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RE-THINKING PATHWAYS FROM ETHICS TO POLITICS WITH EMMANUEL LEVINAS: HOW CAN LEVINAS' RADICAL RE-GROUNDING OF ETHICS CONTRIBUTE TO A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL? – THESIS SUMMARY

The project of this thesis is to provide a novel reading of the work of Emmanuel Levinas to extract theoretical resources that can help address the numerous crises of the contemporary world. Beginning from the premise that the world is in a state of multiple crises and that current political groups and institutions are failing to find adequate responses, I argue that Levinas' thought provides radically different, and often unsettling, contributions to these discussions. I first review the areas where Levinas discusses the political and identify key dynamics in his work that can hinder its deployment and contribute to unhelpful readings. Following this with an examination of the secondary literature of this topic, I establish important parameters of the future course of the thesis. Recognising the limitations of Levinas, I nevertheless proceed with the main exposition of the thesis, which aims to extract what is of most value in Levinas' work, aiming to maximise its utility in challenging the political structures which are currently falling short. The project then circles back to the limitations left unresolved earlier and through the intervention of other thinkers seeks to ameliorate these issues. The main conclusions are as follows: first, Levinas' work on the political should be read as being torn between commitments to both transcendence and freedom, and a somewhat conservative approach to politics. Second, the most helpful approach is to strongly emphasise the radical and anti-authoritarian elements. Third, that the result of this reading leads to an anti-political position, or at least with a vision of politics so alien it is hardly recognised as such. Finally, while Levinas' work has issues, particularly around race and colonialism, that cannot be simply resolved, it retains the capacity for compatibility with other thinkers who can address them more adequately.

Re-thinking pathways from Ethics to Politics with Emmanuel Levinas: How can Levinas' Radical Re-Grounding of Ethics Contribute to a Radical Transformation of the Political?

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Declaration

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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Contents

List of Abbreviations of Works by Emmanuel Levinas

EI – Ethics and Infinity

EE – Existence and Existents

ET – The Ego and the Totality

FC – Freedom and Command

MS – Meaning and Sense

OB – Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence

OE – On Escape

PM - The Paradox of Morality

PP – Peace and Proximity

RH – Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism

TeI - Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité

TI – Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority

TN – In the Time of the Nations

TO – Time and the Other, and Other Essays

Introduction

It is particularly tempting, when writing a work concerning radical political or social transformation, to insist on the timeliness of one's intervention, the burning relevance of one's interpretations, analyses, and prescriptions. It would be prudent, however, to temper this hubris by remembering, with Walter Benjamin, that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule." (Benjamin, 1968, p.257). The cruelties visited on the world today are not new, nor were they in a meaningful sense lesser in past times; however, at this moment as I write this, something is in the air. Something is ending. If the global financial crisis of 2008 was the beginning of this end, then the last two years of global mass uprisings of 2019 and the accelerant in 2020 of plague, economic catastrophe and millenarian death-cults may be the end of this beginning. This period began with occupy, anti-austerity and the Arab Spring and is ending with Yellow vests, George Floyd, the Storming of the US Capitol and unrest from Chile, Haiti, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Sudan, Iraq, and Ecuador, to name but a few.

Something is ending. What will survive this ending, who or what will triumph and what course this will take is impossible to say. "Everything is teetering on the edge of everything" (DeVega, 2020) and which way any of it will fall is shrouded in terrifying uncertainty. There is no spectre for the modern-day Metternichs to fight, or perhaps, it is more spectral than ever before. In the last twelve years, it is difficult to think of a single corner of the world that has not been touched by serious unrest, polarisation, or rampant authoritarianism, and now the pandemic has arrived, cloaking the planet in anxiety, anger, and fear. Even if this ending is not fully consummated, this trembling will not simply be forgotten. It would be comforting to think that an election here, a peacekeeping force there, will allow everything to simmer down, will lower the temperature, but it is difficult to imagine this. A vaccine might turn the tide of a pandemic, but it does nothing for those already washed away; the new inlets and precipitous overhangs worn by its erosive power remain. Even if absolute collapse is avoided this time, the lack of political imagination evident in the world today, combined with climate change's increasingly irreversible progress, this will be a stay, rather than a pardon.

This situation provokes the first motivation for this project. As the world lurches closer to disaster, a profound re-evaluation of how we consider the political, and the life that is interrupted or enclosed by it, is increasingly necessary. The profundity of the crisis leads not to thinking a simple reconfiguration of politics, but a new way of living, a new ἦθος (Ethos), provoked by these waves of crisis. However, as Derrida notes, to write, to teach, to prescribe

how to live, is at best perplexing and, at worst, highly presumptuous (Derrida, Spectres of Marx, 1994, p.xvi). This new ethos, which, as we will see, is an ethics, is not something to be taught, but as Derrida puts it, something that only comes from "the other and by death" (Derrida, Spectres of Marx, 1994, p.xvii). What I will be unfolding in the following pages is not a prescription or a programme in itself, but shrinks back from the arrogance of that presumptuousness. Instead, I will explore a way of living that is, fundamentally, an attentiveness to the other and to what the other reveals on the boundary of life. To the extent that this project does have a normative element, it will show how certain normative elements follow from my reading of Levinas. That is to say, I will show that, if we accept elements of Levinas' thought as true, then a certain weak normativity presents itself that can help to answer the crises that loom over us. The importance of this comportment to what is other is necessary not only because of the catastrophes facing the populations of the world but because this change in how we live cannot come from a single source or the narcissism of a closed inner life. It cannot find its solution in a single collection of texts or practices but must retain an openness to collaboration.

Additionally, this approach avoids ignoring or erasing the practices and theories which are already enacting some of this thinking. The task at hand necessarily requires humility, the triumphalism of previous ways of thinking is rarely illuminated kindly by the harsh experience of history. Additionally, I find myself conscious of the fact that I am writing this from the historic seat of such arrogance and triumphalism, that is, the Western Academy. The thinker whose work I find holds the closest to this attentiveness, this potential for learning and openness, as well as humility, is Emmanuel Levinas.

If so many new and dangerous crises beset the world, why have I chosen to turn to Emmanuel Levinas? As a thinker variously characterised as apolitical or cynically concerned with politics, whose thought is considered a manifestation of survivor's guilt and an opening to the worst violence, Levinas seems like a curious choice. Moreover, Levinas is a thinker of the last century, with a chequered past on issues of race, colonialism, and gender, and a persistent aversion to engagement in radical political traditions. What I demonstrate in this thesis is that across Levinas' oeuvre, from *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* (henceforth *RH*) in 1934 to The *Paradox of Morality* (*PM*) in 1988, there is a wealth of thought precisely suited for such a world on the brink. Levinas is writing because the true world is absent, yet we are in the world (*TI*, p.33). Against the totality of history, there is an urgency to his work, despite its emphasis on passivity. The goings-on of the world will not work themselves out through historical forces or be justified by the arc of progress, but in bringing everything to judgment here and now, as if it were the end. However, more than this, it is an urging that I am responsible now, and I more

than the others. It is only a thinker who knows what it means for a world to end, whose thought is an eschatology, who can help us develop a thinking that does not rely on impersonal forces to once again assimilate divergence but can allow us a radically different way of thinking the end.

Beyond the tenor that Levinas writes in, I find in his work an astute and nuanced critique of the political order of his time and our own. While, as I will discuss, I disagree with many of his conclusions, his analyses of the position of the state, institutions, economy, and the other, form a fascinating angle of critique, distinct from liberal or Marxist traditions. As I will also demonstrate, his criticisms can lead to conclusions that are not the moderate compromise some find in his work, but rather indicate something much more radical and, in a sense, utopian.

It seems that we are at a point of flux and instability not seen since the interwar period, which like now, saw pandemics, economic crises, and authoritarianism break down the boundaries of historical development, disrupting the teleologies associated with Marxism and Liberalism alike. Levinas was a witness to, and occasional participant in, these upheavals and disasters. By learning from Levinas, we can develop a thought that can avoid the failures of his time. The greatest of these failures will remain the rise of fascism and Stalinism, as well as the continued dominance of colonial empires around the globe. My reference to Stalinism is not simply an attack on the crimes of this ideology, but also the failure of forces nominally aimed at liberation to overthrow imperialism and capitalism, instead embracing nationalism and state capitalism, as well as inaugurating its own imperialism. The interlinked features of ideology and movements point to Adorno's description of this period as one where the opportunity for the realisation of philosophy was missed (Adorno, Negative Dialectics, Routledge, 1973, p.3). This debate may seem removed from the current state of affairs; however, Levinas can help us understand the root of this failure, from which many contemporary disasters spring. These are not necessarily replicated or correlated in a directly comparable way, but rather we can see that these dangers, or ones like them, are ever-present as long as we maintain a thinking rooted in the political and the forces and institutions of totality (understanding totality as that tendency that erases otherness, integrating everything into systems, masses, objects of administration, etc.).

Levinas, if we take him seriously, provokes us to think a counter-political subjectivity, which can help fight new totalitarianisms and subvert the ones already existing by its corrosive effect on the political itself. This analysis of subjectivity is paired with a novel and incisive critique of the political, which I will also draw out in my readings. Levinas remarks that the institutions of the state and law are always on the brink of finding their justification in themselves rather than the ethical. It seems to be in moments of crisis such as these that this slide can become total and

destroy any possibility for action. My project aims to draw out this critique and, coupled with Levinas' ethical account of subjectivity, lay out the orientation of praxis that follows from it.

What do I mean here by Levinasian subjectivity being corrosive to the political? First, one might ask, what do I mean here by the political? The political in relation to the ethical is particularly slippery. It is never entirely clear what separates one from the other. Is politics simply ethics put into practice? This seems a reductive approach that relegates the ethical to pure theory, ignoring various practical ethical fields. Is it ethics applied to a community, that is, applied in public? Again, this approach seems to restrict ethics to pure matters of conscience and removes it from the public sphere. I do not pose these questions to indicate that the political and the ethical are synonymous, but rather that the political does not necessarily occupy the essential position many understand it to. Likewise, the ethical ought not be considered simply as a theoretical or private consideration, but is, or can be, fundamentally pragmatic, material, and collective.

Further to this, the structure of the political is itself dangerous. In the institutions of the political; the state, courts, bureaucracy, we find a constant looming force of engulfment. In line with certain anarchist and radical postcolonial thinkers, as well as Levinas himself, I find 'The Political' constantly engaged in projects of comprehension and control, in the words of Harney and Moten "claiming to defend what it has not enclosed, enclosing what it cannot defend but only endanger" (Harney and Moten, 2013, p.18). This is not the *particular* fault of certain regimes, but a *systematic tendency* towards domination and totalisation.

 I find in Levinas all the groundwork for developing this understanding of the ethical and the political; however, the resulting construction from my project will be quite distinct from Levinas' own conclusions. Returning to consider the danger of the political, the tendency of the institutions of political life to become a totalising force and overwhelm the ethical, may give us a clue as to the actual means of distinction. Further than this, towards the end of my project, working with *The Undercommons* by Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, there is perhaps an indication that there is not a great deal worth saving in the political.

By the understanding I will use, what distinguishes the political sphere is the use of power to administrate, regulate and maintain a polis through institutions. In the best case, one would hope that this is based on a good ethical foundation, but fundamentally ethics forms a second-order concern. The main concern of the political is the use of power to maintain and regulate the polis. This is not to say other means of organisation, those proposed by anarchists for example, would not be political, as they, by refusing to cede power to institutions or individuals, still take a position in relation to power. Despite this, one would struggle in such a society to

point to a political realm. One could certainly point to collective decision-making, but no permanent representative body or institution of power; one could point to various logistical and organisational initiatives and collectives, but no ministry or similar formal body. At least, if one did contend that certain bodies constituted the political, it would be alien to what we understand as the political today. Similarly, I contend that one can apply ethics in a practical and collective sense, without it becoming subsumed to the political by the exercise of power and the establishment of institutions jealous for their own preservation over concern for the other. What Levinas can help us think is a way of being with each other that is not mediated through these institutions, is not a separate private aspect of life, but forms a generative and generous commons (Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 2012, p. 17, 156).

As a result of the above, I can perhaps say that this project is in a minimal sense political, but what I mean to get at is that combination of a corrosiveness towards institutions of power that comprise the political proper, as well as a resulting praxis that, even in the sense it is minimally political, provides such an altered vision as to render the label 'political' entirely insufficient. The comparison with anarchism is instructive here. Indeed, one might identify this project as anarchistic. I would certainly agree if one uses the term anarchist as some kind of umbrella terminology for libertarian and anti-authority ideologies and forms of praxis. However, 'anarchist*ic*' might be a better terminology, as while the final formulation may find itself a fellow traveller with anarchist thought, its genealogy, intellectual resources, and, in a sense, motivations, remain quite separate from the classical anarchism of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, etc.

To return to the question of how Levinas' subjectivity can aid such a project, I will show throughout this work that the aspects of absence, passivity, and vulnerability, or affectability, are what is valuable in Levinas' conception of the subject. The subject, considered in the context of substitution as hostage and involuntarily obligated, provides a very difficult substance for totality to work on. That is to say, as the subject is instantiated by substitution (the pre-conscious foundational impact of the other), it evacuates itself, abdicates the sovereign position it is given in much Western thought in favour of the other. The Ego as a *solus ipse,* an in and for itself, is evacuated and substituted for the other. This is combined with the marker of affectability, a rejection of the sovereign will of liberalism that both challenges liberal ideas of the political and provides an understanding that combats the racist idea of the European subject. This different understanding of the self, opposed to the often egoistic understanding of Western thought, provides a basis for the radical subjectivity I want to lay out here.

Further, I will show that the other, and this understanding of subjectivity, is fundamentally resistant to the framing of totality found in the state and capital. The indeterminacy and unknowable otherness of the other is fundamentally a rebellious element that can never be entirely subsumed into totality and thereby constantly destabilises what attempts to engulf it. My project is to take this destabilisation to its most extreme and expansive conclusions and imagine a praxis that completes the initial chipping away at totality that the Levinasian subject instantiates simply by its existence and comportment towards otherness. By identifying this theme in Levinas, I develop an account that amplifies this tendency and follows through on its more radical and utopian inclinations.

The second motivation for this project is not only the conviction that Levinas has important insights into the current moment and new ideas for moving beyond it, but also that these insights have not, for the most part, been effectively utilised or expressed in the existing literature (although of course, other important insights and critiques have been, as I will explore in chapter 2). As I will show, this is due to two factors. First, this is not helped by Levinas' own writing. For example, I have spoken about the radical potential of Levinas' work, but if one was to look at his writings, one might be able to just about note the presence of this potential, but this direction is by no means clear. For example, Levinas' position acknowledges the destabilising nature of the other, and the danger posed to it by the state, yet maintains the state in relation regardless. There are many other instances where it seems that Levinas hedges somewhat, unwilling to commit to a more radical position but also convinced that maintaining the status quo is untenable. The other issue is in the secondary literature where, as we will see, either this tension and uncertainty is maintained, leading to an overly conservative conception, or the tension is ignored outright. This certainly leads to a radical idea of Levinas, but it fails to negotiate the difficulties I and others find in the text.

This critical position in particular has a significant bearing on methodological considerations. Rather than the scholars who take a more straightforward and faithful reconstructive view of Levinas' work, or those who seem to read into the text what they find the most useful (I will address these more fully in chapter two), I take a somewhat appropriative approach that identifies Levinas' revolutionary potential and pushes it further than Levinas himself did, while still acknowledging and negotiating remaining issues. This gets to a core principle of this project, that I am not attempting to construct a true or authentic vision of a Levinasian political, but instead, I am pushing Levinas' thought to its very margins, transforming Levinas' thought into what is needed for navigating the crises facing us today. In many ways, one could argue that it ceases being Levinasian. I think this would be premature, as while Levinas' thought will find itself

stretched to positions it would not initially be at home in, I have attempted throughout to demonstrate this on the basis of a thorough reading which remains faithful to a certain spirit within Levinas' thought. The interpretation I will give remains textually grounded and thoroughly Levinasian in a looser sense but divorced perhaps from Levinas himself.

Levinas' oeuvre possesses qualities that are particularly suited for this somewhat appropriative method. In terms of the philosophical consistency of the method proposed here, Levinas accepts the nature of reading and producing work as an inherent surrender of the producer's will to the other who takes and uses the work. Levinas maintains this as a necessary betrayal, and so, with apologies, I aim to take full advantage of this approach. Levinas gives us a body of work stretching almost sixty years, from what I consider to be his first original work, *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, to his later interviews and essays of the late 1980s. While the breadth of this body of work is of help simply by virtue of the quantity of material, it also aids the present project due to its distribution over Levinas' career. Primarily, it is temporally spread out, distributed in such a way that one can trace the appearance and fading of certain themes and ideas, but also, in this changing of emphasis, there is a constant unsaying and re-stating of various themes. This flexibility and ambiguity of meaning is something one can take advantage of and use to develop an understanding in a similarly flexible way. Unlike other scholars, who often identify a clear turning point in Levinas' work between *TI* and *OB*, I do not identify in Levinas a clear break or turn in Levinas' work. To be sure, *OB* represents something of a departure from his earlier work, but it is by no means a straightforward or unambiguous repudiation. Instead, I understand *OB* to be an evolution into a different emphasis and different means of expression, while still working towards the same goal, towards understanding whether justice issues "from a war of all against all, or from the irreducible responsibility of the one for all" *(OB*, p.159), as well as an attempt to describe those conditions of universal human solidarity. These qualities allow for the weaving together of different themes found in different parts of Levinas' work with relative freedom, restricted only by limits of consistency and coherence.

Literature

The literature I utilise in this project can be split into three categories: primary texts from Levinas, secondary literature concerning Levinas, particularly concerning his relationship with the political, and other primary literature on politics, race, and moral philosophy. I will briefly run through the texts that will form the focus of this project and make explicit some thinkers who have had a great deal of influence on this project but are not directly discussed in the text.

As I have discussed, Levinas' work spans almost sixty years of writings, comprising both philosophical works and Talmudic readings, which leaves a considerable amount of potential material to engage with. Given the focus of my project, and my methodology, it would, of course, be unhelpful to attempt to cover the entire span of his work. As a result, I have restricted my reading according to whether the text in question is important in the development of his thought, expresses a helpful dynamic or concept for the task at hand, or is particularly relevant to discussion of his relation to the political. As a result, I cover a broad scope of his work, although certain areas are dealt with in less detail than others. For example, I deal with *RH* in great detail, as I argue it is crucial for understanding his later work and deals with the political explicitly, whereas his work from 1936-1947 (such as *EE* and *TO*) gets little attention besides what it can tell us about the development of his thought. *TI* and *OB* will, of course, get the most attention, given their importance to his work as a whole. Certain other essays, particularly those written in the 1950s, which were so important for the development of *TI* (*ET*, will be particularly helpful in this regard), will be given more attention.

The bulk of my attention is aimed towards the overtly philosophical side of his work, however there is additionally some work on his Talmudic commentaries where they seem to reflect or express ideas important in my reading of his political work. I am, to an extent, maintaining the division here between the Talmudic commentaries and the philosophical work, but these engagements are important to note certain links and their importance for Levinas' philosophical work generally. It is important to note that my focus on Levinas' 'philosophical' work as opposed to what is often called the 'confessional' works is not a result of squeamishness over religion or denigration of the very real philosophical work done therein. Indeed, the Talmudic readings contain some of the most explicitly political work, particularly in works such as "Judaism and Revolution" and "The State of Caesar and the State of David", so not addressing it here might seem unusual. In Annabel Herzog's recent effort to get to an understanding of a Levinasian political in *Levinas's Politics: Justice, Mercy, Universality* (Herzog, 2020), she identifies a critical difference between the Talmudic and more straightforwardly philosophical work, in that "the phenomenological books present a utopian and impracticable ethics, while the Talmudic readings reflect a political, and at times pragmatic, mode of thought" (Herzog, 2020, p.5). For Herzog, it is in the Talmudic Readings that we stand the best chance of finding a practical politics in Levinas, avoiding much of the utopian and distant thought of the phenomenological work. Conversely, this project I am embarking on seeks to take what is *most* utopian and radical, to move away from the 'small-c' conservatism of some of Levinas' conclusions. As such, this renders a lot of Levinas' Talmudic readings unsuitable for the current project, not due to their

status as religious, but rather because they end up adhering more to the order of the ontological than the radical aspects I aim to draw out of the phenomenological readings.

The secondary literature surrounding Levinas that I engage with primarily revolves around the wave of Levinasian works that came out of anglophone philosophy departments in the 1990s and early 2000s. Dominated by figures such as Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, this wave of Levinas scholars forms the base of my engagement with Levinas. Other figures from this period that I include who are particularly relevant to understanding Levinas and the political are Howard Caygill, Asher Horowitz, and Gad Horowitz. This section is also indebted to the literature overviews and analysis undertaken by Bettina Bergo, as well as for her work on Levinas more broadly. Gillian Rose is present in the second chapter as a critical perspective on Levinas, and the criticisms of Badiou and Žižek have substantially impacted my reading and argumentation. I round off my investigation of critical perspectives by looking at Fred Moten's recent work on Levinas.

I additionally draw on perspectives from Latin American Liberation Philosophy, which is heavily indebted to Levinas primarily through his influence on Enrique Dussel. I largely engage with this tradition through Santiago Slabodsky and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, who feature prominently in the last two chapters. In many ways, these two thinkers straddle the boundary of Levinas scholarship and bring in thinkers and ideas not found in the other readers of Levinas I examine.

A notable exception in cited works for these sections is Jacques Derrida, the figure through which many of the scholars I have been discussing first encountered Levinas. While Derrida has taken an important role in shaping my thoughts on Levinas' work more generally, and indeed helps me open this work, his work does not fit in the context of my project, in large part due to my methodology. If I were doing close, critical readings of particular works by Levinas, such as *TI* or *OB*, as they are, then Derrida's critique would merit lengthy discussion and citation. However, my method of taking specific ideas from Levinas' works and stitching them together into a somewhat different project has allowed me to sidestep many of the criticisms Derrida levelled in his dialogue with Levinas. In this way, by my selection of Levinas' ideas, Derrida, and his critiques of Levinas, represent the silhouette surrounding the argument I have constructed, despite not being present in a more explicit manner.

The final group of writers I utilise help to fill the spaces missed by the account given within the intellectual world of Levinas scholarship. Each tradition I address goes some way to helping to provide a more (although never totally) cohesive account. Lisa Tessman, a thinker operating in analytic moral philosophy, helps to consider more practical aspects and implications of Levinas'

thought, while Denise Ferreira da Silva helps me to clarify and amend Levinas' thought's relationship to the white supremacist texts of the western canon. Walter Benjamin, Georges Sorel, and Franz Fanon provide insights into the position of violence in the account developed to this point, and Fred Moten and Stephano Harney provide concepts that can help to envision the intersubjectivity and resistance implied in my account.

The Argument

This work is broken up into three broad sections. Section one, chapters one and two, examines the political as it is discussed in Levinas, identifies issues, and looks at responses found in the secondary literature. The second section, chapter three, embarks on an original and radical reading of Levinas' work before moving to the third section, chapters four and five, which introduces other thinkers to supplement this reading.

Before going through the course of the argument in greater detail, a word to explain the logic behind the structure I have laid out. The role of the first two chapters is to lay out the challenges facing the kind of project I am pursuing by indicating problems with the clarity of Levinas' work on the political, as well as highlighting criticisms by other thinkers as to the plausibility and desirability of a Levinasian engagement with the political. In thinking about this project, it seems important that these questions and challenges be posed before a resolution is given, even though this delays the central exegesis to chapter three. I believe that these preparatory chapters provide important context and transparency for the decisions I make in my later readings by allowing me to respond to these critiques either by using sources in Levinas to reject them or accepting the criticism and adjusting my reading and conclusion accordingly. On that subject, it will be made clear that I will not find all the answers to these critiques in my re-reading of Levinas alone, which is why the second two chapters enter into the picture by introducing new figures. Introducing new figures at this late stage is necessary to respond to the limitations of the reading given in chapter three, emphasised by the questions left unanswered from the second chapter. In this way, the work alternates between questions posed, answers given, and reflections and improvements upon these answers. To further clarify, I will lay out the course of the argument in more detail below.

The first section, comprising chapters one and two, draws out and provides a preliminary evaluation of the political content of Levinas' work, such as it is, and various scholars' work in the area of Levinas and politics. The first chapter begins by following a chronological reading of Levinas' work before moving into a broader thematic approach examining topics of particular

relevance. These readings begin with *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* before moving to Levinas' post-war work and finally considering his major texts of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. From this, I find that Levinas' explicitly political engagements are undoubtedly present, although they are sparse, open-ended, and often, if not flatly contradictory, at least in tension with each other at various points. Identifying this problematic provides a point of understanding to proceed from with my reading of secondary literature, in opposition to secondary scholars, whether they provide an overly optimistic or pessimistic view of Levinas' political engagement. I have specifically oriented this chapter towards how Levinas discusses the themes of the political and related areas, and, as a result, readers who are not so intimately familiar with Levinas' thought may find it beneficial to first read the third chapter before returning to the first and second. The third chapter looks at his thought more broadly, examining the structures of Levinasian subjectivity, the face, and the ethical dyad more thoroughly.

The second chapter takes these conclusions and, by way of secondary literature, asks two main questions: first, is it possible to move to a political understanding from Levinas' ethical considerations, but beyond that would such a move even be desirable given some of the more problematic aspects of Levinas' work? The first half of this chapter proceeds with the work of Howard Caygill, Bettina Bergo and Simon Critchley, among others. Once I have addressed this more technical aspect, I proceed to examine whether it is in fact desirable to pursue a Levinasian standpoint. This section uses Critchley's now ubiquitous "five problems" as a starting point for this assessment. By proceeding through these problems (fraternity, monotheism, androcentrism, filiality and the family, and Israel), I am able to address the most pertinent criticisms of Levinas' work on the basis of its desirability, rather than just possibility. These discussions will also be supplemented with the criticisms of Gillian Rose. From these readings, I conclude there remain numerous issues with Levinas' thought as a whole; however, by the method of reading I have chosen, there remains the possibility of extracting valuable and insightful thought from his body of work. This method means that the issues we have identified are by no means disqualifying when it comes to using his work for the ends I have described.

Having concluded this preparatory section, I move on to the second section, comprised of the extended third chapter, which seeks to apply the conclusions I have drawn already to a detailed reading of Levinas' work as a whole. As stated above, this detailed and close reading is not, however, in service of a faithful and reconstructive reading. Instead, while I am taking a somewhat appropriative approach, this does not give me license to take a looser approach to the reading I will be undertaking. It is only by reading with care and a keen eye that I will be able

to identify the conceptual tools and components that are essential to my own construction. Additionally, if my reading was to be exceptionally liberal in its approach, I might as well not use Levinas at all! There remains a certain Levinasian spirit that I still aim to hew closely to.

If the previous chapter was meant to indicate that it was possible and desirable to pursue Levinas' thinking in this direction, then this chapter attempts to demonstrate what that would look like. This demonstration does not seek to erase the issues and contradictions identified previously but instead takes up the texts flexibly and pushes them to a place where they will work for the purposes of this project. In many ways, this chapter takes a similar course to the phenomenal logical progress of some of Levinas' own work, that is, starting from an exploration of the subject before gradually bringing this into contact with the other, the external world and then communal intersubjectivity. The main results of this discussion are, first, my reading in light of *RH* positions my understanding of Levinas' attitude to the political as fundamentally both anti-fascist but also incompatible with liberalism; second, that distance from the other by way of mediating institutions, such as the state, is dangerous to this project. The final, and potentially most vital, result is that the extension of these first two positions indicates the necessity of struggle and activity to fundamentally change present circumstances. These conclusions remain partial and provisional because, despite the progress made from reading Levinas in isolation to this point, some of the issues identified in the preliminary chapters remain present, despite having been understood as not disqualifying.

As a result of these readings, we are left with two primary questions to be answered by the final section, chapters four and five. First, to what extent, despite all my efforts, does the thinking I have outlined fundamentally remain within or disrupt the racist tradition of western thought? Second, we must consider whether the manner of thinking I have outlined can be translated into a practical way of living and engagement with the world. What unites these two questions, which otherwise appear quite distinct, is that these are the remainders to Levinas' thought as we have explored it so far, and therefore both require engagement with traditions and sources exterior to Levinas and his tradition. Chapter 4 draws on the work of Santiago Slabodsky to understand links between Levinas and decolonial thought, before engaging in a detailed examination of Denise Ferreira da Silva to help demonstrate how my reading of Levinas can be understood as breaking with this western tradition and find commonality with ideas in Critical Race Theory and the Black Radical tradition.

However, this leaves us with the second question to be tackled in this section, that is, how might these ideas we have been exploring and enumerating translate to something more concrete? As

I have already mentioned, this will not be anything approaching a comprehensive programme, and nor should it. Instead, I turn to Walter Benjamin, Franz Fanon, and Stefano Harney and Fred Moten to help trace an open-ended and preliminary sketch of my project in the realm of praxis against the political. The goal of this section will be to demonstrate the value of this reading of Levinas to more concrete projects and promote dialogue and collaboration between scholars working with Levinas and those working in other traditions.

Chapter 1: The Puzzle of The Political in Levinas

This Chapter will, as previously mentioned, pursue a thorough reading of Levinas' oeuvre as it pertains to discussions of the political, initially in chronological order before changing to a thematic presentation. This section initially investigates his writings up to the period immediately following the Second World War, and so I will start with one of Levinas' earliest published works, and potentially his work that is most overtly concerned with political philosophy. The most significant benefit that this approach to the political in Levinas' oeuvre provides is to overcome the difficulties that arise when studying Levinas' writing on the political in any one text. Levinas, as we will see, rarely explores the political in any one place comprehensively. Instead, Levinas tends to only allude to the political or touches on it only as part of his main exposition. However, this is not to say that Levinas is unconcerned with the political or that political implications cease to exist.

My main goal here is to establish that Levinas' writings, where they concern politics, are often vague, contradictory, yet deeply insightful. That is to say, this insight and utility exists within Levinas' writings, but I contend that this is not eliminated by the above difficulties, although it does undoubtably complicate drawing them out. These first two points are not incredibly controversial, Levinas is not widely known for his simple and concise expression, but it will be important to establish both that his writings on this topic fail to form a coherent unity, and how this occurs. By pairing this with acknowledgements and investigation of the valuable insights in his work, I will establish in this chapter an understanding of Levinas' political writings as a loose patchwork of ideas, allowing subsequent sections to make use of them more freely.

Where Levinas is consistent, however, I will be clear to highlight this. The area in which I find the most consistency across the full scope of his work is in the dynamic I will demonstrate between transcendence and materiality, that is, the dual commitment I find from the 1930s to the 1980s to a thinking that has neither, as Levinas characterises it, the fatalism of bare matter nor the empty abstraction of liberal idealism. I will show the continuity through his work and understand the function of these dynamics. This allows me to use these later on as a base for my new reading, keeping my account grounded in the text, while also allowing me, by understanding them on a functional level, to change them as necessary, while retaining the role they play in his thought overall.

The discussion will begin with an extended reading of *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* before briefly discussing *On Escape.* The Discussion of *OE* largely serves to demonstrate

continuity and to flesh out the ideas extracted from *RH*. The post-war section covers *TO* and *EE* predominantly and will likewise be relatively brief due to the formative nature of these writings. This is not to say that they are not of value, indeed, it will allow for a more developed understanding of Levinas' ideas in general. Their primary function is to help us understand the work that came before, *RH*, and what came after, mainly *TI* and *OB*. If one of the primary goals of this section is to trace a continuity of concern throughout his work, these texts form a crucial bridge between these early and later ideas.

The thematic investigation that follows draws freely from works as early as *Freedom and Command* (first published in 1953) and as late as *Peace and Proximity* (1984), dwelling particularly on the most significant works of *TI* and *OB*. The stability of terminology in these texts enables a thematic approach and gives the freedom for the appropriative methodology I have described, taking disparate texts, and weaving together and interrogating those passages and themes which aid the overall project.

Early Levinas

Pre-War

Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism, the work I will address first, takes on a greater significance than simply being chronologically first. This essay provides a grounding on which I base my analysis of the rest of Levinas' work. I identify something like a summation of Levinas' overall aim, to which one can connect and evaluate the rest of his work. I say, 'to an extent', as while this work will remain my primary rubric for Levinas' work up to and partially including *Totality and Infinity*, once we approach Levinas' later work, particularly around *Otherwise than Being*, concepts will be introduced which disrupt the use of this work. This is not to argue for a break in Levinas' work, he is still concerned with the same project *(OB*, p. 30), but the shift in focus from economy and phenomenological methods to passivity and a more methodologically ambiguous exposition makes the application of the categories discussed here more complex and merits a reconsideration of my approach.

RH was written as a contemporary critique and analysis of the philosophy of National Socialism, having been first published less than a year after Hitler seized power in Germany. The essay displays a remarkable prescience regarding the regime that was being created, as well as a nuanced, detailed and remarkably early analysis of the appeal, origins, and impulses of National Socialism. At this time, Levinas had received his Doctorate only five years before and was well acquainted with the debates around antisemitism still rumbling in the Third Republic over twenty years after the Dreyfus Affair (Caygill, 2002, p7-8). From this, it is clear that Levinas is

well placed to analyse the nuances of the philosophical basis of this movement, which for previous commentators, amounted to a simplistic philosophy of "racist particularism", an aberration that allows Western Philosophy to escape unblemished (*RH*, p.64). In many ways, this text is reminiscent of some of Walter Benjamin's political essays and fragments from the interwar period, sharing incisive critiques of fascism, employment of Biblical and Classical references, and a profoundly critical position regarding Western Liberal states.

The above forms the context and historical significance of the text, but what can we learn concerning Levinas' approach to politics, and how can it help to provide a criterion by which to assess the political elements of his later writing? In a sense here, my reading will echo Howard Caygill's, with several key differences. First, I will highlight Levinas' occasionally sympathetic tone towards Liberalism, but only in order to critique this position as indicative of the issues I will discuss later in this chapter. Second, I will not engage in Caygill's rubric of the Republican Trinity of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, but rather examine this work through themes that will come to take vital roles in Levinas' thought: Transcendence, Freedom and Materialism or corporeality. It is the method and measure of these themes that will be decisive in discussions of the face to face relation, but also in relation to the third and the political generally, particularly in works up to *TI* (1961). To explore how these will be vital for Levinas moving forwards, we will examine the role they play in Levinas' diagnosis of the philosophical nature of Hitlerism.

Levinas' analysis begins with a fundamental disjunction, not a shallow particularism against universalism, but instead one of Judeo-Christian (this term, while problematic, I feel accurately represents Levinas' own understanding in this text, particularly as a Jewish thinker writing in a progressive Catholic journal) redemption and Greco-Pagan fate. In this fate, this "elemental feeling" (*RH*, p.64-65), humanity is "swept along by a fleeing present", which forever evades their control. It is the source of Greek Tragedy, the inevitability of whatever may befall humanity (*RH*, p.65), weighed down by an inescapable past. The contrast with the Judeo-Christian understanding is stark. This is expressed through the Judaic possibility for a redemption that exists as "something in the present with which he can modify or efface the past" (*RH*, p.65). Levinas extends this with the Christian concept of universal redemption and a soul absolutely free and ready at any time for this redemption. This opposition would seem straightforward, however the progression of these ideas is not so. On Levinas' account, Liberalism takes its idea of the soul and freedom from the Christian model and incorporates this in an account of free and universal reason, which Fascism opposes. However, it is also made clear that the elemental forces that Nazism speaks to do not spring from nowhere but are instead given potency by very real issues that arise from the extensions of the ideas of freedom that arise within liberalism.

Levinas claims that since Plato Western Philosophy has a rich tradition of subordinating the bodily and material qualities of the human being in favour of pure reason and its associated faculties (*RH*, p. 67-68). However, when subjected to phenomenological analysis, this rejection of the body raises problems. The refusal of the intuition of corporeality "betray(s) the originality of the very feeling from which it is appropriate to begin" (*RH*, p.69). This absolute separation between the intellect and the body leads to a dangerous relegation of corporeality to the realm of biology and crude materialism. This reduction of the body and its significance to biology and the play of forces leads to the dangerous urges of blood and heredity (*RH*, p. 69). However, we must think, why does this reduction end up being necessary? Why is this level of significance required to be extracted from biology and extended to the field of human relations? Indeed, we have the inadequate account of pure reason, but there is another factor, namely, that the very freedom accounted to the intellect in the Western liberal tradition carries with it a significant risk.

The possibility of separation between the intellect and the ideas it partakes in, the ability to recuse oneself from that relation, can, if untempered, lead to society losing the connection with the impulse of freedom it is born from, and "accept degenerate forms of the ideal" (*RH*, p.70). When this happens, the realm of abstract thought, which supposedly seeks to escape contingency in pursuit of the ideal, finds itself in a twofold failing. First, it claims to emancipate the soul from the body, but without an account of the body adequate to the experience of the embodied and concrete ego, this promise rings hollow next to the compelling nature of the claims of biology and materialism. Second, the absolute freedom of the thinking ego becomes a freedom lighter than air and thus fails to be serious or meaningful. In this play of reason, where anything is possible without commitment or responsibility, the concrete and "authentic" claims of blood and soil seem a source of substance and solidarity. As Levinas puts it, once biology and blood lay claim to a concretisation of spirit, "if race does not exist, one has to invent it!" (*RH*, p.69). One can view these discussions of the failure of idealist liberalism as occurring in the context of the crisis of metaphysics which dominated the early 20th century, where the challenge from thinkers such as Freud and Nietzsche, as well as the advances of science and positivism, showed traditional philosophy to be somewhat antiquated at best, and utterly irrelevant and damaging at worst. For Levinas, one could contend, the only thinker within the tradition to identify this crisis and attempt to respond to it would be Edmund Husserl. I will explore the potential risks of engaging in a defence of western metaphysics when we come to Moten in the next chapter.

What is particularly important to note here is not simply that Levinas criticises liberalism, but that he appears to assign a causative role to the kind of liberalism he describes above. It is precisely the weakness of liberal thought that both provokes fascism, or more specifically National Socialism, as a response, making liberalism incredibly ill-equipped to resist the allure and power of this movement. These consequences will be essential to bear in mind throughout the current project, that is, not only to produce a thinking that is other to that of fascism, but is also preventative, that can, in a sense, inoculate against it in a way liberalism was never able to.

Contra the two weaknesses of liberalism described above, Levinas wants to construct a position that maintains transcendence and freedom, but in a manner that avoids a disavowal of the body allowing for a more credible conception of freedom rather than the absolutist view of the liberal position. Indeed, in *TO,* Levinas traces the outline of a philosophy that allows transcendence but only while acknowledging, not primarily my own body, but that of the other. This allows a freedom and escape from the forces of history and economy, but this freedom is called into question and given weight by the other. We can potentially read Levinas here as simply attempting a modification of Liberal thought, reinforcing liberalism against the murderous power of Hitlerism, or, as Caygill might put it, an assertion of the priority of Fraternity against the overbearance of Liberty (Caygill, p.35). Alternatively, one might read it as an attempt, not to maintain liberal thought, but instead to salvage those qualities within the Western tradition necessary for transcendence beyond the contingencies of race and homeland, while radically separating them from the other core foundations of liberalism. From this, we will see Levinas ground these qualities instead in a thought that is without-ground, which finds itself uprooted and questioned at every stage by the other who confronts me.

Even at this early stage, we can understand two primary potential directions that present themselves. Is the impulse to salvage certain qualities of liberalism to rethink an ethics which is anathema to fascism, or to reinforce liberal thought's standing in order to ensure it can more robustly combat authoritarianism? We will continue reading and see the fullness of this disjunction, which is currently only found in ambiguous form, but suffice to say, I see an indication here that I need not be committed to either of these readings particularly. However, what I *am* committed to, and what beyond this text, I will remain committed to, is formulating a thought where freedom and transcendence have a stake in concrete affairs, an attempt to transcend contingency without abandoning the intuitive phenomenological sense of embodiment, and a responsible freedom other than that in which "Thought becomes a game" (*RH*, p.69). It is this ambiguous disjunction that leads me to shy away from Caygill's discussion, which takes place in the language of French Republicanism. In Caygill's reading, it seems as

though the disjunction has already been decided, and the alternative reading, the reading of a project which stands radically separated from traditional liberalism, is automatically precluded. For the time being, I will leave the disjunction as it is and hesitate to commit to either side for the present to better study the interaction and development of these two readings in their fullness, a movement that must be allowed to occur before a revised understanding can be reached.

Before moving on, two further aspects of this essay are worth remarking on. First, Levinas comments on Marxism, which is given as an example of a mode of thought that is based on materialism but fails to commit to it entirely. Even though one finds oneself trapped, and to an extent determined by historical material circumstance, Levinas notes that the break with liberal thought and rationality is not complete. Even in servile existence, the proletarian retains "the power to shake off the social bewitchment that then appears foreign to its essence. To become conscious of one's social situation is, even for Marx, to free oneself of the fatalism entailed by that situation" (*RH*, p.67). To put it in Lukascian terms, the proletarian is not merely the object, but is the embodied subject of history, not only determined but the producer of that determining force itself. While this goes some way to avoiding liberalism, the materialist impulse remains at the level of contingency, rather than forming the foundation of being (*RH*, p.67). Based on this, one is left to wonder to what extent the critiques of liberalism expounded above apply to this thought and leave commitment to transcendence and materiality a matter of degree rather than an absolute choice. How small does the aperture of escape or transcendence need to be? To comment further on this aspect of the text would be to do so without sufficient textual resources and is supplementary to the main focus of this section, however, the ambiguity highlighted here will prove helpful in our discussions of later writings.

