a result, he demanded compensation for his suffering, and announced God the greatest creditor of all times. Keeping his promise, remaining faithful to his word just like a decent legal and pious subject, he demanded compensation for his suffering in terms of redemption, even if not to be experienced in this world. From the “beyond” was supposed to arrive redemption; hence the meaning for suffering in this cruel and indifferent world. Thus man invented meaning for his worldly suffering, and he was happy.

Nietzsche conveys that it is not necessarily suffering itself that upsets man – he is enduring and strong and can deal with pain – but the uselessness, the meaninglessness of suffering that devastates him.⁵¹ So what Nietzsche regards as revolutionary in values is the fact that man created religion as a compensation for his suffering. This is the moment of the slave revolt and this is how the slave overcomes the master by subjugating him to his slave morality. Nietzsche thinks that inventing Judaeo-Christianity, the religion based on mixing Platonism with a hint of guilt is the genius of slave morality. Impressively, the slave learned to turn his weakness into strength by casting his revengeful spirit into redemption (for himself) or punishment (for the master or whoever is powerful or “evil” from the slave perspective) in the other world.

The slave owes his final victory over the master through his morality to his intelligence and complex nature. Because he is weak, his vital drives cannot manifest themselves. As his will cannot discharge itself on the external world, his drives turn inward and his *ressentiment* turns into hatred for the master and self-pity toward himself. Nietzsche attempts to clarify what is despicable and degenerate about *ressentiment* below:

Every instinct which does not vent itself externally *turns inwards* – this is what I call the *internalization* of man ... the state organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom – punishment belongs above all to these bulwarks –, caused all the instincts of the will, free, nomadic man to turn backwards *against man himself* ... the greatest and most sinister sickness which still afflicts man even today, man's suffering *from man, from himself*: this as a result of his violent separation from his animal past ... which previously constituted the basis of his strength, pleasure, and fearfulness.⁵²

Even though born out of the spirit of revenge, *ressentiment* gives birth to the concepts of justice and equality and attempts to have a totalizing effect upon the members of a society by declaring those concepts as the highest values. Nietzsche is against the ideal of equality because he thinks that as a violent way of suppressing the essential

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *GM*, II, 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, II, 16.

differences between individuals, equality is unnatural and sickly.⁵³ In Nietzsche's view, the conception of equality is life-denying because asserting its mediocrity, it hinders cultural development and growth which could in fact flourish if only the society could tolerate certain exceptional individuals (the free spirits who pave the way to the Overman⁵⁴) rather than suffocating them with petty moral obstacles – the herd's values.

Equality requires that the strong lose their power and sacrifice themselves so that the masses do not suffer or everyone suffers equally. However Nietzsche thinks that what justifies the suffering of humanity is the eventual emergence of a stronger species of man as this is the essential manifestation of the law of life – the will to power – or progress.⁵⁵ He argues that the purpose of the essential will to life is to create larger units of power. In this respect, the legal system's oppression of this urge reveals its futile attempts to settle conflicts by declaring the equality of each will; which is in Nietzsche's view hostile to life.⁵⁶

What Nietzsche regards as misguided about morality born out of the spirit of *ressentiment* is that it considers phenomena only from the perspective of "injury" done, which is a very limited perspective for determining value by itself. As long as life operates in terms of mastery, overpowering, reinterpretation, manipulation of forces and meanings; injury, exploitation, violation, destruction and so on are not major worries.⁵⁷ And of course, the last big problem *ressentiment* leads to is the promotion of the ascetic ideal.

In a nutshell, Nietzsche summarizes the essence of the ascetic ideal within the slogan "man would rather will nothing than not will" which he states in both the first and the last pages of the third essay of the *Genealogy*. It is important to note the difference between willing nothing and not willing. Willing nothing is still willing whereas not willing is the state when the primordial essence of life, the will to power cannot operate. For this reason, willing nothing is still living in accordance with the essential operation of life, even if indirectly or in a distorted way. However, it is crucial to realize that willing nothing is still a symptom of life and as such, it alludes to an instinct for not mere

⁵³ Nietzsche likens morality to an illness, and moral subjects to people who are subjected to an illness like pregnancy (*ibid.*, II, 19), implying that it is nothing inherently moral but is just a troubling situation that must be overcome. He even emphasizes the arbitrariness of moral subjection by comparing it to the subjection to a prince.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche theorizes that the Overman (the *Übermensch*) is a superior breed that evolves out of the overcoming of man, and it is the possibility of attaining that level of over-humanity which justifies the existence of the entire human race.

⁵⁵ *GM*, II, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

survival but for maximizing power. A most convenient way to see how this notion operates is the case of the ascetic ideal for the philosopher. In his comparison of the philosopher to the ascetic priest, Nietzsche notes that even while denying existence, the ascetic priest still affirms himself.⁵⁸

Nietzsche regards man as “*the sick animal*,” even though he is stronger, more enduring and smarter than all the rest of the animals put together, he is also the “great experimenter with himself.”⁵⁹ His stamina has been tested on too many occasions, and he has been traumatized too many times in history through wars; epidemic illnesses and what not. Eventually in the end he has grown fatigued, chronically sick and frustrated. Nietzsche suggests that over time this frustration evolved into something else; man figured that as he began to deny life, he affirmed himself through his own “wound” which bound him to life. So Nietzsche hints that over the course of time, man began to interpret his wound as something that made him stronger. Becoming addicted to his sickness, he found within it the very vitality and redemptive power that could compel him to carry on. In that respect, Nietzsche conveys that, contrary to how it appears, the ascetic ideal is in fact a cunning “trick” played in order to “preserve” life⁶⁰ – even if not to improve or overcome one’s own being.

However, while exploring the ascetic ideal, although Nietzsche sometimes expresses a sense of admiration at the genius lying behind the idea of self-preservation, this should by no means indicate that he is in favour of it. Quite the contrary, Nietzsche exposes the ascetic ideal so that one can recognize it and beware of its sirens. After all, Nietzsche’s intention in elaborating the ascetic ideal is once again to draw the line of the “pathos of distance” between the sick and the healthy. He strongly emphasizes that “the sick should not infect the healthy with their sickness” and the essential “pathos of distance” be maintained.⁶¹

Nietzsche regards the ascetic ideal and man’s suffering in naturalistic terms, by the terminology of health whilst comparing human suffering to the organism’s incapacity to digest. In his view, the strong person has the stamina to deal with suffering and does not immediately seek to avoid it. His digestive system works well enough to support

⁵⁸ Nietzsche suggests this idea as he states: “... in beholding the ascetic ideal, the philosopher sees before him the optimum conditions for the highest and boldest spirituality, and smiles – in the process, he does *not* deny ‘existence’, but rather affirms his *own* existence and *nothing but* his own existence, and this perhaps to the extent that he is not far from the sinful wish: *pereat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, fiam!*” (translator’s note: Latin: May the world perish, let there be philosophy, let there be the philosopher, let there be !!) (*ibid.*, III, 7).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, III, 14.

him whereas the weak person cannot take the pain and becomes restless at the slightest moment of disturbance. Since the termination of the disease or a permanent cure would mean the end of the ascetic priest and render him obsolete, it works to the ascetic priest's advantage that the sickness must be as pervasive as possible. That is why, the healthy individuals who pose the ultimate threat to the ascetic society as bad role models must be infected with the sickness as well. Thus, in Nietzsche's account, the genealogy of moral psychology is ascetic in its core. Without containing any ethical value in itself, as the social manifestation of the will to power, morality is the means through which a society maintains itself. Subsequently, this is the way the moral subject affirms himself; because "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will at all..."⁶²

For the rest of this section I will briefly provide some responses to the *Genealogy*, particularly on the notorious themes of the master and the slave, the conflict between egoism versus morality, the constitution of moral psychology and *ressentiment*. As Nietzsche's conceptions of the master and the slave are highly controversial, they evoke rich associations with diverse interpretations. Even though Nietzsche often refers to them as separate castes of people, many critics argue that it is misleading to read the master and the slave at a literal level as if they pertain merely to social classes fighting over economic superiority or civil privileges.

Richard White, for example, in his depiction of the master reads Nietzsche at a slightly literal level and associates the master with the sovereign individual. So even though I disagree with White, I briefly lay out his argument in order to correct a common misreading of the master. Contending that "master" and "slave" allude to basic modalities of individual existence which still concern us as types,⁶³ White claims that with those types Nietzsche attempts to show us "the double origins of value" and evokes redemption by the "return of the master," that is, the emergence of "the sovereign individual."⁶⁴ White regards the conflict between the master and the slave as analogous to the deities Apollo and Dionysus, and he hints at the similarities between the master and Dionysus especially by emphasizing the life-affirming attitude in both.⁶⁵

⁶² *Ibid.*, III, 28.

⁶³ Richard White, "The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Moral*," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht, London: University of California Press, 1994, 63.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-5.

⁶⁵ Even though I find his evocation of the analogy between Apollo and Dionysus interesting, I think that White makes a misleading parallel reading between the Dionysus and the master. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche alludes to Dionysus in an almost mournful tone. He criticizes the fact that the Apollonian concepts such as form, reason and rationality are overrated at the

However, in my opinion White's association of the master with Dionysus does not work partly because the master and the slave are much more complicated and ambiguous concepts, and partly because Nietzsche does not associate the master with a saviour.

A deity or a cult symbolizes redemption for the masses. In his article, – even as the title “The Return of the Master” implies – White suggests associating the master with some sort of saviour, which I would see as a misunderstanding of Nietzsche's overall philosophy. Although Nietzsche points to a “philosophy of the future” and speaks to “free spirits,” he does not invoke any sense of anticipation for a redeemer. Even the Overman is not a shepherd to lead the herd but is the eventual individual who has become himself. Even Zarathustra addresses his disciples: “‘This - is now *my* way: where is yours?’ Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ For *the* way - does not exist.”⁶⁶

Offering a much more cohesive and plausible account, John Richardson suggests that the master and the slave refer to different modes of the “organization as a synthetic will to power,” or in short “self-synthesis.”⁶⁷ He remarks that what distinguishes the master from the slave is that the former attains a certain unity of the soul by organizing his inner drives in a way creative enough to originate action on his own. By contrast, the latter, mainly because of the diversity of his inner drives and conflicts, fails to synthesize himself in a mode to initiate action but remains solely reactive. Moreover, these types could also be understood as temporary behaviours or attitudes. For instance, one can act masterfully on a specific matter in a given situation, but not act masterfully in other contexts.⁶⁸ Nietzsche criticizes vanity by asserting that a vain person is wholly dependent upon other people's opinion of him; and his vulnerability and inner weakness is comparable to slaves, as he states: “It is ‘the slave’ in the vain man's blood, the remains of the slave's craftiness.”⁶⁹

Richardson argues that the Overman is somebody who is “synthesized in the right way.”⁷⁰ He suggests a progressive reading of Nietzsche's types of the slave, the master and the Overman which follows a dialectical pattern in evolution. It is Richardson's contention that having created so many values over the course of time, the slave comes closest to attaining the level of the Overman once he undermines his

expense of underrating the essential creative artistic life force symbolized by Dionysus. So, in that early work, Nietzsche suggests a revival of the Dionysian spirit for cultural reformation.

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, III, “Of the Spirit of Gravity,” 2.

⁶⁷ John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 58.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *BGE*, “What is Noble?” 261.

⁷⁰ Richardson, 66.

own values.⁷¹ That stage points to the moment in which the slave overcomes himself by reconsidering his values. Yet he also needs to acquire the master's skills in organizing his drives and reincorporating them into creative use and toward an active overall practice.⁷²

I agree with Richardson on the issue that the sovereign individual Nietzsche aims to theorize is beyond the prototypes of the master and the slave. Away from the rigidity those types imply, the Nietzschean individual is a being that constantly undergoes individuation, so her selfhood consists of that very battle between the master and the slave urges; aspiring for an ever greater self-synthesis. It is important to note that the vagueness of these terms does not indicate Nietzsche's internally contradictory or flawed thinking but rather reveals the versatility of his philosophy. It is possible that Nietzsche left those concepts ambiguous on purpose. White notes that even while praising the confidence and the robustness of the master, Nietzsche still calls him "the blonde beast" in order to prevent easy identification with him.⁷³ Indeed, it should be remembered that even when Nietzsche admires Napoleon, he nevertheless considers him half-monster by referring to him as a "synthesis of the *inhuman* and the *superhuman*."⁷⁴ Most strikingly, in his longing for the Overman, Nietzsche dreams about a type of man who is "the Roman Caesar *with* Christ's soul."⁷⁵

Lastly, it is crucial to take into consideration the fluidity of concepts for Nietzsche. Nietzsche is brilliantly attentive to the transitory nature of things which on the surface may seem like binary oppositions. Yet he sees *through* the rigidity of concepts such as the Apollonian and the Dionysian; the active and the passive; commanding and obeying; sickness and health; misfortune and blessing; the friend and the enemy; love and hate; pain and pleasure; obstacle and overcoming; Being and Becoming and so on. Perceiving existence as the will to power; as the constant dynamic forces of interpretation and reinterpretation, shaping and reshaping, appropriation and re-appropriation, Nietzsche recognizes the essential flux inherent in all conceptions. In that respect, it is quite plausible to read the master and the slave as transitory psychological stages or conflicting inner drives or attitudes toward life.

Another controversial topic many philosophers puzzle over is Nietzsche's conception of egoism. Undeniably, what makes *GM* so provocative is the fact that Nietzsche praises

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ White, 66.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *GM*, I, 16.

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 983: 1884.

the self-centred master type at all. It seems horrendously unacceptable, even offensive to our moral standards that he does not sympathize with the slaves but rather expresses amusement at the master's exploitation of the slave by regarding those incidents almost as innocent student pranks. Deeply critical of the egoism Nietzsche propagates, in her article "Nietzsche's Immoralism," Philippa Foot nevertheless asserts that analytic philosophers have to meet the challenge he poses on morality.

Foot is not convinced by the sympathetic critics of Nietzsche who defend him on the basis that regarding egoism, what matters is whose egoism is at stake. In their defence of Nietzsche, if an individual is on the ascending line of life, then her egoism is justified; the presumption being that since she is a "high type," she will not give in to petty selfishness but rather will be concerned about spiritual satisfaction and artistic creation. Yet if one is on the descending line of life, she is only a member of the herd so her capricious greed, vanity and narcissistic attempts at immediate self-gratification are not to be tolerated.⁷⁶ Foot acknowledges the plausibility of the account that what Nietzsche suggests is a certain self-organization teaching self-mastery and disciplining the passions. Just like enemies, passions are not to be extirpated or annihilated but can be controlled and be put to creative use or sublimate the self. For instance, she notes that the drive for aggression and cruelty can be canalized into a rigorous and ambitious search for truth.⁷⁷

However, all those persuasive accounts do not stop Foot from siding with Thomas Mann who asks whether Nietzsche is "naive about the wickedness of evil."⁷⁸ Even though she is impressed by the depth of Nietzsche's psychological observations and fascinated by his rhetoric, she finds his philosophical views regarding morality uncreditable and his attack on morality invalid. She reveals her major worry about Nietzsche's "immoralism" in the end of her article, asking: "His teaching has been sadly seductive in the past. Who can promise that it will never be seductive again?"⁷⁹

In symmetry to Foot who claims that (analytic) philosophy should meet the challenge Nietzsche poses on morality, I think that just as importantly, the defenders of Nietzsche have to be able to confront the worry Foot expresses. Interestingly, her statement quoted above points to the rhetorical power of Nietzsche's work. She ends her essay with a slight sense of frustration about her own inadequacy to match his rhetorical power in writing. She hints that philosophical reasoning can persuade but not "seduce."

⁷⁶ Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism," in Schacht (ed.), 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

So Foot's main concern seems to be that people will be seduced into enacting their egoism rather than restraining their (moral) selves. In her worry, she therefore reveals a very common presumption which points to the insurmountable conflict between morality and egoism.

It is Frithjof Bergmann who explores this conflict between morality and egoism, and I think he proposes a reasonable answer to this worry. He notes that we mistakenly think that we need an authoritarian moral law which will protect us from the anarchy of our egoism. He criticizes our presumptuous belief that we are prone to acting egoistically. In his article, he asserts that this is an overstatement. Bergmann contends that a common mistake most (analytic) philosophers make about Nietzsche – theoretically Foot is in this category as well – is that they take him to emphasize a dichotomy that distinguishes morality on the one side and egoism on the other. Bergmann argues that this kind of reading Nietzsche makes it impossible to fully understand and appreciate his philosophy.⁸⁰

Bergmann observes that most readers are at first attracted to Nietzsche's works; most likely allured by his rhetoric and his gift at integrating provocative ideas into striking literary prose, but after a while they feel repulsed by the ideas which they think propagate a mode of egoism that prompts a chaotic "rapaciousness." Bergmann thinks that after a brief period of flirtation with Nietzsche, most readers come to their senses; that is after all, if morality did not exist to constrain them, the world would go mad and everybody would act in a brutishly coarse way – because this is what we think egoism eventually leads to.⁸¹

Bergmann claims that even though we like to think of ourselves as being egoistic in our nature, in reality we hardly act as egoists proper. He notes that in our everyday life for the most part we act like marionettes rather than determined agents who are the captains of their ships. We live in a mode in which we are vulnerably open to the forces outside of us, and we are constantly manipulated by our social, cultural and familial surroundings.⁸² In that respect, the "self-synthesis" that Richardson inspiringly describes and Foot suspiciously mentions is not easy to attain in the first place. Pointing to the difficulty and the challenge of genuinely egoistic acts, Bergmann states that "the typical, normal action is therefore *anything but egoistic*."⁸³

⁸⁰ Frithjof Bergmann, "Nietzsche and Analytic Ethics," in Schacht (ed.), 77.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

I find Bergmann's ideas quite tenable as a brief exploration of Nietzsche's criticism of moral acts suffices to support his arguments. In order to understand the psychology of *ressentiment* better, it is important to remember its relation to moral acts or the good deeds as well. As Nietzsche conceptualizes it, *ressentiment* is the mode of existence in which one attunes oneself entirely to the external world and acts in accordance with either the fear of punishment or the expectation of a reward. This psychology is prompted by the revengeful spirit who always whispers that "things could and should have been otherwise." After all, it is the anticipation of reward or a saviour – still, a reward – that grounds the idea of the other world.

Since expecting a reward constitutes the hidden motive behind the seeming altruistic acts, Nietzsche is deeply suspicious and critical of them. As for him, any kind of selfless act; doing charity or even making big sacrifices such as sacrificing oneself for a political cause or for the other person – out of love, fidelity or companionship etc. – is an outcome of fragmentation of the self. Nietzsche thinks that in such situations, we do not necessarily stretch out our hand for the other but rather divide ourselves into two, and one part sacrifices or substitutes for the other part of ourselves.

Nietzsche thinks that there are no genuinely selfless acts because in such so-called selfless scenarios – not only a mother sacrificing herself for her child but even situations in which courageous strangers put their lives in danger to save someone from fire etc. – we mainly see the other person as an extension of our egos.⁸⁴ So we declare a certain aspect of ourselves as an enemy to be annihilated and consequently, this approach causes an impoverishment of the instinctive complexity of our organism. Fragmentation weakens us by disrupting our self-unity. Nietzsche writes that in such cases:

... man is loving *something of himself*, a thought, a longing, an offspring, more than *something else of himself*; that he is thus *dividing up* his being and sacrificing one part for the other... in morality, man treats himself not as an 'individuum', but as a 'dividuum'.⁸⁵

This way of fragmenting ourselves leaves us with a very unhealthy way to experience our individualities by threatening our sense of wholeness and leaving us with a feeling of alienation to ourselves. That is how selflessness comes up as a dangerous notion that we need to be cautious about. Nietzsche is mistrustful of the notion of selflessness also because this overrated "virtue" generally functions as an excuse for us to turn away from ourselves and from our responsibilities towards ourselves.

⁸⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, London: Penguin Books, 1994 [HATH], "On the History of Moral Feelings," 57.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

As a matter of fact, it is far more difficult for us to find our own ways in life rather than following the paths already drawn for us by conventions, morality or culture. It is much more challenging to answer Zarathustra who asks us which way *our* way is – because the healthy egoist does not follow any predetermined religious creed or philosophy (other philosophers' ideas) either. Yet this is the challenge of egoism that Bergmann elaborates above. It is always easier to be the marionettes rather than originating our own purposes, beliefs and actions – in short, being “the artists” of our own lives. The people around us that we feel “responsible” towards are often excuses we create ourselves to distract ourselves from our freely chosen commitments or projects. Under the pretext of charity we usually feel the temptation to indulge in the comforts of the society. This is what Nietzsche evokes when he speaks through Zarathustra:

Your love of your neighbour is your bad love of yourselves. You flee to your neighbour away from yourselves and would like to make a virtue out of it: but I see through your selflessness.⁸⁶

On the other hand, it would be unfair simply to say that Nietzsche is categorically against good deeds. He mainly draws attention to the dubious nature of the conventionally good. So, what matters here is again, *how* or *from whom* goodness originates; whether it is done out of weakness, performed by the weak who does not have the strength, the claws and the fangs to attack or by the strong. Nietzsche finds it insincere when the weak individual tries to gain moral credit by emphasizing her goodness. Yet he regards it as the greatest sign of a high nature when the strong individual performs good deeds as the manifestation of her overflowing benevolence.⁸⁷ In this case, the individual actually reveals her self-fullness rather than selflessness.

Even though I regard Bergmann's ideas on the false conflict between egoism and morality quite plausible, I do not think that his account can fully respond to Nietzsche's provocation and resolve Foot's worry so easily. Thus lastly, I will turn to Bernard Williams who points out several other vital issues about Nietzsche's naturalistic moral psychology. Williams is aware of the fact that the very conception of a “naturalistic” moral psychology is bound to collapse if it reduces moral activity to “physicalistic reductionism.”⁸⁸ We cannot simply read Nietzsche literally and appropriate the natural fact that the lion eats the lamb into society as a moral criterion. Also, another problem about the “naturalistic” approach is that since naturalism can include everything, it can hardly suggest anything substantial about our moral capacities. Williams therefore

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, “Of Love of One's Neighbour.”

⁸⁷ This idea is expressed by Nietzsche in “Of the Bestowing Virtue,” in *TSZ*, I, 1. I will return to this issue in the coming chapters.

⁸⁸ Bernard Williams, “Nietzsche's Minimalist Moral Psychology,” in Schacht (ed.), 239.

remarks that the vague idea that our moral activities should be compatible with the fact that human beings are part of nature does not convey much.⁸⁹

Williams suggests that Nietzsche's assertion that psychological elements are not distinctly moral actually points to a realistic rather than naturalistic moral psychology. Williams implies that a realistic approach helps us better understand Nietzsche's claim that there are no moral phenomena but only moral interpretations of the phenomena.⁹⁰ Williams elucidates his views by elaborating on two vital factors of Nietzsche's conception of moral psychology; willing and *ressentiment*. The former is a quite baffling concept as Nietzsche emphasizes the phenomenon of willing by indicating how it embodies both commanding and obeying; both activity and passivity.⁹¹ Yet we are only aware of the outcome, the act, which manifests the double nature of willing (the thing one does; either intentionally, consciously or not) and the interpretation based on the relation between the agent and the cause. Generally, the latter is a moral interpretation because as a natural phenomenon, will does not realize or discriminate what is moral or not.

Williams interprets *ressentiment* as the peculiar psychology of the will. He remarks that as the foundation of morality, *ressentiment* cannot be regarded as alluding to the ethical realm but is embedded within the category of power and anger. It is Williams's contention that the harmed person (whom Nietzsche regards as the slave) who feels *ressentiment* does not necessarily fantasize about being in a stronger position so that she would not be victimized. Even if the harmer did not mean to cause any damage intentionally, the harmed party resents the fact that the harmer did not acknowledge her. So her fantasy consists of punishing the person who harmed her by not acknowledging her. Thus, *ressentiment* pertains to retribution rather than to any sort of active reform. It does not propagate a genuine change of things but transfers the injured party's frustration into an authoritative but sanctionless moral law which carries no power other than the power of the judgment itself.⁹²

I think that by elucidating the psychology of *ressentiment*, Williams remarks on a crucial point that the harmed person does not aspire to be stronger herself; but rather desiring

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁹¹ Nietzsche writes: "*To reassure the sceptic.* – 'I have no idea how I am *acting!* I have no idea how I *ought to act!*' – you are right, but be aware of this: *you will be acted upon!* at every moment! Mankind has in all ages confused the active and the passive: it is their everlasting grammatical blunder." (*D*, II, 120). This is a very striking passage pointing at several important aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy; such as free will, the delusion of the linguistic self and the flux between active and passive forces. This quote appears in Williams's essay as well.

⁹² Williams, 245-6.

compensation for the damage, she wishes the harmer to be weaker. This may be analogous to the camel in *TSZ* which kneels down and lets itself to be laden and presumably prefers everyone else to be burdened by humps also, rather than getting rid of its own hump.⁹³ In this respect, Williams's argument that retribution does not prompt any positive reformation makes sense. I find noteworthy Williams's views referring to the potential dangers of a purely naturalistic morality which could lead to a physicalistic reductionism.

Yet it should also be noted that Nietzsche's principal concern on that matter is not so much about naturalism including everything, but morality excluding so much – so much which is human, all too human; like the denigration of the body and this world. Yet considering that Nietzsche's assertions are mainly observations of how certain actions gain moral value through interpretations, I regard Williams's dissociation of realistic moral psychology from naturalistic morality tenable and helpful in terms of clarifying Nietzsche's position.

However, despite these justificatory attempts, Nietzsche's critique of morality is still open to a great deal of debate. The most disturbing version of physicalistic reductionism would presumably be the scenarios of gross social injustices and fascism, such as the seductions Foot warns us against above. These ideas will become clearer in the coming chapters as I explore Nietzsche's life-affirmative attitude through his important themes of *amor fati* and the eternal recurrence of the same from a Levinasian perspective. The question of whether a cool and resolute approach taken towards a variety of personal misfortunes could also apply to cases of societal terror remains to be an ambiguous matter. Foot's worry over the immoralism of Nietzsche will haunt me throughout this project until the conclusion where I will end up partially agreeing with her on the issue of Nietzsche's naivety about the wickedness of evil but not sharing her discomfort regarding the seductive power of Nietzsche's rhetoric.

c) The Self as the Will to Power

The victorious concept "force," by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as "will to power," i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc. Physicists cannot eradicate "action at a distance" from their principles; nor can they eradicate a repellent force (or an attracting one). There is nothing for it: one is obliged to understand all motion, all "appearances," all "laws," only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ

⁹³ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, III, "Of the Spirit of Gravity," 2.

man as an analogy to this end. In the case of an animal, it is possible to trace all its drives to the will to power; likewise all the functions of organic life to this one source.⁹⁴

In the last section of this chapter, I examine Nietzsche's conception of the will to power and explore how it relates to the Nietzschean self. Firstly, I clarify that with this idea of the will to power Nietzsche offers an account to overcome causality by suggesting that the will to power is not necessarily an alternative but actually the only plausible account to explain the processes of life. Attempting to defeat the mechanistic, the teleological and the theological world view – as propagated by causality –, Nietzsche also intends to refute the notion of free will by drawing attention to how the inner drives operate at both conscious and unconscious levels. The aspect of the will to power Nietzsche employs here aims at undermining the subject versus object dichotomy by pointing at the vagueness of the boundaries between the organic and the mechanic.

Since all beings strive for the will to power, every organism is a battlefield upon which diverse wills play themselves out; the subject is not a unity but a web of power relations. This is the case in every aspect of life and this applies to every organism; both to human individuals and societies. Yet this is the space in which Nietzsche's ethics of individuation dwells. Towards the end of this section, I suggest that the best way to understand how Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power can be incorporated into ethics is via the exploration of his notion of *agon*. This concept which Richardson interprets as spiritual or "enlightened competition"⁹⁵ embodies Nietzsche's essential idea of the will to power and manifests the way a Nietzschean ethics of individuality (predominantly, that of self-overcoming and creating values) can reveal itself.

In order to unravel these claims, it would help to unpack the opening quote. Nietzsche aims to theorize his idea of the will to power by first rejecting the scientific explanation of "force," which he regards as already an extension of the metaphysical idea of God. Nietzsche criticizes this idea because of its teleological baggage which propagates causality. In his attempt to correct the misleading belief in the mechanistic world view and the misconception of causality, Nietzsche asserts that organic functions can be explained or understood not in terms of causality but in terms of the will to power which manifests itself as directedness towards power, originating from within. As manifestations of growth in activity, the will to power exhibits itself by way of overpowering; which means constantly shaping, assimilating, interpreting and re-interpreting whatever it comes across.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 619: 1885.

⁹⁵ Richardson, 157.

As noted above, because what we see is only what is externalized, it is difficult to imagine how willing operates. Even though it is always elusive, Nietzsche defines willing as always willing something; the intentional aspect cannot be disregarded since an act or a deed cannot be frozen and dissected into components or motives as epistemologists would like to assume. Willing does not occur in an isolated context, so it cannot be associated with thinking⁹⁶ or confused with “desiring,” “striving” or “demanding.” What differentiates willing from those acts is the fact that willing is always accompanied by the affect of commanding. That is, whenever there is willing, there is also commanding and being commanded.⁹⁷ At microcosmic level, the will to power occurs as nourishment; the stronger will directs the weaker will – the leading example for this is the body. At larger scales, it manifests itself as the will to property; to tools, to servants, to slaves or even to empires.⁹⁸

Going back to the quote above, an important point to note is the emphasis on the notion of “interiority” and how Nietzsche presents the will to power as an inner “event” unfolding and coming forth. In a subsequent passage Nietzsche states that “the will to power is not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* – the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge.”⁹⁹ Nietzsche’s emphasis on interiority is crucial because it is also a significant point about which he criticizes the sciences and in particular the (Darwinian) theory of evolution. He criticizes the evolutionary theory for putting all the emphasis on the outside; the external circumstances and the environment. Instead, Nietzsche asserts that “the essential thing in the life process is precisely the tremendous shaping, form-creating force working from within which *utilizes* and *exploits* external circumstances.”¹⁰⁰ So he suggests that forces basically work from the inside towards the outside, and during this process organisms shape the world.

This criticism by Nietzsche is important in terms of illustrating his denigration of evolutionary theory on the grounds that it is merely an extension of the mechanical world view which reduces everything to sole causality. In this respect, Acampora regards the will to power as Nietzsche’s alternative to causality. She notes that

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 668: Nov. 1887-March 1888.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 658: 1885.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 635: March-June 1888. Walter Kaufmann notes the translation of “pathos” to correspond to occasion, event, passion, suffering, destiny in Greek; yet he suggests that occasion or event would be the most plausible translation in this context (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 647: 1883-1888.

Nietzsche's notion of the will to power is not a causal system but the manifestation of the ongoing processes of interpretation and appropriation.¹⁰¹

Nietzsche also opposes the Darwinian idea according to which organisms struggle for the sake of mere adaptation and survival. He finds this view inaccurate because overrating the exteriority and neglecting the inner forces at work within the organism, it cannot give a solid account of the emergence of creativity either; which Nietzsche thinks is the core of life processes. In his view, an account which aims to explain the emergence of life processes cannot skip the issue of creation and creativity. He regards life as predominantly creative; leading and being led by the creative, spontaneous and active processes of constant shaping, reshaping and being shaped.

Overall, Nietzsche criticizes evolutionary theory mainly because of its inherent passivity; as it gives no account of the essential spontaneity that is behind every creation. Nietzsche openly states that at every level of organic life, there is constant spontaneity; so adaptation or evolution is actually a matter of appropriation and above all, interpretation. As a matter of fact, he takes all overpowering to be cases of interpretation and strongly emphasizes that the relationship between appropriation, adaptation, interpretation and creativity cannot be separated from the phases of evolution.

Another aspect showing the plausibility of Nietzsche's argument is also visible in his acknowledgment of the fact that every individual is essentially constituted of various parts. He clearly states that each individual itself is always already a battlefield of diverse forces: "The individual itself as a struggle between parts (for food, space, etc.): its evolution tied to the victory or predominance of individual parts, to an atrophy, a 'becoming an organ' of other parts."¹⁰² The Darwinian view, on the other hand, seems to regard the individual as a starting point or seems to presuppose a unity within the organism whose unified aim is to adapt to the surroundings and survive. As another version of teleology, it also leaves the question of free will unchallenged because it studies organisms only from the angle of consciousness, which Nietzsche thinks is rather misleading.

In addition, Nietzsche asserts that regarding an organism as a unity would be a very simplistic and superficial way of seeing it and ignoring what lies beneath the "skin." It is important to notice that Nietzsche and the evolutionary theorists could disagree on where the "externality" begins. Nietzsche would not consider the externality to begin

¹⁰¹ Acampora, 321.

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *WTP*, 647: 1883-1888.

where the outer skin ends. Underneath the skin, there are cells and atoms and subatomic particles and what not; a Nietzschean externality would begin at the atomic or subatomic level, not where the individual body of the organism appears.

Elaine P. Miller argues that by the notion of the will to power, Nietzsche offers an alternative middle way to the conflict between the mechanical world view and the organismic view.¹⁰³ Also, by emphasizing that there are no enduring substances or “unities,” Nietzsche vehemently focuses on the significance of the “relationships of power.” This idea leads Miller to suggest that Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power is at the same time an attempt to overcome the subject versus object dichotomy.¹⁰⁴

The subject versus object dichotomy stems largely from our habitual way of regarding the subject as a substance. In his writings, Nietzsche profoundly indicates that our belief in causality is intricately connected to our belief in free will, and both gain their credibility from our attachment to metaphysical thinking – the sciences and morality still cannot detach themselves from the notion of God; or “authority” or the “unity of will.” As mentioned above, Nietzsche is already sceptical of associating the deed with a doer; yet in addition to that, he also proposes that the “doer” is not necessarily a unity either. When we do something, we think that we act out of a unified will because we always regard ourselves as a unity; we think that our actions originate from us because thinking this way consolidates our egos as a unity.¹⁰⁵ Yet Nietzsche explicitly states that “the subject is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.”¹⁰⁶

Since it is rather complicated to give an account of that “what there is,” we comfortably take the subject as a “given;” something easily distinguishable as an individual or a body – which can be punished, rewarded or manipulated if necessary. Nietzsche touches on the implausibility of regarding the subject as a single being. He notes that as a matter of fact, it would be much more plausible to think of the subject as a

¹⁰³ Elaine P. Miller, “Nietzsche on Individuation and Purposiveness in Nature,” in Pearson (ed.), 71.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche brings up those ideas in the passage “The logical-metaphysical postulates, the belief in substance, accident, attribute, etc., derive their convincing force from our habit of regarding all our deeds as consequences of our will – so that the ego, as substance, does not vanish in the multiplicity of change. – But there is no such thing as will.” (*WTP*, 488: Spring-Fall 1887).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 481: 1883-1888.

multiplicity which hosts constant interaction and contest and thereby grounds our thoughts, feelings and consciousness as a whole.¹⁰⁷

Having clarified the multiplicity that constructs the (Nietzschean) self and the disunity of the will(s), it is just as important to emphasize that apart from being neutral in determining any epistemological moral value, the will is not the simple explanation regarding human acts either. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche makes it quite clear that it is one of “The Four Great Errors” to associate the will as the motive in acts. The will by itself does not determine action:

The ‘inner world’ is full of illusions and phantasms: will is one of them. The will does not do anything anymore, and so it does not explain anything anymore either – it just accompanies processes, but it can be absent as well ... People projected their three ‘inner facts’ out of themselves and onto the world – the facts they believed in most fervently, the will, the mind and the I. They took the concept of being from the concept of the I, they posited ‘things’ as beings in their own image, on the basis of their concept of I as cause. Is it any wonder that what they rediscovered in things later is only *what they had put into them in the first place?*¹⁰⁸

Since our human, all too human urge is to build narratives that satisfy our need for intelligibility, we point to the will or the mind or the “I” (free will) to be accountable to our acts. Rationalizing our existence through concept-making or inventing the “I,” we reserve ourselves a primordially metaphysical position, the V.I.P. seat from which we name everything else around us and call it reality – which insinuates the ancient pathos of distance.

In the passage above, Nietzsche also notes how people confuse the “three inner facts;” the will, the mind and the I, and criticizes the Cartesian dualism mainly because it straightforwardly detaches the mind from the body. Yet in detail, another major reason why he finds that duality implausible is because it is not possible to distinguish thinking from other mind activities such as feeling, sensing, willing, desiring, or any other mental states. Thus, even when trying to justify the solidity of the I, thinking does not completely cover all the grounds because we cannot easily distinguish our mental states which are often in flux; undergoing constant change and renewal.

Richardson elaborates on how Nietzsche depicts the will as something we are not directly in control of. The will to power operates through the drives in us as a sort of

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche writes: “The assumption of a single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of ‘cells’ in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command? *My hypotheses: The subject as multiplicity.*” (*ibid.*, 490: 1885).

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, “The Four Great Errors,” 3.

“non-conscious intentionality.”¹⁰⁹ Within the notion of the will to power, we tend to visualize a unitary force, however, according to Nietzsche that is not the case. Richardson suggests that the term “the will to power” denotes “a potency for something, a directedness toward some end.”¹¹⁰ He claims that a “drive” manifests this directedness; this “will.” So, at this point the relationship between the self and the will gets a bit clearer in the sense that the drives in us enact this will, which is an always already directed, intentional will towards growth and progress. Nietzsche’s basic claim is that the will is oriented towards “power.” It is thereby the self; the individual, the body, the organism which is prompted by the drives that manifests the will to power.

All individuals strive for growth; for power. Drives within an individual do not necessarily work in cooperation and collaboration with each other, and they mostly operate at a non-conscious level. And since they are often in conflict with each other, before we are conscious of the experience of a feeling or an idea, that sensation is already the outcome of a remarkable battle among the drives.¹¹¹ According to Nietzsche, there are only power relationships which are beyond the criteria of morality. When a strong will assimilates the weaker will, they form a bond and together strive further;¹¹² or over time they perish together.¹¹³ The weak will does not “hate” the strong will – the way the slave feels *ressentiment* towards the master.

Yet it is this genuinely amoral nature of the power relations that prompts so much controversy about Nietzsche’s philosophy. Does Nietzsche eventually suggest an amoral world view in which ethical concerns can easily be neglected for the sake of “the big picture,” which in Nietzsche’s case could easily mean the sacrifice of the masses – “men are not equal!”¹¹⁴ – for the sake of breeding the Overman?

It is important to respond to this question by primarily noting that although power relationships may lead to cruelty, power itself is a neutral term. Even though it is

¹⁰⁹ Richardson, 21.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Nietzsche states: “It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.” (*WTP*, 481: 1883-1888).

¹¹² Nietzsche writes: “My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (– its will to power:) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement (‘union’) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power: And the process goes on.” (*ibid.*, 636: March-June 1888).

¹¹³ Nietzsche writes: “I beware of speaking of chemical ‘laws’: that savors of morality. It is far rather a question of the absolute establishment of power relationships: the stronger becomes the master of the weaker, in so far as the latter cannot assert its degree of independence – here there is no mercy, no forbearance, even less a respect for ‘laws.’” (*ibid.*, 630: 1885).

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, II, “Of the Tarantulas.”

crucial to present Nietzsche's conception of power accurately, the challenge arises from the beginning: power is not a representable phenomenon. Yet since the term "power" is heavily loaded with socio-political connotations, it is difficult to consider it in an ethically detached manner. As a matter of fact, the question above arises because we are prone to regarding power in these terms; as a representable thing.

Gilles Deleuze clarifies that the idea of associating power with representation is the most common misinterpretation and distortion of Nietzsche's notion of power. It is crucial to note that the will to power is not to be associated with conformism or conventional physical representations of resources such as money, fame, reputation, socio-political or military force or the like. There is no direct relationship between the will to power and the struggle to dominate others. Nietzsche does not disregard the phenomenon of struggle, but it depends on its motive. In Deleuze's interpretation, above all, Nietzsche advocates creating values; and the only kind of struggle that can relate to the will to power is that which leads to creating values.¹¹⁵

In Nietzsche's view, struggle for the sake of accumulating political power is consistent with mere survival and adaptation, which has no value in itself. Nietzsche would indubitably reject the outrageous cases of social Darwinism because they basically promote greed – the constant paranoia of losing resources – rather than creating values. As mentioned above, Nietzsche criticizes Darwin's theory because it explains evolution mainly in terms of maintenance through passively conforming to physical environment without acknowledging the creativity and the constant self-overcoming of the human being.

That is why it would be inaccurate to think that Nietzsche's notion of the will to power propagates or justifies brutal manifestations of power such as the military, the economic or socio-political ruthlessness. As will be clearer below, Nietzsche's conception of struggle can be best understood metaphorically; through contesting of values in which one respects one's "enemy" (or opponent) rather than fears her – as fear stems from one's own insecurity and leads to the wish to eliminate the enemy. In

¹¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze clearly states this view as he writes: "One cannot over emphasize the extent to which the notions of struggle, war, rivalry or even comparison are foreign to Nietzsche and to his conception of the will to power. It is not that he denies the existence of struggle: but he does not see it as in any way creative of values. At least, the only values that it creates are those of the triumphant slave. Struggle is not the principle or the motor of hierarchy but the means by which the slave reverses hierarchy. Struggle is never the active expression of forces, nor the manifestation of a will to power that affirms – any more than its result expresses the triumph of the master or the strong. Struggle, on the contrary, is the means by which the weak prevail over the strong, because they are greatest number." (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, London: Continuum, 1983, 76-7).

this respect, struggle in the sense of self-overcoming; of promoting growth for attaining human greatness; for “living the *great* life”¹¹⁶ is of utmost significance.

For this reason, it is crucial to note that Nietzsche has ethical considerations, and these considerations regarding ethical subjectivity particularly reveal themselves within his idea of “individuation” through *agon*. I will argue that the Nietzschean individual is a subject that emerges partly from Nietzsche’s conception of power and partly from the Ancient Greek concept *agon*, which he mentions in “Homer’s Contest.” “*Agon*” means “contest;” yet the Latin root of “compete” also means “to meet;” “to be fitting” and “to strive together toward.”¹¹⁷

Nietzsche argues that a remarkable difference between the Homeric Greeks and us moderns is that the former regarded life as something that could be justified through “struggle” and the “joy for victory;” and thus developed the individual ethical concepts of *Eris*¹¹⁸ and “envy.”¹¹⁹ However these concepts had different connotations from what we think today. Rather than suppressing ambition and competitiveness, the Homeric Greeks encouraged challenge as they regarded it as the chief stimulant for growth and development.¹²⁰ Those values openly manifested themselves at the Homeric contests. In the essay Nietzsche mentions that in Homeric times there are two *Eris* goddesses. One drives people to feel a certain desire to annihilate the opposition whereas the other one drives people to strengthen their opposition in fights of contest.

Acampora argues that *agon* creates a specific context in which the participants gain the meaning of their performance from the conditions of their opponents. This is also a situation in which the participants are mutually dependent on each other for bringing out the best performance in each other since what comes forth is each one’s own unique power. She gives the example of two runners; when one runner runs faster, the other regards this as a stimulus to run faster. She does not wish the other to stop or slow down, but rather tries harder to maximize her capabilities.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 3.

¹¹⁷ Christa Davis Acampora, “Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds: A Typology of Nietzsche’s Contests,” *International Studies in Philosophy*, 34.3 (Fall 2002): 135-151, 147.

¹¹⁸ Kaufmann translates this as “discord.” Nietzsche, *HC*, 35.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Nietzsche writes: “... not only Aristotle but the whole of Greek antiquity thinks differently from us about hatred and envy and judges with Hesiod, who in one place calls one *Eris* evil – namely, the one that leads men into hostile fights of annihilation against one another – while praising another *Eris* as good – the one that, as jealousy, hatred, and envy, spurs men to activity: not to the activity of fights of annihilation but to the activity of fights which are *contests*. The Greek is envious, and he does not consider this quality a blemish but the gift of a *beneficent* godhead. What a gulf of ethical judgment lies between us and him!” (*ibid.*).

¹²¹ Acampora, 148.

In Acampora's view, what makes those contests so remarkable is that at some level they function as the sublimation of letting the striving impulses out. Encouraging contestants to out-perform one another, these contests enable them to overcome their own previous performances as well. She notes that this contesting spirit later on reflects upon their (the ancient Greeks') institutions and overall culture.¹²² In that respect, from a Nietzschean perspective *agon* precipitates the revaluation of values and aims to emanate cultural transformation. That is why, while on the one hand *agon* individuates the individual from the rest of the community, on the other hand it enables the culture to benefit from it in the long run. So, *agon* clearly is a certain use of power that can be put to creative use.

Richardson regards *agon* as a means through which my power individuates me from others by revealing my active powers and the drives that constitute me alone. In this way, a remarkable aspect Richardson sees in Nietzsche's "*agon* argument" is that it points to a space untainted by the slavish *ressentiment* – in which whatever I do is only a conscious reaction to the other's action. Richardson conveys that via *agon*, I can not only overcome *ressentiment* but also get in touch with my real self; that is, I can fully realize my true power and my true "distinctiveness" from others.¹²³

Nietzsche suggests that my power is my virtue which I share with no one else. According to him, my virtue is so personal that I do injustice to it if I attempt to put it in words because translating it into linguistic terms or communicating it in any way to people - using (the herd's) language – would make it common. Nietzsche strongly emphasizes the significance of battle, conflict and envy as being stimulating factors for the growth of power and writes that virtues manifest themselves through the "necessary evils" of battle and war; envy and mistrust. Similar to the battle of drives fighting with each other to purify the will and dominate the organism, virtues are also in constant battle with each other; as Nietzsche puts it: "each virtue is jealous of each other."¹²⁴

In his elaboration of the Hellenic popular pedagogy, Nietzsche states that "every talent must unfold itself in fighting."¹²⁵ This agonistic model is a prevalent theme in Nietzsche's thinking; and he writes about the productive uses of the feelings of envy and jealousy because without such feelings, one would not have a chance to improve oneself and be a rival worthy of one's opponent. Having opponents or enemies is

¹²² *Ibid.*, 137.

¹²³ Richardson, 154-5.

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, "Of Joys and Passions."

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *HC*, 37.

important in life for testing one's limits against them and bringing out the best of oneself. But even more importantly, one can bring forth one's individuality; one's uniqueness from the rest of the community or herd. As noted above, power only realizes itself and comes to the fore at the moment of contest. For one's personal growth, one needs enemies; even needs to seek them, if necessary. Rather than feeling ashamed of the feelings of hatred and envy, one should project those feelings onto a worthy enemy who can challenge one's values and thoughts.¹²⁶

As Acampora notes, what irritates Nietzsche most about slave morality is that in it, the agonistic drive is degenerated into self-annihilation and asceticism. The main fallacy regarding this slavish reaction is that the slave mentality – just like the Church, its continuation –necessarily wants to annihilate the opponent rather than excel itself to match the strength of the masterly. The desire to annihilate the opponent is the wish to prevent struggle, which is unnatural and against life. So, what gets misleadingly labelled as “evil” is this agonistic drive which would correspond to “self-interest, jealousy, the desire to legislate values.”¹²⁷

For instance, in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche criticizes the Church as it always has the instinct to annihilate its enemies whereas the free-spirits never feel the urge to annihilate their opponents. Rather, respecting the enemy or the opponent is a very noble feeling that descends from ancient times:

The Church has always wanted to destroy its enemies: but we, on the other hand, we immoralists and anti-Christians, think that we benefit from the existence of the Church. Even in politics, hostility is becoming much more spiritual, – much cleverer, much more thoughtful, much more *careful*. Almost every party knows that its self-preservation depends on its opposition not losing too much strength: and the same is true in power politics ... We act the same way towards the ‘inner enemy’: we have spiritualized hostility there too, and have come to appreciate its *value*. The price of *fertility* is to be rich in contradictions; people stay *young* only if their souls do not stretch out languidly and long for peace ... Nothing is more foreign to us than that one-time desideratum of ‘peacefulness of the soul’, the Christian desideratum; there is nothing we envy less than the moral cow and the fat happiness of good conscience. You give up the *great* life when you give up war...¹²⁸

The quote above seems to summarize the most important aspects of Nietzsche's politics and ethics; both at social and individual levels. Pointing at the significance of having obstacles, Nietzsche suggests not terminating them but overcoming them. Since he regards struggle and conflict as the most stimulating factors in life, it is not

¹²⁶ Nietzsche states: “You should have eyes that always seek an enemy – *your* enemy.” (*TSZ*, I, “On War and Warriors”). Nietzsche's emphasis on the pronoun “your” also reveals the individuating role of the enemy upon the individual. One's enemy is unique as it is a factor that singles one out.

¹²⁷ Acampora, 141.

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 3.

living that he is concerned about; but living the *great life* which comes at the expense of a great contest.

Wanting to end struggle is already a degenerate feeling as it negates the vital energy and dynamism of life. At an individual level, this Nietzschean self is someone who does not lead an ascetic life as that would eradicate the richness of her drives and impoverish her selfhood. She does not seek constant pleasure either, because that would lead to a nihilistic lifestyle as well; consisting of mere consumption of “things.” She does not seek peace or conventional happiness either; because that would mean suppressing her vital instincts for the sake of conforming to the society and investing her skills on mere adaptation to conventions at the cost of losing her individuality; her uniqueness or her potential virtue – the only genuine thing that needs cultivation.

