



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

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Enjoyment and Transcendence

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UiT The Arctic University of Norway

*Those who love their life, lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it
for eternal life. (John 12:25)*

*The world is a good place. We may be bad, but the world is a good place – Grushenka
in The Brothers Karamazov*

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Abbreviations

Works of Levinas

- TTI* (1995) *The Theory of intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Translated by André Orianne. 2nd edition. Evanston: Northwestern University Press
- RPH* (1990) 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 62-71, translated by Seán Hand
- OE* (2003) *On Escape*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- EE* (1988) *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers
- TO* (1982) *Time and the Other*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press
- TI* (1969) *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press
- OB* (1998) *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press
- BPW* (1996) *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- CP* (1987) *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers
- RB* (2001) *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*. Translated by Jill Robbins and Marcus Coelen, Stanford: Stanford University Press
- OG* (1998) *Of God who comes to Mind*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- DF* (1990) *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Seán Hand. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press
- US* (2002) 'Useless Suffering', translated by Richard Cohen, in Bernasconi, R. and Wood, D. (eds.) *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*. London: Routledge, pp. 156-167

Works of Nietzsche

- BoT* (1999) *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- BGE* (2002) *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- GM* (2017) *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- AC* (2005) *The Anti-Christ*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- ToI* (2005) *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- EH* (2005) *Ecce Homo*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Works of Heidegger

- NI* (1979) *Nietzsche: Volume I*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper One
- NII* (1984) *Nietzsche: Volume II*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper One
- NIII* (1987) *Nietzsche: Volume III*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper One
- NIV* (1982) *Nietzsche: Volume IV*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper One
- BT* (2010) *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press
- EG* (1998) 'On the Essence of Ground', in *Pathmarks*. Translated by William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- PRL* (2004) *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Translated by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

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Introduction

Does the belief in transcendence – in the otherworldly and the afterlife – threaten to make *this* world and *this* life less valuable? The associations evoked by the terminological couple ‘immanence’ (from *in-manere*, ‘to dwell in’) and ‘transcendence’ (from *trans-scandere*, ‘to climb beyond’) testifies to the possibility. They have been thought as the difference between ‘earth’ and ‘heaven’, ‘body’ and ‘spirit’, ‘the transient’ and ‘the eternal’, etc., a difference that can suggest the picture of the spiritual reality of heaven *above*, and the fleeting existence of earth *below*. Whereas worldly bodies are trapped in a transient cycle of life and death, the spiritual realm is eternal and immortal. According to this picture, earthly life is lesser and of lower value than what transcends it.

One modern response to this picture is that belief in transcendence must be given up in order to accept that *this life is all there is*. Belief in God or gods could in fact be seen as a stubborn refusal to accept this plain fact. This is an accusation atheists throw at believers of any tradition.

This thesis is written by a Christian who thinks that believers have something to learn from this accusation. Christians too must accept that, in one sense, this life is all there is. More precisely, if God created this world, and if this creation had a purpose, then I believe that this life must be valuable as an end in itself. It cannot be a mere waiting room for something that comes after it, but must have value for its own sake.

It is with this end in view that this thesis seeks to interpret our immanence – our worldly, embodied here-and-now life – as centered in and around the possibility of enjoyment. It does not propose this as a new theory, but takes inspiration from the main protagonist of this thesis, the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Similarly to the author of this thesis, Levinas also believes that there is something that transcends this life, that there is *more* to this life than immanence. He is nevertheless able to combine this conviction with the idea that worldly life is valuable and sought after on its own, for “God always calls us to Himself too soon; we want the here and below” (*TI* 41). This ‘here-and-below’ is the possibility of enjoyment and happiness. This is, in one sense, the primary meaning of life. At the same time, something transcends it. Levinas, I believe, is able to hold these two thought simultaneously in a meaningful way.

I want to argue that Levinas' philosophical insights on this point are relevant for Christian theology. This is because, as I intend to show, faith in transcendence can lead to a negation of worldly life. The idea that the true meaning of life directs us beyond life can imply a neglect if not a downright hatred against life itself. No one has made this argument more forcefully than Friedrich Nietzsche. His accusation against Christianity on this point, remains, I believe, unrivaled, and Christianity has much to gain by letting itself be exposed to this critique. Beyond its accusatory aspect, Nietzsche's thought is also an excellent meditation on the possibility of and difficulties associated with affirming life.