The other aspect which requires an addendum is the portion pertaining to the discussion of universality and particularity. Levinas disrupts this opposition by pointing out that racism, though formed contra to the empty and bloodless universality of reason, cannot seem to escape the requirement of truth to claim universality (*RH*, p.70). In this sense, it remains universalist, but a universalism paradoxically based on particular, material, and contingent aspects. However, this is a "basic modification of the very idea of universality" (*RH*, p.70), that is, one that gives way to expansion. Levinas then proceeds to outline two models of epistemic expansion, both with a view to claim universality and truth. The expansion of an idea in the realm of thought and reason is, according to Levinas, entirely different to that of a "force" (*RH*, p.70). Once it is propagated into the world, an idea can be mastered by anyone, taken and re-interpreted and refigured. It is not (or one might say it ought not to be) inseparably joined to its source. Racism,

on the other hand, is by definition, tied to a home soil and a people, finding its source in the understanding of a crude materialism. This rootedness indicates it is unable to flow freely between "peers", but instead the particular logic from which it issues must by default expand through force to enlarge its ground and make this basis itself universal. Levinas writes: "It is attached to the personality or society exerting it, enlarging that person or society while subordinating the rest. Here the universal order is not established as a consequence of ideological expansion; it is that very expansion that constitutes the unity of a world of masters and slaves." (*RH*, p. 70-71)

Two things are worth noting here: initially, there is the strikingly accurate identification of the expansionist violence and will to dominate at the heart of national socialism. The second thing to note about this passage is to ask what it says about universality and truth? The thinking here seems to indicate clearly that a claim to truth cannot avoid universality, and additionally, that different claims to truth enact that universality in different ways. In many ways, Levinas' consideration of how an idea can be promulgated in a community of peers with equal status of master over the idea seems, at best, naïve. This is particularly the case when he contends that universality in a Western context "always reflects this universality of truth", that is, a free promulgation of ideas, oriented towards persuasion and equalisation of knowledge (*RH*, p.70), certainly a curious view of European history in 1934. Indeed, as powerfully noted by Fred Moten, "In 1934, the capacity to conjure pre-Hitlerian Europe as a community of masters without slaves is as chilling as the unity of a world of masters and slaves that Levinas presages for Europe's immediate future" (Moten, 2018, p.7). However, the possibility of this modality of universality, while not necessarily one that might be considered to have actually existed historically in Europe, is worth considering as we proceed. When I move to his later works concerning the third, this conflict of universality and particularity will recur with great significance.

Horowitz particularly takes up the discussion around universality in his commentary on this essay. I will not comment at length on Horowitz' analysis, suffice to say that while it is broadly sympathetic to my view, the discussion of universalism seems to miss much of the nuance demanded by this topic, particularly when it comes to Levinas. Horowitz's overall project seems to be, like my own, a refusal of liberal interpretations of Levinas, however rather than by acknowledging a conflict within Levinas as the primary reason, Horowitz appears to conceptualise the issue as one of exegesis (Horowitz & Horowitz, 2006, p.20-21). To emphasise the thesis of this project once more, the problem when Levinas is understood politically, where scholars deem such an understanding possible at all, is fundamentally due to issues within Levinas that require additional theoretical resources to generate an understanding of the

political that is as radical as the foundations of Levinas' project. For example, Horowitz here seems to understand that any claim to epistemic universality is fundamentally opposed to Levinas' thought, and therefore any liberal understanding is foreclosed due to this opposition (Horowitz & Horowitz, 2006, p.20-21). However, as we will see when we arrive at the later texts, this opposition is not quite as aporic as Horowitz understands it to be.

On Escape, Levinas' subsequent major work, is almost entirely focused on this theme of transcendence, or "escape". This work is worth noting however delving too deeply into this other pre-war work is of limited use, as many of its themes will be addressed more fully in later works. This being said, some thoughts bear noting before we pass onto Levinas' post-war writings. Here we again see, in a theme which will be further developed, a discussion of the danger of mere ontology, or an excess of ontology. When a civilisation surrenders to mere being, "with the tragic despair it contains and the crimes it justifies", it "merits the name 'barbarian'" (OE, p.73). This use of the word 'Barbarian' will have greater significance when we discuss Slabodsky's work, but for the present it will suffice to say that Levinas has refined what he merely alluded to previously. The thought which enables these crimes and injustices is no longer simply "biology" or empirical materialism, but rather is the whole school of Western ontology. The link between what will come to be known as Western Ontology in Levinas' writing and the biologistic materialism of *RH* is made clear in Levinas' introductory note to that essay (*RH*, p. 63). For Levinas in this work, it is only the impulse - but importantly not the "path", for even that leads back to being (OE, p.73) - of Idealism in Western thought which seeks to overcome the impulses and fate of ontology.

This argument seems to be a repetition of the argument made in the essay on Hitlerism, the similarities in the last few pages are very close indeed. The notable difference is this: the discussion has shifted away from the explicitly political, instead the terms have changed to Ontology and Idealism, as opposed to Materialism and Liberalism. The similarities noted above indicate that we can take this shift in language and utilise it to experiment with the interchangeability of these terms moving forwards, which ought to give a greater understanding of the applicability of these different terms in his later works. These are unlikely to map perfectly, but this acts as a starting point to examine the different ways in which this language is used and what modifications are needed to shift the application of future discussions to the political realm.

Post-War

I will now move on to the two essays written immediately after (and during) the Second World War, *Existence and Existents (EE)* and *Time and the Other (TO)*. I will begin with *Existence and Existents*, examining the economic discussions and what amount to the initial descriptions of the subject in Levinas' thought, which will be developed and changed going into *Totality and Infinity*. The discussion on *Time and the Other* will primarily focus on an intriguing passage concerning "a constructive and optimistic Socialism" before tracing the development of the subject and the nature of its relationship or encounter with the other.

EE, predominantly written in captivity during The Second World War, is primarily a repudiation of Heideggerian Ontology, and the beginnings of a positive work on Time and Subjectivity, taking the form of a relatively traditional phenomenological analysis. Explicit references to the political are lacking here, however many of the themes raised previously are still present, so we will discuss these insofar as they help build a picture of Levinas' thought and how it can relate to the political.

Two things are particularly relevant in this essay, namely, Levinas' characterisation of the subject in relation to a world, the existents which comprise that world, and the introduction of the *il y a* or the "there is", and second, the introduction of the concept of an other possessing absolute alterity. The relation to things in the world, to clothes, food, furnishings etc., is placed in stark contrast to Heidegger's conception. It is neatly summarised in the analogy of a logistics officer and a common soldier: "Food is supplies for logistics officers; houses and shelters are a "base." For a soldier his bread, jacket and bed are not "material," they do not exist "for ..." but are ends." (*EE*. p.43). Where, for Heidegger, the beings in the world are "gear" or "equipment" for some project, for Levinas these items are not necessarily tools, existing in a fallen ready-to-hand sense, but instead are ends in themselves, we savour and consume not to live, but because we are hungry (*EE* p. 37). Far from the everyday being a deficient mode of being, they are the incarnations of our materiality and speak to an essential aspect of our nature. This *jouissance* and savouring will be an essential aspect in Levinas' strange materialism going forwards, all the way to *TI* and beyond.

This attitude, taken politically, provides a double function. On the one hand, it speaks against the philosophical tradition that would take the body and its needs as unwanted distractions and burdens on reason, following through on the importance given to the intentionality of the body mentioned in *RH*. On the other, it additionally critiques the Conservative disillusionment with the "material". Horowitz, in his analysis of *RH,* indicates the anti-modern tendency to oppose

the "chaotic" and "levelling" material with the "spiritual" and "authentic" organic. Where "the first gesture of the Hobbesian-Lockean revolution" is characterised by "reduction to the equality of indifferent abstract units", the anti-modern thought wishes to return to a qualitative hierarchy, from the levelling nature of modernism (Horowitz & Horowitz, 2006, p.14). For Levinas, this emphasises that existence is never "anonymous", that there is never an impersonal Being to which all things are in sway and pulled along in a fateful manner. Instead, we are animated and desirous not for any particular end, not towards anonymous matter, but we are attracted to objects as fulfilling bodily desires. We eat when we are hungry or presented with a particularly enticing dish, and we sleep when we are tired, not in aim of anything beyond satisfying our appetites or resting ourselves.

However, there is still an absolute presence, the "there is", which, even without items in the world, remains present. The constant murmuring and bustling of this impersonal Being is the cause for existential anxiety, and the prospect of being unable to escape, the problem of insomnia, inspires the desire for transcendence (*EE* p.57-58). These two ontological and economic considerations provide the basis for what we will see in the concept of the subject in Levinas, that is, one that is material and desirous, living sincerely from the fruits of the world, and one which is still pinned to itself, and kept awake by the constant bustling of anonymous being, longing for escape. As we will see, in our satisfaction of desire, a limited escape is possible, but any true transcendence cannot come from something we can negate, but from the other.

TO treads much of the same ground as *EE,* however, it contains an intriguing passage on the relationship between philosophy and "socialism", further clarified as the conflict between salvation and satisfaction (*TO*, p.p.58-61). This is one of the most explicitly political passages of Levinas, and it will be important as our discussion develops. The discussion begins with a summarising of the need for salvation, which I find cause to read as transcendence, as the flight beyond materiality that is unsatisfied by "*jouissance"* or enjoyment. Levinas describes the position of this flight from matter, and the solitude that accompanies it, as distinguished from traditional existentialist anxieties. These theories, on Levinas' reading, treat material existence as "fallen" and "everydayness", as not merely relegated to insignificant, but as a distraction and corrupter of the need to escape this solitude (*TO*, p.59). Materiality is not simply incorrect but, moreover, is made into a moral failing (*TO*, p.60). This "despair of solitude" runs into conflict with the "hope for a better society" present in socialism. Both proceed to decry the other as inauthentic and distracting. Levinas notes that it is with equal justification that socialism can refer to existentialist philosophy as "Idle Chatter" or "flight before the essential" (*TO*, p.61). This is clearly an unsatisfying position. By his analysis in the earlier portion of the essay, Levinas

points out that the fact of solitude and its anxieties amounts to an experience in the everyday, not a privileged experience of being-towards-death. Our everyday life "is surely not a simple sequel of our animality continually surpassed by spiritual activity", but likewise, "neither does the anxiety about salvation arise in suffering a need that would be its occasional cause" (*TO*, p.61*)*.

How then to discuss this antimony of political action and an escape from the existential dread summoned by matter? Simply co-opting socialism as a vehicle for metaphysical liberation divests the revolutionary struggle "of its true significance and real intention when it serves simply as a basis for spiritual life" (*TO*, p.61*)*. Instead, Levinas posits that they both are already on equal footing, with neither claiming a specific authority as universal and authentic experience, as both arise in the first hypostasis that creates the acuity of solitude. Levinas is still treading the line between an escape or transcendence that escapes submission to being and fate, yet maintains a stake in materiality and embodied existence, neither of which can simply subsume the other without refusing an impulse borne out of that same basic condition of existing. Nevertheless, we also see here Levinas' continued ambiguity regarding the political. Even in this explicit discussion, he appears as a commentator, sympathetic but never committed to one side or the other.

The strict division put in place here between salvation and satisfaction is of great interest, but it is difficult to say what the significance of this passage is without further development. As with much of Levinas' writings concerning the political, there is no firm conclusion given, and so the task of interpretation is often not as fruitful as one might prefer. At this stage, Levinas seems to be convinced that any thought concerned with transcendence must have respect for, and at times give way to, the utopian movement to improve society. This being said, the conclusion that ethical and political action in the material world is on equal footing to metaphysical liberation is a vital insight that I will take forwards.

It is relevant here to briefly mention the further discussion of similar concepts in *TI*. In the preface to this work, Levinas discusses the division between theory and practice, noting that hitherto, the relation between the two has only been conceivable as "a solidarity or a hierarchy" (*TI*, p.p. 29). That is to say, they are either seen as wholly identical, robbing each of its character, or one is privileged over the other and thereby robs the neglected approach of its beneficial elements. Levinas wants to rethink this relation between theoretical reason and practical action; for him "theoretical thought, guided by the ideal of objectivity" does not exhaust the ambition of the work (*TI*, p.29*)*. Indeed, Levinas indicates that he deliberately wishes to confuse the two

realms, maintaining their separation but qualifying both of them as modes of metaphysical transcendence. These realms, rather than existing as a hierarchy, are brought together by the "royal road" that is ethics is of itself "an optics", or as Levinas also states, ethics is not simply a preparation for theory, or the theoretical basis for action, but rather the phenomenology of the ethical encounter with the other is the opening of truth and the investment of the responsibility for action. This manner of approaching theory and practice represents both a movement from the discussion in *Time and the Other,* but also a consistent concern that theory concerned simply with existential dread and the agonies of existence does not give a full account of experience and ethics, and that movement between theory and practice that was left open-ended in *TO* needs some kind of resolution. The implications of this will become particularly relevant when discussing the problem of the movement between ethics and politics that occupies much of the secondary literature.

The Mature Levinas.

At this stage, it is suitable to change the methodology I have been using. After the above essays, the terminology and overall focus of Levinas' work becomes somewhat more stable. The categories and concepts developed above gain further solidity and are carried forward in a more (but not absolutely) consistent form. As a result of this, it is appropriate to alter the course of the analysis somewhat. Where before I proceeded with a chronological analysis, I will now examine these themes and topics in turn. I do not mean to say that this indicates a 'break' in Levinas, where his concerns change, or his earlier work is abandoned. Rather, I feel the need to adjust the structure here to examine what themes emerge from the foundations laid out above. For any understanding of Levinas' later work, particularly concerning the political, an understanding of Transcendence and Freedom in *RH* and an understanding of the first introductions of the Face and the dyad are essential.

As a result, before I delve into these later works, I will give a brief outline of the basic schema of the dyad and the face that Levinas uses throughout these later works. This will not be comprehensive, and I engage more fully in these topics in the third chapter, but, hopefully, this brief explanation will aid with the discussions of this chapter for those who are not so familiar with Levinas' works. The basic situation of ethics for Levinas, in works before *OB,* is oriented towards the dyadic encounter with the other, with some elements of the third, which I will explain further in this chapter. The subject in these works is in the world, living from its various

nourishments in its corporeality. This living-from primarily consists in taking and absorbing these elements of the world, a relationship that is essentially one of the same. This situation is broken by the other, who approaches me in the form of the face, that is, that presentation that exceeds "the idea of the other in me" (*TI*, p.50). This absolute alterity is such that we do not even properly enter into an enclosed relationship with the other, as they can always disavow or disengage from this relation. Yet, despite this distance, the other comes to me with questions, asks for food, shelter, and mercy, is vulnerable and corporeal but opaque and in-comprehensible. The details and terminology of this subject and encounter with the other change somewhat when discussing *OB*, however, this basic schema remains, and this explanation should suffice until I engage in a full discussion in chapter three, which places a heavier emphasis on the account in *OB*.

My analysis is similar to Asher Horowitz's, in the sense that I also note Levinas at once seems to decisively attack the political, but then at the same time defends its necessity. As Horowitz puts it, "everything is different than it was before, and yet nothing has changed." (Horowitz, 2006a, p.27). Essentially, Levinas advocates a philosophy, which, while unseating the ontology of the Western Philosophical Tradition and attacking the political instantiations of that tradition, ends up functionally underwriting that political tradition. As Horowitz says, there is a sense in which Levinas' work feels unfinished or unnecessarily hindered by this (Horowitz, 2006a, p.27-29). My analysis will, however, differ in important respects. Primarily, I examine the issue at greater length and in greater detail than Horowitz is able to in his essay, which will lead us to conclusions that are very different from Horowitz's own materialist analysis of Levinas' account of Works.

Initially, I will look at Levinas' discussions of politics through his framing of the state and economy, and examine the aforementioned contradictions and ambiguities, followed by an account of how Levinas develops ideas of economy and commerce, which will be no less fraught with difficulty. Any definitive conclusion will be suspended at this stage but will be expanded on in the third chapter.

The State

Levinas' discussions of the state vary widely, from condemnation as simply a suspended state of war to praise as a guarantee against tyranny and authoritarianism. These articulations seem to sit uneasily together and comprise some of the key examples of the difficulties in understanding Levinas' approach. As mentioned, I follow a similar line to Asher Horowitz, however, I will not

come down on a side of this disjunction, to mark one side more "authentic" or "correct" concerning Levinas. Instead, I will show the presence of both aspects and investigate the sources for this situation, and hint at a way forwards that could move past this disjunction without 'resolving' it. That is to say, the goal of this section is to demonstrate multiple 'politics' and to consciously salvage a particular approach without denying their multiplicities.

When Levinas talks about the state and politics initially (and I will primarily discuss *TI* here, although this largely holds for other works as well), it is in opposition to morality. The state is at best a temporary peace of empires, which ultimately issues from war (*TI*, p.22), but then also forms the opposite of the Good in an "essentially hypocritical civilisation" (*TI*, p.24), whose cynical gaze mocks morality. This passage is particularly worth highlighting, since the motif of Western philosophy and civilisation as being fundamentally hypocritical, and beset by a bad conscience, torn between the good and the true, will continue throughout Levinas' work. This theme will form a vital part of the revised formulation of Levinas' politics presented in chapter three. Further than this, the state "awakens the person to a freedom it immediately violates" (*TI*, p.176), and that which, in realising itself through works, "slips towards tyranny." (*TI*, p.176). Levinas links the criticism of the state with his critique of the tradition of western ontology, where "Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. It issues in the state and the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives, and which appears in the tyranny of the state" (*TI*, p.46).

It is interesting to note at this point the faithfulness to the core contention mentioned at the outset of this chapter found in the *RH,* if one considers the shift in terminology found in *OB*. Still, in *TI,* Levinas is trying to find a freedom which escapes ontology and the state, as well as the history in which they develop, "not with the void that would surround the totality and where one could, arbitrarily … promote the claims of a subjectivity free as the wind", but instead he aims at "a relationship with *a surplus always exterior to the totality*" that he will describe as infinity (*TI*, p.22-23, italics in original).

Based on these characterisations of the state as totality, as opposed to the separated ethical subjectivity which exists outside of and resists totality, a certain anti-state and anti-political stance seems clear. When this is combined with Levinas' phenomenological descriptions of the ethical relation and his positioning ethics as first philosophy in an upheaval of the western philosophical tradition, it would appear that the political, as the concrete form of ontology, is anathema to Levinas' understanding. It does not seem like a step too far to characterise this example of Levinas' discourse as fundamentally hostile to the state.

However, there are two methods by which the political and the state seems to be recuperated not only as a contingent aspect of the practicalities of Levinas' thought but rather as recovering their vital and necessary position, only this time, underwritten by Levinas' re-thinking of ethics. These two movements are the intervention of the third and institutional defence against tyranny. It should be said at this stage that these conciliatory discussions of the political are not themselves a simple re-integration but contain their own ambiguities and problematics, which we will explore in due course.

The Third

Levinas most commonly re-introduces the political through the third person. This third party, who stands outside my face to face relation with the other, who is the neighbour of my neighbour, is presented as creating a dilemma for the dyadic encounter Levinas has hitherto described. When the third is considered, it is a competing ethical claim with that of the other who is directly before me. To whom do we owe justice? How can we envision both ethical demands? How can I provide justice to the third when I am in service to the other? The other who is not me nor the other I am speaking with demands justice regardless. This is presented in a limited form in *TI,* where the third is present in the face of the other, calls for institutions and a state, although this is not developed to the extent it will be in *OB* (*TI*, p.213 and 300)*.*

Levinas begins his most comprehensive description of the third near the end of the chapter on Substitution, which contains the most forceful and developed description of the epiphany of and encounter with the face of the other. In this section, the transcendent other, in their demand and my infinite assignation, makes me hostage and irreducibly response-able. I am divested of my ego and become substituted for the other. However, Levinas tempers this extraordinary description with an intriguing passage towards the end, where this radical responsibility and de-centring of the ego can, or rather, must "manifest itself also in limiting itself" *(OB*, p.128). Further to this, our substitution and immediate responsibility are limited by the third party, which gives birth to "thought, consciousness, justice and philosophy" *(OB*, p.128). The entry of the third is the beginning of the problem of justice. However, this limiting of initially unlimited responsibility allows this responsibility to be forgotten, and in this lies pure egoism, although one that cannot entirely escape the initial responsibility we receive, as Jonah could not escape God.

Levinas then turns to the further implications of the third. The thinking of the third is developed to playing the role that limits my obsession with the other, as a qualification necessary for social justice. This broader idea of justice which includes the third, requires "weighing, thought, objectification, and thus a decree in which my anarchic relationship with illeity is betrayed" *(OB*,

p.158). Thus far, this does not pose significant challenges or distortions to a judgment in line with the previous statements about the state. It seems eminently reasonable that, in the course of social life, the encounter in proximity is limited. For true justice, it must be given to the one before me and the others as well. The explanation of the third is required as the initial description of substitution does not seem to provide an account for this.

It is at this point that the third is brought into relation with the state and the political. The third party, in its necessitation of a degree of thematisation and comparability of incomparables, then "calls for control, a search for justice, society and the State, comparison and possession, thought and science, commerce and philosophy" *(OB*, p.161). As Horowitz characterises this, there is "a flood of categories and relations, and all at once. Indeed, there are too many all at once, as though Levinas has made the decision in advance that, for example, justice immediately brings with it the state and money" (Horowitz, 2006a, p.27). The necessary betrayal seems to become an endorsement, a maintenance of the idea of the state but underwritten by Levinas' ethical account. It must be said that Levinas does not think this should be a politics "delivered over to its own necessities", and further, it means "empirically that justice is not a legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn" *(OB*, p.159). It is in many ways difficult to see the exact path of this argument, or indeed, to think what this kind of 'state' is and whether it merits the name 'state' at all! What kind of mainstream jurisprudence could account for such a system of law? To add further uncertainty to this picture, Levinas also states that a just society is only a society where there is no distinction "between those close and those far off" *(OB*, p.159), raising further questions as to the necessity of the third as a category, and further the necessity of the state as protector of it. I will expand on these in subsequent chapters, suffice to say at this stage that the discussion of the state as arising out of the third presents numerous problems, both internally and regarding Levinas' earlier characterisation of the political.

Levinas wrote *Peace and Proximity* (*PP*) later in his career, and yet there is a distinct similarity in the themes discussed, and the proposed remedies for the problems that have plagued European political thought, as in his earlier work. Levinas begins with the wish within European thought and consciousness towards peace, a desire that rings hollow in the face of centuries of war, imperialism, and genocide (*PP*, p.132). This creates a bad conscience at the heart of Western thought, a bad conscience that does not issue from the incoherence or contradiction of the atrocities and the thought that preceded them, but from the inherent anxiety of harming others (*PP*, p.134-135). The philosophical project, which Levinas takes to be predominant in the West and derived from the west's Greek influences, is one that derives the good from the true, finds

ontology and totality as its root and envisages a peace from unity realised in the logical unfolding of history. What must come first is the Good, a disinterested ethics as first philosophy. However, the Greek heritage is still necessary when the third is considered (*PP*, p.141-143). The third's unique problematic is again emphasised here: "The third party is other than the neighbour, but also another neighbour, and also a neighbour of the other … What am I to do? What have they already done to one another? Which one comes before the other in my responsibility?" (*PP*, p.142). Despite the horrors mentioned above, the third still calls for comparability and a system of political laws and state institutions with "perfect reciprocity", into which the third and I can enter as citizens (*PP*, p.143).

However, here, once again, the description of the state is incredibly cautious, almost to the point of not describing a state at all. The justice which founds this state, the achievement of which is its primary concern, must "preserve for the human its proper sense of dis-inter-estedness under the weight of being" and which would not be (in what is almost a verbatim repetition of the passage from *OB* quoted above) "a natural and anonymous legality governing the human masses … placing in harmony the antagonistic and blind forces through transitory cruelties and violence, a state delivered to its own necessities that it is impossible to justify". (*PP*, p.144) As mentioned previously, the qualities of this state are difficult to imagine based on these descriptions and point further towards a conception of the political within Levinas that is somewhat other than our traditional ideas of the political. However, one is additionally struck by the case Levinas makes for how this state is to be limited. As we have seen in his critique in *Totality and Infinity*, the state is eager for its own preservation and "slips towards tyranny", however all that Levinas takes to be sufficient to place limits on the state is "the vigilance of persons who would not be satisfied with the simple subsumption of cases under a rule." (*PP*, p.144) If, by the end of these readings, it would appear that this state is like none we know of, one which does not fall to the problematics of nation-states currently understood, the problem here is lessened dramatically. However, if the reverse is true, the problem becomes all the more troubling.

To further clarify the idea of the third and its inauguration of the political, it will be necessary to examine another text in detail. This text, *The Ego and the Totality (ET),* was written much earlier in Levinas' career, first published in 1954. My exposition will benefit from this text precisely due to this early position in Levinas' career, as it is in this text that we get the first and potentially most comprehensive description of the third and Levinas' cause for introducing it. The primary goal of the text can be understood as a check against the "pious soul" found in much contemporary religious thought, and instead of focusing on the good conscience in an intimate society, religious and moral thought must address the "true society" in which we can do social

wrongs for which we cannot be pardoned. Further to this, the intimate society of me and the other does an injury to the third party, to the social others in the totality, by forming a society of solitude that indicates "privilege if not preference", love of one to the detriment of the other (*ET*, p. 31).

By my treatment of the other, then, I am at risk of doing wrong to the third person as "I can, even by my act of repentance, injure the third person" (*ET*, p. 30). In other words, the interpersonal dyad of me and the other does not consider all that it should. Love only becomes justice when it is economic justice, not simple charity. In social existence, what we do takes on a life of its own and is alienated from me. In the distance between my works and the intentions which animate them, there is the impossibility of pardon, but the fault remains. Levinas then takes us through a submission to a wholly impersonal reason, or the judgments of survivors, which is history. While this makes us aware of the third and does not fall to charity or the totality which is love, it leads to a situation reminiscent of the *RH,* where "I can no longer speak. Not because we no longer have an interlocutor, but because we can no longer take his words seriously… beings lose their identity; faces are masks" (*ET*, p. 34). This relation is as undesirable as the conception that ignores the third party. Beyond these two options, Levinas attempts an approach that allows us to understand the totality as "a totality of egos which are without conceptual unity but in relationship with each other" (*ET*, p. 37). The answer will be that in order to tread this line between totality and charity, one must not bow down before an impersonal universal law, but before the other who approaches me and demands accountability (*ET*, p. 43).

The essay from this point engages with concepts that are not so present in Levinas' later work. For example, there is no mention of asymmetry here, and the discussion of money near the end does not seem to be replicated in his later work. Despite this, it is worth briefly looking into this discussion of money as it engages with the state and the third. As Levinas mentions in *OB,* comparability is a necessary factor introduced by the third, and is required to do justice to them. Being able to measure and make comparable incomparables is necessary to prevent us doing harm to one by my forgiveness to another, and the role money plays in the last part of *ET* is intriguing on this point. For Levinas, money is the ability for comparability par excellence, it introduces a level of quantification which does not end in complete absorption. This idea appears to have been abandoned by Levinas later on, at least in this framing, but the importance of comparability and mention of commerce in *OB* as mentioned above seems to suggest that this is possibly not the case.

The final aspect worth noting is found within the concluding segment, where the idea that the violence in the everyday peace of totality is nonetheless violent but is fundamentally better than war and, further to this, is necessarily present to prevent war. This dynamic is more fully developed in other works, which I will now investigate.

The State as Guardian against Tyranny and War

Discussions of the state in relation to the third do, to a certain degree, present the state as something of a guarantor, an impartial arbiter of justice which tempers the perilous relationship between me, the other, and the third. The state and its institutions provide a protection against injustice and moderate the asymmetry of substitution. However, they play a more substantial protective role, which is emphasised in a couple of other essays. On Levinas' view, as we will see, strong institutions of the state, alongside a watchful civil society, are necessary to provide safeguards against tyranny. A just law must be established and subsequently protected by the forces of the state, so long as these forces do not become delivered to their own devices. This discussion will address a text from early in Levinas' career, *Freedom and Command*.

 This text takes as its starting point Plato's consideration of command as laid out in The Republic. In this traditional view of leadership and command, the philosopher-king instructs what is in the best interest of the one being commanded, and the tyrant institutes laws that can be refused at the risk of one's life. However, even in this refusal, human dignity and freedom are maintained even in death. Socrates dies, but it is a noble death, a good death (*FC*, p.16). However, the experience of modernity has changed and problematised this view of freedom; it has shown us the possibility of a "servile soul" (*FC*, p.16). The possibility of breaking a soul so it would obey any command, and subsuming its will in that of the master, demonstrates that human freedom is not heroic. The conception of human freedom as unheroic and fragile is a crucial theme in Levinas, and this insight, tied with his emphasis on corporeality, will very much shape our conception of Levinas as related to the political.

We are, however, free in our ability to foresee the degradation of freedom and to prevent it by arming freedom and justice with force against tyranny (*FC*, p.17). It is not enough for Levinas to have some kind of categorical imperative or reason, as these are too easily taken and manipulated by reason, but rather, we require a written and concrete law that the institutions of the state protect. This emphasis on material instantiation in opposition to an abstract liberal conception echoes the balance taken in *RH*. Indeed, Levinas also states in *OB* that it is not enough to simply refuse violence, but to "question ourselves about a struggle against violence,

which, without blanching into non-resistance to evil, could avoid the constitution of violence out of this very struggle." *(OB*, p.177)

For Levinas, this setting-up of a state and institutions can inculcate its own tyranny, as the system set up by freedom for its own preservation can itself be a tyranny (*FC*, p.16-17). Therefore, we must be led to the state by non-violent means; we must arrive at the state's institutions by our discourse and relation with the other. The imperative that the face of the other puts on me is a non-violent one (*FC*, p.20), as the resistance of a force would not be other but would simply be material that we can assimilate and work on as one would a project of labour. Indeed, in their absolute resistance to me and ability to engage in discourse, the other constitutes a world of signification already there for me and invites me to join a society with the other. We must then peacefully take on impersonal reason to allow for this discourse and creation of a state antithetical to tyranny, and thus protect freedom with a power where alienation is minimised through its founding on the relationship with the face of the other.

The opening premise of this essay proceeds straightforwardly insofar as it posits human freedom as breakable, tyranny as possessing a significant degree of power, and the requirement of freedom to guard itself against this very tyranny. These points lead to a relatively open-ended and general conclusion, that is, that freedom and justice cannot simply exist as a categorical imperative or free-floating idea in the mind, protected by the nobility of human reason and freedom, but rather must be concretised and protected from the threat of tyranny. The method of protection is not made clear by the premises, but Levinas takes this role to be best filled by the state and its institutions.

The inclusion of what appears to be a traditionally understood state here raises certain questions. Namely, is the state the correct means to protect freedom, or is Levinas here advocating for understanding the state simply as whatever social structure is created to protect freedom? How can the state, which precariously guarantees freedom, be prevented from falling into its own unfreedom? The state always forms a looming and dangerous figure in Levinas, even as he admits of its necessity, in the same breath he warns that the state and politics "are at every moment on the point of having their center of gravitation in themselves, and weighing on their own account" *(OB*, p.159), and earlier in *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas states that the "peace of empires issued from war rests on war" (*TI*, p.22). Considering what is at stake and the precarity of a just state, this question is perhaps the most vital, and we have already seen how Levinas' response to this danger in *PP* is somewhat unsatisfying. However, as with the previous

discussions, the lack of detail Levinas applies these descriptions also raises the question of how this state would appear and how the foundation described above changes its nature.

Levinas on Commerce, Works, and Economy

Any discussion of the political sphere is left wanting if the economic underpinnings and ramifications are neglected. Levinas' discussions of economic justice and the material realm of works and labour are therefore vital if we are to understand a way to move forwards with the ideas discussed thus far. In this section, I will largely attempt to assess two factors: first, what is at stake in production and economy, and what is the metaphysical significance of works more generally? This will lead us to the second question, which will tease out how economy seems to play a role in the previous discussions of justice.

To a certain extent, for Levinas, economy and labour are of a fundamentally different order than that of ethical relations. Work on matter, the transformation of matter, is fundamentally not a relation with alterity or otherness but an exercise of the will of the same (*TI*, p.226-227). That is to say, when we encounter, produce, or consume a being in the world, it is an exercise in mastery and of subsuming that being. By understanding and perceiving some phenomena or other we get a hold of it, and it becomes something for us and is absorbed into an assembly of items with which we set up a world or a home, the site from which we are approached by the other. When we consume food, for instance, it becomes part of our essence. We live from it and are absorbed with our activity and the relief of our hunger (*TI*, p.110-111).

However, works maintain a twofold link with the realm of ethics and justice. The first link is the fundamental role that the interaction with the other plays as setting up the foundational metaphor and signification of "one for the other". Levinas locates the origin of signification in the ethical realm, in the substitution which compels me to say, "here I am for the others", and so it is only through this that anything can be something for me *(OB*, p.85-86). We are never alone in the sense that our entire sense of reference to the world is enabled by the other. This role of substitution will be explored at greater length in chapter three.

The most significant link for our purposes is, of course, the fact that anything we make or consume, and any system of ownership or distribution, takes place with the other. The goods we make are consumed by the other; we share our food with the other in need. In this role, works and economy form a crucial stage in Levinas' ethical descriptions. To clarify this further I will have to first bring together several of the places above where I have touched on economic aspects.

The first economic aspect to touch on is the discussion in *TO* regarding "constructive socialism" and its supposed opposition to spiritual emancipation. The first work that casts significant doubt upon this separation is *ET*, which, as mentioned above, insists that any justice at all must fundamentally be economic justice, a simple "pious soul" feeling spiritual pain can never measure up to the wrong we may do to unseen others. On this understanding, the ethical demand is not an abstract imperative, as mentioned above, but must be concrete. Of course, as we saw above, Levinas goes so far in *Ego and Totality* to describe money and exchange as the truest form of justice, of making comparable incomparables while also allowing their particularity and separation. This aspect of economy implies an understanding of economics and emancipation through relation with the other as intrinsically linked. We are only freed from existential anguish and totality through our ethical relation with the other, which is enacted in "giving the bread from my mouth" *(OB*, p.142). Again, also in *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas quotes the Rabbi Yochanan that to leave someone without food "is a fault no circumstance attenuates" (*TI*, p.201).

There is additionally the aspect of producing works for the others. Levinas understands the process of creating any work for those other than oneself involves an essential act of alienation for oneself, and likewise, consuming the produce of the other alienates them similarly. When one reads a work by an other or sees their craftsmanship, the other is accessed "by burglary" (*TI*, p.66). They are accessed in their absence and cannot speak for themselves. They are, in this sense, ambushed, and likewise, my products are jettisoned into the world of others and taken and interpreted in ways we would not recognise (*TI*, p.227-228). The created thing takes on a life of its own in the life others give to it. The striking similarities here that we find with Marx have been commented on extensively. However, there is a key difference, insofar as Marx can imagine unalienated labour, whereas, for Levinas, this is impossible. When encountering the work of another, or another encountering my work, the maker is absent from it, but a trace remains from which the recipient can glean information about the maker that has not been freely given. The recipient *par excellence* is the historian qua survivor. The survivors gather the works made by dead wills and interpret them, taking the works that have been ultimately surrendered and making them their own by taking hold of the works from those who cannot protest (*TI*, p.228).

We can, from the above, conclude that economy and works occupy a nuanced and difficult position in Levinas' account of justice. They can never be of the pure order of justice, however, this "pure" or "pious" justice utterly fails in its responsibilities from the other. The order of justice cannot be for Levinas, as we saw in *RH*, an abstract one which evades our corporeality -

this is what necessitates economic justice - but at the same time the relation to works provides duplicitous access to the other and does not address the other with the sincerity of discourse. Levinas additionally is not inclined to address any particular economic system. Indeed, much like his discussions of the state above, his discussions of economics largely shy away from investigation of its historical instantiations, besides some occasional and undeveloped references to Marxism or commerce.

Conclusion

What ought to be evident here is that the political positions in some works are either contradicted by others or underdeveloped to such a degree that they can be developed in a number of valid directions. Levinas' position on the state and the political is one whereby the state and the political are of a different, but not degenerate, order than ethics. These seem to be guided by the ethical, indeed, as interhuman relations, the ethical relation with the other and the third appear to determine their necessity in pursuing true justice, yet we have also seen passages that dispute this necessity. At the same time, the political threatens ethics. The totalising nature of politics and the state put ethical existence in peril, and the state is constantly on the brink of turning in on itself to the exclusion and annihilation of alterity. But then we also see a description of the laws of that state which strike one as radically different than any existing in states traditionally conceived, that is, not a law that is concerned with simply "regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn" *(OB*, p.159).

Three things are shown from the above that I will use in my analysis of the secondary literature and the subsequent reformulation. First, these developments are incredibly open-ended and provide plentiful room for manoeuvre if one wanted to develop them in this or that manner, as is necessitated by the abrupt point at which Levinas tends to cut his political thinking short. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is a freedom that has been utilised to a great extent by Levinas scholars, although not always to positive effect. The second is that the lack of development and the scattered nature of the political commentary means that it is near-impossible to present a unified and coherent picture. As I have said above, many of the passages I have discussed do not sit comfortably together, or at least raise significant questions. The final point is this: despite the confused picture painted by these disparate passages and discussions, there is nonetheless a political impetus and clear concern throughout Levinas' work, dating from *RH* onwards. The concern is to tread a line that maintains liberalism's freedom but avoids its hypocrisy, but in so doing does not fall to simplistic materialism or Heideggerian authenticity.

This balance, between the material and the transcendent, is the source of many of the difficulties we have noted but is also the source for a re-thinking of politics that is as different from traditional forms of political thought as Levinas' ethical system is from previous ideas of first philosophy.

I will use these conclusions in two ways primarily. Immediately, they will be addressed to the secondary literature to show, first, that those who attempt to style Levinas in one unified manner are mistaken, as they seem to take the task of a Levinasian politics to be more straightforward than it is. Second, I intend to demonstrate that those secondary scholars who are overly sceptical about any such attempt whatsoever are also mistaken by demonstrating both that their criticisms, while often pertinent, are not disqualifying, and, for those that find the gulf between Levinas' work and the political to be too wide, that the political is present and addressed. The work done above will form the foundation for a re-thinking of a Levinasian political, informed by the preceding discussion of the secondary literature.

Chapter 2: Assessing Levinasian Political Projects

What has been demonstrated thus far is, in large part, a modified version of Howard Caygill's core thesis in *Levinas and the Political,* that "the question of the political consistently troubles Levinas' thought" (Caygill, 2002, p.4). The primary modification is that while I have demonstrated the relevance of the political to Levinas' thought, I have constructed it in such a way as to emphasise the ambiguity and conflicted nature of this politics. as previously mentioned, this acknowledgement of conflict and, at times, apparent contradiction, agrees with Horowitz. However, I will now take a step back from this position and ask if we are to work with the political matter uncovered thus far, how does this relate to Levinas' foundational and (largely) dyadic ethical analysis? Under what conditions is it even possible to move from ethics to politics? Furthermore, pressingly, is such a move even desirable? That is to say, when we consider the implications of a politics from Levinas, does the resulting politics sufficiently answer the challenges facing the political as such, or does it remain too entangled in problems issuing from its place in the philosophical tradition and Levinas' own political commitments?

This forms the second preparatory chapter and will be succeeded by a revised reading of Levinas, which will be influenced not only by the initial exploration but also the analyses in this chapter, utilising both to pursue the most productive direction of development. In attempting to answer the above questions I will read various secondary thinkers who have delved into and problematised the concept of the political as it relates to Levinas. The claims that I wish to make will be tentative at this stage, to be developed and expounded in the next chapter. That being said, the primary conclusions are these: first, I will assess the question of the very possibility of the move to the political to be not as intractable as certain commentators hold, although it must be said, it is nonetheless not as simple as others appear to imagine. Instead, a move to a political understanding of Levinas (and a Levinas-inspired understanding of the political) is certainly possible, although not without difficulty. The second conclusion, whether this manner of reading Levinas is desirable, or leads to anything desirable, will be more tentative still. This discussion will touch particularly on questions of race and Eurocentrism, emphasising the troubling account highlighted by Moten in particular. This problematic will require further investigation and will strongly influence my reading in the next chapter, but more importantly, it will be determinative for my deployment of thinkers external to the Levinasian tradition in chapter four.

I will proceed by examining authors that problematise Levinas' thought in particularly exemplary or productive ways, beginning with the question of the possibility of the move to the political, and subsequently moving towards questions of desirability. This will allow for both questions to

be addressed but remain interconnected. It is vital to know not only whether it is possible and whether it is desirable in a binary sense, but also under what conditions is this project possible, and how does this then change or condition such a project? How do these conditions affect the desirability of the project? I will be able to show here that as I build up a picture of the possibility of a Levinasian approach to the political, we will see what constraints are put upon it and how that changes the final approach. I am not undertaking this with the goal of locating an "authentic" Levinas or a more faithful reading. I instead mean to, by way of these readings, develop an understanding of the Levinas I wish to utilise in my rethinking of the political as such. This may well not be a thought that Levinas would himself recognise, as Bernasconi acknowledges in his account (Bernasconi, 2006, p.257). However, is this not the inevitable fate of a work cast out into the world, to be taken up by others (*TI*, p.227)? Indeed, we shall see throughout the present work how Levinas' theorising of the fundamental anonymity of ideas will allow a transformation of his work into what it needs to be for the challenges facing us today. By pursuing this process of negation, I will have prepared the ground for the seeds of the next chapter, allowing me to examine Levinas' work anew, informing my revised reading by highlighting different approaches to take and pitfalls to avoid.

Structural Barriers to a Levinasian Political: Bergo, Rose and Critchley

Bergo and Rose

In her work Levinas Between Ethics and Politics, Bergo constructs an assessment of Levinas's political potential, which is sceptical but does not entirely foreclose upon such a project. In this work, she seeks to position herself as resting somewhere between Gillian Rose, who understands a Levinasian political to be impossible, instead limiting Levinas' influence to a highly individualised quietism; and Simon Critchley, in his project to construct a Levinasian "politics of adults". That being said, we will see how she tends closer to the more sceptical position, particularly in her reading of Levinas' ethical account found in *OB*. I will proceed much in the way Bergo herself does, by initially considering her conclusions reached via a reading of *OB* and then examining Rose and Critchley to see the potential other paths.