The Nietzschean individual would be someone who affirms her individuality not by trying to annihilate that which tries to overpower her. These factors could be the society or even her own self – her hazardous psychological habits could also pull her down by self-pity, *ressentiment* or what not. Self-overcoming would require recognizing these inner conflicts; interpreting them and noting how they change and evolve. Resolving the conflicts could even mean the demolition of the self. In “Homer’s Contest,” Nietzsche remarks that the Ephesians used to “ostracize” the “best among them” because that would mean the end of the contest. He comments that those ancients did not make a “cult of the genius” so as to keep the stimulation of the contest going. Being a winner was actually not necessarily a desirable state because “without a rival, unopposed, on a solitary peak of fame, the winner would perish.”¹²⁹

Conflicts do not end but change and evolve because life consists of the constant interpretations and reinterpretations of power; both in nature and within an organism. Life is the will to power, and it involves endless striving and the drives that constitute us undergo constant struggling as well. Our bodies are the battlefields of diverse drives and desires; some of which we are aware of and others, we do not even sense consciously. In that respect, it is crucial to realize that Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power is not a cult of narcissism or rapacious egoism but a delicate manifestation of the agonistic contest.

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, *HC*, 36-9.

Conclusion

This chapter has served its basic descriptive purpose by presenting Nietzsche's notion of selfhood and some of the major criticisms posed to him. I tried to clarify Nietzsche's ideas pertaining to subjectivity as a rejection of the subject as a socio-political invention and emphasized Nietzsche's conception of selfhood as a naturalistic manifestation of the will to power. I suggested that as a person the Nietzschean individual is someone who is on the ascending line of life; meaning that she affirms life to the fullest. Since there is no other possible world – elsewhere or in the future –, she does not fantasize about how things could have been otherwise. Hosting so many conflicting drives within herself enables her to experience a variety of perspectives which makes her capable of regarding phenomena as beyond good and evil.

Yet even if these ideas sound plausible, stirring rich associations, I think that the tenability of Nietzsche's views cannot be properly tested without bringing in the challenge Levinas poses in his approach to ethics and subjectivity. From the Levinasian angle, Nietzsche's virtuous self-affirmation nevertheless appears as the narcissism of the same. So, despite the allure of Nietzsche's ideas, we must suspend our enchantment and question the ethical ramifications of the naturalistic individual who emerges from Nietzsche's power ontology. The ethical aspects of the Nietzschean individual will be best evaluated in the following chapters, as I examine them in greater detail in relation to Levinas's ethics and his notion of the subject. In my view, this Levinasian confrontation is crucial, not necessarily to undermine Nietzsche's philosophy, but rather to understand him better and appreciate the depth of his thought.

CHAPTER TWO

LEVINAS ON THE EMERGENCE OF SUBJECTIVITY

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine Levinas's notion of subjectivity and its relation to ethics, mainly as presented in his two masterpieces *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. I argue that Levinas's conception of subjectivity is grounded upon the idea of relating to the Infinite through sociality, via the asymmetrical relationship with the Other. However, since both works are immensely rich, for the sake of keeping my project focused, I limit my scope basically to the themes that directly relate to subjectivity; and avoid detailed discussions on the erotic relationship; the feminine; fecundity; the state; politics or language.

In the introductory section, I begin by giving a brief account of what Levinas indicates by the "same" and the "Other" and what separation means in his philosophy, and analyse the relevance of the idea of the Infinite for ethics. In order to clarify the ambiguity of the Infinite, I elucidate not only its rapport with religiosity but also its divergence from religion. In the second section, I probe into what Levinas calls the "interiority" and show how this private realm has significance for the potential of the ethical life for the subject. I briefly touch on the phenomenology of everyday life, which Levinas depicts in his notion of "enjoyment" and the "elemental." This mode of existence is egoistic proper based on the fulfilment of needs; yet since it does not host Desire, it is bound to be conceptually and ethically dubious. In spite of its misleading temporal or spatial associations, interiority is never a pure state consisting of the ego's blissful solitude because the ego is always already obsessed with the Other.

In the following section, I explain what Levinas conveys with his conception of the face and the nature of the subject's interaction with the Other and the others. In this part, it becomes clear that it is only the Other who can teach the subject by expanding one's capacity for goodness. In this respect, the subject's endless responsibilities for the Other do not prompt one to deny oneself, but actually broaden and enrich one's ethical potential; which is not only concerned with the Other but also affected by the obligations signified by the third party. In the last section I delve into Levinas's provocative notion of substitution. Even though this section is the most central place for Levinas's account of ethical subjectivity, I leave it until the end because without the conceptual clarifications and introductory ideas in *Totality and Infinity*, it would be impossible to follow Levinas's complex thought pattern. Having explored the impurity

of the ego's existence, this concluding section looks into the ethical constitution of the self which realizes itself only through the essential passivity before the Other.

a) The Infinite, Ethics and Levinas's Conception of Religiosity

This book (*Totality and Infinity*) then does present itself as a defence of subjectivity, but it will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded in the idea of infinity... Infinity is produced in the relationship of the same with the other.¹

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas begins his account by elaborating on two key concepts and emphasizing the separation between them: the "same" and the "Other." With the former concept, Levinas implies a predominantly narcissistic and totalitarian mode of human existence, called totality. The "Other," on the other hand, points to a non-representational realm which evokes transcendence and the ethical, regarded as "infinity." This section intends to explain why the idea of the Infinite matters to Levinas; how he relates it to ethics, and clarify its association with *and* dissociation from religion.

According to Levinas, it is the essential separation between the same and the Other that makes the experience of ethics possible. Any attempt to undo that separation means nothing other than reducing the Other to the self-same in a mode of assimilation as there is an absolute difference between what is me and what is not me; what is otherwise than me. Because the Other and I are uniquely different from one another, the insurmountable separation between the same and the Other makes it impossible for me and the Other to engage with each other in a dialectical manner. The Other is simply the "absolute other," but definitely not "the opposing party" of the same.

While contemplating the relationship between the same and the Other, it is misleading to regard the two parties as "opposites" because regarding the Other as the opposing party would always already mean re-constructing the same "system" – which Levinas is attempting to overcome or "transcend." For this reason, Levinas proposes that transcendence is not negativity; the relationship with the Other is not to be understood in terms of mutual resistance. Far from it, associating infinity with perfection, Levinas ascribes a sense of height and nobility to transcendence; and thereby calls it *transascendence*.²

Even though "I" is the point of departure from the Other, it is not a fixity: "it does not remain the same but identifies itself throughout its existence no matter what happens to

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969 [TI], 26.

² Levinas writes: "The idea of the perfect is an idea of infinity... the idea of infinity designates a height and a nobility, a transascendence." (TI, 41).

it.”³ The I is still identical in all of its alterations even when it “thinks;” “understands;” “merges together;” “appropriates;” “objectifies” and so on because all of these are eventually the “plays of the same.”⁴ Our way of being in the world; or in short, “I”’s way is “the way of the same,” which means reducing every alterity to the self-same; by conquering any heterogeneity and transferring all into the concreteness of egoism.⁵

Since the system of the same becomes constructed and told as history, that is how history identifies itself.⁶ In that respect, if there is any concept of resistance, rather than the “I,” it is the Other resisting the system by defying the categories the same tries to impose on it. As for Levinas, ethics begins at the very recognition of this essential separation which illustrates that the Other can never be assimilated into a version of the narcissistic self-same. It is actually the failure of not realizing the impossibility of the irreducible alterity of the Other that paves the way to violent deeds.

The recognition that the insurmountable separation between the same and the Other is the first step to relate to the Infinite nevertheless needs further clarification. Levinas argues that all philosophy aims for truth; and in aiming for truth one has to explore, which by nature requires venturing into the territory of the unknown, or the Other. He notes that truth has two dimensions; freedom, which manifests itself as the inquiry through appropriation, and experience. In his contention, Western philosophy has mainly emphasized the former aspect, to the extent of promoting violence by neglecting the latter which alludes to the exteriority or alterity of what is encountered.

According to Levinas, the traditional notion of truth comes from Socrates, whose teaching consists of midwifery, conveying that everything I can learn is already embedded in me; and the outsider, the interlocutor can only be a midwife who helps me recollect knowledge and wisdom.⁷ Based on this approach, I get nothing

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷ Tanja Staehler elaborates on the (often misunderstood) midwifery aspect of Socratic teaching and emphasizes that Socratic teaching is not as simplistic as it seems. That is, the Socratic method relies heavily on the conversation with the Other; the immediacy of speech is the most important factor (73-74). I find Staehler’s argument plausible especially in the sense that, after all, at the end of the conversations Socrates makes the interlocutor realize that he does not know what he previously thought he knew – which is always the case with Socrates as well, who only ever knows that he knows nothing. The way Socrates eventually puts the interlocutor’s beliefs and convictions in question during the conversations is indeed very similar to the way Levinas argues the Other puts me (my being) in question and suspends my spontaneity (my powers) with her mere presence (or face). However, my focus is not so much on Socratic teaching itself but the Socratic notion of “reason as self-sufficiency.” In this respect, I hope it is clear that even though I regard Staehler’s observations convincing, I do not contradict myself by presenting Socrates’s reasoning – based on “maieutics” in a critical

worthwhile from the Other as I innately possess everything I ever need to know.⁸

Levinas criticizes the Socratic notion of truth because it depends on the self-sufficiency of the same, which prompts Levinas to refer to traditional Western philosophy as “egology.”⁹

Levinas regards reason as the permanence of the same as it operates in neutralizing the Other by way of stripping off the elements of shock, surprise and alterity. All these elements go through the processes of cognition and come out as concepts; ready-mades for grasping and “comprehending” (Levinas notes that the French word for comprehending comes from *com-prendre*; “prendre” meaning to take, grasp or fetch by the hand). Denying the Other leads ontology to presume that the same already possesses all the knowledge available without the necessity of developing a critical viewpoint towards itself - which can only be provided by the Other. Immersed in the panoramic view of totality, since it cannot properly question itself, ontology is bound to be a philosophy of injustice; a philosophy of power. It is this perspective from which Levinas criticizes ontology’s notion of freedom:

Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other to ensure the autarchy of an I. Thematization and conceptualization, which moreover are inseparable, are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other. For possession affirms the other, but within a negation of its independence. “I think” comes down to “I can” – to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality. Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power.¹⁰

Levinas’s criticism of the conventional notion of freedom points to the dominating instinct of the same to “sink its teeth” into the Other, which is very similar to Levinas’s depiction of enjoyment as alimentation. It seems that there is a notable parallel between the alimentation of the ego through food and its invigoration by conceptualizing the Other – all within the realm of “freedom.” The movement from “I think” – symbolizing the intentional conscious Cartesian subject – to “I can” implies the thrusting of the self into the Other. Levinas says that possession still affirms the Other, but by negating its independence, which evokes murder. That is how he associates the essence of power with annihilation and murder.¹¹

manner. For an in-depth analysis of Levinas’s relation to Plato, see Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-Side of Ethics*, New York and London: Routledge, 2010.

⁸ Levinas, *TI*, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

Levinas criticizes the appropriative aspect of truth-seeking because appropriation always eventually leads to “fusion”¹² through “participation”¹³ and eliminates the separation between the same and the Other, in which case truth ceases to be truth or loses its meaning by losing its otherness from the same. Eventually what is consolidated is only the self-affirmation of the same, which has been the mainstream mode of Western philosophy. The freedom aspect of seeking truth also makes it clear that the one searching for truth must be a free, independent agent who cannot lose herself on the way to truth. One cannot fulfil one’s destiny if one becomes immersed in human collectivism, religion or any mode of fusion. Between the truth and the ego, there has to remain an essential separation.

Levinas intends to revise the foundation of Western philosophy by bringing up two essential ideas from the two key figures of philosophy, Descartes and Plato. From the latter he borrows the idea of the metaphysical as the Good beyond Being (emerging from beyond, from “up there”); and from the former he takes the idea of the Infinite. Both themes contribute to Levinas’s conception of ethics which arises from non-philosophical, non-representational experiences. Leaving the exploration of the latter concept to the later sections of this chapter, this section proceeds first to unravel the former one.

Levinas proposes a completely different approach to ontology by re-introducing the idea of the Infinite. Even the most rational ego can never comprehend the Infinite because of its elusive exterior essence. The notion of the Infinite is not an alternative to ontology but rather is an instance that exposes its limitations; hence undermining the philosophy of power. The proud cogito gets stuck when it comes to thinking about or grasping the Infinite. Levinas borrows the idea of Descartes who infers that God must have put the idea of the Infinite in me since as a finite being I could not possibly have contained that idea myself. And since the Infinite is overwhelmingly more primordial than the finite, the latter must have gained its meaning and significance from the former.

When I desire¹⁴ the Other, I necessarily measure myself against the Other; only to realize that I am far too imperfect to match the Other’s transcendental moral superiority. In order to apprehend my inferiority, I must try to think about the Infinite or

¹² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴ I elaborate on Levinas’s notion of Desire in more detail in the next section. Yet here it is important to note that Levinas associates Desire with the perfection of the Other, hence with the Infinite.

compare myself to the perfect¹⁵ – only, to drastically fail in my effort to do so. The ultimate role of the Other is to remind me of what is not-me; what is outside of me; that which I only have a vague hint of but completely lack: the Infinite. I only have the idea of the Infinite without ever being able to think about or contain it in a thought, which inevitably consolidates the essential separation between me and the Infinite. In Levinas's mindset, what is most dreadful for humanity is to be within the oblivion of the Infinite (rather than the Heideggerian Being) – which can only be evoked within my Desire for the Other. Levinas argues that we can think about, contemplate and meditate on all ideas, except for infinity; because the Infinite is the absolute Other:

The idea of infinity is the mind before it lends itself to the distinction between what it discovers by itself and what it receives from opinion. The relation with infinity cannot, to be sure, be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very *infinition* is produced precisely in this overflowing.¹⁶

The important quote above lays out several themes of Levinas's philosophy which are significantly relevant for this chapter. In the first sentence, by referring to the idea of infinity as the "mind before it lends itself to the distinction between what it discovers by itself and what it receives from opinion," Levinas alludes to the sentient, the pre-perceptive and pre-evaluative moment of experience. This exposure to infinity is an essentially pre-conscious stage in which there is no cognitive discovery or judgment; or any opinions emerging from meditative reasoning. For this reason, it is impossible to express infinity in terms of conscious experience as it cannot be articulated. In the last sentence, Levinas suggests that, as a matter of fact, infinity occurs – or is produced – in this exact moment of inarticulacy. Its overflowing overwhelms the mind or the thought that tries to think it, and it is essentially this overflowing that prompts Levinas to link it to highness and exteriority; or the Other.

However, this impossibility of representation is not to be associated with theology but with the transcendence of the Infinite. Levinas is deeply impressed by Descartes's Third Meditation not because the latter accurately proves the existence of God¹⁷ but

¹⁵ Levinas writes: "To discover the unjustified facticity of power and freedom one must not consider it as an object, nor consider the Other as an object; one must measure oneself against infinity, that is, desire him. It is necessary to have the idea of infinity, the idea of the perfect, as Descartes would say, in order to know one's own imperfection. The idea of the perfect is not an idea but desire; it is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls in question my freedom." (*TI*, 84).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷ Levinas states: "It is not the proofs of God's existence that matter to us here, but the breakup of consciousness, which is not a repression into the unconscious, but a sobering up or awakening, jolting the 'dogmatic slumber' which sleeps at the bottom of every consciousness resting on its object." (Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy" (1975) [*GP*], in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987 [*CPP*], 159).

because he evokes the existence of the Infinite as “the breakup of consciousness;” that the Beyond wakes the subject from his otherwise “dogmatic slumber.” In this respect, the experience of ethics is associated with “awakening,” which is sensed as sensibility. One awakens without solidly knowing what woke one up. Yet Levinas parts ways with Descartes and onto-theology by emphasizing that the “surplus,” the idea of the Infinite “does not come from within” as modern philosophers adopting the Socratic midwifery of truth would like to believe.¹⁸ These philosophers assert that the subject can surpass himself by creating;¹⁹ by working from what is always already embedded within him, waiting to be unconcealed; to be brought forth. It is clear to see that this mode of regarding truth is nevertheless the crystallization of the assimilative, appropriative solipsistic ego which needs nothing from exteriority.

However, Levinas is cautious about not misleading us to associate infinity with the awe or the sublime mood before God or religious mysticism; or the anxiety before death; or the sheer romanticism of the unique individual. Levinas distances himself from theology²⁰ or the revival of any sort of dogma that celebrates the idea of “fusion” or “mystical union” or (the Heideggerian) “pagan enthusiasm”²¹ as he elaborates on infinity. Even though he talks about God and God’s trace a great deal, in his philosophy God has different connotations. His notion of infinity does not correspond to conventional religions because according to him, religion essentially pertains to the realm of need rather than Desire – I will elaborate on this distinction in the following section.

Religions function to help societies cohere and celebrate societal solidarity, which is a factor that reinforces totality rather than welcoming alterity. Levinas mentions God not as the Creator but as the Infinite Other whose only guiding sign is the trace that is visible upon the face of the (human) Other.²² When Levinas states that “The Other must be closer to God than I,”²³ his reasoning seems to be that I am not Infinite, and that is the one thing I am certain of; but since the Other is otherwise than me, it must be the Other who has the closer connection to God or ethics. Levinas’s proposition continues by noting that God never appears whereas the (human) Other appears, paradoxically as the visible invisible.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity” (1957) [PII], in *CPP*, 54.

¹⁹ This is a key point to be explored in the later chapters as it alludes to the Nietzschean creative individual who aims to “create beyond oneself” (Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, “On the Way of the Creator”).

²⁰ Levinas, *TI*, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² I will elaborate on the face and the Other in my “Exteriority” section.

²³ Levinas, *PII*, 56.

So, the conclusion Levinas draws is not the existence of a dogmatic God but transcendence; beyond Being; exteriority or the Other. Levinas argues that the idea of infinity is produced in sociality²⁴ via the same's relation with the human other. He defends a subjectivity that founds itself in the relation with the Other; a subjectivity that aspires to fulfil its infinite responsibilities for the Other; because underneath this relationship lies infinity. Since it is the human other that bears the trace of exteriority, it is only by responding to her that I can relate to the Infinite. It can be suggested that what also strikes Levinas is not only the benevolence of what is out or up there – infinity – but also my own inability at containing even that thought. Presumably, the hospitality Levinas theorizes is an attempt to get a glimpse of what I desire. He builds a firm relation between subjectivity, hospitality and the idea of infinity, which can be clearly seen in his attempt to “present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated.”²⁵

Even though I cannot perceive or measure the moral authority of the Other with my cognitive powers, according to Levinas, this is not a major concern. He asserts that where moral consciousness – and hence, justice – begins is already primordial to philosophy or rational thought, and states that ethics does not rely on cognition. As a matter of fact, he notes that cognition pertains to the ego; the finite whereas infinity, as the exceptional idea, overflows ego's cognition and marks its finitude. That is why Levinas contends that “the idea of the infinite is more cognitive than cognition itself.”²⁶ In his view, ethics is primordial to the distinction between the theoretical and the practical (the “is” versus the “ought”) or description and evaluation. Consequently, he proposes that ethics is not a category among others in philosophy but actually is the first philosophy.

As the Infinite does not have a representational quality, Adriaan Peperzak suggests that with this idea Levinas also intends to refute Husserl's notion of intentionality.²⁷ Since the Infinite overwhelms cognition, the presupposed relation between the intention and the thought (or “noema” and “noesis”) fails. The Infinite reveals itself in the impossibility of the materialization of the ethical;²⁸ so the ethical responsibility is not understandable in ontological terms.²⁹ Even though ethical responsibility is non-

²⁴ Levinas, *TI*, 197.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁶ Levinas, *PII*, 56.

²⁷ Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993, 58.

²⁸ Levinas states: “Ethical resistance is the presence of infinity.” (*PII*, 55).

²⁹ Levinas writes: “The ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics. It does indeed arise from what Alphonse de Waelhens called non-philosophical

representable, this ambiguity is best realized within proximity to the Other who bears the trace of the Infinite. Owing to its non-representational nature, it can be suggested that the notion of the Infinite is at the same time the most accurate concept to relate to Levinas's idea of asymmetry. The Infinite is the unique concept which would reject any attempt for reciprocation by evincing the ethical relationship with the Other at whose core lies the idea of the essential asymmetry.³⁰

For the remaining part of this section, I will clarify Levinas's affinity with religion and religiosity which is a rather controversial issue, so I keep it brief and only emphasize the aspects relevant to Levinas's conception of subjectivity. What I aim to elucidate nevertheless is that Levinas rejects religion as it coincides with the ontological realm of need (such as ritual or prayer) but most importantly with theodicy; yet he embraces religiosity as it evokes the Good beyond Being and signifies an elevation of the human soul when the latter obeys the primordial ethical response of being for the Other. Levinas argues that divinity signifies not otherworldliness or redemption but immediacy, proximity and sociality through responsibility towards the Other.

Levinas rejects the dogmatic understanding of God and religion mainly because it promotes the notion of symmetry. An afterlife or reward as compensation for suffering still propagates the belief in symmetry; therefore suggests an order or balance between the ontological (book-keeping) account of harm versus benefit, which maintains the key egological aspect of Western philosophy. Theodicy is equivalent to symmetry which is contrary to Levinas's major provocation of the essential asymmetry between the subject and the Other. The idea of infinity secures asymmetry and thereby refutes theodicy. However, Levinas's relation with religion and God needs further clarification.

According to Hillary Putnam's interpretation, Levinas notes that whilst discovering or confronting the Infinite, rather than proving the existence of God, Descartes is having a profoundly religious experience that disrupts all his mental categories.³¹ Yet does having a religious experience necessarily mean that one devotes one's entire life to God through religious contemplation? For Levinas, not at all; he comments that there can be divinity only by means of sociality; through service to humanity where God reveals His trace. But, is not God already dead, as Nietzsche allegedly declared?

experiences, which are ethically independent." (Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998 [OTB], 120).

³⁰ I will explain this concept more elaborately in the later sections. At this point, I mainly intend to emphasize the close link between the Infinite and asymmetry.

³¹ Hillary Putnam, "Levinas and Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [2002], 42.

Levinas is far from denying the death of God – He was certainly dead when the Holocaust took place. Levinas rigorously opposes the dogmatic idea of God when believers try to justify the suffering of others by theodicy. So even when we regard Levinas as a religious thinker, we must think of him as elaborating on the religiosity of the human soul rather than practising religion.

In Levinas's thought, religion in the conventional sense does not attempt to overcome theodicy but rather functions as a mechanism to propagate it. Disguising it under another form of theodicy, religion fails to relate to the problem of evil. As it is also beyond our capacity of cognition and interpretation, evil evokes transcendence which Richard Bernstein interprets as a "malignant sublime"³² and defines theodicy as the attempt for "integrating evil into a coherent economy of good and evil."³³ In order to make our suffering bearable, we ascribe meaning to it, which can function as a selfish consolation. Although our suffering is useless, we console ourselves by justifying it. Yet an even more immoral aspect arises when we justify the suffering of others; either by the promise of compensation in the afterlife or by the belief that they deserve it or that God will hopefully do something about it. All these rationales serve as easy escape routes enabling us to shrug off responsibility for the suffering of others.

It is plausible that by emphasizing non-belief, Levinas intends to reject theodicy, for the reason that theodicy cannot respond to the horror of evil even in the remotest sense. The problem of evil cannot be resolved by any neat symmetrical solution such as the goodness of God overcoming evil; good does not beat evil because of the transcendent nature of evil which also defies one's categories for thinking. The phenomenon of evil cannot be brushed aside with such a proposition which still presupposes symmetry. Even though it is too tempting and easy to regard evil simply as the negation of good; Levinas warns us against such a possibility; signifying excess, evil refuses any possibility of synthesis.³⁴

In "Transcendence and Evil," Levinas refers to evil as "an excess in malignancy;" the "ex" of "excess" signifies that evil is beyond any category of order, logic and reason as it evokes the "non-integratability of the non-integratable;" in other words, it is transcendence "in monstrosity."³⁵ Evil is intricately related to suffering in the sense of

³² Richard J. Bernstein, "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy," in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds.) [2002], 260.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Evil" (1978) [TE], in *CPP*, 183.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

seeking me out; picking me and singling me out in my pain.³⁶ Evil can be neither rationalized through rigorous argument nor justified by intellectual reasoning. For this reason, Paul Davies suggests that rather than attempting to “refute” evil on rational grounds, we could “refuse” evil acts such as hatred and murder.³⁷ Yet this refusal is never a passive rejection but an active orientation for the ethical; a call to take action by responding to the Other without expecting reciprocity. In order to be able to do this, it is a prerequisite that we overcome the temptation of theodicy.

Davies remarks that rather than succumbing to religious consolations to explain away suffering, Levinas proposes that what is required is a philosophical critique of theodicy.³⁸ Davies’s observation is significant in terms of offering a sound response to common criticisms posed to Levinas regarding his curious affinity with religion and his frequent employment of religious terminology. Some philosophers, such as Alain Badiou³⁹ and Miguel de Beistegui, accuse Levinas of sacrificing philosophy for religion.⁴⁰ I regard this as an overstatement because that line of criticism ignores not only Levinas’s rejection of theodicy on philosophical grounds but also the fact that Levinas appropriates religion based on his own interpretation – for example, he argues that even when praying, one prays without making demands; one prays never for one’s own needs, but for the salvation of the Other(s).⁴¹

In Levinas’s thought, far from being counter-intuitive to reason or contradictory to rigorous argument, religiosity provides the essential categories required to study or exercise rationality,⁴² which is evident in his reference to monotheism as the “eternal anteriority of wisdom with respect to science or history.”⁴³ Theophany (the visual manifestation of God to human beings) occurs when we recognize the prescriptive

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁷ Paul Davies, “Sincerity and the End of Theodicy: Three Remarks on Levinas and Kant,” in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds.) [2002], 177.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁹ As a harsh critic of Levinas, Alain Badiou disparages Levinas for having no philosophy. According to him, what Levinas proposes as ethics cannot even serve theology. (Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verso, 2001, 22-23). Yet a detailed account of Badiou’s criticism is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁰ Miguel de Beistegui presented the idea that Levinas is sacrificing philosophy for religion in a paper delivered at *Speaking the Phenomenon: A Graduate Conference in Phenomenology*, held at University of Sussex (24-25 May 2012).

⁴¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989 [LR], 233.

⁴² Putnam, 52.

⁴³ Levinas, LR, 257.

rather than descriptive value of the Good.⁴⁴ There is no punishment if we do not dignify our souls through obedience; but it nonetheless signifies a break with the Good.⁴⁵

Even though Levinas's position on religion is somewhat clear, his relation to Judaism remains contentious and ambiguous. To conclude, for the sake of giving as complete an account of Levinas as possible, I would like very briefly to touch on the issue of Judaism in his thought, which raises a considerable amount of controversy surrounding his philosophy. Although Levinas mainly elaborates on these ideas in his non-philosophical writings, it is impossible to ignore the compelling continuity between his philosophical themes and his interpretation of Judaism, which will also enable us to understand his perspective more clearly.

Levinas is undeniably affected by Judaism. Throughout his philosophy, he employs themes of religion and Judaism⁴⁶ in a very selective and idiosyncratic manner; so much that Putnam suggests that to a conservative Jew, he may even appear as an atheist.⁴⁷ Yet Levinas's idiosyncrasy does not stop him from universalizing the particularity of Judaism. Most strikingly, there is an obvious continuity between Levinas's subject of substitution and the Judaist conception of the Jewish identity as the one who is more

⁴⁴ Levinas writes: "The horror of the evil that aims at me becomes horror over the evil in the other man. Here is a breakthrough of the Good which is not a simple inversion of Evil, but an elevation. This Good does not please, but commands and prescribes." (*TE*, 185).

⁴⁵ The absence of punishment is also implied when Levinas describes interiority and emphasizes that there is no internal contradiction if one chooses that mode of existence for a lifetime; denying responsibilities for the Other (*TI*, 173). And, interiority does not mean avoiding human interaction like a hermit; one may be very social and have lots of friends or acquaintances but remain entirely ego-centric and narcissistic throughout her relationships with others.

⁴⁶ Here are some examples of how Levinas universalizes Judaism through an employment of Jewish themes: Putnam observes that Levinas gives the Other a godlike quality. The traditional Jew finds his dignity by following the ethical command; the ethical obligation is associated with being commanded to say *hineni*, which Putnam translates as "me voici;" "here I am, at your disposal" (39). Abraham offers himself to God by saying *hineni* (38). Infinite responsibility is another theme: Levinas emphasizes the ancient Jewish principle *kol Israel 'arevim zeh lazeh'* which can be translated as "every Israelite is responsible for every other;" which is quite similar to the Levinasian assertion that every human being is responsible for every other (43); this claim is at the same time the essential foundation of Levinas's conception of subjectivity. In addition to Putnam's contributions, I think even the theme of the third party may be inspired by Judaism: the religiosity of the soul can be experienced by divinity, which is possible by relation to the human other. Levinas writes: "The direct encounter with God, *this* is a Christian concept. As Jews, we are always a threesome: I and you and the Third who is in our midst. And only as a Third does He reveal Himself." (*LR*, 247).

⁴⁷ Putnam, 53. Putnam remarks that Rabbinic Judaism underwent a significant amount of changes and revisions. In addition, since Judaism is a very rich source, Putnam comments that Jews were often referred to as a community of interpreters (46). Moreover, unlike a conventional Jew, Levinas did not emphasize the importance of rituals as much as he emphasized the significance of "study and mitzvot" – which can be translated as commandments (51).

responsible than everyone, which is symbolized as “a stiff neck that supports the universe.” Interpreting Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner in agreement, Levinas writes:

... he (Volozhiner) wrote that a Jew is accountable and responsible for the whole edifice of creation. There is something that binds and commits (*engage*) man still more than the salvation of his soul. The act, word and thought of a Jew have the formidable privilege of being able to destroy and restore whole worlds. Far from being a serene self-presence, therefore, Jewish identity is rather the patience, fatigue and numbness of a responsibility – a stiff neck that supports the universe.⁴⁸

Levinas explicitly asserts that Judaism is not a religion among others, and Jews are not the people of a specific race sharing a definite history or geography. He endows it with “anachronism;” attributing to it a value of timelessness; signifying eternity. He associates the obligations of a Jew with “uncomfortable privileges”⁴⁹ towards humanity. Even though Levinas is well aware of the possibility that he may appear as a pro-assimilation nationalist, he dismissively rejects this criticism by emphasizing that the message of Judaism is open to all, and rhetorically asks: which singularity after all, has the capacity to move beyond universality while at the same time incorporating the irrefutable core values of the West and even going beyond it?⁵⁰

All in all, Levinas argues that it is the responsibility of the Jew to contribute further to the universalization of Judaism by translating its essential values into Greek.⁵¹ I will leave this debate here, and return to the issue of Levinas’s universalization of Judaism in a more critical manner in the final chapter. Hopefully, having clarified Levinas’s puzzling relation to religion for the moment, it is time to get back to his phenomenological account of subjectivity, which begins with the unique experience of interiority, to be discussed in the next section.

b) Interiority

Truth is sought in the other, but by (her/) him who lacks nothing... The separated being is satisfied, autonomous, and nonetheless searches after the other with a search that is not incited by the lack proper to need nor by the memory of a lost good.⁵²

In Levinas’s philosophy, the prerequisite of the ethical relationship with the Other is the ego as the subject of enjoyment which pertains to what Levinas refers to as “interiority,”

⁴⁸ Levinas, *LR*, 264.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ In Levinas’s regard, Greek is the language of philosophy and of Europe which is the sole guide of humanity. As if another physician-philosopher, Levinas seems to determine the health of societies based on whether they are on the ascending or descending line of ethical legitimacy; whether their values are generous and universal – addressing the whole of humanity – or mere “local colour” (*ibid.*, 265).

⁵² Levinas, *TI*, 62.

and calls the section devoted to explain it in *Totality and Infinity* as “economy.”⁵³ As a complicated concept, at first, interiority evokes an amoral mode of human existence; a happy self-dependence that appears at odds with Levinas’s overall philosophy.

However, it must be noted that Levinas never portrays interiority as a pure state which is temporally or spatially prior to exteriority. Rather, there is not a clean-cut separation between the two modes because the Levinasian subject is always already obsessed with the Other.

In spite of its egoistic associations, interiority constitutes the possibility of an ethical life because only a being who is aware of interiority can realize the significance of making the ethical choice of responding to the Other. So, Levinas’s emphasis on interiority is a starting point for ethical subjectivity because only a subject that enjoys life can suffer; can sacrifice its comfort for the Other; and thereby gain ethical meaning – or, in a similar pattern, only a being that dwells can offer its home to receive the Other. At some level, interiority can be regarded primarily as an ethical preparation to express hospitality to the Other, which is visible in Levinas’s words “no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home.”⁵⁴

In addition, Levinas’s notion of enjoyment has philosophically crucial implications in terms of suggesting a fundamentally non-instrumental account of being-in-the-world. He argues that rather than based on empirical evaluation or practicality, our way of being-in-the-world is thoroughly sensible and primordially corporeal. In this respect, Levinas’s account of our corporeal experience of life appears to undermine both (the Husserlian conception of) intentionality and the Heideggerian instrumental notion of being-in-the-world. In its “service” to the Other, the self necessarily needs to remain as an “individual” which conceptually signifies hedonism and selfishness. The subject, prior to finding itself in a net of relations and dealings with the world or using tools to attain its ends, “enjoys” itself. Through work, labour, eating, sleeping, feeling the wind and the sun on the skin, and so on, one enjoys the world, anterior to functioning in the practical everyday relations. So, one’s mode of existence in the world is not necessarily instrumental, but primordially sensible.

However, an important point is that Levinas does not dismiss our everyday dealings with the world as mundane and trivial. Rather, the fulfilment of personal needs like eating and sleeping reveals one’s sentient relation with life, as one’s “sincere

⁵³ Peperzak notes that the term etymologically is derived from the ancient Greek *oikos*, which means “house” and *nomos*; which means “law” (120-1). Thus the term economy refers to “home laws.”

⁵⁴ Levinas, *TI*, 172.

intentions.”⁵⁵ Far from enslaving me, my corporeal needs satisfy me and make me happy within a happy dependence. The particularity of my enjoyment is called “the ipseity of the I,”⁵⁶ which designates the privation of the particularity of joy; suffering; need; lack or satisfaction. In Levinas’s philosophy, signifying the separation between the same and the Other, the ipseity of the “I” points to the fact that no one but I can enjoy my pleasure or undergo my pain; nobody can replace or substitute for me.⁵⁷ By claiming that “subjectivity originates in the independence and sovereignty of enjoyment,”⁵⁸ Levinas emphasizes the non-transferable nature of subjectivity in terms of the ipseity.

Levinas labels our way of being in the world as “living from,” which illustrates that our relation to life is not theoretical or intentional. Rather, by bringing up concepts such as enjoyment, elemental and sensibility, Levinas attempts to show that our way of being in the world is prior to reason; beyond instinct; and sensibility evokes the pure naivety of the “unreflected I.”⁵⁹ The term “living from” points to both dependence and independence simultaneously. The dependence on the world – such as of the joy of breathing, pain of walking, looking, working, sleeping and so on – at the same time evinces a sense of self-sufficiency; as if detached from sociality. Levinas gives the lucid example of nourishment to illustrate our dependence on the world as we assimilate our environment into our self-same:

Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me. All enjoyment is in this sense alimentation.⁶⁰

What I live from; what I enjoy, at the same time constitutes me. As the passage above states, physically and physiologically I depend on the other – be it the oxygen, food, the flesh of an animal or a plant. The things I consume from the world make me strong, indulgent and happy, which is an egocentric, hedonistic yet nevertheless innocent state. That is why Levinas writes that “life is *love of life*,”⁶¹ and that “enjoyment is not a

⁵⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press, 1978 [EE], 35.

⁵⁶ Levinas, *TI*, 115.

⁵⁷ I will explain the concept of ipseity in the “Substitution” section in more detail, in relation to the theme of persecution and my infinite responsibilities which single me out; no else can fulfil my responsibilities but me – as my responsibilities cannot be transferred to anyone else.

⁵⁸ Levinas, *TI*, 114.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

psychological state among others, the affective tonality of empiricist psychology, but the very pulsation of the I.”⁶²

It becomes clear with this statement that what Levinas means by “enjoyment” is a much more comprehensive notion than “having a pleasant experience of any sort” but actually, *the way of relating to life; the mode of human existence in the world.*

Enjoyment cannot literally be reduced to “having fun” but actually emphasizes the receptivity of our sentient capacities in diverse ways. Also, it is important to note that the pulsation of the I cannot be limited only to pleasant experiences but includes bitter memories, pain, suffering, nausea, shame or such unpleasant experiences as well. Even the gratification of any need always presupposes the pain pertaining to the need.

But how do we enjoy things? Levinas argues that our enjoyment of things does not follow a representational second order. Levinas claims: “In enjoyment the things are not absorbed in the technical finality that organizes them into a system. They take form within a medium (*milieu*) in which we can take hold of them.”⁶³ Yet it is important to see the difference between these two sentences. Could we say that Levinas is still refuting Heidegger’s equipmentality while proposing that things take form as a medium in which we operate?

Arguably what distinguishes Levinas’s approach from Heidegger’s is the former’s rejection of the mechanical associations the latter’s system would suggest. Heidegger’s *Dasein* always operates within a “totality of equipment;” already oriented towards projections and task-fulfilments, the *Dasein* acts in accordance with an “in-order-to;” consequently, its relation to the world is predominantly in terms of service, manipulation, conduction and use.⁶⁴ The Levinasian subject, on the other hand, is a primordially sentient creature that feels hunger,⁶⁵ cold, pleasure, pain, trauma and so on. Her most defining trait is the capacity for enjoyment and suffering, which also signifies her capacity for ethics. Another notable difference between the two modes of being is that Levinas’s subject is not so much “in control” of situations as Heidegger’s *Dasein* seems to be. The former “bathes in”⁶⁶ the elements whereas the latter possesses tools and gains its factual significance out of the system in which it operates. Levinas states: “Every relation or possession is situated within the non-possessable which envelopes or contains without being able to be contained or

⁶² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, 68.

⁶⁵ Levinas states that Heidegger’s *Dasein* is never hungry. (*TI*, 134).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

enveloped.”⁶⁷ Levinas calls it the elemental - which refers to water, space, the wind, the street, soil; the field; the sea; the sky and so on.⁶⁸

The elemental is formless, anonymous and intermediary; that is why it cannot be possessed or represented. Since Levinas identifies intelligibility as reason’s ambition to erase the exteriority, objectification would mean the elimination of the separation between the same and the Other. Yet, in spite of the separation, I am always already constantly immersed in it; surrounded by it; “bathed” in it. Levinas describes enjoyment in a vivid and zestful intensity by noting how “things revert to their elemental qualities,”⁶⁹ and elaborates on our experience of sensible qualities which we do not “know” but “live” – such as the green of the grass or the taste of wine. Far from being a matter of representation, the moment of enjoyment⁷⁰ is even prior to conscious articulation.

An important aspect of Levinas’s notion of the elemental is its allusion to the transitory stage between absolute otherness and non-absolute otherness. Peperzak indicates that the elemental pertains to the relative, integratable otherness⁷¹ as the elements are too formless and indeterminate to be possessed or integrated into any sort of “knowledge.”⁷² Since we “bathe” in the elements, they are neither interior nor exterior.⁷³ For this reason, Peperzak argues that through his emphasis on sensibility, Levinas suggests undoing the body and spirit duality.⁷⁴ Levinas’s emphasis on the elemental and enjoyment aims to refute the traditional notion of the individual as either a socio-political subject or a biological (naturalistic) member of a specific genus. Rather, Levinas offers a genuinely phenomenological account of being human and relating to one’s (human) environment.

However, this virtually blissful and joyful mode of existence is not the full account of Levinas’s conception of interiority. Presumably, because of the way Levinas structures

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁶⁸ Staehler remarks that Levinas does not necessarily refer to the elemental in terms of the four elements – air, water, earth and fire – but rather as the wind, the street one walks on, the coffee shop one sits at, the rain and so on (Staehler, 47). The important difference is that this way Levinas provides a genuinely phenomenological account of the human experience. I do not regard a glass of water as a means to hydrate my body with H₂O but I feel the sense of the glass, taste the flavour of the water and so on.

⁶⁹ Levinas, *TI.*, 134.

⁷⁰ By this, Levinas intends to clarify that “sensibility is of the order of enjoyment and not of the order of experience. Sensibility thus understood is not to be confused with still vacillating forms of ‘consciousness of.’” (*ibid.*, 136-137).

⁷¹ Peperzak, 151.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Totality and Infinity by starting with interiority, to be followed by exteriority (I follow the same pattern in this chapter as well), one can easily misconstrue and assume that subjectivity emerges out of a joyous mode of self-sufficiency and later on becomes disturbed when the Other arrives at the subject's door to ruin its peaceful state. Rather, the subject is always already obsessed with the Other and is responsible for the Other even before it can recognize in itself a right to choose. That is why it is important not to read any temporal dimension into the emergence of the Other. Moreover, the ego already knows that its harmonious tranquillity can never be secured as the Other can disrupt this state at any time.

Partly because the ego is not self-begotten but is always already obsessed with the Other, even in solitude; and partly because the Other does not emerge "after" the ego establishes its self-sustained habitat – but can knock at its door at any moment –, interiority is never a pure state. Levinas argues that it is the Other who introduces temporality into the ego's world by questioning its being and suspending its spontaneity. However, as this experience of temporality is not linear, while causing restlessness on the one side, on the other side it makes ethics possible.

Since we can distinguish interiority from exteriority not based on temporality but on ethics, perhaps the clearest way to understand the separation is to recall the myth of the ring of Gyges.⁷⁵ Levinas states that "Gyges's ring symbolizes separation,"⁷⁶ and argues that the myth of Gyges exemplifies the human condition concerning the attitude towards interiority versus exteriority. It alludes to the possibility of shutting oneself off from the responsibilities for the Other or to become visible; that is, exposed and vulnerable and ready to suffer if necessary, in service to the Other. One can choose to be visible and take responsibility; or cheat and be invisible and deny responsibility which is always already there, requesting one's attention at a sentient, pre-rational level; before one cognitively formulates a response. But how one uses one's reasoning and eventually respond, by way of either shutting oneself in privacy or making oneself

⁷⁵ According to Plato's account of the myth in his "Republic," Gyges was a shepherd in Lydia who found a ring one day when an earthquake made the soil crack wide open. Gyges soon discovered that the ring had the power to make the one wearing it become invisible when turned inwards, and visible when turned outwards. Taking advantage of this situation, Gyges abused the power of the ring to kill the king of Lydia and marry the queen. The myth conveys that people would not abstain from evil deeds if they knew that they would not suffer from the consequent punishments. (Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, London: Penguin Books, 1955, Book II, 359a-360d).

⁷⁶ Levinas, *TI*, 173.

available for attending to the Other, is up to the individual.⁷⁷ Such is the distinction between interiority and exteriority.

According to Levinas, what makes injustice so powerful is the fact that interiority does not have any apparent “internal contradiction” to convince us to leave that state.⁷⁸ The myth is so compelling because the condition is so familiar: why should I care about the Other if I could just “get by” with anything? Levinas points out that what makes separation so radical is the fact that it can be done without any “internal contradiction” or conflict. However, when we read Levinas closely, we observe that in spite of the seeming absence of internal contradictions, what prompts me to leave interiority and be visible to the Other is not even the call of conscience but something much more primordial – it seems that even “conscience” comes too late as an outcome of rational contemplation. It is evoked that there might be some disguised internal contradiction about remaining in the interior mode as a choice.

It can be suggested that the internal contradiction pertaining to the realm of interiority is the factor of Desire which is always already in me whether I acknowledge it (by the transition into the exterior) or deny it. Relating to the realm of need, the elemental mediates enjoyment and thereby satisfies my needs such as food, music, religion, prayer, philosophy, love making and so on. Yet since the elemental realm is devoid of genuine alterity, it cannot enable transcendence; in other words it can fulfil my needs but never satisfy my Desire. Levinas argues that the structure of the Infinite is not cognition or contemplation but Desire, which is eventually Desire for Goodness that cannot be compared with any sort of need or hunger. Desire is moral consciousness; pointing at a realm beyond the economy of needs, Desire evokes transcendence by pertaining to the exterior, to the Other.

Surpassing my capacity of understanding, transcendence relates me to the Infinite and makes the ethical relationship possible by exposing my essential passivity before the Other which evinces the fact that I am not nor have ever been in a position to choose my responsibilities for the Other. This passivity can be associated with a certain mode of suffering which is humanizing in essence by promoting peace and justice. As a non-violent way of suffering, it elevates humanity – as opposed to violence which is basically a loss of human dignity.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ This is an interesting topic which be considered in the following chapter in relation to Nietzsche; particularly regarding his theme of *amor fati*.

⁷⁸ Levinas, *TI*, 173.

⁷⁹ Levinas explains the non-violence invoked upon the face of the Other (*ibid.*, 203). This is a topic I will explore further in the following section.

To conclude this section, I will touch on one last aspect of suffering in relation to interiority. Apart from the uneasiness of the Other's potential interruption into my peaceful world and the absence of Desire and ethics, there is also the fact that within my private world I am deprived of sociality. This is suggested by Rudi Visker who conveys that the etymological meaning of the word "private" comes from the Latin root *privare*, which means "to rob," "to withhold," similar to the word "deprivation." What is notable about deprivation is that there is something lacking; which was supposed to be there; and its absence is thus a defect.⁸⁰

So, it can be inferred that Levinas's notion of the private realm still evokes a feeling of deprivation, that of "sociality." Visker implies that in a Levinasian sense, privacy could point to "a shortcoming or failure to be responsible"⁸¹ and explains that since responsibility is a natural component of being human – similar to birds having wings and fish breathing in water –, such a shortcoming is also visible in privacy. Even though any sort of robbery is unacceptable, privacy is romanticized. But it is this tension that Levinas hints at, as he associates the essential egoism with the hypocrisy and indecency of playing with the ring of Gyges. One can talk but not signify, look at the Other's face but only notice the eye colour. Worst of all, one cannot even be aware of this utter contradiction if one is not challenged by the face of the Other.

However, the lack of internal contradiction continues to be an ambiguous issue as it suggests a crack in the separation between need and Desire. Even though Levinas argues otherwise, it is never too certain whether the orientation towards the Other is only Desire. Or, can my Desire for the Other – which is not solely the erotic relationship but any form of basic sociality with any human other – constitute some part of my cluster of needs as well?⁸²

If I am always already obsessed with the Other even before gaining my "self consciousness," then it looks plausible that Desire is always already embedded in me before I even know it. And if it is part of me, then it can be regarded as pertaining to my realm of needs as well – at the very least, let alone family, friendship or erotic relationships; as a human being, I will always feel the need of the primary sociality with the Other. However, it is crucial to note that Desire cannot be regarded as any other need which can be fulfilled within the existential structure of interiority.

⁸⁰ Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger*, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2008, 143-144.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸² This idea is also noted by Jean-Michel Longneaux, "Nietzsche and Levinas: the Impossible Relation," in Bettina Bergo and Jill Stauffer (eds.), *Nietzsche and Levinas: "After the Death of a Certain God"*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 66.

Perhaps we could regard Desire as analogous to the idea of the Infinite according to which Desire is put in me; but unlike my needs which I can satisfy without reference to exteriority, Desire always prompts me to venture out by responding to the Other. The bare fact that Desire has been put in me does not convey that it can be assimilated into my bundle of needs, like any other need. Desire challenges and overflows all my other needs. For this reason, noting the ambiguity concerning the separation between need and Desire does not refute Levinas's basic argument that Desire is exteriority and that interiority mainly refers to the gratification of self-interests.

c) Exteriority: the Face of the Other and the Third Party

A calling into question of the same – which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same – is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.⁸³

Levinas intimates that it is only via the Other, whose reference point is exteriority, that my freedom can be called in question, where the justification of my being is put in suspension. This rupture I experience within my self is consolidated by language which is prompted by the face of the Other signifying an interruption rather than continuity. This section intends to illuminate these core ideas Levinas develops in *Totality and Infinity*. While unpacking these thoughts, I also explain the nature of conversation as “apology” and the essence of the face as peace.

Levinas argues that ethics is experienced in the sensibility of exposedness and vulnerability before the Other. I am not only called into question but corporeally exposed to the Other; which prompts me to respond to the Other. This mode of bodily exposure emphasizes the fact that ethics is a matter of performance and experience rather than a list of theoretical statements or cultivation of personal values. Levinas claims that ethics begins primordially at the dyadic relationship I have to the Other. The face to face encounter makes me aware of my spontaneity by judging it and making me feel embarrassed and ashamed, which can only be ethically justified by being for the Other.