Nevertheless, I do not believe, as Nietzsche does, that belief in transcendence is incompatible with an affirmation of our immanence. With Levinas, but also with Dostoevsky, I intend to show that the idea of something transcending life does not necessitate a conflict with the idea that life primarily seeks after its own happiness. In contrast, the happiness of enjoyment can participate in transcendence in the form of charity and sacrifice. This participation, argues Levinas, depends both on enjoyment retaining its own meaning as a 'for its own sake' and on this meaning finding itself transformed;

It is the passivity of being-for-another, which is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat. But for this one has to first enjoy one's bread, not in order to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give oneself in giving it. (OB 72)

It is only a sacrifice to give away those things that I enjoy for their own sake, for it is because that they are dear to me that it is a sacrifice to part with them. Additionally, I express my love for the Other precisely in desiring their happiness. As Dostoevsky writes, "He who loves men, loves their joy" (Dostoevsky 2021, 382). This is the guiding idea of this thesis.

The path of this thesis will take us from the history of the early Church to Nietzsche's genealogical analysis of morality, to the phenomenology of enjoyment in Levinas and to Dostoevsky's literary masterpiece *The Brothers Karamazov* and its lifelike discussion of pleasure and love. The remainder of this introduction is dedicated to a methodological discussion of the relationship between philosophy and theology. I explore and challenge the idea that the relationship between them can be interpreted as the difference between the immanence of human knowledge (philosophy) and the transcendence of revelation (theology). Chapter I explores how the theme of transcendence and immanence manifested themselves

historically in the early Church, in the conflict between the dogma of the goodness of creation and the ascetic ideal. The question is why and in which way early Christians sought to express their faith through abstinence from the pleasures of the world. This theme continues into Chapter II with Nietzsche's answer to this question, which states that belief in the afterlife must be understood as a symptom of hatred towards this life, which becomes especially visible in hostility towards enjoyment. According to Nietzsche, the affirmation of this life depends on being able to think the immanence of life without any reference to transcendence. Chapter III, IV, V and VI turns to Levinas and his attempt to think transcendence meaningfully in a post-Nietzschean world. It does so by exploring first, in Chapter III, how the analysis of enjoyment developed from the earliest of Levinas' work, while Chapter IV deals with the analysis of enjoyment as it appears in Levinas' first major work, *Totality and Infinity*. Having fully immersed ourselves in the immanence of enjoyment, Chapter V continues by showing how Levinas thinks the relationship between this immanence and the transcendence of my ethical relation to the Other. Crucially, Levinas does not see this as an allergic relation of opposing forces, but rather as the possibility of there being something in the experience of my life that weighs heavier than my concern for my own happiness. Chapter VI explores the issues we have been dealing with as they appear in Levinas' second major work, *Otherwise than Being*. In the conclusion of the thesis, both the Nietzschean and Levinasian perspectives are brought into conversation with Dostoevsky and his final work, *The Brothers Karamazov*. I will argue that this work contains a highly relevant discussion of the question of life's affirmation or rejection, and that we find in the characters of Zosima and Alyosha a perspective which affirms both the immanence of creation and the transcendence that goes beyond it. It is a question of Christ revealing Himself in the 'Good Wine' at the Wedding at Cana, which thus signifies that there is no conflict between the goodness of the wine and the divine revelation that transcends it.

This thesis therefore explores its main thematic from a number of different perspectives. It is primarily a philosophical thesis, and within the rich tradition of philosophy, it is primarily based in the field of phenomenology of religion. In addition to this, however, this thesis also consults the philosophical genealogy of Nietzsche, and furthermore engages with disciplines beyond philosophy, such as history and literary fiction. I hope to convince the reader that this multifaceted approach is justified in the continuous attempt to get *zu den Sachen selbst*, as the Husserlian motto goes. This 'thing itself' is an interpretation of our worldly, embodied immanence as oriented around enjoyment, the question of whether belief

in transcendence can threaten an affirmation of this enjoyable immanence, and, finally, the argument that it does not have to.

a) Philosophy and Theology

But what is immanence? What is transcendence? The thematic of this thesis will come more clearly into view by beginning with the methodological discussion of this thesis, for what the Danish theologian Regin Prenter says about methodology is especially true of this thesis; namely that “Method is the progressive approximation of a science with its object” (Prenter 1955, 15, my translation). The method of this thesis lies somewhere in-between philosophy and theology, and coincidentally, the relationship between these disciplines can be described as the difference between immanence and transcendence.

This thesis is a philosophical study that seeks to be relevant to Christian theology, and belongs therefore to the discipline called philosophy of religion. More precisely, it is a work of philosophy of religion in the tradition of French phenomenology of religion, a tradition many would argue Levinas was responsible for initiating, and which some furthermore have argued signaled a theological turn in French phenomenology. What does this entail? For some, it entails a transgression; it entails philosophy stepping outside of its legitimate boundaries and trespassing on grounds belonging to theology. This is an accusation that can come from both philosophy and theology.