Bergo's analysis constitutes an extensive reading of Levinas and addresses some critical concerns with great depth and nuance, as well as a highly effective mapping of the secondary literature of these concerns. Despite, or perhaps because of this, the conclusions reached after this analysis are relatively inconclusive. The primary example of this that I will examine is her

position on the role of mediation in her analysis, seeming to at some times agree on its necessity with Rose, then at others demonstrate a certain scepticism particularly regarding mediation as it figures in the tradition of German Idealism. One might wonder if this is a necessity when reading Levinas, particularly when reading *OB*. There are valuable insights to be gained from examining this work. Bergo's main concerns focus specifically on the transition from ethics to politics, from the transcendental realm of the face to face to the political realm of justice and the third, and, beyond that, the basic plausibility of such a politics when that movement is completed. Bergo locates the dilemma reading Levinas tends to lead to, and what is in many ways the opening dilemma of any discussion of Levinas and politics. She writes:

> "The moment we understand what Levinas is trying to suggest to us, we are able to doubt his claims. We can question the ground upon which they rest. We rationalise them as utopian or reduce them to the expression of one man's survivors' guilt … We may, alternately, understand Levinas' suggestions as a living spiritual exercise. If we do so, we run the risk of reducing them to a flat piety … Three questions arise in us persistently: How shall we be-for-the-other? Where and how does substitution come to pass, in what space, in what form? And could it be protected?" (Bergo, 2003, p.212)

These questions and doubts are as common to have as they are vital and challenging to answer for any project such as Bergo's, or my own for that matter. However, as one reads Bergo's work, one gets the sense that her reading of Levinas seems to make the above challenges more challenging still, perhaps rather more difficult than they need to be. This is exemplified through two points of emphasis Bergo brings out in her reading of Levinas. The first is the degree to which any relation with the other, or the third party, is empirical or purely transcendental, and the second is the role monotheism necessarily plays in Levinas' philosophy. The first point is where most of my disagreement lies, and here my reading will in many ways follow Bernasconi's analysis in *Strangers and Slaves in the land of Egypt: Levinas and the Politics of Otherness*. This forms my main focus presently, as while we will question Bergo's analysis of the problem of monotheism, this will be a thread that will continue throughout this chapter, so closing it at this stage would be premature.

Bergo's reading of substitution and the entry of the third as non-empirical events, or, as she puts it, "the (non)presence of a (non)being" which yet "represents... the ground of subjectivity" and which "fissures the 'I' into an exiled self and the 'I' of representation and cognition." (Bergo, 2003, p.281) opens Levinas' thought up to the charge of formalism and the related lack of mediation. While Bergo is largely able to defend against these challenges, she is left with a thoroughly diluted Levinasian position, where the idea of a concrete socio-political imaginary appears impossible (Bergo, 2003, 298-301). I contend that this limitation is exacerbated by

Bergo's own analysis of Levinas' descriptions of the third and substitution, and so I must examine these in order to understand just how my reading can potentially avoid these same hindrances.

I have said throughout that the goal of the present work is to draw out a certain Levinas regarding the political, so which Levinas does Bergo extract? Where does the emphasis lie in her reading? Bergo focuses her reading in the second part of her text to *OB*, so we will follow this focus. The issue regarding the immateriality of the later work of Levinas initially appears correct, particularly where Levinas describes substitution as "a passivity inconvertible into an act" *(OB*, p.117) as well as the comparative absence of a phenomenology of lived activity as is present in *TI.* Much of her reading seems to be influenced by her reading of Rose, to whom she is somewhat sympathetic, although, as I will highlight, this is not an uncomplicated or wholehearted endorsement. Indeed, Bergo's conclusion ends with a tentative rejection of Rose's arguments. This being said, to see in *OB* a complete turn away from the factical world and away from concrete justice seems to be an error. The first issue with this understanding is that for the project in *OB* to be unconcerned with the material and to represent a turning away from that movement would seem to imply, based on the consistent presence of political and economic discussions in his other works, a rather drastic change in Levinas' project. There is little to support this position in the literature, particularly where Levinas continues to write about this movement in later works such as *PP,* to his 1979 preface to *TO* (*TO*, p.30)*,* where he insists that he remains engaged in the same project.

How, then, are we to understand the (non)event of substitution? What is required here is a transcendental reading that can be combined with readings from the rest of his work, seeing them not as distinct but reading his works holistically, as aspects of a larger project. Although it should be emphasised here that while all his work is available to be drawn from, we shall see that it will be a mixed blessing when it comes to constructing the kind of reading I move on to do, particularly as regards racist and androcentric theories and comments he has made. This is evinced by Levinas' remark in *Otherwise than Being* that to be a hostage, that is, to undergo substitution and find oneself responsible, is the condition that allows "that there *can* be in this world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity - even the little there is" *(OB*, p.117). Beyond this, the condition of being hostage and of our responsibility is something we can forget or, one presumes, be reminded of *(OB*, p.128). Substitution and the passivity it imbues is not to be thought of as a state of ethical consciousness with which one can go out in the world and convert directly into ethical praxis, but rather is instead the (meta-)meta-ethical precondition for ethical consciousness. Without substitution and that transcendental sense of response-ability, discussions of ethics, of good works and economic justice simply would not make sense.

Additionally, we must consider that substitution is only possible with the infinite transcendence of the other, but also that the transcendence of the empirical other is only guaranteed by our being substituted. Despite being transcendent and, to some extent, metaphorical, the other in substitution cannot be removed entirely from the others that inhabit my everyday world. This is shown by the readings made in the first chapter, which demonstrate the importance of material aid and embodiment to Levinas' account. If he were to remain with an abstract and formalist account, he would fall prey to precisely that powerful critique of liberalism made in *RH*. We can understand the combination expressed here as proximity, that is, the lived recollection or enaction of the demand of substitution. This reciprocity significantly undermines some of the critiques of formalism found in readings of Levinas, particularly Rose's, as we will examine shortly. Even if this undoes some of what we understand by substitution as described above, this is the vital rhythm of saying and unsaying that marks the text of *OB*, which undoes what has been said in a manner that multiplies possibilities and conclusions, leaving them present, but delicate and ambiguous. Additionally, it is not clear whether the descriptions in *TI* are precluded by substitution.

Now some of the doubts regarding substitution and how we might imagine a concretisation or enactment of our responsibility to the immediate other have been allayed somewhat, we are still left with the real and somewhat more pressing issue of the capacity for the movement from the other to the third, by way of *illeity,* to justice, politics, and law. I will examine the degree to which the third party can be considered empirical and the implications of that in Bergo's thought for understanding a generalisation or universalisation of this resulting possibility

We have seen in the previous chapter the crucial role the third party plays in discussions of Levinas and the political, and for Bergo it is one of the most significant factors in her scepticism about this issue. For Bergo, this argument hinges on a passage from Levinas where he discusses the "entry" of the third party, and on Bergo's reading removes any empiricism from this aspect of Levinas' thought. As we have said, when Bergo removes the materiality from these core claims of Levinas, the move from these descriptions to concrete social action is understandably difficult. The passage is as follows:

> "It is not that *the entry of a third party* would be an empirical fact, and that by responsibility for the other finds itself constrained to a calculus by the 'force of things'. In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness." *(OB*, p.158 - emphasis added)

The above passage does not seem to support Bergo's premise quite so clearly as might be supposed (see Bergo, 2003, p. 282). Examining this passage more closely, we see that Levinas claims that the "entry" of the third is not an empirical fact, so it is not that there are two, and suddenly there are three. However, more importantly, that does not seem to preclude the idea that the third is factical. Indeed, as we read on, we can see that the others are present in the other before me, the others can be affective without being factically present, and yet this again does not preclude their actual existence, their being factical, if not being literally before me. Of course, this is not a particularly alien notion; by recollection and inspiration we find what is not present in what is, or we look over our shoulders, feeling the presence, actual or suspected of certain others as we gossip about them. Indeed, to use Levinas' own example, when we encounter the other, in the betrayal of that original substitution, we ask ourselves what the other and the third have done for or to each other *(OB*, p.157), and have to enter into measure. The third, by their physical presence or absence, always raises the question of what we ought to do, not simply to do justice to the one before me, but to do justice within the context of a society of neighbours and strangers.

However, one final question is posed by Bergo, by way of Hegel, to ask, how is this universalised? For this asymmetric relation between me and the other to exist in a society requires that I be treated as an other by the others. This is to an extent addressed by the betrayal of substitution, where this extreme asymmetry cannot be maintained and is dulled, giving way to the said, law and justice. However, Bergo highlights a passage in which Levinas states that it is only "thanks to God" that I am an other for the other. This use of God as a mediating factor, as an excluded third party to which both me, the other and the third party are in relation to is something that will potentially provide further trouble for my reading (Bergo, 2003, p.283). Certainly, Rose takes this as a further example of the private and religious nature of a praxis derived from Levinas. However, still, we see Levinas deny a "positive theology" *(OB*, p.147), continuing the saying-unsaying that marks the spiral of *OB.* That being said, we remain troubled by the other side of that pattern highlighted above, and it is not clear that this will allow us to escape from the sublime signifier "God", as Critchley holds (Critchley, 1999a, p. 114). Throughout this chapter, we will see that the problem of monotheism will be maintained as an issue identified by many in the secondary literature, but in the next chapter we will see how this reified third term can be addressed. The main discussion will involve both assessing the relative merits of doing away with it entirely and investigating to what extent this term can be altered to avoid the semantic and cultural signification that the term "God" inevitably carries with it.

The challenge I have given to Bergo's readings of Levinas is also somewhat appropriate to address the Hegelian-influenced critique from Gillian Rose, primarily in her work *The Broken Middle*. This work identifies a common failure within postmodern philosophy to effectively implement mediating terms when discussing the movement from the pre-thematic to the thematic, finding that the lack of a middle term leads to a dirempted and formalist philosophy, failing to heed the challenge Hegel posed in the previous century.

Rose's critique of Levinas holds that Levinas cannot transition to political critique, leading to Horowitz's conclusion that Levinas is left with a political realm untouched by his ethical work. In many ways, I agree that this reading of Levinas exists and that Horowitz and Rose are correct in identifying this problematic result. However, as previously, my contention is that this is by no means the only reading of Levinas. Despite this, Rose offers a potentially more dangerous critique. Rose does not merely argue against a reading of Levinas that ends up politically quietist, as Horowitz does. Instead, she argues that this is the necessary result, as the diremption between the realms of ethics is so great that it cannot be spanned. This position is due to Rose's reading of Levinas' ethics as a sublimely rarefied and holy realm which can only ever interrupt the political, where it becomes "a sacred not social relation" (Rose, 1992, p.261), and where the political and the ethical are utterly dirempted so that the ethical is sacrificed before omnipotent impersonal forces of the state and the *il y a* (Rose, 1992, p. 258-259). As I have written above, this is undoubtedly *a* valid Levinas to be read, indeed, one that I wish to challenge, but it is by no means a necessary reading due to the deep intertwining of ethical, political, economic, and social existence across Levinas' oeuvre, as has already been noted and will be developed further.

For Bergo's part, she seems at times fairly convinced by Rose's Hegelian challenge. The characterisation of Levinas' thought as a fundamentally dirempted unhappy consciousness bought about by the relative absence of mediation seems a severe one. However, at other times, Bergo seems somewhat sceptical of the Hegelian insistence on eliminating diremption in favour of a rather more harmonious mediation. Bergo's contention that there may, in fact, be ethical fecundity in this diremption (Bergo, 2003, p.292) is one that I will take forwards. I take this in something of a different direction than Bergo, partially enabled by the examples of divergent readings given above, particularly concerning the emphasis given to Levinas' Rabbinic writings.

This recognition of the centrality of social and economic life might seem to indicate that I ought to embrace the tendency to mediation and institutions found in Levinas, those mentioned in the preceding chapter. However, could one not imagine this differently? Is there not a potential for neither the angelicism of Rose's Levinas nor the institutionally minded Levinas of Caygill? Could

one not imagine a certain love getting the upper hand over a certain understanding of law? One could potentially read from this diremption, an anti-political ethics, a utopian ethics that moves beyond the political. I cannot say yet what kind of ethics, what kind of love, this would be, but it is indeed possible that this diremption need not follow the path Rose places it on. The way I will develop my reading will have to avoid these challenges, initially by refusing an interpretation which allows for this wholly strict diremption and focus heavenwards, rather than to society itself, and additionally by accepting this danger in Levinas, and the extent to which additional thinkers will be needed to overcome it entirely. Da Silva in particular will indicate that the logic of mediation proposed by Hegelian thought carries its own dire consequences, particularly for the colonised.

Critchley

Bergo presents Simon Critchley as the other side of this debate, representing an optimistic position regarding Levinas' political potential. Indeed, Critchley has spent much ink and paper advancing, or more recently, criticising, the idea of a Levinasian political, so it will be necessary to examine the trajectory of his thought over the years at some length. I will begin with the first major work he wrote on this subject, and the one commented on by Bergo at length, *The Ethics of Deconstruction.* On Critchley's account in this early work, the transition to a political understanding, while remaining somewhat fraught, is very much possible. This early work seems to agree that this Levinasian politics is possible, however, I will follow Bergo's line of inquiry, which will show that this project, while possible, is perhaps more problematic than Critchley seems to maintain in this iteration of his argument.

I have already mentioned that Critchley seems to escape the shadow of monotheism rather too easily, and this is a pattern that will continue throughout this chapter of *The Ethics of Deconstruction.* This is vital, particularly when Critchley then uses this to frame the *Tiers* as a simple secular socio-political phenomenon, and subsequently jumps further to describe a community with a "double structure", based on "a commonality among equals which is at the same time based on the inegalitarian moment of the ethical relation" (Critchley, 1999a p.227). This movement seems difficult to justify, and multiplies questions as rapidly as it moves itself, particularly regarding the debate over the empiricality of the third described above. However, I largely agree with Bergo, particularly concerning exactly what kind of state Critchley is referring to, whether a simple division of just and unjust states is possible and where it is questioned whether someone with a different political persuasion than Critchley could similarly avail

themselves of Levinas' gift under Critchley's model. That being said, I disagree with Bergo when discussing Critchley's phrase, which is almost a slogan: "ethics is ethical for the sake of politics" (Critchley, 1999a, p.223). As I have demonstrated, when Levinas' whole work is read holistically, the political is maintained as the horizon his thought addresses.

The Later Critchley: Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity to Infinitely Demanding.

Simon Critchley undergoes something of a reversal of his previous analysis of Levinas' place in thinking the political in the following two major works. While in *The Ethics of Deconstruction,* Critchley figured Levinas as the thinker who could bring out the politics of Derrida and Deconstruction, the publication of Derrida's later political works of the nineties, primarily *Spectres of Marx* and *The Politics of Friendship,* mean that by the time *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* is published, this use of Levinas is in some sense redundant. Critchley's discussion of these two thinkers then undergoes a reconfiguration whereby Derrida provides the pathway to a Levinas-inspired political imaginary. The result embraces the formalism we have seen Levinas being criticised for previously, providing a non-arbitrary yet non-foundational basis to a politics of deconstruction. Levinas provides the demand provoked by the other's decision in me (Critchley, 1999b, p. 277) to which political content can be appended. Critchley then reframes a discussion of a Levinas-inspired political in such a way as it ends up being a Derridean one, with Levinas' originary ethical encounter serving as a formalist prelude to political decision. In addition to the material available from Derrida, Critchley additionally finds himself disillusioned with Levinas more broadly and lists five critical issues with Levinas' conception of the political, which Critchley argues his reformulation can avoid.

This move away from a straightforwardly Levinasian ethics to one where Levinas plays second-fiddle to another thinker is repeated in Critchley's later work *Infinitely Demanding*, where we see the introduction of Lacanian theory to Levinas' thought. Critchley explored some similarities between Levinas and Lacan in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity,* however, this was only realised fully in *Infinitely Demanding*. The introduction of Lacan in this later work attempts to address what Critchley has elsewhere called the "masochistic" (Critchley, 2015, p.88). That is to say, such is the scale of the demand from the other, such that not only do we find ourselves hostage, persecuted and responsible, we even find ourselves responsible for our own persecution by the other! A certain incredulity comes over the reader of Levinas when this portion is read; it runs so counter to everyday moral sensibilities as to almost be insulting. But further to this, Critchley

does not find the demand in itself an issue, as one can tell by the title of the book, but it is the fact that in Levinas' work, there is no opportunity for sublation of this demand. It cannot be turned to the aesthetic, there is no relief from the demand. As a result, a praxis based on Levinas' thought would be utterly frozen by this, unable to act and constantly tortured by this inability and the demand which is never fulfilled. It would, under this reading, be a traumatised philosophy, a way of being with others dominated by trauma and tragic failure. This links to Critchley's schema of the comedic and the tragic, indicating that Levinas' thought becomes dangerous if this sublation is not allowed (Critchley, 2007 p.67-68). Again, beyond this Levinasian conception of the demand of the other, the remainder of his philosophy essentially ceases to feature in subsequent chapters.

This is similar to the final critique levelled by Rose, who characterises the lack of sublation and mediation of the extreme ethical demand as a "violent" love of the other, the severity and un-sustainability of which is dangerous to the self and the other (Rose, 1992, p.253-254). This is another view which at first blush seems reasonable, but further readings bring it into question. First, we can see how Levinas himself explicitly states that we must be able to forget substitution to some extent, we must be able to care for ourselves to function in the world *(OB,* p. 128). It is when there is *only* forgetting that we see the triumph of ego and will of the same over the other and over goodness itself. Additionally, we can find further space for mercy and gentleness by incorporating aspects of Lisa Tessman's thought. Tessman will play a vital role in the very final chapter of this project.

As a result of the discussion of these three thinkers, Bergo, Rose and Critchley, there are two critical issues concerning the possibility of a Levinasian praxis and one following from that regarding its desirability. I will engage with the issue of desirability in depth in the second half of this chapter. To briefly summarise the stumbling blocks ahead, first, there is the issue stemming from the reading from Rose, and to a lesser extent Bergo's, analysis, which follows a close reading of *Otherwise than Being* that emphasises the 'angelic' and immaterial aspects of the philosophy therein, figuring Levinas as constructing a formalist and socially impoverished ethics. I have hinted at a solution that might correct the balance, by reading Levinas' discussions across his oeuvre and consciously choosing to emphasise certain portions which demonstrate a different approach. This development sits alongside maintaining a coherent reading that recognises that my ability to completely nullify these challenges is limited. The second issue is from Critchley's early work, where we find our concerns inverted. Whereas before a reading made the task seem even more daunting than it is on its face, Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* makes the situation appear more straightforward than it is in practice. By

identifying these, we now see that a balance must be struck between a reading which understands and accepts certain challenges while not ceding more than is necessary. The issue regarding desirability stems from Rose's critique, where the unmediated and absolute nature of Levinas' thought leads to an unhappy consciousness, which oscillates between the violent terror of the *il y a* and a violent love of the other. I will resolve this primarily through my re-reading of the empirical and materialist nature of Levinas' thought.

From these moves by Critchley in particular, I take it to indicate that so far as he is concerned, a Levinasian politics is no longer possible due to the overwhelming and un-sublated ethical demand, therefore the Levinasian aspect must be relegated to a supporting role, playing little to no part in the exposition beyond that point. This seems to leave out many of the important contributions that other areas of his philosophy can make and appears to rely on a specific reading of substitution which does not seem particularly tenable, as I cover in the next chapter. However, it is not quite as simple as this. Beyond simply not seeming workable to Critchley's mind, we also see that he finds it flatly *undesirable* to straightforwardly follow a politics of this kind. This leads us into the next, and potentially most vital part of this review of literature, that is, to ask the question 'if a Levinasian politics *is* possible, would we want to achieve it?', and most pressingly for us, how does it support or undermine the goals we have set such a philosophy to achieve?

The Desirability of a Levinasian Political.

Critchley's Five Problems.

Critchley's "Five problems" found in Levinas' politics are, by now, almost ubiquitous in Levinas scholarship, appearing in many collections of essays since its publication. Admittedly, Critchley's scornful dismissal of the pious disciples of Levinas is refreshing and appealing, however, the main body and content of the work is more mixed in value. What should be said at the outset is that the criticisms that Critchley makes are of a kind vital to make of any thinker, and a failure to address them is all too common, and as Bernasconi notes, "represents both a moral and a philosophical shortcoming" (Bernasconi, 2003, p.13). It should further be noted that while Critchley indeed notes key elements of Levinas' thought that pose problems for a political thinking, the weight he gives to certain of them and the potential solutions he offers, appears much more questionable. I will consider the "problems" in turn before briefly assessing the solutions that Critchley advocates.

The five problems identified by Critchley are Fraternity, Monotheism, Androcentrism, Filiality and the Family, and Israel (Critchley, 2007, p.94-95). We can essentially reduce these five into two groupings, which I will refer to as Androcentrism - containing Androcentrism, Fraternity and the Family, and Eurocentrism - which forms the discussion around Israel and Monotheism. The grouping of these first three is due primarily to the marginalising of feminine subjectivity in these conversations, with its focus on fraternity, the son, and the "abject" status of the feminine (Chanter, 2007, p.75). The second pairing, Israel and Monotheism, initially seems odd, but the connection is made very clear in the pages after the initial listing, where Critchley emphasises the manner in which attempts to soften the charge of a problematic Zionism and associated religiosity has been conceived as an allegiance instead to the French Republic. This provokes similar, if not greater, problems for those populations which might not be interested in submission to either the Talmudic or Republican law (whether this is what Levinas means will also be discussed). I will discuss those whom Levinas dismissed as the translatable exotic, those who "dance" in greater detail when we get to Moten's work on Levinas.

As a method of addressing these problems he has identified, Critchley's own response points to two ways forwards. The first is in many ways similar to his argument in *Infinitely Demanding* when discussing Levinas and Lacan. That is to say, it is a method whereby Levinas' thought is something like the thrusters on a rocket, which simply break away once it has achieved sufficient velocity, leaving the rocket to continue. Essentially, Critchley characterises Derrida and Levinas as having gaps in their theory that mutually benefit each other if bought into proximity. Levinas has a hiatus between ethics and a politics troubled by his own commitments (Critchley, 2007, p.97), and Derrida requires a non-foundational basis for his politics of a New International. Critchley attempts to correct both of these issues by utilising Levinas as the ethical impetus that can provide the basis for a Derridian politics (Critchley, 2004, p. 180). This final politics has a certain trace of Levinas but operates without many of Levinas' key insights, simply using the immediate ethical encounter to justify the political aspects. In this way forward, we see Critchley abandoning a Levinasian political altogether, simply placing Levinas as a supplementary element to a different politics.

The second way forward proposed by Critchley is somewhat less developed than the above and is what he refers to as an "anarchist metapolitics" (Critchley, 2007, p.102). This move functions as a mode of disturbance of the current understanding of politics as order, challenging it with a multiplicitous democratic dissent in the form of street-protest. This is to be carried out by the *demos,* imagined not as any particular race, class or gender, but as a "non-space" that is comprised of those "who do not count, who have no right to govern" (Critchley, 2007 p. 103).

This section is rather hazy, and it is not made clear how or to what extent this is drawn from a reading of Levinas, apart from some references to the concept of an-archical disturbances, but beyond this basic concept, it is unclear how Critchley arrives at his conclusions. In any case, Critchley contends that this interruption is necessary to reaffirm the political nature of the political in order to challenge militarism etc. The necessity of interrupting and challenging the political is relatively agreeable, but how far does this challenge go? To what end? How is Critchley's specific methodology of demonstration and a certain undefined *demos* justified or elaborated? It is unclear how these questions can be answered in this short segment, so the ability to move past this is weakened.

Androcentrism

For the time being, I will predominantly discuss the complicated impact of Androcentrism, as there will be a more in-depth discussion of Eurocentrism shortly as part of the discussion on Moten and, towards the end of this thesis, Ferreira da Silva, Slabodsky, and Fanon. How will this discussion of Androcentrism cause us to adjust our reading? Is its impact so significant that it would force me to abandon my reading? To judge this, first some comments on its relative force as a challenge to the kind of project we are undertaking. First, it ought to be accepted without reservation the consistent tendency of Levinas to refer to male subjects in his work and apparently relegate female or feminine (we will discuss this distinction shortly) subjectivity to pre-rational and pre-ethical domesticity. This is made clear in the numerous metaphors of the son and brother and certain discussions of the feminine. I will largely not engage with the feminine as presented in "The Phenomenology of Eros", as that portion of *TI* will not play a role in my argument, instead, I focus on the feminine in relation to dwelling, domesticity and labour. Additionally, other thinkers such as Chanter (2007), Derrida (1991) and Iragaray (1991) have identified and questioned these moves by Levinas. While I will not be able to address all of these contributions, it is worth noting the widespread problematising of this aspect of Levinas' thought.

Tina Chanter notes that the texts where the feminine is not mentioned could potentially be evidence of this concept as occupying a non-essential space in Levinas' thought, supporting critics who hold that the feminine is not structurally important in Levinas' thought (Chanter, 2007, p.74). Chanter, however, remains unconvinced by such arguments. I will end up in a position that argues for the discussion of the feminine as non-essential; however, that being said, it will be in a somewhat different way and will still have to address Chanter's strong critique. While the idea of Levinas' thought limiting the subjectivity of the feminine still raises problems,

I will raise some pertinent questions here that will indicate how I aim to treat this matter in the main exposition.

By Chanter's account, the figure of the feminine, and by extension, women generally, are figured by Levinas as "abject" (Chanter, 2007, p. 75). In this reading, Levinas' thought "digests the feminine, absorbing its nutritional value, as it were, before spitting it out, expelling it, discarding it… but not before absorbing, usurping, and appropriating its usefulness." (Chanter, 2007, p.75). The feminine is absorbed, left without alterity, simply absorbed as a silent foundation for thinking but unable to participate in it (Chanter, 2007, p. 75). Further, Chanter understands the feminine welcome as the very condition for Levinas' ethics. This then puts Levinas in a double bind, where to think the feminine as such would undermine its alterity, yet the alternative causes him to exclude from ethics the very thing that has made it possible (Chanter, 2007, p. 76). The essay then diverges into an uncited and unargued assertion that Levinas fails to grant radical alterity to Palestinians (a position that seems to have been taken largely as a point of faith in writings from the critical movement of the 2000s that following the initial surge of interest in Levinas that came in the late 1980s and 1990s). The rest of the essay primarily explores the consequences of this "abjection" of the feminine that Chanter has identified.

First, how do we understand the feminine and its characteristics in relation to actually present or existent women and their characteristics? Does Levinas actually make claims to this end? Levinas does make it plain that no woman necessarily has to be present for the response of the feminine, potentially implying a break between womanhood and femininity (*TI*, p.157-158), and Chanter also recognises this (Chanter, 2007, p.77), but seems to miss the true import of this passage, and largely dismisses this qualification. It will be worth reproducing the context here to investigate Levinas' meaning more clearly:

> "This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcome in itself - *the feminine being*. Need one add that there is no question here of defying ridicule by maintaining the empirical truth or countertruth that every home in fact presupposes a woman? *The feminine has been encountered in this analysis as one of the cardinal points of the horizon in which the inner life takes place-and the empirical absence of the human being of "feminine sex" in a dwelling nowise affects the dimension of femininity which remains open there, as the very welcome of the dwelling*." (*TI*, p.157-158, emphasis added).

Two things are worth remarking on here. First, Chanter, and others, frequently make reference to "the Feminine Other" in relation to discussions within *TI*, despite that formulation never actually appearing in the text. Similarly, "*l'autre féminin*" never appears in *TeI*. I believe this misreading, and others, arise from the phrase reproduced above referring to "the feminine

being". This rendering, complete with the definite article, seems to lead one to imagine some being or entity that would be essentially feminine, who remains tied to the home, domesticity, and reproductive labour. However, this translation seems misleading. The term "the feminine being" arises twice within *TI*, (*TI*, p.p.156 and 157), both instances arise as a translation of "l'être féminin" as it appears in *TeI* (*TeI*, p.167 and 169). The inclusion of the definite article "the" in the translation gives the impression of a distinct "being", whereas the status of "être" as an abstract noun indicates that while it requires a definite article in French, this carries much more ambiguity. It would be technically correct to translate the above phrase as either "the feminine being" or simply "feminine being".

So, which is it to be? One could potentially make a case for either, however, I contend that the italicised section above demonstrates that when Levinas speaks of *l'être féminin,* he is indeed speaking of "one of the cardinal points of the horizon in which the inner life takes place", that is to say, about a kind of being which he labels feminine, or, to use Levinas' earlier language, he is discussing exist*ence*, not exist*ents*. Indeed, as Chanter correctly points out, he cannot label others as feminine, to do so would erase their alterity, but the other side of the double bind, whereby he supposedly builds his account on women, is rendered somewhat irrelevant by this reading of *l'être féminin* as "feminine being" rather than "the feminine being".

Admittedly, this is a narrow understanding of "feminine being", as one limited to domesticity etc., however, it is perhaps not quite as essentialist as might initially be supposed. Indeed, one could read this passage that the references to the feminine as regards domesticity refers to a socially prescribed sphere of feminine labour and value and that this does not, therefore, refer to the ultimate role for women or their essential space. As a partial conclusion to this discussion, one might argue that Levinas' label of "feminine" remains problematic, however, what he in fact labels bears little to no relation to actual women. Therefore, it would be desirable to instead think what is labelled "feminine being" differently, as domestic being, the form of existence which is marked most fundamentally by hospitality, thereby retaining the work that this concept does, while altering this aspect in order to avoid what is more troubling about it. This would be somewhat in line with Levinas' statement in *EI*, where he claims that, when reflecting on his language in *TO*, "these allusions to the ontological differences between the masculine and the feminine would appear less archaic if … they would signify that the participation in the masculine and the feminine were the attribute of every human being" (*EI*, p.68). This is, of course, only in the context of an interview, and one given over thirty years after the text was written, and so should be given appropriate weight. Despite this, I think it remains a helpful indication of how Levinas' thought here can be adapted to a more suitable role.

It might also be mentioned that, while there is a great deal of emphasis on the positive virtues of the masculine, of fraternity and paternity, the masculine does not exist as an unalloyed good. Particularly in Levinas' later work, there is much discussion of the "virility" of the conqueror, of the logic of Being and ontology which is dominated by war *(OB*, p. 185). Set against this vision of these masculine themes, the Feminine becomes a counter which carries out the very anarchic disruption Levinas discusses in *OB*. It is important here to consider the work of Catherine Chalier, who puts forward a much more generous reading of the feminine, positing the dual roles of welcome and maternity as far from side-lining the feminine, but instead presenting a reading which centres it (Chalier, 1991).

However, do these readings leave a certain essentialism in my further analyses? It is true that while Levinas uses the masculine *il* throughout his work, I find no cause to maintain or adhere to this pronoun. While Levinas discusses feminine being specifically, as I have established, this does not have a necessary connection to factical women, nor does it indicate that the other must, therefore, due to lack of qualifier, be male. Indeed, this argument has also been made by Bernasconi in 'Who is my Neighbour, who is the Other?', where he notes that one could argue "that by writing of the Other of man as a woman, without exploring what it might mean for the Other of a woman to be a man, Levinas was simply preserving the asymmetry of a relation that necessarily excludes reciprocity" (Bernasconi, 2005, p.11).

Additionally, where does this leave the frame of what is often a heteronormative conception of the family? Levinas devotes the last chapter of *TI* to this familial ideal and still maintains much of the discussion of the feminine, although not as strongly as in *TO.* There are places where family plays the role as a clear metaphor, for example, how maternity figures as substitution, the one-in-the-other, in *OB.* However, the family can, in other places, inhabit a much more ambiguous and crucial position in his philosophy. This is particularly troubling when it comes to the terms of "paternity" and "fraternity", key features throughout his work that remain stubbornly relevant and gendered in such a way as to potentially imply exclusion on this basis. Additionally, the figure of paternity or fatherhood then forms the basis for a dedication to monotheism that remains present. However, in the face of this, we will have to think the significance of these terms differently, think the meaning they embody in a different manner, not simply in the manner of vocabulary, but rather to think these bonds with others in the mode of a truly universal solidarity with others.

As a counterpoint to the heteronormative account of the family and fecundity, I would highlight Levinas' consistent employment of the Biblical formulation of the other as stranger, widow and

orphan. Putting aside the issue of Abrahamic monotheism for the time being, it is essential to note here that all of these figures are defined primarily from their position outside of links of kindship, tribe, or nation. These are figures outside of patriarchal relations, although they are nevertheless defined in relation to family and patriarchy.

The issue of androcentrism doubtless remains something of an issue in Levinas despite my discussions here, and I wouldn't claim to have somehow cleansed him from these issues. Hopefully, this section demonstrates that the identification of Levinas' work with an endorsement or prioritising of the masculine over the feminine is simplistic and that there is perhaps more nuance and ambiguity in these positions. The space opened here is one that I will utilise in the next chapter to try to imagine a reading of Levinas that inhabits these spaces of ambiguity, imagining a thinking that can better engage with issues of the political without the problems of androcentrism entirely obstructing any path forwards. This is not to say that I necessarily find in Levinas a visionary feminist philosopher, I would still go elsewhere for that, as I have for issues regarding race later in this project. However, this demonstration of ambiguity provides a minimal level of room for manoeuvre and prevents the project from being written off before it has even begun.

Levinas, Race and Eurocentrism: Moten, Critchley and Bernasconi

The second main failing of Levinas, as per Critchley, is his Eurocentrism and, in places, racism. For Critchley, the maintenance of a conception of monotheism in Levinas necessitates a universalisation of a profoundly limited conception of religiosity, incompatible with a pluralistic ethics or politics. This is coupled and intensified by Levinas' commitment to what Derrida calls a certain "terrestrial Jerusalem" (Critchley, 2004, p.81), which has led to numerous uncomfortable confrontations with the reality of the state of Israel and its policies. In addition to this, Critchley examines some attempts to avoid this association by emphasising Levinas' commitment to French Republicanism and the French state, a somewhat lateral move given the past and present enactment of racist and colonial violence by the French state. However, while Critchley correctly identifies these failings and presents them suitably straightforwardly, his response, as we have seen above, is relatively under-developed insofar as it remains within a Levinasian frame. On the problem of racism itself, besides responding pithily to Levinas' dismissal of everywhere outside Europe as "exotic" and "dance" with "then let's dance", there is not a significant engagement with this issue (Critchley, 2004, p. 186).

The discussions surrounding racism and eurocentrism in Levinas are fraught and require careful and considered negotiation. There is a strong temptation to dismiss much of the more overtly racist statements, as they are largely confined to interviews later in Levinas' career. Contra this, the critique from Fred Moten makes it clear that, much like the issue of androcentrism, this problem cannot be so simply side-stepped. However, we can make some points that potentially mitigate these challenges, and we will see in later chapters how additional thinkers can be utilised to meet these vitally important critiques and support the overall project. My central engagement on these points will be concerning the criticisms laid out by Fred Moten in the first essay in The Universal Machine and engaging with Robert Bernasconi's work.

Before I enter into the discussion of Moten, I will first examine the case of Kant's racism and how that has been treated in the secondary literature. This detour is for two reasons: the first is that the discussion of Kant's racism has been much more widely (but still somewhat inadequately) covered in secondary literature, thereby providing us with more resources to draw from. Now, having these resources is of little use if they cannot be effectively implemented when discussing Levinas, but this is my second point: that Levinas and Kant are often introduced as occupying a similar place in the constellation of moral philosophy. The moral philosophy of both at first blush and taken in isolation gives the impression of a universalist humanism, which reaches to the good beyond being, a thought dominated by kingdoms of ends, respect for the other, and so on. This makes it all the more jarring for readers of both when one discusses Kant's anthropological works, or Levinas' description of "asiatic hordes" (DF p.165).

While there are similarities, there are meaningful differences regarding the scale and systematicity of the racism found in these thinkers. Kant's racism formed the core of entire treatises on anthropology and became foundational for scientific racism. Kant implicitly endorsed African slavery and created a racial hierarchy with White Europeans firmly at the top. Levinas' comments, on the other hand, are largely (although not exclusively) found in interviews, and he never devoted an entire work to these theories. These comments are less developed, however they potentially betray certain more structural problems with Levinas' thought in this area.

The instances of Kant's racism have been briefly mentioned above, so the discussion will focus on how this interacts with his moral theory and its implications for his thought. First, I will outline the issue through Bernasconi, Charles W Mills and Emmanuel Eze, and follow that with a discussion on ways to move past this, further drawing on the work of Mills. In *Will the Real Kant Please Stand Up?* Bernasconi identifies two problems regarding discussions about racism and

the major figures of the philosophical canon. First, a reticence to talk about these issues at all, considering them largely irrelevant, and second, is that when they are discussed, various manoeuvres are attempted to extricate the serious and central philosophical work from the distasteful racist portions of their work (Bernasconi, 2003, p. 16). Before we examine these arguments in favour of quarantining Kant's racism from the rest of his work, it will be instructive to examine two problems present in Kant that will be instructive for the discussion on Levinas.

The first problem is straightforward to describe, if not to solve: in a purportedly universal moral system, which applies to all people as free rational agents, what is the ethical status of those who do not meet this criterion? For Kant, we must treat all others as ends in themselves, as per the categorical imperative. However, if some races, for Kant this was predominantly Native Americans and Africans, are unable to be taught the principles for developing a universal maxim, etc., they are unable to engage in a moral community. Moreover, since they are supposed not to be able to participate in ethics fully, if at all, then they, when understood in the context of Kant's teleology, are failing on a much deeper level. As a result of this, they simply do not figure in his visions of an ethical community, and in some places Kant intimates they do not fit into any future world at all (Bernasconi, 2003 p.18-19). This will be related to Levinas' philosophy insofar as it will be worthwhile to question what the limits of participation are within the schema of the ethical encounter, and asking who has a face, and what is required to fully understand and take one's responsibility to another according to Levinas? It is worth pointing out that Levinas is distinguished from Kant in the sense that, for Levinas, the ability to partake in his ethical community is not dependent on a special faculty of reason or other qualifying aspects. However, if one understands the tie to monotheism as essential to the structure of ethics understood as fraternity, there is a potential to pose a similar problem (insofar, of course, as we accept that link and the degree to which it is understood metaphorically etc.).

The second problem is one of representation and discussion as such, which is linked to the first problem. This section primarily draws from Mills' work on the Racial Contract. For Mills, taking his cue from feminist theory (Mills, 1997, p. 3), the omission of a racialised ethical other, maintaining the other as blank in terms of history, race, or gender, presents a glaring omission in any work concerned with justice (Mills, 1997, p.1-20). This is a problem bigger than simply Kant for Mills; it means that one of the greatest systems of domination governing the world today, white supremacy, is not discussed in the thought of someone talking about justice. In such a situation, even bracketing Kant's overt racism mentioned above, there is a severe deficiency in this thought, and the implied white subjectivity of this race-less subject is a more subtle but still pernicious form of racism present in many of these works. In addition, this both

leads on from the above problem, but then also compounds it, as one cannot tackle the issues raised in the former so straightforwardly as the more subtle case of simple omission, which then, in turn, allows for exclusion.

Levinas, with his conception of the other as apparently abstracted from race, gender, place, history etc. appears well placed to fall into this position, which must be considered carefully if it is to be avoided. Of course, Levinas' other is fundamentally without history or culture in the initial encounter, the question of race, nationality, gender deferred. The other instantiates the ethical demand prior to being placed in a world, but it is then a question of whether this figure is subsequently absorbed into a world, and if so, how should race impact Levinas' discussions in a meaningful way here? It is worth pointing out, in addition, that much of Mills' work addresses writers such as Rawls, who talk about justice in a very different manner to Levinas. For someone like Rawls, who formulates a political theory of justice with reference to specific situations and aiming for a greater degree of applicability, not discussing race seems a more glaring omission than for Levinas' thought. Nevertheless, in chapters four and five of this work, my revised reading of Levinas with other thinkers indicates that this omission can be used in a surprisingly beneficial manner in reconsidering approaches to Levinas.

There are numerous methods employed in Kantian scholarship to avoid these problems, however, as Bernasconi and Mills point out, they are fairly ineffectual and fail to identify the real issues at the core of these problems. This is usually framed (with some exceptions as we shall see) as wanting to extract or defend a workable Kant, whereby we can still have use of his ethics without having to commit to ideological positions we find repugnant. However, on this point, it is also important to point out that in Mills' later book, *Black Rights and White Wrongs*, he is trying to do precisely that, and in a sense, we are attempting a similar task with Levinas, and therefore it will be important to see how this is justified and criticised as an approach.

Mills outlines three points required of a case demonstrating Kant's racism: that *a)* "demonstrate how Kant's general theoretical claims can be shown to have these implications", show *b)* "citations of specific remarks and passages from Kant seemingly consistent with these implications" and finally *c)* showing a certain textual silence regarding certain issues (Mills, 2017, p.98). We can imagine the Levinasian content of these as follows: firstly, one could take a strong stance (and this is quite a strong position, taken for illustrative purposes) on the topic of monotheism, Israel, and the Law, and understand Levinas' thought as intrinsically excluding polytheists and, more importantly, the "exotic" and the "materialist… asiatic hordes", as well as potentially Palestinians. This may exclude them from Levinas' considerations of moral

encounters and moral community as such. *b)* can be shown by the passages referenced above to the exotic and anything essentially non-European (i.e. not of Jerusalem or Athens). And then point *c)* fits very neatly with Levinas' supposed silence on the plight of Palestinians, as well as the relative absence of discussions on race.