However, the phenomenon of the “face to face” is not to be taken literally; although it could include a physical concrete confrontation with another person, it cannot be reduced to only that situation. Levinas writes that “face to face” does not mean “along side of;”⁸⁴ the latter signifies union and fusion whereas the former points to the

⁸³ Levinas, *TI*, 43.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

essential separation. Yet even if the phrase suggests confrontation, it does not mean mutual resistance but emphasizes the primordial separation and the insurmountable distance, which is nevertheless a distance in proximity:

The relationship with the Other does not move (as does cognition) into enjoyment and possession, into freedom; the Other imposes himself as an exigency that dominates this freedom, and hence as more primordial than everything that takes place in me. The Other, whose exceptional presence is inscribed in the ethical impossibility of killing him in which I stand, marks the end of powers. If I can no longer have power over him it is because he overflows absolutely every *idea* I can have of him.⁸⁵

Similar to the case of the Infinite, the face also resists my powers to comprehend or contain it in my finite thought. Just like the Infinite overflowing my rationality, the face overwhelms and overpowers me in the ethical sense. It is the site where the idea of infinity reveals itself, which Levinas states in his words as “the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face.”⁸⁶ The Other has infinite authority which is manifest in the “ethical resistance” revealed upon the face making it impossible for me to kill the Other. As the face commands me “Do not kill me,” it points to the difference between “authority” and “force.” Levinas distinguishes between authority and force by noting that the former refers to the primordial moral command that is beyond rationality – and which is itself, without force - whereas the latter indicates the mere naturalistic “effort to exist.”⁸⁷

The face changes my power (to kill) into powerlessness⁸⁸ and turns it into passivity before the Other. Of course I can always physically murder the Other, but I can never annihilate the moral authority, the ethical imposition the Other has upon me. Moreover, the more vulnerable the Other is, the greater is the ethical resistance.⁸⁹ That is why it is impossible to murder the Other. The irony related to this impossibility becomes even more obvious when we consider the fragility and vulnerability of the human face or skin and the ease of killing a person – especially with today’s weapon technology.

However it is crucial to note that ethical resistance does not imply dialectical opposition. Even when the face says “Do not kill me!” it does not mean to oppose me. The Other is not rejecting me or confronting me; nor does she expect me to deny

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 1988 [PM], 175.

⁸⁸ Levinas, *TI*, 199.

⁸⁹ So I have force, but not authority; my force can be measured or calculated but the Other’s authority is outside of the realm of measurements, as it is outside of my system. This is an important distinction that a Nietzschean perspective would overlook and could possibly confuse the Levinasian notion of responsibility with moral pride.

myself for her sake because my relation to her is not a matter of oppositional confrontation but of proximity. Being-for-the-Other does not mean self-denial but realizing one's capacity for generosity. As a matter of fact, if I deny myself or consume my own being, then I would end up having nothing to offer to the Other.⁹⁰ Thus the resistance implied upon the face does not signify violence but ethics, which is always a positive structure.⁹¹

From Levinas's perspective, what makes killing a person ethically impossible is related to the idea of associating murder with power and ontology. As mentioned above, Levinas thinks that ontology, being predominantly a philosophy of power, has the urge to reduce everything to the self-same and consider any difference or anything unforeseeable as an opposition that requires immediate oppression. Ontology operates through taking possession which, to repeat, is based on negating its independence and evoking murder. That is how Levinas associates the essence of power with murder.⁹² The Other can be killed technically, or labelled as an enemy, for instance. But at the ethical level, the otherness of the Other can never be annihilated, because the physical power I have over the Other at the moment of killing her cannot be compared to the ethical power she exerts over me through her elusive alterity.

Levinas's emphasis on the face-to-face encounter with the Other is significant in terms of turning the relationship with the Other into a concrete immediate experience. First of all, by the term "face," what Levinas refers to is beyond the plastic oval shape; for instance even the side of the shoulder seen from behind – or any part of human body – could count as face.⁹³ The face judges me⁹⁴ as it is the phenomenon through which I realize the impossibility of denying the presence of the Other and acknowledging the immediacy of my responsibilities for the Other. As the epiphany of the face reveals infinity, Levinas associates face with language by stating that: "The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse."⁹⁵ In Levinas's view, language does not imply a consolidation of logic or a unity of rationality but rather it is the realm in which absolute alterity is realized. And since language is essentially employed for the Other

⁹⁰ Silvia Benso writes: "The other does not deny the I, does not alienate it; the other keeps the I awake as a one-for-the-other, as an exposure, as a Me capable of the excesses of generosity" ("Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?" in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 227). So, Benso's statement clarifies that negation resides neither on my side towards the Other nor on the Other's side, towards me.

⁹¹ Levinas, *TI*, 197.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985 [EI], 97.

⁹⁴ Levinas, *TI*, 215.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

and to be practised with the Other, it denotes exteriority. Thus in its core, language signifies a disruption of the same by the Other.⁹⁶

The face is a linguistic phenomenon before being a visual phenomenon of perception as it says “Do not kill me;” conveying that language is an ethical signification prior to being a neutral sign system for communication. The emergence of language consists in my laying my world out and offering it to the Other. Via language, my world is at the disposal of the human other; so it is a matter of ethical sincerity. Levinas emphasizes that speaking is essentially one’s attempt to present oneself by signifying which cannot be reduced to its discursive content, but rather reveals the presence of exteriority. In this respect, discourse is not about exchanging ideas but getting into a relationship with the originally exterior being, and meaning is determined by the immediacy of what is said and taught by presence.

In Levinas’s philosophy, language is grounded upon conversation, whose essence is “apology.” At a Platonic level apology denotes “defence” (as in Socrates’s *Apology*, which is not apologetic as we conventionally understand it), and at a commonsensical level it means to accept our mistake and claim responsibility for our deed, often accompanied with a feeling of inhibition and humiliation. Yet the Levinasian conception of apology embodies not only these meanings but also the sense that I was responsible for the Other even before I did anything wrong or committed any offence.

Staehler offers an interpretation of Levinas’s notion of apology in which she regards his position as analogous to a myth mentioned in Plato’s *Gorgias* which is about ensuring justice without the possibility of deceit. The myth depicts judgment in the other world where human beings are stripped bare of their flesh so that they can be judged purely as souls. This is done in order to dismiss prejudice based on the beauty or ugliness of their bodies; devoid of skins, the naked souls can be judged without any chance of deception.⁹⁷

The notion of nudity is important for understanding the nature of apology. Even when one literally apologizes, she always feels shame and self-consciousness which is phenomenologically very similar to being stripped bare. While it requires a lot of courage to apologize, at the same time it is an extreme form of sincerity; because accompanied with the actual words said, there is always an underlying sense which is

⁹⁶ Levinas writes “Language accomplishes a relation between terms that breaks up the unity of a genus... Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history.” (*ibid.*, 195).

⁹⁷ Staehler, 103-104.

unuttered but intimates that “I hereby give an account of myself and I am at your disposal.” It implies that I recognize the Other as my master since it is the Other to whom I offer my apology.

Levinas regards conversation as a relationship where the parties do not form a totality in which the same leaves itself and proceeds from the “I” to the Other.⁹⁸ Instead, what is intrinsic to language is the possibility to “recognize in the Other a *right* over my egoism.”⁹⁹ For Levinas, this is how I can justify myself, and it is this way that “apology belongs to the essence of conversation.”¹⁰⁰ Language does not emanate from my consciousness manifesting my reason but functions by putting me in question.¹⁰¹ Even though the idea of the Other judging me and calling my spontaneity in question sounds intimidating and alienating, Levinas suggests that this judgment does not aim to alienate but, to the contrary, deepens my subjectivity as he argues that “the call to infinite responsibility confirms the subjectivity in its apologetic position.”¹⁰² So, apology is the moment of the subject being singled out in its singularity.¹⁰³

Giving an account of myself enables me to justify my existence; far from belittling me, apology consolidates and confirms me in my subjectivity because it is only me who can apologize and thereby justify myself before the Other. So, in the Levinasian sense, apology is a non-violent mode of humility as it is offered to the Other whose face signifies peace and whose discourse signifies teaching. In this respect, my apology is a precondition for speech and a willingness to learn from the Other. The Other’s face marks the beginning of language by “speaking” not by words or symbols but by merely addressing me. The face also “teaches;”¹⁰⁴ we learn from the Other what we cannot learn by ourselves; which is mainly our responsibilities and our realization of our will to transascendence.

It is also important to note that the face-to-face relationship does not have a dialectical nature even when Levinas explicitly calls the Other my master. We cannot consider this case in terms of a cliché master-slave relationship, which in Levinas’s thought, does not even qualify as a relationship because such a situation arises from an always

⁹⁸ Levinas, *TI*, 39.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁰³ However, apology does not refer to the subject’s humility or the unquestioned obedience to the whimsical caprices of the Other; the Other is not a master in this sense. Levinas clearly dissociates being-for-the-Other from servitude in *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, Jill Robbins (ed.), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001 [*IIR*], 229.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, *TI*, 98.

already established totality. This presupposed dialectical encounter is entirely indifferent to the essential separation between the same and the Other, which protects the alterity of the Other. The master and the slave only play roles without the possibility of a relationship in between. It is only through the relationship that the same and the Other come into each other's presence; so Levinas regards a relationship as the "not disinterestedness" between the same and the Other. Even if one can consciously or purposely ignore the Other, she can never be disinterested in the Other's existence.

Also, it must be noted that far from servitude, in Levinas's conception, in order to obey the Other, I must be a master myself; when the Other commands me, s/he commands me to command; the Other's command is primordially "a command that commands commanding."¹⁰⁵ Thus, when saying that "the Other is my master," rather than implying a dialectical relationship, Levinas emphasizes the moral height the Other evokes in me. Yet when Levinas discloses the Other as my master, he does not indicate that I am necessarily the weaker party. Rather, he suggests that it is the Other who is necessarily in the vulnerable position. When referring to the Other, Levinas states that: "He is so weak that he demands."¹⁰⁶ In *Otherwise Than Being*, he frequently refers to the Other as "the orphan," "the widow," "the refugee." That is why I can always have something to offer to the Other. Yet I do not do it out of the fear of punishment in the after-world; nor with a forced and pretentious altruism but out of my potential benevolence which I realize only through my encounter with the Other. The face that commands me teaches me by expanding my capacity for Goodness, and it expresses itself by imposing itself not in a violent way but by emphasizing its destitution. Since I cannot turn a blind eye to the Other's hunger and needs, the Other "promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness."¹⁰⁷ Rather than violating my freedom, the Other bestows meaning on it by founding my responsibilities.¹⁰⁸

It is Levinas's contention that truth comes from the experience of the exterior. The absolutely Other is beyond the physical and thereby "metaphysical," as inspired by Plato. In Peperzak's interpretation of Levinas, "the true is not only *other* than she/he who has an experience of it and *exterior* to the nature wherein the human subject has settled but is also *more* than exterior, it is 'over there' (*la-bas*) and 'up there.'"¹⁰⁹ As noted above in relation to transascendence, Levinas associates alterity with an

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *PM*, 170.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas, *TI*, 200.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁰⁹ Peperzak, 42.

ascription of “highness.” Whatever the absolutely Other is; whenever it comes to surprise and shake me, it always comes from a height¹¹⁰ and takes me over to the point of seizure, which can be regarded as an enlightened enslavement:

There is no enslavement more complete than this seizure by the good, this election. But the enslaving character of responsibility that overflows choice — of obedience prior to the presentation or representation of the commandment that obliges to responsibility — is cancelled by the bounty of the Good that commands... to be dominated by the Good is precisely to exclude for oneself the very possibility of choice, of coexistence in the present.¹¹¹

As this provocative passage conveys, Levinas argues that to be seized and commanded by the Good is the most dignifying privilege which can be obtained only by the proximity to the Other. Since this seizure of the Good is overwhelmingly transcendental, its enslaving character cannot be a genuine worry. Even though my primordial responsibilities overflow my ontological freedom, to be elected, commanded by the Good is incomparably more profound.

Even if it sounds paradoxical when regarded from the ontological plane, Levinas suggests that there is a closely knitted relationship between the Other and my freedom which is always already embedded within my relation to exteriority, through the event of separation. The separation secures and maintains both my ipseity and the illeity¹¹² of the Other. It constitutes my subjectivity by separating me from the exteriority; without separation, I would not be able to relate to the exteriority — in other words, no separation would mean no relationship; hence no subjectivity. Separation thus grants freedom without which there would only be totality, or the narcissism of the same:

The relation with the face is produced as goodness. The exteriority of being is morality itself. Freedom, the event of separation in arbitrariness which constitutes the I, at the same time maintains the relation with the exteriority that morally resists every appropriation and every totalization in being.¹¹³

In Levinas’s account, it is misleading to associate freedom with an ontological mode of independence from the exteriority. It does not have the nature of certitude or self-assurance pertaining to the consciousness self-coinciding with itself in its closed circuit. Rather, my freedom points to my moral self-improvement by way of movement from the interiority to the exteriority; in other words, the transition from the self-righteous ego to

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Humanism and An-archy,” (1968) [HA], in *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller, Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006 [HO], 53.

¹¹² Even if the term “illeity” designates he-ness (derived from *il* in French) or the singularity of the Other, Levinas employs the term to signify a non-representational or diachronic departure from the I towards the trace of the Infinite via the neighbour or sociality (OTB, 12-13). As such, the term uniquely hints at God as the He (*Il*); evokes the third party, he (*il*) and also alludes to the Other.

¹¹³ Levinas, *TI*, 302.

the undergoing self. This self-overcoming suspends my powers by putting me forth for being judged by the Other. For this reason Levinas conveys that it is only when I am judged that I am free and vice versa – the relationship between freedom and being judged will become clearer below.

Thus I must respond to the face, and my response manifests my responsibilities. In Levinas's account responsibility is not a moral choice "added" to the human condition but rather is pre-rational and precedes any mode of reasoning, logic or theory. The fact that I am not and have never been in a position to choose my responsibilities reveals my essential passivity before the Other; because I am not only responsible for the Other but also for the others. In addition, I am simultaneously responsible for the Other's responsibilities for the others; the third party, and even their responsibilities for myself. Since my responsibilities are infinite, the third party is the essential frame of reference for securing justice for everyone, even for me.

My responsibilities await me from immemorial times; I am not only responsible to my concrete surroundings and the people physically around me at any given context but also to the people who lived before me and the people who will live after me. That is why, in Levinas's philosophy, the third party is the crucial term conveying justice as it evokes an abstract notion of humanity within sociality. As a matter of fact, what the third party represents is as ambiguous as the connotation of the Other; the third party may be the third person; the interruption of the face-to-face relationship through justice; universal reason; shared humanity; fraternity or the trace of God.

The third party is both an enigmatic and embracing theme; yet as a concept it is an indispensable constituent of Levinas's philosophy. Even while I am fulfilling my endless responsibilities for the Other, the only factor that has the moral authority to limit my services to the Other is the third party. The third party does not reside in isolation from the Other but always already dwells in the Other; it looks at me from the eyes of the Other.¹¹⁴ The Other suspends my powers and questions my spontaneity, and moreover judges me because it is at the same time the third party.

An instance clarifying Levinas's emphasis on the third party as the sign of justice reveals itself in his dubious attitude towards the erotic relationship. Levinas thinks that couplehood excludes the third party and thus leaves me devoid of that special feeling of shared humanity or fraternity which I can only feel when exposed to the Other.¹¹⁵ In

¹¹⁴ Levinas, *TI*, 213.

¹¹⁵ Of course, in the erotic relationship, my partner is also an Other, so I am obligated to be fair to my beloved in the relationship. However it is important to note that when Levinas elaborates

other words, love cannot lead to justice. Levinas also seems to be critical of the contemporary fetish of the institutionalized romantic relationship and comments that “the couple is a closed society”¹¹⁶ and trivializes it by regarding it as a “negation of society.”¹¹⁷

So, it is not the couple that exemplifies justice but the third party that signifies judgment. When I am judged, I am no longer isolated; whereas when I am loved, my being as a substance (body) is confirmed but not judged. However, far from being an undesirable situation, being judged is a liberating moment because in this condition I feel that I am not alone; I experience the privilege of the “primary sociality”¹¹⁸ which cannot be compared with anything spatio-temporal or representational (such as a courtroom). Even if it sounds paradoxical to be socialized when judged, Levinas explicitly states that “what is inhuman is to be judged without there being anyone that judges:”

For me to know my injustice, for me to catch sight of the possibility of justice, a new situation is required: someone has to call me to account. Justice does not result from the normal play of injustice. It comes from the outside, “through the door,” above the fray; it appears like a principle external to history. Even in the theories of justice which are forged in social conflicts, in which moral ideas seem to convey the needs of a society or a class, appeal is nonetheless made to an ideal conscience, an ideal justice, in which an ideal justification, and the right to elevate these quite relative needs to the status of an access to the absolute, is sought. As an expression of the objective relationships in society, these ideas must also satisfy a living consciousness which passes judgement on those objective relationships. The human world is a world in which one can judge history. It is not a necessarily rational world, but it is one where one can pass judgement. What is inhuman is to be judged without there being anyone that judges.¹¹⁹

on the face-to-face, he does not have in mind the image of a couple in love. My relationship to my beloved is complicated and ambiguous because even as I respond to him on the one side, at the same time I enjoy him by objectifying him. Erotic relationship has the dimension that pleases my interior “needs;” while serving him, I also serve myself, so this reciprocity still hosts egoism.

¹¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, “Ego and Totality” (1954) [ET], in *CPP*, 32.

¹¹⁷ Levinas writes: “To love is to exist as though the lover and the beloved were alone in the world. The intersubjective relationship of love is not the beginning, but the negation of society... Love is the ego satisfied by the you, apprehending in the other the justification of its being... The society formed by love is a dual society, a society of solitudes, excluding universality.” (*ibid.*, 31).

¹¹⁸ Levinas states: “[T]he moral justification of freedom is neither certitude nor incertitude. It does not have the status of a result, but is accomplished as movement and life; it consists in addressing an infinite exigency to one’s freedom, in having a radical non-indulgence for one’s freedom. Freedom is not justified in the consciousness of certitude, but in an infinite exigency with regard to oneself, in the overcoming of all good conscience. But this infinite exigency with regard to oneself, precisely because it puts freedom in question, places me and maintains me in a situation in which I am not alone, in which I am judged. This is the primary sociality: the personal relation is in the rigor of justice which judges me and not in love that excuses me.” (*TI*, 304).

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *ET*, 40.

The difference between the ontological version of justice and the Levinasian notion of justice would be that the former would make laws to secure the legal rights of each individual so that one could be civil to one another without causing harm. However, in Levinas's view, the epiphany of the face disrupts the system, and this very interruption of totality makes justice possible in the first place.¹²⁰ Levinas's notion of justice precedes the juridical justice which always already owes its existence to the face. What makes justice possible is the face of the Other which evokes non-violence and bears the trace of the Good beyond Being, and transcendence can only be introduced by the rupture of the face.

For this reason, in spite of its misleading otherworldly allusions, the notion of the "ideal" is the concrete point of reference for this world. The ideal makes the experience of justice possible and familiar – as it bears the familiarity of human fraternity – and acts as a guiding sign for judicial justice. The former makes the emergence of the latter possible. What is relieving about being judged is that when I know my wrong, I have the possibility to correct it. This is a notable Platonic moment for Levinas as it evokes the Socratic idea that what is more miserable than being a victim is being a victimizer without being punished.¹²¹ If I am punished, I have the chance to correct it whereas if my mistake goes unnoticed or excused – as happens in the case of the erotic relationship –, I do not even have the chance to improve myself.

The intervention of the Other can eventually redirect me onto the way of the Good and enable me to dignify my existence by devoting myself to sociality. All in all, it is only when I am accused and judged by the third party that I am able to breathe and escape my barren existence. I am for the Other; I am with the others; I am part of humanity. Through my obsession by the Other; through my responsibility, I maintain my kinship with humanity. So the accusative is simultaneously that which heals my isolation because "language is fraternity."¹²²

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. J. Zeyl Donald, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, 472e.

¹²² Levinas writes: "Responsibility as an obsession is proximity; like kinship, it is a bond prior to every chosen bond. Language is fraternity, and thus a responsibility for the other, and hence a responsibility for what I have not committed, for the pain and fault of others... The I, the ego are individuated completely 'from within,' without recourse to a system. But this individuation cannot be described as a pole of a consciousness identifying itself, for the oneself is precisely the big secret that has to be described. The ipseity that the reflexive pronoun *self* expresses is not reducible to an objectification of the I by itself; the return to myself involved in the reflection already implies the initial reflexion of the *oneself*. In it an endless passivity is not assumed by any activity that would double it up and welcome it or pre-exist it. In its 'accusative,' which the nominative does not precede, arises a beginning." (Emmanuel Levinas, "Language and Proximity" (1967) [*LP*], in *CPP*, 123).

Bernasconi suggests that Levinas's notion of the third party reveals the intersection between the ethical and the political. Through this argument, Bernasconi conveys that contrary to the common perception, Levinas is not only an ethical thinker because he also makes significant contributions to revising our political thought.¹²³ By intersection, Bernasconi indicates that the face-to-face evokes a correction or an ethical questioning of the socio-political order.¹²⁴ The Other interrupts the political; and the third party interrupts the Other; "the Other serves the third party and commands me to join with him or her in this service."¹²⁵ Bernasconi notes that even though separation is the precondition of the face to face relationship, it is through the third party that I am joined with the Other:¹²⁶

In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves in the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality.¹²⁷

On the one hand, we are always already with the others; there is not an instance without the third party, or the ethical without the political. This is how the third party interrupts the face to face. As mentioned above, the third party is the only factor that limits my infinite responsibilities for the Other by signifying that the world does not consist of her alone; but of others also, including even me. In *OTB*, Levinas states that the third party at the same time signifies a "Thank God!" moment; meaning that the others also embody myself; and through the third party, I am reminded that I have rights too.¹²⁸

Additionally, with the conception of the face, Levinas also wants to ensure the vice versa; that the consideration of the ethical shall not be absent from the political either. There is always an impending threat of the tyranny of the impersonal universality; the universal reason¹²⁹ which can operate in a totalizing system if the primordial relationship of the face-to-face is forgotten. Levinas seems quite aware of the tyranny of the impersonal operation of the political, disguised as the "universal," which in this

¹²³ Robert Bernasconi, "The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Vol. I, II, III, IV*, Claire Katz and Lara Trout (eds.), London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005, vol. I, 45.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Levinas, *TI*, 300.

¹²⁸ Levinas, *OTB*, 158.

¹²⁹ The inevitable association of the third party with universal reason or the third-person perspective, or the universalizing effect of the third party, is an issue open to debate in the Nietzschean perspective. I will come back to this issue, along with a detailed account of Levinas's notion of universalism as depicted analogously to the commonness of a father in monotheistic religions, in the last chapter.

case would mean not the common father of monotheism or fraternity but the inhuman condition in which “one is judged without there being anyone that judges.” So, by emphasizing the notion of fraternity, Bernasconi suggests that Levinas secures the separation yet also maintains the passage from the ethical to the political and vice versa without leading them into fusion; or reducing them to units of totality¹³⁰ because fraternity is primordial to the unity of human race or biology.

Is man man’s brother or his wolf? This question appears to haunt Levinas as he theorizes on the interrelation between the same and the Other and the third party. Do we respond to another’s call because it is our primordial orientation toward the Other; or out of our fear of punishment if we do not? Even with the best intentions, is it enough to secure the safety of our neighbour through law enforcement and sanctions; or would it make any difference if we transformed our values and political convictions bearing in mind the epiphany of the face? Levinas claims that the latter makes all the difference:

...it is very important to know whether the state, society, law, and power are required because man is a beast to his neighbour (*homo homini lupus*) or because I am responsible for my fellow. It is very important to know whether the political order defines man’s responsibility or merely restricts his bestiality. It is very important, even if the conclusion is that all of us exist for the sake of the state, the society, the law.¹³¹

The important quote above summarizes the gist of Levinas’s position on the transition between the ethical and the political according to which the state law will always be inadequate if it is not inspired by the primordial ethical responsibility before the Other. It is only owing to this inspiration or the ethical command that the law can move beyond the superficial technicality of determining harm versus damage to maintain order – the security of the citizens’ rights – at the ontological level. Of course, Levinas would not reject the significance of legal rights and their further improvement; however what is at issue is that the material improvement of the rights of the legal subjects will never be good enough to respond to the needs of the Other(s). For this reason, our inherently self-sufficient laws are doomed to moral inadequacy because they solely indicate limiting one’s cruelty towards others – which is good enough neither for the individual nor for the society. There is always more to be considered, to be done, to be sacrificed by the self-same as the ethical obligations are infinite.

In order to conclude this discussion pertaining to the intermediation between the ethical and the political, we may recall the Levinasian notion of diachrony and synchrony. In Levinas’s philosophy, diachrony refers to the primordial relationship with the Other;

¹³⁰ Bernasconi, 54.

¹³¹ Levinas, *LR*, 247-248.

which is spatio-temporally nonrepresentable as it evokes transcendence.¹³² Synchrony on the other hand, alludes to the birth of consciousness and the synchronized order; such as institutions to maintain equality among subjects; hence stability.¹³³ As opposed to diachrony, synchrony signifies representation because one is already surrounded by others from birth through constant physical interaction. The third party conveys the transition from diachrony to synchrony which implies not causality but interrelation.¹³⁴ So, what Levinas implies with the memorable quote above can also be interpreted as the conjunction between diachrony and synchrony exemplified as the third party, which ensures justice and goodness in the world, as the latter is interrupted by the former.

d) Substitution and Asymmetry as the Grounds of Subjectivity

Persecution is not something added to the subjectivity of the subject and his vulnerability; it is the very movement of recurrence. The subjectivity as *the other in the same*, as an inspiration, is the putting into question of all affirmation for-oneself, all egoism born again in this very recurrence. (This putting into question is not a preventing!) The subjectivity of a subject is responsibility of being-in-question in the form of the total exposure to offense in the cheek offered to the smiter. This responsibility is prior to dialogue, to the exchange of questions and answers, to the thematization of the said, which is superposed on my being put into question by the other in proximity, and in the saying proper to responsibility is produced as a digression.¹³⁵

Presumably the most baffling and provocative aspect of Levinas's philosophy is the theme of substitution which signifies the most drastic expression of ethical subjectivity based on asymmetry. Levinas's second and final masterpiece, *Otherwise Than Being*, is devoted to explaining this theme. Substitution is the key concept for the Levinasian ethics because owing to this notion, Levinas elaborates on his theory of subjectivity by employing concepts such as proximity and being a hostage which according to him, signify the foundations of goodness in the world; be it in grand scales such as keeping peace in the world; or in small, everyday human interactions.

Substitution crystallizes Levinas's ethics which is grounded on the essential asymmetry between the subject and the Other(s) by presupposing that the subject not only responds to the Other but also suffers for the sufferings of the Other(s). Rather than implying putting oneself in the Other's shoes, evoking empathy¹³⁶ or building sympathy,

¹³² Levinas, *OTB*, 154.

¹³³ Jill Stauffer, "The Imperfect: Levinas, Nietzsche, and the Autonomous Subjects," in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 47.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³⁵ Levinas, *OTB*, 111.

¹³⁶ To the contrary, putting oneself in the other's shoes is impossible for Levinas as it would mean the violation of the essential separation between the same and the Other, and it would reduce the alterity of the Other to the same, hence incorporate her into my system.

substitution in the Levinasian sense points to the extremity of my infinite responsibilities which extend to the limit of substituting myself for the Other's responsibilities as well. In Levinas's philosophy, the subject is singled out as being-for-the-Other, and this is the way substitution grounds the conditions of ethics.

Levinas's notion of substitution is in large part a critique of the Western philosophical tradition's concept of subjectivity as "substance;" as pure consciousness or the "sovereign identity" that coincides with itself. Levinas conveys that subjectivity as consciousness is mainly an ontological event; that is, a project of ontology to justify its always already established notion of rigid knowledge and spirituality. Throughout the Western philosophical tradition, the subject is always regarded as a consciousness that goes on an expedition, but only to be able to come back to where it started. The problem with this idea – or ideology – is that all those arrogant adventures are not genuine undertakings at all if the subject never interacts with true alterity; exteriority or the Other.¹³⁷

Likewise, while critiquing consciousness, Levinas points out that the seemingly alternative approach of the unconscious is still playing the same game of ontology, only this time, with the ambition of finding deep meanings for the search of the self.¹³⁸ For instance, Levinas criticizes psychoanalysis¹³⁹ for its inherent motive of consolidating the self as substance and crystallizing the myth of the ego. Levinas's radical claim is the existence of a far more primordial realm that is irreducible to consciousness, which he refers to as obsession, persecution, proximity to the Other; the passivity beyond passivity.¹⁴⁰ Levinas expresses these ideas vividly by stating that "the ego is in itself like a sound that would resound in its echo,"¹⁴¹ followed by another provocative claim: "the oneself cannot form itself; it is already formed with absolute passivity."¹⁴² Levinas expresses his disagreement with the notion of the subject as "substance" with the remarkable statement below:

¹³⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution" (1968) [S], in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Roberts Bernasconi, Simon Critchley and Adriaan T. Peperzak (eds.), Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press, 1996 [BPW], 80.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹³⁹ Levinas supposedly takes psychoanalysis in its initial Freudian form and disagrees with its suggestions to divide consciousness to further subcategories such as id, ego and superego based on its primary naturalistic presumptions. Yet discussing whether Levinas's rejection of psychoanalysis is justified or not is beyond the purposes of this project.

¹⁴⁰ Levinas conveys that this passivity is "beneath all passivity. It cannot be defined in terms of intentionality," and he continues by indicating that my obligation for the Other; my assignment or this "anteriority is 'older' than the a priori." (OTB, 101).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 104.

The ego is *in itself* not like the matter is in itself, which, perfectly wedded to its form, is what it is. The ego is in itself like one is in its skin, that is to say, cramped, ill at ease in one's skin... The ego is an irritability, a susceptibility, or an exposure to wounding and outrage, delineating a passivity more passive still than any passivity relating to an effect.¹⁴³

What Levinas regards as crucial about passivity in this context is that substitution is not to be associated with or “converted into” any kind of act.¹⁴⁴ Under the influence of our ontological thinking patterns, we consider passivity as the opposition of activity. However, Levinas theorizes another mode of passivity which is much more passive than the receptivity of our senses; emphasizing exposedness, susceptibility and being a “hostage,” which implies that one can escape neither from oneself, nor from one's responsibilities. Additionally, with this concept Levinas intends to refute the idea of the subject that goes on a spiritual or cognitive journey, returns and reflects back on itself, because the Levinasian self is too passive to move anywhere in the first place.

Paradoxically, the Levinasian subject is at the same time both the host and the hostage: the host in the sense that it welcomes the Other as the condition for ethics; as hospitality. Owing to the idea of the Infinite embedded within the subject, it primordially contains the Other, which is expressed by Levinas as “the-other-in-the-same,” and this situation enables it to be a creature capable of having ethical significance. On the other side, the subject is also a hostage; since as the condition for the possibility of ethics, its spontaneity is suspended, and its freedom is granted. In order to apprehend this idea better, it is crucial to revisit Levinas's notion of freedom – above, I already indicated the essential separation being its *precondition*, so now we must explore the condition of my freedom, which is the Other.

Levinas's notion of freedom is granted by the Other, which is impossible to comprehend from an ontological viewpoint as it associates freedom with a strict mode of “book-keeping;”¹⁴⁵ a calculation of one's rights against another's. Yet since Levinas's critique of the ontological conception of freedom (for merely pointing at legal rights) is in line with his criticism of totality, if we are to understand freedom we need to interrupt the “essence” where “nothing gets lost or gained.”¹⁴⁶ In this respect, it is clear that Levinas's conception of freedom signifies the breach in totality which marks my infinite responsibilities inscribed in my finite freedom:

¹⁴³ Levinas, S, 86.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁴⁵ Levinas writes: “Freedom in the genuine sense can be only a contestation of this book-keeping by a gratuity. This gratuity could be the absolute *distraction* of a play without consequences, without traces or memories, of a pure pardon. Or, it could be the responsibility for another and expiation.” (*OTB*, 125).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

This finite freedom is not primary, is not initial; but it lies in an infinite responsibility where the other is not other because he strikes up against and limits my freedom, but where he can accuse me to the point of persecution, because the other, absolutely other, is another one (*autrui*). That is why finite freedom is not simply an infinite freedom operating on a limited field. The will which it animates wills in a passivity it does not assume. And the proximity of the neighbour in its trauma does not only strike up against me, but exalts and elevates me, and, in the literal sense of the word, inspires me. Inspiration, heteronomy, is the very pneuma of the psyche. Freedom is born by the responsibility it could not shoulder, an elevation and inspiration without complacency. The for-the-other characteristic of the subject can be interpreted neither as a guilt complex (which presupposes an *initial* freedom), nor as a natural benevolence or divine 'instinct,' nor as some love or some tendency to sacrifice.¹⁴⁷

The exquisite quote above summarizes Levinas's core ideas pertaining to his notions of the subject's finite freedom, infinite responsibilities and the elevation inspired by the Other. I will unpack the quote further below as I unravel the idea of the Good *before* Being. I will begin by noting Levinas's link between substitution and freedom as he asserts that the Other frees the subject of substitution. Without substitution, the subject suffocates in "ennui"¹⁴⁸ which is the natural outcome of the same anchored in totality; within its finite freedom. The Other (my neighbour) both accuses me and elevates me.

The humanity of the Levinasian subject brings to mind Levinas's emphasis upon sociality, which is explicit in his notorious statement "I am in 'myself' through others."¹⁴⁹ Even though it looks paradoxical; considering the terrifying notions of obsession, trauma, being a hostage and persecution, Levinas suggests that substitution is nevertheless the phenomenon that liberates the subject from itself.¹⁵⁰ He claims that persecution is significant because "without persecution the ego raises its head and covers over the self."¹⁵¹ What he implies by this statement is that, without my ethical concern for the Other, I become the sole ego which exhausts itself and presumably suffocates in its own "interiority." According to Levinas, in spite of the distress of being a hostage and undergoing persecution, serving the Other is nonetheless a "divine discomfort."¹⁵² Visker suggests that while paralysing and persecuting me, the Other nevertheless heals me.¹⁵³

On the one side, the Levinasian subject is guilty, paralysed, obsessed, persecuted and held hostage, as depicted in a negative and chillingly terrorizing imagery; yet on the other side, Levinas undeniably hints at freedom, elevation and escape from the ennui.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴⁸ Levinas writes: "Substitution frees the subject from ennui, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distraction of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out." (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁵³ Visker, 84.

Since the Other frees me, elevates me and relates me to the Good, the Levinasian subject is a voluntary hostage; enjoying and indulging in her finite freedom. That is because the Other haunts me and is already in possession of me before I even know myself. By the notion of the-other-in-the-same, Levinas suggests that my relationship with the Other(s) is always prior to my relationship with my own self; moreover, the former constitutes the latter: "In expiation, the responsibility for the others, the relationship with the non-ego, precedes any relationship of the ego with itself."¹⁵⁴

Another remarkable idea Levinas conveys is that expiation unites identity and alterity, by which he indicates that the subject of substitution is not an entity of self alienation but rather evokes a sense of human fraternity. Expiation unites the other and me, which is already a directedness towards the Good beyond Being,¹⁵⁵ and as such it marks an unavowed and un-thematizable innocence. Through persecution, the Levinasian self senses the touch of the "original goodness of creation,"¹⁵⁶ which is a pure relation to the logos. For this reason, Levinas envisions persecution not only as an aggravating experience but also as a blissful state, and by calling it a "divine discomfort," he illustrates the paradoxical situation of the subject: on the one hand it suffers intensely, paralysed in a disturbing passivity, and on the other hand, it feels that the responsibilities it never chose secure its elevation. So, the fact that it is responsible before it is free is the proof that the Good is beyond and before Being:

This antecedence of responsibility to freedom would signify the Goodness of the Good: the necessity that the Good choose me before I can be in a position to choose, that is, welcome its choice. That is my pre-originary *susceptiveness*. It is a passivity prior to all

¹⁵⁴ Levinas, *OTB*, 119.

¹⁵⁵ Levinas states: "We have to speak of expiation here as uniting identity and alterity. The ego is not an entity 'capable' of expiating for the others: it is this original expiation. This expiation is voluntary, for it is prior to the will's initiative (prior to the origin). It is as though the unity and the uniqueness of the ego were already the hold on itself of the gravity of the other. In this sense the self is goodness, or under the exigency for an abandon of all having, of all *one's own* and all *for oneself*, to the point of substitution. Goodness is, as we have said, the sole attribute which does not introduce multiplicity into the One that a subject is, for it is distinct from the One. If it showed itself to the one, it would no longer be a goodness in it. Goodness invests me in my obedience to the hidden Good." (*ibid.*, 118).

¹⁵⁶ Levinas writes: "The passivity prior to the passivity-activity alternative, more passive than any inertia, is described by the ethical terms accusation, persecution, and responsibility for the others. The persecuted one is expelled from his place and has only himself to himself, has nothing in the world on which to rest his head. He is pulled out of every game and war... The self involved in the *gnawing away at oneself* in responsibility, which is also incarnation, is not an objectification of the self by the ego. The self, the persecuted one, is accused beyond his fault before freedom, and thus in an unavowable innocence. One must not conceive it to be in the state of original sin; it is, on the contrary, the original goodness of creation. The persecuted one cannot defend himself by language, for the persecution is a disqualification of the apology. Persecution is the precise moment in which the subject is reached or touched with the mediation of the logos." (*ibid.*, 121).

receptivity, it is transcendent. It is an antecedence prior to all representable antecedence: immemorial. The Good is before being.¹⁵⁷

The enigmatic theme of substitution also suggests that the Good survives the death of God.¹⁵⁸ In relation to this, it must be noted that Levinas's notion of being a hostage does not signify a loss of integrity or humility but quite the contrary, it alludes to a state of "innocence,"¹⁵⁹ presumably because it does not stem from me; I am not the starting point of being held hostage; it is the Other that grants me this status; thus it is good (and innocent). Substitution is the way of subjectivity for Levinas because it is only by substitution that communication with the Other becomes possible, which is the condition of ethics as the openness to the exterior, the Infinite.

That which determines the finitude of my freedom is the notion of substitution which singles me out because "no one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all."¹⁶⁰ The crucial aspect of this concept is its essential asymmetry which is clearly indicated in the lengthy quote from Levinas above, highlighting the fact that I respond to the Other neither based on any sort of guilt complex (which would wrongly presume that I was free before encountering the Other); nor out of natural kind-heartedness; nor based on any religious dogma which innately presupposes theodicy.

Rather I substitute myself for the Other without expecting reciprocity, since anticipating any kind of reciprocity not only makes my substitution insincere but is also against Levinas's conception of ethics. Since my asymmetrical relation to the Other secures her alterity, any symmetrical expectation would be a disguised attempt of the ego to assimilate the Other into the same – and in this case, the Other would no longer be Other but devoid of its alterity, it would eventually be another version of the same. That is why, in Levinas's philosophy, it is irrelevant to ask: "How about the Other's responsibilities for me?" When Philippe Nemo asks this question to Levinas in an interview, Levinas responds by stating succinctly that reciprocity is "*his* affair."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁵⁸ Levinas states: "...this desire for the non-desirable, this responsibility for the neighbour, this substitution as a hostage, is the subjectivity and uniqueness of a subject. From the Good to me, there is assignation: a relation that survives the 'death of God.'" (*ibid.*, 123).

¹⁵⁹ Levinas indicates: "Responsibility for the other, for what has not begun in me is responsibility in the innocence of being a hostage." (*ibid.*, 125).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁶¹ Philippe Nemo asks Levinas, "But is not the Other also responsible in my regard?" Levinas answers: "Perhaps, but that is *his* affair. One of the fundamental themes of *Totality and Infinity* about which we have not yet spoken is that the intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subject to the Other; and I am 'subject' essentially in this sense. It is I who support all. You know that sentence in Dostoyevsky: '*We are all guilty of all*'

However, another reason why the Levinasian subject cannot expect reciprocity is because Levinas does not aim to outline a practical manual of human interaction but rather to explore the conditions for the possibility of ethics. Proposing a handbook based on asymmetry accompanied by the literal illustrations of substitution could go as far as preaching human sacrifice, which would be absurd.¹⁶² The very idea of reciprocity is counter to the idea of substitution because expecting reciprocity is basically reversing places rather than breaching totality; which opens the possibility for communication and the relationship with the Other. Reciprocity diminishes the possibility of communication with the Other by merely consolidating the ego in terms of placing the self and the Other side by side rather than face to face.

So, reciprocity not only corrupts the possibility of communication and revelation, but also degenerates the structure of one's responsibilities towards the Other. According to Levinas, our responsibilities do not arise from our decisions or choices; contemplation always arrives too late. Yet the subject is accused of things it did not do; it is accused for others' actions and is even responsible on their behalf. In this respect, Levinas argues that everything concerning the self "begins in the accusative."¹⁶³ We do not intentionally "choose" our responsibilities because responsibilities do not stem from our "free commitments." Our responsibilities cannot be explained or determined in rational terms because in Levinas's thought rationality pertains to the realm of Being whereas the Good, evoking the Infinite, comes from beyond Being. Goodness cannot be explained by reason. In order to understand this idea precisely, we could turn to Levinas's criticism of altruism as an outcome of rationality.

Levinas is not convinced by arguments that give accounts of egoism leading to altruism, according to which man as a free agent can be capable of compassion and pity owing to its capacity of rationality. He thinks that the evolutionary or biological accounts do not disclose the motive behind goodness either. Such an account could argue that altruism stems from the social benefits of group solidarity which has helped the species to survive in the long run. By establishing cohesion within the group,

and for all men before all, and I more than others' (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, New York: New American Library, 1957, 264). This is not owing to such or such a guilt which is really mine, or to offenses that I would have committed; but because I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others, and for all in the others, even for their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others." (*EI*, 98-99).

¹⁶² Levinas writes: "The ego involved in responsibility is me and no one else, me with whom one would have liked to pair up a sister soul, from whom one would require substitution and sacrifice. But to say that the other has to sacrifice himself to the others would be to preach human sacrifice!" (*OTB*, 126).

¹⁶³ Levinas, S, 88.

supporting one another may have proven more advantageous than every individual looking out for themselves, in an evolutionary biological perspective. However, this argument assumes equality between the members of the species without explaining dramatic situations such as sacrifice because for Levinas, sacrifice is not a matter of backing one another up. It is asymmetrical and not done for another fellow “soul identical to my own.”¹⁶⁴

Levinas notes that if this notion of subjectivity in Western thought as pure ego were correct, we could explain the situations where individuals endanger their own lives and sacrifice themselves for others; even for complete strangers. He suggests that what makes sacrifice possible is the condition of the essential inequality between the same and the Other as he writes that it is the “passage of the identical to the other in substitution which makes possible sacrifice.”¹⁶⁵ Levinas argues that when we consider the subject from the viewpoint of ego, sacrifice is not possible because the ego, as a substance, is not capable of “expiating for others.” Yet a grand task like sacrifice can only be done involuntarily.¹⁶⁶

For this reason, it is very important to dissociate Levinas’s being-for-the-other from altruism. Levinas would reject the idea of altruism because presupposing a clean-cut separation, altruism also depends on a dialectical understanding of the self versus the Other where the two parties are regarded as opposites – as in totality. However, we must note that from a Levinasian angle, not only cruel deeds but also altruistic acts have their motives in a dialectical way of understanding human interaction. Since he proposes an ethics that is outside of that dialectic, it would be misleading to regard Levinas’s thought as a revised version of altruism.

In addition, Levinas is probing into the conditions of altruism, which already precedes ego or free consciousness. Driven from “non-philosophical experiences,” primordial to theory or rationality or phenomenon,¹⁶⁷ substitution points to the possibility of an ethical language in which one is unable to defend oneself because in persecution, where the logos cannot touch the subject,¹⁶⁸ apology is not acceptable. Signifying human contact and proximity, language is to open oneself to the Other without expecting

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁶⁸ Levinas writes: “The birth of the Ego in a gnawing remorse, which is precisely a withdrawing into oneself; this is the absolute recurrence of substitution.” (*ibid.*, 93).

recognition.¹⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, Levinas distinguishes between the pronouns “le moi” and “le soi;” the former referring to the ego or the intentional I whereas the latter, indicating the “me;” the “self” – the reflexive “se,” which announces “me voici” or “here I am! Now and here! At your disposal!”¹⁷⁰ The distinction between these pronouns points to the exposure and the orientation of the self. The subject is subjected not directly to the Other – that could lead to servitude – but to the responsibility for the Other.

What is absent from ontology’s account of subjectivity is the notion of proximity, which Levinas takes to be a relationship that cannot be thematized or represented as it is basically a relationship with a singularity.¹⁷¹ A typical example Levinas gives of proximity is my relationship with my neighbour whom I do not know; who has no kinship with me. Yet proximity¹⁷² is not a spatial concept but signifies extreme exigency. The neighbour is also a lucid image because, as Bernasconi remarks, Levinas strongly emphasizes that we cannot know from where or “from whom the summons comes.”¹⁷³ This is an aspect of proximity showing that ontology can never provide an epistemological explanation; one cannot “know” about the summons but hears it. One cannot point one’s finger at where the demand comes from, but it is clear that the summons calls for the one.

Bernasconi notes that the Western philosophical tradition cannot make the notion of substitution intelligible the way Levinas does, because the subjectivity propagated by ontology is too self-sufficient to be able to be “challenged from the outside,”¹⁷⁴ and this overt complacency is exaggerated as a pretentious uniqueness. In order to explore the Levinasian subject who is nothing but *the* challenged from the outside, we need to examine ipseity and persecution in more detail.

¹⁶⁹ Levinas indicates: “To communicate is indeed to open oneself, but the openness is not complete if it is on the watch for recognition. It is complete not in opening to the spectacle of or the recognition for the other, but in becoming a responsibility for him. The overemphasis of openness is responsibility for the other to the point of substitution, where the for-the-other proper to disclosure, to monstration to the other, turns into the for-the-other proper to responsibility.” (*OTB*, 119).

¹⁷⁰ Levinas, *GP*, 170.

¹⁷¹ Levinas, *S*, 81.

¹⁷² Levinas states: “Proximity is thus *anarchically* a relationship with a singularity without the mediation of any principle, any ideality.” (*OTB*, 100). What Levinas means by anarchy is that which brings a halt to the play of ontology; or into consciousness where everything is presumed within intentionality. However, by employing terms such as obsession, passion, anarchy and proximity, Levinas intends to point at “a passivity beneath all passivity.” (*ibid.*, 101).

¹⁷³ Robert Bernasconi, “What Is the Question to which ‘Substitution’ is the Answer?” in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds.) [2002], 236.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

As for Levinas, what make me unique are my responsibilities for the Other. No one can fulfil them but me; my responsibilities cannot be transferred or handed over to anyone else; that is, no one can substitute for me. Levinas clarifies that the ego is not endowed with moral qualities or attributes but rather “its (ego) exceptional unicity in the passivity of the Passion of the self is the incessant event of substitution, the fact of being emptied of its being, of being turned inside out, the fact of *nonbeing*.”¹⁷⁵ The fact of nonbeing must be interpreted not as the annihilation of the self but rather as “the outside of essence” which can only be realized through the essential passivity before the Other. Levinas emphasizes the uniqueness of the subject with the term “ipseity”¹⁷⁶ which evinces that I am “chosen,” “elected” for my responsibilities. Ipseity, in this sense, grants me my uniqueness; yet not in an ego-centric way, but by the way of “me-ity.”

Nevertheless my uniqueness cannot be compared to the Other’s uniqueness because of the essential asymmetry between the Other and me. I can never compare myself to the Other because such a comparison would put the same and the Other in the same totalizing category. The Other is endowed with uniqueness owing to her relation to exteriority and the Infinite. That said, it is however noteworthy to say that my Desire for the Other is unique of me - in addition, my enjoyment of the world in my private realm is also unique.

At this point, a question may arise regarding my responsibilities for my own self. For Levinas, the question of my responsibilities for myself is irrelevant because it misunderstands the nature of both “responsibility” and “self.” Firstly, the question presupposes the idea of self as substance; as a container of responsibilities. However, responsibilities are not inherently static rigid fixed “things” but to the contrary; they take form coming from exteriority. We realize them as we respond to the Other not in terms of fulfilling daily chores but by responding to the ethical call. Thus in the Levinasian sense, this question seems not only necessarily unethical but even impossible because I can never build a relationship with myself and respond to my own self the way I respond and relate to the Other. Besides, being responsible “for” the others always evokes a surplus; involving people I know and do not know; from the past immemorial to the future. In order to emphasize this surplus of responsibilities stretching all the way to include everyone, Levinas uses a quote from Dostoevsky whose meaning he

¹⁷⁵ Levinas, S, 91.