From the side of philosophy, it can be argued that the advent of modern philosophy entails a so-called turn towards immanence (see e.g. Rölli 2004, 53). Whereas pre-modern philosophers like Plato and Descartes saw no problem with philosophizing about transcendence, modern philosophy signals a return to the immanence of the human condition as the only legitimate starting-point of philosophy, a turn that entails a prohibition against asking questions about God. It is above all Immanuel Kant that is decisive in this turn, and his status as one of the most important philosophers in history – and for the history of the enlightenment and modernity in general – follows from the way in which *The Critique of Pure Reason* sets the legitimate boundaries of philosophy. The work famously opens by stating that “There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience” (Kant 1998, 136), and this is his key insight; philosophy is not allowed to go beyond – i.e. transcend – what is given in experience.

This does not mean that experience is everything to Kant, which would make him an empiricist like David Hume. Experience is not reducible to sense-data, for experience is

structured or given in an intelligible way that implies more than this experience itself. There is therefore a sort of knowledge that is not derived from experience, but which nevertheless is implicit in it, because it structures it. Kant names this additional knowledge transcendental knowledge: the pure categories of reason and sensibility that are not a part of our experience, but structures it. The question transcendental philosophy asks is this: what are the necessary conditions for my experience to be possible? Otherwise said, what needs to be true for the objects of my experience to be given in the way they are?¹

The philosophical tradition of phenomenology, that Levinas' own philosophy – and by extension this thesis – is based in, can also be said to be signal such a turn towards immanence. Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, bases his method on the idea that human experience is an indubitable field open to philosophical investigation, and he posits the indubitability of experience by excluding transcendence from it (Husserl 2014, 82-84). While I cannot be sure that my experience of a tree corresponds to an actually existing tree – that is corresponds to something *beyond* or transcending my experience –, it is beyond doubt true that I have an immanent experience of a tree, and this experience can be structurally analyzed. Similarly to Kant, Husserl also acknowledges that this experience consists of more than empirical data like colors, sounds and shapes. The tree I experience stands 'over there', 'on the other side' of a rock, or 'on top of' a hill, but these categorical relations are not in my experience like a shape or a sound is, but nevertheless irreducibly belongs to how this experience is *given*. Therefore, strangely enough, transcendence returns as a theme already in Husserl, although exactly as a transcendence-in-immanence. This follows from the way in which the tree is given, for although I cannot know for sure if the tree actually stands 'over there', it is nevertheless undoubtedly *given as if* it stands over there; it is thus given *as a* transcendent phenomenon outside of myself rather than in my head (Husserl 1999, 41).

The crucial lesson to be taken from Kant and Husserl is thus not that human experience is all there is, but that any legitimate philosophical investigation must be able to trace its objects back to how they are constituted in the human horizon. As Jacques Derrida says of them both, "Kant and Husserl always criticized or limited with one and the same gesture metaphysics and empiricism" (Derrida 2016, 54). In other words, the way in which

¹ To illustrate, one example of an answer Kant gives to this are space and time. There is no possible experience that is not given in a space and in an interval of time. While not objects of experience, then, space and time are still necessary preconditions for the possibility of experience.

the empirical reality is given implies something more than this reality itself; relations, categories, etc. According to this schema, even transcendence can be discussed philosophically in reference to how it structures immanent experience, but only *in reference* to immanence, which is the foundation of meaning with which every philosophical investigation must limit itself to.

This would imply that the question of God must be banished from the realm of philosophy, for God is transcendent in a wholly different way than the abovementioned tree is. God does not simply appear on the human horizon, and is in fact not even a part of this world; God is transcendent in an absolute and irreducible way. This has often been accentuated in terms of how God is beyond human reasoning; there is no definition or idea of God that can be said to actually capture God, for God is always *more* than what humans imagine God to be. For Kant, this leads not to an atheistic but properly speaking agnostic philosophy, which does not simply banish God, but more fundamentally the possibility of posing the *question* of God in an intelligible way. God is simply put beyond the scope of philosophy.

On the one hand, then, philosophy of religion oversteps its own boundaries by asking questions about God. On the other hand, it can also be seen as overstepping the boundaries of *theology* by asking questions that should be left to theologians. This is the argument Regin Preter makes in the prolegomena to his work in dogmatic theology, *Creation and Redemption*. Preter argues here that the approach of philosophy is untenable for dogmatic theology, for dogmatic theology is the discipline that concerns the Christian truth as it is revealed by God and witnessed in the Bible (Preter 1955, 7). This is, importantly, a *revealed* truth, and it is for this exact reason that Preter is wary of what role philosophy should play in accessing it.