These positions are the most severe versions of the accusations against Levinas, but we will see how they can be moderated and answered for. Mills first addresses those that assign Kant's racism a subordinate and pre-theoretical position, a stance that is difficult to countenance considering the scale and complexity of Kant's racial anthropology (Mills, 2017, p. 98-99). With Levinas, it is somewhat easier to subordinate many of his explicitly racist remarks, as these occupy the odd line rather than entire treatises. However, it is worth noting that their presence alone ought to give us pause in such an enterprise. Additionally, it is not so much the explicit racism but the structural failings within Levinas' work that potentially open it to the most troubling charges. It is then a question of whether Levinas' work, insofar as it does have these failings regarding race, can be reconstructed in a "sanitised" way, in which we leave the racist elements behind. This faces two problems: first, it is not clear whether it is desirable to simply move the racist elements to one side and assume nothing remains in his 'proper' work, and secondly, can we effectively remove the more structural elements we have touched on? The second of these problems causes the most significant challenge due to the embeddedness of Levinas' dedication to monotheism and a very European conception of philosophy.

The last objection Mills discusses is that Kant's racism impacts his philosophy, but it largely leaves the core principles untouched and therefore does not excessively compromise things like the Categorical Imperative, for example. The rejection of this point is either, as Eze does, to make Kant's racial claims are similarly transcendental, or, as Mills elaborates, reject the idea that simply because an idea is empirical and, in some way, non-foundational, by no means indicates that it is somehow then irrelevant to the philosophy. Particularly in moral philosophy, if a group is excluded, even if that philosophy has noble aims for the group that is included, it is still fundamentally compromised (Mills, 2017, p.104). This raises questions if we are to accept the strong sense of Levinas as exclusionary. To exclude Palestinians, for example, even if it were to be thought of as simply a personal prejudice of Levinas, remains quite fundamentally damaging to the rest of his ethical thought.

We have seen here that racist works and sentiments by Levinas cannot be quarantined from the rest of his work and that it would be dishonest to present a sanitised account. Rather, what I will attempt to do is much the same as Mills' project regarding Liberalism. In Mills' work there is an

attempt to demonstrate the diversity and ambiguity of liberalism, demonstrating its problematic qualities as well as what can be of use, before then attempting to construct a liberalism that can be of use in an anti-racist project.

This analysis of Mills' work on Kant shows us that if we are to continue with a project informed by Levinas, primarily using his texts, it can fundamentally not remain unchanged. Given the presence of Levinas' racism and androcentrism, it would be dishonest to present simply a sanitised and purely progressive Levinas, much as it would be to do so for Kant. However, I hold that it remains possible to imagine a way forward that operates with Levinas' thought, and where Levinas is the primary textual source, while leaving his thought open to challenge and dialogue from other thinkers and traditions, without abandoning insights found to be valuable.

Moten

Fred Moten's essay on Levinas, "There is No Racism Intended", in his book *The Universal Machine*, is partially an essay on Levinas, an exploration of specific racial implications of his work, and a theory as to their root. The other aspect is that of developing an idea of a phenomenology of "unintended" racism. The first aspect will take up the more significant part of our discussion here, but the thinking of a racism which is unintended, as Moten suggests, opens a way of thinking Levinas in the context of a history of philosophy, specifically a European philosophy. This is somewhat outside what I aim to discuss here, but Moten's discussion of Levinas and how Levinas is situated will provide important insights into the current project.

Moten begins his argument with the essay *The Philosopher's Fear of Alterity: Levinas, Europe and Humanities' Without Sacred History,* by McGettigan and, insofar as McGettigan is utilised, I will comment on these passages before my main engagement with Moten. The most significant argument to deal with is the assertion that the Face, as a specific historico-cultural formation, is a limited event, only possessed by, or accessible to, only those who participate in "Sacred" or effectively Judeo-Christian history (McGettigan, 2006, p.15). This excludes those who do not partake in this history, denying them the ability to engage in ethics as described by Levinas. As discussed above, this is a serious charge for any ethical philosophy, potentially compromising much of it. Indeed, this seems congruous with some of Levinas' statements on non-Europeans, whom he seems to consider alien to the idea of human dignity. However, when McGettigan says that the face is not a "universal possibility", it is unclear what he means. Is he referring to the possibility to experience the face? Or to present as a face? Or both? Additionally, it is important to remember two things: First, McGettigan does not consider this criticism to include the analysis of *OB* (McGettigan, 2006, p. 15)*,* and second, while Levinas certainly describes the face

as analogous to the Cartesian Infinite, the face on its most straightforward reading is the way the other presents as exceeding any idea I can have of them (*TI*, p. 50). McGettigan is correct to understand the face as not simply a countenance, however, it would be a mistake to understand the face as purely metaphorical or abstract completely unconnected to a specific other (see Bernasconi, 2006). Figuring the other in this manner, as fundamentally unable to be grasped in comprehension as an object of science or instrumental reason, does not seem to carry the same cultural specificity as McGettigan's reading. Indeed, one may suppress, ignore, or forget the irreducible uniqueness and incomprehensibility of the other, but that is a different question.

My other fundamental dispute with McGettigan's reading is his contention that the idea of the alterity of the other is constituted primarily by height rather than simple difference (McGettigan, 2006, p. 20). This is characterised quite simply by McGettigan; the other is simply figured as "master", as in the image of a specific God. However, height in *Totality and Infinity* is not a simple and static relation. The other does not possess height as power, but rather, the other is first and foremost poor, and a stranger (*TI*, p. 213). The other is the widow or orphan without family ties and who comes with palms outstretched, or the foreign stranger (for further discussion of the complex figure of the stranger in the Bible, see DOUGLAS, MARY. "The Stranger in the Bible." European Journal of Sociology, 35, no. 2 (1994): 283-98.). It is from this position of poverty and vulnerability that we feel the ethical demand of the other. On McGettigan's view, this height and refusal of basic difference denies a "saraband of innumerable and equivalent cultures" (*MS*, p. 58). Many of McGettigan's concerns emanate from the *MS* essay, and I will engage more fully in the complexities of this work in the next chapter. For the time being, however, we can understand, in the other approaching as a stranger with hands outstretched, the initial experience of the other as one not of forcing the other to a particular culture, but instead, an unconditional welcoming of the stranger with the food, drink, and shelter. Of course, this originary ethical experience is not the entirety of interaction with the other, and is not meant to absolve any exclusionary racism, but raising this means to problematise this simplistic reading of the relation to the other and indicate another potential path.

McGettigan's paper illustrates why I have folded the issue of monotheism in with the broader theme of Eurocentrism. For McGettigan, the primary avenue through which Levinas' thought falls to Eurocentrism is through the emphasis on a particular European idea of the divine, the sacred, and of God. It is worth remembering that while the signifier of God can be seen to do meaningful work in Levinas' thought, like some of the other concepts that I have looked at, this work can be replicated by different means that carry less particularist and regionally specific implications. For now, I will concede that Levinas can be read in a way that centralises, or even

necessitates, a monotheistic God, however, I will show that a secular reading is entirely viable. In addition to this, it is worth suggesting that the ability of Levinas' account to incorporate the divine in some way is not necessarily a problem in itself. If one moves away from an Abrahamic god-figure, then one can simply acknowledge some kind of divine aspect to the practice of ethics, which does not necessarily lead to exclusionary practices, which is my main concern here.

These readings allow us to consider where Moten picks up the thread differently. Moten, at this point, illustrates the intrusion of that other or stranger who approaches and is unable to engage with this sacred history or "stand in relation to alterity" (Moten, 2018, p.6). The configurations of exclusion mentioned above seem somewhat unconvincing and will be addressed further as this project proceeds. However, now we approach the truly incisive element of Moten's discussion, which is to understand a divide in Levinas between the Levinas of the early essays and the Levinas of the later interviews in their relation to affect and the thingly. Moten links the denigration of the affective and thingly with Levinas' alarming and racist remarks, so for Moten, there is a similar question to ours raised previously: why and how does this apparent incongruity come about, and for Moten, what can this tell us about racism in Levinas, and racism in Philosophy as a discipline (Moten, 2018, p.11)?

One of Moten's starting points, as for the present work, is the essay on Hitlerism. By reading through this work and contrasting it with other moments of Levinas' oeuvre, Moten identifies an additional tension within Levinas. This tension lies between the break with being that is the very otherness of the other, the refusal to accept the subjugation of the other to "violent, regulative understanding" (Moten, 2018, p.5) by turning away from being, and that very turning from being and affect leading to a thought that is so allergic to the thingly that any affect is abandoned and denigrated. The first severe conflict here is that, if we take the criticism of exclusion above from McGettigan seriously, if one's participation in otherness is restricted by relation to sacred history, that person becomes the thingly and subject to that same denigration. Additionally, on a weaker reading, we see the urge that the other not become "thingly", the presence of what we earlier identified as the longstanding commitment to transcendence, and the ability for liberal idealism to provide that at some level. However, as this becomes emphasised further, being and affect become, if not dangerous, then at best irrelevant for ethics. For Moten, this commitment to an idea of liberalism aligns Levinas with a particular moment in the philosophical history of Europe and an interest in defending "European Man". Therefore, at the same time, Levinas potentially opens a philosophy of escape (Moten, 2018, p.17), against biologistic materialism, he does so within the field of a philosophy dedicated to the defence and universalisation of Europe, of its "invasive stillness" (Moten, 2018 p.1).

For Moten, there remains the rudimentary possibility for a philosophy of escape, which is hinted at in other parts of the work. However, for Moten, the possibility of escape figured in *RH* seems to be hollow. The escape in the earlier essays we have discussed seem to be false, as it is not to escape European man, but to save it (Moten, 2018, p.24). It becomes not simply an escape but an escape in order to commit to a re-envelopment. Levinas, in attempting to engage with the crisis of metaphysics and its political ramifications, can be seen, particularly in his interviews, to be additionally attempting to save the world of what came before the crisis, which as Moten notes, can categorically not be considered as a world of masters without slaves (Moten, 2018, p.7).

The task that Moten sets a useful reading of Levinas is to understand a thinking of flight and escape, which is not a flight from the thingly but is nonetheless still an escape from envelopment, comprehension and grasping. Moten finds in Levinas a tendency to think a thing without world, to remove this essential component of the thing. However, we must take a pause here to consider Levinas as regards beings, things, and Being. One can characterise Levinas' later interviews as thoroughly denigrating beings and affect, expressing horror at a certain fallenness. However, as I touched on in the previous chapter, throughout most of Levinas' work, the significance of the thing *is* its affect. The savour of it, we eat not to live but because we are hungry, or the food is particularly enticing. Levinas presents a discussion of beings whereby they are not subsumed into a vast anonymous Being but are instead affectively present. It is the anonymous Being without beings, the rumbling of the *il y a,* that Levinas is horrified by in these early texts. Despite our ability to negate their alterity by grasping in perception, the thing retains all of its qualities. Additionally, Levinas seems at several points to show quite deep appreciation for the thingliness of the self, although never of the other. The other as face is precisely not thingly, however when there are discussions of violence, then the thingly emerges, with discussion of fragility and danger, ventricles of the heart being so exposed to the blows of the other, or vice versa.

Regarding the thingliness of oneself, the removal of humanity, a comparison or reconciliation ought to be thought regarding Levinas' time in the Stalag (*DF*, p. 152-153). Indeed, while there are elements of an aversion to beings in Levinas, his scepticism concerning representation, for example, which I believe is a far stronger indicator of the problematics Moten identifies - as opposed to the *il y a* - I think it is clear that there are ample resources for an appreciation and integration of the thingly to be explored. Moten's reading, influenced by McGettigan, seems to all too readily contend that Levinas has abandoned his earlier work, when really there seems to be tension throughout, between thing, subject, world and other. In many ways, this ties to the

trap we found in Levinas when examining his work in the last chapter. In finding himself on the periphery of the centre, Levinas is in a position criticising the European tradition, while constantly reaffirming it, criticising it in order to save it.

Conclusion

My discussion here and in the preceding chapter does not aim to transform Levinas, I am not arguing that he is Fred Wesley, but also, I mean to say he is not entirely Frank Verwoerd (Moten, 2018, p.1). Rather, I mean to show the heteronomy of his work, and in my readings gather an understanding of how best to navigate these tensions. All throughout this latter part of this chapter, concerning race and racism in Levinas, I have not tried to demonstrate that racist passages 'aren't really Levinas' or that they are irrelevant to his other work. Rather, I have tried to destabilise readings of his work as a unified or settled body, but instead one of change or development, with many aspects of his long career (a full sixty years' worth of published work) conflicting with each other in crucial aspects. What my readings here have done is to first and foremost instruct us in how to approach Levinas' texts, how to improve my reading, but also to demonstrate the malleability of Levinas' works. If Levinas is correct, and works are anonymously cast into the world to be taken and appropriated by the other, out of control of the one who produced it, then I indeed mean to undertake a similar appropriation for the task at hand. These appropriations in the next chapter will provide a new reading which can bring together the nuances and cautions I have noted here and integrate them to allow a reading which can take Levinas' texts further.

Moten's aim, as he presents it in the interview at the end of *the Undercommons*, when discussing *Autonomia,* is to find whatever is present there that has "something useful to say about the possibility and practicality of tearing shit up and building something new" (Moten & Harney, 2013, p.153). Moten maintains that the debt that exists cannot be repaid, and to even engage with repayment of debt is capture by credit, is governance and policy. The debt is recognised, unforgiven, uncollected, and fundamentally not transformed into credit. Ultimately, what we can take from Moten's writing on Levinas is a new way of examining the disjunction laid out in the first chapter and crossing it with further axes of tension. Where Levinas is utopian and conservative, critical of Europe, but only in order to preserve European man/consciousness/thought/religion (empire?), we see that this is the real hinge upon which our understanding of Levinas must turn. Even in the essay on Hitlerism, Levinas has the goal of saving Europe from its own omnicidal drive but ultimately preserving the Europe which gave rise

to this very danger. Yet, as Moten states, Levinas also hints towards a thinking of escape and being otherwise than the thought of the tradition of western ontology, a thinking that, when taken for another end than to simply save European man from the crises generated by his thought and being, has the potential to play a part in the fugitive resistance to this dominion.

The question that must be asked of ourselves, the biggest question arising from this chapter of interrogation and interlocutors is: can we take Levinas' analysis of European man as warmonger, totalitarian, coloniser while not as possessor of sacred history, as the sole possessor of conscience, redeemed by the horror at what it has done? By a debt apparently paid by acknowledgement? Can we use Levinas to disrupt trajectories of envelopment, governmentality, and instrumental reason, as well as re-understanding politics to remove its very grounding? In short, can we find a Levinas that can tear shit up and build anew? Perhaps not entirely, certainly not without fault, but we will see by the end of the next chapter that a certain fraying and perforating will have taken place, incomplete but not insignificant, and forever indebted.

Chapter 3: Levinas and the Political: A New Reading

I have, in the preceding two chapters, laid out quite a problematic for myself. I have explored numerous challenges, regarding the conflicting accounts Levinas himself gives of the political, as well as critics who either find an impossibility of considering Levinas in this way, or indeed consider that Levinas *can* be considered politically, but provides solutions that only compound the problem. What follows in this chapter will be a careful reading of Levinas' work, but one which is constrained by the project I want his work to enact and by the thought and critique of the thinkers in the previous chapter.

However, it is not simply that I will be constrained. The analyses of the last chapter have led to a position where the freedom of my reading is extended in another way. Having abandoned commitments to searching for a "true" or "authentic" Levinas and being unburdened by wanting to remain faithful to the master, I can instead read his work differently. This different reading focuses on how the texts can be taken up and utilised, allowing these texts to work flexibly, creating a reading which no doubt remains, in a sense, Levinasian, but can be taken elsewhere than Levinas himself, or much traditional Levinasian scholarship, have taken it. This freedom and constraint limits which portions will form the final analysis but allows me to take the passages and ideas I wish to preserve and think them radically otherwise.

The primary goal here, the end to which I orient my analysis, is to address the disjunctions noted in the previous two chapters. These are the conservatism and utopianism discussed in chapter one, and the commitment to Europe on the one hand while continuing a thorough critique of European man and subjectivity throughout his work on the other, as discussed in the second chapter. It is important here to note that by "address", I neither mean to ignore the disjunctions nor to create a simple compromise. Instead, my reading will draw out the more radical ideas of Levinas, forcing his thought out of conservatism and instead tracing a path through the development of his thought to create a reading of a radical subtext that can confront the ethical and political challenges dominating the political.

The course of the investigation in this chapter will proceed from a discussion of the Levinasian subject. I will show that understanding Levinas' investigations of the subject will be vital for progressing my reading, both in terms of grounding the discussion and contextualising the descriptions he uses elsewhere, but additionally to use as a guide to refer back to when diverging from Levinas' own position. The initial focus of understanding this subject and its formation will primarily draw on *OB*, but additional texts from earlier in Levinas' work will also be helpful. This

will predominantly concern substitution and how the evacuation of the ego from the self and the pinning down of responsibility forms the an-archic source of signification and meaning as such. This will provide the basis for further ethical descriptions as I build a picture of the overall model. As a basis, substitution will be constantly referred back to, as it will be necessary to demonstrate its constant relevance to the discussions of material life as well as the ethical encounter.

Once the subject and its pre-original formation in substitution have been elaborated, I will then investigate the subject's relation to the world of matter. This discussion will elaborate the subject constituted by substitution by emphasising the affectivity of this subject, who finds itself in a world of nourishments and works, from the first embedded in it and engaged with it. Additionally, I will touch on how these indicate the other, and while I may be engaged in living-from, I nonetheless remain oriented to the other who is beyond. I will also interrogate what significance this materiality has and how that is altered by the entry of a factical other. This and the next section will largely follow the course of the first half of *TI* but heavily supplemented by other texts by Levinas, including *OB* and earlier essays such as *ET* and *EE*.

The following section will continue immediately from the discussion of objects and works, leading directly into a discussion of the face to face encounter as described in *TI*. The ordering here in no way implies a precedence of objects over the other, I am beginning with substitution after all. The other will always remain the pre-original starting point and orientation for our thought. Instead, this means to indicate that immersion in materiality and the experience of corporeality are original (although not pre-original) features of existence and that these two strands of the subject, those that concretise it and those that transcend it, must be discussed together. I will expand and emphasise the connection between economy and justice and discuss the cultural-historical anonymity of the other who is before me, as relayed in the schema of *TI* and other works.

I have completed this, the concept of the third person will be interrogated. The key questions I mean to engage with here are to what extent the concept of the third is necessary, what are its implications according to Levinas, and which of these are consistent with his other writings. This will be one of the most extended conversations, as this seems to be where many of the disjunctions really take hold and raise the most challenging questions. However, despite these problems, this discussion will provoke us to rethink the concept of the third in a different manner than Levinas' framing of it.

What will be made clear from these discussions is that certain positions one can draw from Levinas' thought are at odds with the more conservative conclusions that I previously outlined and that instead one can trace, but no more than trace, the outline of a political imaginary that is in many senses still distinctly Levinasian, but at odds with many of his conclusions. However, this conclusion will not be arrived at simply by dismissing Levinas' conclusions, but rather the source and meaning of the disjunctions will be analysed, and the work done by those ideas I discard will be replicated by other means. This section will be found most wanting, and I will be unable to give a complete account using only resources found in Levinas. As a result, a turn to other thinkers and resources will once again be necessary, which in combination with incomplete aspects of the previous sections, will provide the transition into chapter four.

This structure achieves several things: first, it places the subject as defined by substitution for the other as the starting point, establishing key qualities of affectivity, materiality/embodiment, and orientation towards the other from the very beginning of the analysis. Second, this allows me to work through a thematic progression in a manner that will avoid the contradictions and confusions of some of Levinas' own analyses. Third, placing the discussion of the political as the final point means that I can cover the essential elements of the Levinasian position, whilst not being drawn into debates that cannot be solved by Levinas alone, thereby allowing me to limit the argument in this chapter and pick it up again in chapter four.

The Subject

The Subject & Substitution.

In beginning with a discussion of substitution, I am, as Levinas would have it, beginning before the beginning. Beginning before any beginning. The prior-to of substitution, beyond any beginning, necessitates careful discussion, almost apophatic in its hesitance to describe this non-occurrence, on the hither side of the thematisable. Despite these barriers, this is where I must begin if the rest of the exposition is to reach a full understanding of Levinas' project. For Levinas, any discussion of anything remains only possible in the context of a self that has the one-for-the-other embedded in its existence. However, the difficulties which must by necessity arise from a discussion of substitution will be eased somewhat, as while I will seek to reach as full an understanding as is possible, my primary focus will be the subject that substitution forms the ground for.

Substitution is not an act *(OB*, p.117), it is before any full ego *(OB*, p.115-6). So, the question arises, as for Bergo, how can one discuss substitution, and how can such an abstract idea aid an understanding of Levinas regarding the political? As will be made clear, the subject generated from this dynamic of obsession, recurrence and substitution forms the core of how we can rethink the political with Levinas. And so, proceeding in a somewhat apophatic sense, what work does substitution do? How can it fit into a larger re-reading of Levinas? Or, to put it differently, the more helpful question is not 'what *is* substitution?', but rather, what does substitution *do*?

It is best to start with the question of what substitution does, to understand what is effectuated from substitution, theoretically speaking. Substitution is the always-already openness arising from proximity to the other that makes possible any ethics at all *(OB*, p.117), and indeed any signification. The crucial element of substitution is demonstrated here. We can see here the foundation of the quality of goodness as such, or the meaningfulness of ethical thought and speech. In this understanding, we are elected to goodness and accused, prior to any freedom or will that could claim to be original. Substitution does not simply add these onto the ego but, instead, by instantiating the schema of the other-in-me, the openness caused by proximity, and the unavoidable election to goodness, the ego is itself constituted. There is no subject that Substitution 'happens to', and no empirical event it describes *(OB*, p.110-111). The movement of substitution, of a self unbearably over-full, "stuffed with itself", forced to flee itself — transforming subjectivity into a null-site which is then cohabited by the other-in-me, before being elected to goodness by that other *(OB*, p.110-111). This leaves a subject pinned to itself, unable to escape the responsibility in accusation, with a constant recurrence of this dynamic leaving oneself backed up against itself, irreducibly responsible, persecuted by virtue of this responsibility before any commitment.

The two aspects it is particularly vital to discuss here are the concept of election to goodness and the concept of finite freedom, as Levinas describes it here. These two concepts are intimately connected. The finitude of freedom is due to the anarchic demand of goodness. In all of Levinas' ethical descriptions we are ethically obligated, however, one is, particularly in previous works like Totality and Infinity, left with the question of why and how this obligation comes about and why it has primacy over ontology? Levinas attempts to answer this with the discussion of infinity and the sheer demand of the face, but there is never a particular reason why this demand is meaningful. Substitution provides an explanatory role for why the other makes demands of me by exploring how any ethical demand can be made whatsoever. For Levinas, ethics only makes sense if we are already committed to goodness as a result of the other in me. Goodness comes from an elsewhere, it is not a dynamic of auto-affection but seems

to reciprocally generate and be generated by the possibility of the proximity of another. We are committed to goodness before any choice needs to be made, before any choice *can* be made, it is an assignation in ultimate passivity, in what Levinas refers to as finite freedom.

However, while it makes possible goodness, communication in proximity, and signification, this is in a sense an unbearable and tyrannical assignation. The election to goodness is described through a reading of the biblical story of Job, who suffers after no sin or action of his own. In a similar way, I am subject to the persecution of the other and called to duty before any agreement, before any exchange between me and the other *(OB*, p.122). In addition to being ultimately and individually obligated to the other, we also find ourselves as late arrivals to a world that is already happening and that we also have to support and give an account for. Levinas is perhaps giving a rather sunny perspective when he describes this as "a divine discomfort" *(OB*, p.122). There is always an obligation on me to give the bread from my mouth and expose my cheek to the smiter. This hardly seems like justice or ethics, but rather, as others have pointed out (Critchley, Rose), seems like a traumatic and horrific concept of justice, requiring complete self-abnegation and sacrifice, beyond what justice requires, an act of psychic self-mutilation. How can a hostage enact justice or be expected to treat their captor in line with such radical self-sacrifice? Additionally, this discussion of substitution seems to be engaging in a level of abstraction that makes it difficult to comprehend any concrete or material analysis coming from this. How can we conceive a material ethical engagement coming from this non-event?

This partially describes the situation the subject we are investigating finds itself in, but there are certain other insights and observations that alter this rather dim outlook and can help us understand Levinas' understanding of freedom as well as duty. The first vital passage to examine is from the end of substitution, where Levinas in a very short passage contextualises substitution, emphasising that it cannot be lived, or at least, not in the manner described previously: "To be sure — but this is another theme — my responsibility for all can and has to manifest itself in limiting itself. The ego can, in the name of this unlimited responsibility, be called on to concern itself with itself" *(OB*, p.128). This clarifies that substitution, while the ground for ethics and responsibility, cannot be simple unending sacrifice, not least because, for Levinas, we have to be able to judge between the other and the third *(OB*, p.128). I will develop this idea of limiting responsibility, of failing goodness (how can one but fail to fulfil the infinite?) in the final chapter with Tessman.

We come, then, to the following position, where the ego is not suffering Job-like trials per se but is persecuted before any action taken or agreement made, is a hostage. This exemplifies one of the most important aspects of the subject in much of Levinas' work: it is not free. That is to say, his subject is entirely opposed to the subject of idealism, the autonomous and sovereign subject who has access to transparency and knowledge. It is impossible to think a Fichtean subject under these conditions *(OB*, p.124). This idea of an unfree subject, with a freedom called into question from the start, or at least a rejection of the absolute freedom of idealism, is a theme running from *RH* through *FC* and *TI*. However, for Levinas, this freedom is not a freedom that would first exist but then be violated, nor an unlimited freedom operating in a limited sphere, instead, this freedom is from the start limited, not in a way that violates the ego, but is the very "pneuma" of the self *(OB*, p. 124). This seems to be corroborated by the assessment of freedom in Totality and Infinity, where freedom is shown to be murderous in its very exercise (*TI*, p.p.84), and that, by revealing this, the other limits my freedom, but also grounds it, and makes it meaningful (*TI*, p.p.203).

This reversal of a free subject of idealism is of great importance and sets a vital piece of the groundwork for the subject I am attempting to construct. We end up with an ego that is persecuted, possessing only finite freedom, and is affected by exteriority. This is entwined with and issues from an anarchic dedication to the good, placing ethics as first philosophy and together providing a framework for a subject which is not an absolutely free, independent, or, to use Levinas' terminology, heroic, will, but is from the beginning oriented towards the other. The other is not an afterthought, and ethics is not relegated or sublated but is the founding orientation of meaning and experience.

The Subject and its existence.

I have elaborated above how we can understand substitution not as an event or phenomenal experience, but as the pre-original and an-archic orientation of the subject towards the other that arrests me by their proximity. However, what else are we to say of this subject, who exists in the world and all its myriad objects, furnishings, and paraphernalia? The matter of labour, the experience of enjoyment and the home we construct for ourselves? Despite the abstract nature of the discussion above, we can find in Levinas a deeply material thought, rooted in phenomenology and open to an affected and nuanced subject. Some of this may not be directly relevant to Levinas' thought's final reconstruction or application, but it allows us resources to think through the subject and the world it inhabits.

Initially, we must contend with the self and its corporeality. The phenomenology entered into here is by no means separate from the discussions above or the subsequent discussions regarding the other. In fact, the corporeality of the subject and the objects of my world are intimately connected to the other. Corporeality and economy become the medium of justice to the other, the possibility of signification issuing from the other, as well as the field of signification that the other before me breaks apart, reorienting all of these items which were thought to be mine towards service to the other, redoubling and reinscribing my obligation.

The self in Levinas at every stage strives to break with the traditional western conception of the self through a constant emphasis on affect, vulnerability and embodiedness. Being in a body, being a body, forms the grounding for Levinas' conception of time in *OB*. A prime understanding of this is the discussion of time as understood through the phenomenon of ageing. The relationship with time is an experience of time lost, of diachronic time. The subject is present, and can re-call certain other presents, but the present is instantaneously past *(OB*, p.54, see also discussion in *TO)*.

This reading has two outcomes that will be key to my understanding. The first is that freedom, a free and sovereign will, is instantly undermined before it can be called upon to make a decision, before any decision is present. It is an original passivity that the will cannot rouse into action or decision but is instead a fatigue and affect that no subject endowed with reason and free will can hope to overcome completely. So, from the start, our freedom is overruled in substitution and our corporeality, our excess of life lived. Additionally, our past, which we can re-collect or re-present to ourselves, slips out of our grasp, so our ability to pull ourselves together as a whole vanishes into the past. On two counts, then, before we are asked to choose, we are subject-ed to this subjectivity. However, it is worth drawing this into an analysis of *RH* and noting that this embracing of corporeality, which is a hallmark of much of Levinas' writing, can be directly traced to the talk of corporeality in that early essay. Regarding *RH,* it is also worth pointing out that the corporeality discussed above is not utterly overwhelming, and it is not determinative in a strong sense, in the sense that the biologistic fatalism of fascism is in *RH* (*RH*, p.69). Rather, it is a conditioned freedom, where there is still something beyond blood, soil, and history, which is the other.

However, the passive flow of time does not simply have the signification of an excess of life lived in spite of itself, but it also individuates me *(OB*, p.52). It is as ageing, a oneself who is a body, experiencing that fatigue that is most my own, that we are individuated from the other. Rather than being down to some idea of the self as an autarchy to itself that I am me and not another,

it is in the corporeal fatigue and passing of time measured in wrinkles, wounds, and stretch marks that I am individuated. It is the passive undergoing of the self in obedience to life and its duration that individuates me. Additionally, this is not some privileged philosophical experience, as in Heidegger's being-towards-death, it does not inspire an active taking-over of my possibilities that are most truly my own, taking on an authentic being as a result of this experience. On the contrary, this is not an event or particular experience but is the texture of experience itself, of any possibility of experience.

But what of substitution? How does the above description of the subject coincide with the substituted subject? Levinas characterises the subject described above as "unique, irreplaceable, me and not another; it is despite itself in an obedience where there is no desertion, but where revolt is brewing" *(OB*, p.52). In this tension, between the endurance of duration and the self which undergoes it, a resolution is found in responsibility for another. In responsibility is found a point of resistance to duration, which is the time in which essence resounds, and a transcendence comes onto the scene. This not only provides an avenue for that rebellion against essence but brings to be a utopianism of a kingdom of the good which is beyond essence *(OB*, p.54). Substitution allows for this opening, which makes the subject exposed to the other in this way, as our skin is exposed to wounds. It is that we are substituted that means that life is not a simple entrapment in the passivity of time, which would be an isolated egoism (a defeated, passive ego, but an egoism all the same), but are instead exposed to an other, and obsessed by them. It is this exposure to the other in proximity that is the subject *(OB*, p.46)

The Subject qua will and economic existence

When thinking with Levinas about beings and how the subject relates to the world it finds itself in, several things are essential to note from the very beginning. The first is that the subject's interactions with the world are not relations with alterity. The phenomenal world with which we interact is different, to be sure, but a difference that is always bridgeable and negatable into the same. Objects in the world can be taken hold of and consumed, understood, utilised, or destroyed in a manner that the other simply cannot be (*TI*, p.p.43). "Space, instead of transporting beyond, simply ensures the condition for the lateral signification of things within the same" (*TI*, p.p.191). If the self can grasp things in the world and utilise them in this way, one could imagine a traditional schema of the self which would then leave the self sovereign among things, able to apply their will arbitrarily to the things of the world. An ego free beyond limit. However, this is not the subject we are working with.

The understanding of the subject I am attempting to develop is already unfree, already a passivity, and affected. We have already understood the self as embodied and afflicted with age, but, if Levinas' critique of Heidegger is that Dasein is never hungry (*TI*, p.p.132), then what of Levinas' subject? Levinas' subject, rather than grasping tools, interacting with the world in terms of projects, etc., exists on the level of enjoyment and engagement in the world. The subject is subject to needs and wants in all of its corporeality. The will to eat is not towards some end or other, but for the very enjoyment of eating, the taste of the food. We mentioned earlier the comparison Levinas makes between the comparison between a soldier and a logistics officer. For the logistics officer clothing, food, and bedding is stock and utility, not affective items, and one gets the impression that it is the forgetting of the affective nature of these items, the warmth of the clothing etc., that has played a part in the failures of western ontology. Levinas finishes his critique of Heidegger mentioned earlier by stating that "Food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation" (*TI*, p.p.134). It is not simply for these items to be grasped in abstract knowledge, as Heidegger also criticises, but nor is it to place them in some system of tools and work as Heidegger does. Instead, a key meaning of the nourishments of the world is to be found in our ability to immerse ourselves in the enjoyment of them, to enjoy them not as some biologistic impulse but in their very taste, or warmth, or softness or quenching.

However, the second aspect of the subject's economic existence that needs to be established is that the subject I have outlined is crucially always-already oriented towards the other. How can we understand a relation with beings, inhabitants of the realm of Being that defines the murderous course of western ontology, in the context of the discussion of substitution and the yearning for the beyond essence and beyond being contained therein? Crucial to this understanding is a clarifying statement Levinas makes towards the beginning of *OB*: "the way of thinking proposed does not fail to recognise Being, or treat it, ridiculously and pretentiously, with disdain, as the fall from some higher order or disorder. On the contrary, *it is on the basis of proximity that being takes on its just meaning*." (emphasis mine) *(OB*, p.16). I wish to propose two ideas that we can take from this in our discussion: first, a clarification of 'ethics before ontology', the common soundbite-friendly version of Levinas. Rather, the situation is somewhat more complicated, in the sense that ethics is the foundation of meaning, however, it is not to say that ontology is fallen, instead, ontology is not the starting point for philosophy and cannot give an account on its own. Ethics is needed as the starting point, to help understand the fundamental openness, exposure, and orientation to the other, prior to any ontology.

Another thread we can take forward from this is an interpretation of the relation between the subject and being is that of proximity giving being its just meaning. I have spoken several times

about proximity and substitution, orienting the subject towards the other. One might hear in that statement that orienting towards the other may imply an orienting away from the world of beings and towards the beyond essence. However, this does not seem to ring true on several counts. First, as was discussed in the first chapter of the present work, Levinas, particularly by the late 1950s, seems to have integrated an economic and material idea of justice into his discussions of ethics. From *ET* onwards, justice is never simply a Kantian 'good will' or a pious soul but is fundamentally economic. What this achieves in the present context is that, by orienting beings and the subject towards the other, the context of meaning and signification given by beings, and the very being of those beings, becomes oriented towards the other. This, in one sense, is uncontroversial, being similar to Heidegger's comments about a boat or a book referring to some other that made or owns it, despite their not being present (Heidegger, 1962, p.153-4). However, what we are describing here is not simply a network of reference but is instead an idea of beings being fundamentally oriented to service of the other. Bread becomes not only something which I can "live from", but refers to another who is without it, and so on. In this manner, proximity becomes determinate for the being of beings. Indeed, as it is based on proximity, the requirement to give alms and economic aid to the other is before any decision, as made clear when Levinas quotes Rabbi Yochanan, that "'to leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between the voluntary and involuntary does not apply here'" (quoted in *TI* p.201).

The other aspect of material and economic life that Levinas engages with extensively, and which will help to illuminate this aspect of Levinas further, is the discussion of works and labour. In Levinas' thought, we see that the products of labour, the works that we produce, become instantly alienated from their producer. When we apply labour and produce something, be it a painting, a radio or an idea, this item becomes free for anyone to take up and use regardless of the will that created it, and independent of any intention the creator may have had. In this way, works refer to an other who was its maker but who does not control the work's fate. One is reminded in the passage in *RH*, where Levinas speaks of an idea "divorced from its point of departure" (*RH*, p. 70). The other retains the power to change, read and modify anything that I may give them, my will and intention do not enter into it, and the producer's interiority is invaded "as by burglary" (*TI*, p.p.66-67). This, in many ways, is a simple fact of producing things. Once they are expressed or manifested, they no longer belong to my interiority and belong to the world of exteriority, that is, the world of the others. Despite the somewhat pessimistic tone, one can sense a degree of freedom afforded here. One is not burdened by one's works, they become gifts that, by the other's appropriation, can hardly be given. In this sense, I am not

defined by what I make, and though the products of my labour are alienated from me, I remain separate from them.

However, there is violence here as well. The historiographers appropriate dead wills to themselves; the survivors take works that their makers cannot answer for and turn them to their own ends. The possibility for discourse is ended, and the will of the other cannot oppose my own (*TI*, p.p.228). In this, the ability to be open to the other and their ethical demand is effaced, and they are forgotten or ignored as others, even as their works and wills are taken and accumulated. They end up treated as merely the sum of accumulated artefacts left for the conquerors, as a historical-ontological residue of flotsam and jetsam, weathered and shaped by historical tides rather than human hands. This is indicated to be the ultimate end of all wills, by the violence and suddenness of death which is always too soon and takes the will's externalisations (*TI*, p.p.41). However, perhaps this acknowledgement, this recognition of the violence done may inspire humility, or perhaps, in the vein of Benjamin's angel of history, an abiding horror at the injustice that delivered these works to us (Benjamin, 1968, p.257).

This differs from other violent economic relations. These are grouped under commerce and war. In these relations, the will does not become a mere "thing", the worker is still present behind their work, but this relation does not aim at the other as a face either (*TI*, p.229). The other is not rendered as an ethical other but becomes part of a mass, either as labour-force in a market, or as a massed force in military formation. These are ways in which the openness in proximity can be forgotten in egoism, as we discussed previously. In this way, manipulations of the market and economic force, as well as the opposition of the steel of a blade, violate the will's for-itself (*TI*, p.228). Here we see that the affective will that is despite-itself rather than for-itself, as well as experiencing living-from and nourishment, can likewise be manipulated and made vulnerable as part of these qualities. "Material things, bread and wine, clothing and the home, like the blade of steel, have a hold on the 'for itself' of the will" (*TI*, p.p.229). As Levinas reiterates, the human will is not heroic (*TI*, p.229 & *FC* 16). It can be and is violated by physical and economic violence and is in that way also vulnerable.

The Subject and the Face.

At numerous times in this work, I have skirted over a full discussion of the face and how this changes my re-thinking of Levinas. Hopefully, the brevity of these previous mentions will not lead to an excess of repetition, or at least, not more than is needed to communicate sufficiently. In order to understand the face, or to come to the understanding that will hopefully be the most

illuminating, we will return to where chapter one began, with a discussion of *RH*, which will place my initial exposition in the context of the political and help to understand what the face achieves.

As discussed when I dissented from McGettigan's thesis, the face is most simply described as "the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me" (*TI*, p.p.50). The face is not a human face, complete with eyes, nose etc., although Levinas' language can occasionally leave this ambiguous, it is the manner of approach and presentation of an absolute other. This is made particularly clear from Levinas' discussion in *PP*, where he quotes a passage in Vassili Grossman's *Life and Fate*, which remarks on the expressiveness of backs and shoulders, backs that seem to "'cry, sob, and scream'" (quoted in *PP*, p.167), demonstrating that "The face is thus not exclusively a human face." (*PP*, p.167). We can understand the face as the experience of the absolutely non-relational other, who we bear an openness to in proximity. The other remains unpredictable, ungraspable and exceeds any and all comprehension due to their opacity in alterity. Alterity here remains so absolute that even if I enter into discourse with another, neither of us are enveloped in a relationship, but rather we can always absolve ourselves from that discourse (*TI*, p.p.102). The face is also not simply a being amongst beings, or wholly accessible phenomena to be taken by perception, it is "from the first an absolute" (*TI*, p.p.215). It should still be remarked that understanding it as material and empirical is not precluded. The face asks for economic and material aid. It is not simply an abstract metaphor for duty but the stranger who comes to me with outstretched hands asking for help, protection, and sustenance.

In encountering the other, the world of the same, of furniture, artefacts, and the home, is left open, and I am no longer at home with myself or absorbed in enjoyment. I am interrupted by the face of the other and made responsible. My freedom, always already founded in finitude by the election that opens me to this challenge before any choice, is revealed "murderous in its very exercise" (*TI*, p.84), and my wealth in goods and nourishments are forfeited *(OB*, p.121). If one accepts that substitution can be forgotten, then we can perhaps say that the act of encountering a factical other which relies on the openness of substitution and proximity is the remembrance of that substituted existence, and the summoning of it in all of its acuity. As a result, we can see that the other is not simply baffling, overflowing any conception I can have, but beyond this demands from me, makes demands from a position of unscalable height. However, this height is not a simple height of one that commands but is height that comes from one who is weak, with a demand, the strength of which issues from the urgency and indigence of the one who requires it. It is the poverty and fragility of the other in the figure of stranger or orphan that is a fundamental aspect of their moral demand. The "total nudity of his defenseless

eyes" (*TI*, p.p.199) is what opens the transcendent and the first word and commandment: "you shall not commit murder" (*TI*, p.p.216).

This juxtaposition of height and transcendence alongside indigence and poverty, I contend, represents an important element of what Levinas is trying to achieve with this figure of the face. It will be illustrative here to revisit the problematic of *RH* as outlined earlier in the present work. The opposition in that work was essentially between the tradition of liberalism, which insisted on maintaining an idea of a transcendence and freedom that denied material embodied existence to the point of dishonesty, and a biologistic materialism that dismissed the liberal tradition but submitted human life to a biologistic fatalism. Within *RH*, both are criticised, liberalism as dishonest, and ignorant of the intuition of embodied existence, thereby becoming vulnerable to the crude and fatalistic thought of a certain materialism, which institutes a world of masters and slaves, obsessed with expansion and exploitation.

When considering the above description of the 'epiphany' of the face in the context of *RH*, there is a thematic continuity, and we can see that the face can be read as the condition for a transcendence and freedom, which are thought otherwise from the field of traditional politics. When thought in line with these themes of transcendence, freedom and fate, the face appears to escape these categories as they are usually utilised in philosophical and political thought. What is achieved in this formulation is not simply a re-adjustment of liberalism but rather a wholly different grounding. The form of the Face results in the following conditions of transcendence, freedom, and corporeality: the source of transcendence is not the free flight of reason, unencumbered with the world, but rather is the challenge of the completely other. In this manner, it remains corporeal, the face is not a purely transcendental metaphor but is a real source of ethical demand in the world, yet is beyond any world I could lay claim to. Freedom is then limited by the questioning of the other, by the ethical appeal in the face of the other that gives that freedom weight. In this way, we can see that the condition for transcendence, which is not simply the fatalism of matter or impersonal history but is something wholly otherwise which does allow for escape, is at the same time what limits our freedom, not through accepting enchainment to our bodies, but instead is a nonviolent calling into question and issuance of ethical imperatives.