¹⁷⁶ Levinas conveys: “The ipseity is then a privilege or an unjustifiable election that chooses me and not the ego. I am unique and chosen; the election is in the subjection.” (*OTB*, 127).

has apparently internalized and fed into his philosophy: “every one of us is guilty before all, for everyone and everything, and I more than others.”¹⁷⁷

Bernasconi suggests that even if this view of being obsessed with the Other to the extent of experiencing the limitless responsibilities and guilt on behalf of every Other seems a bit odd or “obsessive,” as a matter of fact, it is only owing to this kind of obsession that one can avoid indifference to the Other. Only a subject that obsessed with the Other can be capable of fulfilling its responsibilities properly, in the Levinasian sense.¹⁷⁸ With this interpretation it becomes clear that the subject as free will, pure consciousness or ego is not profoundly capable of suffering or being overwhelmed by the Other’s suffering. The rational ego proud of its spontaneity and knowledge is devoid of ethical sensibilities as it cannot relate to the Other. Unable to sense the weight of its responsibilities, its experience of this world mainly consists of reducing it to the narcissistic self-same. Indeed, we could stop fixating about accounting our self-interests and calculating what the Other owes us only when we overcome our fundamental egoisms:

Why does the other concern me? What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother’s keeper? These questions have meaning only if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned only with itself, is only a concern for itself. In this hypothesis it remains incomprehensible that the absolute outside-of-me, the other, would concern me. But in the “prehistory” of the ego posited for itself speaks a responsibility. The self is through and through a hostage, older than the ego, prior to principles. What is at stake for the self, in its being, is not to be. Beyond egoism and altruism it is the religiosity of the self. It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple “After you, sir.”¹⁷⁹

It is impossible to ignore the call of the Other at the pre-rational level because subjectivity emerges at the moment of persecution which is a moment “before freedom.” By the claim that to be a self is to be responsible before doing anything, Levinas seems to point out that selfhood as emerged in the accusative is primordial to freedom. To repeat, this primordality is not to be understood in a spatio-temporal way; as a matter of fact, persecution is the extreme phenomenon through which my whole identity – my conception of temporality, spatiality or consciousness – is suspended because it is the mode of “non-being;” the primordial passivity which cannot be converted into any act.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Dostoevsky, 264.

¹⁷⁸ Bernasconi clarifies the idea: “The one who bears the suffering of others and responds to it, no longer has the appearance of a free being but of one who is overwhelmed.” (Bernasconi, 241).

¹⁷⁹ Levinas, *OTB*, 117.

¹⁸⁰ Levinas, *S*, 91.

Undeniably, “persecution” is a multilayered – perhaps even personal – concept for Levinas. Having suffered most evils of the Holocaust era, the term must have not only metaphorical but also a literal significance for him. Bernstein argues that the core of Levinas’s philosophy is to be understood as his response to the events that took place in the twentieth century. Even though the Holocaust is only an example, the general and pervasive phenomenon of evil¹⁸¹ is universal and timeless: “...Levinas’s entire philosophic project can be best understood as an *ethical* response to evil – and to the problem of evil which we must confront after the ‘end of theodicy.’”¹⁸²

Suffering is a huge theme for Levinas which he associates with evil. He sees in suffering an evil transcendence which overwhelms the subject and takes over its agency, leaving it in a desperate, inhuman passivity. Even though there is no possibility of compensation for suffering, Levinas nevertheless emphasizes that suffering for the suffering of the Other elevates the subject; that beyond suffering, an exit resides in the inter-human.¹⁸³ Accompanied by a tremendous amount of suffering, Levinas argues that persecution suspends the subject’s being; leaving her without speech, temporality or logos, it shatters the core of her conscious identity.

Elisabeth Weber suggests that Levinas’s notion of persecution manifests his own condition when he was literally persecuted and hence evokes a sense of the “survivor syndrome” that was quite common after World War II.¹⁸⁴ Not only the dedication Levinas writes at the beginning of *OTB*¹⁸⁵ but also his confessions about feeling guilty for surviving makes Weber’s observation appear quite accurate. She suggests that Levinas might be experiencing the “deep guilt of having survived.” However, in acknowledging this possibility, I do not mean to reduce the profound insights of his philosophy to a mere subjective account.

To the contrary, the factor of personal experience in his account means that we can attribute to his ideas a much deeper sense of sincerity, and it makes his idea about the primacy of ethics much more genuine. Levinas’s subject is a deeply traumatized subject; its memory is haunted both by the immemorial past and contemporary political

¹⁸¹ Bernstein, 256.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁸³ Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering” (1982) [US], in Bernasconi and Wood, (eds.), 158. I will elaborate on Levinas’s account of suffering in more detail in the next chapter as I contrast it with Nietzsche’s conception of suffering.

¹⁸⁴ Elisabeth Weber, “The Notion of Persecution in Levinas’s *Otherwise Than Being* or *Beyond Essence*,” in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, Adriaan T. Peperzak (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 1995, 75.

¹⁸⁵ “To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.”

events. Referring to the Holocaust, he remarks that “it is impossible to forget things which belong to the most immediate and the most personal memory of every one of us, pertaining to those closest to us, who sometimes make us feel guilty for surviving.”¹⁸⁶ Yet regarding memory, Levinas also employs a curious continuity between connecting the personal and the anonymous. The subject’s memory is obsessed not only with the most immediate, but also with the most distant events; notably, Levinas comments that “the traumatism of my enslavement in Egypt constitutes my very humanity, that which draws me closer to the problems of the wretched of the earth, to all persecuted people.”¹⁸⁷

All in all, Levinas implies that the personal is not only political, but also universal because it is those traumas that constitute the humanity of the Levinasian subject. In my opinion, what makes Levinas’s philosophy so provocative is that, apart from its originality, he is a unique philosopher who manifests the intersection of the political and the ethical at the point of subjectivity.

Conclusion

Hilary Putnam refers to Stanley Cavell who conceptualizes basically two types of moral philosophers; the ones who theorize about legislators seeking detailed analysis of politics and moral norms, and the others he calls “moral perfectionists;” Emerson, Nietzsche and Mill being the prime examples. Moral perfectionists are philosophers obsessed with the ancient questions such as “Am I living the right or the just life?” or “Am I doing the best effort I can to reach my unattained but attainable self?”¹⁸⁸

Inspired by Cavell, Putnam regards Levinas as a “moral perfectionist” as well; considering the latter’s proposal that prior to formal rules and regulations, we need to account for a very basic commitment to be able to relate to moral principles in the first place. If one follows moral laws just for the sake of conformity, it is not good enough. Putnam thus argues that it is crucial to see the perfectionist dimension of Levinas’s thought, which enables us to realize that it is only by keeping an eye on the impossible commitments that the subject can strive for her “unattained but attainable self.”¹⁸⁹

This idea is compatible with the notion that only an overwhelmed and obsessed subject can substitute herself for the Other. The perfectionist obligation is neither a certain code of behaviour nor a theory of justice. Yet it is only by keeping the perfectionist

¹⁸⁶ Levinas, *LR*, 291.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁸⁸ Putnam, 36.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

obligation in mind that any theory of justice or moral or socio-political law can have any meaning.¹⁹⁰ After the end of theodicy, the perfectionist obligation as the basis of ethics can be our only possibility to secure the non-indifference to the human other and promise an elevation of the condition of humanity.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

PART II

MUTUAL CRITICISMS

CHAPTER THREE

A LEVINASIAN CRITIQUE OF THE NIETZSCHEAN NOTION OF THE SELF ON ETHICAL GROUNDS

Introduction

A striking point concerning the difference between Levinas and Nietzsche reveals itself as we contrast the former's ethics with the latter's naturalism. This chapter argues that from a Levinasian angle, Nietzsche's naturalistic account of subjectivity and ethics is implausible mainly because under its naturalistic pretext it does not accommodate ethics, and the reason for this is because nature – even when Nietzsche attempts to substitute Being with Becoming – still pertains to the realm of ontological totality. Levinas's contention however, is that ethics can only emerge from beyond Being.

It might be suggested that Levinas does not necessarily reject or deny the crucial insights that a naturalistic account entails.¹ However, Levinas's rapport with such a mode of naturalism could only go as far as what Bernard Williams describes as "realistic moral psychology;"² the plausibility of which nevertheless cannot simply lead to the promotion of those depictions. Levinas is already well aware of the essentially egocentric nature of the human subject. Yet this approach is unacceptable for Levinas because he thinks that any philosophy that does not prioritize the essential uniqueness of the Other is violent. For Levinas, ethics begins at this recognition of the priority of exteriority over the self; and as such, it is primordial to philosophy.

The first section of this chapter explores a Levinasian critique of Nietzsche's central ideas pertaining to subjectivity and ethics. In Levinas's view, just like any other naturalistic account, Nietzsche's naturalism fails as an ethical proposal; blind to the Good beyond Being, the subject of naturalism is not capable of self-critique, and thus is not eligible for being an ethical subject. The possibility of ethics is only feasible with the critique of the subject whose reference point is the recognition of the Good beyond Being – which can only be introduced with the alterity present within the face of the human other. So I present a critique of Nietzsche's naturalism from a Levinasian

¹ Even though there are moments when Levinas makes mention of Nietzsche with some ambiguity, he appears averse to engage with Nietzsche in an openly argumentative manner. Traumatized by the Holocaust, Levinas may not have wished to refer to the philosopher of the will to power and thereby "dignify" his philosophy. Interpreting the concept of power as primal violence, Levinas regards Nietzsche's philosophy and naturalism as ontological and unethical – as there is no concern for the Other.

² Williams, 240-1.

angle, drawing from a conclusion of the previous chapter, that “ethics cannot be materialized.”³

Having touched on the parallel between Nietzsche’s naturalism and aesthetics, the second section of the chapter looks into Nietzsche’s notions of *amor fati* and life affirmation and questions the ethical validity of an aesthetically justified life. This critique will also evoke the parallel Levinas points out between the pretentious unity of artworks and the impersonality of the *il y a* – the similar feeling of nausea accompanied with a desperation for escape within the artwork. This section exposes an implicit pattern of continuity within the Nietzschean individual of naturalism and the aesthetic justification of life.

The final section begins with a focus on Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal recurrence of the same and remarks on the influence of Stoicism embedded within the idea of the eternal return; which suggests a sense of aestheticization regarding the self-sufficiency of the individual. I contrast the aestheticized suffering of the Nietzschean Stoic with the Levinasian account of suffering which is dehumanizing, useless and fundamentally traumatic. I conclude by noting that Nietzsche’s account of suffering entails an aesthetic consolation that inevitably suggests a justification of suffering, which is highly dubious from Levinas’s ethical perspective.

a) Ethics and Naturalism

The Infinite transcends itself in the finite, it *passes* the finite, in that it directs the neighbour to me without exposing itself to me. This order steals into me like a thief, despite the outstretched nets of consciousness, a trauma which surprises me absolutely, always already *past* in a past which was never present and remains un-representable.⁴

As the quote suggests, in Levinas there are two realms, the finite and the Infinite, which are not separated by any spatio-temporal boundaries. The Infinite is non-representational, and it affects the finite in terms of being the eternal frame of reference for the possibility of ethics. Primordial to consciousness, the Infinite is the ethical level manifesting itself as a radical passivity more passive than any mode of passivity we can understand consciously.

The link between the Infinite and the finite is the human other. In Levinas’s thought, the way the subject is morally awakened is by the interruption of the Other, which may be considered as a mediator between the subject and the Good beyond Being. The intervention of the Other is what grants the subject its ethical capacity. Thus in

³ See page 58.

⁴ Levinas, *GP*, 171.

Levinas's philosophy, humanism is the catalyser of ethics. Rather than nature – which is mainly Being posed in the ontological plane⁵ –, it is the human other(s) who can teach us and hence enable us to have a glimpse at the trace of Goodness.

Levinas's doubtful attitude towards naturalism can be observed in his depiction of the ambiguity of any “ground;” or “arch” – “arch” means ground; so an-archy implies groundlessness; a breach of totality.⁶ By “an-archy,” Levinas draws attention to the distraction of the ontological plane which can be nature or Being; or any philosophy that advocates naturalism. It is within that rupture that consciousness discovers in itself a Desire for the Other; endless responsibilities prior to freedom; within which there is a hint of the “seizure by the Good” – as touched on above. Levinas suggests that it is the “an-archy” that secures humanism. As any “ground” is an ontological and rational category, ethics is groundless; and as explained above, since ethics cannot be understood rationally – as it relates to the Infinite and is experienced as a revelation from beyond Being –, it is futile to seek naturalistic or ontological foundations for ethics.

However, the strong emphasis Levinas puts on the transcendental essence of the ethical and the primordially of the non-representable to the ontological spatio-temporality should not blind us to the importance he gives to the body. It is important to note that, just like Nietzsche, Levinas is also a philosopher of the body; providing elaborate accounts of enjoyment, pleasure, need, hunger and suffering, he exposes our creaturely natures. For this reason, in spite of his obvious debt to Descartes on the conception of the Infinite, we cannot regard him as a Cartesian thinker who prioritizes the mind over the body. As a matter of fact, Levinas undermines the traditional body versus mind duality by emphasizing the ethical significance of the flesh; the meaning of ethics he searches for does not dwell within the mind, but within the body, necessarily. He makes this idea explicit in memorable metaphors which both physically and metaphorically highlight the strong connection between skin and ethics – for instance he likens the notion of being for the Other to the phenomenon of pregnancy in which the Other is physically under the skin of the subject.⁷

Body is a key issue which at first sight brings Nietzsche and Levinas together, as both philosophers in their own ways accurately articulate the relationship between corporeality and morality or ethics. This observation is also noted by David Boothroyd

⁵ Levinas, *HA*, 50.

⁶ Peperzak conveys that Levinas notes the derivation from the Greek word *archè* which means “beginning,” “principle” or the “ground;” thereby calling his philosophy an-archival, Levinas implies following a different route from the conventions of Western philosophy. (*To the Other*, *op. cit.*, 32).

⁷ Levinas, *LR*, 202.

who remarks that for both philosophers the subject, the “I,” becomes an undergoing, rather than a “*conatus essendi*”⁸ – which signifies a struggle for existence; the effort to live. Rather than signifying a fierce and forceful battle for survival, for both philosophers the body is a host or an interpreter of various sensations and experiences.

However, the way the two philosophers deal with the body is quite different. Nietzsche regards the body as a microcosmic version of the universe which operates in accordance with the will to power.⁹ In his account, as part of nature, man is an animal who throughout his evolutionary adventure turned out in a certain way. Having learned to make and keep his promises as they got branded upon his flesh, he invented morality and secured the order of his surroundings. Levinas, on the other hand, proposes a phenomenological account of the body in which he reconsiders the body as the precondition for ethics. In his view, only a body that suffers; enjoys and feels hunger can have ethical significance. My capacity for ethics is dependent on my bodily abilities. Since I am capable of suffering, I suffer for the Other; and since I am able to, I can offer my skin to the Other.

So far we observe that as a remarkable common point, Nietzsche and Levinas consider the body primordial to reason and rationality. Moreover, both of them think that morality and ethics are groundless; but for completely different reasons. As for Nietzsche, morality comes about randomly, socio-politically – almost like superstition –, as man struggles to adapt to his environment and maintain order within his social group. Yet from a Levinasian angle, Nietzsche’s naturalistic account of the body upon which he grounds his conception of subjectivity is superficial (and consequently, violent and unethical) because naturalism prompts that we only consider the apparent phenomenon; whatever is visible within the scope of Being. As for those forces lying within our bodies, can we rely on anything inherent in us to be necessarily “good,” or anything “natural” to be in rapport with ethics? The answer to this question depends

⁸ David Boothroyd writes: “In their thinking on suffering, Nietzsche and Levinas overlap most significantly, I suggest, in their respective accounts of the formation of morality as it emerges from the experience of the body ... In neither case, let us be clear, are we referred to the body as it is objectified in the sciences of biology, physiology, and anatomy, all of which deal with *representations* of the body: both thinkers direct us, rather, to the not-yet-represented materiality of sensation.” (“Beyond Suffering I Have No Alibi,” in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 155-156).

⁹ Nietzsche states: “The struggle for existence is only an *exception*, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power – in accordance with the will to power which is the will to life.” (GS, V, “We Fearless Ones,” 349).

very much on how we regard ethics, and this is the key issue upon which Nietzsche and Levinas disagree.

Do one's inner forces justify one's own ethics? As for Levinas, this is the beginning of the tyranny of the ego – or the same – which leads to nothing but violence and catastrophe. As indicated above, he is critical of naturalistic accounts because in his view, ethics comes from beyond Being, beyond nature; and in an attempt to prove his point, he suggests that if we were to determine ethics from a naturalistic perspective, it would be impossible to explain situations such as sacrifice or hostage. He defends his view by stating that subjectivity as being a hostage is not only obviously non-voluntary, but particularly, “against nature.” He states these ideas in the important quote below:

If obsession is suffering and contrariety, the altruism of the subjectivity-hostage is not a tendency, is not a natural benevolence, as in the moral philosophies of feeling. It is against nature, non-voluntary, inseparable from the possible persecution to which no consent is thinkable, anarchic ... Egoism and altruism are posterior to responsibility, which makes them possible ... Persecution is a trauma, violence par excellence without warning nor a priori, without possible apology, without logos.¹⁰

As already noted above, Levinas dissociates his notion of the hostage-subject from the altruistic accounts offered by the “moral philosophies of feelings,” which he seems to associate with naturalistic propositions that favour natural benevolences – one assumes he implies the philosophies of utilitarianism or naturalistic views suggesting altruism to be beneficial for group solidarity. Nietzsche is obviously not a utilitarian; yet he clearly reveals his naturalistic attitude on the matters of morality and the genealogy of moral feelings. Altruism is always already under the category of rational acts for Levinas because of its voluntary nature. So, in Levinas's account, it is not possible to trace the genealogy of ethics or Goodness within the accounts of evolutionary survival or socio-political maintenance of a society.

However, there is another argument Nietzsche proposes on the issue of selflessness and sacrifice. For Nietzsche, every act is an act of egoism; even the most apparently altruistic ones such as parenthood, sacrificing oneself for a cause¹¹ or spontaneous courageous acts, such as risking one's own life by jumping into a river to save the drowning person or venturing into a burning building to rescue a stranger.

¹⁰ Levinas, *OTB*, 197, n.27.

¹¹ I already touched on this issue in my first chapter and explained Nietzsche's position on the matter by stating that in his view, in such situations, the subject experiences fragmentation and sacrifices one part for the other. So I will not elaborate on this fragmentation, the *dividuum* *individuum* (see page 35-36) now, but rather reveal how it is different from Levinas's notion of being-for-the-Other.

For Levinas, on the other hand, the proposition that “every act is an act of egoism” can still be valid but for an entirely different reason: as my primary mode of living is enjoyment and hedonism, I nourish myself by assimilating everything around me to into the self-same. It is because of my narcissistic nature that I am always already guilty; whatever I do is never good enough or morally justifiable because in all my attempts to relate to the Other, any word I utter already sounds violent and every act I perform remains inadequate within my finite realm. Yet it is this inadequacy that prompts Levinas to protest against my limitations and try to overcome my egoism. So, the important difference between Levinas and Nietzsche is that for the former, every ethical act means overcoming a fundamental egoism whereas for the latter, my egoism itself an issue worth investing in by way of creating my values or cultivating my idiosyncratic virtue. Rather than denying or suppressing it, the problem lies in how to reinterpret my egoism and what to do with it.

Above, while presenting Frithjof Bergmann’s account, I conveyed that our habitual way to regard egoism and altruism as opposites is misleading as it mainly aims to consolidate an authoritarian moral law.¹² In addition to that, Bernard Reginster argues that according to Nietzsche, there is not an opposition between egoism and altruism in terms of value, and the important point to keep in mind is that altruistic does not necessarily mean selfless:¹³

An accident and suffering incurred by another constitutes a signpost to some danger to us; and it can have a painful effect upon us simply as a token of human vulnerability and fragility in general. We repel this kind of pain and offense and requite it through an act of pity; it may contain a subtle self-defense or even a piece of revenge.¹⁴

Nietzsche suggests that in certain situations which appear as sacrifice, if we scratch the surface, we see an unyielding revolt against the poor and inadequate nature of man to protect himself. Reginster notes that Nietzsche’s deep psychological perceptiveness conveys an unconscious protest against the fragility and vulnerability of human life.¹⁵ In such situations, as the quote makes clear, the person who risks her life to save the person in danger acts out of pity, which is partially mixed with a subtle sense of arrogance; as if the person cannot bear the sight of such a terrorizing scene depicting the human subject – the victim – in distress. This feeling is further intensified with the inevitability of self-association; the helper sees the dangerous context as a possible scenario which signifies a potential threat to her very being as well; what is happening

¹² See page 34.

¹³ Bernard Reginster, “Selflessness and the Value of Altruism,” *Philosophy Quarterly*, 17.2 (Apr., 2000): 177-200, 178-80.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *D*, II, 133.

¹⁵ Reginster, 181.

to the victim may happen to her too, so the fate must be reversed. The last notion, the hidden motive to change or reverse the fate is associated with “a piece of revenge;” yet one could ask “revenge for what?”

In Nietzsche, “revenge” can be taken against the past, in terms of a constant battle with the inner voice that whispers into one’s ears that “things could have been otherwise.” When the spirit of revenge is at work in a sacrificial scenario like this, presumably the worry is about one’s capability to deal with future life threats. In any case, it is clear that from a Nietzschean angle, helping someone in danger stems from a pretty egoistic concern, namely one’s own security. Nietzsche reads this context quite emphatically and sounds like an enlightened cynic who makes us revisit our presumptions regarding the forceful opposition between altruism and selflessness. However, despite the euphemism, from a Levinasian perspective, this approach resonates with the ontological totality and consolidates the ego rather than pointing at the ethical responsibility.

Without denying the psychological depth and truth of this Nietzschean attitude towards sacrifice based on life-risking, what would irritate Levinas about this account is not necessarily the selfish motive in helping the other person but the nature of the relationship between the self and the Other. Levinas would protest at the “absence” of the Other in the argument. In my view, he would respond by indicating that Nietzsche’s intolerance of human weakness and vulnerability is basically the consciousness of a physical challenge. However, Levinas is not interested in risky scenarios but in the ethical moment which is when my consciousness itself is challenged; not the other way around (not when I feel conscious of any specific challenge). While alluding to the phenomenon of the face, Levinas writes:

This is a challenge of consciousness, not a consciousness of a challenge. The Ego loses its sovereign coincidence with self, its identification where consciousness comes back triumphantly to itself to reside in itself. In the face of the obligation of the Other, the Ego is banished from that repose, is not the already glorious consciousness of this exile. All complacency destroys the rectitude of the ethical movement.¹⁶

In this respect, we see that Nietzsche’s naturalistic account does not challenge Levinas’s ethics. In addition, quite different from Nietzsche’s naturalism, Levinas elaborates on the inspirational account of sacrifice out of saintliness. He argues that everyone, including even the most cynical people, can be moved by saintly acts. The

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, “Signification and Sense,” in *HO*, 33. Since this translation by Nidra Poller enables me to make my point more clearly, for this instance I quote the article from *HO*. For the rest of the dissertation, however, I use the translation entitled “Meaning and Sense” (1972) [MS], by Alphonso Lingis, in *CPP*.

fact that there is something in every human being that is affected by saintliness is presumably a hint of the Good beyond Being that gets a channel to come forth through a human other – saints are not hermits or loners but individuals who are for the people; for-the-Other(s). Levinas ascribes a sense of the holy to saintliness as it evokes a possibility for human elevation. Holiness signifies an opening for humanity, and as if substitution's motive, saintliness evokes the lived experience of authentic humanity. Levinas says:

Holiness is nevertheless the supreme perfection, and I am not saying that all humans are saints! But it is enough that, at times, there have been saints, and especially that holiness always be admired, even by those who seem the most distant from it. This holiness which cedes one's place to the other becomes possible in humanity. And there is something divine in this appearance of the human capable of thinking of another before thinking of himself. With humanity, holiness thus comes to transform the being of nature by constituting this opening...¹⁷

Levinas's understanding of saintliness reveals continuity with his notion of substitution. In both ideas, he explicitly seeks the condition for the possibility of ethics based on the asymmetrical relationship to the Other – “thinking of another person before oneself” defies reciprocity. Without preaching human sacrifice, Levinas asks how it comes about that one can sacrifice oneself for the Other; given that such a situation is both unnatural and non-voluntary. In the same way, without calling people saints, Levinas wonders how we are all moved by saintly acts. In his view, just the bare fact that we feel a certain affectivity towards saintly acts tells us something about our human “nature” or humanity. It suggests that different from Nature in which Being poses itself ontologically, human nature does not crystallize itself through maintenance in Being but by transcending it. Rather than consolidating the self through self-preservation or self-indulgence (which could take any form; including the Nietzschean notion of artistic expression or “creating beyond oneself”¹⁸), humanity seeks a breach in totality; the interruption of Being which only comes about through the Desire for the Good beyond Essence.

So, one wonders, is it the saint or the animal in us that is the most necessary for human flourishing and transcendence? Nietzsche emphasizes the “great intelligence of the body” whereas Levinas asserts that the idea of the Infinite already overflows cognition. How can we interpret the vast space between these utterly conflicting views? I am tempted to suggest that by remarking on the great intelligence of the body, Nietzsche intends to demystify rationality and dethrone reason. However, his

¹⁷ Levinas, *II*R, 183.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, “Of the Way of the Creator.”

method is still naturalistic; the ambiguity of his proposal makes itself most apparent as he clouds the boundary between the animal and the human being. Levinas, on the other hand, also aims to draw attention to the limitations of reason, but since his utmost concern is to emphasize the call of the ethical, he is indifferent to the account of the human being which treats it merely at the level of an “organism.”

Nietzsche asserts that what is most valuable in man is his animal side, and argues that it is because of the initial detachment from his early animal self that man today is so degenerate, corrupt and weak.¹⁹ In his account, the animal man, by contrast, was determined, strong-willed and pure. Nietzsche explicitly praises the master type for being active, strong, spontaneous, aggressive, life-affirming and thinks that “active” feelings such as the desire to dominate or possess have greater biological value than reactive feelings like hatred, envy, *ressentiment*, rancour or revenge.²⁰ Even though it is generally assumed that reactive feelings are the home of justice, he argues that it is the active feelings that lead to justice – namely, justice in the Nietzschean “healthy” sense; free from *ressentiment*.

The active, attacking, encroaching man is still a hundred paces closer to justice than his reactive counterpart; to the extent that he has no need to evaluate his object in a false and prejudiced manner as the reactive man does. For this reason, in fact, the aggressive man, the stronger, braver, nobler man has at all times had the *freer* eye, the *better* conscience on his side. Conversely, perhaps it is clear by now on whose conscience the invention of “bad conscience” rests – that of the man of *ressentiment*! As a final point, one need only consult history: where has the entire administration of law, and also the actual need for law, made its home up to now? In the sphere of the reactive man? Not at all: rather in that of the active, the strong, the spontaneous, the aggressive man.²¹

It is important to consider the issue of *ressentiment* in combination with Nietzsche’s keenness on our animal aspect in order to interpret this connection correctly: does Nietzsche simply advocate modelling the master type and taking on a ruthless and aggressive attitude for the sake of attaining justice? It is always alluring to link those ideas to the various places in *TSZ* where Nietzsche insists that man is only slightly superior to an ape, compared with the Overman. When we consider these ideas, we could be tempted to conclude that Nietzsche is deeply suspicious about the integrity of being human; and as a far more dignifying alternative, he is highlighting the fact that the human animal is basically a part of nature; hence an animal.

Bernard Reginster offers a plausible response to this issue. He argues that Nietzsche’s main target of critique is not necessarily values themselves, but valuations

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *GM*, II, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*

that are born out of *ressentiment*. As a psychological condition, *ressentiment* leads the agent to self-deception and alienation; hence robs her of her integrity.²² In Nietzsche's view, moral judgments are mainly expressions of psychological attitudes; so, when one acts under the psychology of *ressentiment*, one undermines one's own integrity. Likening the psychology of *ressentiment* to Aesop's well-known fable of the fox and the sour grapes, Reginster remarks that the man of *ressentiment* finds himself in a paradoxical situation: he is neither able to achieve the attributes he finds desirable (such as socio-political power) nor does he give up his desire; moreover he is utterly dishonest about accepting his failure.²³

When we reconsider the two important quotes above, we observe that Nietzsche essentially makes a comparison between the man of *ressentiment* (the ascetic priest) and the man-animal (the master clan) and regards the latter as having more wholeness of character than the former. The honesty of the man-animal is valuable not because he is more truthful or more intelligent than the man of *ressentiment* but because unlike the latter, he does not tell himself "dishonest lies."²⁴

On the other hand, to most provocative issue, Nietzsche's emphasis on our animal side, Levinas would presumably respond by noting that the vitality of the animal definitely is precious and special; however, lacking the face in the human sense makes animals speechless or turns them into ethical invalids, at some level. Since ethics reveals itself through the Saying, language would not come out without the (human) face. In his account, what makes the face the initiation of language and ethics is its frailty and authority – which is, of course, the moral authority of the vulnerable face which is itself without force. One would not see those attributes in the face of a lion, for example – which would be a fine example for Nietzsche in terms of characterizing the active, encroaching animality. When asked what it is that makes a human face more distinctive from an animal face, Levinas says:

One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog. Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face. We understand the animal, the face of an animal, in accordance with *Dasein*. The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog. In the dog, in the animal, there are other phenomena. For example, the force of nature is pure vitality.²⁵

²² Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57.2 (Jun., 1997): 281-305, 281.

²³ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 298, n. 17.

²⁵ Levinas, *PM*, 169.

In my opinion, Levinas's neglect of the topic of animals is consistent with his low opinion of naturalistic accounts. Associating animals with pure vitality suggests that Levinas regards animals as part of nature; pertaining to the realm of enjoyment or the elemental rather than the ethical – they are not capable of traumatizing me with their unforeseeableness. Likening the order of animals to the web of the *Dasein* evokes that the animal mainly cares for itself and struggles for its own existence; it is not capable of receiving a revelation or sacrificing its life for another fellow animal.

John Llewelyn notes that Levinas seems to display a Kantian attitude on this issue: since an animal is not capable of responsibility, it is not capable of ethics; so my responsibilities do not extend to an animal the same way they extend to my human fellows who are capable of responsibility and ethics. Llewelyn states that Levinas's world is clearly a "very *human* world;"²⁶ so the sociality which evokes a promise of the Infinite does not include the realm of animal.²⁷ Levinas is not apologetic about his anthropocentrism. Yet he confronts the ambiguity of the face of the animal by suggesting that one can be capable of discovering the face of an animal only after one is capable of realizing the meaning of ethics – which can only be possible through one's relationship with the human other.²⁸ An animal cannot teach me the meaning of ethics, only the Other can. That is why my relationship with the animal is contingent upon my primordial relationship with the human other.

However, Llewelyn speculates on the dubiety of Levinas's easy dismissal of animals in the ethical debate by quoting from Jeremy Bentham that the burning question is not "Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?"²⁹ I also think that suffering is a key issue in Levinas's dismissal of animals. Even though it is true that animals do suffer, they do not suffer the way human beings suffer. An animal suffers the way the *Dasein*³⁰ suffers; it cares only for its own life - or instinctively for its

²⁶ John Llewelyn, "Am I Obsessed by Bobby?" in *Re-Reading Levinas*, Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (eds.), Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991 [1991], 237.

²⁷ Christian Diehm also remarks that the otherness of the animal is an underdeveloped theme in Levinas. Diehm accurately points to the latter's inadequacy in his article "Facing Nature: Levinas beyond the Human," in Katz and Trout (eds.), IV, 184.

²⁸ Levinas admits the inadequacy of his account on the face of the animal as he states: "I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called 'face.' The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don't know if a snake has a face. I cannot answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed." (*PM*, 171-2).

²⁹ Llewelyn, 240.

³⁰ I will not discuss the accuracy of Levinas's interpretation of the *Dasein* here, as it is beyond the scope of this project. However, the link between the animal and the *Dasein* is important for emphasizing Levinas's conviction that just like the *Dasein*, animals only care for themselves, in a mechanical sense.

offspring - in an automatized manner. A human being, on the other hand, is the unique creature who is capable of suffering for fellow humans; who can “substitute” for the human other. For this reason, the issue of animals is an incident revealing the close relationship between Levinas’s notion of substitution and suffering for the Other(s). Just like the self-caring *Dasein*, an animal’s life signifies “a struggle for life without ethics;”³¹ so even if the animal suffers physically at a tremendous level, its suffering is devoid of ethical meaning, in the Levinasian sense.

A moment pointing at Levinas’s confusion on this matter is when he likens animals to young children and says that we like children for their animality.³² Babies and young children are always interesting creatures in terms of evoking the ambiguous middle stage between the animal and the proper human being. When Levinas theorizes on the Other, he customarily implies (male) adults; yet there are also moments when he refers to women and children as the “widow” and the “orphan” – when they allude to suffering. It seems that even though children are animal-like, they gain humanity and ethical significance only when they suffer.

Getting back to the challenge of Nietzsche’s naturalistic argument, we could consider the primordially of nature versus ethics in relation to the theme of consciousness as well. According to Nietzsche, consciousness is an organic outcome of evolution whereas Levinas claims that the subject is the pre-conscious, pre-reflective being, and ethics is the first philosophy. The problem of consciousness is definitely a key point to exemplify the question of naturalism and subjectivity. Even though neither Nietzsche nor Levinas ascribe much importance to consciousness; what each philosopher thinks as the *pre-conscious* is nonetheless uniquely distinct. In Levinas’s philosophy, the notion of the pre-conscious alludes to the primordial passivity of the subject of substitution who responds to the ethical command evoked by the face of the Other.

As a completely naturalistic alternative, Nietzsche’s notion of the pre-conscious corresponds to the fascinating operations of the will to power which guide our intricate mental operations; our innate interpretive forces that value our surroundings. Consciousness originates as the outcome of this faculty of interpretation – of which we are only partially aware. Nietzsche explains the elusive nature of consciousness by asserting that consciousness is only present as much as it is useful, whose use is

³¹ Levinas, *PM*, 172.

³² Levinas says: “In the dog, what we like is perhaps his child-like character ... Children are often loved for their animality. The child is not suspicious of anything. He jumps, he walks, he runs, he bites. It’s delightful.” (*ibid.*).

determined by the extent that it enables us to preserve ourselves.³³ Our conceptions of spirit, reason, logic, morality etc. as “fictitious syntheses” are completely contingent upon the interpretations of consciousness, which is an immature organ that has been evolving based on our responses to the outer world.³⁴ For this reason, Nietzsche does not attribute much significance to consciousness as he thinks that what matters is the will to power; the will to be stronger; to grow further, which is the source that originated consciousness in the first place. Consequently, he regards moral issues as misconceptions or misinterpretations of the body. In order to present the Nietzschean perspective fully, I would like to quote a substantial passage from *The Will to Power*:

In the tremendous multiplicity of events within an organism, the part which becomes conscious to us is a mere means: and the little bit of “virtue,” “selflessness,” and similar fictions are refuted radically by the total balance of events. We should study our organism in all its immorality –

The animal functions are, as a matter of principle, a million times more important than all our beautiful moods and heights of consciousness: the latter are a surplus, except when they have to serve as tools of those animal functions. The entire *conscious* life, the spirit along with the soul, the heart, the goodness, and virtue – in whose service do they labour? In the service of the greatest possible perfection of means (means of nourishment, means of enhancement) of the basic animal functions: above all, the enhancement of life.

What one used to call “body” and “flesh” is of such unspeakable importance: the remainder is a small accessory. The task of spinning on the chain of life, and in such a way that the thread grows ever more powerful – that is the task.

But consider how heart, soul, virtue, spirit practically conspire together to subvert this systematic task – as if *they* were the end in view! – The degeneration of life is conditioned essentially by the extraordinary proneness to error of consciousness: it is held in check by instinct the least of all and therefore blunders the longest and the most thoroughly.

To measure whether existence has value according to the pleasant or unpleasant feelings aroused in this consciousness: can one think of a madder extravagance of vanity? For it is only a means – and pleasant or unpleasant feelings are also only means!

What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power.³⁵

It is Nietzsche’s contention that rather than pointing at the emergence of consciousness, what we call ethics is basically our herd instinct moralizing nature and attaching value to consciousness. Ascribing moral value to consciousness is a hangover from religion – which actually descends from ancient times all the way down to (Platonic) Judaeo-Christianity. Nietzsche’s ambition to demystify the cult of the moral subject mainly targets the underlying idea of associating consciousness with

³³ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 505: 1885-1886.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 524: Nov. 1887-March 1888.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 674: 1887-8.

God, which still manifests itself as the association of consciousness with subjectivity. Our emphasis on authorship makes us overrate our consciousness or rationality.

However, according to Nietzsche, what makes us interesting and prone to growth is our animal nature, which is our genuinely life-enhancing side. Our animal functions are crucial not only because they reveal vitality, but also because they are the parts which are uncontaminated by misinterpretations of rationality. Our conscious (rational) minds often cloud our “best judgment,” which is our bodily affects and drives. As touched upon above on the importance of active feelings, Nietzsche thinks that candidly, the primitive man of the master clan is by far closer to the concept of justice than the cunning ascetic priest of *ressentiment*. In addition, Nietzsche’s argument is that we are only partially conscious of our organisms, and that is why the separation between what is conscious and what is unconscious is not as clean-cut as Levinas insinuates, in terms of “ontological modality.”³⁶

Hypothetically, even if Nietzsche’s account does not necessarily object to Levinas’s assertion that ethics signifies a rupture in consciousness,³⁷ the latter’s denigrating association of consciousness with totality; in other words, Levinas’s complete indifference to our complex mental operations could nonetheless disappoint Nietzsche. Rather than disclosing the mundane or trivial order of things, what Nietzsche hints at instead is the exciting operations of the will to power concealed underneath consciousness, which is itself essentially a mere symptom;³⁸ like the tip of the iceberg. Without overrating or underrating its essence, Deleuze interprets Nietzsche’s notion of consciousness as “nothing but the symptom of a deeper transformation and of the activities of entirely non-spiritual forces.”³⁹

Far from being a rigid, fixed entity, consciousness is an ongoing process of organic transformation, and the way consciousness operates is hidden from conscious

³⁶ Levinas states: “Consciousness is a mode of being such that beginning is its *essential*. To begin – to ignore or suspend the undefined density of the past – is the wonder of the *present*. All contents of consciousness were received, were present, and consequently are present or represented, memorable. Consciousness is the very impossibility of a past that had never been present, that is closed to memory and history. Action, freedom, beginning, present, representation – memory and history – articulate in various ways the ontological modality that is consciousness.” (HA, 49).

³⁷ Levinas, GP, 171.

³⁸ Nietzsche argues that “consciousness is only an accident of mental representation, and *not* its necessary and essential attribute; that consequently what we call consciousness only constitutes a state of our spiritual and psychical world (perhaps a morbid state), and is *far from being that world itself*.” (GS, V, “We Fearless Ones,” 357).

³⁹ Deleuze, 36.

experience.⁴⁰ Even though the active and passive forces constantly affect one another, the active forces elude us, so we can only have access to the passive or the reactive part. That is why consciousness is essentially reactive;⁴¹ in other words, we can never have the full story regarding what goes on within our organisms. In addition, it is also misleading to reduce consciousness to self-awareness or mere self-consciousness. Interpreting Nietzsche, Deleuze writes:

In Nietzsche consciousness is always the consciousness of an inferior in relation to superior to which he is subordinated or into which he is “incorporated.” Consciousness is never self-consciousness, but the consciousness of an ego in relation to a self which is not itself conscious. It is not the master’s consciousness but the slave’s consciousness in relation to a master who is not himself conscious ... This is the servility of consciousness; it merely testifies to the “formation of a superior body.”⁴²

In Deleuze’s accurate analysis, Nietzsche discerns the “servility” aspect of consciousness; it always responds to a superior body. Almost in an analogous manner, the inferior force (reactive) obeys the superior (active) which is evocative of the Levinasian subject serving the Other (the morally superior party). However, rather than taking place in the context of inter-subjectivity, for Nietzsche all these phenomena occur within consciousness.

However, in spite of the plausibility of naturalistic accounts distinguishing the complex workings of consciousness, it is important to note that Levinas would be rather indifferent to the distinction between the conscious and the non-conscious. For instance, Levinas could suggest that *ressentiment* as a psychological condition is utterly different from the phenomenon of hostage and persecution. The man of *ressentiment* is a conscious ego, not a pre-conscious, pre-sentient self undergoing the trauma of persecution, which is a crucial distinction. As a matter of fact, Levinas even distances himself from psychoanalysis – in its initial Freudian formulation – because he

⁴⁰ Paul Katsafanas attempts to clarify Nietzsche’s theory of consciousness by summarizing its four basic traits: “...firstly, consciousness is not an essential property of the mental; the majority of mental states are unconscious – such as unconscious thoughts, emotions and perceptions ... Secondly, a mental state is conscious if its content is conceptually articulated, whereas a state is unconscious if its content is nonconceptually articulated ... Thirdly, consciousness is falsifying ... Lastly, conscious states causally interact with unconscious states, altering the unconscious states in a variety of ways; but, since the conscious states are already simplified versions of the unconscious states, this alteration of the unconscious states often results in unconscious experience coming to represent the world in inaccurate ways.” (“Nietzsche’s Theory of Mind: Consciousness and Conceptualization,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13.1 (Apr., 2005): 1-31, 1-2).

⁴¹ This is the main reason Nietzsche criticizes natural sciences; we can only observe the organism’s reactions but can have no access to its active forces. Yet we draw conclusions based on the reactive results; and invent superficial causalities; and assume that we “know” about the organism. Nietzsche criticizes Darwin chiefly because the latter explains evolution within a purely reactive framework.

⁴² Deleuze, 36.

thinks that just like any other naturalistic account, psychoanalytic approaches do not convey anything about the meaning of ethics either.⁴³

According to Levinas, neither plain consciousness nor plain unconsciousness leads to ethics. Ethics is not some sort of dormant energy remaining latent in the unconscious, waiting to come out. Rather, it is the realization of the primordially of the Other before me. Levinas defends the plausibility of his ethical account on the basis of primordially. According to him, ethics precedes ontology; the face-to-face encounter is primordial to rationality and the face of the Other says “Do not kill me” before it prompts the rational question of “what is.”

But if primordially determines the plausibility of accounts, then does not Nietzsche’s evolutionary naturalistic account precede Levinas’s ethics? And how are we supposed to understand primordially; does it mean that which comes first; or which is more essential, more important by essence? Influenced by the natural sciences of his day, Nietzsche gives an account of the “eye” in *Daybreak*, arguing that vision cannot be the motive behind the evolution of the eye; vision must have been construed much later, as a side effect or by pure chance.⁴⁴ Nietzsche holds a similar opinion for the emergence of consciousness as well; that it is an organ – one among others – that must have been evolving as the result of the adaptation process. As for Nietzsche, body clearly precedes consciousness.

While arguing that ethics precedes rationality, technically Levinas seems to work from an already established and functioning consciousness. However, this technicality is not a genuine worry because Nietzsche and Levinas tackle with different questions. How consciousness or rationality evolved; or the genealogy of our values is the question the former asks whereas the possibility for the condition of ethics is the question the latter is interested in. The answer to the first question – perhaps science can help us – does not have to relate to the second question. And as a matter of fact, the essential separation between these two realms constitutes the backbone of Levinas’s philosophy: the sciences explore the scope of Being whereas ethics comes from beyond Being. So, it is futile to seek naturalistic accounts for ethics.

⁴³ Simon Critchley comments on Levinas’s disfavour towards psychoanalysis: “For Levinas, psychoanalysis is simply part and parcel of the antihumanism of the human sciences, which, in criticizing the sovereignty of ‘Man’ risks losing sight of the holiness of the human.” (“The Original Traumatism: Levinas and Psychoanalysis,” in Katz and Trout (eds.), II, 71).

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *D*, II, 122.

Not being able to give a naturalistic account of ethics at a satisfactory level does not mean that we need to dismiss our search for the meaning of ethics altogether. Quite the contrary, it shows that we should give up wasting our intellectual and spiritual energies trying to wed nature to ethics. In Levinas's account, it is not possible to give a naturalistic account of ethics because ethics comes from exteriority, beyond nature – for which, only the human other can be my guiding sign; not wild nature or hungry birds of prey. Attempts to ally nature with ethics are doomed to fail because nature is amoral – and Nietzsche convincingly explains this fact all throughout his career; which is also illustrated as the gist of this thought in the long passage above.

Most probably, Levinas would not deny that “the objective measure of value” is “solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power.” Yet he would insist that this tells us nothing about the *nature* of ethics. In seeking our very “capacity;” our unique “ability” or “possibility” to sacrifice ourselves for the Other, Levinas regards consciousness as always already posterior to ethics. In this sense, I consider the quote below to be a valid response to Nietzsche's provocative passage above:

Proximity, obsession and subjectivity as we have expressed them are not reducible to phenomena of consciousness. But their un-consciousness, instead of giving evidence of a preconscious stage or a repression which would oppress them, is one with their exception from totality, that is, their refusal of manifestation.⁴⁵

The quote above elucidates that for Levinas the essential factor that makes us human – our capacity for ethics – is the aspect of us which cannot even be translated to consciousness. That is why, the debate pertaining to the ontological or chronological primordially of nature versus ethics is a wrong question. If asked from the position of Being, of course evolution is primordial. However, what Levinas pursues in his philosophy is non-representable; the interruption of Being does not signify the birth of consciousness but rather a suspension of spatio-temporality – hence, the suspension of the subject. And ethics means the subject's spontaneity being called in question.

b) The Aesthetic Justification of Life

... it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified.⁴⁶

Even though it is the young Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* who proclaims the spectacular statement above, the idea remains prevalent all throughout Nietzsche's works; revealing itself in his middle career underneath the themes of *amor fati* and the

⁴⁵ Levinas, *OTB*, 197 n.26.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1966 [BT], 5.

eternal recurrence of the same, and in his late career as the Dionysian affirmation of life in *The Will to Power*. It is important to see the continuity between Nietzsche's naturalism and his medical concern to heal society as the philosopher-physician and his regard for aesthetics as the sole justification of life.

Aesthetics is the ultimate sign that reveals the concern for appearance – of course, it is not only limited to sight but engaging all five senses –; for apparent things; for Being. It is detectable, on display for examination; it is exposed just as a patient is exposed before the physician. Walter H. Sokel remarks that attributing himself the role of a physician, particularly in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche takes on a “medical perspective;” he points to certain individuals who are distinguished from the rest of the herd and claims it is owing to their contributions to history that the overall health of a culture can be evaluated. Nietzsche's metaphor for history is therefore “calls from mountain top to mountain top with vast stretches of flatland between them.”⁴⁷

Sokel's observation is tenable when we consider that rather than worrying about the general well-being of individual lives, which constitute the herd, Nietzsche is genuinely concerned about the potentially damaging effects of the herd morality upon great individuals. His strongest opposition to morality arises from his worry that those exceptional individuals may be inhibited and hindered from attaining greatness, which could result in the intellectual and spiritual stagnation of the overall society. It is those individuals who pave the way for healing the society and spurring the advancement of a culture.

As noted above, Nietzsche is horrified at the idea of the sick (the ascetic slave morality) inflicting their sickness upon the healthy; thus he dedicates his philosophy to protecting those candidates for the great individuals, or the philosophers of the future. In this respect, Sokel suggests that the physician-philosopher does not seem to have any reservations about cutting out the gangrened organs to save the whole body: “the physician's task is not to cultivate and preserve each organ, but to care for the health and life of the whole body.”⁴⁸

Richard Cohen also observes the connection between aesthetics and health in Nietzsche's philosophy and suggests that this inevitably becomes the framework from which we can understand his thought; notably the theme of the will to power. Similar to

⁴⁷ Cited in Walter H. Sokel, “On the Dionysian in Nietzsche,” *New Literary History*, 36.4 (On Exploring Language in Philosophy, Poetry, and History, Autumn, 2005): 501-520, 508.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Richardson, Cohen regards him as a metaphysical thinker who asserts that within every organism inherently lies the essence of the will to power, as *conatus essendi*; which is supposed to be the necessity of the universe.⁴⁹ Critiquing Nietzsche's obsession with health and greatness, Cohen regards his philosophy as aesthetics:

In contrast to all asceticism, Nietzsche demands greatness: "*great health*" in individuals and "grand politics" for nations. Nietzsche's philosophy is therefore an *aesthetics*: a philosophy of the body, and on top of this it is a pagan or Greek aesthetics: the celebration of victory, superiority, domination – hegemony as greatness.⁵⁰

Cohen's provocative quote suggests a striking parallel between naturalism and aesthetics. It is notable that the greatness Nietzsche passionately propagates is essentially an aesthetic judgment, especially in this context. That is, when greatness is associated with the celebration of victory, superiority, domination and health, the one that celebrates always already occupies the position of a "spectator." Sokel remarks that in the same manner, the aesthetically justified life implies a sense of delight and admiration within the spectator on whose behalf the world gains meaning and significance.⁵¹

Sokel contends that greatness is not a moral but necessarily an aesthetic notion as it presupposes an object of admiration; yet the admirer is not the agent of action but the spectator.⁵² Rather than initiating (moral) action, admiration prompts self-indulgent contemplation accompanied with a sense of detachment. One recalls Nietzsche's notion of the "pathos of distance" which the master clan used to maintain before the common herd, the slaves. Likewise, spectatorship evokes a condescending attitude in which what is admired is reduced to an object of spectacle.

The incompatibility between the aesthetic attitude and the moral attitude sounds very Levinasian. However, can admiration ever be innocent? In the quote above, Levinas suggests that the holiness evoked by the saints and saintly acts are admired even by the most distant people such as atheists and cynics. Could we also regard saints as performance artists – which is somewhat equivalent to a Nietzschean spectacle? Could it be that, similar to Nietzsche, Levinas is also envisioning a divine spectacle in which the God from beyond Being is pleased at sacrifice scenarios and appreciates the acts of saints as the deeds of the tragic heroes?