Preter demonstrates this point through a refutation of Friedrich Schleiermacher's attempt to justify Christianity on transcendental-philosophical grounds in *Der christliche Glaube*. Schleiermacher's project responds to the Kantian turn in philosophy by providing an apologetics for Christianity within a modern, scientific worldview. It accepts the Kantian point of departure, and thus begins with an inquiry into the immanent human condition. What it claims to discover, however, is that this condition is naturally religious (Preter 1955, 23). Utilizing the transcendental method, Schleiermacher demonstrates that human freedom and knowledge both necessarily imply a relationship with what transcends them (God). My feeling of independency as an autonomous human is unintelligible without me being

conscious of my absolute dependency on having been created, and the knowledge science produces is only intelligible in virtue of a normativity that science itself cannot produce (Prenter 1955, 26). The immanence of the human condition thus testifies in itself to a need for religion, and it is this need Schleiermacher believes justifies the Christian faith in the modern world.

It could seem, then, that Schleiermacher has broken up the secular immanence established by Kant, and re-introduced the question of God into the human horizon. In another sense, however, he has only re-affirmed the absolute authority of philosophy to an even further degree. Schleiermacher has discovered a need for the transcendent in the immanence of the human condition, but this means that transcendence is only allowed back into the fold if it can justify its return within the confines of immanence. One must *first* show that there is a religious need that can be deduced from the human condition, and *then* one can move on to Christianity to show how it satisfies that need.

Prenter protests above all against this order of procedure. While he is open to the idea of a religious dimension immanent to human existence, Prenter rejects the idea that Christianity should have to justify itself with reference to it. We do not have to begin with a philosophical analysis proving the need for Christianity, for Christianity justifies itself; “The truth of God’s revelation is justified by its content alone.” (Prenter 1955, 8, my translation). The idea that God’s revelation would have to subordinate itself to an analysis of the human condition in order to be justified is absurd, for it is God – not man – that justifies God’s truth. This does not mean that ‘the meaning of God’ would not have to be intelligible in some way within the human condition. Prenter accepts this readily, and ties it to the Incarnation itself; God’s truth can be expressed in human words precisely because Jesus Christ descends to share in the human condition (Prenter 1955, 8). The difference is between receiving a revelation from God that has been made intelligible to humans, or beginning with human intelligence as necessary to justify God. By beginning with a philosophical analysis of the transcendental horizon of the human condition, one has determined the limits within which the Christian bible must submit itself in order to have sense. How can a revealed truth be heard in its authority if we must begin by demarcating the justifiable limits within which it is allowed to be heard? Can humans set up the court in which God is to be judged?

b) Enjoyment and the Body in John

Going straight to the Bible itself, however, I do believe a certain quandary appears that makes things more complicated than Prenter would like to have them. It is undoubtedly true, as Prenter says, that the revelation of Christ in the Bible is intelligible to humans because of the Incarnation. But how does it become intelligible? In the Gospel of John for instance, Jesus's revelation works through a sort of dialectic between numerous and ambiguous meanings, a feature that has long been recognized in this Gospel in particular. Jesus says that the disciples knows the way, but they respond, confused, that they don't know it; Jesus responds that *he* is the way (Richard 1985, 96-98). Whereas the disciples first thinks Jesus is speaking literally about the way, wanting him to point it out on a map for him, Jesus is talking about the way which he himself is.

One could understand this as first and foremost a question of symbolism, but this forgets something essential; for it is equally a question of the body. When speaking to the Samaritan woman in John 4 for instance, it is concretely speaking the embodied thirst of human beings that Jesus invokes. Jesus, sitting by the well, asks the Samaritan woman to draw water from the well to give to him; this becomes an opportunity for Christ to announce himself as the Living Water. Similarly, Jesus announces himself as the Good Wine at the Marriage at Cana, and as the Living Bread after the feeding of the five thousand.

Does the human condition not precede the revelation in a decisive way here? In all these different examples, Jesus begins by appealing to the familiar, embodied condition of humanity – we recognize the thirst for water and the hunger for bread. He then follows up with an announcement in regards to what is above or more – what transcends – this familiar embodiedness; the Bread of Life, Living water, etc. It is then necessary to first recognize the worldly existence of bread in order to be able to receive the revelation of what transcends it. The announcement of Christ as e.g. 'the Water of Life' follows after an interaction centered around the everyday, earthly and familiar water in the well.

If Prenter agrees to this step, however, then it seems nonsensical to say that a philosophical analysis of the human condition cannot and should not precede the interpretation of God's revelation. Take for example this statement from Jesus about the relation between the water from the well (earthly water) and the Water of Life that He Himself is:

Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' (John 4:13)

What Jesus says about the water from the well is instantly recognizable for any human being. Earthly water is of such a nature that thirst at some point will return, and I will have to drink again. This is furthermore recognizable as belonging to a general feature of our carnality; the human body lives in a cycle of needs appearing, becoming satisfied and then re-appearing, becoming satisfied yet again, etc.