We are exposed to the transcendent 'beyond', not in a manner that validates our free play of reason or in a way that appears fraudulent and deceitful. Instead, we are humbled by it and are in service to the ethical demands that issue from it. Understood like this, we can think of the subject who is susceptible to the face and its demand as the political subject that can potentially

instantiate a politics thought otherwise, which disarms an essential aspect of fascist ideology while not failing as simple liberalism did. What this politics can become, and whether it is valid to refer to it as political in a traditional sense, remains to be seen.

Exteriority and the Third

Culture, History, and the Face

I have spoken above, at many points, on the 'beyond'. The face and the other is 'beyond' and 'transcendent'. It is all well and good to describe the ways the other is beyond being, but to understand the meaning of this statement and thereby its potential problematics, we will need to examine what exactly Levinas means by being in this context. The realm of being and totality is one of contingency, logistics and economy, as examined previously. However, it is also the realm of history, culture, race, religion and power. When trying to describe an ethics that impinges on or displaces politics, it is vital that we understand this basic encounter and in a way that it can be brought to bear on these themes. This follows quite directly from the previous discussion on Levinas and race and will attempt to see how far we can get within Levinas' oeuvre towards formulating an adequate response to these challenges.

The traditional account goes something like this: in the encounter with the other, both myself and the other stand outside history and culture, the alterity of the other shines forth as an ethical appeal which is regardless of historical and cultural contingency, and "without complexion" *(OB*, p.49). The accompanying conclusion, which yields an ahistorical account that refuses materiality and leads to an attitude of 'not seeing colour', can lead to profound insensitivity about race due to this abstract and formalist account. Some of my response to this problem will come when I discuss the third but, for the time being, I will concentrate on reading the face differently, both in its content and position within Levinas' taxonomy of the encounter.

In order to understand the place of history and the racialisation it instantiates in the description of the other, we have to take into account the philosophical implications and pitfalls I take Levinas' theory as trying to avoid (these preliminary formulations will be expanded on with Da Silva in a later chapter). When Levinas places the face and the other outside of history, he is trying to avoid two undesirable outcomes that he takes to befall traditional western accounts. The most pressing failing that Levinas ascribes to history is the subjection of individual others to impersonal 'historical forces', which eliminates the alterity of and subsumes both me and the

other as objects of a historical dialectic or teleology (*TI*, p.p.55). This, in many ways, is analogous to what Levinas finds so repugnant in *RH*, that is the submission to fate, moreover a fate that is often violent and cruel. When the dignity and freedom of the other are rejected in this way, all manner of actions can be condoned as 'authentic' and right on the basis of this judgment of history. This idea of the other becoming object has also been touched on when considering the historiographer's treatment of works. As in my discussion then, it is worth linking this with Benjamin's recognition of the terrible violence of history.

We can see here how this issue, of the other being absorbed into the same, which is totalised by instrumental reason and is rendered transparent to the same, applies, to some extent, to all of the ideas mentioned here. Indeed, it would seem that some critics who are concerned about the contentlessness of the abstract other erasing difference run a very real risk of removing the alterity of a different and more radical kind. If we consider any of these structural forces determinative, we lose the particular alterity of the other as it is totalised and thereby lose some of the other's dignity, height, and agency as they are negated into comprehensible identity. This is not by any means to say that a refusal of identity is the correct method, the problems mentioned above remain serious, however, I must again say that these identities and histories are not the first or the last word. The other must maintain a degree of the beyond because that beyond demands its instantiation in the material world, which requires the negotiation and disruption of its categories, identities, and historiography.

The other problem Levinas is attempting to evade is related more specifically to the idea of a judgment of history. Here we approach Levinas' concept of the eschatological impact of the other. The encounter with the other brings all of history for judgment, and I am judged outside of history. There is an anxiety in Levinas that ethical judgment ought to rest on a basis that is not historically contingent; we are at every moment open to this judgment and ethical demand (*TI*, p.p.25). We are thrown into a world after the fact but must be able to judge this world by a standard that is beyond it. This standard is the face and the substitution which allows us openness to that proximity. (Although we must, in a caveat here, reassert the materiality of the face and the other, against characterisations of it as abstract.) In a sense, resigning to the judgment of history becomes an egoism writ large, whereby the judgment of the other is occluded in favour of a play of the same, which is never interrogated by true alterity and forgets its responsibilities.

So, we can understand here that Levinas, for all the problems it might cause us, does have some good reasons to keep the other beyond history. The question then becomes, how do we proceed

in a manner that avoids these same things Levinas is trying to avoid but still be able to engage in discussions of history, and come to a greater understanding of history's place within Levinas' thought? There is a potential move outside of this impasse, between abstract, ahistorical others and determined objects of history. Levinas writes that the other is beyond history but not beyond the past and the present (*TI*, p.22). What could this mean? How can we distinguish these?

We can understand the other having a past as a unique element in their alterity. The other has a past and time that are unknown and ungraspable to me. The other's infinite alterity contains as an aspect the possession of a unique and incomprehensible past and inner life. What we might understand as a history and a heritage is contained within this unassailable black box that is the other. What is present is not a history as a commonality within a unity, but the unique past that only adds to the opacity of the other. Although it ought to be mentioned that the possession of a history is not the sole or even primary determinant for the alterity of the other, if I and another were bought into existence ex nihilo, without past or memory, I would nonetheless be obsessed by the other, and be obligated in alterity.

Additionally, we can understand that, much like what was said regarding ontology, a more traditional idea of history may not be completely anathema, but instead that it is neither the first or last word and is always preceded by the alterity of the other in their need and height. History comes on the scene, and can be applied to the other, but the other is never determined by this, or simply an object for it, but history becomes a tool for discourse and a means for enacting the need of the other. Alternatively, to put it differently, if the other approaches us in our openness to proximity in a position of need and indigence and lays ethical obligations on us before we can consent, that particular need will be historically contingent. That is to say, at this stage of the analysis at least, that we can understand the demand of the other historically in a similar way as we earlier understood it materially and economically. In other words, much as the other's ethical demand is not caused by some empirical lack, but there is regardless an obligation to offer the other material aid in response to their material needs, the obligation to help the other does not come from history or its judgment, rather the concrete response to the obligation must be responding to real and historically instantiated need if it is not to be the simple charity of the "pious soul" described in *ET*. How this might occur, and any specifics beyond this, are not to be found within Levinas, and so will be continued in the next chapter as I utilise other thinkers to provide this imaginary.

The face also enacts a vital role in how Levinas discusses the idea of cultural pluralism. Meaning and Sense is one of the essays by Levinas that provokes the most significant concerns around his eurocentrism and disparaging attitudes to non-European cultures, as we saw with the earlier discussion of the McGettigan piece. These, for the most part, are concerns that I share. Levinas seems to envision in this work Western culture and the Western philosophical tradition as being uniquely able to understand cultures and, in a shocking display of arrogance, claims that they even understand cultures better than they understand themselves (*MS*, p. p.58). However, a different reading might be introduced here.

Levinas is concerned with the opposition between a western thought that claims the platonic privilege of access to the ideal and an almost nihilistic relativism that does not distinguish between a vast array of cultures (*MS*, p., 84). Levinas wants to maintain some of the Platonism in the former, thereby avoiding an empty pluralism, but does not want to fully rehabilitate Platonism (*MS*, p., 101). He thereby comes to a point where numerous meanings, culturally conditioned, are present but oriented by a sense of the ethical as the condition for civilisation and culture as such. It is by the ethical demand in the face of the other, which is abstracted from and separate to culture, that we can judge culture by. However, here Levinas begins to speak in a way that seems to betray a sense of cultural superiority and arrogance. Where Levinas speaks of judging cultures, from his position in metropolitan France, one gets an echo of the metropole eager to judge the colonised, and thereby justify their domination. It should be noted that Levinas does not seem unaware of this danger (*MS*, p. p.101), yet he seems not to attune his conclusions to heed these potential consequences. Instead, his conclusion simply ends on the possibility to judge cultures based on the ethical foundation of culture and meaning, which he places beyond culture.

However, this seems quite odd in the context of other discussions of the face. Based on the other works I have examined so far, it seems somewhat alien to think of the face as enabling and empowering us purely to judge. Instead, when we have examined this previously, the emphasis has been on me being judged and called into question. The face and the ethical is to be sure necessary for judgment and for my ability to judge in a sense, however, this is always a secondary concern. The emphasis is always on my freedom called into question, my subjectivity shaken, and my temporality disrupted. It is unclear why this does not apply when judging cultures. The alternative reading I wish to propose here is to accept certain parts of Levinas' argument, that the ethical precedes culture, and that a simple pluralism fails to treat cultural difference effectively, and even that this does provide a basis on which to begin to think about a standard which is apart from culture. But crucially, if this is a relation with a face, it is I who is

judged first and foremost and are reduced to a passivity, not an active position of authority from whom judgments may pass. If meaning and its culture is to be oriented with a sense of generosity and responsiveness to the other, then it is clear that what arises cannot be a judgment of culture, but rather assumes a role more like that of discourse, which, as between me and the other, has a first word which is neither 'yes' nor 'no' (*TI*, p.p.42).

The above is not to say that the relation from me to a culture is that of the face to face, or that a culture could possess the ineffability of the other in any way. What I do mean to say is that if Levinas is going to use the obligation of the face as applying to a culture in order to criticise it, that obligation of service and passivity ought also to apply to the very criticism and judgment one would raise, so the freedom of one's supposedly ethical criticism would itself be subject to those ethical standards implied in any interaction with the other. It will be difficult here to discuss further without an investigation into the third, and so we will break off our discussion of culture and history as our discussion is in danger of surpassing the confines we have set for it, that is, as it relates to the face specifically, and from here proceed with our reading of the third. Additionally, this conclusion will remain provisional until it is developed further in a later chapter.

The Third.

Levinas tells us, towards the end of Otherwise than Being, that, until the third enters, "there would have not been any problem" *(OB*, p.157). If this is the case, we must look on the previous fifty or so pages of the present work rather sheepishly and look with some foreboding on what is still left to discuss. In seriousness, however, this passage is highly illustrative. The relation between me and the other has a simplicity, the obligation is always already present, and my openness to it through proximity sends forth the demand of the other, which is put to me before any decision of mine. We are here, however, dealing with a twofold "problem of the third". To investigate the problem, I will first revisit the conclusions of the brief discussion of the third that took place in chapter one. From that reading, I will isolate the aspects of the third that seem not only necessary and valuable but are consistent with the readings immediately above.

To begin, I will investigate Levinas' discussions of the third and examine them one by one, before attempting to synthesise these understandings of the third into a format we can take forward in our discussions. These works have quite different understandings of the third; indeed, *ET* does not even use that terminology, but they respond to the same anxiety about the limitations of the dyadic face to face structure we have previously discussed. This will cover some of the same

ground as previously, but rather than an overview which looked at the third as exhibiting a broader problem within Levinas' work, this will be a more focused investigation of the third as such and begin a process of re-conceptualising of this figure.

Ego and Totality, published in 1954, is most helpful in understanding the core anxiety that motivates Levinas to discuss the third at such length across his work. The terminology and some of the conceptual moves in this essay are not quite so relevant, but the predominant concern with the dyad, as opposed to wider society, will prove useful regarding the present discussion. There are important distinctions between this and the later works. For example, the dyad is primarily described in amorous terms rather than the face to face we find in the bulk of his work, particularly after this point. Despite this, we can consider the same dynamics arising and understand how Levinas' attempts to resolve them here bear similarities to his later work.

Levinas approaches the discussion primarily through the themes of piety, pardon, and two visions of society: the intimate society and the true society. In the pious account of certain religious tendencies, Levinas identifies a deficiency. In an account whereby I can simply ask for or grant a pardon, the intention of the action cannot be outrun by that action and its consequences. This works in the intimate society of the couple, where the other freedom concerned is offended but not wounded (*ET*, p.p.31) because they retain the ability to absolve the wrong. Levinas even goes as far as to say that because of this, the wrong is not even properly speaking violence. This capacity for absolution restores the ego that did a wrong and allows it to become absolute. In the intimate society, the ego remains completely free and can disown the wrong it has done. For Levinas in this work, the intimate society is just another interiority, no longer exposed to an absolutely other freedom.

However, this is shown to be a mistaken representation of the nature of pardon and wrong. We are never simply a two, in relation with only each other, but we are in fact in the presence of others we are in relations with, relations that we are not privy to, which complicate the role of pardon (*ET*, p.p.29-31). By pardoning the other even in an intimate society, I can do wrong to a third with whom the other is in relation. Once I have acted, already that action escapes my intention in the objective outcome of that action. In this way, it is impossible for my guilt to be absolved and for my lack of intention to suffice for justice. It is this true society, instantiated by the third, which forces me to leave the two and enter into a community where justice, and here Levinas means strictly economic justice, can occur.

As mentioned previously, several aspects of this essay differ significantly from Levinas' other work regarding the third, primarily in his discussion of the intimate society. This differs in

numerous ways from the description of the face to face, making comparison somewhat difficult. The intimate society as a society of love does not equate to the dyadic encounter with the face, and additionally, there seems to be a denigration of some of the core principles of the face to face, such as separation from society/history and the asymmetry he discusses in other works. However, we can map the dynamics described in this work onto our broader discussion. The fundamental anxiety here is how to do justice to one that I cannot face, and to whom I can do injustice entirely unintentionally, and more crucially, what if my doing right by one wrongs another?

Levinas' answer in this essay is, first, to turn away from the interiority of the intimate relation and instead to turn to the exteriority of an interlocutor, which is more akin to the face-to-face relation we discussed above. This is necessary because complete immersion in the totality of the realm of the third becomes dominated by psychoanalysis and sociology, by which everything is determined, and all sincerity and straightforwardness becomes impossible (*ET*, p.p.34). We see here the need for a balance between the participation in society, but without the two parties becoming subsumed by society's totalising influence, the concept of balance and the use of language here bear strong resemblances to the discussion in *RH* once again.

The second step is to insist on the economic and material nature of justice. If your intention becomes irrelevant, or at best, insufficient, for any pardon, or rectifying of wrongs, then justice must be delivered materially, as this surpasses the paltry excuse of 'I didn't will that'. He also here introduces the need for measure. His attempt to find a solution to a problem of needing comparison and measure without reducing the alterity of the other is found to be in the form of money (*ET*, p.p.44-45). Addressing the previous ideas discussed, money is presented as possessing the ability to quantify the other and any wrong which might have been done to them without subsuming them under this value. The value is individualised and can yet be understood in comparable terms. This is certainly a novel idea, but its lack of inclusion in later texts besides vague references to "commerce" gives the impression of an idea still being worked out. It is difficult to see how money would in fact avoid the totalisation of the other. Indeed, money's primary influence is to erase the other's particularity and reduce it to a simple numerical figure, which might be particular in a sense, but is ultimately the anonymised figure of value that has as its measure all other things. As a Marxist analysis would have it, one can be paid a certain amount for some productive activity, but what that productive activity might be is immaterial when it is translated into the universal value-form of currency. Levinas himself seems to acknowledge this in his writing on works in *TI* (p.76).

From the above, we can take forward the inadequacy of a dyadic relation regarding practical ethics, and the need for ethics to be applied socially and materially. The other thing that it will be vitally important to bear in mind is the delicate balance, which is an ethics that participates socially and recognises these complicating factors but does not simply subsume the other into a totalising politics or economics. Instead, what is developed is an understanding of the situation as one where the other is outside of and beyond these factors and recognises the impossibility of ethical action that rests solely on a Kantian good will.

I will address the third party in *TI* only briefly, as its treatment is only somewhat brief. The main section dealing with this problem is on "the Other and the Others", which bears strong similarities to the discussion in *ET*, while containing some important novel developments. Levinas continues the theme of love of a couple as the end of society, where communication "loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter and cooing" (*TI*, p.p.213). However, here we have an interesting discussion of the third, as it does not behave as an interruption of the two but rather is always already present in the very look of the other.

In contrast to some of the other accounts that Levinas gives, the third in *TI* is not so much an interruption as a fundamental aspect of the face. Levinas states that the third looks at me in the face of the other before me, and it is in the light of this public sphere, I experience the face and its demand. As Levinas puts it, "the thou is posited before a we" (*TI*, p.p.213 italics in original). The poverty and destituteness of the other are first before a public multiplicity before whom I undertake my action, but additionally, the face is an exhortation (ibid.), the face commands me not only to do justice to them but to do justice for all of the others that their destitution speaks to. It is a prophetic word and exhortation to do social justice, not to simply remain in the dyad. This form of the others is quite different from the other accounts we are examining. In this case, we can see that there is no separate 'third party', with their own status and dynamics, giving rise to the question of whether this idea of the third is a necessary one, or if it is accounted for simply in the face of the other. However, despite these differences with the other accounts, we will see that once this has been elaborated, it is possible to create some kind of synthesis between them, and further taking this holistic approach to Levinas's comments on this topic will solve some problems that appear in particular accounts.

Levinas' further characterisation of this phenomenon specifically as a fraternal complicates this understanding with two issues. That is to say, it is a community of brothers united by a father, a schema that monotheism is the expression of (*TI*, p.p.214). this framework is problematic for our account in two ways. First, all humans are fraternal, united, or perhaps it would be more

accurate to say 'connected', as they still maintain their separation and alterity in this form, under one father. The figures here are solely and conspicuously male, in a manner that is troubling to say the least. This is then compounded further by the assertion that this connection to a father is monotheism (*ibid*). We have discussed these previously, so we will not dwell for longer than is necessary.

As with the discussion of *MS*, it will first be necessary to understand precisely what work these concepts are doing in Levinas' account before we can understand how to avoid the problems they cause. For the "we" and the others to be present in the look of the face, Levinas has to come up with a manner in which the other, whose alterity is absolute, can somehow be a referent for, or be connected with, all of the others. There seems to be an attempt at a kind of universalist humanism that would allow the recognition of each individual other as not subsumed into a system or genus. However, additionally, one that would guarantee the status of others universally, and moreover imply that this status, and its associated ethical obligation, is shared in some way universally. Additionally, the description allows it to be tied in with the discussion of fecundity and the family at the end of *TI*.

In many ways this is Levinas, once again, attempting to tread a careful line, running a fine risk, but attempting to resolve it by an imperfect mechanism. However, we are able to review this problem from a different vantage point and with the resources of his later work at our disposal. Taking *TI* in isolation makes it difficult to find ways to avoid or move beyond these problematic sections due to the important work they do here. As a result, it will be necessary to refer to the analysis of the face that we made in the context of *OB* and read the face in relation to substitution and proximity. On this reading, one can imagine the presence of the third in the face of the other, but not as some referent to a category of brother or a unicity under fatherhood, but instead to conceive of the face as the very exposedness to of proximity, as a result of the pre-original substitution. Additionally, if we further understand the face, and the experience of the face-to-face, as that which reminds us of the demand of substitution (understood as something that can be forgotten to a fault), then we can potentially understand the others in the face as the face reminding us of the pre-original exposure and obligation to the other as such. This allows us to utilise the flexibility afforded by the abstract nature of the other in substitution to allow for a universal recognition of alterity while avoiding the paternalistic and exclusive schema of fraternity and monotheism.

We now come to what is perhaps the most substantial work examining the third, the discussion found in "From the Saying to the Said, Or the Wisdom of Desire" in *OB*. This presents the most

fleshed-out and mature description of the third and the description written with substitution explicitly in mind. As a result, this will be the most crucial text within this section and will form the base of my modified account, largely intact, notwithstanding the amendments I will make per the above discussions. This text in the main covers similar ground to the previous ones, however, there are a few key passages and asides which allow us to radically reconsider the third as opposed to traditional reading. This is made possible due to how our reading is uniquely complemented by *OB*. This work's incessant saying and unsaying, tying and unravelling, allows us to pick a thread, follow it, and pick out the reading from the multiplicitous offerings to allow us the reading that most suits the current project. My reading will initially outline the main argument before picking out key passages that problematise this account before attempting to reconcile our reading with portions of the previous texts.

The third in this text occupies a vital part in Levinas' overall discussion in *OB*, in fact, it is the move to the third that explains the very possibility of the discussion and descriptions found in *OB*. As noted at the beginning of this section, the third gives rise to philosophy and the problem itself. If everything remained on the level of substitution and the other, one would occupy a reality that would remain entirely anterior and before any question or said, so discussion would be impossible. There would only be a saying unable to be betrayed into a said. The third, however, disrupts this simple one for the other and requires some kind of representation and ability for discourse, while aiming to ensure that this discourse and knowing does not overcome the alterity of the other. As Levinas cryptically describes it, it requires a comparison of incomparables *(OB*, p.158). The third is not, as in previous works, simply another consideration or a method of avoiding an angelic I-Thou relation, but is the very possibility and necessity for language, representation, and philosophy. This initial relationship of the one for the other is disrupted and is made uneasy by the third, who makes it impossible for me to engage in a simple dyadic obligation, and irreversibly alters the situation and disrupts the intimate demand of the other.

So, what are the characteristics of this? What features does it possess, and how do these compare to the descriptions of the third discussed in the works above? We have already discussed the structural role this plays in the context of *OB*, that is, as the ethical call that brings the self into the realm of the said, justice and measure, while not allowing this realm to rest on itself, but always recognised as issuing from an anarchic ethics. On the understanding in *OB*, we see the development of a twofold idea of the third. First, there is the neighbour of my neighbour, the other of the other to whom I also owe justice, in a manner that we can relate quite directly to some of the other discussions *(OB*, p.157). However, additionally, we can understand the third

here as referring to the sense in which ethics changes when removed from the immediacy of substitution, that is, a general, non-empirical idea of 'thirdness' *(OB*, p.158). This understanding expresses how ethical obligation and action occur before not just me and the other, but before all of humanity, which remains impartial and independent, a third observer that gives birth to the possibility of disinterested action *(OB*, p.159). The third-ness described here can be most helpfully read as the sense that it is never simply me and the other, and that there is, seen or unseen, present or absent, an entire world of others before whom I act, and who are affected by my action. In many ways, the empirical existence of any particular third necessitates the third-ness which permeates my activity and existence, yet this thirdness is always already disrupting and introducing a tension to my relationship with the other. Neither of these are prior to the other, there is no empirical entrance of the third, but also the abstract third-ness is dependent on the possibility of others besides the other *(OB*, p.158).

The Third and Betrayal

In *OB*, this realm is also fundamentally one of betrayal; betrayal of meaning in saying/said, betrayal of the illeity of the other, and a betrayal of the demand of substitution. This is the realm where substitution can be forgotten, and egoism can run rampant *(OB*, p.128), with the institutions supposedly necessitated by the third - the state, commerce etc. - turning upon their own axes and gravitation *(OB*, p.159). It will now be necessary to understand how Levinas foresees the betrayal progressing, as well as how it can be, and to what extent it should be, limited.

The saying and the said ties to much of Levinas' previous discussions. The theme of my meaning and intent being lost in the act of vocalisation or writing is a familiar one when viewed alongside other works I send out into the world. In the said, the uprightness and straightforwardness of saying is lost, and my intent becomes irrelevant before the others *(OB*, p.168). However, more than this, the codifying of the saying into the said also entails entering into a common language and common rules of legibility, coherence, and logic. In this alterity is exposed and reduced by its entrance into coherence and thematisation. It is a betrayal that philosophy is called on to mediate and reduce *(OB*, p.152), but one that might be troubling to our account. Levinas seems, on an initial reading, to cede representation to philosophy, and upholds the necessity of rigorous and thematic meaning that is on a certain reading a repudiation of affect and is instead formal and can lead to an uneasy alliance between philosophy and the state, enforced by doctors and asylums *(OB*, p.170).

Levinas discusses the manner in which the system of the said, and its betrayal of saying in its bringing of everything into a system of coherence, has a political element. Levinas enters into something of an almost Foucauldian analysis of how philosophy, as the discipline called upon to understand this coherence and logic, can become allied with state power, indicating an intertwining of the political and of language *(OB*, p.169-171). The entrance of things into the light of coherence and ontology calls for a coherence and logical rigour, which can become an axis of state power and regulation. We can also see this discussion over expression and coherence cross over into the analysis we saw from Moten in the previous chapter, seeing how approved forms of discourse are married to state power and white supremacy, and philosophy's role in that dynamic. This allows us to understand Levinas' ideas around the saying and said, particularly regarding its relation to state power, as well as considering philosophical projects as such in the process, whether it is possible for any philosophy to escape this role.

However, Levinas himself recognises the position he is in, when he has expounded the totalisation of the logos, and the inability to escape this totalisation, and wonders if he has not "encircled our position from all sides?" *(OB*, p. 169). Indeed, in his description of the universality and simultaneity of discourse, it seems that nothing can interrupt or escape it. Even objections, and things lost, can be retraced and assembled, made into coherent themes that erase alterity and preserve unity. However, as is so often the case in Levinas, a window to transcendence is left ajar, one that we may find need to prop open a little further in order to secure it.

Philosophy is called upon to reduce the betrayal of saying in the said and ensure that sincerity remains *(OB*, p.152). However, philosophy also, to this end, institutes reason, a systematising whereby what is said is present within the context of the third, and communication and essence generally. When saying becomes the said which operates within essence and being, alterity becomes impossible. Philosophy is called upon to circumscribe "the life of the approach" and measure "obligations before the third party with justice and knowledge" *(OB*, p.168). However, Levinas points out that philosophy does not operate unhindered and alone, does not simply enter everything into reason and systematicity, but is instead followed at every step by scepticism, which brings back the diachrony of meaning and representation, which is the separation between myself and the other, even if philosophy gets the last word *(OB*, p.168).

Levinas then notes that despite the apparent unassailable nature of the totalisation of discourse, as the very use of language implies "a meaning distinct from that which comes to signs from the simultaneity of systems and the logical definition of concepts" *(OB*, p.169-170). Language and the said always presuppose the possibility of an approach that is necessary before any word that

can be uttered. This diachrony and refusal of absolute coherence and simultaneity is faced with an attempted reversal by the violence of philosophy and the state, which attempts to suppress subversive discourse, and makes "reason and knowledge force and efficacity" *(OB*, p.170). But all of the attempted suppression of the disruptions and intervals never recuperate the breaks, the attempts to thematise and integrate them reverse the discontinuity that issues from the basic distance and difference between myself and the other. Even in the book, even in the book that Levinas wrote and that I now read, "the reference to the interlocutor permanently breaks through the text that the discourse claims to weave in thematising and enveloping all things" *(OB*, p.170). The return of scepticism indicates that structures of logic and reason are fundamentally not the ultimate framework of meaning, and that these structures will always require repression for the universalism of their meaning (an interesting counterpoint to the more naive view given in *RH*). For Levinas, there is always an alliance of logic with politics.

If we consider the violence discussed above that is necessary to maintain the betrayal, the violence that enforces it, and that issues from the state, this clearly gives us much to consider when thinking about how this betrayal is to be minimised. It also requires us to consider how philosophy, philosophy understood as what maintains discourse legible to the third while minimising the betrayal of proximity that allows saying, is to operate in relation to the political. If discourse and difference are not to be smothered under a universal discourse that erases alterity and commits violence on those who do not conform to the frameworks of logic and coherence imposed by that state, then it will require a radical rethinking. For Levinas, the violence of the state here seems largely unavoidable. As a result, it falls to us to consider whether a state that does not engage in this repression is possible, and, if not, how we might imagine a state of affairs that keeps the balance mentioned above. Moreover, how can this minimise the violence that maintains it? This may not only demand a rethinking of the state but also of a different philosophy that does not become the violent partner of an enforced and imperialist reason.

The other two betrayals mentioned above, that of the alterity of the other and the demand of substitution, are deeply interlinked. Through the entrance of the third, and the institutions it founds, the other is no longer an absolute incomparable but is instead a comparable incomparable, and the demand of substitution is to some extent moderated by this need for measure and comparison. As we have noted previously, substitution has to manifest itself by limiting itself, and the third plays a role in this. The institutions that arise necessarily betray, to a greater or lesser extent, the alterity of the other and the origin of the ethical as such in substitution. As Levinas says, these institutions, such as the state, commerce, etc. are always at

risk of having their centre, origin, and orientation turned inwards, existing merely for their own propagation, leading to an absolute forgetting of the obligation to the other in a kind of egoism divorced from the ethical.

From this, I infer several things. First, that a certain betrayal seems necessary, or rather, an absolute fidelity to substitution in a dyadic mode seems untenable, and, in order to move beyond that, the demands and exposure of proximity must be mediated to some extent. Second that, ideally, this betrayal ought to be minimised, as the less the betrayal, the less the chance that the ethical will simply be forgotten by those forms of totality and ontology that it has given rise to. The hope here is to protect the ethical imperative issued in proximity from being overrun by these institutions that become existent for their own aggrandisement. As a result, we can finally suggest that if the betrayal indicated above issues from the institutions of the third, and that despite being necessary, this ought to be minimised as far as possible, we can also suggest that certain formations of institutions indicate a greater or lesser degree of betrayal, and a greater or lesser danger of that betrayal becoming absolute. This insight will be vital in considering in what sense political forms are justifiable on the Levinasian reading we have expounded here, and which are incompatible not just with the ideas discussed in the context of the third, but the very idea of the self and its affectivity and existence. It might seem odd, when I go on to develop an anti-political conclusion, given my acceptance of the betrayal and, to an extent, mediation of the other by the third, if one considers that it may be just this mediation itself which constitutes the political realm. Granted, this may on some level qualify as such and hold some kind of contradiction, however, if the betrayal is truly minimised, then this resulting idea of the political ought to be so weak as to be the political in name only.

This apparent contradiction may not be as straightforward as it initially seems, however. In the first chapter of the present work, I addressed two curious asides Levinas gives in *OB* regarding the third: "justice remains justice only, in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest" *(OB*, p.159), and that the institutions supposedly necessitated by the third cannot amount to "legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn" *(OB*, p.159). With these two brief comments, largely unexpanded on in the text, the theme of the balance I have mentioned throughout this project is once again bought to the fore. However, more than this, I take these clarifying remarks to indicate several key aspects that will impact my later conclusions. First, it explicitly emphasises that the betrayal I have discussed in this section cannot be allowed to become complete; second, I take this to indicate that the third and the other cannot simply be held at arm's length, addressed only through institutions that

render discourse and proximity impossible. Regarding the first passage, might one not also suggest that this distinction, between the third and the other, that is so often identified as depending on distance is not quite as solid as it is presented elsewhere? That perhaps, other than the betrayal of politics that threatens the possibility of proximity, there is a different, utopian way of being together collectively?

To review, the third is the always present interruption of the simple face-to-face relation with the other, in which my obligation to the other, as previously described, ceases to be a simple dyadic or personal ethics, but this obligation and my actions it relates to become social. This alteration means that one not only has to enquire about the obligation of myself to the other, but my relation to the other other, that is, the third. But to add further complexity, one also must consider how my obligation to the other may contravene or otherwise fail my obligation to the third, or vice versa. Even forgiveness may wrong a third party of whom I may or may not be aware. This dynamic of interrelated, potentially conflicting obligations that exist and can be responded to materially, remove from relevancy any intention I might have, but emphasises the material impact on others besides any pious intention I may have. This is the problem of the third, this problem of society or community. How do we conceive of a solution to this problem? For Levinas, the problem calls out for numerous answers, as I outlined previously. On a weak reading: comparison, comprehension, judgment, weighing. We have seen how Levinas then develops this into Institutions, law, philosophy, and state. Additionally, justice, true justice, is in a situation where there is no distinction between the other and the third, and yet we are incapable of simply passing by the closest, and that the action of these institutions cannot simply by what we usually understand as law and state activity. This fine balancing and retuning still requires much thought and will be revisited.

Violence, Utopia and Unsaying: "In Other Words"

The final portion of my reading has the potential to be the most challenging and will focus on the final chapter (if, at fifteen pages, it can be properly called a chapter) of *OB*. "In Other Words" seems to set out to alternatingly problematise, unsay and restate many of the theses previously expounded in the rest of the book, composed in a halting and hesitant prose which adds further complications to its position in regard to the rest of the text. The tone of this chapter can at times seem rhetorical, and it is often unclear to what extent what is said and unsaid here is a genuine statement of a position. There remains the possibility that it is rather an introduction of further ambiguity or encouragement to hesitation and patience, which is necessary for the

rest of his thought. However, despite these factors, a careful reading can uncover some key passages that might reveal further substance with which to make this argument. Due to this chapter's unusual and difficult composition, its intentional complexity and cautiousness, it will be difficult to read this in a manner similar to the third, for example. My analysis will be more akin to the reading of Substitution, in that rather than following an unfolding schema, indeed, this is more of an unravelling than an unfolding, I will take particular passages and read them in greater detail. "In Other Words" will take up the bulk of this section, but as regards the themes above, it will be helpful for us to refer to other works to fully understand how these ideas are placed within the rest of Levinas' work, but also to understand how he is using them here.

Violence is a vexed question within Levinas' work. Based on the descriptions of substitution and the face, violence seems absolutely prohibited and beyond consideration. The self is hostage to the other, compelled to turn their cheek to the smiter and submit to the asymmetric relation described above. However, ambiguity is present throughout his work, both in *TI* and in other works, and within "In Other Words", this becomes even more acute. The question of violence becomes a crucial problem when we think about the interview regarding the Sabra and Shatila Massacres, where he infamously stated that "in alterity, we can find an enemy" (LR, 294). This case is not my focus here, but my discussions will pertain to it, and it ought to remain in the background of our discussions.

Beginning in *TI*, as I have touched on, we first see the assertion that the other can be a hostile force, that war remains a possibility (*TI*, p.p.224-225). The discussion here is rather frank about the prospect and considers the possibility for war as outside of totality, while recognising that this by no means categorises totality as peace. The conflict with the other is not one of true alterity however, it is instead a matter of logistics, of "ruse and ambush" (*TI*, p.p.225). The face of the other is obfuscated in this struggle but not silenced or eliminated. War is the rejection of law and community, it is an existence that runs up against a will that opposes it and "recognises, but bends the will" (*TI*, p.p.229). The discussion here is quite interesting, but its position in *TI* has some necessary limitations. For example, it discusses the situation primarily in the context of the face to face, rather than the third and the betrayals mentioned above. Where this discussion is helpful is to frame the basic idea that Levinas has of violence and war and contextualises the main discussion I will be examining, which takes place after the discussion of the third, and the relation here is the real point of contention of our reading.

My discussion of violence in this section of *OB* begins with this enigmatic passage:

"The true problem for us Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence which, without blanching in non-resistance to evil, could avoid the institution of violence out of this very struggle. Does not the war perpetuate that which it is called to make disappear, and consecrate war and its virile virtues in good conscience?" *(OB*, p.177)

At once, this does not seem like the matter-of-fact discussions in *TI,* or the purity of substitution, or the political calculus of other passages. Opposed to the rest of Levinas' writings, this seems normative, something of an instruction for how one could perhaps imagine an ethical conflict? Indeed, the analysis of the third, and the idea of an other other, imply conflicting ethical obligations and wrongs, which may cause us to see an enemy in the other. As Levinas says in the interview mentioned above, when my neighbour attacks another neighbour, alterity can become enmity. However, here we also see a direct address to a kind of audience, this is a problem not for humanity generally, but instead "for us Westerners". What are we to make of this exclusivity? Is it only Westerners (whatever this dubious category is meant to encompass) who this is demanded of? That Westerners are capable of? Moreover, reading on, does that imply an exclusivity in the "other kinship" *(OB*, p.177) mentioned later in the text? The ambiguity here is troubling, and Levinas' implications here are challenging to read. It might be thought that Levinas, in this work, as with many others, reserves interest and discussion solely with the work of the western tradition. He consistently places himself firmly within that series of thinkers and responds to them almost exclusively, with the notable exception of his engagement with Talmudic literature and Jewish philosophy. In that sense, this mentioning of an audience only makes explicit what has, to a certain extent, been implicit throughout his work.

The intrigue is not lessened by its immediate textual context, but the context gives an understanding of the philosophical and political framework Levinas refers to, and that the above passage is only part of a solution to. The above passage takes place after a discussion of a certain tradition within western philosophy. We can read this passage as Levinas drawing back and, to an extent, unsaying the influence and place of essence put forth in the previous chapter. The Western philosophical tradition, Levinas is discussing, personified here in Zeno, Spinoza, and Hegel, is characterised to an extent by a "Stoic resignation", a complete surrender to essence, a surrender without escape or transcendence, instead simply an envelopment by essence and totality *(OB*, p.176). However, Levinas asks, is essence and ontology where the subject draws itself from? As Levinas remarks elsewhere, the very opposite is the central thesis of *OB (OB*, p.140). Such an existence would be, for Levinas, an existence of struggle and violence, ready to be seduced by the "power of powers" and the violence of nationalism *(OB*, p.176). The discussion of violence above, then, is twofold. First and foremost, it clarifies what Levinas is

proposing, contra the thinkers he names, and second, it provides a manner of rethinking violence ethically, rethinking it in a way that is beyond essence. We can see not a point-blank refusal of violence, a pacifism, but the kind necessary for a thinking beyond being. The distinction here is between a pacifism that, to use Levinas' distinction, is a "being otherwise", and not a rethinking and an openness to weakness and difference, which would be an "otherwise than being" (see *OB* p.7). What is called for is not simply an outlawing of violence, violence understood as ethically necessary for the third, but has to proceed on the basis of a new kinship between others that would be "absolutely opposed to oppression" *(OB*, p.177)

The second passage comes at the end of the chapter, on the last page of *OB.* In the midst of the halting, hesitant, and yet exhilarating exhortation of that final page, comes this interjection on the "war against war":

> "A breakdown of essence is needed, so that it not be repelled by violence... For the little humanity that adorns the earth, a relaxation of essence to the second degree is needed, in the just war waged against war to tremble or shudder at every instant because of this very justice. This weakness is needed. This relaxation of virility without cowardice is needed for the little cruelty our hands repudiate." *(OB*, p.185)

In this passage and the previous one, Levinas tells us what the problem is. He appears even to go as far as to prescribe an attitude, or a task of thinking and acting. The peculiarity of the tone of these passages, even the move from the first person Levinas usually utilises to the collective "we", ought to provoke perhaps some degree of scepticism or uncertainty about their deployment. However, despite the differences mentioned, insofar as these passages can sit alongside his thought and aid our own, there does not seem to be a particularly strong case to simply disregard his thinking here.

The polemical style of this portion of the work notwithstanding, we can still take these words and think again about this remarkable "just war against war". The themes here are somewhat similar, the themes of weakness, rejection of virility and militarism etc., however, what we see here is a more forthright understanding of a confrontational ethics. What is needed can be neither an abstract pacifism that does not engage with the world, the others, or the violence in which they are constantly submerged, but is also never a submission to realpolitik and the play of forces and logistics. We must now, at this stage, be well used to this attempt at balance. From the discussion on *RH*, we have constantly found this balance that Levinas finds so crucial, between transcendence, angelicism and a certain idealism on the one hand, and resignation to essence, fatalism, and violent materialism on the other. From that early text to *OB*, this consistent theme marks a strong continuity and a primary concern with a thinking absolutely

opposed not only to the fascism and nationalism embodied in the latter case, but also the abstract liberalism of the former. It is this fundamental aspect of his thinking which it will be vital for us to consider the above passages. The flexibility enabled by this balance provides a much more imaginative and effective base from which to build our political imaginary upon, with assistance from other philosophical disciplines.

If the above is how we can consider aspects of engagement with the violent realm of essence, this engagement must be built on a new understanding, not of violence alone, but of our relation to others as such, and how such a relation has issued from the beyond being. This rethinking, and our engagement with the realm of essence, cannot be thought on the basis of essence, it has to be haunted by an openness to the otherwise than being. In political thought, this otherwise, elsewhere that is a nowhere, a non-place, that which does not exist but cannot have a beginning because of this, is utopia. I have said little so far about a utopia, and in fact the idea of an abstract utopia seems somewhat irreconcilable with Levinas' equilibrium mentioned above. It is clear that such a utopia could not be some kind of abstract heavenly city, an abstract utopia divorced from the world. Nevertheless, throughout "In Other Words", we see Levinas discuss Utopia a number of times and in slightly different contexts. By investigating these, we can arrive at a reconciliation of Levinas' thought with utopia and come to an understanding which does not fall foul of certain critiques of utopianism but allows us to use it in a manner that can be developed further.

In a sense, when we consider utopia in the barest sense, insofar as Levinas has been discussing the beyond essence, we can consider him to have always been talking about utopia. The refusal to be closed off and set up in a site, of being displaced and called from an elsewhere are consistent themes that stand in relation to a utopian thinking. However, in the chapter we are currently considering, the use becomes more precise and applicable to our thinking politically. When we consider the previous passages concerning violence, it is clear that some kind of change is necessary, the mention of a "just war against war", aside from interpretation, indicates a struggle to be had and some kind of opposing force. I argue that, based on other passages in *OB*, this struggle by necessity, must, if it is to fulfil Levinas' ethical demands regarding the other, be a utopian one. Despite occurring within the realm of essence, and despite requiring some betrayal and conciliation with essence, it remains fundamentally oriented towards an elsewhere.