⁴⁹ Richard Cohen writes: "Nietzsche's thought is from the start and throughout and always and self-consciously a philosophy of *life*, of health and sickness, strength and weakness, growth and decline, self-preservation and disintegration, a thought of instincts and organisms." ("Levinas, Spinozism, Nietzsche and the Body," in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 175).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵¹ Sokel, 511.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Moreover, considering that Levinas is greatly influenced by Plato on the theme of the Good, the question becomes slightly puzzling when we also bear in mind that for Plato the Good is at the same time the beautiful and vice versa. However, we must note that “beautiful” cannot be merely reduced to the production of an aesthetic effect upon the audience. The saint sacrificing herself for another person can be regarded as having a beautiful soul as she evokes the transcendence of the human soul – that is beautiful. But the aesthetic evaluation of the spectacle itself is completely irrelevant.

As a matter of fact, Levinas would intimate that anyone who regards such a scene as an aesthetic moment is immoral. He argues that while looking at a face, noticing the eye colour or the particular features of the Other distracts one from the ethical encounter.⁵³ Likewise, we could think that a scene of sacrifice could invite us to action – to do “good” – for the Other(s) rather than providing us with a panoramic scene to consume and remain as passive observers. So, an act of sacrifice or saintliness does not count as an aesthetic performance for the bystanders to *enjoy*. Actually, Levinas would be quite critical towards even the idea of an artistic attempt to make a painting or a sculpture of such a saintly deed, because compared with the eternal (and Platonic) concept of saintliness, the depiction; the “caricature,” the “lifeless life of an image,” would seem dehumanizing and degrading.⁵⁴

Apart from the notion of “admiration,” another notion Sokel raises in relation to Nietzsche’s urge to translate life into an aesthetic spectacle is the latter’s use of the word “interesting” while praising the “cunning intelligence of the slave.” Nietzsche thinks that it is owing to the role of the slave in world history that the world has become an “interesting” place at all. Sokel remarks that: “‘Interesting’ is a cognitive, also an aesthetic, category, but definitely not an ethical one.”⁵⁵ He explains that when something is “interesting,” what mainly matters is the effect upon the spectator; it does not call one into take action, but rather leads to an irresponsible hedonism or passive observation. Yet, at times, this seems to be the world worth justification in Nietzsche’s mind:

Nietzsche conceives of his task as helping to make the spectacle of human existence as interesting and admirable as possible. His thinking was to help transform life from the dull and drab show, to which it had deteriorated as a result of the victory first of Judeo-Christian and then modern democratic slave morality, into a provocative, breathtaking, and sublime show, one worthy to entertain gods.⁵⁶

⁵³ Levinas, *EI*, 85.

⁵⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow” (1948) [*RS*], in *CPP*, 9. I refer to Levinas’s ideas on arts in more detail, below.

⁵⁵ Sokel, 513.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 512.

An important Nietzschean theme, *amor fati* suggests a similar sense of aesthetic detachment and disinterestedness regarding the “fate” (of others) for the sake of “seeing the big picture” and *loving necessity*. Cohen remarks that seeing the will to power as a metaphysical necessity of the universe, with his notion of *amor fati*, the love of fate, Nietzsche propagates the idea of “accepting one’s life without moral or metaphysical judgment, to the point that one accepts one’s life and all of reality even if it were to recur eternally.”⁵⁷ The worrying aspect of this idea is that in complete surrender to the blind forces of the will to power – even if one innately hosts those forces within one’s being –, there is no room for the ethical.

It seems that there is a pattern in Nietzsche’s thought which begins with the assertion of aesthetics as life’s justification and reveals itself all throughout his naturalistic claims which advocate moral neutrality; yet consolidates itself most explicitly with the themes of *amor fati* / the love of fate and the eternal recurrence of the same. Presumably, the notion that underlies all these ideas is a concern for justifying suffering and consolation for existence. From a Levinasian perspective, an aesthetically justifiable life is ethically question-begging because such a proposition inevitably conveys an attitude towards life which is irresponsible, escapist and amoral. If morality is a hindrance to understanding life, then Nietzsche’s attempt to justify existence suggests cultivating an essentially positive attitude towards life that is morally neutral.⁵⁸ I would like to begin discussing the notion of *amor fati* by quoting a memorable passage from *The Gay Science*:

For the New Year.—I still live, I still think; I must still live, for I must still think. *Sum, ergo cogito, ergo sum.* To-day everyone takes the liberty of expressing his wish and his favourite thought: well, I also mean to tell what I have wished for myself to-day, and what thought first crossed my mind this year, -- a thought which ought to be the basis, the pledge and the sweetening of all my future life! I want more and more to perceive the necessary characters in things as the beautiful: -- I shall thus be one of those who beautify things. *Amor fati*: let that henceforth be my love! I do not want to wage war with the ugly. I do not want to accuse, I do not want even to accuse the accusers. *Looking aside*, let that be my sole negation! And all in all, to sum up: I wish to be at any time hereafter only a yea-sayer!⁵⁹

One of Nietzsche’s most beautiful passages conveys several crucial aspects of his philosophy. Before critiquing this idea from a Levinasian view-point, firstly I will attempt to explain it. In an implicitly ridiculing manner, Nietzsche starts by dissociating himself

⁵⁷ Cohen, 178.

⁵⁸ The value of life cannot be limited to hedonistic pleasures or happiness. It is also a well-known fact that Nietzsche is genuinely fascinated by the tragedy in the Ancient Greek era mainly because he admires the way Greeks regarded suffering within their culture as a natural part of existence; not something to evoke pity; weakness; or any mode of cheap sentimentalism. They were somewhat neutral to it all.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, GS, IV, “Sanctus Januarius,” 276.

from Descartes by emphasizing the primordially of life and the lived experience to conceptual thought. He stresses the word “to-day” by using it twice to draw attention to the present fleeting moment. In addition, Nietzsche curiously emphasizes his wish to see the necessary things as beautiful – as if one can love at will. He desires a shift in perception and aspires to this change to transform his life – and future. Plus, his determination not to face ugliness but to turn from it as his sole response hints at his special notion of fatalism, the Russian fatalism. These are several ideas pertaining to Nietzsche’s enigmatic theme of *amor fati*, so it is crucial to unpack those ideas and reveal how they relate to an aesthetic consolation which is ethically dubious from a Levinasian perspective.

What does Nietzsche mean or propagate by *amor fati*? Why should we necessarily love fate? If it happens whether we love it or not, then what difference does our love make? Is this not an absurd idea or “futile love?”⁶⁰ A thought-provoking interpretation comes from Beatrice Han-Pile who interprets *amor fati* by dealing with each term of the expression separately. She begins her account by focusing on the first term “*amor*” and notices that the plain translation of “love” is not enough to understand its meaning. Trying to figure out what kind of “love” Nietzsche implies with his notion of *amor fati*, Han-Pile remarks that there are several types of love in ancient (Greek) literature – such as *eros*, *agape*, *caritas*, *philia* and so on –, however only two types of love can be relevant to what Nietzsche seems to have in mind: *eros* and *agape*.⁶¹

Han-Pile distinguishes between *eros* and *agape* by suggesting that the former type of love (erotic love) is “motivated by the perceived value of the object; we love someone or something because we value them.” *Agape*, on the other hand, can be associated with divine love, in which case “we value someone or something because we love them.”⁶² She suggests that is the latter kind of love that better characterizes the Nietzschean notion of *amor fati*. Fate is not lovable in the erotic sense since I cannot love at will; I cannot choose my fate, the way I can choose my lover. My fate includes suffering which is not possible to love; I cannot force myself to love my painful memories either. My love of my fate can be limited to neither pleasant memories nor predictable happiness.

As for the second term “*fati*,” in order to interpret fate, we must note that *amor fati* roughly translates as the love of fate. Yet even while loving fate, Nietzsche is

⁶⁰ Beatrice Han-Pile, “Nietzsche and Amor Fati,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 19.2 (Jun., 2011): 224-261, 226.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶² *Ibid.*

determined “not to wage war against the ugly.” Nietzsche does not associate *amor fati* with blind fatalism. In order to make the distinction clear, he contrasts Russian Fatalism against Turkish Fatalism, which he regards as despicable since it dictates people to be weak, fearful, submissive and gloomy. In this mode of fatalism, fate acts on man as a force overpowering and manipulating him. As Craig Dove notes, rather than emphasizing the interconnectedness of everything and the celebratory affirmation of life, this version of fatalism depends on a metaphysical separation between fate and man.⁶³ Nietzsche rejects Turkish Fatalism as it propagates pure passivity (passivity as inactivity) in a resentful and revengeful manner.⁶⁴

Compared with Turkish fatalism, Nietzsche is in favour of “Russian Fatalism” which is, according to him, “fatalism without revolt.”⁶⁵ This fatalism is like a will to hibernate; similar to slowing down the metabolism, and unlike passive Turkish Fatalism, it is necessarily an active decision to remain inactive. To illustrate his point, Nietzsche gives the example of the Russian soldier who, figuring that the military campaign is becoming too difficult, decides to lie in the snow. He decides not to react. What Nietzsche finds remarkable about this mode of fatalism is not only that this strategy may prove quite effective at times for survival, but basically that it does not accommodate *ressentiment*. By not reacting, one reserves his energy for longer, and keeping control of his metabolism he does not get worn out.

However, even while hibernating in the snow, one is still reacting to one’s circumstances – only minimalizing action on purpose. Yet the notion of *amor fati* is not only about “tolerating necessity” but not wanting to change anything; neither in the past nor in the future, not for eternity – it is about “loving” necessity.⁶⁶ In that respect, loving fate also implies trusting fate. But that is not an entirely passive condition either; to the contrary, it requires an active appropriation of fate into one’s life,⁶⁷ in other words, it

⁶³ Craig Dove, *Nietzsche’s Ethical Theory: Mind, Self, Responsibility*, London: Continuum Books, 2008, 30.

⁶⁴ In Nietzsche’s words: “Nothing burns you up more quickly than the effects of resentment. Annoyance, abnormal vulnerability, inability to take revenge, the desire, the thirst for revenge, every type of poisoning – these are definitely the most harmful ways for exhausted people to react: they inevitably lead to a rapid consumption of nervous energy and a pathological increase in harmful excretions, of bile into stomach, for instance.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo [EH]*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, “Why I am So Wise,” 6).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, “Why I am So Clever,” 10.

⁶⁷ For instance, rather than regarding an illness or an accident as something that is “happening” to us externally, we should regard it as something actually “making” us. Only then can we realize that rather than passively submitting to fate, we actively own or appropriate our pasts and our lives in totality. Only then can we redeem ourselves and be able to turn all “it was” to

points to an intermediary state between the active and the passive. Life affirmation is intricately linked with self-affirmation, and in Nietzsche's thought it bears on our shoulders our "greatest responsibility," which is to create values in a world after the death of God.

At some level, we may be tempted to regard *amor fati* as a reconsideration of one's whole life from a bird's-eye view and try to calculate; measure and evaluate the positives and negatives on both scales to determine the overall picture. In addition, Han-Pile interprets Nietzsche as thinking only about one's individual fate rather than loving life in general.⁶⁸ As stated above, she rejects the erotic construction of *amor fati* because love cannot come as the result of the effort of the will. Rather, by associating *amor fati* with the hint of divine love, she associates it with *agape* and ascribes a fatalistic mode of surrender to *amor fati*.⁶⁹

In my view, however, Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati* is ethically unacceptable for Levinas. Even the most sympathetic interpretation of *amor fati* as the active appropriation of fate into one's life, as if it is possible to mould fate the way an artisan moulds clay, does not save Nietzsche from a Levinasian attack. As a matter of fact, it is this effort to give a necessarily "artistic" account of life – the concern to "beautify things" and "loving necessity" – that is utterly questionable since Levinas is rather conscious and cautious about the anaesthetizing effect of the aesthetic.

What makes *amor fati* vulnerable to a Levinasian criticism is primarily its ego-centric content. In agreement with Han-Pile, I also think that with this idea Nietzsche only considers one's own life rather than life in general.⁷⁰ However, this separation of the ego's care for itself is unethical for Levinas. According to him, since I am always already obsessed with the Other, an ontological clean-cut separation between my fate and the fate of the Other(s) is implausible. The essential separation between the self-same and the Other not only secures the alterity of the Other but also makes it possible for the former to relate to the Other by justice, by the Saying. Rather than separating

"thus I willed it." In Nietzsche's words, "All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident – until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I will it; thus shall I will it!'" (TSZ, II, "Of Redemption").

⁶⁸ Han-Pile, 230.

⁶⁹ Quoting Nietzsche, Han-Pile writes: "Nietzsche refers to *amor fati* in terms which emphasize its passive dimension: 'I am in a mood of fatalistic "surrender to God" – I call it *amor fati*, so much so, that I would rush into a lion's jaws.'" (*ibid.*, 231-2).

⁷⁰ Even though *amor fati* is a rich and multi-faceted idea which is open to various interpretations and criticisms, for my purposes, I critique it mainly from a Levinasian angle.

my fate from the Other's, the essential separation in between binds and unites us in terms of the expiation of humanity.⁷¹

That is why, my life without the Other is not only meaningless but also impossible even as a thought experiment. Of course, Nietzsche's ideas pertaining to self-affirmation and the individualistic essence of *amor fati* (loving one's own fate) do not lead to solipsism or any sort of solitary existence. However, the very idea of loving one's own fate evokes the possibility of dissociating one's fate from the fates of others. But how does one draw the line to separate the responsibilities towards "one's own fate" and towards others?

As elaborated above, Levinas is so sensitive on this issue that he makes it very clear that I am not only responsible for the Other, but also for the others; I am even responsible for their responsibilities, which include their responsibilities towards me as well. I am therefore infinitely responsible for everyone and everything, and that is the essence of my subjectivity. *Amor fati* is rather question-begging for Levinas also because it alludes to the Nietzschean notion of responsibility (creating values) which is quite distinct – almost oppositional – from Levinas's conception of responsibility. From a Levinasian perspective, another dubious aspect of *amor fati* is its ambiguous fatalism. Nietzsche's differentiation between Turkish and Russian fatalism would not ease the Levinasian worry about justice and responsibility for the Other. In his view, fatalism cannot be justified with any version, be it Turkish or Russian, because it could easily turn into a strategy to turn a blind eye to the Other(s).

Amor fati embraces the Nietzschean idea of the dice-throw which signifies a fundamental difference between Nietzsche and Levinas on the issue of existence. For the former, existence is innocent as it evokes an essentially "Dionysian affirmation of the world,"⁷² which is already visible in the quote laying out Nietzsche's ambition to see the necessary characters in life as beautiful; his aim to beautify things and his aversion to waging war against the ugly. Deleuze remarks that in Nietzsche's notion of the dice throw, it is the bad player who counts on the throws of the dice; who employs causality and probability to see the desired result. Yet those are the ones who do not know how to play dice as they do not know how to affirm chance.⁷³ As for Nietzsche, the world is the eternal dance floor upon which dice are thrown; as all things "*dance* on the feet of chance."

⁷¹ See page 87, n. 155.

⁷² Nietzsche claims: "philosophy, as I have hitherto understood and lived it ... Such a philosophy as I live ... wants to cross over to a Dionysian affirmation of the world." (*WTP*, 1041:1888).

⁷³ Deleuze, 25.

A little wisdom is no doubt possible; but I have found this happy certainty in all things: that they prefer – to *dance* on the feet of chance. / O sky above me, you pure, lofty sky! This is now your purity to me, that there is no eternal reason-spider and spider's web in you -- / that you are to me a dance floor for divine chances, that you are to me a god's table for divine dice and dicers!⁷⁴

From a Levinasian perspective, such a concern for interpreting everything aesthetically, which could inevitably include the suffering of the Other as well, would sound almost ludicrous. The Nietzschean notion of the dice-throw would be a rather uncomfortable idea for Levinas as it would remind him of the chaotic *il y a*, which portrays Levinas's account of Being. Levinas characterizes the *il y a* as impersonal,⁷⁵ sonorous, imprisoning, entrapping and pagan; analogous to a nightmare. Bettina Bergo remarks that the entrapment is two-fold: within the self and within Being that is outside of us;⁷⁶ in a way, Being is entrapped within itself.

Rather than evoking "divine chances" or infinite possibilities, the *il y a* alludes to the impossibility of possibilities; suffocation, nausea and the loss of separation between the interior and the exterior. Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of it is the lack of anything human to orient oneself towards; as an inhuman condition, it evokes no trace for transcendence. For Nietzsche, Being can be interpreted in a Heraclitian manner as a child at play⁷⁷ whereas for Levinas, the *il y a* marks the end of childhood as it signifies the seriousness of Being.⁷⁸

Pertaining to Levinas's understanding of suffering, the *il y a* makes it impossible to enjoy existence, which is the main reason why the Nietzschean notion of *amor fati* is unethical and implausible from a Levinasian point of view. The Nietzschean notion of everything being connected within a sheltered and harmonious mode of cosmology interprets existence as innocent. Yet if everything is interconnected, then there can be

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, III, "Before Sunrise."

⁷⁵ Levinas says: "For me ... 'there is' is the phenomenon of impersonal being: 'it.' My reflection on this subject starts with childhood memories. One sleeps alone, the adults continue life; the child feels the silence of his bedroom as 'rumbling.'" (*EI*, 47-8).

⁷⁶ Bettina Bergo writes: "If we glimpse Being through the being that we are, concerned as we are about our being, then it is not its finiteness that we flee or anticipate resolutely, it is Being's self-entrapment. And this entrapment must be both within itself, as well as in the Being that is outside us." ("Levinas's 'Ontology' 1935–1974," in Katz and Trout (eds.), II, 33).

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *GM*, II, 16. Yet Nietzsche elaborates on the close connection between being a child; play, artistry, creation and destruction as all being harmonious within the concept of game, in relation to Heraclitus in more detail in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan, Washington, DC: Regnery, 1962 [*PTAG*], 7.

⁷⁸ Levinas writes: "The impossibility of getting out of the game and of giving back to things their toy-like uselessness heralds the precise instant at which infancy comes to an end, and defines the very notion of seriousness. What counts, then, in all this experience of being, is the discovery not of a new characteristic of our existence, but of its very fact, of the permanent quality [*l'inaévitabilité*] itself of our presence." (Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, introduction and annotation by Jacques Rolland, trans. Bettina Bergo, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003 [*OE*], 52).

no singularity singled out; no responsibility to fulfil; no orientation towards the Good as there is no guidance by the Other; which altogether makes it impossible for the Levinasian subject to emerge. What is unacceptable in Nietzsche's account for Levinas is that the former aims to overcome *ressentiment* and guilt with his notion of the innocence of existence. The *il y a* is terrifying because surrounded by the unknown, alienating and rumbling chaos, it defies sociality. The only "exit" from this prison would be being-for-the-Other, rather than seeking escape in arts and investing in aesthetic sensibilities.

Levinas's criticism would target the internal sufficiency of *amor fati* which is quite analogous to an artwork. From a Levinasian view, it is not at all surprising to see the connection between Nietzsche's naturalism and aesthetics as both rely on a fundamentally totalizing instinct. Levinas is deeply critical of this totalizing effect of aesthetics which he examines in his essay "Reality and Its Shadow," where he expresses his concerns about the ethical validity of artworks. He notes that since an artwork is a totality in itself, it resists the conversation with the Other in which there could be any space for the possibility of ethics. Yet since even the artists or writers cannot assist their work, left alone without a face, a work cannot offer us any trace for transcendence. Levinas contends that art-making and revelation are oppositional: "... art does not belong to the order of revelation. Nor does it belong to that of creation, which moves in just the opposite direction."⁷⁹ Contrary to conventional thought, Levinas dissociates arts from creation, and by firmly refusing the latter's link to artistic endeavour, he instead hints at an implicit rapport between revelation and creation.⁸⁰

There is a notable continuity between Levinas's depictions of the *il y a* and the arts, which can be detected by the similar vocabulary he employs in expressing his dismay and bitterness such as "entrapment,"⁸¹ "nightmare,"⁸² "impersonality,"⁸³ "anonymity,"

⁷⁹ Levinas, *RS*, 3.

⁸⁰ Levinas attributes ethical significance to creation; for example in describing the innocence of the self, the persecuted one, Levinas regards him in the state of the "original Goodness of creation." (*OTB*, 121).

⁸¹ Levinas asserts that "The characters of a novel are beings that are shut up, prisoners." (*RS*, 10).

⁸² Levinas writes: "... we should compare art with dreams: the instant of a statue is a nightmare ... Not that the artist represents beings crushed by fate – beings enter their fate because they are represented. They are enclosed in their fate but just this is the artwork, an event of darkening of being, parallel with its revelation, its truth." (*ibid.*, 9).

⁸³ Levinas elaborates: "A statue realizes the paradox of an instant that endures without a future ... the Mona Lisa will smile eternally ... In this situation the present can assume nothing, can take on nothing, and thus is an impersonal and anonymous instant ... the artist has given the statue a lifeless life, a derisory life which is not master of itself, a caricature of life." (*ibid.*).

“inhumanity,” “monstrosity”⁸⁴ and “paganism.” While speculating on artworks, Levinas is terrified by the closedness of an artwork whose suspension of time leaves no open door for interruption; neither by way of dialogue nor by any promise of a positive change in the future. Reminiscent of pagan gods, the artwork is frozen in its representation.

Levinas observes a dreamlike quality pertaining to artworks whose intoxication does not lead to enjoyment but rather to a dodgy experience of Being by resonating with the impersonality and impossibility of relations. For instance, the sound of musicality haunts the listener with “relationshiplessness,”⁸⁵ and its sonority evokes a loss of selfhood. Levinas refers to rhythm almost as a sort of violation in which the subject is affected without consent; without the possibility of escape, the self loses itself to anonymity.⁸⁶ With reference to music, even though both Nietzsche and Levinas invoke the similar associations of intoxication and the loss of boundaries of individuality, they end up with entirely different interpretations. In contrast to Nietzsche’s case where this experience is described as a Dionysian ecstasy, orgy and the absolute moment of life affirmation,⁸⁷ Levinas emphasizes an agonizing sense of self-annihilation.

In relation to representational arts, Levinas seems to take offence at the fact that a mere representation is taken as a depiction of life; he stresses that “*every image is already a caricature.*”⁸⁸ Reducing life to an image which is always already a caricature, Levinas suggests that artworks not only misrepresent life but also, through representation, they ridicule to entertain. Evoking irresponsibility and hedonism, the artwork is hostile to interruption: “the work is completed *in spite of* the social or material causes that interrupt it.”⁸⁹ Because the frozen immobile image cannot go towards the

⁸⁴ Levinas contends: “Art brings about this duration in the interval (the eternal duration of the interval – the *meanwhile*), in that sphere which a being is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilized. The eternal duration of the interval in which a statue is immobilized differs drastically from the eternity of a concept; it is the meanwhile, never finished, still enduring – something inhuman and monstrous.” (*ibid.*, 11).

⁸⁵ Levinas writes: “Sound is the quality most detached from an object. Its relation with the substance from which it emanates is not inscribed in its quality. It resounds impersonally. Even its timbre, a trace of its belonging to an object, is submerged in its quality, and does not retain the structure of a relation.” (*ibid.*, 4-5).

⁸⁶ Levinas conveys: “Rhythm represents a unique situation where one cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it. The subject is part of its own representation. It is so not even despite itself, for in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity.” (*ibid.*, 4).

⁸⁷ Nietzsche comments on the significance of music, dance and song as pertaining to the Dionysian in *BT*, 1; he comments on the orgies in *BT*, 2; and elaborates on the Dionysian life affirmation in *WTP*, 1050: March-June 1888.

⁸⁸ Levinas, *RS*, 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

better,⁹⁰ that is, be open to dialogue, the artwork blocks theoretical reflection and thereby enables the spectator to avoid one's responsibilities by getting immersed in the beautiful. Endowing himself with "pretentious and facile nobility,"⁹¹ the artist or the art consumer suspends criticism by the easy escape offered by the artwork:

To make or to appreciate a novel and a picture is to no longer have to conceive, is to renounce the effort of science, philosophy, and action. Do not speak, do not reflect, admire in silence and in peace – such are the counsels of wisdom satisfied before the beautiful. Magic, recognized everywhere as the devil's part, enjoys an incomprehensible tolerance in poetry... There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague.⁹²

What Levinas rejects about art is blind admiration without critical interpretation. He highlights the significance of criticism through which philosophy can undo the frozen effect of solid art – be it a statue, painting or a novel – and open new possibilities for dialogue. By breaking the self-sufficiency of the artwork, art criticism can help overcome the "artistic idolatry" and thus make a breach for revelation. That is why Levinas regards modern literature as exceptional in terms of being aware of the potential idolatry artworks can evoke. The self-reflexive nature of a Dostoevsky novel can be promising for undoing the mythical totality of the work and leave an open door for interruption by the art critic. Levinas's interest in the notion of the self-reflexivity of artworks can be regarded as the continuation of his pattern of thought according to which ethics is the subject's spontaneity called in question. In a similar way, an artwork's justification can be called in question by criticism; just as the narcissism of the same is challenged by the Other, the totality of the artwork can be ruptured by the criticism that emerges from the outside.

Nietzsche's assertion that life can only be justified aesthetically could be challenged by Levinas as the latter could ask what justifies aesthetics in the first place. Levinas's proposition is that aesthetics can only be justified through criticism; which owes its validity to the interruption by the Other (the Other can be the art critic or anyone taking the role of the art critic; the reader, the observer etc. – we should bear in mind that the art critic is not supposed to take over the privileged position of the "genius-artist" either). Yet the idea of interruption is completely missing from Nietzsche's account which, through the theme of *amor fati*, suggests the opposite. Loving fate in such a

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 12.

Nietzschean sense can be as passive, irresponsible and detached as enjoying an artwork; as if one lives one's life as a narrative.⁹³

From Levinas's viewpoint, in addition to its irresponsibility and inherent amorality, the notion of *amor fati* implies some other philosophically implausible points as well. In spite of Nietzsche's enchanted language which adorns the idea of *amor fati* with an air of Dionysian revelation and the creative processes of appropriation, some paradoxes reveal themselves. An obvious paradox is the temporal aspect of it: how can one live one's life and reflect on it or love it simultaneously? Is it not necessary to take a step back from one's life to decide whether she loves it or not? The ambiguity of *amor fati* is that it prompts us to live – love our fate –, and to think – measure and calculate –, at the same time. Rational evaluations which require contemplative detachment are supposed to be made while being enveloped within the richness of immediate life experience.

As a response to this paradox, Han-Pile suggests that Nietzsche conceptualizes *amor fati* to be necessarily "lived" or "experienced" rather than theoretically "understood." She argues that it is not possible to reduce *amor fati* to pure conceptuality. Moreover, the temporal ramification of this idea is that as a mediopassive – only partially active and partially inactive - modality of existence, determining the capacity of our will, *amor fati* helps us live fully in the present moment by enabling us to realize and appreciate the "smallest, most fleeting moments that life gives us."⁹⁴ In addition, the surrendering mode of *amor fati* endows us with an affirmative attitude towards the future.

Although Han-Pile's defence seems tenable and accurate, it would not be satisfactory for Levinas. In my opinion, Levinas would critique *amor fati* the way he critiques the ambiguity of artworks. Even if it looks similar to Levinas's elaborate account of enjoyment and the elemental at first sight, focusing on the present moment still pertains to the economy; to the realm of need where ethical responsibility for the Other is suspended. Yet it must be noted that Levinas's love of life is utterly different from Nietzsche's love of fate (or *amor fati*) as the former signifies the prerequisite condition for receiving revelation because only an enjoying subject can suffer.

Nietzsche's love of fate, on the other hand, suggests appropriating suffering into enjoyment because only a suffering subject can enjoy life. In order to say yes to a

⁹³ For a full examination of this idea, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.

⁹⁴ Han-Pile, 243.

single joy, do we not need to undergo all the suffering that goes along with it?⁹⁵ In addition to being a prerequisite for intensifying enjoyment – or happiness or pleasure, in Nietzsche’s terms –, pain and pleasure act like interdependent factors that add to the spice of life, just like the ornaments of the big picture; without contributing any ethical significance to it. The emphasis on the “smallest, most fleeting moments that life gives us” is analogous to the attempt artworks make – such as capturing the smile of *Mona Lisa* – to freeze the fleeting moment. Consequently, since the subject of *amor fati* only affirms what she has just experienced, her experience of fate could be comparable to *nature morte*.

For Levinas, such a conception of temporality cannot lead to ethics because what ignites ethics is a non-representable primordially. Similar to the alienating effect of a still life painting, *amor fati* makes the subject estranged to the actual life which is synchronized with the Other(s). For this reason, the Nietzschean notion of *amor fati* will only give us an incomplete, shallow and inaccurate “picture” of reality. What is worse, Nietzsche proposes *amor fati* as his resolution for the New Year; as a way of living his future life. By “looking aside” as “his sole way of negation,” he implies to secure himself from the unpredictable, unforeseeable possibilities – or the Other? – in the future. It almost seems like he buys himself the ring of Gyges as the New Year’s present. The Dionysian affirmation Nietzsche invests in sounds pagan rather than ethically significant. Is it really possible to stay ego-centrally carefree within the present moment? Is it ethical to affirm life only by loving one’s own fate at the complete disregard of the fate of others? Does not “loving” fate tempt us to remain inactive and not attempt to change anything for the *better*, for others?

From a Levinasian angle, in spite of its high spirited tone, the Nietzschean notion of *amor fati* lacks revelatory essence because it is not inspired by the Other. However, would it be accurate to suggest that, according to Nietzsche, one’s fate is never affected by others? This is an important question leading to various responses; yet for the sake of brevity we could discern that in Nietzsche’s account, one’s fate can be affected by one’s family, heritage, nationality, and so many other factors. Yet others do not affect or traumatize the Nietzschean subject at a fundamental level; other people can either be obstacles that need to be removed if they hinder development or positive challenges to spur the individual’s growth – like soil, water or the shade which affect the flourishing of a plant.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, IV, “The Intoxicated Song,” 10.

Nietzsche philosophizes in the thin air of the mountainous heights where solitude can be much more rewarding than company. Speculating on the one who “has turned out well,” Nietzsche comments that one “is always in his own company, whether he deals with books, men, or landscapes.”⁹⁶ Rather than being exposed to the Other like an open wound, in a relatively self-controlled manner, the Nietzschean individual calculates the pros and cons of what the relationship may contribute to him and evaluates and discriminates people based on their affects on his economy. In this regard, it seems that from a Levinasian perspective, Nietzsche considers other people as fulfilling some “needs” rather than evoking “Desire” for transcendence. The most expressive notion summarizing Nietzsche’s position on the influence of other people on oneself is his conception of friendship; in particular the “stellar friendships.” One can befriend someone, benefit from one another, but when the time comes, it is only natural that paths separate, as each individual has his own project to pursue. Time changes, individuals change; their needs and desires shift; the former friends may turn out to be strangers or even enemies; yet that is “the law to which we are *subject*.”⁹⁷

Jean-Michel Longneaux notes the utter difference between Levinas’s notion of being-for-the-Other and Nietzsche’s seemingly more intimate account of being for another person, namely a friend. He comments that the question of the other person is one of the very core issues on which these two philosophers can never share a common ground. Observing their “impossible relation,” Longneaux remarks on the inadequacy of Nietzsche’s notion of stellar friendship: “stars are incapable of friendship – or any other relation – because their frozen light is blind. They shine, but they cannot illuminate one another: only the night reveals them, to themselves.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 1003: Jan.-fall 1888.

⁹⁷ Nietzsche writes: “*Stellar Friendship*.— We were friends, and have become strangers to each other. But this is as it ought to be, and we do not want either to conceal or obscure the fact, as if we had to be ashamed of it. We are two ships, each of which has its goal and its course; we may, to be sure, cross one another in our paths, and celebrate a feast together as we did before, -- and then the gallant ships lay quietly in one harbour and in one sunshine, so that it might have been thought they were already at their goal, and that they had had one goal. But then the almighty strength of our tasks forced us apart once more into different seas and into different zones, and perhaps we shall never see one another again, -- or perhaps we may see one another, but not know one another again; the different seas and suns have altered us! That we had to become strangers to one another is the law to which we are *subject*: just by that shall we become more sacred to one another! Just by that shall the thought of our former friendship become holier! There is probably some immense, invisible curve and stellar orbit in which our courses and goals, so widely different, may be *comprehended* as small stages of the way, -- let us raise ourselves to this thought! But our life is too short, and our power of vision too limited for us to be more than friends in the sense of that possibility. -- And so we will *believe* in our stellar friendship, though we should have to be terrestrial enemies to one another.” (GS, IV, “Sanctus Januarius,” 279).

⁹⁸ Jean-Michel Longneaux, “Nietzsche and Levinas: The Impossible Relation,” in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 66.

c) Suffering, Theodicy and Nietzsche's Aesthetic Consolation

The Heaviest Burden.—What if a demon crept after thee into thy loneliest loneliness some day or night, and said to thee: "This life, as thou livest it at present, and has lived it, thou must live it once more, and also innumerable times; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh, and all the unspeakably small and great in thy life must come to thee again, and all in the same series and sequence – and similarly this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and similarly this moment, and I myself. The eternal sand-glass of existence will ever be turned once more, and thou with it, thou speck of dust!" – Wouldst thou not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth, and curse the demon that so spake? Or hast thou once experienced a tremendous moment in which thou wouldst answer him: "Thou art a God, and never did I hear anything so divine!" If that thought acquired power over thee as thou art, it would transform thee, and perhaps crush thee; the question with regard to all and everything: "Dost thou want this once more, and also for innumerable times?" would lie as the heaviest burden upon thy activity! Or, how wouldst thou have to become favourably inclined to yourself and to life, so as *to long for nothing more ardently* than for this last eternal sanctioning and sealing? —⁹⁹

Following on from the previous section, Nietzsche's notion of the eternal recurrence of the same is the twin concept of *amor fati* in terms of promoting an aesthetically justified way of existence. It can be suggested that from a Levinasian view, what makes *amor fati* such a notorious idea is its infamous allusions to the moral aspect of justifying suffering; especially the suffering of the Other(s) and thereby resonating with theodicy. The quote above presents the thought experiment of the eternal return as an experience to challenge and overwhelm the individual, signifying a change which reveals itself explicitly upon how she conducts her life.

It is John Llewelyn who also sees the interdependency between *amor fati* and the eternal recurrence of the same and argues that in an attempt to redeem suffering, in his early career Nietzsche turns to arts (particularly non-plastic forms such as music, dance and ancient Greek tragedy) and seeks there a vital Dionysian spirit which is supposed to discharge a redemptive power beyond suffering through artistic creation and thereby justify life aesthetically. However, Nietzsche's enchantment does not last long partially because of his disappointment in the reception of Wagner in Bayreuth; presumably the audience's interest in food, drinks, clothes, being seen; in short, art being turned into "show business" makes him question his belief in the role of art in revolutionizing the "health" of the society.

Nietzsche comes to realize that in overestimating the value of art, he falls into the trap of ascribing other-worldly meanings to art, which is evident in his criticism of his own

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, GS, IV, "Sanctus Januarius," 341.

work, *Birth of Tragedy* in 1886 as he renounces it to be embarrassingly romantic.¹⁰⁰

Llewelyn suggests that losing faith in the power of art in redeeming suffering, Nietzsche eventually turns to the doctrine of the eternal return and the theme of *amor fati* and seeks there what he cannot find in art.¹⁰¹ Llewelyn particularly emphasizes that with his teaching of the eternal return of the same, Nietzsche's main purpose is to relate it to Becoming; that is, the essential aspect of the eternal recurrence is not necessarily the "same" to which one returns but the actual "return" itself which stresses the constant movement and flux rather than making the "same" the absolute fixed goal.¹⁰²

Llewelyn's point is crucial for indicating the primordially of Becoming over Being, which is the very modality of existence for Nietzsche. This idea is already expressed quite vividly in the passage above as Nietzsche refers to life as the "eternal sand glass of existence" being turned again and again; and the individual is called a "speck of dust." However, Llewelyn enables us to see another important point: stressing the close relation between *amor fati* and the eternal recurrence of the same prompts us to see the organic bond between them: the Nietzschean subject "loves" the eternal return and therefore affirms his life. Yet this affirmative love of fate makes him also love his mistakes, his joys, his sorrows, his religion, his neighbour and consequently redeem his past.¹⁰³ To repeat, after all, does not Nietzsche sing in *TSZ* that in order to say yes to one single joy, one also has to say yes to every accompanying sorrow?

Llewelyn's criticism gains significance when we note that repeating everything infinitely, the eternal recurrence of the same always already contains the Overman and his supposed values as well. On the one hand, as broad themes, *amor fati* and the eternal recurrence seem promising in their proposition to overcome revenge and pity; but on the other hand, within their enclosure they also accommodate the love of man, of the herd; God; Christianity; pity, morality and everything that has been, is and ever will be.

¹⁰⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" (1886) [ASC], in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner, London: Penguin Books, 1993.

¹⁰¹ John Llewelyn, "Suffering Redeemable and Irredeemable," in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 191.

¹⁰² Llewelyn writes: "According to Nietzsche's teaching of eternal return, suffering is not redeemed by a hoped-for goal. That would be to give priority to a state of being. The 'same' of the eternal return of the same is not a same to which a return is made. It is the same of the eternal return itself as such. If there is anything for the sake of which the return is made, it is the circling of the return itself." (*ibid.*, 192).

¹⁰³ Llewelyn states: "But does not the doctrine of eternal return imply that future mankind has already existed? If so, the duty of love and the love of duty comprised in *amor fati* is directed also to that segment of mankind of which one says 'it was' and 'it is' ... Given the combination of that doctrine with the doctrine of *amor fati*, the commandment to love one's neighbour would appear to figure on the new tablet, too." (*ibid.*, 194).

Since everything is intricately interconnected, affirmation of life as a philosophical theme appears rather unspecific, to the extent of losing its meaning.

If one loves everything, one excludes nothing; and the flaw in this encapsulating attitude is that if one affirms everything, one ends up not leaving an open door for new possibilities. As a matter of fact, it is this sense of claustrophobic repetition that points to the challenge of Nietzsche's thought experiment. In his regard, the weak person would react in bitter protest and resentment whereas the strong-natured individual would have an epiphany. As I see it, the eternal recurrence makes sense most in terms of overcoming the spirit of revenge which eats up one's soul by constantly whispering to the subject that "things could have been otherwise." The brightest moment of the eternal recurrence is to get over the futile wish to change the past for the better; more suitable or advantageous to one's current condition. But perhaps, this is as good as it gets. It would indeed be a great relief to defeat the endless annoying feeling to obsess oneself with the past and stop investing so much creative energy and time in wishful thinking in spite of accepting the rational impossibility of changing the past. Moreover, getting over the fixation with the past also marks a possibility for overpowering the feeling to take revenge on one's past¹⁰⁴ and thereby overcoming self-pity and *ressentiment*.

Ressentiment underlies our most so-called sacred convictions and taints all the otherwise decent and promising values, such as justice. For this reason, once we beat *ressentiment*, we can be one step closer to the Overman who signifies an evolved type of persons, which in Nietzsche's thought, gives meaning to the Earth. Overcoming *ressentiment* can also point at a different way to regard the future; rather than obsessing about her mistakes and organizing her future in a way to compensate for the losses in the past, one can devote her full attention to the present moment to create her values and cultivate her character.

Llewelyn suggests that when we consider the core issues of their philosophies, Nietzsche and Levinas differ drastically; yet it seems that in his service to the Other, Levinas turns out to be more bound-to-earth than Nietzsche. Llewelyn remarks that despite its otherworldly associations at first look, Levinas's notion of the Good beyond Being is not a telos.¹⁰⁵ Rather than Levinas, Llewelyn argues that it is Nietzsche who presupposes to have some kind of telos; even if somewhat indirectly. Even though

¹⁰⁴ The connection between *ressentiment* and taking revenge on one's past is elaborately discussed by Jill Stauffer in "The Imperfect: Levinas, Nietzsche, and the Autonomous Subject," in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 37-40.

¹⁰⁵ Llewelyn, 196.

Nietzsche does not have an explicit “hoped-for goal” to arrive at; the very circling; the “return itself” is the essential operation of the will to power.¹⁰⁶ As mentioned above, the Nietzschean notion of “loving necessity” most importantly corresponds to this affirmation of the cycling of the return. The danger of the deterministic operation of the will to power which manifests itself through the eternal return of the same and *amor fati* reveals itself as we try to figure out the role of the subject for ethics. If the subject eternally loves her fate, then her subjectivity gets dispersed through the affirmation of life which is already too great a task. The problem is that in his Dionysian celebratory mood of life affirmation and Becoming, Nietzsche leaves no proper space for the subject to emerge.

This idea is also brought up by Longneaux who notes that Nietzsche mainly refers to the subject as an “error” or as a “necessary fiction.”¹⁰⁷ The way Nietzsche portrays the role of the subject within the themes of *amor fati* and the eternal recurrence (“a speck of dust”) can be regarded as analogous to the characters imprisoned within a novel. Just like novel characters, it is pointless for them to feel *ressentiment* or the wish to change the past or affect the course of the novel. What remains the most reasonable thing to do on their behalf is to affirm their existence infinitely and repeat themselves as self-sufficient novel characters. They have no possibility for moral or intellectual improvement because they are already locked up, immobile.

Levinas emphasizes the locked-up condition of literary artworks by likening characters in a novel to prisoners¹⁰⁸ where nothing new can be added or subtracted; where the totality of the work cannot be challenged or interrupted; where there is no possibility for improvement towards the *better*¹⁰⁹ as everyone’s role – or “rank” - is already firmly inscribed. I consider this analogy quite appropriate as a possible interpretation of Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal recurrence because otherwise, why should one necessarily consider to be “favourably inclined to oneself and life, so as *to long for nothing more ardently* than for this last eternal sanctioning and sealing?” What can be so divine about one’s fate being sealed?

¹⁰⁶ Llewelyn writes: “This gives us a for-its-own-sake that may be seen as Nietzsche’s alternative to the for-its-own-sake Kant attributes to deeds done out of respect for the moral law. But Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal return is a this worldly mimicry of the doctrine of an immortal afterlife that is an article of faith for Christianity and Kant. And it inherits that doctrine’s pattern of theodicy, albeit in an atheistic form. It is a doctrine of justification, whether we conceive it as justification by works or justification by faith or, forcing a little bit Kierkegaard’s reading of Luther, justification by a little bit of both.” (*ibid.*, 197).

¹⁰⁷ Longneaux writes: “Nietzsche leaves no room for the subject. If becoming is everything, then subjectivity is no longer anything at all.” (*ibid.*, 58).

¹⁰⁸ Levinas, *RS*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Perhaps the celebration of entrapment could signify a fundamental human need for having boundaries. One feels secure within established boundaries, within which the entrapment functions as a safety net where nothing from the exterior can harm the individual or pose a threat to her being. In addition, if everything is to be repeated infinitely, then this condition is at the same time a guarantee that nothing *worse* can ever happen than what has already happened; so it can provide a sense of consolation for the tiny “speck of dust.” Yet this comfort zone is reminiscent of the cluster of needs that Levinas would critique as a version of interiority or economy; referring to home laws, economy is that which is familiar and has boundaries carefully drawn and protected by the individual subject.

Regarding Nietzsche’s fascination over being sealed, it is possible to read this passage in relation to his keen interest in Stoicism and Stoic ethics which appreciate self-sufficiency, self-mastery and tolerance of hardship without giving in to the comforts of pity or compassion. Martha Nussbaum elaborates on Nietzsche’s close affinities with Stoic thought and reveals how the latter has definite influences on his philosophy – in particular on the issue of pity. In her account, even though she clearly dissociates Nietzsche from a “boot-in-the-face fascist,”¹¹⁰ Nussbaum nevertheless remarks on a considerable controversy and internal inconsistency surrounding his interpretation of “Stoicism.”¹¹¹

In a brief overview of the theme of Stoicism,¹¹² Nussbaum comments that “according to Socrates, one’s own virtue is entirely sufficient for a flourishing human life, or *eudaimonia*.”¹¹³ *Eudaimonia* is mainly associated with the notions of sufficiency and completeness; such that in Socratic thought “a virtuous person is truly complete in him or herself, whatever the world around him is doing.”¹¹⁴ Nussbaum gives the example of a Stoic person not lamenting the death of his friend or a member of his family; he would reject pity as it would signify an indication of incompleteness, and thereby offend him. Any misfortune related to external things such as family, friends,¹¹⁵ money or reputation are not supposed to pose a threat to his wholeness or belittle his integrity.¹¹⁶ In

¹¹⁰ This is a common interpretation, and as an example for such critics, I have already indicated Philippa Foot and her worry regarding Nietzsche’s “immoralism,” see page 33.

¹¹¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche’s Stoicism,” in Schacht (ed.), 140.

¹¹² Since it is not my task to critique Stoicism in this paper, I keep the discussion limited to the ideas inspired by Stoicism in Nietzsche and expose some of the internal inconsistencies.

¹¹³ Nussbaum, 144.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹¹⁵ We have already glimpsed Nietzsche’s conception of stellar friendship where he emphasizes a strong sense of independence and separation of individuals which almost implies the distance to be more preferable over close companionship.

¹¹⁶ Nussbaum, 145.

Nussbaum's account, following Socrates's notion of the importance of self-sufficiency for the equivalence of virtues, Greek and Roman Stoics go even further and denounce not only pity but also all the other basic emotions such as fear, love, anger, envy, gratitude and so on because they are dependent on fortune, which is an external factor uncontrollable by one's virtue. That is why it is wrong to ascribe great significance to those emotions:

To love is to give hostages to fortune. And there will be no occasions for either anger or gratitude for a person who does not entrust her *eudaimonia* to the care of others. If I value only my virtue, which nobody else can either damage or produce, I will see the events that are the usual occasions for anger as beneath me, unworthy of a passionate response.¹¹⁷

As Nussbaum clarifies, in Stoic tradition since love is perceived as a liability, the Stoic maintains his personal integrity at the cost of turning indifferent to the love, affection or the needs of others. Allowing himself to be irresponsible towards everyone else, his virtue becomes his shield to ward anyone who needs his attention off. For this reason, Nussbaum emphasizes that the happiness of the Stoic lies in his fear; the Stoic is someone who needs security, and the reason he values nothing material or familial is because he does not want to fear losing them.

Nussbaum questions the tangibility of the pretentious "hardness" in Stoic thought by unravelling the vulnerability hidden under the reclusive image. She emphasizes that, as a matter of fact, it takes far more courage to be vulnerable to others – any damages or heart breaks that may come from others – and be aware of one's own feebleness than shut oneself off from others for the sake of security. She conveys that the Stoic "looks like a fearful person, a person who is determined to seal himself off from risk, even at the cost of loss of love and value."¹¹⁸

On further reflection, it becomes notable that the ideals of Stoicism appear ironically similar to Buddhism, which Nietzsche strongly criticizes for being other-worldly. The only superficial difference between the Buddhist and the Stoic would be that the former aims to reach Nirvana whereas the latter aims to cultivate his *eudaimonia*. Both appear to envision a solitary way of existence where one is fully occupied only with oneself, to the extent of disregarding everything and everyone else. All these efforts of the Stoic thus stem from a desire to be invulnerable to others and to the whims of fortune.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

There is an implicit connection between Stoicism and asceticism; the Stoicism Nietzsche attests has common roots with Christianity and otherworldliness in the sense that both advocate a sense of hardness as a form of “self-protection” and “both express a fear for this world and its contingencies, both are incompatible with the deepest sort of love, whether personal and political.”¹¹⁹ What is paradoxical is that underneath Nietzsche’s emphasis on life affirmation and eternal recurrence seems to lay a hidden wish, an implicit fear and desire to be immune from the caprices of fate and others. Even while expressing his admiration to the evil demon, Nietzsche’s speck of dust is genuinely fearful and insecure about his well-being and place in this world. His exaggerated enthusiasm seems to disguise a fundamental angst.

Nussbaum challenges Nietzsche’s argument against pity by noting that there is still some valuable truth regarding pity being the source of moral sentiments. Nietzsche rejects the fundamental moral feelings associated with pity too simplistically by asserting an unnatural and rigid divide between pro-pity traditions versus anti-pity traditions. He does make some important points, such that a certain attitude in pitying can have a violating effect upon the pitied, and that rather than relying on others, one should always primarily seek one’s own inner resources.¹²⁰ However, Nussbaum remarks that Nietzsche’s assertions regarding pity increasing suffering in the world and pity being essentially egocentric are overstatements.¹²¹ It is always possible that one can orient pity and compassion towards others such as people undergoing severe socio-economic deprivation without violating their personal integrity or increasing the amount of suffering in the world.

Nussbaum suggests that underlying Nietzsche’s facile rejection of pity may be that he does not understand what pity really entails. This dubious attitude is also visible in his hasty dismissal of democracy and socialism too easily based on a rather superficial understanding of those political ideas – in whose core lies the provision and protection of the very fundamental human needs for equal opportunities such as in food, shelter, health, education etc.¹²² Nussbaum thinks that Nietzsche’s Stoicism, which shapes his views on pity, is basically a “bourgeois vulnerability” rather than a genuine “basic vulnerability;” and his solitude is a romantic bourgeois solitude which spurs his

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ I present the “dark side” of self-sufficiency in this chapter within the image of the Stoic indifferent to others. But I will present the bright aspect of self-sufficiency and self-overcoming in the next chapter with the idea of the free spirit.