However, is this regenerative cycle, familiar as it is, open to only one philosophical determination? Far from it, and the fact that it is not is decisive for this thesis; *for the regenerative carnality of the human condition is tied to two different philosophical interpretations of enjoyment.*

In the platonic dialogue *Philebus*, Socrates uses the regenerative needs of the body to reproach bodily enjoyment in favor of spiritual enjoyment. He compares bodily enjoyment to an itch that, while it might be pleasurable to scratch, necessarily implies the painful state of the itch; "it is the deprivation that gives rise to the desire for replenishment, and while the expectation is pleasant, the deprivation itself is painful" (*Philebus* 47c). The pleasures of the body are conditioned on a prior pain, and are thus a mixture of pain and pleasure. Bodily pleasures are therefore subordinate to the pleasures of the intellect, for intellectual pleasures are not preceded by a painful state of deficiency.

Levinas' phenomenological analysis of enjoyment responds to Plato, 2400 years later, by asking whether "we [must] remain at a philosophy of need that apprehends it in poverty" (*TI* 116). It is a basic misunderstanding of the experience of enjoyment, Levinas argues, to see bodily needs as 'poverty', as a painful state, for these needs are in fact something we enjoy; "The human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs" (*TI* 114). Simply put, 'needing something' opens the possibility of filling this need. Satisfaction is conditioned on needs, and this belongs to the experience of these needs themselves; hunger and thirst anticipate their future satisfaction. Observed objectively from the outside and seen only in isolation, 'hunger' and 'thirst' might seem like lacks, but this is to miss how they are lived in experience; hunger *hungers* after food, and thirst *thirsts* after water. To lack something is, for the body, the anticipation of the satisfaction to come from filling those lacks. Let it be noted

in passing that this is the advantage of the phenomenological method, which analyzes a phenomena like enjoyment by asking how it is structured within human experience.

Importantly for this thesis, the difference in how enjoyment is interpreted has, I argue, crucial consequences for how the above Bible-passage can be interpreted. The difference between the Platonic and Levinasian interpretation of enjoyment opens up for different ways to at least preliminary define what ‘the Water of Life’ could be. If the Platonic view is taken, then the regenerative nature of thirst is taken as negative. The state of having to continually replenish one’s thirst is a state of slavery to the body. We are bound to these earthen vessels by a chain that we would like to break. Is Christ perhaps offering to break that chain? Does drinking the water that will eternally remove my thirst signify that the Water of Life repairs the fundamentally depraved state of our bodies?

On the other hand, what if we, with Levinas, see the condition of ‘needing water’ as a positive one? Another aspect of this passage opens up to us. Jesus initiates the interaction with the Samaritan woman by reporting *his own thirst*, and thus referencing his own, incarnate embodiment; “Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’” (John 4:6-7). Jesus asks for something to drink, and can only do this because He is incarnate, having come to join our embodied situation down below. Just as Jesus here asks for a drink of water, Jesus also eats bread, drinks wine and gathers wheat by the side of the road, even on the Sabbath.

Whatever complex relations exist between Jesus asking to receive water from the woman, and then offering another type of water, does there not seem to be at least a potential affirmation of the bodily nature of thirst here? Jesus does not ask the Samaritan woman to abstain from the water from the well, but asks for it, admits His own carnal thirst. The presupposition for receiving the Living Water is not to abandon earthly water, but to share it. What does this say about the Living Water? Perhaps that it does not compare to earthly water as a ‘superior form of water’ that would repair the flaws of earthly water, but rather as corresponding to another kind of thirst. Perhaps a spiritual thirst?

In its concluding pages, this thesis will return to the Gospel of John and the question of the relation between ‘the water in the well’ and ‘Living Water’. For now, however, the point is that the difference between well-water and the Living water can be understood as the difference between immanence and transcendence. Furthermore, the immanent water of the well can, in its regenerative structure, be understood according to two different philosophical

interpretations of enjoyment. Finally, these different interpretations of enjoyment leads to different interpretations of what transcends it. In other words, how we preliminary define immanence is crucial for how transcendence in its turn is understood. If worldly enjoyment is understood as a *suffering lack*, then it makes sense to think of transcendence as something which restores this fallen condition. If enjoyment is understood as *self-sufficient*, however, then it becomes possible to think transcendence as something more than enjoyment while also affirming the value of enjoyment for its own sake. One of the principal claims of this thesis is that the way in which we interpret enjoyment has crucial consequences for our interpretation of transcendence.