 If then, the ethical charge put on us by the other necessitates a change in the world, a material change, as I would argue the above shows, then the nature of this demand that comes from the

beyond essence cannot simply be fulfilled by a reorganisation of matter or a change or negation in the play of forces and essence. Indeed, as Levinas argues, such an attempt for change is, in a sense, impossible:

> "Is not essence the very impossibility of anything else, of any revolution that would not be a revolving upon oneself? Everything that claims to come from elsewhere, even the marvels of which essence itself is capable, even the surprising possibilities of renewal by technology and magic, even the perfections of gods peopling the heights of this world, and their immortality and the immortality they promise mortals — all this does not deaden the heartrending bustling of the there is recommencing behind every negation." *(OB, p.182-183)*

From the above passage, we can see that, indeed, a simple negation or change within essence is not sufficient. Such a change cannot be dictated simply by the laws of essence, which according to the Stoic resignation previously mentioned, would accept the impossibility of change and instead submit to the sway of Being. Instead, change, the radical change that is required, must be guided and oriented by the beyond being, that is, towards a utopia. Continuing with our previous analysis, this is not a choice between abandoning essence and fully immersing oneself in it, but of any engagement with essence being guided by openness to the other and the weakness and patience that requires. As detailed above, a simple play of essence, a being otherwise, runs the risk of retrenching and reinforcing the struggle that would attempt change.

But again, this utopianism cannot be absolute. We can see Levinas further clarify the dangers of utopianism and, in a sense, absolute transcendence, when he mentions the extent to which *OB* suffers from a charge of utopianism:

> "This book escapes the reproach of utopianism — if utopianism is a reproach, if any thought escapes utopianism — by recalling that what took place humanly has never been able to remain closed up in its site. There is no need to refer to an event in which the non-site, becoming a site, would have exceptionally entered into the spaces of history … But each individual of these peoples is virtually a chosen one, … to respond with responsibility: me, that is, here I am for the others, to lose his place radically, or his shelter in being, to enter into ubiquity which is also a utopia." *(OB, p.184-185)*

Utopia here seems to be essential to what takes place "humanly". The activity of others is necessarily utopian by its issuance from a beyond, in its participation in transcendence, and always overflows in signification and impact beyond what can be contained in comprehension and being. Again, there is always a pre-original openness to transcendence, which is the very possibility of utopia. However, we see also that this utopia is not of the spectacular kind, there does not have to be some imagined site in the sense that More would use it or some actual

historical event in the sense of utopian socialism. Rather, each instance of openness to transcendence and accepting the election and responsibility which I am obligated to before any decision is itself in this sense utopian. The utopia is not realised as such; it is not a destination that is reached but a fundamental orientation. This orientation, doubtless, would be troublingly abstract and distant, were it not for this orientation not simply being towards an imagined utopia, but instead that the utopian impulse is also an orientation towards the other.

Conclusion

From the fragments and hints towards what a political understanding could be, that I have teased out above, I will now attempt to synthesise this as far as possible and consider how this can relate to the political more broadly. I will only be able to reduce the abstraction somewhat, as the political imaginary here is not very well developed or grounded. However, I can address some issues more concretely, using additional sources, and attempt to come to a consistent position on these issues. These themes we will discuss are essential to approaching the political, and the conclusions reached will be indicative of the eventual final formulation.

I can initially restate the position I have reached more concisely and clearly, both what has been achieved in our reading and subsequently what remains unsaid, or cannot be said with Levinas. First, I would emphasise that my reading begins with understanding the subject that forms the basis for Levinas' thought. This subject cannot be understood before substitution, which is the evacuation of the ego and a substitution of my subjectivity for that of the other-in-me, leading to an overwhelming passivity. This provides the schema for signification and meaning, making proximity possible, understood as a fundamental openness to the other and their ethical demand. It also embeds transcendence and ethics before any beginning or other realm of meaning while still allowing this to be forgotten, reduced, or betrayed. How we can imagine this unlimited demand and its limitation in a more grounded way will be investigated in the final chapter.

The subject is always already concerned with the transcendent, but at the same time is also corporeal and concerned with the realm of being, in the form of nourishments and dwelling. The corporeality of the subject necessitates that I am concerned with embodied existence. This then combines with the ethical that I have already established, in that this concern with economy and materiality is oriented towards the other, and the transcendent ethical demand of the other is

always oriented towards matter in the form of economic aid and reparation. Moreover, this subject is clearly demarcated as anathematic to the ego of western idealism, in that it is passive, affected, exposed, and not absolutely free, while also not being closed up within being, economy and essence. This forms the first section of the reading, setting up the subject I will be working with in subsequent sections, in terms of both the immediate ethical encounter, and the third and questions of the political. It also gives us the first concrete re-formulation of Levinas' balancing act between transcendence and freedom, and materialism and fatalism that I identified in chapter one.

I then established the nature of the ethical demand as experienced, in an existence bought about by that pre-original substitution, and the openness to proximity allowed by it. If substitution can be forgotten, it is also the case that it can be remembered. This remembering is the exposure to the face that brings to mind the ethical demand of substitution. I have chosen to understand the face minimally, as simply that manner of the other's presentation which is entirely ungraspable and radically other. The face would not have the ethical sense and import it has without substitution and proximity. As transcendent and material, it again follows that narrow path Levinas is so insistent on following. With this balance, I have also investigated the problems that arise with something beyond history, race, and culture, but also recognised the importance of an ethical value and importance that is beyond the eddies of historical contingency but remains historically instantiated. This is a distinct area that I have not been able to investigate as fully would be required to do the subject matter justice and rectifying this will be a crucial part of the next chapter.

The third was then extensively investigated as we reached the limitations of the analysis of the dyadic encounter and required some investigation of society in order to think a response to the political appropriately. The third was expressed in numerous ways; the following conclusions were identified as the most significant: first, the third is a necessary form that does not have to represent some empirical third person but represents the consequences and interests involved in any interaction. Second, the third can instantiate a betrayal of the other and of the ethical demand of substitution, leading them to be potentially forgotten by its institutions and the workings of the social or political realm. Therefore, if politics is always at risk of eclipsing ethics and being only concerned with itself, we can consider different political forms as more or less dangerous in this regard, however not that any entirely escape this danger. We also saw how philosophy can partner with the state to enforce rules of coherence and order, to engage in violent regulation of speech and thought. Then finally, the amorphous observations above were given direction by the oddly normative passages from "In Other Words", emphasising that

change remains necessary and cannot thereby disavow violence, nor remain in the non-, or anti-, utopian realm of essence.

From this chapter, I find three theses important to carry forwards. First and foremost, we see the continuity of the rubric of the balance given in *RH*, whereby absorption in being, totality and essence leads to a fundamentally fatalist and authoritarian thinking, and, on the other hand, refusal of corporeality and materiality is angelic and dishonest, failing to take account of our own lived experiences as a body inhabiting a real world. From the emphasis on economic justice in *ET*, to the face in *TI*, to the discussions on violence and the third in *OB*, this balance is more or less replicated. Moreover, if the earliest text of Levinas' thought is fundamentally anti-fascist and is referenced by Levinas as still being relevant to his later thought, this indicates a common thread and inclination against fascism. However, this is not only against the totalitarian thought fascism embodies, or takes to its conclusion, but also against those forms of liberalism that would take that dishonest course and so leave themselves open to the challenge from fascism and maintain a fundamental vulnerability to fascism. Additionally, this orientation emphasises the sheer level of the stakes here. It is not simply about a slightly more pleasant society or equitable social arrangement, but fundamentally a thinking whose prime concern is an opposition to fascism.

The second thesis I have drawn out here is that if substitution can be forgotten, and its demand betrayed, but is also bought to mind and pressed upon us in the face of the other, then the third, by necessarily distancing us from the other in proximity in order to give an account of the one far-off, plays an ambiguous role in this balance. Specifically, if the third institutes justice, and this involves the establishment of "being, totality, the State, politics, techniques, work", then this proves problematic insofar as these "are at every moment on the point of having their center of gravitation in themselves, and weighing on their own account." *(OB*, p.159). Once this becomes absolute, the other and ethics become erased from the equation, and substitution is forgotten entirely. Therefore, the conclusion to draw is first, which of these categories are necessary and which are not, and second, how can we understand, rethink, and remake such social institutions that they will not fall to this eternally tempting totalitarianism Levinas describes. If their common factor, and the common factor in their dominance, is the investment of power, it falls to us to think of a society that does not invest power in this way.

The third thesis bears upon this directly. The above proposes a fundamental transformation. If fulfilling the good depends on the ethical demand of the other not being crushed under the weight of totality and egoism, then our society and institutions must live up to safeguarding that

task. A look at the world today, as well as Levinas' talk of a "just war waged against war", indicates that such a society is not in existence. Does this not give an imperative to change this state of affairs? What then, for Levinas, must characterise this change? From the last section of this chapter, we can see it cannot be pacifist, nor can it simply be reformist in that it would immerse itself in the logic and techniques of the political. It also, due to the nature of the subject within Levinas' thought, cannot simply be a retrenchment of liberalism but must be a thinking which accommodates the affective and passive aspects of the Levinasian subject. Instead, this movement ought to be understood as a struggle not for a "being otherwise" that would keep the danger of absolute totalitarianism burning fiercely, but an absolute and utopian change in society. A change not governed by a revolutionary triumphalism, but one in the mould of Marx's description in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, where proletarian revolutions "constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts" (Marx, 2010a, p.7). It is with this spirit that we ought to understand the exhortations to trembling and hesitation expressed by Levinas at the end of *OB*.

Here, however, the capacity for Levinas to help us move forwards is severely limited, and as noted throughout this chapter, various issues arise from his work that, unfortunately, his work does not provide the answers to. My account, then, will now have to take direction and assistance from other authors, that I might revisit my argument here and find it enriched and armed with new thoughts to achieve the thinking Levinas calls us to. This will be done by first looking at Levinas, race and colonialism, before moving to issues of applicability and bringing Levinas' sometimes ethereal descriptions down to earth.

Chapter 4: Barbaric Community and the Analytics of Raciality: Levinas, Race and Colonialism

If I have done what I have intended thus far, the last chapter represents the furthest we can get with Levinas alone, the most complete reading of Levinas for the purposes of this project, within the space available. This previous chapter demonstrates a way of thinking with Levinas that is utopian, grounded, and radical in a fundamental way, that is neither aloof and angelic but not cynical and conservative. We have shown his concern with economy, the manner in which *TI* and *OB* can be incorporated in a way to answer each other's shortcomings and demonstrated how sections that are more problematic to my goal could be treated without whitewashing them. However, in my conclusion, I noted an area of my project that was left inadequately covered in this reading of Levinas alone, an area of contention that has been with us since the second chapter. The discussions of colonialism and race in these chapters have contributed something to our understanding by identifying problematic areas within Levinas' thought, as well as identifying resources in other parts of Levinas' work that can counteract these less desirable passages. However, this has only had the effect so far of providing a minimally workable position to allow the other work we needed Levinas to do to proceed. This, suffice to say, is not an adequate treatment of this monumental issue.

The goals of the present chapter are to develop Levinas' affinities for these areas of thought, providing an active and more fully formed understanding of race for the present re-reading of Levinas using texts in decolonial thought, critical race theory and the Black Radical Tradition. The account I have given thus far is currently sorely lacking in this respect, therefore drawing on these traditions forms the next steps for this project. This is not to say that this chapter will simply recapitulate the points raised in chapters two and three. The purpose of those discussions was to, at a minimum, achieve a minimal position of the viability of a Levinas influenced thought. Instead, this chapter will attempt to actively integrate an account of the racial that is compatible with the conclusions of chapter three but will also build on these conclusions to correct the conspicuous absence of an active account of the racial in that section. These other texts that will be brought into contact with our re(de)-constructed Levinas will allow us to think the racial in conjunction with his thought, something the anonymity of the other makes remarkably difficult otherwise.

Two thinkers will be the focus of this chapter, alongside references back to Levinas himself. First, Santiago Slabodsky will attune us to the partial decolonial turn taken by Levinas following his contact with liberation philosophers in the mid-1970s, particularly Enrique Dussel. This will help

me open my account to Levinas' own responses to critiques from the global periphery and understand some of his work in this alternative context, allowing us to explore them more fruitfully in the rest of the chapter.

The next thinker will be the most challenging and will take up a large amount of the critical engagement of this chapter. In her work Towards a Global Idea of Race, Denise Ferreira da Silva has developed a complex and comprehensive analysis of the emergence of raciality from enlightenment epistemology and metaphysics. In several places, Da Silva actually draws on Levinas directly, providing a starting point, alongside the reading of Slabodsky and the account developed thus far. Despite this, there is the challenging task of working out points of dialogue and contention between my account of Levinas and Da Silva's descriptions of what she calls the analytics of raciality. This is challenging enough, but it will also mean rethinking the basic components of the account so far, reading them with and through Da Silva's own technical vocabulary that she developed for her project. The mapping of these terms, so far as it is possible, will, in turn, provoke a re-thinking of Levinas and the current project, preserving the impressions made by this contact.

This re-formulation of my account through da Silva's work will pave the way for a step beyond, once this compatibility has been established by working with da Silva's later thought on Black Feminist Poethics and the concept of Difference without Separability. Another important consequence of these encounters will be what this means for the ideas of subjectivity we have picked up through Levinas' work, destabilising our account to maintain its openness. The process of dialogue here works to unsettle what would otherwise be a static account, written indelibly in legibility, and instead brings about an unsaying, and in that unsaying, an orientation towards the otherwise.

The goal of this chapter, to demonstrate affinities with these other thinkers, and to utilise their thought to improve the preceding account of Levinas, has to be carefully considered in the context of my previous discussions. I have previously been at great pains to avoid the fate of other discussions of Levinas and the political, and I am particularly considering Critchley here, which seem to largely abandon Levinas once they have ascertained some pre-ethical grounding for the political project they wish to pursue. How, then, will this discussion avoid the trap of simply supplanting Levinas, either missing his insights or rendering the discussion so far redundant? It will be important to emphasise previous insights and the value that they retain. The affinities I identify in certain areas here will be specifically demonstrated in their compatibility with Levinas' other insights, showing resources that can amplify Levinas' vital and

insightful thought and make it more useful for those both within the tradition of Levinasian scholarship and outside it. Rather than a case of simple replacement, the process will be one of dialogue and compatibility, where Levinas' thinking will be supplemented, not abandoned. For example, when introducing the ideas of other thinkers in the coming chapters, it will often be concepts that can either replicate some of the theoretical work of ideas I have chosen to put to one side. This furthers the Levinasian account by allowing the overall structure to remain even as certain components may be exchanged. Alternatively, the work of other thinkers can instead give further resources to the reading of Levinas already given, allowing us to see Levinas' writings in a different light, changing emphasis while still maintaining Levinas as the primary resource.

The goal described above bears some similarity to the project pursued by John Drabinski in *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (2013). Both Drabinski's project and the current one aim to amend certain aspects of Levinas' work through the intervention of postcolonial theorists, in his case Spivak, Bhaba, and Glissant, and in my own, Slabodsky, Da Silva, and later, Fanon, Maldonado-Torres and Moten. Despite these similarities of form, it is important to note the differences in the resources drawn upon and how they change the overall analysis. Drabinski's use of Glissant is interesting, and highlights a helpful way of approaching Levinas, but requires one to deploy certain somewhat unwieldy concepts, such as the figure of the Rhizome. On the other hand, Da Silva's work benefits from possessing pre-existing affinities with Levinas, such as her use of his work in her own and their shared scepticism regarding representation. This allows for a more straightforward deployment, and, as I will show, Levinas' attitudes to history and identity, which are considered so detrimental in Drabinski's work (Drabinski, 2013, p.192), can, when read with Da Silva, be reconsidered in a manner which is actually beneficial. Another benefit of the closeness of the thinkers I have chosen is that it allows more of Levinas' own thought to be preserved. I have always tried to maintain an affirmative answer to the question of whether we should even bother with Levinas, and Drabinski also addresses this towards the end of his book. It is clearly a question worth considering; however, after the chapter that precedes the question in Drabinski's work, I get the sense that for what he is trying to do, after all of the conceptual scaffolding and alterations, Levinas remains relegated to a simple unsettling of the political by ethics. I trust that my preceding chapter will have clarified that my reading of Levinas cannot reconcile itself to such a minimalist reading.

Levinas and Barbarism, towards a Barbaric Community.

As we have seen, the relationship between Levinas, colonialism and race has been fraught, from his uneasy defence of Europe to his insistence on judging other cultures in *MS*. Potentially more

disturbingly, other portions of his work do not mention these issues at all, potentially erasing the pervasive and devastating impact of these forces in the last half-century marked by increased European dominance. This was the challenge bought to Levinas in the early 1970s, when, as Santiago Slabodsky recounts, Enrique Dussel and other Latin American Liberation Philosophers visited Levinas in France and impressed upon him that this is not something he can ignore (Slabodsky, p.109-110). From this encounter, on Slabodsky's reading, one can identify a turn of sorts in Levinas' work. That is to say that Slabodsky identifies in *OB* and in other works, particularly some of his Talmudic commentaries, a positive counter-narrative of barbarism, a positive articulation of the barbaric as colonised, and an inclusion of the Jewish People within this community (Slabodsky, p.107). This turn towards solidarity with the global south is, however, as we shall see, compromised by a number of factors, and never reaches its fullest potential, despite a greater degree of engagement than in other aspects of Levinas' work.

Slabodsky begins by identifying three key moves in the narrative of Barbarism within European thought, particularly as it relates to Judaism. First, there is that of the enlightenment, carried out by luminaries such as Voltaire, who figure the Jewish people as a barbaric and corrosive influence on civilisation (Slabodsky, p.96). This antisemitic narrative of barbarism is provided with a counterpoint in the Marxist criticism of the west that emerged from largely secular Jewish intellectuals and revolutionaries in the early to mid-20th century. These figures reversed the narrative to level the charge of barbarism on the capitalist and imperialist systems of Europe, the most famous being Rosa Luxembourg's dichotomy of "Socialism or Barbarism", which Slabodsky dubs the "negative counter-narrative" (Slabodsky, p.75, 81).

However, what Slabodsky finds the most fascinating is the move that emerged in the decolonial movements in the 1950s and 1960s, what he dubs the "positive counter-narrative" (Slabodsky, p.93). Rather than accusing the colonial powers of barbarism as a pejorative, this discourse is instead characterised by the colonised and subaltern embracing the charge of barbarism as a positive identity opposed to the 'civilising' colonialism they were fighting (Slabodsky, p.10). This move emerges primarily in former Spanish and French colonies, with North African Jews such as Memmi and Latin Americans like Dussel both embracing the designation "barbarian" (Slabodsky, p.24). For Slabodsky, what gives Levinas value in thinking decolonialism, particularly Jewish decolonialism, is Levinas' partial embrace of this thinking in his later work.

However, initially, Slabodsky runs into conflicts similar to the ones I have already addressed. He finds Levinas as simultaneously offering great resources, the rejection of the triumphalism and self-assurance of western thought, instead formulating a philosophy of the other and the

oppressed, as well as Levinas' own position as a border thinker (Slabodsky, p.102). However, Slabodsky also draws our attention once again to Levinas' eurocentrism and his racist attitudes to the others of Europe, as well as Levinas' tendency to uphold a traditional narrative and counter-narrative of barbarism, maintaining its negative valence (Slabodsky, p.103-4). Additionally, on Slabodsky's account, Levinas maintains the history of the Jewish people as the paradigmatic case of suffering and genocide (Slabodsky, p.104).

Contra this, Slabodsky identifies a "Barbaric Encounter" between Levinas and Dussel in 1971 and 1972, when Levinas finds himself challenged on a number of the above points, and Levinas' view of these issues seems to alter drastically (Slabodsky, p.110). From this encounter, Levinas seems to position himself, and indeed the Jewish People, not as being of Europe, but rather as part of a barbaric community that stands in solidarity against European Empire. Far from being without 'Sacred History', what were previously termed "Afro-Asiatic masses" instead inhabit the margins of European imperial history, along with Jewish people, one could say, foreshadowing Moten, they inhabit an under-side. Slabodsky employs two primary sources to demonstrate this turn in Levinas' focus, which we will briefly examine before looking at the limitations of Levinas' move towards this barbaric philosophy, which primarily takes the form of his attitude towards Israel. Following this, we will see what new paths are opened by this change in Levinas' stance and how we can read his work in a manner more amenable to decolonial movements and thought.

The first work Slabodsky identifies is a short passage towards the end of *OB*. In that enigmatic chapter we commented on at length previously, "In Other Words", Levinas speaks of introducing some barbarisms into Philosophy, referring to the "barbaric" phrase "otherwise than being" *(OB*, p.178). However, as Slabodsky notes, this is not simply a wry commentary on his use of language but references Dussel's barbaric philosophy. Levinas expands on this theme to discuss the otherwise that exists in the margins of European history (Slabodsky, p.105). This should not be seen as an attempt to denigrate those outside European history, but instead, to note that it is in these margins, these murderous encounters with the barbaric frontier, we see the meaning of the beyond essence, in these traces of an otherwise.

The second text Slabodsky identifies as demonstrating the influence of this decolonial thought is a Talmudic lecture, *The Nations and the Presence of Israel.* Slabodsky identifies this text as differentiating between the "criminal empire" of Rome, which is then transposed to the modern American Empire as a continuous empire of pure accumulation on the one hand, and on the other the barbaric forces of Israel, Egypt, and Ethiopia (Slabodsky, p. 106). Levinas' discussion here is not unproblematic. For example, he uses Ethiopia as a stand-in for the entire 'third world'

(*TN*, p.p.99). Nevertheless, what is crucial here is Levinas' embracing of these nations, which do not traditionally share in the universal history of Europe but stand in common cause with Israel against Rome in a common Barbaric community (*TN*, p.p.104 & Slabodsky p. 106). This barbaric community against criminal civilisation, empire and sameness, a barbaric and fugitive underground, opens a path in Levinas' thought that will be a source of fruitful discussion later on in this work.

Before we leave Slabodsky's analysis and move on to the discussion of Da Silva, two necessary clarifications: first, these passages dealing with colonialism and race by no means 'cancel out' Levinas' racist remarks I discussed previously or other problematic statements. Instead, it serves to provide examples of where Levinas applied these decolonial ideas, however sparingly, to his own thought and allows us to think how we might go about developing this more comprehensively, expanding from these junctures that Levinas himself identified. The work I will be doing in the rest of the chapter is still needed for this reason. These topics Levinas discusses are fundamentally limited and refer to only short passages in the context of his work overall. But if we pull back from these short passages to the context beyond that, helpful connections can be made.

The other limitation that needs clarifying is Levinas' use of the word "Israel" as a fundamental part of this barbaric community, which Slabodsky spends a great deal of time problematising. This is largely on two counts. First, Slabodksy understands Levinas' idea of Israel expounded here as being fundamentally at odds with the actual history and founding of the state of Israel. The issue of Israel in Levinas is a complicated one, as Slabodsky notes, as it seems to vary whether he is referring to the actually existing State of Israel or Israel as an 'ideal type' (Slabodsky, p.111). However, by Slabodsky's account, it is not quite so simple to dismiss it as a simple metaphor (Slabodsky, p.111-112), and further, this continued allegiance to the State of Israel undermines, perhaps fatally, Levinas' decolonial move (Slabodsky, p.112-113). However, the cause of this is uncertain, whether it betrays a lingering Eurocentrism within Levinas, or, alternatively, it is simply a lack of awareness of the changing position of the Jewish, particularly European Jewish, people within the global system of raciality, and Israel's role in this. Indeed, Slabodsky references Herzl's founding statement of intent that Israel should be a "'rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarism'" (quoted in Slabodsky, p.157).

So, what problems does this pose for our project here? Given the heuristic I have been moving with so far, it seems that this does not so much pose problems as indicate the moves necessary for us to continue. That is to say, if we were working to rehabilitate Levinas entirely, then this

would pose a more significant issue, but as the main task is to look at how Levinas' thinking can join up with these other decolonial texts, then this serves as a useful guide as to how we should proceed. In combination with the anti-state thinking uncovered during the last chapter, this affinity for barbaric community expands this anti-authoritarian reading and exposes the potential for an additional reading of corrosiveness not only to the centralism of the state but also to the centralism of Europe and the metropole. We can then see the importance of solidarity not only with the immediately oppressed, but also on an international level. We can think of this international solidarity as something of an extension of the thinking of the third that Levinas does when he says that there must also be peace to the one far off and that true justice only exists when there is no distance to the third *(OB*, 159), the need for solidarity not just within a given geographical boundary is clear. This speaks most to those in the imperial core, insisting that solidarity and forgiveness to those closest cannot be at the expense of others elsewhere, who still demand justice no less urgently despite their distance. We will expand this understanding in our discussions of Da Silva, but this affinity and parallel will be essential to build on.

Levinas, Da Silva, and the Analytics of Raciality.

Having now established some points at which we can read in Levinas a concern with colonisation and imperialism, and indeed how his analyses might be applied to these phenomena, and vice versa, Da Silva's account comes into the picture. With Da Silva, I will be exploring some of these themes, but more so, I will be looking at the regime of racialisation that underlies the system of imperialism addressed previously. I have discussed issues regarding Levinas and race in the second chapter of this work, as well as the immediately preceding section, and so what is needed to overcome these obstacles is to bring Levinas into contact with a more comprehensive theory of what Da Silva calls the Analytics of Raciality. Once I have examined Levinas in this context, it will highlight further areas of conflict which we can address and adapt, utilising Da Silva's thought and vocabulary to elucidate a Levinasian thought which is conscious of these issues and can be altered in such a way as to make combatting these narratives and impacts of racialisation a core component of its praxis.

The main work I will be examining here is Da Silva's *Towards a Global Idea of Race.* This text presents numerous challenges, both due to the scope of material it covers, as well as the unique vocabulary Da Silva has developed to carry out this work. As a result, our approach will have to be considered and thorough in tying up the threads that run through this project. I begin by

briefly overviewing Da Silva's project, including some of her terminology that will be important for the work here and highlighting how Da Silva uses Levinas in her work.

In a condensed form, Da Silva's project is an examination of the development of the modern subject, using this to discuss the emergence of race as a scientific concept that emerges from several principles, which can be collectively termed the "Scene of Regulation". This regulative force, in combination with the moralising force of the "Scene of Representation", or Historicity (Da Silva, 2007, p.xxxviii), forms the basis of the "analytics of raciality". This return to previously dismissed ideas of "scientific racism" is needed, for Da Silva, as the simple turn towards culture fails to account for the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of racism that are still with us today (Da Silva, 2007, p. xviii). Already, in this briefest of overviews, the challenge becomes apparent. The terminology employed is unique and, in many ways, essential to what Da Silva is attempting to explore. The other issue is the sheer scope of what she is trying to achieve. Her project doesn't only look at philosophical sources from the early modern period onwards but also considers scientific, anthropological, and sociological texts from throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and ancient and medieval sources. The question concerning terminology and vocabulary will be discussed at greater length when I try to actively integrate some of these ideas into the current account, which will necessitate a thorough definition of these terms, although I will try to limit this as far as possible. The second problem will be addressed by only straying out of the realm of philosophy insofar as is strictly necessary. It will be possible to have much of this discussion without delving too deeply, as Da Silva does, into Cuvier's philosophy of life or Boas' Cultural Anthropology.

Clarifying her project as neither a Derridean Deconstruction nor a Foucauldian Archaeological project, but "somewhere between the two" (Da Silva, 2007, p.20), Da Silva clarifies the analytical tools she will employ through this project. Da Silva is interested in rendering the political as contentious, that is, "a moment of human existence defined by (the possibility of) violence" (Da Silva, 2007, p.21-22). However, her project aims to look at the very introduction of a "political subject" as an effect of "symbolic, productive violence" (Da Silva, 2007, p.22). The violence that Da Silva is examining is the very constitution of subjectivity, and differentiated subjectivities, and it is here where she draws on Levinas' thought. Da Silva summarises the reconciliation she is pursuing as between "Foucault's notion of productive power, Derrida's notion of writing, and Levinas' rendering of representation as 'partial violation" (Da Silva, 2007, p.23). Foucault's critique of truth and self-determination are found to be helpful, but ultimately his attachment to interiority limits the usefulness of his analysis for Da Silva's project (Da Silva, 2007, p.24-25).

Derrida provides an ideal response to this trouble with interiority. By Derrida's refusal of the primacy of interiority, and instead giving preference to the exteriorised trace (an aspect of Derrida's thought very much inspired by Levinas (Derrida, 2016, p.76)), he "adds to the critical arsenal a tool that refuses this absolute referent, the transcendental I, that precedes and institutes signification" (Da Silva, 2007, p.26). This embrace of exteriority and "spatiality" allows the recuperation of the moments of productive violence that constitute the modern subject (Da Silva, 2007, p.26) and then positions these subjects before the horizon of death. Death here figures as the ultimate demarcator of spatiality and exteriority, which allows for the displacement of interiority to "establish exteriority as the ruler of signification" (Da Silva, 2007, p.27).

Having set this up, Da Silva expands on how Levinas' thought fits into her analytical arsenal. This will be the first true dialogue with Da Silva, and as much as the discussion of Levinas sets up her own narrative, it will help us rethink Levinas and how he can be bought into dialogue with this reading. Levinas is employed by Da Silva here to examine further that 'scene of representation' which forms the violent methods whereby subjects are defined in exteriority, as per Derrida. Da Silva uses Levinas to further conceive of representation as a "partial violation", that is, "modern political-symbolic strategies can be read as productive acts that address (articulate and disavow) the Other… this analytical position recognises productivity as a dimension of scientific signification" however it can also be read as a violent act of engulfment (Da Silva, 2007, p.27). Also, vitally, Da Silva picks up on the inherently antagonistic nature of the other to western ontology (Da Silva, 2007, p.28), perhaps one could locate this in proximity to Levinas' assertion that whatever has taken place "humanly" cannot remain closed up in a site, is necessarily utopian *(OB*, p.184-185).

This all seems very promising but let us remember that Da Silva is using an aspect of Levinas' thought as a tool in thinking representation and regulation, and while this may make the rest of her work somewhat more accessible to my analysis, it by no means necessarily allows me to go further than this. So, we get to the first rung of her excavation/deconstruction of Western Thought. Da Silva understands the challenge facing early modern philosophers as "how to sustain the writing of man as a self-determined (interior) thing" as established by western philosophy and theology in a new materialistic and scientific worldview (Da Silva, 2007, p.31). In Da Silva's terminology, this self-determined interior thing that is man is the "transparent I", aware of itself and its desires, self-determined and un-affected. Essentially western ontoepistemology finds itself attempting to reconcile the stage of exteriority, where universal

reason becomes *universal nomos*, "the regulative (constraining) force that governs… affectable things" and the stage of interiority, where universal reason becomes *universal poesis*, that is, "the productive (representing) power that founds the tools housed in the mind of man" (Da Silva, 2007, p.31).

This attempt by early modern philosophy at reconciliation can be clarified in relation to my project by comparing some Levinasian terminology. For example, we can see this self-determined "transparent I" in Levinas' dismissal of the heroic conception of the will. Levinas will, time and again, emphasise that the will is not heroic (i.e. *TI* pp.235-239 or *FC* pp.15-16). However, we can see that on some traditional readings of Levinas, this would be further problematic. While Levinas' subject addresses the problem of affectability and rejects the transparent I or heroic will, in *FC,* for example, Levinas uses this universal susceptibility to become a "servile soul", requiring the force of *universal nomos* as the external regulating force of reason. That is to say, the fragility of freedom requires a setting up of laws informed by this universal reason. One might say that while Levinas universally rejects un-affectability, as opposed to conceiving it as a privileged aspect of European consciousness, he then goes a step further by calling for a universal application of *universal nomos* in the form of state and institutions to provide this regulating function (*FC*, p.23). This is certainly more consistent than the early modern thinkers that Da Silva explores, by rejecting a spatial or geographic limit to affectability, but it is hardly an ideal outcome. However, we can look at *universal nomos* here in conjunction with Levinas' conception of ontology and totality and the discussion on representation as violation Da Silva introduced earlier. In our earlier reading, we have seen how it is possible to undermine the positing of universal reason as a solution to the problems Levinas poses, finding it unessential and undesirable. Furthermore, we can see that even if one does accept this concept, it fails to be the same universalising force as Da Silva examines, as one which is constantly undermined and pestered by scepticism and alterity. For Levinas, universal reason ends up a partial violence, as in the passages on coherence in *OB*, but appears to be too necessary to abandon entirely. In showing a Levinas that rejects even this level of totality, I find further commonality with Da Silva.

Proceeding with Da Silva, we see that these two symbolic gestures are accompanied by a third, that is, by Hegel's transformation of these categories into what Da Silva terms "Transcendental Poesis" (Da Silva, 2007, p.31-32). Hegel's formulations, on Da Silva's reading, reconcile the two above moments of modern thought, as the prior dichotomy of exterior/determined and internal/transparent is resolved through the mediation of Spirit, accessed through the use of

reason, and enacted by the particular exterior, all folded into the same trajectory of Spirit, or what she refers to as "*the scene of engulfment"* (Da Silva, 2007, p.70). For Da Silva, this move by Hegel is the essential bridge to connect the Enlightenment thought of the transparency thesis with 19th and 20th century investigations of the "truth" of man (Da Silva, 2007, p.71). Hegel's accomplishment is to resolve but "not dissipate exteriority and the ontological context it announces" (Da Silva, 2007, p.71). Alternatively, as Da Silva puts it elsewhere: "the theater of reason became the arena of history as the universe became the product of the temporal trajectory of a self-producing and self-moving transcendental (interior-temporal) I, namely, 'Spirit,'" (Da Silva, 2007, p.73). By engulfing the exterior within the play of reason, which still finds its seat primarily within the (European) mind, even the investigations into the determinacy of the exterior fail to threaten the hegemony and security of the Western conception of self-determining interiority. The term engulfment is important, it is where Da Silva sees an opportunity for recovery of exteriority and where a convergence with a Levinasian account will be the most fruitful.

Suppose we recall Da Silva's understanding of Levinas' conception of representation as a partial violation that cannot eliminate or destroy alterity, but rather engulfs it. In that case, along with Levinas' own comments contra Hegel, we find another crucial juncture where we can enter dialogue with Da Silva's account. So, as one might surmise from how Da Silva utilises Levinas, there is largely an accord between both views of engulfment, particularly regarding Hegel. Levinas will continually, primarily in *TI*, but also in other texts, figure Hegel as one of, if not the foremost, architects of Totality, a partisan of the Same (see: *TI*, p.87, 102, 196; *OB* p.176). Particularly of interest is the discussion in *TI*, where Hegel is said to maintain "the positivity of the infinite, but excluding all multiplicity from it… Like the god of Aristotle it refers only to itself, though now at the term of a history." (*TI*, p.196), and further, the finitude Hegelian thought opposes "and which it encompasses, (is) the finitude of man before the elements… traversed by faceless gods against whom labour is pursued in order to realize the security in which the 'other' of the elements would be revealed as the same" (*TI*, p.p.197). This once again seems to point to the engulfment of the other by the same in comprehension (*productive Nomos* acting in the scene of representation), and to accept this enclosure, if it weren't for the Other who refuses and questions enclosure. We know that this is Levinas' solution to the imperialist impulses of totality and the same. However, I would be getting ahead of the argument to apply this too simply to Da Silva, and therefore I will continue to follow her argument so far as it applies to my own.

Levinas, Da Silva and History.

We saw how history created difficulties in chapter two, with a partial resolution in chapter three. However, Da Silva's insights into this point will be instructive and allow us to rethink the account we have laid out so far. Da Silva initially investigates historicality through Herder's thought in the late 18th century, which acts as the foundation for discussions of historicality in the rest of her work, beginning with Hegel, and extending to the cultural anthropologists of the early 20th Century. Da Silva then moves to how history figures into Hegel's synthesis of the tension within early modern ontoepistemology. In this sub-section I will explore the historical in the formulation of the European subject and the others of Europe and augment my Levinasian reading with these insights.

Herder's contribution to what I have been describing so far, European consciousness, is to introduce the temporal to subjectivity, understanding history as a process of moral and cultural development, and most crucially, differentiation of different kinds of consciousness (Da Silva, 2007, p.63). Da Silva notes three distinct movements in his description of the historical. First, there is a rejection of exteriority, that is, there is a "placing of the conditions for social or moral unity in the mind and the rewriting of sensation not as the effect of things upon the human being but as a moment of its own representation" (Da Silva, 2007, p.64). So far, so typical of early modern thought, but the establishment of temporality alters this as the mechanism whereby peoples or nations are differentiated. It is the task of the historian to find the process of this differentiation and thereby further understand the *Bildung* of the human (Da Silva, 2007, p.64). Herder's third move is then to comprehend these differentiated "actualizations of human self-productive force" (Da Silva, 2007, p.64), and, via the Divine ruler and author, reconciled into the family, to sustain a view of interiorised authority as the basis for the unity of these differentiated peoples (Da Silva, 2007, p.65). Exteriority is maintained as a weak force in terms of land and place, operating on the already interiorised trajectory of human development which only serves to account for intrinsic difference between peoples (Da Silva, 2007, p.66).

It is also important to note that paradoxically, Herder is writing against universal reason as conceived in Enlightenment thought and against its "arrogant self-definition as the end (the final goal) of human history" (Da Silva, 2007, p.66). However, what Da Silva wants to emphasise is how Herder "manages to defer affectability… by conceiving of the social, moral unity, as an effect of guiding principles that are first and foremost products of the mind's ability to

represent" (Da Silva, 2007, p.66). This is what Da Silva understands by equating history with the scene of representation, and it is from this concept, we will see Hegel shift the account to one of total engulfment, as was the case with the Hegelian account of subjectivity.

We have seen how Da Silva reads Hegel's account of reason, qua transcendental poesis, as providing a reconciliation which engulfs exteriority, allowing the scientific study of extended and affectable things, to be ultimately resolved within interiority (Da Silva, 2007, p.79), while definitively protecting the privileged Transcendental I. However, the intimacy with Reason which the (European) mind possesses also provides it with access to the ultimate expression of the progress of that Reason, that is, what Hegel calls World History. The move that Hegel makes, per Da Silva, is to set up social ontologies in a novel way compared with previous thinkers. Hegel manages to sidestep universal nomos, "in which the basic moral entity, the 'individual,' sacrifices its 'natural freedom'", and later thought which laces freedom as "also an attribute of the moral collectivity to which the individual belongs" (Da Silva, 2007, p.80). In its role as refashioned universal reason, Hegel's Spirit forms not only the ground and guide for freedom, understood as self-determination, but is freedom itself, thereby transforming history into the process of this engulfing Spirit's actualisation (Da Silva, 2007, p.80).

This gives the human endowed with reason, the tools of Spirit, "the ability to measure the rightness and goodness of its actions", it can measure the extent to which its social configurations achieve, or the degree to which they are in proximity to, perfection, that is, total self-actualisation of spirit (Da Silva, 2007, p.80). What this serves to do, is to embed the transparency thesis, that is, the privileging of self-determination that is embedded in Enlightenment social configurations, where "freedom is claimed as the sole ground of thought and action" and when "universality is actualized in law and morality", into the teleology of history, and thereby all social institutions and cultural products (Da Silva, 2007, p.81). In essence, Hegel achieves a combination of Herder's account of temporal human differentiation, with the account of universal Nomos as divine author and regulator. As Da Silva puts it, we move from "a conception of history as mere repetition of an 'original' authority, which takes hold of human hearts and souls from the outset, to an account of history as constituted by the many steps of the struggle of an 'absolute power'" (Da Silva, 2007, p.81).

Da Silva, Levinas, and Thinking the racial

Why have I just gone to such great lengths to spell out Da Silva's thinking on history and on Hegel's conception of historicity in particular? These points address some of the difficulties we

encountered with history in previous portions, specifically concerning raciality. I have not gone through the entirety of Da Silva's arguments, as previously stated, but the ones I have covered so far indicate significant difficulties regarding subjectivity and history's role in constructing subjectivity. Here, we recall the numerous criticisms of Levinas' anonymous other, without history or place or culture, as ignoring race and making whiteness, and potentially maleness, the default (Drabinski's characterisation of difference without differentiation is particularly relevant here (Drabinski, 2013, 192)). However, as the account from Da Silva indicates, historical and cultural differentiation is not a simple neutral descriptor. Within certain logics, it can be read either as an act of engulfing or as the differentiation that allows these exteriorised groups to be read from the centre as defective forms of human life (if granted the status of human at all). Indeed, early in her account, Da Silva states that the two failed analyses of raciality she is taking aim at are both "the critiques of juridical universality", which utilises exclusion, rather than engulfment, as the primary account of "social subjection", but also "critical racial analyses premised upon historicity", as these attempt primarily to "exhibit the racial subaltern in transparency" (Da Silva, 2007, p.34).

To clarify the latter point, it will be helpful to look at Da Silva's criticisms of some proposals to combat colonialism and racial subjection, the ones that she finds inadequate, evidenced by the continuation of these hierarchies and their subjugation of the other of Europe. The instructive example she gives is her analysis of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (which I believe can also be levelled at Drabinski), where, while Da Silva identifies a "*better* history" (Da Silva, 2007, p.183 Italics in original), she still can't laud it as achieving the goals it sets itself (Da Silva, p,184). Despite Chakrabarty's inclusive and diverse history, including "gods and spirits" (cited in Da Silva, 2007, p.182) that are "always already outside the movement of universal (rational-scientific) history." (Da Silva, 2007, p.182) and inviting us to consider otherness, Da Silva finds his account fully returning to *universal poesis* (Da Silva, 2007, p.183). Most vitally for my account, Da Silva finds herself essentially in agreement with Spivak, that the subaltern cannot in fact speak, that in "whatever version of the play of reason… the subaltern is always already inscribed in the larger text" (Da Silva, 2007, p.184). In other words, "the choice between the universality of regulation and the universality of representation keeps 'post' critics fully within the text they attempt to deconstruct" (Da Silva, 2007, p.185). Does not Levinas, albeit in a different context, contend similarly? For Levinas, all history is one of appropriation and resolution of others into objects of knowing, or in Da Silva's terminology, are rendered objects of *universal nomos*, to be determined from without by the transparency of historicity (*TI*, p.228 & 243).