¹²¹ Nussbaum, 157.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 158.

creativity rather than a real plight of a hungry person who can barely function.¹²³

Getting carried away with his romantic lyricism, the reader never gets to know which basic welfare system is supporting Zarathustra in the mountains.¹²⁴

In agreement with Nussbaum, a Levinasian critique would not leave Nietzsche's overly simplified notions of pity and compassion for the Other(s) unchallenged. In Levinas's philosophy, pity and compassion are crucial concepts which affect not only the trivial everyday interactions, but also significantly contribute to issues such as justice and the elevation of humanity. In Levinas, the basic moral sentiment is being for the Other; feeling for the Other; experiencing the impossibility of being disinterested towards the Other, as expressed in his words: "It is through the condition of being a hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple 'After you sir.'"¹²⁵ In contrast to Nietzsche's romanticism, Levinas appears much more realistic and indeed bound to earth – as suggested by Llewelyn above.

The discussion on pity brings to mind the theme of suffering which has substantial implications for both philosophers, and their attitudes towards suffering, either for oneself or for Other(s), reveal their unique differences from one another. For most of the time, Nietzsche regards suffering in terms of suffering for oneself; such as failing health or loneliness, which mainly indicate one's own problems with life in general at individual basis. For Levinas, on the other hand, suffering is associated with victimization and evil; analogous to the victimization of the anti-Semitic hatred during the Holocaust era. Richard White notes that Levinas regards suffering not as something *happening* to me but as something *done* to me,¹²⁶ targeting me personally. According to White's interpretation, in Levinas's account suffering signifies the impossibility of escape; the subject feels the insurmountable superfluous disclosure of

¹²³ Nussbaum writes: "In all of Nietzsche's rather abstract and romantic praise of solitude and asceticism, we find no grasp of the simple truth that a hungry person cannot think well; that a person who lacks shelter, basic health care, and basic necessities of life, is not likely to become a great philosopher or artist, no matter what her innate equipment. The solitude Nietzsche describes is comfortable bourgeois solitude, whatever its pains and loneliness. Who are his ascetic philosophers? 'Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer' – none a poor person, none a person who had to perform menial labor in order to survive." (*ibid.*, 158).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹²⁵ Levinas, *OTB*, 117.

¹²⁶ Richard White, "Levinas, The Philosophy of Suffering, and the Ethics of Compassion," *The Heythrop Journal* 53.1 (Jan., 2012): 111-123, 115.

Being or the *il y a*. Consequently, suffering not only marks the end of her mastery and virility over her being but also evokes an intimation of death.¹²⁷

Completely different from Nietzsche's depiction of suffering which implies a sense of self-control (as characterized by the proud Stoic), for Levinas, suffering points to an intense disturbance; even a violation of order.¹²⁸ Levinas's suffering subject is deeply paralysed by the evocation of evil, and her humanity is "overwhelmed;"¹²⁹ suffering shatters her personal integrity as it is a "pure undergoing."¹³⁰ Overwhelming the subject with its excessiveness, it makes it impossible for her to appropriate; to integrate or synthesize the surrounding world to her. As the very "denial and refusal of meaning,"¹³¹ suffering cannot be made intelligible or justifiable. Experiencing her loss of agency, the victim feels a radical passivity which is not necessarily a denial of her freedom or the frustration of her desire, but necessarily, the negation of her subjectivity in pure absurdity.

However, Levinas suggests that where there is evil, there is also the possibility of a response,¹³² a hint for the promise of goodness which can only be canalized through the inter-human relationship. The only way out of suffering is sociality, which signifies the ethical dimension of suffering. Rather than seeking any way to justify suffering by associating it with any pattern of theodicy, Levinas suggests that the sociality evoked by suffering can at some level mitigate the evil suffering embeds. Yet it is crucial to note that this proposition does not even remotely suggest any sense of compensation; as mentioned above, there is no possibility of balancing "good" with "evil" in harmonious symmetry – since both are transcendental, hence incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, even though the Goodness pertaining to sociality cannot counter-pose the evil of suffering, by alluding to the Good beyond Being, the Goodness inherent in

¹²⁷ White, 116.

¹²⁸ Levinas states: "For the Kantian 'I think' – which is capable of reuniting and embracing the most heterogeneous and disparate givens into order and meaning under its *a priori* forms – it is as if suffering were not only a *given* refractory to synthesis, but the *way* in which the refusal opposed to the assembling of givens into a meaningful whole opposed to it: suffering is at once what disturbs order and this disturbance itself." (*US*, 156).

¹²⁹ Levinas writes: "The evil which rends the humanity of the suffering person, overwhelms his humanity otherwise than non-freedom overwhelms it: violently and cruelly, more irremissibly than the negation which dominates or paralyzes the act in non-freedom... All evil refers to suffering." (*ibid.*, 157).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹³² Levinas states: "... Is not the evil of suffering – extreme passivity, impotence, abandonment and solitude – also the unassumable and thus the possibility of a half opening, and, more precisely, the possibility that wherever a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh happen there is the original call for aid, for curative help, for help from the other ego whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation?" (*ibid.*, 158).

hearing the sufferer's cry and responding to it can ease the sufferer's isolation and desperation, at the very least. Even if responding to the suffering of the Other intensifies my own suffering, which is unjustifiably useless and meaningless for me, I still respond to the Other's suffering; hoping that my suffering can alleviate hers:

... the suffering of suffering, the suffering for the useless suffering of the other person, the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the Other, opens upon suffering the ethical perspective of the inter-human. In this perspective a radical difference develops between *suffering in the Other*, which for *me* is unpardonable and solicits me and calls me, and suffering *in me*, my own adventure of suffering, whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on a meaning, the only meaning to which suffering is susceptible, in becoming a suffering for the suffering – be it inexorable – of someone else.¹³³

Without hinting at any remedy or justification, Levinas ascribes some meaning to it only when one suffers for the suffering for the human other(s) – even if my suffering is still useless in the Other; and insufficient for founding a political or ethical order¹³⁴. He notes that it is useless to try to alleviate my suffering or seek justifications to make it tolerable as pain will always be incomprehensible and unassumable. Nonetheless, Levinas seems to make a distinction between the actual suffering and the beyond of suffering – or what suffering gives to signification. He explicitly states that for “pure suffering, which is intrinsically meaningless, (useless) and condemned to itself without exit, a beyond takes shape in the inter-human.”¹³⁵

Of course this “beyond” does not apply to me to get out of my painful condition, but rather signifies the possibility that there is always something that can be done for the Other. “Beyond” manifests itself as the relationship with the human other; and the core of this “inter-human” is the “non-indifference of one to another,”¹³⁶ which is also my connection with the Good beyond Essence. And as an important detail, when I suffer, this suffering indubitably cannot have any melancholic pleasure. Suffering is distant from any mode of pleasurable cynicism, self-pity, melancholy or consolation; I cannot be consoled because I am always guilty and responsible.

Levinas builds his philosophy upon the re-ignition of “human dignity” by implying that everyone is an Other; and every human being has dignity simply for being human. This is a non-negotiable fact for him, and any ideology or philosophy which ignores this reality he considers evil. Levinas's theory of suffering is crucial for understanding his philosophy and his difference from Nietzsche. The absurdity of suffering marks Levinas's vehement stress on the uselessness of suffering. For this reason, it is vital to

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

understand that he rejects theodicy not only rigorously on philosophical grounds, but also on ethical grounds. He writes that seeking any sort of justification or “use” in suffering is the mark of evil: “the justification of the neighbour’s pain is certainly the source of all immorality.”¹³⁷

According to David Boothroyd, in both Nietzsche and Levinas, the theme of suffering is central for the moral formation of selfhood. Boothroyd notes that the issue of suffering seems to occupy the minds of both philosophers as they try to establish the main threads of their thinking and condense their major arguments – life affirmation, becoming and overcoming in Nietzsche and responsibility and transcendence in Levinas.¹³⁸ So, in an attempt to understand the relationship between these two philosophers, it is crucial to consider what each of them thinks about the relationship between “suffering” and “what lies beyond suffering.”¹³⁹

For instance, as for Nietzsche, what distinguishes the noble from the herd is the former’s attitude towards the meaninglessness of suffering. The noble has no issues concerning the meaninglessness of suffering whereas the slave cannot accept suffering without justifying it by ascribing religious significance to it or moralizing it. The slave is the spider which gets stuck within its own web of reason, as in the quote above. The noble, on the other hand, dissociates himself from the meanings attributed to suffering by the herd, and thereby individuates his will.¹⁴⁰ By individuating his will, he re-interprets suffering and it is basically this creative power that makes him noble and gives him the authority to “name” things in his world. The noble is the good player who knows how to play dice; the one who does not calculate the throws or seek strategies to get the desired result.

Nietzsche’s account of suffering reveals itself most clearly as he explains it in terms of willing; as the dialectic between pain and pleasure. He asserts that pleasure and pain are not opposites but are actually the components that create the dynamics of the feeling of power.¹⁴¹ Moreover, pleasure and pain always accompany the undergoing of an act; the consciousness of a work.¹⁴² Mutually dependent on each other, pain is the feeling associated with facing an obstacle whereas pleasure relates to the experience of growing power owing to the overcoming of the obstacle. Thus, pain indirectly

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹³⁸ Boothroyd, 151.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 660: 1885-1886.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 661: 1883-1888.

enhances growth; so, experiencing pain can be canalized into a productive outcome.¹⁴³ Even though he does not directly or deterministically say that pain is experienced for a reason, Nietzsche implies that undergoing suffering can serve certain purposes.

For the same reason, Nietzsche emphasizes that it is misleading to overrate happiness and underrate the significance of suffering. Suffering tests one's limits for tolerating resistances; and in the meantime, similar to a strength training exercise it builds one's stamina to tolerate further difficulties; hence empowers one to overcome the obstacle. That is why, Nietzsche wishes his friends much suffering; desolation, humility and even diseases just so that the people he cares about can be challenged and consequently get stronger as they struggle to master their problems.¹⁴⁴ In Nietzsche's mind, happiness is associated with the removal – not mastery – of the obstacle and thus promises a blissful monotony and stagnant peacefulness. Happiness is the invention of the last man who no longer creates but blinks like a dull animal. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche suggests that if there is anything useless, it must be the monotonous happiness and the joy of conforming to the society; even suffering can be more useful than happiness.

So, from a Nietzschean perspective, suffering can even be considered a reward; if handled wisely, it can be a prerequisite for getting stronger.¹⁴⁵ However, it is important to interpret Nietzsche correctly: the subject getting stronger is not the consciously desired or anticipated result of the dice throw. One can experience anything; any disaster or accident in life. Yet, being a good player means not to interpret the conditions of life in terms of good or bad. I do not suffer in order to become strong; strength comes naturally as I learn how to play dice, which means not to calculate the throws. So even if I got stronger, I may not be aware of it as a "reward" necessarily. Loving necessity means not to wage war against what one dislikes or cannot control; it means to cultivate an attitude in life; cultivating the love of life, even if it means that one perishes at the end. Having created beyond oneself, having created oneself, what

¹⁴³ Nietzsche writes: "The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it – this is the primeval tendency of the protoplasm when it extends pseudopodia and feels about. Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same." (*ibid.*, 656: Spring-Fall 1887).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 910: Spring-Fall 1887.

¹⁴⁵ This idea is crystallized by one of Nietzsche's best known aphorisms: "... what does not kill us makes us *stronger*" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 [WLN], Notebook 10, Autumn 1887: 10[87]).

matters is eventually to learn how to dance with chance. If there is a reward at the end, it is the individual herself only, nothing else.

Based on a certain interpretation of Nietzsche, it can be said that suffering can have a purpose after all; it may not be as “useless” as Levinas claims. The striking difference between Nietzsche and Levinas is that the former finds some “use” in suffering. However, does this sense of “use” justify suffering? Daniel Came explores this issue and suggests that what Nietzsche aims at by justification ends up taking the form of some sort of consolation rather than justification proper. Came argues that Nietzsche’s notion of justification does not pertain to the intrinsic qualities of the object or our relation to it; or whether it makes us happy or not, but rather the Nietzschean notion of justification enhances life-affirming attitudes in us. So, Came claims that this kind of justification is “optative,” rather than rational or having any propositional truth value.¹⁴⁶

Came writes that “when Nietzsche speaks of the aesthetic justifying life, he does not mean that it shows us that life is *actually* justified, but rather that it educes an affectively positive attitude towards life that is *epistemically neutral*.”¹⁴⁷ Came’s observation is important as it also confirms Boothroyd’s impression that the “beyond” of experience leaves an imprint that will carry on its signification regardless of its actuality – the meaning or the value of the experience or suffering endured. Came associates this “beyond” with the positive attitude towards life that will have an ongoing effect upon the subject.

However, for Levinas, even the epistemic neutrality evokes an amoral approach towards the Other. The Levinasian subject is not epistemically neutral but traumatized; the condition she undergoes is persecution and being a hostage. So the notion of neutrality still resonates with the naturalistic approach in which the subject is only occupied with herself. What Levinas suggests instead is that we are not “neutral” but rather, for good reason, deeply “traumatized” at a fundamental, primordial level. Since suffering is “an ordeal more passive than experience,”¹⁴⁸ suffering for a meaning is irrelevant. Imposing any sort of meaning, even to say that it is “neutral” always already comes much later than suffering, since suffering is prior to ascribing meaning to experience. It is important to note that “neutrality” is a value judgment as well, and as such, it arrives much later than the primordial experience:

Suffering, in its hurt and its in-spite-of-consciousness, is passivity. Here, ‘taking cognizance’ is no longer, properly speaking, a taking; it is no longer *the performance of*

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Came, “The Aesthetic Justification of Existence,” in Pearson (ed.), 47.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴⁸ Levinas, *US*, 158.

an act of consciousness, but, in its adversity, a submission; and even a submission to submitting, since the 'content' of which the aching consciousness is conscious is precisely this very adversity of suffering, its hurt ... It is the *impasse* of life and being, their absurdity, where pain does not come, somehow innocently, "to colour" consciousness with affectivity. The evil of pain, the harm itself, is the explosion and most profound articulation of absurdity.¹⁴⁹

When Levinas claims that suffering is unassumable, he implies that it is already irrelevant to ascribe any meaning or use (or social or religious function) to suffering. And since suffering in this Levinasian sense neither lacks nor awaits meaning, it is clear that Levinas does not remotely seek any pattern of theodicy to compensate for any loss (of God or of personal happiness or well-being). One does not choose to suffer, one just suffers. Levinas's account of suffering is quite different from Nietzsche's notion of suffering which can be somewhat controllable or even "welcomed."

It is impossible to ascribe any meaning to suffering because suffering is prior to interpretation or conscious evaluation, as it is the experience of losing all the ground for thinking. Compared with Nietzsche, Levinas offers a far more elaborate account of suffering by emphasizing that it is misleading to consider suffering based on the conscious experience of the dialect between pain and pleasure. Suffering is not something to spice up one's life either to break the monotony of everyday life or to take risks to explore further possibilities in one's life. The vitality that comes with a sudden shock of misfortune or a chosen solitary life style cannot be associated with the phenomenon of suffering in the Levinasian sense.

All in all, I believe that Levinas's rejection of theodicy – no matter how disguised – and accentuation of the ethical dimension of suffering offers a much fuller, more concrete and convincing account of suffering than Nietzsche's. Yet, in addition to its persuasive power, with his argument Levinas also reveals that rejecting theodicy is not only a matter of intellectual preference but beyond that, signifies an ethical choice in which one refuses to turn a blind eye to the suffering of the Other.

Conclusion

Since in Levinas's ethics moral consciousness is not an experience of values or virtues but exposure to the alterity of the Other, any philosophy which invests in the closure of the individual to the Other is immoral. Nietzsche explores the possibility of creating values after the death of God by relying heavily on the frontiers of the individual,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

alluding to a Stoic self-sufficiency. Nietzsche's notion of suffering which promotes an epistemically neutral and morally detached attitude towards life is closely in line with his naturalistic philosophy of the will to power where the self seeks compensation between harm and benefit. His account of suffering is continuous with his notion of an aesthetic justification of life where, considering the "big picture," one can comfortably evaluate and reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the damage upon the overall health of the subject.

Yet Levinas argues that suffering is not something reducible to my calculative schemes. As deeply constitutive of my subjectivity, suffering is not a matter of narcissistic caprices where one suffers due to the ambitions and the greed of the conscious ego. To the contrary, suffering signifies an opening for substituting for the Other. It evokes transcendence when one suffers for the suffering of the Other; without expecting any reward or consolation, but solely out of responding to the Goodness disguised under the desperate cry of the human other demanding response. Responding is Good. And Good is useless.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NIETZSCHEAN CHALLENGE TO THE LEVINASIAN SUBJECT

Introduction

Nietzsche dedicates his *Zarathustra* to everyone and no one¹ whereas Levinas explicitly states to whom he dedicates his *Otherwise Than Being*.² To me, the crucial distinction between the concrete dedication of Levinas and the abstract dedication of Nietzsche is like a sign post pointing at the distinct approaches of the two philosophers. *Zarathustra*'s dedication hints at the transcendence of the Overman, who is everyone and no one; everyone in the sense that every individual person has the potential to pave the way for the Overman – by way of being one of his forefathers – and no one as the time for the Overman has not come yet. The Overman is an untimely being; it is in the “not yet.”

Nietzsche's cheerful dedication evokes a sense of individualization which is capable of embracing everyone who wants to seek the road to the Overman within one's own soul. Levinas, on the other hand, ascribes responsibilities to everyone by invoking one of the most traumatic events of the twentieth century. He haunts the individual reader with the immemorial guilt – however irrational or pre-logical may it be – of living; surviving on behalf of the deceased ones. In his sermonic tone, Levinas also hints at an authoritarian or universalistic moral philosophy which attributes a sense of shame to everyone. It is this inhibition; this non-indifference to the Other (even if out of sight; even if deceased) upon which Levinas theorizes his conception of subjectivity.

The main tension in this chapter is based on the utter conflict between Levinas's conception of universalism and Nietzsche's moral perspectivism which leads to an individualistic ethics of the character. In the first section, I explore Levinas's notion of universalism within its frames of reference. In the second section, I delve into Nietzsche's idea of perspectivism and challenge Levinas's universalism with the former's perspectivism according to which a subject individuates not by submitting to the authority of the third party but by refining her drives and cultivating herself. This is a genuine criticism of Levinas as it asks whether there is any room for the creative individual subject within the Levinasian notion of substitution. In the last section, I

¹ On its dedication page, Nietzsche refers to *TSZ* as “A book for everyone and no one.”

² Levinas's dedication in *OTB* goes as follows: “To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.”

explore the notion of subjectivity in terms of the character and question whether the Levinasian subject lacks the rich inner complexity of a proper character.

a) Levinas's Universalism

The very status of human implies fraternity and the idea of the human race ... it involves the commonness of a father, as though the commonness of race would not bring together enough. Society must be a fraternal community to be commensurate with straightforwardness, the primary proximity, in which the face represents itself to my welcome. Monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself and for the Other.³

In a broad sense, Levinas's conception of universalism relies on the intricately interwoven dual aspects of humanity and the relation to the Infinite. Yet in spite of the embracing quote above, upon close scrutiny we realize that Levinas's universalist account of subjectivity alludes to a very special combination of ontological particularities, namely Judaeo-Christianity and Platonism. Associating humanity with fraternity can only lead to an abstract notion of fraternity. Even though the phenomenology of humanity as an abstraction of fraternity could be plausible, problems occur while interpreting the relationship between the abstract and the concrete. In contexts where Levinas depicts man as too abstract, Robert Bernasconi is eventually driven to comment that "for Levinas, there is not an other who is *the* Other."⁴

In my view, what seems philosophically question-begging about Levinas's universalism is the conflict that emerges between Levinas's notion of the singularity of the subject and its relation to universality. In order to unravel this problem, firstly, I explore the significance of Judaism in his thought. After that, I examine his close association of universalism with Platonism. Lastly, I question the meaning of the third party as the guiding sign of ethics and argue that the third party stifles the individual by suppressing her inner active forces. Overall, Levinas's universalist account is open to a Nietzschean criticism.

There is an undeniable continuity between Levinas's humanistic philosophy and Judaist thought in his account of subjectivity based on his idiosyncratic synthesis – as discussed above.⁵ He weds Platonism with Judaism in a relatively secular manner by rejecting any sense of dogmatic otherworldliness. For instance, even if its reference point is the (Platonic) ideal, the "perfect," the manifestation of transcendence must be

³ Levinas, *TI*, 214.

⁴ Robert Bernasconi, "Who is my Neighbor? Who is the Other? Questioning 'the Generosity of Western Thought,'" in Katz and Trout (eds.), IV, 9. This quote will gain clarity below.

⁵ See page 62-63, n. 46.

sought in this world by serving the Other. In an attempt to mitigate the potentially religious undertones, Levinas suggests that rather than praying for oneself, one directly serves the Other. Richard Cohen touches on this matter as he conveys that Levinas is keen on quoting Rabbi Israel Salanter, the nineteenth-century Eastern European rabbi who is also known for his zealous commitment to ethical self-examination and self-improvement, and who is famous for his quote: “The other’s material needs are my spiritual needs.”⁶

Richard Cohen explicitly draws attention to this issue as he states: “Humanism, after all, is not merely the affirmation of the dignity of one person, of each individual alone; it is an affirmation of the dignity of all humanity, the affirmation of an interhuman morality, community, and social justice.”⁷ Already referred to as moral perfectionism, Levinas’s philosophy can be regarded as the subject’s investment in self-improvement; as a way of moral self-overcoming whose teacher is the Other.

Levinas emphasizes two essential aspects of human fraternity; the common father and singularities. The former signifies the utmost human kinship independent of blood relationship or family resemblances which is by analogy, indicated in the opening quote as the common father of monotheistic religions. The latter, on the other hand, points to self-referential singularities which cannot be logically reduced to differences in a genus.⁸ Even though he does not elaborate on these matters in detail, one assumes that by these irreducible individualities Levinas evokes the alterity of the Other(s) and my singularity which must be understood as my non-substitutable responsibilities for the Other(s).

Very plausibly, critics such as Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Hillary Putnam, Robert Bernasconi, Judith Butler and Fabio Ciaramelli note Levinas’s tendency to interpret and universalize the human condition – particularly, the human subject – in terms of Judaist thought. As hinted in the dedication of *OTB*, Levinas always has in mind the Jew as the uttermost model for subjectivity, which was already indicated above in his portrayal of the Jew as “the stiff neck that supports the universe.”⁹

Referring to the dedication of *OTB*, Peperzak writes: “This dedication shows that anti-Semitism is for Levinas the equivalent of antihumanism, and that to be a Jew is

⁶ Richard Cohen, *HO*, xxxiv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁸ Levinas, *TI*, 214.

⁹ See page 63.

identical with being authentically human.”¹⁰ Is this necessarily a problem? Responses differ on this matter. However, since I regard this issue as quite central to Levinas’s depiction of universalism, I intend to devote some space to this discussion. Peperzak does not consider Levinas’s association of Judaism with authentic humanity problematic in terms of undermining the power and plausibility of his philosophical arguments:

... just as a Jewish chemist is not necessarily Jewish in his chemistry, so a philosopher obeys professional rules and standards that are neither Jewish nor Buddhist, neither atheist nor antireligious ... Philosophy speaks a universal language, even if this language was discovered or invented in Greece (just as the language of chemistry was discovered in modern Europe, but in principle is open to all people).¹¹

It is important to recall the Levinasian claim that philosophy is rooted in pre-philosophical experiences, “orientations” and commitments. In that respect, it does not matter if it is Judaism that kindled the spark for philosophizing in Levinas’s case. It could have been anything; Christianity, Buddhism etc. would not make any difference. Peperzak argues that Levinas’s “method” of uniting philosophy and Judaism is not problem-begging as long as he keeps his rigour in philosophizing.¹²

I consider Peperzak’s comparison between chemistry and philosophy implausible because of its disregard for the substantial differences between ethics and sciences. Philosophy is a vast subject covering a huge variety of subjects from logic and epistemology to metaphysics and ethics. So I think that if Levinas were an epistemologist working on justification of truth claims; also focusing closely on mathematics (in philosophy), it could be more suitable to compare him to a chemist. Fields such as mathematics and chemistry seek truth without reference to moral interpretations, and as natural sciences they are international and universal. Levinas, on the other hand, is not even a naturalist in philosophy. Concentrating specifically on ethics and seeking the transcendental possibility for its meaning, he confesses on many occasions how Judaism has shaped his thought. I suspect Judaism would shape the perspective of a chemist or a mathematician.

As for the other aspect of Peperzak’s argument, is philosophy really as clean-cut and precise in requiring “professional rules and standards,” analogous to chemistry, as he

¹⁰ Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997, 7.

¹¹ Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, “Levinas’ Method,” in Katz and Trout (eds.), I, 338.

¹² Peperzak touches on a crucial theme concerning philosophy; on whether religious belief can be compatible with philosophy or whether such is always inevitably the onto-theology. Since this is a deeply controversial subject, I limit it to Levinas’s case.

would like to think? I do not think so. In my opinion, even Levinas's very own approach to philosophy, his claim about its origination in the pre-philosophical sensations defies easy and straightforward categories for doing philosophy.

In Nietzsche's view, since one's philosophy is as personal as one's autobiography, Levinas's affinity with Judaism does not pose any problems when explored in terms of *ad hominem* arguments. What matters is the character of the philosopher; so a philosopher like Levinas, who is deeply intrigued with religion and transcendence can be even more interesting as a character for Nietzsche. However, ascribing universal authority to his philosophy would appear as counter-intuitive as ascribing universal authority to his own character. Yet, the controversy concerning Levinas's universalism does not end here. What is furthermore problematical about Levinas's association of authentic humanity with Judaism reveals itself as we consider the latter's ontological status. The quote below exposes the continuity of ideas from *Otherwise Than Being* especially on the notions of responsibility and substitution:

The ultimate essence of Israel derives from its innate (*innée*) predisposition to involuntary sacrifice, its exposure to persecution. Not that we need think of the mystical expiation that it would fulfil like a host. To be persecuted, to be guilty without having committed any crime, is not an original sin, but the obverse of a universal responsibility – a responsibility for the Other (*l'Autre*) – that is more ancient than any sin. It is an invisible universality! It is the reverse of a choosing that puts forward the *self* (*moi*) before it is even free to accept being chosen. It is *for the others* to see if they wish to take advantage of it (*abuser*). It is for the free *self* (*moi libre*) to fix the limits of this responsibility or to claim entire responsibility. But it can do so only in the name of that original responsibility, in the name of this Judaism.¹³

Judith Butler notes that Levinas seems to neglect the fact that Judaism is the outcome of specific historical and social circumstances. Rather than manifesting authenticity, it discloses facticity; it is therefore an ontological category rather than a pre-ontological one. In that respect, Butler asserts that overlooking the fact that the Jew is a culturally constituted ontology, Levinas confuses the ontological and the pre-ontological.¹⁴ For this reason, it can only recount a very limited extent of human experience let alone exemplify the pinnacle of humanity. Butler comments that portraying Jews as always the persecuted but never the persecutor is already outrageously misleading. However, what Levinas does that is even more worrying is to neglect the ontological status of

¹³ Cited in Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

Judaism which leads him to racist and dehumanizing remarks about the non-Jewish and non-Christian people.¹⁵

It is already far-fetched to claim Judaism to be a modality rather than a particularity.¹⁶ Yet when Levinas insists on regarding it as a non-category, he unreservedly ascribes universalist meanings to Judaism by associating it with humanity. Bernasconi observes this attitude both in his confessional and philosophical works.¹⁷ The dedication of *OTB*, equating anti-Semitism with the general term “hatred” should not go unnoticed; anti-Semitism is definitely a part of the hatred of the other man, but it does not constitute *the* essential core of it. We must note that associating the original responsibility with “this Judaism” is in line with Levinas’s conception of humanity. Pointing to the dangers of this mode of universalization based on a specific race, Bernasconi states that “the language of the victim is not a universalizable language.”¹⁸

In his attempt to ascribe universal value to particularity, Levinas’s other benevolent source is Platonism from which he borrows the concept of the Good beyond Being. Staehler elaborates on Levinas’s universalism in terms of “the universality of the Good” which is mainly influenced by the Platonic notion of the Good. She suggests that from a Platonic point of view, the Good beyond Being is the universal and eternal point of reference which addresses and unites all human beings as the “ultimate ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ (*hou heneka*)” that guides all human activity.¹⁹ Since Plato’s influence on Levinas is mostly evident in his important essay “Meaning and Sense,” I regard it as a key text in unravelling how Levinas develops his theory of universalism, so below I offer some space for its assessment.

¹⁵ Butler notes: “Levinas claims that Judaism and Christianity are the cultural and religious preconditions of ethical relationality itself and warns against the ‘rise of the countless masses of Asiatic (*des masses innombrables des peuples asiatiques*) and underdeveloped peoples (who) threaten the new-found authenticity’ (*DF*, 165) of Jewish universalism. This, in turn, resonates with his warning that ethics cannot be based on ‘exotic cultures.’” (*ibid.*, 94).

¹⁶ Levinas says: “... to be Jewish is not a particularity; it is a modality. Everyone is a little bit Jewish, and if there are men on Mars, one will find Jews among them. Moreover, Jews are people who doubt themselves, who in a certain sense, belong to a religion of unbelievers. God says to Joshua, ‘I will not abandon you’ (and, in the subsequent phrase): ‘nor will I let you escape’ (Josh. 1:9)” (*JIR*, 164).

¹⁷ Bernasconi, “Who is the Other?” 19.

¹⁸ Bernasconi writes: “... if racism does call its victim to his or her ‘ultimate identity,’ it is not an identity that can in all cases be given the name ‘anti-semitism’. It is only the Jew who can discover in anti-semitism, not a racial identity which separates him or her from the members of other races, but ‘an invisible universality’ (*DF*, 225). Blacks could make the same discovery only under some such name as anti-blackness. And so on. But perhaps this is the point. The language of the victim is not a universalizable language.” (*ibid.*, 22).

¹⁹ Staehler, 118.

In “Meaning and Sense,” Levinas roughly associates “meaning” with the historical, cultural or artistic manifestation of the ontological order,²⁰ granting Being intelligibility. “Sense,” on the other hand, is associated with the a-historical, the primordial, beyond Being, which is termed by Levinas as the essential “orientation” for the ethical. Throughout the article, Levinas endows it with the meaning of the “unique sense;” the “one-way sense” which implies the radically non-reciprocal (Western) generosity and openness for the Other.

In the article, Levinas accuses contemporary philosophy of a growing interest in the “meaning” which manifests itself as the enthusiasm for cultural expressions and arts. He attributes mere ornamental qualities to cultural meanings as he associates them with the realm of needs. What pass as culture is therefore mere oddities and peculiarities, which lead to the celebration of multiculturalism. Levinas displays a dubious attitude towards multiculturalism as it suggests a possibility for the equivalence of cultures, which is a notoriously unacceptable idea for him.

In Levinas’s view, we need to be able to judge cultures, and in order to be able to do so, we need to have certain reference points; some “norms of morality” which are most elaborately developed and theorized by Plato with the notion of the Good beyond Being. That is why, according to Levinas, any ethical, political or philosophical theory disregarding the key insights of Plato is doomed to fail. While developing new ideas (even if to reject Plato) we need to refer to Plato – to capture within a slogan, while philosophizing on ethics, one can philosophize with Plato; against Plato; but not without Plato. In defence of Plato, Levinas writes:

For Plato there exists a privileged culture which approaches it (the world of meanings that precede language and culture) and which is capable of understanding the provisional and as it were infantile character of historical cultures.²¹

Levinas argues that multiculturalism leads to a “de-occidentalism” of the world; which also means the “dis-orientation” of the world.²² He warns us against this disorientation as it implies the loss of sense; and hence the loss of the ground for the possibility of moral norms; evoking the dispersion of ethics altogether. Levinas seems disappointed in the recent ethnographic findings which locate multiple cultures on the same plane, and evaluating this as symptomatic of “disorientation,” he interprets multiple cultural meanings to be the modern expressions of atheism.²³

²⁰ Levinas writes: “Culture and artistic creation are part of the ontological order itself.” (MS, 82).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²² *Ibid.*, 101.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86.

To illustrate orientation and generosity, Levinas gives the example of a French person deciding to learn to speak Chinese. Levinas notes that prior to the decision to learn Chinese grammar, she has already displayed an ethical orientation for the Chinese, which is a quality she owes to the impressive generosity of Western thought.²⁴ Levinas regards Greek as a kind of esperanto in which everything can be expressed²⁵ without loss; since it is the language of the university, Levinas ascribes universal or international potency to it. The complacency of Levinas's argument reveals itself when he goes as far as asserting that Western civilization is even able to understand cultures that never understood themselves.²⁶ Yet as a consolation for those who are not Westerners, Levinas offers a recipe as well: so long as one speaks Greek, one can be elevated to the level of the master:

Whereas the Platonic soul, liberated from the concrete conditions of its corporeal and historical existence, can reach the heights of the empyrean to contemplate the Ideas, whereas a slave, provided that he "understands Greek" which enables him to enter into relationship with the master, reaches the same truths as the master...²⁷

It is quite surprising that Levinas does not seem to notice the irony of this situation: on the one hand he dedicates himself to dignify the alterity of the human other and on the other hand, he feels too comfortable associating himself with the privileged language of the West.²⁸ In spite of his general conviction that ethics cannot be formalized, Levinas states the necessity to "fix with precision the conditions for such an orientation."²⁹ The prerequisites for this condition are – as elaborated previously for the notions of the Infinite and substitution – "a departure with no return;" implying the movement of the same into the Other without the anticipation of self-coincidence.

²⁴ Bernasconi rightly queries how it is that the Chinese person's generosity in learning French is never acknowledged (*ibid.*, 23).

²⁵ Levinas says: "One can express everything in Greek. One can, for example, say Buddhism in Greek. Speaking Greek will always remain European; Greek is the language of the university. With this I am thinking neither about the Greek root of words nor a Greek grammar. The way of speaking in the university is Greek and cosmopolitan. Certainly, in this sense, Greek is spoken at the University of Tokyo. It is central, because Greek is not one language among others ... When I speak about Europe, I think about the gathering of humanity. Only in the European sense can the world be gathered together!" (*IR*, 138-9).

²⁶ Levinas says: "I often say, though it's a dangerous thing to say publicly, that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest – all the exotic – is dance" (cited in Bernasconi, 17). "Europe, then, is the Bible and the Greeks. It has come closer to the Bible and has come into its own destiny. It takes in everything else in the world. I have no nostalgia for the exotic. For me, Europe is central." (*IR*, 138-9).

²⁷ Levinas, *MS*, 86.

²⁸ Bernasconi notes: "Levinas allows himself the luxury of the promise of this universal language of the West ... whereby being human reaches its fulfilment in being Western ... Being a Westerner is, for Levinas, not something confined to the West. It is open to all.. there is nothing to make this new colonialism hesitate." (*ibid.*, 24).

²⁹ Levinas, *MS*, 91.

Associating ethics with “liturgy,” Levinas asserts that one dedicates herself to this “work” even if she cannot witness the results of her efforts in her lifetime. In line with the argument in “Useless Suffering,” this orientation is “an eschatology without hope for oneself.”³⁰ This work is not prompted by need but by Desire, and it is revealed as Goodness which only manifests itself as sociality. The Other creates in me an unquenchable desire to be generous, good and benevolent. Yet since this benevolence or generosity is interpreted as responsibility in Levinas’s thought, my responsibilities lead me to a paradoxical situation: on the one side I am liberated, on the other side I am restricted by the Other as I am aware of my responsibilities more than ever:

The relationship with the other puts me into question, empties me of myself and empties me without end, showing me ever new resources. I did not know I was so rich, but I no longer have the right to keep anything for myself. Is the desire for the other an appetite or a generosity? The desirable does not gratify my desire but hollows it out, and as it were nourishes me with new hungers. Desire is revealed to be goodness.³¹

As the essay develops, we witness Levinas associating sense with the third party and the face of the Other. The “abstract man” becomes the frame of reference towards which ethics orients itself. Eventually, the abstract man alludes to the primordial non-representational time and space – the “before culture” – and as such, bears the trace of God. It is crucial to explore the abstract face and the abstract man. I begin with the former.

The face is nude and abstract, yet, in Levinas’s account, there always seems to be some ambiguity pertaining to the abstractness of the face in terms of evoking a potential danger of effacement. The abstractness of the face turns dubious when it suggests denying the heterogeneity of the concrete singular face (of the person). Levinas highlights that what constitutes the bareness of the face is necessarily its dispossession of cultural ornamentation.³² Even though the ambiguity of the abstractness of the face is visible also in *TI*, the account given in the book does not lead to problematic situations as it does in “Meaning and Sense.”

In *TI*, Levinas rigorously argues that the face cannot be reduced to the plastic oval shape as it primordially evokes language and peace. Levinas emphasizes the insignificance of the physical features of the face by claiming that while looking at a person, noticing the colour of her eyes in a way disrupts the ethical relationship.³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

³² *Ibid.*, 96.

³³ Levinas, *EI*, 85.

Rather than signifying facial features, the face signifies conversation and the existence of ethics. On the issue of the face, the accounts given in *TI* and “Meaning and Sense” lead to contradictory conclusions. When the nudity of the face is explained in terms of its fragility and potency for the ethical relationship, it is highly plausible. But when its nudity is a matter of deprivation of culture, then this account seems untenable because deprivation of culture (analogous to the nude and abstract face) leads to the question of the abstractness of the human other. That is why we need to be cautious about the uniformity insinuated by the “abstract.”

Critiquing “Meaning and Sense,” Bernasconi offers a twofold criticism to Levinas’s idea of the abstract humanism and the abstractness of the face. Firstly, Bernasconi asks Levinas a Levinasian question just to develop his thought further by drawing attention to the ethnic alterity of the Other. Does not the challenge of the face also call one’s ethnic identity into question? Is not one’s ethnicity – plus one’s gender, which is another aspect determining one’s identity that Bernasconi notes Levinas never takes into consideration³⁴ – also a part of one’s identity?³⁵ So when the Other suspends one’s subjectivity, is not one’s (Western) culture also questioned?³⁶

Apart from the obvious problem about the self-righteousness of the Western identity never being called into question by any non-Western culture, there is also the problem of the absence of the concrete identity of the Other, which is suggested by Levinas’s notion of the “abstract man.” By pointing to the vagueness of the notion, Bernasconi infers that Levinas implies that we do not take the Other’s identity or culture into consideration. But then, is it not violent to strip the Other of her alterity (are not ethnicity and culture constituents of one’s alterity content, after all?) to reduce her to a mere person “like me?”³⁷ Bernasconi argues that within the notion of the abstract humanity, Levinas implicitly suggests homogenization. The stranger, the widow and the orphan are obviously Biblical references, yet these are at the same time curiously anonymous terms; rather than pointing at concrete individuals, they evoke unspecified, faceless beings:

Does Levinas’s claim about the abstractness of the face mark a certain continuity with abstract humanism and its complicity with homogenization? Levinas’s emphasis on the

³⁴ Bernasconi, 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁶ Bernasconi comments: “... Western culture is not challenged by the stranger. It regards the stranger as a barbarian who has nothing to say precisely because he or she cannot speak ‘Greek,’ cannot speak the language of the University.” (*ibid.*, 15).

³⁷ Bernasconi writes: “... while the skin colour is of itself a superficial marker, is there not a violence implicit in the reduction of the alterity of the Other to the status of a human being *like me?*” (*ibid.*, 8).

Other as *etranger* – stranger, foreigner, alien – offers a natural starting-point from which to develop such questions ... For Levinas, there is not an other who is *the Other*.³⁸

At this point, one cannot help but ask again: who is the Other for Levinas, then, if everyone speaks Greek and everyone is to be gathered in Europe? I think that Levinas's arguments lose their credibility in these three points: Firstly, Levinas regards Judaism not as any religion or culture but as a privileged modality of being which exemplifies authentic humanity. Secondly, Levinas regards Greek not as any language among others but as *the* language of the university – the medium via which all universal truths can be conveyed perfectly without any loss in translation. And importantly, Levinas regards Platonism not as any philosophy emerging from some specific history, culture or tradition but as the a-historical absolute norm of morality which all the other patterns of thought and societies need to model in order to overcome their infantile cultures, peculiar traditions or moralities.

These three issues reveal a disguised double standard embedded within Levinas's thought – to me, this is reminiscent of George Orwell's classic dystopian fable *Animal Farm* which is famous for its notorious slogan "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." In my opinion, when Levinas advocates universalism under those three rationales, his rigour weakens and his writing turns into quasi-philosophy. In his quest for the meaning of ethics he loses his sincerity. The problem is not only limited to Levinas just losing his "rigour" in making philosophical arguments but the bigger worry is that he is at the brink of undermining his main argument by contradicting himself at his very core.³⁹ His main criticism against Western philosophy is its "egology," in which disregarding the exterior, the narcissistic self-same coincides with itself. But if Levinas is indifferent to the Other as the non-Western – by implying that the non-Europeans are mere "dancers," – then what he ends up achieving is only the crystallization of the authority of the (common) "Father" of Western philosophy, namely Plato.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson we learn from Levinas is self-questioning and the interruption of self complacency. Yet these ideas gain more significance when we

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ This point is also observed accurately by Bernasconi: "First, does not Levinas give the impression of being too comfortable with terms like 'the West' and 'Western philosophy' for a thinker who has set himself against totalizing? Secondly, does not any attempt to approach the Other as outside of culture, including this 'humanism of the other man,' not repeat the violence, long since exposed, of a humanism that reduces the other to nothing more than a *man*, thereby depriving the other of his or her cultural identity? Is abstract humanism not the contemporary form of Western ethnocentrism, sustained by its tendency to define and measure the humanity of man in terms of approximation to a European model? In this way is it not found to be complicitous with the racism it is supposed to contest?" (*ibid.*, 17).

surpass Levinas; rather than ignoring his fallacies, we could expose his mistakes and developing his crucial insights, we could become better Levinasians than Levinas himself. He presents a provocative account exploring the meaning of ethics which emerges at the moment when the subject's ego, power and spontaneity are called into question; as the ego acknowledges the priority of the human other before itself. Yet when Levinas ceases to make us question our beliefs about subjectivity and ethics by asserting universalist formulations, his account becomes less convincing;⁴⁰ or at best, incomplete.

From a Nietzschean point of view, Levinas's universalistic account of subjectivity is problematic because of its final reference point as well: the third party. It can be suggested that Levinas's strong emphasis on the third party seems to disguise the homogenizing effect of his universalism; the point of reference for the "abstract man." In Levinas's philosophy, in order for justice to be possible at all, the third party is indispensable.⁴¹ According to Levinas, justice always comes from the outside because by its essence, justification of anything is provided by an above view, by an external examiner, or appeal. There has to be a judge, and it is the third party, which is always already embedded within the illeity (the *He*-ness; the trace of God) of the Other.

However, from a Nietzschean viewpoint, the third party has a stifling effect on the activity of the subject. For Nietzsche, the notion of justice is essentially a reactive – or slavish (because of its reactive essence) – concept because it gains its significance based on man's reactive forces rather than active forces. The quality of an action is "judged" from the single point of view of the third party – be it the state, the law, God or the Church. And what is "judged" is only the tip of the iceberg; only the consequences of the manifest action. Since we have no access to the performer's hidden motives – even she may not know it herself, consciously –, we only take the effect as the cause of the damage done.

It may be helpful to remember Nietzsche's criticism of free will to understand on what grounds he doubts the validity of the justice determined by the third party – or the society which can be regarded as a disclosure of the third party (this would not be

⁴⁰ Bernasconi states this situation quite nicely as he writes: "Although Levinas seems to mean no more than that each nation has a universal responsibility, the slippage between having *to answer* for all and having *the answer* for all is particularly acute." (*ibid.*, 26).

⁴¹ Levinas states: "It is requisite for this totality that a free being could have a hold on another free being. If the violation of one free being by another is injustice, the totality can be constituted only through injustice. But injustice could not occur in the society of love, where pardon annuls it. There is real, that is, unpardonable, injustice only with respect to a third party. The third party is the free being whom I can wrong by constraining his freedom. The totality is constituted through the other qua third party." (*ET*, 37).

inaccurate as Levinas also associates the third party with humanity or sociality; at least as one possible interpretation). Society needs a subject to punish so as to reinforce its own force upon the subject and maintain the status quo. In order to punish, it invents the subject as an agent of free will – who can be punished and thus the evident damage be calculated and translated into the currency of punishment. Deleuze points out that the third party determines the utility of an action precisely because he does not perform it himself.⁴² This is quite interesting because with this observation, Deleuze seems to note Nietzsche's idea that the third party is the sterile omnipotent point of view, *the* perspective from which the "fairness" of actions is judged. For Levinas, the third party signifies not only justice but also the possibility of ethical relationship. Yet from a Nietzschean view, this justice upon which the Levinasian ethical relationship is built is actually established at the cost of oppressing the individual subject – the performer of any act – and most importantly, diminishing her "perspective" for the sake of submitting to the perspective of the omnipotent third party has an alienating effect upon the subject.⁴³

Of course, there could be some significant differences between what Deleuze interprets as Nietzsche's third party and Levinas's conception of the third party. Yet there are also some undeniable similarities in terms of designating exteriority as the frame of reference to restrict the activity of the subject. As a matter of fact, as mentioned above, Levinas is also highly conscious of the potentially tyrannizing effect of the third party, and that is why he suggests that the face interrupts the third party and vice versa; with the intention that the ethical invalidates the context-blind rigidity of the political.

Nevertheless, all sciences, morality and laws are done by considering only the reactive forces. Sciences draw conclusions based on observing the reactive forces. Morality and laws – justice – also operate with the same instinct; solely evaluating the reactive causal relations based on calculating damage done and referring to utilitarianism as its most defining value. Nietzsche emphasizes that there is a common spirit in sciences,

⁴² Deleuze writes: "to whom is an action useful or harmful? *Who* considers action from the standpoint of its utility or harmfulness, its motives and consequences? Not the one who acts: he does not 'consider' action. It is rather the third party, the sufferer or the spectator. He is the person who considers the action that he does not perform – precisely because he does not perform it – as something to evaluate from the standpoint of the advantage which he draws or can draw from it... we always end up replacing real activities (creating, speaking, loving etc.) by the third party's perspective on these activities: the essence of the activity is confused with the gains of the third party, which he claims that he ought to profit from, whose benefits he claims the right to reap (whether he is God, objective spirit, humanity, culture or even the proletariat...)." (69).

⁴³ Nietzsche proclaims: "For me – how should there be any outside-myself? There is no outside!" (TSZ, III, "The Convalescent," 2).

morality and the juridical system, which is the triumph of the reactive forces. And as such, all these systems feed on *ressentiment* and consolidate nihilism. According to Nietzsche, the third party diminishes the subject by suppressing its active, essentially creative force. Consequently, unable to find its exit for discharge; when separated from what it can do, the active force eventually turns back against itself and becomes reactive and thereby loses its power.⁴⁴

A similar idea can be considered in relation to Levinas: for Levinas, the Other separates me from what I can do and therefore limits my active force. But on the other hand, as apparent from the quote above, Levinas claims that the Other makes me realize and expand my capacity for generosity and hence gives me other powers that I did not know existed or thought I was capable of.

Generosity is an interesting theme that signifies the different approaches between the two philosophers. In *TSZ*, Nietzsche regards gift-giving, bestowing as the highest virtue, but it can only gain significance depending on who does and with which motive. As for him, the charity of the weak does not have much value because if the weak performs generosity, it is still out of weakness – without the claws to fight back; it offers its services as compensation.⁴⁵ The goodness of the weak is its only asset for survival; it “has to” play the pious out of necessity.

Yet if the noble is generous, it is done out of strength rather than a disguised “need” for self-protection, and it is performed out of a spontaneous overflowing; without calculation or slavish evaluation of harm or utility. For Nietzsche, generosity does not seem to be necessarily directed towards others but points to an explosive energy; discharge; superfluity or dynamic abundance, as an event of natural benevolence. For Levinas, on the other hand, generosity is directed towards the Other; and as if in a calculative manner, the Levinasian subject is obligated to respond more to whomever is in need the most – the more vulnerable the Other is, the more responsible the Levinasian subject is. From the Nietzschean perspective, Nietzsche’s notion of generosity is an active phenomenon whereas Levinas’s conception of generosity is predominantly, reactive.

⁴⁴ Deleuze accurately summarizes the characteristics of reactive force: “Thus reactive force is: 1) utilitarian force of adaptation and partial limitation; 2) force which separates active force from what it can do, which denies active force (triumph of the weak or the slaves); 3) force separated from what it can do, which denies or turns against itself (reign of the weak or the slaves). And analogously, active force is: 1) plastic, dominant and subjugating force; 2) force which goes to the limit of what it can do; 3) force which affirms its difference, which makes its difference an object of enjoyment and affirmation.” (57).