Returning to Prenter's methodological question, does the revelatory status of the Bible require that it speaks first, before philosophy? I argue that it cannot. The Bible is only intelligible to those who share in the human condition, and this 'human condition' is open to multiple and varying philosophical interpretations. The revelation of God in Christ is preceded by the human condition it addresses itself to. While Prenter is correct in pointing out that the Bible surely wants to tell us something *about* the human condition (Prenter 1955, 31), he also has to admit that the transcendent truth of God can reach humans and be intelligible for us because it, in the incarnation of Christ, comes to share in it. But is it then not correct to say that the Bible reveals something *new* about something *familiar*? The announcement of 'good news' (*euangélion*) to the world of old? The Bible addresses itself to a human carnality that is already familiar – we already recognize the thirst of water. It is in this recognizable, familiar and thus intelligible carnality that something new and transcendent is announced.

Is it then necessary to let the Bible speak the first word in theology? Perhaps it is more important that it has the *last word*. The revelation of Christ is the Good Wine that, to the surprise of the steward of the wedding, comes last rather than first (John 2:10). The relation between philosophy and theology could be interpreted as such. In order for the revelation to be receivable, it has to be intelligible within a human horizon. The human horizon is the zone of familiarity with which philosophy is occupied. Philosophy is a human knowledge concerned with the human condition. It begins from the human and limits itself to the human. Philosophy is, otherwise said, the extent of what human beings can learn about themselves.

It is to this familiar horizon that the Bible addresses itself. The Bible refers itself to the human condition in order to be understood, but it teaches us something that is wholly new and unpredictable and which, more importantly, is underivable from the human condition itself. The revelation of God is, in other words, a truth delivered *to* the human condition that does

not follow *from* the human condition. The difference between the truths of philosophy and God's truth is that the latter is a truth humans could never have arrived at by themselves.

c) A caveat

I must, however, add an asterisk to the above schema. The method of this thesis can, in one sense, not be said to proceed as a philosophical investigation of the familiarity of the immanent which then opens itself up to the newness of the transcendent revelation. Why? Simply because Levinas does in fact philosophize about transcendence. The decision of this thesis to focus on Levinas' analysis of enjoyment is in fact unconventional, for the main theme of his philosophy that he is most known for is the transcendent relation to the Other human being. Furthermore, it is impossible to understand his interpretation of immanence as enjoyment without also understanding his notion of transcendence. This is above all because Levinas defines immanence and transcendence as the difference between the *secular* and *religious* dimensions of life (*TI* 58-59 & 80-81). The enjoying subject is also the atheist subject, and this subject is happy at home in a world that suffices for its happiness. Additionally, the subject also stands in an ethical relation with the Other, a relation that transcends happiness and which Levinas calls religious.

Levinas therefore breaches the tenuous peace we were able to establish above. Rather than limiting philosophy to inquire into the immanent human condition on the one hand, and leave to theology to interpret the revelation on the other, Levinas writes about the relation *between* the secular and the religious. Immanence and transcendence are both topics of his philosophy.

Levinas argues that this is all possible within philosophy itself. He distinguished sharply between his philosophical works and his commentaries on the Talmud, both theoretically and by publishing the different works through different publishers. In his philosophical works – which are the works which occupies this thesis –, Levinas argues that he remains faithful to the phenomenological method (*TI* 28). Furthermore, Levinas believes that the question of transcendence, far from being foreign to philosophy, concerns it critically. Philosophy is not only the autonomous philosophers grasping the true, but also a relation to an absolute heteronomy that, because it always transcends philosophy and therefore always is more than its grasp, inspires the unquenchable thirst for truth in the first place (*CP* 58-59).

Nevertheless, some of Levinas' readers argue that what he does is more than philosophy. Jacques Derrida asks in his essay 'Violence and Metaphysics', a highly

influential interpretation of Levinas' philosophy, whether there is not a "complicity of theology and metaphysics" (Derrida 2001, 135) in Levinas' works. In the essay, Derrida contextualizes Levinas' philosophical writings in the tension between Hellenism and Hebraism. Derrida sees Levinas' discourse on transcendence as a sort of prophetic speech that is impossible in philosophy, but which because of its impossibility contests the rigidity of philosophy. The essay ends ambiguously with the question of who we are when we speak about transcendence; "Are we Greeks? Are we Jews?" (Derrida 2001, 192). Derrida thus leaves it open-ended whether Levinas' notion of transcendence can have a place in philosophy.

Another of Levinas' critics who is less open-ended about this possibility is Dominique Janicaud, who argues in the essay 'The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology' that it is Levinas who initiates this turn, a turn he would rather have phenomenology not take. For Janicaud, Levinas' philosophy is a departure from the immanence to which phenomenology should remain faithful. This does not, however, mean that Janicaud does not believe that this immanence can be questioned, a point he makes by comparing the analysis of the invisible in Levinas' and Merleau-Ponty's work. Both, Janicaud argues, seek to describe the "overflowing the intentional horizon" (Janicaud 2000, 26) by asking whether experience is reducible to everything that appears in it. In Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the flesh, for example, it becomes 'clear' that the flesh is not simply that which makes the world an intelligible place, but rather that "the visible is never pure, but always palpitating with invisibility" (Janicaud 2000, 24). In investigating the way in which my body structures my experience, Merleau-Ponty also discovers a meaning that withdraws, that is refractory and resistant and thus does not appear, but remains invisible.