So, from these readings of history and culture, we can re-read the anonymity of the other in Levinas differently. With Da Silva's additional insights and context, we can imagine this anonymity, not as a humanistic reification of the other, where the material is rejected and obfuscated, but rather Levinas' refusal of engulfment by totality is given additional signification by incorporating Da Silva's analysis. Engulfment is now not only present as the means of totalitarianism, as Levinas usually characterises it, but also as the very means and ends of racialisation. We saw this hinted at, in a limited way, in *RH,* where it necessitates the invention of racialisation, but this expanded idea includes the liberalism that Levinas previously held to be opposing the fatalistic logics of force and totality. If we hew closely to the analysis of *OB*, particularly the latter sections on the saying and the said, we can understand a Levinasian position that not only attempts to, in a way, protect the other from transparency, but also finds the other as the destabilising and corrosive force to the totalising effect of the transparency thesis. In other words, one might characterise the other not as anonymous or take this anonymity to be disregarding raciality/history/culture, but rather see in this deferral of identity a refusal to expose the other to the partial violation of representation. But more than this, it is to locate the other whose very (non)essence is otherness, a direct counter to the forms of social subjection that find their origin in transparency and are enacted through the racial and its more coded formulations of historicity and culture. This can also alter our attitude to representation. Rather than a refusal of affect or materiality, we can instead understand Levinas' idea of the other as an expression of a scepticism or pessimism of representation. While one does not necessarily find this precise expression in Levinas' writings, and it can take a problematic form, as we discussed previously, we can make our own reading which emphasises this aspect in particular.

Before moving on from Da Silva, it will be helpful to look at where she proceeds from this rather pessimistic position. First, I will briefly examine her assessment of historical materialism in *Towards a Global Idea of Race,* and then her potential paths forwards in the essays *Towards a Black Feminist Poethics* and *On Difference without Separability*. This discussion will not simply be a substitution of Da Silva's thought for Levinas as, particularly in terms of the discussion of historical materialism, we will see how Levinas can provide for some of the shortcomings Da Silva identifies in her analysis.

As we will see, Da Silva's analysis of historical materialism bears a striking resemblance to Levinas' critique in *RH*, but the promise she sees in it will be more helpful in thinking a way forward. Da Silva is at great pains to point out that she is not trying to develop a theory of the

subject but to develop a critical strategy that can be deployed against the forms of modern thought we have discussed previously, utilising globality as an ontoepistemological context (Da Silva, 2007, p.186-7). Marxist historical materialism achieves this, at least in part, through its ability to "deploy scientific universality to produce a social ontology that centers *affectability*… historical materialism briefly moves self-consciousness to the stage of exteriority." (Da Silva, 2007, p.187). We can understand this in parallel with Levinas' description of Marxism as standing in opposition to European Culture by articulating a "spirit (that) is no longer a pure reason that partakes in a realm of ends. It is prey to material needs. … its concrete and servile existence has more weight and importance than does impotent reason." (*RH*, p.66-67). However, for both Levinas and Da Silva, the Marxist development pulls back. Da Silva notes that the "radical gesture that would turn modern representation on its head" does not occur (Da Silva, 2007, p.190). Historical materialism, on Da Silva's analysis, "retains the transparency thesis", that is, the self-determined nature of self-consciousness (Da Silva, 2007, p.190). The moment of transparency ends up simply "postponed to the moment when the proletariat recognises the 'true' nature of its existence as the dominated/exploited class", and therefore "retains recognition as the sine qua non of proletarian emancipation" (Da Silva, 2007, p.190). Levinas also does not find the break Marxism initially instantiates to be definitive. As Levinas argues, "if the basic intuition of Marxism consists in perceiving the spirit to have an inevitable relation to a determined situation, this link is in no way a radical one" (*RH*, p.67), indeed, in historical materialism the subject retains "the power to shake off the social bewitchment that then appears foreign to its essence. To become conscious of one's social situation is, even for Marx, to free oneself of the fatalism entailed by that situation." (*RH*, p.67). The truly radical move, for Levinas as for Da Silva, "is if the situation to which he was bound was not added to him but formed the very foundation of his being" (*RH*, p. 67).

However, for Da Silva, Marxist analysis retains value, because even as "classic historical materialism peers into the theater of globality, the 'Other' ontological context announced by exteriority, just to immediately enclose it" (Da Silva, 2007, p.192), it still retains a degree of openness to this "other" ontoepistemological context, even if it remains only a possibility. So historical materialism remains an effective tool of social and epistemological criticism for Da Silva, even if it ultimately falls to an embracing of modern representation. Here, however, there is a moment I contend that Levinas, our Levinas, the Levinasian reading I have constructed with all its alterations, amputations, and appropriations, can serve a similar role, but with something of an edge over the historical materialist account, in its unwavering refusal of transparency.

But what does this mean? I have established the basic compatibility of our Levinasian account with Da Silva, both as Da Silva utilises Levinas himself against engulfment and *transcendental poesis,* and in a general criticism of the foundations of western metaphysics, that is, the transparency thesis. I have also looked into how Levinas can critique historicism, and the projects of knowledge/power that erase the alterity of the other, instead subsuming them into the project of knowing, which transforms them into spacio-temporal, that is, racial, subjects, always already determined as such. We have also seen how Levinas' 'anonymous' descriptions do not necessarily have to be read as such, but instead figures subjects as, to a degree, vulnerable, affectable and violatable (one might say always already violated) but defers this violation. This has allowed us to arrive at a position that does not affirm absolutely free self-determination but neither allows engulfment as affectable others. Each moment defers the other, each unsettled and left with a fundamental aporetic openness. Indeed, one might say, if one was feeling obtuse, that the question of the self's determinability remains perpetually undetermined. This is not as a movement of sequentiality, with moments of affectability or freedom, but rather a productive yet unresolved tension which, by our reading, does not baulk at the resistance to modern representation but retains the tension as one which resists recuperation in its instability.

However, one might still be concerned that by its universality, this concept renders both the subaltern others of Europe and the transparent I's of Europe as utterly undifferentiated. Contra to this, two points must be re-emphasised. First, it is not a denial of the affectability and determinability of others, but a deferral of such, particularly of any ultimate determinability, with the analytics of race, understood as one of these moments of outer determination. It is through the very writing of the other in its particular determination that the other is engulfed within the discourse of modern representation and the text, that is, partially violated in representation. Second, it does no favours to exclude the beneficiaries of modern representation, that is, those within the broader confines of Europe, from this thinking. This is because it would both allow the privileged escape from affect and hold that simply being the being that visits partial violence on others does not protect one from the effects of this economy of representation. It is illuminating here to recall the passage from *TI*, where Levinas, discussing war as the ultimate "truth, of the real" points out that "every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them. It establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance; nothing henceforth is exterior" (*TI*, p.p.21). Alternatively, skipping ahead, to look at Moten's note that this violent economy of representation is killing them too "however much more softly" (Harney

& Moten, p.140-141). One can potentially also connect this allegory with *RH*, where Europe's intellectual tools of totality were turned inwards.

What I have worked to tease out of the above conversations, both with Slabodsky and Da Silva, is to establish basic compatibility first between Levinas and concerns for decolonisation as such, and subsequently to see how our account could integrate and be integrated into Da Silva's project to uncover the analytics of raciality. From this, I have tried to understand how a Levinasian analysis could potentially be utilised in service of this critical investigation. I have hopefully settled some concerns not only regarding Levinas and race but also regarding the factoring of history and culture into imaginings of the other as such. My next step in this chapter is to investigate Da Silva's Black Feminist Poethics to understand how my reading can be bought forwards with her thought. This will set us up for the final chapter, where we will attempt to put more flesh on the bones of a gesture towards praxis, both imagining critical movements and engaging with extant ones.

Black Feminist Poethics and the Thingly

The analysis of Da Silva has in many ways reinforced aspects of Levinas' thought I investigated previously, with its scepticism towards representation, totality, and transparency. However, we might grow concerned here that simply stopping at this point leaves two issues outstanding. First, there is the concern that the aforementioned scepticism may simply end up replicating Levinas' previously examined strained relationship with the thingly, leading to an inevitable turning inwards, rejecting the scene of exteriority and affect, as proposed by Moten. The second issue here is that it leaves us at something of a dead-end. If modern representation is thought as above, as oppressive, engulfing and necessarily violent, by not re-imagining representation we are potentially left with a silence that cannot respond to injustice and violence.

What we find in Da Silva's writings on Black Feminist Poethics is not necessarily a resolution to these problems, but a way we can think about the thingly differently in the Levinasian account expounded previously and move another step closer to the praxis this project has been aiming towards. "Towards a Black Feminist Poethics" (Da Silva, 2014), it is important to note, is not describing a program as such or a definitive praxis, but rather aims to "provide an outline of the general … questions and questionings demanded by the project" (Da Silva, 2014, p.82). However, despite this limited scope of the work, what will be of interest here, in particular, is Da Silva's understanding of the Category of Blackness as possessing the "necessary tools for dismantling the existing strategies for knowing", and further, a "Feminist Poethics of Blackness, which

includes the outline of a description of existence without the tools of universal reason, and the narratives of science and history that sustain the transparent trajectory of the subjects of universal reason" (Da Silva, 2014, p.82).

What does this different thinking of existence call for? Black Feminist Poethics takes the two symbolic figures of slavery and creative capacity as the two faces of Blackness, and rather than resolving them into historical or biological essence, it undertakes "a moment of radical praxis (which) acknowledges the creative capacity Blackness indexes, reclaims expropriated total value, and demands for nothing less than decolonisation - that is, a reconstruction of the world with the return of the total value without which capital would not have thrived and off which it still lives" (Da Silva, 2014, p.85). While decolonisation requires "the setting up of juridico-economic architectures of redress through which global capital returns the total value" it has expropriated, this does not amount to simply monetary restitution, but the abolition of the world as it exists (Da Silva, 2014, p.85). That is to say, "we need first to follow Blackness as it signals that knowing and doing can be released from a particular kind of thinking, which is necessary for a radical departure from a certain kind of world" (Da Silva, 2014, p.85-86).

This reimagining of the world, or rather, this removal of an old one, is the work that our thinking developed so far will hopefully be able to contribute to. Levinas' thinking of a subject is one unlike the subject of western thought, a subject which, in our formulation, repudiates transparency and autonomy in favour of vulnerability, openness, always already with others and inhabited by them. There is no interiority when the exterior other impinges upon us before we have the chance to set up a self at home. The other does not need to break down the walls of the subject, they were already there when it was constructed. However, the relation to the thingly, and to matter, is an area where Da Silva's imaginary can provide a last change to our Levinasian conception, or instead allow us to rephrase it in a manner alien to Levinas, but not to his thought. We have seen how Levinas conceives of the world of matter as a realm of determinacy and fatalism, which can only take the form of objects grasped in the understanding, the coerciveness of cruel, indifferent matter on the body, or its atheism in enjoyment, or the always-present horror of the *il y a*. For Levinas, the realm of the thingly is one of totality and engulfment, so he retreats from it insofar as he can whilst maintaining corporeality and exteriority. However, Da Silva advocates instead to re-imagine the exterior, that is, material, world, not as "necessity and determinacy" but as "contingency and possibility" (Da Silva, 2014, p.92-93).

While Da Silva's conception rests upon Deleuze's refiguring of Leibniz, we can see how Levinas can contribute to such a thinking. We have already discussed thinking the material through Levinas in a more positive valence, understanding it as the medium through which we serve the other, and this serves as a very productive starting point. I will not attempt to explore a Levinasian ontology in great depth here, such a project would demand much more attention, but what I will point out is that, in line with the readings above, the realm of ontology is thoroughly wrestled from universal reason. Instead, its meaning and signification are first instituted by the other, that most opaque, irreducible and unsublatable difference that is never statically graspable. Proximity to the other collapses time and makes impossible the simple sequentiality and temporality that would otherwise allow for the scientific determination of things, but rather in the eschatological and utopian proximity of the other, the openness of possibility is also present. Particularly potent here is Levinas' observation, that we have revisited many times, that whatever takes place humanly has never remained closed up in a site *(OB*, p.184), and that within the realm of essence, any revolution is simply a revolving upon itself *(OB*, p.182). Might we say on reflection of these two passages that the challenge unsaid is to think something which could take place thingly, that refuses to be closed in a site, that is, a thingly divorced from essence which could participate in a revolution not upon its own axis? This question remains to be thoroughly thought in Levinas, and perhaps cannot be, but it is important, even at this late stage, to feel ourselves chafe somewhat against the limitations of Levinas where necessary and to indicate future paths of investigation.

Perhaps a more viable method of moving forwards, suggested elsewhere by Da Silva, is the idea of "Difference Without Separability" (Da Silva, 2016). What is needed is "an ethico-political program that does not reproduce the violence of modern thought", but instead pursues "re-thinking sociality from without the modern text. Because only the end of the world as we *know it* … can dissolve cultural differences' production of human collectives as strangers" (Da Silva, 2016, p.58 italics in original). Thus far, this is not a significant change from the previous works of Da Silva we have investigated, however, this latest move against Western ontoepistemology ends at a somewhat different position, with quite different inspiration.

So, what does this rejection of the "abstract fixities produced by the (Kantian) Understanding" look like (Da Silva, 2016, p.58)? Da Silva initially characterises the project of Western thought as resting on three pillars, those of:

> "*separability*, that is, the view that all that can be known about the things of the world is what is gathered by the forms of the intuition and the categories of understanding"

"*determinacy*, the view that knowledge results from the understanding's ability … to determine (i.e. decide) the true nature of the sense impressions gathered by the forms of intuition"

"*sequentiality*, which describes Spirit as … process of self-development, and describes History as the trajectory of Spirit", introducing "a temporal figuring of cultural difference as the actualization of Spirit's different moments" (Da Silva, 2016, p.60).

In many ways, this is a recapitulation of the analysis of *On a Global Idea of Race*, but in a more concise manner and a much clearer indication of what is specifically called to be dismantled. Da Silva's proposed solution, rather than the literary focus of the last piece, is rather to use understandings of particle physics and quantum mechanics to recognise the entangled nature of human and inter-human existence. That is, one can use the findings of particle physics, of nonlocality, entanglement, and virtuality, to demonstrate a way of thinking and imaging otherwise than the principles of separability, determinacy and sequentiality (Da Silva, 2016, p.63-64). The abandoning of these principles leads to an abandoning of separability, which leaves "difference among human groups and between human and non-human entities" with "very limited … ethical significance" (Da Silva, 2016, p.65). This then results in difference not as "a manifestation of an unresolvable *estrangement*, but the expression of an elementary *entanglement*" (Da Silva, 2016, p.65)

Where the current project enters into this discussion is to think about how this can change our conception of Levinas, to make an account that is more corrosive to the pillars Da Silva outlines above, and further, how this account can contribute to a thinking against these notions of the Understanding from its own perspective. It will be worth briefly looking into this schema that Da Silva has outlined using the Levinasian vocabulary and analysis that has been developed so far. We can refer back to discussions where the other breaks apart standard time and history, interrupting the ordinary flow of time with the messianic time Levinas discusses in *TI*, and more generally in *TO*. Likewise, the other is the ultimate form of the indeterminate, constantly evading and exceeding prediction and determination.

The issue of separability will require some more investigation to integrate. If we think back to *TI*, we will recall Levinas's discussions of separation, it takes the form of the deficient counterpart to exteriority, the "sovereign interiority of the separated being" (*TI*, p.81). Separation is synonymous with an interiority which, if we borrow the language used above, utilises the tools and forms of the intuition and understanding and applies them to phenomena in the world. This is the world of determinacy that Da Silva previously encouraged a re-imaging as contingency and possibility. However, Levinas recognises that we cannot simply be separated beings, for "it is

necessary to have already been in the society of signifiers for the sign to be able to appear as a sign. Hence the signifier must present himself before every sign, by himself - present a face" (*TI*, p.182). Once we consider here that the other is always already upon us, in proximity to us, and we are already exposed (recall here also our discussion of substitution in *OB*), we see this separation precisely not give way to a world of determined things to be comprehended, but something else entirely. Levinas then discusses speech as that moment at which the signifier is present at the manifestation of the signified (*TI*, p.182). While Levinas denigrates written language and works in this portion, what is of value is where he recognises that "from my speech-activity I absent myself, as I am missing from all my products. But I am the unfailing source of ever renewed deciphering" (*TI*, p.182). This gets to what we are trying to demonstrate here. That is, the Other is what disrupts the separated understanding that can determine and order the meaning of things, and since we are never without the Others, separation, absolute separation which would enable determinacy and the autarchy of the ego, remains impossible.

However, one might be perturbed at this reading of Levinas. Is it not the case that the Other can always disavow any relation with me? Surely this entanglement represents the drawing of the other into totality with me, simply offering a new realm of transparency and comprehension? This remains a concern, however, one might clarify it by emphasising that it is not that the other is a term in a relation, but rather that proximity to the other instead implies a constant, destabilising, and re-orienting presence, but engendered by nothing graspable. That is that the affect aroused by the Other and the experience of that proximity lingers, and this very uncertainty and obligation of the other generate and are generated by the inscrutability of the other that precludes grasping of the world and the Other in the Understanding. The world is no longer simply mine to grasp and understand.

We can see from this discussion how Levinasian concepts and our understanding of his thought can be utilised to undertake the work that Da Silva finds so vital in this essay. We had already established the ability for our account to incorporate Da Silva's general critique of the ontoepistemological foundations of the analytics of raciality, however now we can understand how Levinas can provide an alternate method for imaging this un-knowing and destruction of the world as articulated and formed by these projects of knowledge in a more specific context. This by no means invalidates Da Silva's proposed way forwards, however, the ability of our Levinas to provide a heterogeneous account of the disruption of the pillars of knowledge Da Silva is investigating here is both helpful for that project and important for how I will move forwards with the rest of this project.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an interpretation of Levinas pushed to the radical margins of his thought, understood in a textually sound manner, yet against the grain readings of his work often follow. Despite this, my project retained an inability to talk about race in a meaningful way, the options at that point apparently being silence, or instead to attempt to rehabilitate Levinas' problematic discussions in *MS*. Instead, I have looked to other thinkers, who to a certain degree engage with Levinas, and who either discuss more promising avenues between Levinas and decolonialism, as is the case with Slabodsky, or in Da Silva's case, provide a theoretical critique of Western ontoepistemology which utilises Levinas' analysis, and has allowed me to utilise her work to improve the current project. By expanding on pre-existing affinities with Levinas and using these thinkers to understand where Levinas cannot answer certain challenges, my account can now have a serious answer to questions about race. In addition, this account now also has further resources to draw upon in resolving internal tensions, as well as hopefully participating in Da Silva's decolonial re-imaging of the world in a very different form of sociality.

Having discussed how Levinas can engage with discussions on colonialism and race, the next chapter will continue the investigations made so far towards more practical ends. The discussions in the present chapter will be discussed and developed, particularly by the introduction of Fanon and *The Undercommons*, but I will also pull back to examine the political and the role of violence more generally. The discussion of violence will take up the majority of the chapter, however, it is important to note that these discussions of a different sociality that we have so far been enumerating will remain at the base of this re-understanding of violence and resistance to totality, despite the initial move back to an approach more focused on interpretation of Levinas.

Chapter 5: Rereading Levinas through Violence and Resistance: Beyond the Political

As we approach the end of this project, I mean to reach out further to those outside the Levinasian tradition and consider some of the themes and concepts I have discussed so far in a more praxis-oriented manner. What has been expounded so far is Levinas pushed to the limits of his thought and, in some places, by the contributions of other thinkers, beyond it. This pushing of the margins will continue in this chapter to understand what the revolutionary posture and ethics of resistance, which we have already discussed as possibility and as necessity, would actually look like. This chapter will, of necessity, not be a comprehensive theory of force or revolutionary activity by a Levinasian understanding but will serve to clarify the currently vague field of possibility. Additionally, this will address some further objections which have not been given a complete account thus far. I will focus largely on the nature of violence in this chapter, not through some need to turn Levinas into a Galleanist or Bolshevik, but rather that violence forms a fundamental part of all political activity, be it direct political violence, or mediated through police, courts, and prisons. Indeed, as we will see, violence forms the very field that political activity operates in, so it will be crucial to discuss in thinking against the political. Violence as a part of (anti)political activity seems to be amongst the most challenging areas to Levinas' thought, even the version presented previously, and so it will form a useful case study, the principles of which can be broadened to other areas of struggles against power.

I will begin this investigation by first restating what has previously been established in my account of Levinas and violence and the necessity of what one might call revolutionary change to the current state of the world. I will explore the ideas of moral failure from Lisa Tessman's work to understand a framework of how violence in resistance can operate in a moral sense and set up a model that can be developed throughout the chapter.

Once I have done this, I will draw on the work of Georges Sorel and Walter Benjamin to conceive different approaches to violence and force and interrogate these approaches. This will tie into Levinas' discussions on the commandment and violence more generally, as well as help to clarify how we might best understand these passages. This understanding also helps to embed ideas of force and resistance in a Levinasian account, enabling future discussions. The second figure I will examine is Fanon and his accounts of decolonial struggles with the aid of Maldonado-Torres' reading. This will provide further clarity by comparison and further exploration of the role of force. I will then develop this further by introducing Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's concept of the "general antagonism", applying this idea of underlying hostility and tension between the

state and institutions of representation and the other to the Levinasian account. This language enables a reframing and expansion of the understanding of the other as always already at odds with the state, commerce, and its institutions. This then has a final articulation through an emphasising of care in Levinas' thought, in a demonstration of the contributions of the subjectivity Levinas describes.

The following chapter aims to demonstrate several points, not only about Levinas and violence, but also developing themes that have already been touched on, such as the necessity and nature of a revolutionary posture in Levinas, how we can think these concepts and others in relation to the radical refusal of politics, and what a Levinasian understanding of the other can bring to liberatory discourses. The primary claim I will put forth is that it is possible, and on the reading, I have advocated here, necessary, to put forward a radical Levinasian ethic of resistance, one that is open to diverse approaches but is grounded in the ethical approach we have outlined so far. This is an approach which is grounded in the final page of *OB*, a war against war that finds its cause and motive not in the virile virtues of militarism, but rather is fundamentally concerned with the defence of, and care for, the other in their vulnerability, to whom I am always responsible. Further, through other thinkers, I will show how this need not, as a counterpoint, fall to a spiral of Pelagian deliberation or interminable casuistic reasoning, which finds purity in pious stillness.

Before proceeding to the main body of the argument, the terminology I have been using in this introduction needs some clarification. I will refrain from giving a full definitional account, as some of this will be worked out in the opening sections of this chapter, but some clarification will be of use here. This is particularly the case when considering the broad term "violence" that I have been deploying. Throughout the present work, we have considered, under the term violence, physical force, the violation done by representation and the coercive role of the state. It seems that while these all fall under a certain definition of "violence", it is not clear that they ought to be considered in the same way. Even under the idea of physical force, when perpetrated by different people, in different contexts, by different means and to different ends, we are faced with a vast array of differentiated actions. Rather than getting bogged down in the manifold ways in which humans do violence to each other in their innumerable contexts and gradations, which would take significantly more space than is available, and would at some point become futile regardless, the primary consideration here will be with the deployment of force as such. I will focus less on the partial violence of representation as we have already covered this in some depth, however as it finds itself so intertwined with these other forms, it will form an important part of my analysis.

The term "Revolution" has also been used somewhat loosely so far, but this is somewhat simpler to clarify. Hopefully, it has been indicated by my earlier discussions, and the tenor with which I have spoken about it, that what is being said when I talk about revolution or revolutionary activity is not the cataclysmic event that characterises the revolutions of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Rather, it is meant to indicate a struggle in resistance to, and aiming at the abolition of, the current state of things. This, much like the violence mentioned above, can take an array of forms, but we need not proceed with an image from 19th and 20th century revolutions as an ideal here. To further clarify this and expand on a revolutionary ethic in a Levinasian frame, I will proceed with the main body of the text, beginning with reframing Levinas' thought on violence in the context of moral failure.

Revisiting Levinas and Violence

Previously I identified several contentions that form the basis of this chapter. First, the institutions of the state, capitalism, carceral justice, etc. are deleterious to the alterity of the other. These institutions of governance, representation and regulation enact, to a greater extent than seems necessary, a betrayal of the ethical demand of the other. In fact, these institutions carry the danger of falling to absolute authoritarianism and an attempted obliteration of alterity in favour of totality. As a result of this, I have found that a thoroughgoing analysis based on my reading of Levinas ought to advocate for a changed situation, one where the betrayal above is minimised as much as is possible, and these institutions, which are always at risk of grounding themselves in their own preservation and mastery as opposed to the ethical demand of the other, are abolished. I also established in chapter three a basic understanding of the permissibility of force, or violence, in relation to the ethical demand of the other.

However, while I have attempted to show how this reading posits a Levinas opposed to pacifism, it is not at all clear how to enter into a discussion on how violence can be considered permissible in a broader sense. This whole field of discussion is made complicated both by Levinas' vague positions where violence or force is treated as permissible and additionally the places where "war" is categorised as apparently utterly anathema to Levinas' understanding. This position is articulated most powerfully in the opening of *TI*, where violence not only consists in "injuring and annihilating persons", but interrupts their continuity, "making them betray not only commitments but their own substance" (*TI*, p.21). Then, even when the struggle is ended, the alienated beings are not restored, as the resulting "peace of empires issued from war rests on

war" (*TI*, p.22). Indeed, even in Levinas' speaking on the just war against war, his language is dominated by hesitation and trembling, of a repudiating of cruelty *(OB*, p.185).

To investigate further Levinas' understanding of violence per se, that is, violence as a relation, it will be useful to first read Levinas' discussion of totality, war, and violence in the chapter "The Ethical Relation and Time" in *TI*, particularly the first four sections. This will give us a greater understanding of the nature of violence as Levinas understands it and allow us to address the question more thoroughly than the previous discussion of permissibility entered into earlier. This chapter is also read in great detail by Howard Caygill in *On Resistance* (2013), and my reading shares some similarities with his. I certainly agree with Caygill's contention that this chapter demonstrates the centrality of the possibility of conflict and enmity in Levinas' thought and understanding of subjectivity. As I will argue, Levinas is certainly no pacifist, and indeed, the pacification of totality is hardly a peace at all. My disagreement with Caygill is largely insofar as he does not temper this image of a combative or resistant Levinas, something I believe is warranted given certain other passages in *TI.* I am thinking particularly here of the "non-violent transitivity" that characterises Levinas' description of pedagogy, which I will explore later in this chapter, which perhaps indicates that the relation of violence is, while ever-present, not foundational, or essential in the manner Caygill seems to present it. Passages such as this, as well as my readings presented in Chapter three of the present work, indicate that to understand Levinas as licensing his "too quick" ethical move on "the ultimately disquieting Clausewitzian premise that the other is the *enemy*." (Caygill, 2013, p.93 italics in original) is perhaps also a somewhat hasty conclusion to draw. As with my previous brief engagement with Caygill, his interpretation of Levinas as political to an almost cynical degree feels thoroughly refreshing in contrast to those who read him as naïve and angelic (see Zizek, 2013), it nevertheless seems to carry this interpretation further than seems warranted, given the highlighting of Levinas' balance discussed previously.

In this chapter, Levinas envisions war as a social-existential mode distinct from that of the totality, and indeed, different to the epiphany of the face, although it still issues from this primordial relation (*TI*, p.222). The approach of violence to or against the other is thoroughly ambiguous. Levinas notes that "war presupposes the transcendence of the antagonist" (*TI*, p.222), but it does not approach them in the manner of the face to face (*TI*, p.228). It is only through the bizarre duality of the other, as an unknowable other who can shock me, and by their skill outmanoeuvre me, but also as a material graspable thing: "violence bears upon only a being both graspable and escaping every hold" (*TI*, p.223). It is in the threat of violence that the acuity of our corporeality is revealed, "the contact of the soul with the body... is inverted into the non-

contact of a blow struck in the void" (*TI*, p.224). We are made to feel the vulnerability in corporeality, the shocking banality that all we are, all of our rich inner lives and depth of thought and feeling remain undoable in an instant, "by the point of steel or by the chemistry of the tissues" *(TI,*229). The corporeality mentioned above results in the domination of the other, "across the gold that buys him or the steel that kills him" (*TI*, p.228).

Difference is not effaced, as in totality, but the aim is total annihilation, or "unlimited negation" of the other, aiming at a face even while overwhelming the face's moral authority with force. In fact, for Levinas, it is only murder that can totally silence the call of the other. Even in one's own death, one can end up serving the other; the independence of the will is not necessarily affirmed in death over submission. The other could be very content with either outcome in the last analysis *(TI,*230).

So, by the above reading, we can see that violence is conceived as coercion aimed at the annihilation or (attempted) control of the other, two outcomes which go against the first word, the primary ethical commandment that speaks in the face of the other. Yet we have seen that the issues of the third complicate this picture, can force me to stand against the other in this confrontation in defence of the third, or vice versa. By the traditional Levinasian account, this is where institutions of the state etc. come in to mediate this necessary violation into the mere partial violation of representation and measure. Nevertheless, we have seen how this mediation simply leads to the perpetuation of the greater violence described above, providing the foundation of a potential greater economy of absolute negation of the other. Da Silva's insights into the role of transparency and representation in a greater epistemology of racialisation, which underpins genocide and slavery, are pertinent here, insofar as seemingly abstract violations by representation and engulfment can very well slide into eliminationism and physical violence against the marginalised. By our analysis, this is the peace of empires that Levinas discusses elsewhere and must be resisted. Given the dire ethical implications of this resistance mentioned above, how this resistance can occur is the question the present chapter is concerned with.

In this context, and with Levinas' general ethical pronouncements on the demand of the other and their dignity, how can we envision engaging the other by force, coercion, or violence? While we have established this as compatible in a very basic sense, this cannot be considered much use if it is infinitely deferred and never actualised due to the agonising and infinite demands of the other. While we have argued that Levinas rejects inaction in pursuit of pious purity, this only gets us so far and does not delve into the details of negotiating this. We might be tempted to take an easy route, and merely say that the resistance is not against the other, but against

totality, and institutions. However, this seems dishonest and evasive, given that these impersonal forces are always manifested in the other, who remains an other despite appearing as a policeman, bureaucrat, or politician. Fortunately, assistance in working through this can be found in the unlikely source of Lisa Tessman's work on moral failure and moral dilemmas.

Lisa Tessman on Moral Dilemmas and Inevitable Failure

Tessman has a meta-ethical approach and intellectual lineage very different from Levinas. Tessman primarily works in the tradition of analytic ethics, influenced by Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum, and focuses on moral psychology and virtue ethics. Additionally, Tessman is a meta-ethical constructivist, a position that Levinas bears little similarity to, in a debate that is largely foreign to his work. Having said this, Tessman's work on the impossible demands of morality, unfulfillable moral requirements, and tragic costs nonetheless tackles precisely the problems we have found in the current discussion of Levinas, which will be vital for this account moving forwards. By using Tessman, we can understand how to consider how, under our Levinasian reading, certain actions may result in moral failure, may leave an unacceptable moral remainder, but must still happen. Regarding this section on Tessman's thought, I will begin with a reading establishing the basis for how this conversation between such different traditions can occur before applying her conclusions to the problems we have raised.

In *Moral Failure: on the Impossible Demands of Morality*, Lisa Tessman is attempting to demonstrate, first, that we can experience genuine moral dilemmas, and second that this experience is both meaningful and coherent. Against a utilitarian action-guiding principle that would validate a 'choosing the least-bad' option as an unqualified good, and a deontological approach would deny the dilemmas altogether (Tessman, 2015, p.4), Tessman formulates two situations in which dilemmas can occur. The first would be one where I am compelled to do something which I am physically, or absolutely, unable to do, and feel remorse and failure despite my inability to act. The second is one where there is not a 'good' option, that is, one where both choices involve an unacceptable or 'tragic' cost, that is, one that no one should have to bear (Tessman, 2015, p.40). In this latter situation, despite one option or the other being, on some level, better, the cost involved is so devastating that an unacceptable moral failure is left in place. This second example is what I will focus on in this reading and which has the most to

contribute to this chapter. The ultimate goal of this reading of Tessman is to use her conception of failure as a framing to understand a Levinasian conception of active resistance and the issues we have discussed above regarding violence.

The first area in which Tessman and Levinas can be understood together is their mutual rejection of the fungibility of moral value and demands. Tessman uses Gowan's ideas of moral fungibility and "irreplaceable loss" (Tessman, 2015, p. 32-33) to reject certain utilitarian approaches to moral dilemmas. It is not the case, for Tessman, that different dilemmas simply involve a choice between different degrees of the same basic idea of 'value'. Rather, it can be, and often is, the case that choosing one option leads to something lost on the other side that is not simply replaced by the choice made. Something is lost in choosing that cannot be replaced by the choice made. To put this in Levinasian terms, the other, and the demands of the other, are not simply part of a convertible field or mass of interchangeable values, but precisely by virtue of their status as other are incomparable. The whole conflict between the other and the third rests on this fundamental aspect of the other, as beyond-essence the other is not convertible as would be a force or an object, and not answering the particular need or call of one other in favour of another is indeed an irreplaceable loss. It is in this context that Levinas advocates for institutions and reasoning that would make these others comparable, and which I have already rejected. However, as we will see, an *irreplaceable* loss does not necessarily equate to an *unacceptable* loss.

Tessman utilises some of Martha Nussbaum's work on the concept of tragic costs to expand her understanding of moral dilemmas and reinforce their existence. This particular line of thought is concerned with that moral dilemma where no action is free of a "tragic cost", that is, a cost that no one should have to bear (Tessman, 2015, p.40). Unlike the prior discussion on irreplaceable loss, these costs are always unacceptable, are of such a severe or destructive quality that they cannot be compensated, and if that cost comes to pass, this is a case of moral failure. Tessman illustrates this with a child losing an anthropomorphised balloon. The child experiences this as an irreplaceable loss, but this is not a tragic cost, whereas something like the trolley problem, where one gives their life (or has it taken) for several others, puts a cost on the one who is sacrificed (and their family, loved ones, etc.) that is an unacceptable cost (Tessman, 2015, p.43).

I will refrain here from following Tessman into her discussion of how to discern between these possibilities, as this is a point where Tessman and Levinas diverge, but we can take this framework forward in a useful way. We could perhaps conceive of the above analysis in

Levinasian terms like this: dilemmatic situations between the other and the third, where one is forced to choose, inevitably involves a degree of irreplaceable loss, such is their incomparability. However, the presence of unacceptable moral failure is more ephemeral. Making a choice, or indeed not making a choice and remaining passive, can lead to a tragic loss, a situation where the other, or indeed others, are subjected to a burden that no one should have to bear. As Tessman states, "some moral wrongdoings are negligible and ought to be taken in stride. Others … leave one with repair work … But some violations of moral requirements are failures *from which there can be no recovery* … Not all wrongs can be rectified, not all losses can be compensated … not everyone can recover" (Tessman, 2015, p.178 italics in original). It can perhaps be said that conflict between the other and the third necessarily involves irreplaceable loss, but not always an unacceptable or tragic loss. Conversely, there are numerous situations that are tragic, where the result, even if one choice is 'better' than the others, results in an unacceptable moral failure. These situations, where morality seems to have failed and where our agency is removed by the inevitability of serious failure, will form the basis of my next engagement with Tessman.

Levinas asks us, at the beginning of *TI,* if we are duped by morality. This, in many ways, is the question Tessman asks of the experience of Auschwitz. Does it even make sense to speak of morality, of moral imperatives, in such a desperate situation? Further, what does it mean for survivors of the Holocaust, and other campaigns of genocide, to feel guilt or remorse over their conduct in those situations? It is here that Tessman introduces another distinction, between moral dilemmas, and situations where morality is absent (Tessman, 2015, p.167-168). In the situation of moral dilemmas, where there is a tragic cost, morality is not triumphant despite the agent choosing the 'better' option. Tessman uses the unimaginably horrifying example of the "Crying Baby" case, where a group of Jewish refugees, being hunted by the Nazis, are forced to kill a baby to stop it crying out and alerting the Nazis to their position (Tessman, 2015, p.67). Here, while the mother has made a choice to ensure the survival of others, and the child will die if their position is revealed regardless, a terrible violation of both the baby and the mother has taken place.

However, in certain situations, such agency is effaced to such an extent that morality and ethics apparently cease to apply in the moment (Tessman, 2015, p.168). Tessman quotes Zygmunt Bauman's characterisation of the Holocaust as "a time of moral conflict … a conflict between morality and a presumably non-moral rational self-interest" (Tessman, 2015, p.166). Contra to Bauman's account, Tessman draws on Lawrence Langer, who points out that "insofar as Bauman is speaking of Germans, collaborators, or bystanders, his observation is pertinent' the confusion

and distortion arise when one tries to apply his 'lesson … to the experience of former victims too." (quoted in Tessman, 2015, p.168). The case of those incarcerated in the camps is one where not only does every choice involve an unacceptable loss, but rather the ability to choose is itself removed. When Levinas speaks of the 20th century having taught us of the creation of the Servile Soul, it might be said that this is what he is referring to. A situation whereby not only is one's status as an other destroyed, but my ability to be approached by an other qua other is removed. I will revisit this inability to give in my discussion of Fanon.

Much of Tessman's discussion hinges on the question of self-sacrifice, the very one-for-the-other dynamic that lies at the core of substitution. For Tessman, it is important to recognise that self-sacrifice, although potentially the more moral option, for the one sacrificed, their friends, loved ones, etc., this still represents an unacceptable loss (Tessman, 2015, p.166). Despite the bravery and moral fortitude present in one willing to die for others, this outcome is not triumphant but is a deep failure. Not of the one who is giving their life, but it points towards the dynamics of a situation for which people are responsible, and it is with them that the failure lies. The pertinent aspect of this discussion is to think about Levinas' insistence that "my responsibility for all can and has to manifest itself also in limiting itself. The ego can, in the name of this unlimited responsibility be called upon to concern itself also with itself" *(OB*, p.128). Tessman's analysis of failure here is vital for thinking about how we might enact that limiting while never denying that presence of responsibility and avoiding total self-abnegation that would destroy any possibility for action.

As Levinas repeatedly reminds us, the will is not heroic. To this, we might have Tessman add that morality is not triumphant, particularly when it comes to resistance to oppression. I will not linger on Tessman's discussion here, as it largely concerns debates within analytic theories of justice, a debate this project is not particularly concerned with. It is, however, worth mentioning Tessman's criticism of various normative theories of resistance to oppression, as in their emphasis on action-guidance, they are negligent of situations that we have described, those of moral dilemmas which are not resolvable (Tessman, 2015, p.178). Tessman points out that "oppressive conditions tend to be dilemmatic in a systemically patterned way; because of systemically constrained options, oftentimes under such conditions all options are morally objectionable" (Tessman, 2015, p.179). Tessman goes on to argue that one must engage in a logic of trade-offs to emerge with some action-guiding principle (Tessman, 2015, p.197), and while one might maximise the outcome as a result of these trade-offs, by the very engagement in this logic one engages in something potentially repugnant, as these tend to result in cases of prescribing moral wrongdoing, despite choosing the best possible option. Tessman grudgingly

accepts this process to a point, as "no matter how dilemmatic a situation one might face, one must still choose and act", however it is vital that one does not "use a cost-benefit analysis that produces a prescription for moral wrongdoing but to think of the prescribed action as morally right" (Tessman, 2015, p.198).

We can see how applying Tessman's ideas of dilemmaticity (see note 10 in Tessman, 2015, p.180 for an explanation of this term) to Levinas' thought helps this in two ways. First, it allows us to think through the dilemmas and possibility of failure when facing the other before me, there are obligations that I cannot and, in some cases, should not, meet. Most vitally, it accepts that there will be, and frequently are, situations in which responsibility, even morality itself, can fail. Again, this lets us think about how we might envision a Levinasian approach to resistance, a normativity that refuses a simple action-guidance but instead hesitates, without refusing action to preserve its own purity. Likewise, it also helps with the more obviously dilemmatic situation between the other and the third. This dilemma is the one I have focused on the most, as the potential opposition between the third and the other is necessarily dilemmatic. Each neighbour can call us to mutually conflicting responsibilities, and, by using Tessman, we can envision a way of navigating this which doesn't just erase the conflict through politics and a liberal negotiation of rights but provides a less abstract understanding of how to negotiate this without the political.

Crucially, Tessman's understanding calls us to accept the possibility of not being able to unravel these dilemmas. It is precisely through these conceptions of failure, which are not negated or sublimated or traded off against some greater good, that we can approach the work that this Levinasian reading calls us to. Not proceeding to simply cut into this Gordian knot with bloodthirsty enthusiasm, but through an undertaking of unfair choices in unfair conditions that we cannot help but fail, and rather than ignoring or valorising the result, or refusing the choice, sit with the aporia of what is, what ought to be, and the choices we have had no choice but to make. To wrestle with moral failure, inevitable moral failure, without the triumphal purity of Pelagius, or the defeatism of the follower of Augustine, who finds in original sin the futility of goodness, is a punishing task. Nonetheless, it is one that, in some sense, corresponds to the stakes and costs involved. To understand this wrestling with the law and the commandment which must not, but sometimes must, be broken, I will now turn to Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* in a critical comparison with Georges Sorel's own *Reflections on Violence*. By examining these two works, I will develop the basic characterisation of force as inherently dilemmatic and tragic.

Benjamin and Sorel: Divine and Mythic Violence, the General Strike, and Wrestling in Solitude

Reflections on Violence, published by Georges Sorel, is a work that one would not generally associate with Levinas. Indeed, ultimately, I will find that the ideas in this work are not, on the whole, compatible with my approach. Despite this, certain points of Sorel's are more agreeable, and it will be worth discussing these as well as the more obvious points of difference. These will then set us up in preparation for the introduction of Benjamin's engagement with violence and, through his modifications, develop the themes that we have discussed thus far.

The first point of agreement with Sorel is the necessity that revolution not simply be a change in personnel or some kind of rearrangement of the forces of state and capital, but instead must be a project of absolute abolition of these institutions, which inherently tend towards dictatorship. Drawing on the example of the French Revolution of 1789, Sorel notes the preservation of the old order in the 'new', particularly the wholesale and enthusiastic embrace of the "employment of the penal procedure to ruin any power which was an obstacle" (Sorel, 1999, p.96). It was this failure to absolutely do away with the old order which led to the legislation of Robespierre, and in these terrorist laws, "we have the strongest expression of the doctrine of the state" (Sorel, 1999, p.98). We might draw this into proximity with Levinas' condemnation of a revolution that is simply a revolving upon itself, and this point will be of great importance when we get to Benjamin's reformulation of Sorel's ideas.