⁴⁵ Nietzsche speaks through Zarathustra thus: “In truth, I have often laughed at the weaklings who think themselves good because their claws are blunt!” (*TSZ*, II, “Of the Sublime Men”).

Another critical point concerning the plausibility of Levinas's account is the Levinasian subject being infinitely responsible for the Other without expecting reciprocity. When questioned "how about the Other's responsibilities for me?" Levinas briefly states that "It is *his* affair."⁴⁶ Notwithstanding his humble reply, we can infer that Levinas proposes a distinct conception of the subject, which he believes is a solid "account of subjectivity" – applying to everyone, including the Other. Otherwise, it would be merely Levinas himself who personally believes that what the Other does is only his affair. Yet it is clear that Levinas's reply is the key component of his theory of subjectivity, universally valid for every subject, not just himself. As a matter of fact, if he were not claiming universal plausibility for his ideas on subjectivity, then why would he even bother to write and publish anything at all and persuade us that his ideas are plausible?⁴⁷

Levinas attempts to lay out a necessarily "universal" account of subjectivity – what is the case for one individual is the same for everyone else as long as everyone is a subject. The subject cannot monitor, criticize or keep an account of what the Other does for her – "it is *his* affair" – but she very well knows that since the Other is also a subject, he must have been sensing the same inhibition; the same primordial passivity pertaining to persecution and being a hostage (even if he *acts* indifferent or cruel to her), because the very experience of subjectivity – as substitution – is universal. Even if one is not consciously aware of the primal condition of being a hostage, it is precisely because of this condition that, as mentioned above, one can never annihilate the moral authority of the face even if one kills the Other physically.⁴⁸

That is why Fabio Ciaramelli notes that Levinas's notion of subjectivity is more than just a "private adventure," but rather the universality of ethics addresses everyone.⁴⁹ Ciaramelli explores and critiques substitution and asks whether it appears like a "theatrical role;" yet, defending Levinas, he emphasizes that it is only me who can play my part, no one else. So, the notion of this so-called theatrical role cannot be ridiculed or reduced to the inauthenticity or banality of any actual theatrical role where any actor can play any part interchangeably.⁵⁰ However, from a Nietzschean perspective, I think

⁴⁶ Levinas, *EI*, 98.

⁴⁷ Fabio Ciaramelli, "Levinas's Ethical Discourse between Individuation and Universality," in Bernasconi and Critchley (eds.) [1991], 93.

⁴⁸ In Levinas's lucid statement: "It is through the condition of being a hostage that there *can be* pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity in the world - even the little there is, even the simple 'after you, sir'." (*S*, 91, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, obviously the condition of being a hostage by its sole existence does not prevent cruelty or promise any cure for evil deeds. Hostage embeds the subject without literally telling it what to do or how to respond to the Other(s).

⁴⁹ Ciaramelli, 83.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

that the Levinasian defence cannot exactly refute the criticism posed here. Continuing with the analogy, a theatrical role is still a role, ascribed to me by someone else – the Other – rather than originating from within my own being.

In relation to the ambivalence pertaining to the asymmetrical relationship, another issue we need to consider is the impossibility of “knowing” the Other. Levinas bases his account upon this impossibility by emphasizing that the Other is eternally elusive, unforeseeable and incomprehensible; the only quality one can infer is the Other’s moral superiority over the subject. Even though there is not an isolated self without the Other(s) – no subjectivity without intersubjectivity – I can never understand the Other, which, from a Nietzschean point of view, makes my relationship with the Other too complicated, almost impossible to maintain. I can have no access to the active forces at work within the Other; just as I have no conscious access to what goes on within my own body. So, while experiencing my own self, my ipseity proper by way of substitution, which Levinas insists is the case of subjectivity, what I am experiencing is a double alienation. I am already alienated from my own acts – the operations of my own body –, and yet the workings of the other person’s interiority seems like further alienation. For this reason, when I try to respond to the other person in the Levinasian sense, I can only superficially re-act to the Other’s reactions – that is, “re-action” in the Nietzschean sense; which points to a slavish mode of passivity spurred by *ressentiment*.

In addition to the Nietzschean vexation of not knowing the Other, the last issue I would like to raise is the validity of the responsibilities of the Levinasian subject. Ciaramelli suggests that with his idea that I am responsible before I am free, Levinas is alluding to a pre-ethical condition rather than an ethical one.⁵¹ Levinas insists that my responsibility is prior to consciousness, and I am not – as a matter of fact, I have never been – in a condition to choose or not to choose my responsibilities. It is, rather, the other way around; I am chosen for my responsibilities as “the elect;” to the point that no one can fulfil my responsibilities on my behalf. For Levinas, ethics is the way of responding to the call of the Other which is undeniably there.

But if there has never been a choice in the first place, can there still be ethics? And in this case, can we consider the subject, who is responsible before she is free, as either ethical or not? Rather, the subject Levinas theorizes about seems like a pre-ethical subject who senses pre-philosophical revelations. Pre-ethically, I am called to respond to the demands of the Other. Moreover, I am judged not only by the Other but

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

simultaneously also by the third party who “looks at me in the eyes of the Other”⁵² by holding the moral authority.

Yet it is this third party that causes distrust in Nietzsche as he associates it with an “eye impossible to imagine.”⁵³ From a Nietzschean viewpoint, Levinas’s conception of ethics is disputable also because it takes the third person as its point of reference. Levinas’s universalist account of subjectivity is construed by the consolidation of the third party and the gathering of humanity within the responsible subject at the cost of the loss of one’s own perspective. In this respect, Nietzsche’s strong emphasis on perspectivism – the topic of the next section – might be considered as his aim to dethrone the third party or the figure of authority that signifies justice (the system of the slaves) because, for him, the third party signifies the mediocre.

Overall, as a humorous contrast to Levinas’s universalist account based on Judaism and Plato, I cannot help but think of Nietzsche’s extraordinary Zarathustra who is neither Jesus nor Moses nor Plato nor Buddha – even though he has hints of every one of them (his town is called “The Pied Cow;” he has disciples, he retreats to his cave, he is a prophet and so on). In this respect, the figure Zarathustra is intentionally symbolic; rather than crystallizing any myth, Nietzsche undoes the myth; deconstructs it and thereby leaves it to the reader to reconstruct whatever she makes of it for herself. The actual historical figure Zarathustra originated in the Middle East which is the home of the all three monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam; but the way Nietzsche depicts his character is fictional, in a fictional land. This way, Nietzsche seems to parody all religions and dogmas. And rather than consolidating the teaching of the Bible or Plato, Nietzsche suggests rejecting all of them in order to signify a new beginning for humanity; but first: for the individual.

b) Nietzsche’s Perspectivism

... to see differently, the *desire* to see differently for once... is no small discipline of the intellect and a preparation for its eventual ‘objectivity’ – this latter understood not as ‘disinterested contemplation’ (which is a non-concept and a nonsense), but as the capacity to have all the arguments for and against *at one’s disposal* and to suspend or implement them at will: so that one can exploit that very *diversity* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the interests of knowledge. From now on, my dear philosophers, let us beware of the dangerous old conceptual fable which posited a ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject’, let us beware of the tentacles of such contradictory concepts as ‘pure reason’, ‘absolute spirituality’, ‘knowledge in itself’; – for these always ask us to imagine an eye which is impossible to imagine, an eye which supposedly looks out in no particular direction, an eye which supposedly either restrains or altogether lacks the active powers of interpretation which first make seeing

⁵² Levinas, *TI*, 213.

⁵³ Nietzsche, *GM*, III, 12.

into seeing something – for here, then, a non-sense and a non-concept is demanded of the eye. Perspectival seeing is the *only* kind of seeing there is, perspectival ‘knowing’ the *only* kind of knowing; and the *more* feelings about a matter which we allow to come to expression, the *more* eyes, different eyes through which we are able to view this same matter, the more complete our ‘conception’ of it, our ‘objectivity’, will be. But to eliminate the will completely, to suspend the feelings altogether, even assuming that we could do so: what? would this not amount to the *castration* of the intellect?⁵⁴

With the close guidance of the substantial quote above, in this section I critique Levinas’s universalism from the viewpoint of Nietzsche’s conception of perspectivism, which is a very rich topic with diverse interpretations. Nietzsche’s notion of perspectivism is a multifaceted idea leading to suggestions regarding both the possibility of knowledge and the cultivation of values. Moreover, in accordance with Nietzsche’s naturalistic account, perspectivism reveals on the one side a conscious aspect of the subject; based on which we can associate a perspective with one’s set of beliefs, rational and moral choices; world view or philosophy. On the other side, perspectivism can also hint at the unconscious aspect of the subject; such as the conflicting drives, affects, the judgments based on the “taste” or the spontaneity of hidden “muscle movements” that constitute each individual. It is at the intersection of these two facets – the conscious and the unconscious – that the will to power operates and values are created. For the current purposes of my project, I keep perspectivism’s relation to the possibility of knowledge and truth quite limited and focus mostly on its suggestions for values. I begin by unpacking this exquisite quote.

Nietzsche begins by emphasizing the importance of gaining a certain discipline of the intellect: before anything else, seeing. The quote highlights a metaphorical connection between seeing and knowing. Maudemarie Clark notes that the metaphor of perspective conveys that what one knows depends on where one stands. So, how one interprets or justifies knowledge depends on what one already believes: “all justification is contextual, dependent on other beliefs held unchallengeable for the moment, but themselves capable of only a similarly contextual justification.”⁵⁵ In Nietzsche’s account, all knowledge is dependent on needs and interests. Brian Leiter accurately conveys that the aspect of perspectivism pertaining to knowledge can never be disinterested; it always presupposes some affect or interest, and knowing is thus analogous to an optical situation. Seeing and knowing is intricately interrelated; how we see affects what we know and vice versa.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 130.

⁵⁶ Brian Leiter accurately summarizes the basic aspects of perspectival seeing: “Necessarily, we see an object from a particular perspective: for example, from a certain angle, from a certain

What we know can always enhance our perspective by improving the way we see. In order to earn this quality, the genuine inclination to see differently is a manifestation of a mind that has an implicit responsibility to acquire objectivity. Stressing the notion of a “preparation for its eventual objectivity,” Nietzsche implies that gaining that objectivity is a desirable quality which demands an ongoing effort – hinting that it is also eventually an ethical responsibility. What Nietzsche means by this “objectivity” is an expansion of capacity for considering a further set of possibilities for thinking: rather than clinging tightly to our anonymous convictions, Nietzsche invites us to revisit our thinking patterns and suspend the gravity of our beliefs and values.

There are always more interpretations that are different from ours. Even though we can never exhaust all possible interpretations, having more perspectives is invaluable; one can always consider a diversity of perspectives and revise one’s own perspective accordingly. Leiter notes that Nietzsche’s conception of perspectivism hosts the notions of non-egalitarianism and pluralism⁵⁷ as the structure of perspectivism is both pluralistic and hierarchical. Along the way, some interpretations will be better than others, and the way to judge them would again be based on our interests.

For this reason, while evaluating other perspectives, one is never disinterested (or “objective” proper); one interprets them based on one’s affects, needs and desires. Yet Nietzsche thinks that this is an expected and mandatory aspect because even when one is open to other diverse perspectives, one has to rely primarily on one’s own active interpretive forces. Otherwise, being alienated from one’s perspective; being completely absolved in other perspectives or being tuned in to some “thing-in-itself” or omnipotent source would lead to the castration of one’s own intellect. One has to maintain one’s feelings and will in order to have a perspective in the first place.

Perspectives are flexible. Just as expanding one’s perspective is desirable, limiting one’s perspective is also crucial for achieving something; to focus, to concentrate on one single goal;⁵⁸ so much that even stupidity can spur development and progress at

distance, under certain conditions (perspectivism claim). The more perspectives we enjoy – for example, the more angles we see the object from – the better our conception of what the object is actually like will be (plurality claim). We will never exhaust all possible perspectives on the object of vision (infinity claim). There exists a catalogue of identifiable factors that would distort our perspective on the object: for instance, we are too far away or the background conditions are poor (purity claim).” (“Perspectivism in *Genealogy of Morals*,” in Schacht (ed.), 344).

⁵⁷ Leiter writes: “... we do indeed have knowledge of the world, though it is never disinterested, never complete, and we can always benefit from additional nondistorting perspectives. As long as we can make out the purity claim, this epistemology is not egalitarian, though it is certainly pluralistic.” (*ibid.*, 346).

⁵⁸ Nehamas writes: “Nietzsche never attacks Christianity because it has ‘tyrannized’ its followers or because it has imposed an overarching direction upon people’s lives. He himself is not (as is

times.⁵⁹ Yet it is promising that one can always be ready to accept that one's ideas are wrong or misdirected; or one's thinking is flawed. Changing or revising one's perspective is always possible and necessary. In this respect, I think that Nietzsche's perspectivism is immune from a potential Levinasian attack on the self-identical subject. Since a perspective is not rigid, its flexible nature makes it unsuitable for self-coincidence. Presumably, the only possibly self-identical subject would be "the pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject;" the "pure reason,' 'absolute spirituality,' 'knowledge in itself,'" "an eye impossible to imagine." Yet it is this precise subject that Nietzsche's conception of perspectivism rejects.

As a matter of fact, it is at this moment that I see a parallel pattern of thought between Nietzsche and Levinas; the latter defines ethics as the suspension and critique of one's spontaneity by the Other. Nietzsche, on the other hand suggests suspending our ages-old convictions in order to cleanse our thinking and feeling patterns; this implies a progress in thinking, which is itself an ethical and decent attempt in terms of taking intellectual responsibility for our thoughts. Yet the way to achieve this is to suspend our beliefs at will (which, as one may imagine, would require an immense training of self-discipline and self-overcoming) and experience a diversity of (other) perspectives. It seems that Nietzsche hints at the definition of (not ethics but) reasoning as the suspension of one's beliefs and thoughts.

Nehamas suggests that alternative readings and interpretations could always, in principle, be devised.⁶⁰ Consequently, there is no such thing as omni-perspectival seeing, and Nietzsche also explicitly argues against this possibility in the quote. By nature, any perspective is limited and subjective; even the belief in the possibility of an omnipotent eye is perspective-denying, hence self-negating. It points to the impossibility of knowledge and creation of values. Some perspectives are better than others, but *the* best perspective does not exist.

sometimes thought) an enemy of single, distinct, clear ends and purposes: 'The formula for my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal* (*Twilight*, I, 44). What he cannot accept is the particular direction Christianity has chosen. And even more, he cannot tolerate the fact that Christianity has always been dogmatic, and has always tried to conceal the fact that its direction is only one direction among many others. He is quite aware, however, that to pursue any of these other directions would have entailed no less a subjection to similar 'capricious laws.' In itself, therefore, this is not an objection to Christianity." (48).

⁵⁹ Nietzsche states: "... this tyranny, this arbitrariness, this severe and magnificent stupidity, has *educated* the spirit; slavery, both in the coarser and the finer sense, is apparently an indispensable means even of spiritual education and discipline. One may look at every system of morals in this light: it is 'nature' therein which teaches to hate the *laissez-aller*, the too great freedom, and implants the need for limited horizons, for immediate duties – it teaches the *narrowing of perspectives*, and thus, in a certain sense, that stupidity is a condition of life and development." (*BGE*, "The Natural History of Morals," 188).

⁶⁰ Nehamas, 63.

What makes a certain perspective better than a lesser one depends on the interests of the people who hold it. If it proves more cognitive or serves better to their needs, the people will prefer that specific perspective to be better than the other one. This nature of perspectivism reminds us of the agonistic contests mentioned above. The common tendency of the competitors in the ancient Ephesus was to ostracize the best one among them.⁶¹ In the competition, all the competitors wanted to compete, but no one wanted to win or be the best one because that would mean the end of the contest – this ancient culture of competition is quite different from how we regard contests today; we make the cult of the champion and consider the rest of the competitors losers.

Yet from a Nietzschean viewpoint, omniperspectivism seems to be the claim in Levinas's philosophy. Rather than a humble perspective – one among others –, Levinas asserts his argument (the Bible and the Greeks to signify cultural superiority) to be a solid frame of reference for ethics and moral norms. In a way, Levinas proves Nietzsche right on the fact that knowledge (hence, values) is never disinterested as Levinas's personal reference points for formulating his own thoughts are Plato, Bible and Judaism. Refusing to change or revise his perspective, Levinas expects the rest of the world to adjust itself to his point of view. In a way, he seems to have always already associated himself with the authority of the third party which is a very problematic moment even for Levinas, because the essential separation between the subject and the exteriority (the Other and the third party) is the backbone of his philosophy.

In Nietzsche's point of view, the complacency of Levinas's perspective implies omniperspectivism which refuses the question of justification from the beginning. As a matter of fact, this seemingly dogmatic approach reveals itself in Levinas's attitude towards ancient Greek philosophy as well, especially Plato. Even though both philosophers are fascinated by ancient Greek thought, their attitudes are quite distinct. Although Nietzsche is deeply impressed with ancient Greek philosophy, particularly the Pre-Socratics, his interest is relatively non-dogmatic.

Nietzsche is very attentive to the changes concerning the interpretations of concepts over time such as "good," "bad" and "evil." Yet a more telling example is the unusually positive connotations of words such as "envy," "jealousy" and "ambition" (*Eris*) – as explored in the first chapter. Nietzsche's aim in pointing at the change of interpretations in these concepts is to illustrate that there has been a time and culture

⁶¹ Nietzsche quotes the Ephesians banishing Hermodorus: "Among us, no one shall be the best; but if someone is, then let him be elsewhere and among others." (*HC*, 36).

in the world in which values were different; people thought and felt differently from how we think and feel today. As there have already been different “perspectives,” it is therefore always possible to interpret life, create values and seek new meanings in the future.

Nietzsche never displays a blind admiration or fetish for the ancient Pre-Socratics; he does not imply that we should imitate them today as our model. But he conveys the important message that our current ways of thinking and feeling are not *the* ultimate ways to interpret and live in the world. Different cultures existing in different slices of time can inspire us to think differently and prompt us to seek new beginnings, to be pursued by the philosophers of the future. Although we do not need to take their accomplishments as our reference points, we could nonetheless be appreciative about the most precious lesson they teach us: that different ways of thinking and feeling *are* always possible; there are always open possibilities for the future. In this respect, Nietzsche seems much more future-oriented than Levinas who hints at a past-oriented model of Platonic morality.⁶²

Agreeing with Clark on the fact that perspectivism is mainly a claim about justification, Bernard Reginster notes that its anti-foundationalism⁶³ points to the “contingencies of practical reasons”⁶⁴ which characterize Nietzsche’s perspectivism as the interconnectedness between reasons and desires. Even though the boundaries of a perspective are somewhat indecisive, one has to observe its standards of justification while evaluating it.⁶⁵ Reginster observes two possible approaches: weak perspectivism and strong perspectivism. The former focuses on the sheer subjectivity of knowledge and values almost at a nihilistic level and as a form of radical scepticism, it denotes the simplistic idea of “anything goes.” The latter, on the other hand, is “a *deflationary* view

⁶² Levinas is quite unwilling to abandon Plato’s thought for the sake of seeking new meanings for ethics. He openly states: “... in the European heritage that is ours, we must not radically oppose the Judaeo-Christian and the Greek sources.” (*IIR*, 183).

⁶³ This idea is elaborately explored by Clark in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 128-135.

⁶⁴ Bernard Reginster notes: “Perspectivism is a repudiation of the idea of ‘pure reason’: this means that there are no reasons which every rational agent is necessarily committed to accepting, simply by virtue of being a rational agent and regardless of his or her contingent ‘perspective.’ Accordingly, there is no *a priori* way of determining what reasons an agent may have, for example, for acting in a certain way, no *a priori* way, that is, of determining the contents of an agent’s deliberative point of view, or perspective. To the extent that it is possible then, the individuation of perspectives can only be done through the observation of the agent’s behaviour: patterns of action, explicit professions and the like.” (“Perspectivism, Criticism and Freedom of Spirit,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 8.1 (2000): 40-62, 45).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

of the nature of justification: there is no coherent notion of justification other than ratification in the terms provided by one's perspective."⁶⁶

Reginster argues that what Nietzsche pursues is the strong perspectivism which is nevertheless a quite complicated view because there is not an easy answer to Clark's worry: if we reject the thing-in-itself or any common standard criteria such as "pure reason," then how are we to compare two conflicting perspectives and decide which one is the better one? Reginster suggests that the self-referential coherence of a perspective can be a guiding sign and calls this the "internal criticism," to judge the validity of a certain perspective. Internal criticism is the strategy that judges values by:

... showing that they are not acceptable *by the very light of the perspective from which they are made* ... The suggestion, in sum, is that criticism in terms internal to the perspective under consideration is meant to *replace* criticism in terms of objective 'foundational' standards.⁶⁷

This is presumably the core aspect of Nietzsche's conception of perspectivism. It reveals how an argument inherent within a perspective undermines itself and invalidates its meaning. For instance, if we take Levinas's philosophy as his perspective, we would expect some sort of coherence and consistency within the pattern of his thought. Of course philosophers always change, revise or at times even reject their former convictions; but we do not expect them to contradict their former ideas at a *fundamental* level without acknowledging their change of heart.⁶⁸

Levinas is accurately known as the "philosopher of the Other" who seeks the meaning of ethics within the alterity of the human other and criticizes Western philosophy for being narcissistic and egocentric. He associates self-coincidence with a deficiency in ethics by suggesting that if one is not willing to venture out to the Other, any exploration that ends up in self-coincidence is only a consolidation of one's own ego. Yet even though Levinas never abandons this idea, it becomes much more clear in his later works that his philosophy does not genuinely intend to stretch beyond the egological boundaries of the Western thought or ideology either; as he asserts that Plato must be the reference point for any (ethical) philosophy whether one agrees with Plato or not. With his implication that multicultural approaches are degenerating ("disorienting") and corrupting the Western heritage which is meant to be the model for the whole world, Levinas takes a rather dismissive attitude towards non-Western cultures. So what is dismaying about the internal inconsistency of his perspective is

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 47-8.

⁶⁸ Nietzsche's "An Attempt at Self-Criticism" (1886) could be an example of this case in which he criticizes *The Birth of Tragedy* for being too romantic; embarrassing and sentimental.

that Levinas, the philosopher of the Other, is rather reluctant to stretch out his hand to recognize the (cultural) integrity of the non-Western (non-Jewish) Other.

Reginster observes an essential distinction between criticizing a certain view emanating from a perspective and criticizing the person who holds that view.⁶⁹

Although the validity of a perspective is always subjective, it does not mean that a foreign perspective cannot be criticized by our perspective and vice versa. To the contrary, as indicated above, in Nietzsche's thought it is crucial to reconsider and revisit our own perspective to check for our own inconsistencies, prejudices or taboos. Such a constant evaluation and reinterpretation can always make our perspective considerably more creative and progressive. Theoretically-speaking, even when critiquing Levinas's perspective, Nietzsche could be re-evaluating his own values. So, when criticizing a perspective, it is important to know our purpose of criticism.

Reginster very plausibly summarizes this aspect of Nietzsche's perspectivism:

Typically, we would say that showing that a *view* is wrong and showing that an agent is wrong to *hold* it are one and the same. Perspectivism compels us to distinguish between these two as distinct purposes of criticism, to be achieved by different means. For a critic to show that a view is wrong is to show that *she* has no reasons to accept it, or has reasons to reject it. By contrast, for a critic to show that her interlocutor is wrong in *holding* a view is to show that *the interlocutor* has no reasons to accept the view, or has reasons to reject it.⁷⁰

In other words, when we apply this idea to the case of Levinas, there is an important distinction between claiming that Levinas is wrong to favour Judaeo-Christian-Platonic world view and claiming that there is an inherent flaw in Levinas's perspective; a flaw that would make that perspective unappealing to Nietzsche. I would argue that Nietzsche would go for the latter option. I think Nietzsche's perspectivism would not criticize Levinas for holding his belief about the superiority of Western culture. But it would note that Levinas's views are contradictory because Levinas criticizes Western philosophy for being egocentric when he himself feels alarmed about the world losing its essential orientation – as he considers multiculturalism a threat to Western culture. This situation reveals a double standard at work in Levinas's perspective, and if honesty and consistency are Nietzsche's core values, he would reject Levinas's perspective but probably would not necessarily try to prove Levinas wrong – on his belief in the cultural superiority of the West.

As a matter of fact, from Nietzsche's view point, Levinas cannot be right or wrong – no one can. Reginster dissociates between internal irrationality and external irrationality;

⁶⁹ Reginster, *ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

the latter is irrelevant for Nietzsche's perspectivism as he denies pure reason or the thing-in-itself; since there is no external referee to judge right or wrong. There is, however, such a thing as internal irrationality, which is what we spot in internal criticism. But what would we do with the internal irrationality of a foreign perspective? Merely point out that the view is wrong or to convince its holder that she is wrong to hold that view and thereby try to win her over to our side?⁷¹ Presumably, Nietzsche is not interested in the latter. Levinas's beliefs concern him, and him only; his perspective is *his affair*.

On the other hand, this attitude should not take us back to the nihilistic experience of sheer relativity, the weak interpretation of Nietzsche's perspectivism famous for its shallow slogan "anything goes." After all, if Nietzsche only ever wanted to keep himself to himself, he would not even bother to publish his books. In addition, Nietzsche is not the ascetic priest who makes notorious statements such as "philosophy is dead" and announces himself as the last of the philosophers; thereby reserve himself the best place within the pantheon of charismatic philosophers.⁷² To the contrary, his whole philosophy is an attempt to refute nihilism by offering an alternative to it.

So what should criticism do if it does not aim to convince other people that our perspective beats theirs? It seems that criticism is invaluable even for its own sake; without any further grand objective or benefit for their owners. Perspectives do need to come out; compete, corrupt, critique, challenge or even inspire one another. For instance, when we point out an internal inconsistency within a perspective, we may at least prompt our interlocutor to be more self-critical and reconsider her views – either in general or on some specific view that is rationally flawed – without blatantly exposing the inferiority of her viewpoint and forcing her to share our perspective.⁷³ Nietzsche's notion of perspectivism seems to deconstruct the pattern of thought of a certain interlocutor or a grand teaching such as Christianity; point to its flaws and leave it there. Further interference would be against the values of a free spirit as a free spirit should not insist any further than that.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷² Nietzsche, *GM*, III, 7.

⁷³ Reginster, *ibid.*, 51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 55. Reginster suggests that even the lyrical tone in Nietzsche's works can be regarded as a test for free spirits: by appealing to our passions, Nietzsche employs his powerful rhetoric to win followers. And the people who fail the test become Nietzsche fanatics; which is actually the most ironic situation because a fanatic cannot be a free spirit; and Nietzsche wants no followers.

At this point we could be tempted to question who a free spirit is. A free spirit is someone who demands reasons and creates her values and lives accordingly.⁷⁵ What is most special about a free spirit is her search for her own reasons to develop and cultivate her perspective. Even if her ideas are not superior to other people, it is her spirit yearning for freedom that is worthy. She works toward giving her own account of life through her own perspective; and in order to give one's account, one has to have cultivated one, first. Improving, developing one's reasoning is an ethical responsibility in the Nietzschean sense as the greatest responsibility sitting on our shoulders, which is to create values after the death of God. In this respect, a rigorous demand for reasons is a matter of *intellectual conscience*.⁷⁶

This is a crucial point that a Levinasian perspective needs to take into consideration. Levinas claims that one has language at a primordial level to offer one's world to the Other. But even to offer my world to the Other, do I not first need to have a world; that is, have cultivated a world of my interpretation? Of course Levinas provides an elaborate account on the significance of interiority; one has to have a home to offer it to the Other; one has to love something -- one has to be really attached to it -- so that giving it up for the Other can be ethically meaningful. Yet Levinas only focuses on the ethical meaning; neglecting the rational meaning. He does not emphasize the indispensability of reason and improving rationality at a sufficient level.

The necessity of an *active critical agency*⁷⁷ is something Levinas seems to ignore for most of the time. However, it is my contention that even in order to be a moral subject in the Levinasian sense, one has to be a free spirit first -- in the Nietzschean sense. As expressed in the opening quote of this section, cultivating one's reasoning takes a lot of effort; analogous to a strength training exercise in which one needs to deliberately question, critique and suspend one's beliefs to reconsider and re-evaluate one's perspective to create values and eventually become who one is. Yet another aspect worth emphasizing is that investing in an active critical agency is already indispensable for being a moral agent as well. Levinas insists that hearing the call of the Other occurs at a pre-rational, pre-intellectual level as the Other calls my spontaneity into question.

⁷⁵ Nietzsche writes: "... it is not part of the nature of the free spirit that his views are more correct, but rather that he has released himself from tradition, be it successfully or unsuccessfully. Usually, however, he has truth, or at least the spirit of the search for truth, on his side: he demands reasons, while others demand faith." (*HATH*, V, "Signs of Higher and Lower Culture," 225).

⁷⁶ Reginster, *ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

However, what constitutes my spontaneity? As for Levinas, it is my capability to act; whereas from a Nietzschean viewpoint, we could infer that in order to feel my spontaneity called into question, first I need to have within me a strong critical agency intact as it is owing to my intellectual conscience that I interpret the call of the Other. I can only respond based on what I interpret from the Other. Although Levinas does not develop this point much further for the sake of avoiding normativity, he hints that one responds to the Other in the *right* way – the ethical relationship with the Other suggests that I respond to the Other's needs; that I serve the Other in the best way I can.

Besides, any kind of random response does not count as the *ethical* response; I could be a sadist and respond to the suffering of the Other in an even more cruel way – even though Levinas's main point is that I cannot be indifferent to the Other (not *not hear* the Other's call), the manner of response is up to me. Paul Ricoeur points to the prerequisite capacity of reception prior to response as well and emphasizes the significance of discrimination and recognition before acting. He looks at the question of reciprocity from the opposite angle: what if the Other is a sadist and I am supposed to yield to her?⁷⁸

Levinas responds to criticisms of this line by arguing that responding to the Other does not mean enslaving oneself to the Other's capricious demands. Yet the distinction between serving the Other (in substitution) and servitude is rather vague. In addition, he notes that in the context of war, the Other can even be an enemy; in his words, "in alterity one may find the enemy."⁷⁹ But then, we always come back to the problem of who the Other *is*. Ricoeur remarks that the "aporia" of the Other continues to haunt the plausibility of Levinas's account of subjectivity. It is never clear whether the Other is a concrete human being; or my unrepresentable forefathers (Holocaust victims?); or my unforeseeable descendants; my infinite debt to all of them or God.⁸⁰

Figuring who or what the Other is already unfathomable. Moreover, interpreting the need of the Other is even more enigmatic; yet Levinas avoids explaining it and suggests that my responsibility is what constitutes my subjectivity. But how can I

⁷⁸ Ricoeur asks: "... what are we to say of the Other when he is the executioner? And who will be able to distinguish the master from the executioner, the master who calls for a disciple from the master who requires a slave?" (Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 339).

⁷⁹ Levinas, *LR*, 294.

⁸⁰ Ricoeur states: "Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God—living God, absent God—or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end." (355).

respond if I cannot even tell what my responsibilities are? How can I receive the revelation of the Other if I cannot interpret what I hear? How can I determine how to treat the Other if I lack a strong critical agency – which could enable me to distinguish the Other (my neighbour) from the enemy? Of course, it could be said that one does interpret both in the case of Levinas and in Nietzsche, but one can never be sure that one's interpretation is accurate or exhaustive.

So even if on the surface there seems to be an agreement between Nietzsche and Levinas on the issue of never being able to *know* the Other, for Levinas, this is all the more reason that I am infinitely responsible for the Other – because I can never know whether I will be good enough in my services to the Other. For Nietzsche, on the other side, the uncertainty surrounding (the true needs of) the Other only creates an alienating effect on the subject. Nietzsche would therefore regard it as a flaw in Levinas's argument that the latter hardly takes into consideration the sense of the estrangement the Other has upon one's active critical agency. That is why, it can be suggested that the Nietzschean active critical agency residing within the free spirit is a prerequisite even for the Levinasian subject whose spontaneity is suspended by the Other. Even in order to be able to be suspended, first the self needs to have some substance of its own.

Yet, Nietzsche is quite conscious of the fact that not everyone can be or needs to be a free spirit. In *TSZ*, Zarathustra is well aware of the fact that very few will be able to get his message – if any. Conformism will always be much more tempting than seeking one's own path in life. And to make matters even more complicated, contrary to what may come to mind, the notion of a free spirit has nothing to do with the superficial narcissism prevalent in today's consumer society. Contrary to its easygoing image, a free spirit in the Nietzschean sense is not someone who feels no obligations or any constraint strict enough to limit her. She can be quite stoical in terms of organizing herself determinedly to attain an overall purpose through laborious self-restraint and discipline.

The issue of self-training and the urge to organize oneself is the last issue I would like to raise regarding Nietzsche's notion of perspectivism: the unconscious aspect at work within the individual. Can my spontaneity be essentially my involuntary muscle movements? For Nietzsche, body; reasoning; rationality; justification and ethics are all interconnected as they are interpreted by the body in a holistic manner.

Since perspectivism is a claim about subjective reasoning and justification, it is not possible to determine to what exact extent the subjective is conscious. Nietzsche's

thought-provoking statements such as “Our most sacred convictions, the unchangeable in regard to our supreme values, are *judgments of our muscles*”⁸¹ make it difficult to evaluate perspectivism in a rational way. As elaborated above, one is only partially conscious of one’s body or emotions – drives and affects. The rest is unknown even to the agent as one is never fully aware of one’s own set of motivations.

As the last facet of the concept, I intend to associate Nietzsche’s notion of perspectivism with his conception of the will to power; with the competitive wills conflicting and competing with one another, which is reminiscent of the agonistic contest. Richardson points to the non-conscious aspect of perspectivism which plays a key role for the revaluation of values. He notes that a perspective is not prior to or separated from the action but rather, is accompanied by it; unified in doing. A perspective is primarily valuative by determining how things matter to the will in terms of value.⁸² In Richardson’s naturalistic account, a perspective can be equivalent to a drive because similar to a perspective, a drive is always already charged with its own interests. A perspective does not mainly aim at truth⁸³ as its perception is not even neutral;⁸⁴ so perspectives and values are related to one another by the will to power. Nietzsche’s strong emphasis that a perspective is predetermined by one’s interests conveys that each will seeks empowerment by pursuing a goal that enables evaluation.⁸⁵

When Nietzsche implies value, he does not refer to good or bad; ethical or unethical. He acknowledges that Christianity created lots of values, but he does not mean those values were necessarily good or bad; some were inherently hypocritical; some were decent. Values are beyond good and evil; some are life-enhancing (or healthy)

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *WTP* 314: 1887-1888.

⁸² Richardson, 36-7.

⁸³ Nietzsche states: “Our apparatus for acquiring knowledge is not *designed* for ‘knowledge.’” (*WTP*, 496:1884).

⁸⁴ Richardson writes: “... we mustn’t think that these perspectives aim basically at truth, at mirroring the world. It’s not that the drive takes a theorizing view aimed to see how the world truly is, as a step before applying that neutral information back to its practical ends. It views the world from its interests: ‘It is our needs *that interpret the world*; our drives and their For and Against’ [WP 481: 1886-87]. And so Nietzsche stresses that even perception isn’t neutral: ‘There is no doubt that all sense perceptions are wholly permeated with *value-judgments* (useful, harmful – consequently, agreeable or disagreeable)’ [WTP 505: 1885-86].” (37).

⁸⁵ Richardson notes: “This way that perspectives are rooted in interest shows the deep place Nietzsche finds (in his power ontology) for ‘value’ [*Wert*]. This lies in what each will ‘sees’ as conducing to its own development: the conditions that help or allow it to grow. ‘But willing = willing a goal. Goal includes an evaluation’ [WTP 260: 1883-84].” “‘Value’ is essentially the viewpoint for the increase or decrease of these mastering centers” [WTP 715: 1887-88]. Value lies in the way the world is ‘polarized’ for each will and not in any theories or beliefs about value. It lies in how things ‘matter’ to the will and so depends on that deep receptiveness of will that Nietzsche calls ‘affect’ [*Affekt*] or ‘feeling’ [*Gefühl*]. A perspective on the world always involves an ‘experiencing’ of it, as it bears on the drive’s pursuit of power.” (37).

whereas some are life-negating (nihilistic or sickly). But overall, values reveal interpretations of the world; they reflect our image of ourselves. So, when Nietzsche emphasizes that we must create values after the death of God, he advocates creating new meanings, new interpretations for life. In this respect, it becomes clear that perspectivism is about the revaluation of values.

All in all, Levinas's universalism suggests a single perspective without any major interaction or conflict with other perspectives. Yet from a Nietzschean angle, it is not the will to power that is inherently amoral or nihilistic but rather it is Levinas's imposition of a single interpretation of the world that leads to a nihilistic account of life by hindering progress through re-evaluation. Nietzsche's notion of perspectivism also reflects the method of Nietzsche's notion of individualization; of knowing oneself. Perspectivism highlights the necessity of self-knowledge – something Levinas hardly focuses on; as self-knowledge is a very under-developed theme in his philosophy. A very crucial facet of perspectivism corresponds to seeking the best circumstances for one's growth. To attain personal greatness, one needs to wisely know one's personal necessities and discover one's own requirements.⁸⁶

Each individual needs different circumstances to flourish and become what one is. Even in nature needs vary: some plants need plenty of water and little sun (like ferns) whereas some others need little water and much exposure to sun (such as cacti).⁸⁷ Every metabolism is different and, consequently, each individual has unique needs for flourishing: some people with fast metabolisms need to eat a lot whereas others, with slow metabolisms, need to eat very little. There is no one common recipe to apply to everyone, no matter how well-intentioned it is. There is no single norm; no socio-political system to determine the requirements of one's own flourishing. Only the individual can seek and find them for herself. Nietzsche's perspectivism is thus the perfect bridge to lead to his *ad hominem* arguments and cultivating the character.

c) Subjectivity as Cultivating the Character

... granting that one is a person, one has necessarily also the philosophy of one's personality; there is, however, an important distinction here. With the one it is his defects which philosophise, with the other it is his riches and powers. The former *requires* his philosophy, whether it be his support, sedative, or medicine, as salvation, elevation, or self-alienation; with the latter it is merely a fine luxury, at best the

⁸⁶ Craig Dove, *Nietzsche's Ethical Theory: Mind, Self, Responsibility*, London: Continuum Books, 2008, 36.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

voluptuousness of a triumphant gratitude, which must inscribe itself ultimately in cosmic capitals on the heaven of ideas.⁸⁸

The discussion on perspectivism points to the intermediation between the conscious and the non-conscious aspects of the self. In an attempt to pursue this line of thought, I will examine Nietzsche's notion that the character is the concrete expression through which the self manifests itself. So, in this section, I turn to the character and explore the meaning of subjectivity and ethics in terms of the character and critique Levinas's conception of subjectivity from this angle.

The impressive quote above from Nietzsche seems to follow nicely from my earlier discussion on generosity. By analogy, the value or the rank of any philosophy depends on the personality of the philosopher and his motive – either out of negativity (pure reactivity) or affirmativeness (active and creative). One could philosophize out of greedy self-preservation, and consequently re-produce traditional values, or one could be a thinker of benevolence and bear new fruits.

This is the viewpoint from which I intend to reconsider Levinas's responsible subject. Rather than seeking her own path in life and bearing her own fruits, does she simply hide behind her responsibilities? Levinas typically responds to such questions by stating that I cannot be responsible for myself the way I am responsible for the Other. He thinks that what makes such a question insincere is the neglect of the essential separation between the self and the Other. Levinas hints that mere self-occupation is self-gratification and vanity. Yet, regarded from Nietzsche's point of view, Levinas seems to restrain the flourishing of the character. The Levinasian subject is always inhibited, and its potential active forces are suppressed with shame, guilt and responsibility for the Other.

Even though Levinas gives elaborate and sophisticated accounts of the phenomenological sensibility and corporeality of the subject – the body that feels hunger, shame, erotic desire, need, pain and what not –, the Levinasian subject does not develop a character of its own. In Levinas's philosophy, the very idea of investing too much in oneself is unethical, which is evoked in his indirect and semi-critical description of interiority. As mentioned above, Levinas suggests that, as an option, one can always consciously choose to remain closed within the confines of one's home and shut oneself off from one's responsibilities for the Other(s) – just like wearing the ring of Gyges and being invisible. There is no internal contradiction in doing so.

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, GS, "Preface," 2.

However, in spite of the lack of internal contradiction, Levinas hints that this attitude is neither natural nor ethical as the uninterrupted life (by the call of the Other) is an ethically unchallenged life.

Below, I challenge this view from the Nietzschean viewpoint which depicts the character as the site upon which aesthetics and ethics merge together, where the will to power manifests itself most clearly. It is not the works; as they can always be done out of vanity, or words as one can always lie; but necessarily one's character which displays the essential complexity of the active and passive forces inherent within one's being. The most determining factor is how one organizes one's drives; how much one can refine or prepare them for an overall purpose. In this sense, one's character is one's performative artwork, and that is what Nietzsche means by his famous idea of "having a style of character:"

One Thing is Needful. – To "give style" to one's character – that is a grand and a rare art! He who surveys all that his nature presents in its strength in its weakness, and then fashions it into an ingenious plan, until everything appears artistic and rational, and even the weaknesses enchant the eye – exercises that admirable art. Here there has been a great amount of second nature added, there a portion of first nature has been taken away:-- in both cases with long exercise and daily labour at the task. Here the ugly, which does not permit of being taken away, has been concealed, there it has been re-interpreted into the sublime. Much of the vague, which refuses to take form, has been reserved and utilised for the perspectives:-- it is meant to give a hint of the remote and immeasurable. In the end, when the work has been completed, it is revealed how it was the constraint of the same taste that organised and fashioned it in whole and in part: whether the taste was good or bad is of less importance than one thinks,-- it is sufficient that it was *a taste!*⁸⁹

As for Nietzsche, giving style to one's character is in continuity with his emphasis on knowing oneself in terms of determining the best conditions for one's flourishing. The metaphor of "giving style" as if one is moulding clay implies the active force of creativity an individual has at her disposal. One's "character," on the other hand, is a combination of one's principles (the conscious aspect of perspective) and one's temperament (the uncontrollable aspect of one's inner drives). It is a matter of forming and being formed. For this reason, it can be suggested that giving style to one's character hosts allusions to both active and passive forces at work and hints at an intermediation between Apollo and Dionysus; between reason and passion. It is an ardent life-consuming work which requires laborious training.

Cultivating one's personality is a crucial aspect of subjectivity because it stimulates the creative forces at work within one's own self. Individuation; or "becoming who one is" can be achieved as one learns to incorporate one's own values or one's own

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, "Sanctus Januarius," 290.

“philosophy” – in the sense of “the way of life” – into one’s own life. Nietzsche strives to revive the times when philosophy was practised not as an academic career pursuit imprisoned within the gloomy walls of lecture rooms; but as it was *lived*. He notes the etymological aspect of reality as “act”uality (*Akt-ualität*); thereby noting the continuity between acting, performing, living and creating “reality.”⁹⁰

In his early works, Nietzsche displays a keen interest in the organic bond between the philosophy and the philosopher, the man. Nietzsche is fascinated by the ancient Greek philosophers before Plato; he calls them pre-Platonic philosophers, and includes Socrates as the last genuine philosopher of this range because according to Nietzsche, Socrates still kept his “purity.” That is, all these figures such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Xenophanes, Zeno, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Leucippus, Democritus and Socrates exemplified certain archetypes of being a philosopher by interpreting the world and building their systems based on the uniqueness of their personalities.

Nietzsche argues that starting with Plato, philosophers started to be “mixtures;” or in the post-modern sense, they employed the “pastiche” personality strategy – for instance, selecting and mingling “the regal exclusive and self-contained Heraclitus with the melancholy compassionate and legislative Pythagoras and the psychologically acute dialectician Socrates.”⁹¹ Nietzsche’s early interest in the “personalities” of these ancient philosophers can be regarded as a foreshadowing of his later notion of individualism and perspectivism. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes that each system of philosophy reveals the imprint of the personality of its creator. In that respect, each philosophy is inevitably autobiographical as the personal element; the individuality of the philosopher cannot be overlooked. Pointing to the significance of the individual character of the specific philosopher; together with his inner drives, affects, desires, attitudes, biochemistry and so on; is Nietzsche’s attempt to reincorporate the character back into philosophy:

It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of – namely, the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious auto-biography; and moreover that the moral (or immoral) purpose in every philosophy has constituted the true vital germ out of which the entire plant has grown.⁹²

Could we think that Nietzsche is trivializing the universal insights of any philosophy by reducing it to the mere idiosyncratic ranting of its specific thinker? One could make this

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *PTAG*, 57.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹² Nietzsche, *BGE*, “Prejudices of Philosophers,” 6.

argument and find this idea offensive if and only if she has a low opinion of individuality. However for Nietzsche, that does not necessarily signify denigration but to the contrary, the individual is sacred since it is the “character” that matters. According to Nietzsche, the thing that determines the ethical value of an act is neither the intentions of the person nor the consequences but rather depends on “who” does it.

As a matter of fact, this idea is evoked both in my earlier discussion of generosity and in the opening quote of this section above. Regarding generosity, I commented that the generosity of the weak cannot have the same worth as the generosity of the strong or the noble. The pious can be generous out of weakness; out of the fear of God or for the sake of demanding protection from the strong party in return – with the expectation of some sort of reward, either in this world or in the afterlife. The strong-natured on the other hand, can be generous as the expression of her overflowing abundance; without expecting any reward or reciprocity of any kind – neither in this world nor in the next one. It is a manifestation of the bestowing virtue.

As for the opening quote, the ascetic priest – disguised as the philosopher – can philosophize to camouflage his hidden wish for salvation in his nihilistic discourse whereas the free spirit, the philosopher of the future, can employ his rigour and gift in a lavish display of extraordinary ideas. Marking the continuity between these two cases, we can observe the remarkable self-affirmation on behalf of the generosity of the noble and the philosophy of the free spirit.

Thomas H. Brobjer claims that Nietzsche’s affirmative ethics can best be understood as an “ethics of the character.”⁹³ Brobjer notes that “the word ‘ethics’ comes from the Greek *ta ethika* (or *ethikos*), which originally comes from the word *ethos*, meaning ‘character,’”⁹⁴ and he claims that Nietzsche must have been quite conscious of this fact. Brobjer argues that Nietzsche’s main fascination with the ancient Greeks is that they had a very unique relationship with their gods. Unlike Judaeo-Christians, who idealized God as an external or otherworldly fantasy, the Greeks regarded their gods as the beings which exemplified what is best in man:

The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods as set above them as masters, or themselves set beneath the gods as servants, as the Jews did. They saw as it were only the reflection of the most successful exemplars of their own caste, that is to say an ideal, not an antithesis of their own nature.⁹⁵

⁹³ Thomas H. Brobjer, “Nietzsche’s Affirmative Morality: An Ethics of Virtue,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 26 (Autumn 2003):64-78, 66.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *HATH*, III, “Religious Life,” 114.

Brobjer suggests that it is most plausible to understand Nietzsche's notion of the Overman (the *Übermensch*) from this point of view. In his interpretation of Nietzsche, solid personality or the character is much more relevant to philosophy than abstract sets of ideas or conceptual systems. In this sense, Brobjør likens Higher Men – the candidates for the Overman, as elaborated in *TSZ* – to Greek gods since they solidify the “most successful exemplars.”⁹⁶ Perhaps the Overman does not exist physically. Nietzsche gives no concrete example; and even Zarathustra, towards the end of Book IV, becomes disillusioned about his own fallacy. He is frustrated with the fact that what he thinks could be the candidates for the Overman at “The Ass Festival” are still worshippers of some form. They worship the ass, which says “yea” to everything – a caricatured version of life affirmation devoid of any critical agency of which Nietzsche wishes us to beware.⁹⁷

Yet, even the idea of the Overman is a much more naturalizing idea than preaching a religious figure or a prophet. Presumably, in Nietzsche's mind the notion of an Overman is much more human and bound to earth; much less alienating than the overly-idealized Jesus Christ, even though he actually existed in history. Maybe it could be wise to remember *Zarathustra's* dedication page and think about it in relation to the Overman – perhaps he is “everyone and no one.” He is to be sought neither melancholically in the ancient past nor within the delusion of a redemptive future but is to be found within oneself.

Overall, compared with the Levinasian subject, Nietzsche has a much more complex account of selfhood than Levinas. Nietzsche appreciates the richness and the complexity of the inner drives which are evaluative, hence crucial for creativity. In Nietzsche's thought, creativity cannot be merely reduced to the artistic drive that pursues pretty things in life that aesthetically please the viewer but is *the* modality of existence; the force that prompts constant creation; re-creation; interpretation and re-interpretation with ethical ramifications.⁹⁸ Levinas's subject of substitution only acts in accordance with responsibility; responding to the Other which, from a Nietzschean perspective, seems slavish because she is only “re-active” to the Other; far from originating action from within herself. The Other always alludes to the exterior, so the Levinasian subject is always obsessed with her (human) environment; with what is not

⁹⁶ Brobjør, 67.

⁹⁷ Deleuze, 168.