Invisibility is also a theme in Levinas' philosophy, for transcendence of the Other is not given on the basis of how my experience is structured. It thus relates to me without appearing within the immanent human condition; "Invisibility does not denote an absence of relation; it implies relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea" (*TI* 34). Nevertheless, there is a relation to transcendence, for transcendence does reveal itself; "It *expresses itself*" (*TI* 51). This is the step to which Janicaud cannot agree. Whereas Merleau-Ponty interrogates the limits of the visible in order to gesture towards the invisible, Levinas posits that the invisible transcendence presents itself, and this is what makes a decisive difference for Janicaud;

Between the unconditional affirmation of Transcendence and the patient interrogation of the visible, the incompatibility cries out; we must choose. But are we going to do so with the head or with the heart – arbitrarily or not? (Janicaud 2000, 26)

Merleau-Ponty discusses the invisible always in reference to the visible, and therefore does not depart from the realm of immanence. Similarly to how Husserl could point out how transcendence belongs to my immanent experience of e.g. that tree ‘over there’ (transcendence-in-immanence), Merleau-Ponty pushes against the edges of immanence from within immanence. Levinas, on the other hand, argues that transcendence reveals itself to me without having to refer itself to my immanent horizon, “telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard” (*TI* 65). Levinas’ transcendence is not a ‘transcendence-in-immanence’ in the way Husserl describes, but a transcendence that *ruptures* my horizon.

Interestingly, therefore, Levinas conceives transcendence in the same way Prenter does. For Prenter, as we saw, the Biblical revelation must be heard first, before any philosophical analysis of the human condition, for it is justified by its own content alone. Levinas also believes that transcendence justifies itself by itself alone, for it does not depend on human immanence for its meaning. This could seem to strengthen Derrida’s and Janicaud’s observation about the complicity of philosophy and Rabbinic Judaism in Levinas’ works.

Levinas’ retort is that the idea of that which absolutely transcends philosophy “is not necessarily religious, that it is philosophical” (*CP* 53). Levinas refers to the idea of the good beyond being in Plato and Descartes idea of Infinity as examples of the legacy of this understanding of transcendence in the tradition of Hellenism as well. Furthermore, Levinas analysis of transcendence must be understood in relation to other philosophical notions of transcendence that he believes are inadequate. With regards to Husserl’s ‘transcendence-in-immanence’ of the tree ‘over there’, for example, this is for Levinas simply immanence. The tree is to be sure at a distance from me, but it is a recuperable distance that, in its intelligibility, opens itself to the autonomous grasp of the philosopher, and is therefore not truly beyond be, does not truly transcend.

The question of whether Levinas’ discourse on transcendence is possible within philosophy is one question, but here I want to focus on the other one; whether Levinas’

philosophy encroaches on theology's territory. On that note, I do not think that the way in which Levinas philosophizes about transcendence destroys the methodological relationship between philosophy and theology established in the above. Otherwise said, even if philosophy inquires about transcendence, this does not prohibit theology to throw light on transcendence in its own way and from its own vantage point. I find myself here in agreement – although with one caveat – with Emmanuel Falque, who in his *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology* argues that both philosophy and theology benefits from allowing disciplinary border-crossings, which neither dispels the existence of the river nor makes this river an insuperable barrier. Such crossings rather allows for mutual inspiration and for a better understanding of one's own disciplinary boundaries, for by traveling to the other riverbank and seeing things from their point of view, I gain not only a new perspective, but also a better insight into the distinctiveness of each riverbank; “*one enters the other's field in order to respect the boundaries*” (Falque 2016a, 138).

A crucial point for Falque, therefore, is that philosophy and theology should not be distinguished with regards to a difference in objects; “As object, the same phenomenon may well fall in distinct ways within the purview of multiple disciplines or, better, of different acts of consciousness” (Falque 2016a, 127). This has been shown, on the one hand, by the success of French phenomenology of religion. Philosophers such as Levinas, but also Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, etc. have been sources of inspiration for theologians because of the way in which they have been able, in the 20th century, to reintroduce questions of God to the horizon of human experience (Falque 2016a, 124). Theology should, on its side, welcome this inspiration. Philosophy too, however, should open itself to “*the counterblow of theology on phenomenology*” (Falque 2016a, 21). While having demonstrated its own excellence in how it can describe theological objects, contemporary phenomenology has not allowed for the possibility of a transformation from a theological point of view.