As a result, Sorel also heaps scorn upon parliamentary socialists and those who would presume to think for the proletariat. Likewise, the approach in the present work rejects reform within institutions as a submission to the logics of force and representation. These amount to a widespread partial violation through representation and a peace which, as we have seen, my interpretation is sceptical of. Sorel's characterisation of this peace and 'progress' as simply a transition from open brutality to cunning is also worth mentioning (Sorel, 1999, p.187-189). I would agree that this hardly represents an embrace of an ethics oriented towards the other, but rather is a different tenor of egoism, that is, refusal of the face of the other and forgetting substitution.

Despite these points of agreement, Sorel's overall project, and conception of violence, is one that this project cannot accept. The preponderance of heroism in Sorel's writing, his emphasis on a grim commitment to duty in service of glory, and his firm belief in the power of violence to

cleanse the decadence of peace is anathematic to Levinas' thought. We might say that Sorel's proletarian violence is akin to Levinas' description of the moment "when the drapings of illusion burn war is produced as the pure experience of pure being" (*TI*, p.21). However, Sorel's thought is taken in a more interesting direction by Walter Benjamin, whose characterisation of the general strike as Divine violence, and his overall conception of violence as either mythic or divine, provide a very useful method of thinking these Sorelian principles of violence in a manner that radically transforms them.

Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* offers us a way of thinking revolutionary force in a way that answers some of the questions left after looking at the previous thinkers. Benjamin's approach of divine violence evades the triumphal heroism of Sorel, the morally bankrupt casuistry that Tessman criticises, as well as the pessimistic or pious inaction of *ET*. Instead, divine violence features as something that does not seek to perpetuate itself, which is destructive and violent, but not for its own sake and crucially, refuses to attempt justification and defies judgment. Engagement between Levinas and Benjamin is, by now, fairly commonplace, however, most of these engagements have focused on Benjamin's later *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (e.g. Herzog, 2003, or Horowitz, 2006b). The engagement I have chosen, with the *Critique of Violence*, is perhaps a more unorthodox choice, but the anarchic stance Benjamin takes here compliments the reading of Levinas that has been produced and furthers the project of these final chapters by interrogating, supplementing, and collaborating with that reading.

Benjamin initiates the essay with a critique of the forms of law, natural and positive, and their conceptions of violence. He finds not one of the forms of violence permitted by these traditions "free of the gravely problematic nature … of all legal violence" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.54). All violence in this context takes the form of either law making or law preserving (Benjamin, 2021, p.45). The paradigmatic instance of legally sanctioned violence is the police, who both preserve law but also maintain the "the simultaneous authorization [Befugnis] to set these ends for itself within broad limits (under the law pertaining to regulations [Verordnungsrecht])" (Benjamin, 2021, p.47) (one might refer here to the modern police's fondness for broad and dubious deployments of the various sections of the Public Order Act (See for example Blowe K. and Walton S., 2019). Violence under the legal understanding above permeates everywhere, as totality – nonviolent resolution is not possible within a legal setting, as it requires a contract, that is, a written guarantee granting "the contract confers upon each party the right to resort to violence in some form or another should one party break the agreement" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.49). Against this picture of a society steeped in implied violence stand the qualities of "courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, trust", which are required conditions for nonviolent

resolution; however, "their objective manifestation … is determined by the law" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.50).

It follows, for Benjamin, that if violence is the spirit and essence of law, the method of enforcing and creating it, then violence becomes a manifestation of that same legal system (Benjamin, 2021a, p.54-55). Akin to the Gods of classical antiquity, the violence of the state is "Not a means to their ends, scarcely even a manifestation of their will, but in the first instance a manifestation of their existence." (Benjamin, 2021a, p.55). The similarities Benjamin draws between Greco-Roman violence of the Gods and the lawmaking/law-preserving violence of the modern state, is that they both possess a fatalistic quality, in a notably similar point to that made in *RH*. The violence of the state and of the gods is fatalistic in the sense that they both form an undifferentiated and, moreover, naturalistic force that permeates the societies in which they are present. Just as Prometheus is heroic by standing boldly in opposition to the fatalistic powers of the Gods, so does a criminal that becomes the darling of the mob, approaching the gallows with a joke and head held high. Except there are no Gods here, but the equally inevitable and encompassing mythic power of law (Benjamin, 2021a, p.55).

As we have seen above, the violence of the state, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, maintains the field of possibility, guarantee and social relations of the world the state dominates. This violence draws all of society into totality. We might here see the tendency which Levinas spoke of, of the state and its institutions to be "at every moment on the point of having their centre of gravity in themselves" *(OB*, p.159), as embracing that fatalism he speaks of in *RH*, and further, the fascist state as one which fully attempts to embody that fatalistic force it sees as the motive force in the world. As Benjamin goes on to say, violence is not dismissed once law is established, but rather "where frontiers are decided, the adversary is not simply annihilated … even when the victor's superiority in power is complete", from which issues "no equality, but at the most equally great violence" (Benjamin, 1996, p.249). This makes the law itself not a conglomeration of differentiated means to ends, but makes the law itself an end, to be manifested in violence "under the name of power … The positing of law is the positing of power, and, in this respect, an act [Akt] of an immediate manifestation of violence." (Benjamin, 1996, p. 56).

It is here that Benjamin, inspired by Sorel, introduces another kind of violence than the boundary-making violence of law and mythic violence. Rather than a violence that does not seek to end violence by its manifestation, but rather by its manifestation envelops everything in a logic of violence, Benjamin explores the idea of a 'divine violence' or 'divine power'. In this

concept, we will find some answers to the problematics that have been discussed so far. Benjamin takes what I find to be valuable in Sorel's account of the general strike, that is, not as the political general strike, which simply seeks to change the laws and government, the proletarian general strike "sets itself the sole task of annihilating [Vernichtung] state power [Staatsgewalt]", not by waiting to "resume work after external concessions and some modification of certain working conditions, but in the resolve to resume only an entirely transformed work that is not compelled by the state, an upheaval that this kind of strike does not so much occasion as consummate" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.52). We might say that this forms a genre of Divine Violence, but the concept as a whole, as we will see, has many more nuances.

In rapid-fire succession, Benjamin enumerates the oppositional distinctions between divine and mythic violence. In short, divine violence is the opposite of mythic violence in every sense, "mythic violence is blood- violence over mere life for the sake of violence itself; divine violence is pure violence over all of life for the sake of the living." (Benjamin, 2021a, p.57-58). This passage, along with numerous others, remains fairly cryptic to say the least. For example, divine violence is said to be lethal without bloodshed (Benjamin, 2021a, p.58), is identified with the Abrahamic God (Benjamin, 2021a, p.57), it is characterised by the educative power, but also annihilates "with regard to goods, law, life, and the like", and yet does not confer lethal power to individuals (Benjamin, 2021a, p.58).

Before bringing this into contact with Levinas and my account so far, we can clarify Benjamin's account through the use of the commandment "thou shall not kill" and a passage from a fragment written the year before the Critique. First, the passage from the fragment *The Right to Apply Force / Use Violence*, a fragment that largely takes the form of a review of an article dealing with this topic. Benjamin outlines four critical possibilities relating to the permissibility of using force, the fourth is of particular interest. This possibility recognises "that only the individual has the right to apply force / use violence." (Benjamin, 2021b, p.87). Benjamin refers to the exposition of this view as belonging to "the tasks of my moral philosophy" (Benjamin, 2021b, p.88). This position appeals to Benjamin first because it sees no distinction between force and morality but does see a sharp contradiction in the principle that does not distinguish between its use by states or institutions and the individual. Benjamin advocates instead for a position that "denies moral right [sittliche Recht] not to violence as such, but rather only to every human institution, community, or individuality that awards itself a monopoly on violence or concedes for itself the right to violence in principle and universally from whatever perspective" (Benjamin, 2021b, p.88). By opposing the ability to conceive of violence as a right to be justified, it instead respects it "in the individual case as a gift of divine power, as *plenipotentiary authority*

[Machtvollkommenheit]" (Benjamin, 2021b, p.88, italics/underlining in original). Given the chronology of these two works, the language of this fragment seems to be the germinal form of the division between mythic and divine violence we get in the Critique, and further, it seems to be the origin of the terminology. As the germinal form, it gives us a description of the essential dynamic of divine violence contrasted with lawmaking violence and states this difficult concept with a very helpful concision. What is crucial here is that the nature of divine violence is that it cannot be institutionalised, monopolised, or in many ways even be justified. Benjamin is very thorough on this point, rejecting monopolisation or claims to the right to use violence "universally from whatever perspective" (Benjamin, 2021b, p.88).

Turning back to the Critique, one of the most famous passages concerns the possibility of using lethal force, that is, crossing the commandment that "thou shalt not kill" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.58). This is the irreducible answer to the question "'may I kill?'". This commandment stands despite the nature of divine justice as being annihilating in regard to life. If this absolute answer of the commandment had the same nature as law, then certainly killing would be an absolute prohibition, however, the logic at play here is of an entirely different kind. It does not stand as an absolute principle, or "a standard of judgment", but becomes "inapplicable to, incommensurable with, the completed deed... And thus, neither the divine judgment of the deed nor the basis for this judgment can be foreseen." (Benjamin, 2021a, p.58). Therefore, the commandment "exists not as a standard of judgment but as a guideline of action for the agent [2:201] or community that has to confront it in solitude and, in terrible cases, take on the responsibility of disregarding it" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.58). The nature of the commandment in the context of divine violence is not, as in the law of mythic violence, a boundary marker established by, and always threatening, violence, but is that very divine power that bestows violence beyond justification. We can understand the divinity of divine violence as first, its impulse as an annihilating and anarchic violence which does not seek to set itself up with laws and a state, which would simply be a new perpetual violence; second, it is a kind of force that can be required but never justified. As pure means, it is not concerned with a situation of ends that might serve this role, but rather could be considered akin to Marx's definition of communism as "not a *state of affairs* which is to be established … We call communism the real movement that abolishes the present state of things" (Marx, 2010b, p.49).

Before we enter into a comparison of Levinas and Benjamin's treatment and interpretation of the commandment against murder, it will be worth comparing Benjamin's account with the concept of action beyond justification as it relates to Tessman's idea of moral failure. As we saw earlier, the most significant danger Tessman warns against is that one might come up with a

prescription of moral wrongdoing in a dilemmatic situation, but then assume that because it is the best option, it is morally correct and justified. When this logic is met with the concept of divine violence, we see a different way of approaching this danger. When an act of killing or force in the context of a divine violence occurs, it is by its nature beyond justification. The danger of understanding it as morally 'good', as justified, is occluded by its nature. What is left is not a matter for judgment against a law, which would visit violence upon the perpetrator as the violator of a principle, but rather the severe weight of responsibility with which the perpetrator is burdened. Additionally, the right for this violence is never granted, before or after the violence, therefore much as in Tessman's analysis, violence can be judged necessary, but never justified, never anything more than a tragic failure, with its tragedy only amplified by its necessity.

The theme of the commandment is expressed in numerous places in Levinas' *oeuvre*, but we will focus first on the expression in *TI*, followed by the discussion on the commandment in the 1986 interview *The Paradox of Morality.* Levinas, in discussing the nature of the face, describes the infinity of the other, a glimpse of which is caught in the face, as "stronger than murder", which already resists me, by "the primordial *expression*, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder'" (*TI*, p.199 italics in original). This resistance, though, this commandment, is "a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance – the ethical resistance" (*TI*, p.199). We see here how the face as commandment is not a law, is not founded in violence, actual or implied, but is an ethical resistance that is beyond law. It is a "purely ethical impossibility … if the resistance to murder were not ethical but real, we would have a *perception* of it, with all that reverts to the subjective in perception" (*TI*, p.p.199). That is to say, if it were simply a real resistance, that is, one based in violence, then it could be apprehended, judged, and that judgment assumed by the subject. Instead, this resistance and possibility of violence is based on peace: "war presupposes peace … it does not represent the first event of the encounter" (*TI*, p.199). Again, we see here a paradox of ethical impossibility, but as we saw in Levinas' statements above concerning pacifism and the necessity of force.

This paradox, and the nature of the commandment as it relates to the face, can be further expounded in Levinas' discussions in *The Paradox of Morality.* Here, we get Levinas' formulation that the face possesses authority but not force (*PM*, p.p.169). For Levinas, the commandment is authority without force, and indeed, God himself "is not a force, but an authority" (*PM*, p.169). This stands in a curious position regarding Benjamin's idea of divine violence, as a pure force that does not defer to any authority, cannot be claimed by any authority, and indeed is

destructive of authority. Conversely, we might instead say that mythic violence is, in fact, the symbiosis of force and authority, arranged to perpetuate their destructive existence. Pure authority, that is, divine authority, is communicated in a Levinasian fashion by the need and destitution of the other (*PM*, p.170). One might further imagine Benjamin's invocation of the community that must wrestle with the responsibility of ignoring the commandment in line with Levinas' conception of wrestling with the other and the third. The fulfilling of the commandment in the face of one by force, force that necessarily violates the other, is not thereby justified or cancelled out but is simultaneously a partial fulfilment of responsibility and a taking on of a yet greater weight of responsibility. In response to a later question, Levinas expands on his conception of the sixth commandment. For Levinas, it "does not mean simply that you are not to go around firing a gun all the time. It refers, rather, to the fact that in the course of your life, in different ways, you kill someone … when we sit down … and drink coffee, we kill an Ethiopian who doesn't have coffee." (*PM*, p.p.173). Though somewhat simplistic, this example is helpful for understanding perhaps the registers of violence and killing. I would understand this, in Benjamin's terminology, to be an example of the pernicious administrative violence that characterises mythic violence's law-preserving character. The law of the markets, of nations, is necessarily predicated on death or the threat of death, and one might stretch Levinas' intent here further and characterise it as predicated on specifically Black death.

We have learnt from Benjamin a different way of thinking force, force understood as the fundamental medium of politics and law, that can respond to the sensitivities of Levinas' work, as well as the issues raised by Tessman's work. Engagement with Benjamin has made clear the distinction between divine and mythic violence, enabling us to understand force differentiated from the violence inherent in law and politics. This gives us a picture of force in line with the rest of the project, which is an annihilating force, that sweeps aside the existing order. By incorporating Tessman's and Benjamin's insights, we can see how force in the sense it has been described so far is not a triumphal display of virility, but an exercise of force against life "for the sake of the living" (Benjamin, 2021a, p.58) that is unjustified, and made tragic by the circumstances that have rendered it necessary. It is not even so much a means to some imagined end, for if it were, that end itself would not only have the marks from resulting from violence but have violence embedded in its nature. Perhaps this is unavoidable. Certainly, it is in an absolute sense, however, this gives us an approach that takes aspects from Sorel, namely the refusal of representative mediators and a simple change of government, but guards against Sorel's troubling excesses. There are two further interventions we will look into. First, I will examine Fanon's work and Maldonado-Torres' reading, followed by Moten and Harney's

concept of the general antagonism, along with their other thoughts regarding rebellion and abolition. The contribution of these thinkers will move us away from considering violence in terms of force and about general ideas of anarchic violence, moving instead to consider violence in a decolonial context, as well as one that emphasises the importance of care and dependence. This will be helpful not only as a different way to consider violence, but also to provide an opportunity to think about a struggle against oppression and the political differently and to bring this into the project I have outlined so far.

Resistance as care, care as resistance: Levinas and the Wisdom of Love

Violence cannot be the last word, as it is not the first. If Levinas' project is to find a basis of human solidarity other than that founded in essence, one that is not founded in a struggle of all against all, we cannot end with essence. Fundamental to Levinas' thought, as I have articulated it here, is care and responsibility, and so it would be odd to leave this by the wayside. It is potentially easy to think Levinas' ideas of care, responsibility, and the wisdom of Love in an individual and quietist manner, but this would be discarding Levinas' most valuable contribution to thinking resistance to the political. Instead of this, I will conclude by articulating not only how Levinas' ideas of responsibility contribute to resistance, but by my conception, form a kind of resistance in themselves. This is not a rebuttal to the ideas of violence I have explored so far, but constituent of the position and posture of revolutionary and abolitionist resistance I have been trying to outline. Likewise, it is not a simple attempt to find some justification of violence which would validate it and make it triumphant in itself. The ideas of care explored here are not made with the intention of rendering violence a 'good' option, but rather to emphasise the tragic nature of their interconnection while maintaining that interconnection as necessary.

The positioning of this discussion of care and responsibility is not placed at this point of the work to discount the discussion of violence, or advocate for an entirely different position, as I have said. But rather the very closeness of these two discussions demonstrates what I find so valuable about Levinas: the combination of a firm and unyielding commitment, which does not compromise, and takes its stand, with a thought that is at its core concerned with care and responsibility, about generosity, welcoming and hospitality. Beyond this, it is the fact that the uncompromising firmness rests only on this care, this gentleness. There is no universal principle one is to die for, no state or institutions to demand their toll in blood, but only the other in all of their vulnerability, indigence, and unassailable height and infinity. It is not only the other's

status as poor and outcast but their status as un-representable and uncontainable that demands a world other than this. Humanism was never enough. Even the category of the human, even discounting its arbitrary and cruel deployment through history (were that possible), was never enough. If, as Levinas says, the true life is absent, and yet we are in the world (*TI*, p. 33), then likewise, the other is absent, and yet overwhelmingly present, in such proximity as to invite a contact, but evading every grasp that would hold them.

Fanon, violence, and the wisdom of Love

Frantz Fanon's discussion of violence in/of the colonial world in *The Wretched of the Earth*, on an initial reading, perhaps bears more in common with Sorel than the other positions I have been discussing. It is an unflinching description of the necessity of an absolute violence, an annihilating violence that can brook no compromise. We even find Sorel's "wise men" and sociologists somewhat correlated with the colonised intellectual in Fanon's work (Fanon, 2002, p. 44-48), wooed or intimidated, to a greater or lesser extent, by the grandeur of the Bourgeoisie in Sorel's case, or the universal principles of European philosophy in Fanon's. However, this reading remains superficial. *Concerning Violence* has none of the nostalgia for the armies of Napoleon, none of the aspiration for glory or emphasis on duty. The responsibility of the colonial revolt for Fanon is not allegiance to duty but is in the truest sense sparked by horrifying, grinding, one might say tragic, necessity. Necessity beyond judgment causes the native to reach for their knife.

Reading this work alongside *Black Skins, White Masks* creates further distance and demonstrates a way of thinking that Maldonado-Torres locates in proximity to Levinas. This will help us articulate the true position of care and resistance within Levinas' thought as we have constructed it. Drawing on the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave, Maldonado-Torres characterises Fanon's understanding of a colonised subjectivity in terms of recognition. The recognition presented here is not the recognition of the later critical theorists such as Habermas and Honneth (Maldonado-Torres, p.128-129), but rather a re-reading of the dialectic in a Levinasian manner. By Maldonado-Torres' interpretation, and my own, the Levinasian subject comes to exist only with substitution; to speak of a "Subject" only makes sense on the hither side of the demand and being held hostage. If we follow Maldonado-Torres' analysis of Fanon, in which he draws on Levinas' understanding of the gift, the colonised subject is precisely one for whom the ability to give, to care for and to love, has been denied (Maldonado-Torres, p.151.). For the colonised, the slave in the dialectic, there is no object to lose oneself in, such is

the domination of the master, who serves as the ultimate provider. Nothing can be given except by the leave of the master, and can therefore never be a true gift by this analysis; the master is the "privileged giver" (Maldonado-Torres, p.151). In this sense, we see a reversal of McGettigan's approach and a link with Tessman's analysis of the holocaust that we mentioned previously. Contra MacGettigan, it is not that some are denied the status of 'face' (as problematic as that interpretation remains), but rather the violence colonialism does to colonial subjectivity is to remove the ability to render aid to the other, not necessarily to render one undeserving of aid. It tears the colonised subject out of proximity. As Maldonado Torres states: "The demand for liberation is indeed the demand to be free and equal, but free and equal not only to have things, but to give and receive as well." (Maldonado-Torres, p.151). Is the inability to give and receive not akin to the status of ethical failure and absence that Tessman articulates when discussing the moral experience of Holocaust Survivors?

We can see that struggle, resistance, rebellion, in this context, is a struggle to give. This is a struggle not simply to have, or rather, it is a struggle to have in order to give. Further, it is not in turning to the object of their work that the slave overcomes the negation of the master, but rather in turning to the others and answering their call. In acquiring and sharing the means to provide aid, to give and to welcome, the slave overcomes the master and the terms of the dialectic itself. This resistance, however, when considered concretely, is not only a resistance in order to give, but can be understood as giving itself. To participate in resistance with, or as, the oppressed, is an acceptance of pre-original responsibility *par excellence*. It is the act of taking on the call of the other and heeding it to the utmost degree. Surely participating in resistance is to an extent a struggle on behalf of oneself, but the acceptance of the chance that one may not make it out signifies a willingness to die for the other who might; "exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others, without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give" *(OB*, p.105). This does not characterise the revolution of the heroic vanguard cadres, or dashing young men hoping to claim a pedestal on the revolutionary pantheon. Instead, it speaks to the desperate defence of the Warsaw Ghetto, the escapes from Sobibor and Treblinka, or the divine decolonial struggles of Algeria, Kenya, or Minneapolis. Again, this is not heroism or devotion to a principle appropriated from dead wills, but a surrender to the passivity characteristic of the demand of the other.

Even at this late stage, we can see how this illuminates the questions that were raised earlier in this project concerning reciprocity and universalizability. Levinas states that it is only thanks to God that I can be treated as an other by the others *(OB*, p.158), then what does that say about

the struggle to allow the other to be able to participate in that act of giving? Of course, if this struggle was simply one to empower the other to take care of me, and me alone, this would be an exercise in egoism. However, there is not just me and the other, there is the third party. In Levinas' comment, it is the others in the plural who treat me, and presumably each other, as others. The asymmetry and opacity of the ethical relation remove both considerations from my purview to the extent, or at least in Levinas' traditional account. With the thread that Maldonado-Torres identifies, however, might we not think that to allow the other to treat me and the others, while remaining at some level up to God, is itself a divine obligation? Indeed, tying in with the discussions of where morality fails or is absent, accepting this most dire possibility, the obligation to engender a community where each is enabled to sacrifice and give seems utterly fundamental, both to allow others to give and as a giving in itself.

I have disclaimed heroism, but with all of this talk of the inevitable drama of the above aspects of resistance, it is important to emphasise that resistance is fundamentally characterised by structures of care and shelter. Resistance cannot continue without the one who gives bread from their mouth to the refugee, the runaway, the partisan or the revolutionary. This aspect is often not treated with the same reverence as the great and dramatic events, but this is precisely the structure of care that my Levinasian account implies. To additionally counter the charge of some kind of virile heroism, we must also remember the character of resistance as fundamentally one of ethical failure. The fact that resistance is needed at all is evidence of this, as well as the everyday nature of carrying on struggle, which is characterised by suffering, by never having enough to give, and by the vulnerabilities that are exposed exponentially more than in 'normal' life. Resistance means taking and imposing costs no one should have to bear but accepting their necessity only asymmetrically, with great hesitation and appreciation of the weight of what is to be done.

I have primarily discussed this in the context of struggle as fundamentally economic, which is valuable, and a considerable portion of the nature of resistance to totality. This is how care becomes manifest and is the ground on which totality operates. However, previously, I characterised the other as both poor and indigent, but also possessing infinite height characterised by avoiding any grasp or conception that might determine them. It might be true to say that it is necessarily on the field of essence and economy that a given totality is defeated, but it is this other realm, this indirect interaction with the beyond being, that prevents a slide into a simple being-otherwise rather than an otherwise than being.

I have spoken of Levinas' characterisation of the face as an authority, but not a force, and much of this preceding discussion has concerned the analysis of force in this equation, the material involvement in acting on the call of the other, to which we are assigned in any case. However, it remains vital not to forget the assignation beyond being, even as we materially enact that demand. Without this, there is the danger of simply sliding back into the political, into an ontology of the administration of things, the simple logistics of material life. This leads to a re-engagement in politics, the very realm which is a betrayal of the alterity of the other, where the administration of things slides into the administration of people. Perhaps in its best incarnation, this leads to some kind of charity, but likewise, this fails to remember the alterity of the other and, rather than understanding the other as having height from their position below, fully reduces them to an outstretched hand. Again, logistics follows, and discourse is ended by the mechanistic filling of bellies. Filling of bellies remains necessary to be sure, but this is still a grasping, a characterising, and an absorbing into totality, which is no resistance to totality at all.

We might say that this charity, the filling of empty bellies, is an activity enabled by the love of wisdom. The techniques of logistics and meeting of needs are enabled by this love of wisdom, that is to say, it is enabled by that pursuit of knowledge that can arrive at schedules, programmes, and systematic approaches towards given ends. While those in need may be fed by the wisdom of love, although of course where the wisdom is applied is fairly contingent, it is Levinas' reversal of this formulation that provides the key to avoiding the fate described above. To speak of the wisdom of love is to speak with the wisdom that love grants, is to acknowledge that even as there may be thematisation, conceptualisation, rationalisation, ethical praxis undertaken always ought to remain "the servant to the saying" *(OB,* 162). To approach the practical tasks of ethics with love is to possess the wisdom that acknowledges the "difference between the one and the other as the one for the other" *(OB,* 162), that to approach with love is to never lose sight of the alterity which is beyond being that even *could* make these demands of us, and what it means to fulfil them.

To approach aiding the other in the context of resistance, while embracing the indeterminacy and unknowable nature of the other, surrendering one's position to be a hostage, is to create not only a space of hospitality but additionally one of what Levinas refers to as pedagogy. Pedagogy, in this sense, is the rejection of maieutics and instead accepting pedagogy from the other as bringing knowledge, thought, and discourse from an absolutely elsewhere, brings me more than I can contain in a "non-violent transitivity" (*TI*, p.51). This does not need to be thought simply as teaching in the sense of instruction in some discipline or practice, but rather a generative moment with something absolutely otherwise, escaping any hold I, or any institution,

would have over it. The fact that this otherwise is always present destabilises the happy picture we might have after the bread is given from one's mouth. When we acknowledge that the other themselves is bringing something that is outside oneself, pure charity becomes a simplistic, almost nonsensical, response. Further, this anarchic generativity, this inadequate sharing of what is beyond myself, is also a sharing of what is beyond, and in its invulnerability to capture, against, the state.

In this sense, we can understand this dynamic as perhaps analogous to Harney and Moten's idea of the "general antagonism", which is that disruptive and other aspect "looming outside every attempt to politicise, every imposition of self-governance, every sovereign decision and its degraded miniature, every emergent state and home sweet home" (Harney and Moten, 2014, p.20). This "riotous production of difference" (Harney and Moten, 2014, p.109) is that experimental and unknown (unknowable) elsewhere or hither side that we find the other, from which leak out signs and gestures always betraying their homeland but bearing that trace of otherness which is already in antagonism to the same and totality. It is difficult to speak on the general antagonism as Harney and Moten speak of it in great depth, as it is left an open and indeterminate concept in *The Undercommons*, but even so, we can see from the above the connections we can make with Levinas' idea of the other. For Harney and Moten, the general antagonism is fundamentally a commons, a holding-in-common. Indeed, they state that the closest Marx ever got to this antagonism was the statement "'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need'" (Harney and Moten, 2014, p.99). In this way, it is very much tied to the economic element we discussed previously. It is in part defined by dispossession (Harney and Moten, 2014, p.109-110), but beyond that, it is difference, and as we quoted previously, an absolute resistance to totalisation. In these ways, the undercommons can help us to think the other in these two registers, which, as we will explore, are in a sense not two registers at all, but the formulation of the other beyond a material hungry mouth or a transcendental metaphor.

Therefore, serving the other cannot simply mean a transferral of means, but rather an attentiveness to the alterity of the other, a collaboration which is always inadequate but in this inadequacy is provocation itself to the totalising onto-epistemology of European thought. Admittedly this does not have the satisfying concreteness of meeting material needs, and doubtless is thoroughly inadequate without it (see the previous discussion of *The Ego and Totality* regarding economic justice), but without this opening of space for alterity the recapitulation to totality becomes a far greater danger. From this we can understand Levinas' complaint of a humanism which is insufficiently human not only as about a particular inadequate instantiation of humanism but rather understand humanism, indeed, the category itself as not

human enough. That is to say, to use the category of 'human', in combination with Levinas' idea of (non)subjectivity (that is, a subjectivity that is at its instantiation evacuated from itself, annihilates itself before the other in substitution), would be to contain within that category far more than could be contained without tremendous violence. This is, of course, borne out in the historical use of the genus human and its violent and genocidal exclusions and engulfments.

But beyond the historical usage of the human, it is simply inadequate to refer to the other. I mention this to emphasise the nature of the demand of a Levinasian subjectivity, without its sublimation, moderation or forgetting. We have seen how previous thinkers have found this overwhelming, even impossible, and it may be. However, to dismiss this enormity as an impossibility is not simply failing the other after "a special disfavour of fortune or … the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature" (Kant, Groundwork to a Metaphysics of Morals, p.8 (4:394)) would have caused this, but is even a failure to try, and further, degrades the very status of the other. Even if this is only marginal and piecemeal, it makes further failure more and more likely every time an obligation is simply waved away. This is not to say that situational limitation of responsibility is never necessary, either in the face of the other or to prevent the taking on of burdens no one should have to bear, as we have discussed previously. This, however, is not a sublimation of the demand *as such* but is rather an openness to the possibility of failure and the weakness of the will.

I have treated these two aspects, the other in the context of resistance as economic and as an infinite overflowing, somewhat separately, however, of course, while there is some degree of dualism, in the last analysis, these are not separable in a meaningful sense. To accomplish one without the other is not only insufficient, it is nonsensical. The call from the other to fulfil their needs is predicated on their overwhelming alterity, the authority of the call is founded on its nature as beyond. Likewise, it would be absurd to be attentive to the status of the other as absolutely other and ungraspable and yet not recognise the very communication of that authority beyond or before any signification, which is their nudity, hunger, and vulnerability.

For Levinas, the negotiation of this inseparable dualism is the very task of his inversion of philosophy. From the love of wisdom to the wisdom of love, this apparently simple play on words belies the very change in hierarchy which undermines each of the above aspect's attempts to pull itself to the position of ultimate and solitary value or goal. Philosophy both brings measure to infinity *(OB,* p.161) and remains the servant of difference, saying, and the one-for-the-other *(OB,* p.162). In the context of these mentions of philosophy as the wisdom of love, Levinas speaks of the state and society in terms that should be very familiar after my previous

discussions, but in the context of my re-readings of those passages, the significance becomes altered.

Conclusion

What I have articulated here is a praxis, based on my previous readings, that goes beyond "the simple 'after you, sir'" *(OB*, p.117) that is often found in Levinas. This articulation is by no means complete, not only due to spatial restrictions, but rather that to articulate a full and enclosed idea of action would be to both undermine the project itself and would exclude those places where we see this praxis already being enacted today. One can see echoes of these principles of action emerge throughout history and even in the world today. One can point to the radical project of autonomy and democratic communalism in Northern Syria, or the ethos of Zapatismo, the links of which to Levinas have already received preliminary attention (Popke, E. J, 2004, 301-317) as bearing commonalities with the project I have outlined.

It is essential to mention these projects, as I have mentioned various movements throughout this chapter, to indicate potential avenues for collaboration, dialogue, and development of both the ideas I have presented here, as well as those present in these other initiatives. Indeed, this gesture towards a praxis is not intended to be instructive or prescriptive in a strong way, but rather to provide future avenues for how my reading of Levinas might contribute to such liberatory ideas and projects by way of dialogue, not dogma.

To review the ideas I have discussed in this chapter, we can perhaps understand what this might look like. By beginning the approach with Tessman's writing on moral failure and impossible moral demands, I gained a framework to draw on as I proceeded to negotiate the fraught ethical problems of resistance, alongside the work I had already done with Levinas. This allowed me to address the problems inherent to violence as described in Levinas and meant that we could move forwards with it while not eliminating the tension already present. Sorel was dismissed, as, while he was somewhat correct in his analysis of power as it relates to force, he was mistaken regarding the nature of force itself. Walter Benjamin was pivotal to moving this account from a realm of heroism and duty to one of hesitation and wrestling with commandments, a position more in accordance with the conclusions I had previously drawn. This led to a position where violence done by states, institutions, and laws was differentiated from other forms of force,

which allowed me to think of the force employed by individuals in a way that drew together Levinas' insights on the commandment, Sorel's on power and Tessman's on justification.

The third section provided both the concrete example of the decolonial struggle, as well as an understanding the position of care and love in relation to struggle through Maldonado-Torres' reading of Fanon. It was made clear that participation in struggle is precisely a struggle to be able to give to the other, to be able to engage in ethics, but also struggling is itself an act of care in the defence and aid rendered to the other. This was qualified from the language of combat used previously to emphasise the networks of support and hospitality that exist in such situations, but further than this, these structures of care understood simply economically or materially are insufficient. Taking Levinas' understanding of the alterity of the other, we saw how this was given new direction and emphasis by combining Levinas' ideas of teaching with Harney and Moten's "general antagonism". This combination allowed us to understand this attentiveness to otherness as contributing to resistance by its generative qualities; as modifying resistance from a purely economic relation which erases alterity with need; and finally, it was shown how this attentiveness is, in fact, resistance itself by its corrosiveness to the structures and institutions of totality.

Throughout this thesis, I have raised the question: why turn to Emmanuel Levinas? What can this philosopher of the 20th Century, with all of his missteps, omissions, and other foibles, possibly have to say to the myriad challenges facing the world and radical movements today? I hope, by now, that these questions will have been met with a resounding answer. Without the pretence of a universal panacea, or a planned program, I have repeatedly shown that approaching Levinas' thinking in a manner that highlights the radicalism contained therein can enact an incredibly valuable re-thinking of society, politics, and even the human itself. However, I have also always been clear that simply taking Levinas' thought as the sole source for an emancipatory movement would be seriously impoverished on a number of counts, which has necessitated the intervention and collaboration of other thinkers and other traditions.

The difficulties with using Levinas in this way is where I began my investigation. The primary conclusion of the initial chapter was to highlight that Levinas' writing and thought generally makes it difficult to pin down and relate to concrete social, political and moral issues. This is due both to the style of Levinas' writing, but most intriguingly for this paper, also the way in which Levinas tries to walk a line between conservative pragmatism on the one hand and utopianism on the other. It is this latter "difficulty" that can be re-thought in a very beneficial manner. By understanding the root of this tension, while acknowledging that Levinas presents a variety of

positions, I was able to approach this differently by taking it as an opportunity to be selective in what I decided to utilise while ensuring other aspects were re-thought to provide necessary functional roles to those that were unhelpful.

I want to stay awhile here with the theme of escape to an elsewhere, which occupies such a dominant and motivating position for Levinas and is perhaps the most important aspect to emphasise in my readings above. Levinas is always attempting an escape to the elsewhere, the subject in Levinas is, in a sense, caught in attempting to escape the unspeakable burden of the responsibility it is saddled with. A predilection with escape is hardly unique in the realm of metaphysics or philosophy generally, but what seems to set Levinas apart is that the escape is not to some abstract principle, some distant utopia, or to a true or authentic history. Escape, relief from the *il y a* is transcendent but it is here. It is at the same time distant, yet present. What would it mean to think of the subject in Levinas as a prisoner? Perhaps the countenance of the other, the other as they present themselves to me, is that tantalising view of the world beyond the bars and barbed wire. For this subject, though, escape is not to be found in solitary contemplation or individualised obedience to imperatives, this metaphysical prisoner has conspirators. In this other, all the distinctions that torture the subject between the transcendent and the material, what should be and what is, the static history of the historiographers and the messianic present always open for judgement, all of these tensions are collapsed. From this encounter, this fleeting glimpse of that trace of the elsewhere, I have demonstrated, a radical rethinking and resituating follows.

Where critics would point to this diremption as a failing of Levinas' thought, I have tried to express how this diremption, this state of being torn between these polarities, is fundamentally necessary to thinking resistance in defiance of totalising epistemic and ontological systems. This resistance is not negative, it is not simply a matter of extending one's own will to change the circumstances one is faced with. Instead of this negativity which is simply the reflection of what is existent, it is a positive resistance that I can join only with a passivity. Resistance comes from the other, to whom I owe my aid.

I began this project with a description of a world on the brink, a world where old certainties are eroding with startling rapidity. It is in this situation where, rather than attempting to resurrect the security of old institutions of totality, we would do well to recollect the proximity which was lost in the enclosure and engulfment of those systems which are now experiencing decline. As the institutions on which we have become reliant continue to dissolve, it is not in egotistical self-reliance that we will find answers, but in friends and faces, in community and interdependence,

a new solidarity by which we might escape this prison before the walls cave in on top of us. It is only with others that we can ensure that the ashes of the old world become fertile ground, rather than a new tomb.

In the talk of friendship and faces, can one not hear the reverse image of the sneering cynic embodied in the political? The Schmittian identification of enemies, the concern with matters of tactics and measures to be taken, in which the thought of Levinas so often appears as hopeless naiveté? On one level, I have gone repeatedly out of my way to allay such fears, accentuating the features of Levinas' thought which push towards materiality, concreteness, and a focus on the specific outcomes for the other. However, on another level, with absolute frankness, I, with Levinas himself, must answer in the affirmative to this charge. To be attuned, or oriented, in the manner described above remains an absurd charge; it is a demand to make oneself vulnerable. It is to be exposed and to be broken. Only when the tearing I spoke of above has become intolerable can the work of justice occur, but not as a mending or a synthesis. It is to be open to sacrifice in a manner that seems illogical, in a manner that is even unfair, and yet these are the sacrifices that have been made by millions upon millions throughout history, even if only to give to the other the smallest comfort. As I have discussed, often the circumstances of these sacrifices are circumstances of failure, further cruelties necessitated by a cruel existence. And yet, "nothing less was needed for the little humanity that adorns the world" *(OB*, 185)

Here we see the trap many who write on Levinas fall into, and one which I have been attempting to avoid throughout this project. The register Levinas often writes in, the messianic and prophetic language, easily leads one writing supportively of Levinas' thought into language that ends up as proselytising, a kind of evangelism for Levinas. Levinas, however, was not a prophet, and it would have been a deeply flawed approach for me to simply carry his thought forwards as sufficient in itself for the ultimate project I have been working towards. That being said, I have been insistent on stretching his work to its greatest potential, to the breaking point, to avoid prematurely cutting my account off from the insights his thought might yet be able to contribute. This position, contra many other readings of Levinas which tend to cut him off (was this not one of Levinas' great fears, as related by Derrida? When thinkers cut his thought short in favour of others, we might hear the "'allo, allo'" Derrida relates Levinas as peppering even between words while on the telephone, always concerned about being cut off (Derrida, 1999, p.9)). This approach has allowed me to demonstrate both the value of Levinas' work, the ability to utilise that value, and, by reading past what other thinkers have envisaged as a dead-end, demonstrate some of the misreadings which inspire this pessimism.

Illusions about the simplicity of rebutting these readings or the obvious helpfulness of Levinas were dispelled by the survey given in the first chapter, which provided an overview of the often confusing or outright contradictory nature of Levinas' writing on the political. When taking Levinas' work at face value, it is hardly surprising that it would inspire misreadings and make it difficult to tease out the points of value for a liberatory project. These accounts were then assessed in the second chapter. Despite the confused situation at the end of the first chapter, in many ways the contradictions and juxtapositions of Levinas himself were found to both be of benefit to the current reading, allowing flexibility, but also make his thought particularly suitable for a polarised and contradictory world.

What was been rebutted, and what valuable points were identified? These were primarily examined through chapters two and three, with the criticisms raised initially and the counter-reading proposed throughout the third chapter. Starting with the subject, I identified a reading that rejects the interpretation of the Levinasian subject as exclusionary and adhering to a naïve humanism, figuring it instead as passive, affective and oriented towards escape and the other. This was vital for exploring the break with traditional western thought and for investigating its liberatory potential. Against readings that figure the relation to the other as similarly naïve and unconcerned with issues of economy and power, I have tried to express a formulation that demonstrates a concern with material and economic justice. I have also tried to show how concerns with history, place, culture, and race, often seen as entirely absent from a Levinasian account, are necessarily relevant due to the focus on material aid. While these empirical factors can be neither the first nor the last, if one is concerned with providing effective material aid, it is impossible to ignore these factors that by necessity condition the material aid required and the aid that can be rendered. On the other side, I have taken readings that figure Levinas as conversely primarily conservative and cynical, and shown them to be misguided in a similar manner to those which cast Levinas as angelic.

Yet the account to this point remained skeletal, the indeterminacy, while helpful in some respects, remained at such a degree that it limited the account. To further lend solidity to the account, it was pitched at two more concrete concerns, issues that any account of the political and justice worth its salt ought to have an answer. These issues were colonialism and racism, as well as issues of violence and the praxis of resistance to an unjust world. These are by no means sufficient conditions but are undoubtedly necessary and further serve as potential examples for how my Levinas-based approach can be utilised in approaching these problems.

These final chapters represent a culmination of the analysis I have been presenting thus far. Further, it is important that this is *a* culmination, by no means the only path that this thinking is bound to lead to, or the only contributions that can be made, however, this demonstrates the value and contribution of Levinas to a struggle beyond and against the political, and to the thinking of this struggle. A balance has been struck between showing lines of dialogue between Levinas and other thinkers, but still maintaining the germ of Levinas' thought, bringing his ideas along in this dialogue rather than erasing the contributions his thought can make. My intention is that the dialogue entered into here be of use in itself, but also that it becomes the springboard for deeper and more wide-ranging reading of Levinas in this way, leading to a more expansive impetus to future dialogue.

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