⁹⁸ Aaron Ridley elaborates on the close connection between arts and ethics in Nietzsche and explores the influence of the former upon an ethical conception of freedom in his article “Nietzsche on Art and Freedom,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 15.2 (Aug., 2007): 204-224.

her. Acting only reactively, she is essentially passive – in the Nietzschean denigrating sense.

At this point, we may be tempted to bring up the significance of enjoyment and ask how this passivity and slavishness reconcile with Levinas's assertion that life is essentially the love of life, as vividly depicted in *Totality*. In my view, there is no contradiction here. Let us take a look at a relevant passage from Levinas:

Life is affectivity and sentiment; to live is to enjoy life. To despair of life makes sense only because originally life is happiness ... The personality of the person, the ipseity of the I, which is more than the particularity of the atom and of the individual, is the particularity of the happiness of enjoyment. Enjoyment accomplishes the atheist separation; it deformatizes the notion of separation, which is not a cleavage made in the abstract, but the existence at home with itself of an autochthonous I. The soul is not, as in Plato, what "has the care of inanimate being everywhere"⁹⁹; it to be sure dwells in what is not itself, but it acquires its own identity by this dwelling in the "other" (and not logically, by opposition to the other).¹⁰⁰

As I have already emphasized above, in Levinas's philosophy only an enjoying subject can suffer. The second sentence of the quote above highlights the close interdependence between enjoyment and suffering. Enjoyment has to be prior to suffering because without that original sensation, the subject would not even literally be capable of suffering – she would not be aware of it. In addition, after emphasizing the uniqueness of the individual (of enjoyment), Levinas states that enjoyment, which hosts my particularity, leads to the "atheist separation." The subject of enjoyment always coincides with the atheistic self where resides the "autochthonous I." The atheistic self is crucial for the awareness of the separation because only after realizing that the cluster of needs does not suffice does the self feel the Desire for the transcendence; for the Other; thus steps outside of its home (metaphorically; not in a literally spatio-temporal manner of course) to open itself to the Other, and thereby gain its "identity." To me, the last sentence is sufficient to prove that the importance of enjoyment does not refute my argument. Levinas clearly states that "the soul ... acquires its own identity by this dwelling in the 'other.'"

Yet it is important to note that by personality Levinas implies the ipseity of the I rather than character in the Nietzschean sense. Ipseity is my individuation; my being singled out; being (s)elected. Ipseity does not suggest the individual freely expressing his or her identity but being a hostage; being called to justice. The idea of my soul gaining its identity by dwelling in the Other is an idea closely supporting the notion of the "divine discomfort" that liberates me, which is the key idea of substitution; that which imprisons

⁹⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246b.

¹⁰⁰ Levinas, *TI*, 115.

me at the same time elevates me. And only a primordially atheistic, originally enjoying self can be capable of receiving the revelation of the Other. For this reason, in spite of the stress Levinas puts on enjoyment, I observe a strong continuity between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being* in terms of the essential passivity and the exposedness of the subject before the Other.

Levinas's neglect of the individual is observed by many philosophers and critics. In an interview, Levinas himself says that Paul Ricoeur tells him that his (Levinas's) "'I' has no self-esteem."¹⁰¹ Hillary Putnam comments that pursuing Levinas's notion of subjectivity to the extent of substitution and accepting responsibility even for one's own persecution eventually leads the individual to a one-sided life.¹⁰² Jean-Michel Longneaux notes that while comparing and contrasting Nietzsche and Levinas on the issue of subjectivity, one cannot help but notice that the former theorizes about a subject that still has zest in life whereas the latter's subject looks so miserable.¹⁰³ Maurice Blanchot interprets Levinas's notion of subjectivity as "dis-individuation" – to the point of losing the ethical – and "subjectivity without a subject."¹⁰⁴ Levinas's subject is always in exile whereas Nietzsche's free spirit is everywhere at home. The latter takes suffering lightly as it comes; not because he is used to suffering, but because he loves life. And he loves life not because he is used to living but because he is used to loving.¹⁰⁵

What leaves the Levinasian subject vulnerable to such criticisms is that Levinas associates freedom with shame. Far from the Nietzschean free spirit who prioritizes individuality, active creativity, expressiveness and freedom, Levinas regards freedom as a mode of inhibition. Levinas defines ethics as the moment when my spontaneity is called into question. Thus, in his philosophy, freedom cannot be arbitrary or self-justificatory. Rather, it can only be granted by the Other. The limits of my freedom can only be determined by the Other, and the only feeling accompanying this freedom is shame:

¹⁰¹ Levinas, *II*, 192.

¹⁰² As an Aristotelian alternative, Putnam embraces the idea that one cannot love others without loving oneself first (*ibid.*, 57). I regard this idea quite similar to Nietzsche's notion of the noble soul having reverence for itself – which I discuss below.

¹⁰³ Longneaux notes: "In Levinas, passivity, suffering, and the loathsome 'I' become such an obsession that it appears impossible to enjoy existence: subjectivity has no horizon other than its own salvation. As for Nietzsche, he allows himself to be dazzled by that great noonday sun that is the affirmation of self. All the shadows disappear, nothing further seems liable to disturb a subjectivity everywhere at home." (60).

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Ciaramelli, 99.

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, I, "Of Reading and Writing."

Thus this way of measuring oneself against the perfection of infinity is not a theoretical consideration; it is accomplished as shame, where freedom discovers itself murderous in its very exercise. It is accomplished in shame where freedom at the same time is *discovered* in the consciousness of shame and is *concealed* in shame itself ... Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent ... Existence is not in reality condemned to freedom, but is *invested* as freedom. To philosophize is to trace freedom back to what lies before it, to disclose the investiture that liberates freedom from the arbitrary.¹⁰⁶

In Levinas's account, shame and the Desire are interdependent; reinforcing each other. The more I feel shame over my spontaneity, the more I desire the Other and am prone to fulfilling my responsibilities for the Other. It is with shame that I serve the Other. My shame also makes me capable of being ethical, because only a creature capable of shame can be capable of receiving a revelation.¹⁰⁷ According to Levinas, freedom cannot be justified by itself;¹⁰⁸ the subject cannot justify herself but can only be critiqued by the Other and since justice comes forth with the third party, the freedom of the Levinasian subject is granted by the third party. As objection to this idea, Nietzsche annuls the authority of the third party and ascribes full authority to the individual subject. Authority moves from the third party, to the *man*.

Brobjer notes that Nietzsche pursues the *ad hominem* argument which literally means "directed at the *man* – rather than at the principles."¹⁰⁹ With this proposition, Brobjør comments that rather than evaluating a philosopher based on his work or deeds, it is best to trace the philosophy to the character of the philosopher to fully realize its "essence." Nietzsche considers *ad hominem* arguments as "the strongest possible form of arguments"¹¹⁰ because they focus on the concrete individual; hence avoid the fallacies of rational arguments, free will or hidden intentions.

Obviously, what determines the value of a person or the level of the nobility of her character is her "rank." Yet it is crucial to understand the Nietzschean notion of "rank" properly. What causes so much controversy and misunderstanding regarding Nietzsche's "evil" nobles is that we often associate rank with some kind of visible measure or the outcome of some sort of "objective" evaluation. However, Nietzsche

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *TI*, 84-5.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas writes: "The unity of spontaneous freedom, working on straight ahead, and critique, where freedom is capable of being called in question and thus preceding itself, is what is termed a creature. The marvel of creation does not only consist in being a creation *ex nihilo*, but in that it results in a being capable of receiving a revelation, learning that it is created, and putting itself in question. The miracle of creation lies in creating a moral being. And this implies precisely atheism, but at the same time, beyond atheism, shame for the arbitrariness of the freedom that constitutes it." (*ibid.*, 89).

¹⁰⁸ Levinas states: "Freedom is not justified by freedom. To account for being or to be in truth is not to comprehend nor to take hold of ..., but rather to encounter the Other without allergy, that is, in justice." (*ibid.*, 303).

¹⁰⁹ Brobjør, 68.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

interprets rank as a purely subjective phenomenon; as a matter of fact it is so subjective that it has no objective criteria other than “self-reverence” which may not even be observable from the outside. Nietzsche thinks that people – mainly philosophers and artists – who endow themselves within an air of flamboyance are often pathetic creatures desperately trying to “convince” others of their feigned nobility. Nobility is not something to be sought, or found or lost. Interestingly, in the significant quote below, Nietzsche asks the question not as “who” is noble, but explicitly as “what” is noble:

What is noble? What does the word “noble” still mean for us nowadays? How does the noble man betray himself, how is he recognised under this heavy overcast sky of the commencing plebeianism, by which everything is rendered opaque and leaden? – It is not his actions which establish his claim – actions are always ambiguous, always inscrutable; neither is it his “works”. One finds nowadays among artists and scholars plenty of those who betray by their works that a profound longing for nobleness impels them; but this very *need* of nobleness is radically different from the needs of the noble soul itself, and is in fact the eloquent and dangerous sign of the lack thereof. It is not the works, but the *belief* which is here decisive and determines the order of rank – to employ once more an old religious formula with a new and deeper meaning – it is some fundamental certainty which a noble soul has about itself, something which is not to be sought, is not to be found, and perhaps, also, is not to be lost. – *The noble soul has reverence for itself.* –¹¹¹

It is neither one’s works nor one’s deeds, but nobleness is a matter of “self-reverence.” However, it must be noted that what Nietzsche means by self-reverence cannot be associated with the Levinasian idea of self-coincidence. As elaborated above, Levinas articulates his conception of substitution by initially harshly criticizing the Cartesian ego which ventures out only to come back to where it started; and what at first sight naively seems like an opening or an exploration towards to the unknown ends up being an assimilation of the exterior into the self-same. By coinciding with itself, the ego only consolidates its narcissistic image.

Nietzsche is immune to this line of criticism because what he means by self-reverence does not aim to crystallize a rigid self. Rather, as explained above, the Nietzschean notion of the self undergoes innumerable change and interpretation – and actually it is this constant renewal that constitutes the essence of the self. Another example of this flexible account of the self is also visible in Nietzsche’s rejection of revenge and regret – to the point of life affirmation and *amor fati*. Experiencing self-transformation by embracing the element of chance¹¹² and the dice throw of innocent existence, the

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *BGE*, “What is Noble?” 287.

¹¹² Deleuze interprets Nietzsche: “The will to power as a principle does not suppress chance but, on the contrary, implies it, because without chance it would be neither plastic nor changing. Chance is the bringing of forces in relation, the will to power is the determining principle of this relation. The will to power is a necessary addition to force but it can only be added to forces

Nietzschean notion of life affirmation illustrates that the exposition of the Nietzschean self does not aim for the consolidation of an ego via self-coincidence. It is instead a flexible being that undergoes constant change by self-transformation.

However, the self-reverence of the Nietzschean noble is open to misinterpretation because as already mentioned above, critics often take Nietzsche's notion of the will to power as a representable phenomenon and consequently regard the noble from the perspective of the slave – as he sees the master. For instance, Silvia Benso argues that when the master narcissistically affirms himself – and life –, what he is celebrating is his warrior nature and conquering his environment. She claims that within the affirmation of the master lies a negation of the slave. As if for self-definition, the master relies on the slave as well; she expresses this idea as she writes: “without the lamb, the bird of prey is only a hungry animal.”¹¹³

The negation of the slave by the master is also suggested by Christopher Hamilton who notes the sarcasm in Nietzsche's statement as he writes on behalf of the master: “We do not hate lambs, we love them, there is nothing tastier than a tender lamb!” Hamilton remarks that Nietzsche's dismissive and ridiculing attitude does not touch the problem, but tends to escape the controversy rather than propose an answer.¹¹⁴ However, I think that it is important to understand that in Nietzsche's account, the master does not rely on the slave for self-definition.

Even if Nietzsche's notorious statement may look like an evasive strategy, Nietzsche nevertheless conveys that the relationship between the prey and the predator is quite distinct from the relationship between the master and the slave. The prey does not take the predator's attack personally; it is a moment of *c'est la vie*. The predator, on the other hand, does not necessarily hate the prey or have any negative feelings about it. The former does not negate the other; but nourishes itself by incorporating it into its body. Yet nourishment is not negation because in nature, animals do not act on feelings of *ressentiment*. So neither the prey nor the predator establishes their identities based on the other one.

The master slave relationship, however, is entirely different. First of all, the master lacks the sufficient self awareness to think that he is the master. He does not see himself the way slave sees him; he is not self-conscious enough. He does not feel the

brought into relation by chance. The will to power has chance at its heart for only the will to power is capable of affirming all chance.” (49).

¹¹³ Silvia Benso, “Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?” in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 215.

¹¹⁴ Christopher Hamilton, “Nietzsche on Nobility and the Affirmation of Life,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3.2 (Jun., 2000): 169-193, 189.

need to establish and assert its superiority by comparing its power to the slave's. The main difference between the master and the slave is that the former does not compare or measure its power to the others the way the latter does. The whole master-slave dialectic is an invention or interpretation of the slave, whose language and mentality we have inherited and currently use. The dialectic is based on comparison and contrast of power, so the slave needs an illustration of power – spiritual, religious power or asceticism - to compensate for its incapacity to beat the master. Nietzsche expresses this idea as he indicates:

It is the slave who seeks to persuade us to have a good opinion of him; it is also the slave who then bends his knee before these opinions as if it was not him who produced them. And I repeat: vanity is an atavism.¹¹⁵

Deleuze notes that this is a “false image of the master,”¹¹⁶ yet nevertheless, this is still the image we have of the master, which we have appropriated from the perspective of the slave. The slave mistakenly regards power as a representational phenomenon, however power is not to be represented, interpreted nor evaluated – as these are all passive actions. Rather, power is an active concept by nature; it wills; it evaluates; it interprets.

In order to overcome nihilism, Nietzsche proposes a transmutation of values, which requires a completely different way of thinking and feeling.¹¹⁷ Rather than offering mere escapism or indifferent absorption in abstract contemplation or adoring the so-called genius or popular artist, Nietzsche considers art crucial for evoking new possibilities. As explained before, in Nietzsche's philosophy, art has the capacity to “evaluate,” even make us reconsider the concept of “evaluation” itself. Different from the scientific or mechanical-technical measurements, and different from the spiritual mystification that pertains to religion or ritualistic morality, art has the possibility to signify a fresh beginning. Artistic evaluation can enable the process of transformation of values in a both creative and destructive manner. Thus Nietzsche observes a complementary continuity; an interdependence between the aesthetic and the ethical.

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, *BGE*, “What is Noble?” 261.

¹¹⁶ Deleuze explains: “What we present to ourselves as power itself is merely the representation of power formed by the slave. What we present to ourselves as the master is the idea of him formed by the slave, the idea formed by the slave when he imagines himself in the master's place, it is the slave as he is when he actually triumphs.” (75).

¹¹⁷ Deleuze writes: “Why is transformation the completion of nihilism? It is because, in transmutation, we are not concerned with a simple substitution, but with a conversion. Nihilism reaches its completion by passing through the last man, but going beyond him to the man who wants to perish. In the man who wants to perish, to be overcome, negation has broken everything which still held it back, it has defeated itself, it has become of affirming, a power which is already superhuman, a power which announces and prepares the Overman.” (165).

Keith Ansell Pearson notes that developing creativity can also help us find “new ways for being ethical”¹¹⁸ by enabling us to discover new perspectives and new sensibilities.

This mode of thinking is quite different from Levinas who considers arts – or the aesthetic – and the ethical to be a troublesome, almost oppositional, combination. Levinas displays a doubtful attitude towards the significance and the value of arts mainly because he regards it as having a problematic relationship to ethics. As elaborated above, in implicit agreement with Plato, he regards the artwork as unreliable in depicting truth, and he is cautious about the artwork’s tendency to suggest an easy escapism such as turning one away from one’s responsibilities. Levinas is also worried that in their attempt to make something – a traumatic event for instance – aesthetic, artworks can banalize it by ripping it off from its original pain and placing it in a new aesthetic context for artistic contemplation and enjoyment.¹¹⁹

Rather than the artwork, which is an exclusive context whose internal consistency has no reference to the outside (which is I think reminiscent of Levinas’s equivocal attitude towards erotic love¹²⁰), Levinas values art criticism which signifies an opening of dialogue as critique invites the third party – together with justice and ethics. However, in spite of his distant approach to arts and his criticism of the potential irresponsibility of the aesthetics, we can easily observe that Levinas himself has been hugely affected by literature.

Levinas confesses that in his search for the “meaning of life” or necessarily the “philosophical problem of the meaning of being human,” he has been immensely influenced by the Russian classics; notably Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.¹²¹ In addition he is also affected by Shakespeare and Vasily Grossman. Moreover, the impression Grossman and Dostoevsky leave on Levinas is so great that, in his philosophical masterpieces, he frequently quotes the latter while formulating his conception of subjectivity.¹²²

We can infer that notwithstanding his worries, Levinas cannot remain indifferent to artworks; they affect him as a person, as a philosopher and as a writer. Interestingly, it is not the art criticisms – the conversation-openers – or the literature reviews of the works of Dostoevsky or Grossman but necessarily the works themselves that speak to

¹¹⁸ Keith Ansell Pearson, “Beyond Compassion: On Nietzsche’s Moral Therapy,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 44 (2011): 179-204, 202.

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *RS*, 12.

¹²⁰ Staehler also has a similar observation (214).

¹²¹ Levinas, *EI*, 22.

¹²² Dostoevsky: “We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than others” from *The Brothers Karamazov*, 264.

Levinas and move him at his very core. Rather than leading him to self-indulgence, these works of art contribute to both his character and his philosophy of ethics. It seems to me that he proves Nietzsche right in the sense that ethics and aesthetics *are* interdependent. Of course, it could be argued that those literary works mainly interest Levinas because of their substantial thematic contents which convey ethical insights about what it means to be a human being. And obviously, literature as a genre can express such themes much more effectively. However still, in spite of his Platonic reservations, we see that Levinas cannot be indifferent to works that invite ethical contemplation and evoke the power of transcendence and humanism.¹²³

However, as mentioned above, Nietzsche's interest in arts and aesthetics is above mere artworks and their thematic contents or the aims of the artists. He is mainly fascinated by the process of creativity in composing the human soul. Nietzsche's conception of art is closely related to his notion of the Overman which is the ultimate example of creativity and the transmutation of values; in which the character, ethics and aesthetics are united. Even if it sounds like an unrealistic super-hero, in Nietzsche the Overman is the most sincere path an individual can possibly put oneself upon. Nietzsche evokes this feeling as he makes Zarathustra holler:

Could you *create* a god? – So be silent about all gods! But you could surely create the Superman.
Perhaps not you yourselves, my brothers! But you could transform yourselves into forefathers and ancestors of the Superman: and let this be your finest creating!¹²⁴

In portraying the Overman, I am in agreement with John Richardson's account according to which, the "master," the "slave" and the "Overman" point at evolving types of persons.¹²⁵ The master is not only the personification of the active type who organizes his creative drives for an overall purpose but also is the prerequisite of the slave. By way of its vital animalistic primitiveness, the master ignites within the slave the feeling of reactivity accompanied by the sense of *ressentiment* and justice which constitute the richness of the latter's inner drives. The Overman is partially master and partially slave but superior to both types. Nietzsche does not yet give an example of

¹²³ Even though Levinas attempts to "defend" his captivation by modern literature by suggesting that modern literature is exceptional as its self-reflexivity invalidates the artistic idolatry and hence invites criticism, I do not find this idea quite convincing. Since self-reflexivity can be considered to be a characteristic of modern art in general (and it is not only limited to modern art but also affects postmodern and contemporary art), I do not see why a Dostoevsky novel should necessarily be more self-reflexive than a Picasso painting, for instance. The latter can be regarded just as open to criticism through self-reflexivity. Yet since this is a vast topic, treating it in justice would require writing another dissertation project.

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, II, "On the Blissful Islands." The "Superman" or the "Overman" corresponds to the same notion of the *Übermensch*; but I preferred the latter and used it throughout the dissertation.

¹²⁵ See page 31-31.

such a person as s/he does not yet exist.¹²⁶ Nietzsche imagines that person to be “the Roman Caesar with Christ’s soul,”¹²⁷ and regards man as a bridge¹²⁸ rather than a goal and explicitly states that “the Overman is the meaning of the earth.”¹²⁹

Towards the end of this chapter, I would like to return to one last issue which is one of Nietzsche’s most provocative ideas. Nietzsche suggests that any philosophy is the autobiography of its philosopher. This idea seems to wrap up the universal versus perspectivist conflict and seems to offer a (Nietzschean) solution. Below is the last lengthy quote from Nietzsche:

Apart from the value of such assertions as “there is a categorical imperative in us”, one can always ask: What does such an assertion indicate about him who makes it? There are systems of morals which are meant to justify their author in the eyes of other people; other systems of morals are meant to tranquillise him, and make him self-satisfied; with other systems he wants to crucify and humble himself; with others he wishes to take revenge; with others to conceal himself; with others to glorify himself and gain superiority and distinction; -- this system of morals helps its author to forget, that system makes him, or something of him, forgotten; many a moralist would like to exercise power and creative arbitrariness over mankind; many other, perhaps, Kant especially, gives us to understand by his morals that “what is estimable in me, is that I know how to obey – and with you it *shall* not be otherwise that with me!” In short, systems of morals are only a *sign-language of the emotions*.¹³⁰

The relevance of Nietzsche’s *ad hominem* argument to Levinas can be construed as we imagine Nietzsche posing the curious question: “What does Levinas’s over-emphasis on responsibility and his account of subjectivity manifesting itself in terms of ‘hostage,’ ‘guilt’ and ‘persecution’ necessarily say about Levinas?” Since Levinas’s *Otherwise Than Being* is a densely “emotional” book, it is tempting to claim that it is an emotional response to what he had to endure during the Holocaust era – as it is also made explicit by the dedication at the beginning of the book.

We could think that terms such as “hostage,” “persecution” or “trauma” are not to be taken literally but metaphorically; and already constituting the self at a pre-rational and

¹²⁶ Nietzsche states: “... my concept ‘Dionysian’ here became the *highest deed*; all the rest of human activity looks poor and limited in comparison. The fact that a Goethe, a Shakespeare, would not know how to breathe for a second in this incredible passion and height, that compared to Zarathustra, Dante is just another one of the faithful and not one who first *creates* truth, a *world-governing* spirit, a destiny-” (*EH*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” *TSZ*, 6).

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *WTP*, 983:1884.

¹²⁸ Nietzsche writes: “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down-going*”: (*TSZ*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” 4).

¹²⁹ Nietzsche states: “I love those who do not first seek beyond the stars for reasons to go down and to be sacrifices: but who sacrifice themselves to the earth, that the earth may one day belong to the Superman. / I love him who lives for knowledge and who wants knowledge that one day the Superman may live. And thus he wills his downfall. / I love him who works and invents that he may build a house for the Superman and prepare earth, animals, and plants for him: for thus he wills his downfall.” (*Ibid.*).

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, *BGE*, “The Natural History of Morals,” 187.

pre-conscious level (“older than the ego”¹³¹), not necessarily corresponding to one’s actual life experience. However, to this assertion, Nietzsche could counter-attack by suggesting that the autobiography is done “involuntarily” or “unconsciously.” So, even if Levinas consciously says that hostage and persecution are non-literal terms, from a Nietzschean view, they could be alluding to “an involuntary and unconscious autobiography.”¹³² Considering the socio-political circumstances Levinas had to undergo in his life – his victimization during the Holocaust era – and the literal hostage-status and persecution he experienced as he was kept prisoner, Nietzsche’s proposition sounds much more striking and vivid. As a matter of fact, Levinas never denies that the Holocaust affected and traumatized him permanently. Yet he could resent the universality of his philosophy of ethics to be reduced to an “unconscious memoir.”¹³³

Of course, Levinas’s philosophy as the symptom of his character does not undermine his philosophy or make his arguments invalid. On the contrary, Levinas seems to exemplify Nietzsche’s point perfectly. But if what he philosophizes is merely the imagination or his “emotional response” to the world he lived in, then it is naive to attribute objectivity or universalism – and is universalism not the essential criterion of ethics? – to his “perspective.” This is the big problem for ethics; and all accounts of ethics, apart from Nietzsche’s “individualistic” ethics of the will to power aspire to claim universality.

As for Nietzsche, the naivety of every philosopher lies in that fact that each one necessarily tries to persuade the rest of the world that their perspective is *the* perspective; the objective or moral truth. This is the case, Nietzsche thinks, with every philosopher, including even Nietzsche himself.¹³⁴ The significant statement of Zarathustra must always be kept in mind: “This is my way, which one is yours? For *the* way, does not exist.”¹³⁵ It is my contention that this motto best summarizes both Nietzsche’s moral perspectivism and individualism.

Conclusion

Even though Nietzsche suggests that everyone can seek self-mastery by refining their perspectives; and even though Nietzsche addresses everyone in the dedication to

¹³¹ Levinas, *OTB*, 117.

¹³² Nietzsche, *BGE*, “Prejudices of Philosophers,” 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Nietzsche’s megalomania in *Ecce Homo* must be regarded as an expression of his self-mockery.

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *TSZ*, III, “Of the Spirit of Gravity,” 2.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, he is well aware that there will only be a very few individuals who can “get the message” – metaphorically of course, as is clear from Nietzsche’s philosophy, there is no message in the literal sense. On the other hand, when Levinas addresses everyone, he means everyone; Levinas is convinced that the Bible speaks to the whole of humanity, and his philosophy is universal enough to be valid for the whole world. His humble message is ambitiously universal.

When compared with Levinas, in spite of his vehement and at times aggressive individualism, Nietzsche’s message seems much more modest. Nietzsche’s modesty is also observed by Keith Ansell Pearson who notes that the way one cultivates oneself is analogous to the gardener stylizing nature; one purifies one’s drives and affects depending on one’s taste, in whichever style – French, Dutch, English, Chinese or whatever - one likes.¹³⁶

I would like to end this chapter with a final modest suggestion: maybe not the Levinasian subject; not the subject of substitution, but Levinas himself could be an exemplar of a candidate for the Overman. The human-all-too-human Levinas certainly refines his drive to seek the genuine meaning of ethics in his philosophy. He unites his religious faith with rigorous philosophical argument, and in spite of his doubtful attitude towards works, he produces two artistic masterpieces. Having given style to his character, one assumes that he publishes them not out of vanity but rather because he sincerely thinks that he has cultivated a message to convey to the world.

¹³⁶ Pearson, 181.

CONCLUSION

Very broadly, Nietzsche and Levinas attempt to rethink the meaning of ethics in a world where neither religions nor current moral philosophies provide definite references any longer. For Nietzsche, consequent to the death of God, the conventional notion of the subject has to be redefined in order to refute the impending nihilism that comes with losing faith in the dogmatic. Noting Nietzsche's key insights, Levinas reinterprets religiosity¹ by re-emphasising the significance of the Infinite and the Good beyond Being, in order to ascertain the essential orientation of the ethical as he realises that Western philosophy fails to acknowledge the Other. I believe there is a special relationship – not so loose and definitely not so direct – between Nietzsche and Levinas which is also observed by John Llewelyn, who remarks on the stimulating relationship between these utterly different philosophers, and suggests that Levinas is at the same time very close to and very distant from Nietzsche.²

In their quest for the meaning of subjectivity both Levinas and Nietzsche offer us invaluable insights; partly in terms of highlighting the prerequisite of serving the Other and partly by seeking the possibility of creating values. Their search for the meaning of subjectivity undoubtedly coincides with the necessity to revisit ethics. It could be suggested that the special connection between the two philosophers reveals itself as they hint at certain common starting points which ramify in various directions in their projects. As the most notable aspect, both Nietzsche and Levinas regard subjectivity as a “disunity;” a platform hosting passivity, activity and reactivity. Rather than seeing the subject as a *conatus essendi* – a rational agent pursuing its determined, premeditated plans in life – they regard it essentially as an undergoing.³ In Nietzsche's case, the subject is the animal forced to keep his promise, whereas for Levinas, the subject is exposed to the point of being hostage as it displays a primordial passivity before the Other.

¹ Levinas: “In this work which does not seek to restore any ruined concept, the destitution and the desituating of the subject do not remain without signification: after the death of a certain god inhabiting the world behind the scenes, the substitution of the hostage discovers the trace, the unpronounceable inscription, of what, always already past, always ‘he,’ does not enter into any present, to which are suited not the nouns designating beings, or the verbs in which their essence resounds, but that which, as a pronoun, marks with its seal all that a noun can convey.” (OTB, 185).

² John Llewelyn states this just before the Abbreviations section of his book, yet his reference to this connection is also visible in the title of his book on Levinas, *The Genealogy of Ethics*, London: Routledge, 1995.

³ Remarkling on similarity between the two philosophers, Jill Stauffer notes that considering the diverse effects and drives, the Nietzschean self experiences its subjectivity essentially as a mode of passivity as well. She elaborates on these ideas in her essay “The Imperfect: Levinas, Nietzsche, and the Autonomous Subject,” in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.).

In addition, for both philosophers, memory and suffering are crucial themes constituting the identity of the subject. Judith Butler points out that in Nietzsche, man's memory is a wounded memory, which is based on his wounded relationship with the other⁴ to keep his promise by paying his debt. Yet, Nietzsche associates memory with *ressentiment* and innocence with forgetfulness.⁵ For Levinas, on the other hand, memory is the crucial aspect constituting one's identity by hosting painful memories. However, contrary to Nietzsche, Levinas associates forgetfulness with immorality and inhumanity. As he also implies in his dedication to *OTB*, innocence resides not in forgetfulness but in remembrance.

The last remarkable parallel between the two philosophers is the theme of self-overcoming, whose ramifications are utterly distinct for each thinker. Unlike Levinas's account, which seeks transcendence by the constant effort towards moral self-coming via prioritising the Other before the self, in Nietzsche's account self-overcoming signifies an individual striving for being on the ascending line of life in terms of creating values. For this reason, Llewelyn suggests that contrary to Levinas's humanism, Nietzsche is an over-humanist,⁶ according to which view it is morally justified for the man to sacrifice himself on the way to the Overman, since after all, man is mainly a bridge; an undergoing for the Overman.

Even though Nietzsche's interpretation of the human subject is fundamentally naturalistic, it undeniably hints at the transcendent as well. On the one hand Nietzsche regards man as a part of nature, as an organism which acts according to the will to power. But on the other hand, he still anticipates a kind of rupture; the trace of some transcendental capacity in man. In spite of man's origin as the wild beast, Nietzsche's account also contains some pseudo (or beyond) naturalistic references. The Overman is a perfectionist ideal or fiction which alludes to a very special breed of mankind to come into being after man evolves himself over a significant course of time.

As a very special case of a neurological, moral, cultural and individual self-overcoming,⁷ Overman is the rupture of mankind, and the way to lead to the Overman is to cultivate the power of creativity and think beyond *ressentiment* or the binary opposition of good and evil. Thus, we see that Nietzsche tries to undo the separation between humanism and naturalism by exploring the human-all-too-human account in

⁴ Judith Butler, "Ethical Ambivalence," in Bergo and Stauffer (eds.), 77.

⁵ Llewelyn, 163.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁷ Dove, 103.

which man seeks to interpret the world through sciences, arts and morality by the beyond human and beyond natural urge: the will to power. It is the will to power that creates values and evaluates life in man's image.

However, all in all, Nietzsche and Levinas differ in so many diverse ways offering us a quite rich and productive space to examine and develop their stimulating ideas. As they prompt us to reconsider our notion of subjectivity, both philosophers at the same time try to overcome nihilism that is doomed to haunt the world. William Large suggests a key point of the main distinction between the two philosophers by noting that Nietzsche and Levinas exemplify the different approaches between genealogy and phenomenology; the former concept signifies the "use," whereas the latter points at the "meaning" of what is disputed.

For example, since the genealogist is interested in the use of the word "god," he traces the norms of morality and observes the foundation of social practices, customs and traditions which propagate the notions of guilt and debt and links them to the subject. The connection between the creditor and god reveals the manipulation of power as the concept is a carbon copy disclosing the power relationships in a society, where interpreting the word of god grants the (ascetic) priest power. Thus, Nietzsche is interested in unravelling the use of god in socio-political manipulation of power relations. On the other side, the phenomenologist is interested in the meaning of the word "god," and he conducts his work at the expense of isolating the meaning from the whole social context. So, in describing the phenomenology of the ethical relation, Levinas uses the word God;⁸ yet even from a religious disposition, Levinas rejects the theological god but not the ancient god of monotheism,⁹ which signifies human kinship and the commonness of a father; hence, sociality based on fraternity.

As the distinction between genealogy and phenomenology seems quite applicable to subjectivity, I find this approach useful for clarifying both philosophers' conceptions of ethics in their depiction of "good" and "evil," and also the *beyond* of good and evil. The Nietzschean beyond good and evil appears to apply mainly to practical categories based on the social context of how power manipulates relations. Beyond means beyond (social) use, which is the manipulation of power contingent upon current moralities, traditions or customs. Although Nietzsche states that he wants to go beyond

⁸ William Large, "The Difference Between Genealogy and Phenomenology: The Example of Religion in Nietzsche and Levinas," in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 19 (Special Issue: Nietzsche and Religion, Spring 2000): 33-43, 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*

good and evil, he speculates with such ease and comfort only because his understanding of evil seems to be relatively limited. In the first chapter, I mentioned Foot's worry regarding Nietzsche's naivety about the wickedness of evil. This is an issue she raises in "Nietzsche's Immoralism," where she expresses her concern that Nietzsche's writing has been sadly seductive in the past, so no one can promise that it will not be seductive in the future again.

Starting with the easy part of the matter, I disagree with Foot's worry about the possibility of his writing being employed in the future as seductive reference texts to justify fascism. Reading Nietzsche is always adventurous, but the provocative nature of his prose should not lead us to dismiss him. Indeed, there can never be full control over how people interpret Nietzsche, as huge discrepancies can always exist between what thinkers write and how people interpret or manipulate their writings. Yet, the fear over the seductive rhetoric of writing suggests the unacceptable idea of censorship which we should never give in to.

As for the challenging part of determining Nietzsche's naivety about evil, I must confess that being haunted by that burning question throughout this project I still cannot formulate an easy answer to it; so I will say yes and no. Viewed from a certain angle, when compared with Levinas's elaborate phenomenology of suffering and victimization, Nietzsche on the surface appears naive about the wickedness of evil. Contrary to Nietzsche's naivety, Levinas strikingly confronts the problem of evil and frankly conveys that evil is beyond our capacity of comprehension. Nietzsche hardly sees a problem about it because he considers it basically in terms of our anthropocentric preoccupation, which is solely interested in the interpretation of harm versus damage, without any access to seeing the big "picture" – such as attaining human greatness; justification of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon or a matter of conflicting interests (among individuals) as power manipulates relations.

For Nietzsche, just as nature cannot be good or bad in itself, in his naturalistic account of evil, taking evil personally is the beginning of naivety and the sign of mental and spiritual corruption as it feeds on *ressentiment*. He notoriously claims that evil is the evil necessity of human flourishing, which is continuous with Nietzsche's notion of there being no doer behind the deed. Even though he does not directly evoke the impersonality of evil, his ideas pertaining to agency are nonetheless ambiguous. He does not reject causality necessarily because he denies the existence of causes and

effects to be wrong but mainly emphasizes that causality gives us a very limited and often incomplete picture.

Just as we cannot observe inner drives, we cannot determine the motives behind acts or predict the harm or benefit beforehand. The “use” causality provides us – such as distributing guilt and punishment from the creditor to the debtor – is misleading. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that pertaining to every single event, there are causalities rather than one causal explanation, as at the end of the day, they are only power relationships. A similar case pertains to the problem of evil as well; what we see is only the tip of the iceberg which is not an inaccurate, but fundamentally incomplete account.

For this reason, I would nevertheless emphasize that in spite of his naive appearance, Nietzsche might be merely referring to the uncomfortable truth that civilizations only come forth at a great expense of wars and terror. By offering us his seemingly amoral perspective, Nietzsche reminds us that all the universal and humane values which we take for granted as inalienable birth rights came into being only as the outcome of unbearable bloodshed, humiliation, colonisation, slavery, massacres and so forth. The bare fact that Nietzsche is reminding us of the appalling agony our ancestors either caused or endured, as a consequence of which sophisticated theories of justice, freedom or human rights came about, does not mean that Nietzsche is completely apathetic about human suffering. In this respect, by referring to evil as the evil necessity for human flourishing, Nietzsche may not be naive but necessarily insightful and courageous enough to expose and demystify the “genealogy” of our supreme values. He may have a point in suggesting that we must study our being in all its immorality.

The binary opposition between good and evil, and even more importantly, the *beyond* of good and evil, has been a central idea for this project as it has a significant relevance for Levinas too. Levinas bases his philosophy of ethics on the distinct separation between good and evil – the meaning of good and evil which arises from sociality. He alludes to the Platonic notion of the Good beyond Being as the eternal reference point for ethical orientation which can only manifest itself by responding to the Other. He associates the indifference to one’s neighbour’s suffering with the source of all immorality. However, in Levinas’s account, both Good and evil are beyond my capacities of cognition, as both already signify the “beyond;” namely, beyond meaning

or comprehension as in transcendence – by evoking highness, it is referred to as transascendence (Good) in contrast to transcendence (evil).

In Levinas's philosophy, evil manifests itself through the experience of suffering, causing the loss of one's powers to interpret and reason through which one loses one's agency. Since it has a demolishing effect upon one's subjectivity, suffering is pure evil and hence cannot be justified. The problem with evil is that it cannot be simplistically refuted philosophically; because its articulation is already beyond one's cognitive capacities. Even though there is no use for suffering, nor compensation; or symmetry or balance between good and evil (responding to the call of the Good beyond Being versus the evil of suffering), there is a "nevertheless;" which signifies a crucial difference between suffering in me versus the suffering in the Other.

On the one hand, undergoing the private experience of suffering, the sufferer loses her singularity, even her ipseity. But on the other hand, by responding to the Other, she senses her ipseity being singled out. Perhaps this might be a reason even for the sufferer herself that suffering for the Other can be meaningful. Levinas makes it very clear that nothing in the world ever justifies the suffering of the Other. This is the major distinction between Nietzsche and Levinas; the determining factor is not the justification of my own suffering (even if I suffer for the Other), but on no condition does Levinas ever consider the possibility of justifying the suffering in the Other. For Levinas, the problem with theodicy is not necessarily the need to justify my own suffering but the hidden rationale for justifying the suffering of the Other.

By mentioning suffering in general, Nietzsche does not make a distinction between my suffering and others' suffering, which is also visible in his important theme of *amor fati*. From a Levinasian viewpoint, the Nietzschean notion of loving fate leads to the idea of the impossibility of critique; even more dangerously, the impossibility of self critique. Levinas calls the ethical moment the suspension of one's spontaneity by the Other. The Nietzschean subject who loves her fate suspends herself to adore herself, which is similar to the narcissism of one taking one's own photograph and loving it. Surrendering to the blind powers of the will to power, *amor fati* also suggests inactivity, surrender, fatalism. In this respect, Levinas criticizes Nietzsche's attitude of treating one's fate or life as one's artwork; Nietzsche already elaborates on this idea as being the artists of our lives. The exclusivity of critique (of one's fate) is reminiscent of Levinas's critique of artworks regarding their being closed totalities.

Nietzsche's (partial) naivety regarding the evil in suffering blinds him to the issue of overcoming theodicy. Although it is Nietzsche who rigorously exposes the hypocrisy of theodicy, he falls into its temptation, if indirectly. Nietzsche vehemently argues that what is pathetic about man is his inability to endure the solidity of suffering without ascribing meaning to it, such as by inventing morality, religion, the idea of an afterlife; anything associated with reward or punishment. As the calculating, measuring animal, man demands compensation. Although Nietzsche is highly accurate in observing this aspect of human nature, while criticizing it, he ends up being unable to resist that mindset. In his attempt to overcome nihilism, he falls prey to a different version of theodicy; in a celebratory mood, Nietzsche acclaims that in order to say yes to one single joy, one has to accept all the suffering that comes along with it.

Even though this proposition sounds plausible at first sight, when we scrutinise it closely, we discover that Nietzsche's idea still contains the condition of symmetry. It is Levinas who remarks on our fixation with symmetry, and suggests that in order to overcome theodicy, one has to get over the obsession with symmetry – because any mode of symmetrical thinking always seeks justification one way or another. It is the asymmetrical which welcomes the non-reciprocal. Thus, in spite of what Nietzsche suggests, one may have to endure a tremendous amount of suffering without the anticipation of a single joy. Or, one may seek a balance between joy and suffering in one's life – as if from a bird's eye view – but that would not be regarded as radically challenging the notion of theodicy or overcoming nihilism.

On the other hand, we need to tie some loose ends regarding Levinas as well. An immediate issue that needs clarification is the role of choice in his ethics. As Fabio Ciaramelli asks, if I am always already chosen for my responsibilities before I even know it, can there still be ethics, without choice?¹⁰ Is this not a pre-ethical being making pre-ethical choices? Is this even a responsibility? As for Levinas, the choice to respond to the Other is up to me, yet in whichever way I respond, whether to fulfil or deny my responsibilities, there is no way I can feel the inhibition or obsession get any lighter. I will always feel burdened by my responsibilities regardless of my choice. My choice is crucial in terms of leading me to ethical relationships, but it is trivial in terms of affecting how I experience my subjectivity.

¹⁰ Ciaramelli, 86.

Levinas's ethics attempts to point beyond the "is" versus "ought" dilemma; he would reject the "is" as long as "is" implies the ethical realism or naturalism because nature cannot provide us with ethical meanings. And Levinas would reject the "ought" as long as "ought" implies the rational justification of moral behaviours, which always comes with some philosophical reasons or compensations pertaining to damages or benefits. When the face says "Do not kill me!" it is the face that says it, not the mouth or the tongue. The ethical command is beyond "is" versus "ought" because I am not rewarded in a practical way, not in this world, and neither am I granted a promise for salvation in the afterlife. To the contrary, my responding to the Other prompts me to suffer for her suffering by substituting myself for her.

What Levinas contributes to the dichotomy of the "is" versus "ought" is to unravel this binary opposition, which presumes a clear cut distinction without indicating anything about the primordial obsession by the Other. Presumably, the originality of Levinas's phenomenology lies in the discovery of the wide grey space in between. The "infinity of responsibilities" defies this easy category because one is never good enough; neither while acknowledging and serving the Other, nor while ignoring the presence of the Other. Levinas's conception of obsession is the key phenomenological insight to describe the ethical moment or the encounter with the face. The face haunts me even if out of my sight; one feels the inhibition and obsession even when ignoring the Other. The one who ignores the Other is not any less obsessed with the Other than the one who responds to the Other. Either way, I will always be obsessed with the Other. If I deny my responsibilities, I will nevertheless be still haunted by the Other, which is why I can never murder the Other in the ethical sense.

Yet, if I accept my responsibilities, I will still be obsessed because I will never be certain whether what I do for the Other will ever be good enough since I cannot comprehend her; there will always be that essential separation between the same and the Other to secure her alterity. The notion of infinite responsibilities signifies that I will never feel the peace of mind and heart pertaining to the realm of the "ought," which implies a sense of complacency; a feeling of satisfaction that deservedly accompanies "a task fulfilled." The pomposity of obeying the moral command evoking a sense of reward is completely absent in Levinas's account.

There is nothing to comfort me or give me peace; no choice I make can ever release me from my discomfort, my obsession, my responsibilities. My neck will always feel stiff from supporting the universe. Yet, when Levinas regards substitution as a divine

discomfort that liberates, he implies that I am only liberated to see that I have even more responsibilities, because that is the condition of life, rather than a mere philosophical proposition.

However, in spite of Levinas's embrative and humanistic philosophy of the Other, there comes a moment when one pauses to question the validity of his conception of universalism. I believe Levinas's humanistic philosophy is highly valid and valuable as long as he emphasizes humanity in general. But when he begins homogenizing humanity¹¹ in terms of creating a universal family – around a common father and brotherhood –, notwithstanding its romantic allure, matters get complicated and question-begging. In Levinas, monotheism signifies human kinship and the commonness of a father, which I think is too optimistic a notion even as an analogy. Without taking his proposition on a literal level, I would nevertheless like to draw attention to the ambivalence of Levinas's thought. It is important to note that monotheistic religions do not promote peace for most of the time, but rather endorse violence and discrimination; functioning just like a family, even if they maintain peace inside, they often wage war outside, towards the "enemies."

Building alliances based on kinship is not a radical idea in the ethical sense, because in theory, a family gains its significance based on its internal sufficiency. By nature, the solidarity of a family is maintained by and large at the expense of exclusion or even hostility towards other families. If all humanity is a family, then there is no family as the concept loses its meaning. Familial belonging always excludes outsiders at some level; typically, families are less sensitive to the plights of other families. For this reason, rather than contributing to further human bonding, ironically families intensify the feeling of being-for-one-another; at the cost of weakening the inclination of being-for-the-Other.

Thus, I think that in order to emphasize the humanism of the Other, it would be much more plausible to stress the more fundamental aspect, namely our shared humanity, without succumbing to an uncritical family discourse. It is possible to refer to the religiosity of the human soul without associating it with any specific religion because another monotheistic religion would point to a different common father – for a different family.

¹¹ I have already touched on the dubiety of Levinas's notion of the "abstract man" because of its potentially homogenizing and suppressing effects upon the "concrete" singularities.

Likewise, it is not necessary to call the universal language of philosophy Greek. If the language of philosophy is supposed to be universal then it does not even have to remain Eurocentric. Rather than regarding multiculturalism as a threat to the integrity of the West, universality could evoke welcome, openness and hospitality without fearing disorientation. If Levinas rejects this possibility, his account will always be vulnerable to the criticism that his conception of the Other tends to resemble the same too much, or favours the neighbour with whom he happens to have literal kinship.¹²

In this respect, compared with Levinas, Nietzsche's non-universalist account seems much more respectful towards singularities. The Overman,¹³ the free spirit are neutral categories, free from any ontological burden of socio-historical connotations. It is important to remember that even Nietzsche's figure of contempt, the cunning ascetic priest, is "universal;" in the sense that the term applies to anyone in every culture. The ascetic priest can be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Platonist.¹⁴ As no specific continent, race or culture is privileged, in his emphasis on individuality Nietzsche hints that one can organize one's drives just like a gardener cultivating her garden - in any style she pleases; Chinese, French, Dutch, Scottish etc.¹⁵ -; perhaps we can thereby infer that not just each individual drive; or subject; but even every different culture could signify a different perspective.

I carried out this project without promising any negotiation between Nietzsche and Levinas, and towards the end of my research, I only feel more convinced of the impossible, yet fascinating relationship between the two philosophers. As phrased by Jean-Michel Longneaux, the "impossible relationship" between them makes itself mostly manifest when we imagine each philosopher regarding the other as exemplifying his own point: Levinas could say that without contributing anything to the meaning of ethics, Nietzsche only ever propagates the narcissism of the same, which is what Levinas attempts to unravel elaborately in *TI*, in order to refute it. This seems

¹² I make this comment also bearing in mind Levinas's facile dismissal of the question posed at him during an interview with Solomon Malka, regarding recognizing the alterity of the Palestinian as the Jew's Other. When encountering a concrete incident of this kind, without hesitation, Levinas responds that his "notion of alterity is completely different" and states that "in alterity one may find the enemy" (*LR*, 294). Nevertheless, I think this question could have been a perfect opportunity for Levinas to expose not only the radical dimension but also the *universality* of his thought, if he had right away acknowledged the alterity of the Palestinian, without reluctance.

¹³ Even though the Overman is obviously a sexist term, a feminist criticism of Nietzsche – and of course, Levinas – is well beyond the scope of this project.

¹⁴ For Nietzsche, it is Plato who invented the notion of other worldliness, yet his critique of Plato would be the topic of another dissertation.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *D*, V, 560.

like a quite obvious point; a justified and reasonable criticism that can be posed at Nietzsche's individualistic philosophy, in general.

On the other hand, Nietzsche could suggest that even while rejecting the narcissism of the same, Levinas nevertheless acts in accordance with the will to power, the metaphysical *conatus essendi* inherent within everyone – and Levinas is no exception. Levinas's arguments for human elevation, responding to the Good beyond Being through sociality could be interpreted as a desire for growth in power. Levinas could be regarded as exemplifying the will to power despite his reference to it in disgust – as he associates it with evil and egoism. Nietzsche could point out that the essential orientation of ethics, the Good beyond Being, is eventually prompted by the non-representational power directedness. As Nietzsche does not associate power with evil or anything representational, he would "amorally" proclaim that power is beyond good and evil. Thus, power applies to the Good as well.

To conclude, without offering any compatibility between the two philosophers, we could nevertheless benefit from their intriguing incompatibility. I think that where Levinas arrives at an impasse, Nietzsche could help us reconsider and revise our perspectives. And where Nietzsche seems to get lost in his naturalistic cosmology devoid of ethical consideration, Levinas could call our spontaneity into question in order to revisit the meaning of being human. Studying a philosopher from the viewpoint of another enables us to see the contrasts and the unique differences in each of the two philosophers much more clearly; and hence appreciate the depth of their thoughts even more. This has been my main motive in exploring Nietzsche and Levinas within an imaginary agonistic contest, where what matters is not the declaration of who wins in the end, but the ongoing challenge itself, for its own sake. The contest only highlights their unique virtues more and hopefully inspires those of us who are in the amateur league to be better contestants.

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