In this thesis, I want to retain an openness to the possibility of such a transformation. The object of this study is the relation between enjoyment and transcendence, or, otherwise said, the Living Water and the water in the well – or yet again, the familiarity of our worldly bodies and the revelation of the Good News. This study approaches this object philosophically, with Nietzsche and Levinas – and to a lesser extent Dostoevsky – as its main protagonists. Nevertheless, it also admits that this same object – the relation between the Living Water and the water in the well – can also be approached in an other way, starting, as Preter would have liked, from the God-given authority of the Bible itself. This more

properly speaking theological approach would then not only concern what is New, but also provide its own interpretation of the old water still running in the well. It would do so, however, in its own way, which is to receive the revelation of the Bible in faith and interpret its message.

In other words, the relation between immanence and transcendence is an object that can be studied both philosophically and theologically. This being said, however, I must add one caveat with regards to Falque's approach. For Falque, it is crucial that philosophy recognizes immanence as its own proper riverbank; "philosophy...is incapable of exceeding the field of its immanence, the source of its greatness" (Falque 2016a, 131). What according to Falque distinguishes philosophy is how it begins from and never goes beyond the finitude of the human condition. Its potential for theology lies in how it is able to describe "the God-phenomenon appearing to the human" (Falque 2016a, 127), that is, how transcendence appears on the finite, human horizon. Restricting itself to the immanence of its horizon, however, it can only show how it is *possible* for these phenomena to *appear*, without thus positing their actuality.

Falque therefore continues the tradition that separates between philosophy and theology as the difference between immanence and transcendence. But from where, I would ask, does one make this separation? From the riverbank of philosophy or theology? This is a question that I believe can be posed to the entire discussion above. When e.g. Prenter distinguishes between 'truths that can be discerned beginning with human intelligence' and 'truths that are revealed and thus justified by God', from where does he get this distinction? Is it a philosophical distinction that depends on human categories of knowledge? Or does the fact that humans can make this distinction testify to us having been already inspired by what transcends us? The question of the difference between 'the familiar' and 'the new' stands in the same dilemma.

I do not think that this is a question that has been resolved, and which perhaps cannot be solved according to any traditional definition of 'resolution'. As Jacques Derrida writes: "It is doubtless the *true order*. But it is indeed the *order of truth* which is in question" (Derrida 2001, 135). Because this order is in question, we cannot know from which riverbank the difference between transcendence and immanence first becomes intelligible. Precisely for this reason, however, this question is open to both philosophical and theological inquiries. The relation between immanence and transcendence cannot so quickly be used to demarcate between philosophy and theology, but is rather an object open to being studied by both

philosophy and theology. Levinas' philosophy is itself a study of this relation. It questions the Kantian premise that the human condition can be explained only with reference to immanence, and does so by delineating the separate dimensions of secular, atheist enjoyment and transcendent, ethical responsibility as both belonging to the concrete reality of the human being. This study will make use of this delineation of the relation between immanence and transcendence for the sake of understanding the relation between the Living Water and the water in the well, thus constituting a philosophical investigation into this relation. By admitting that this is an object that can also be studied theologically, however, this thesis also hopes to be able to open itself to an interdisciplinary discussion of this selfsame object.

d) The goodness of creation *ex nihilo*

We will very soon turn to the first chapter of this thesis, where I will provide a brief historical outline of the emergence of the ascetic ideal in the early Church. To prepare for this, however, it will be useful to consider one additional alternative to how the difference between 'immanence' and 'transcendence' can be conceived, one which will testify to the complicated relationship between philosophy and theology when it comes to determining the terminological couple immanence/transcendence. In addition to the ways of understanding this couple that we have already surveyed – 'the familiar' vs 'the new', the 'above' and 'here-below', etc. – we can also think the difference between transcendence and immanence as the difference between *Creator and creation*. This difference is intimately related to the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), and this notion is for a number of reasons crucially relevant to this thesis.

Its relevance follows, on the one hand, from how Levinas uses this notion in his philosophical works to formulate his understanding of the *separation* between immanence and transcendence.² The notion of creation *ex nihilo* is, however, a *theological* notion, and a Christian one at that. Levinas' use of the notion therefore marks, for one time at least, an example of a philosopher drawing on the tradition of theology in order to formulate or perhaps even arrive at a philosophical insight. On the other hand, however, the theological notion of creation *ex nihilo* also testifies to how the theological terminology of the early

² I intend to show that Levinas' use of creation *ex nihilo* is a theme in his work that marks a strong continuity between his two major works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than being*, and demonstrates that, in contrast to the opinion of some of Levinas' readers, the structure of separation remains consistent between the two works.

Church developed out of a fruitful dialogue with philosophy. The notion was developed in the early Church in order to distinguish the Christian notion of creation from the different pagan accounts of creation. Plato's account appears in *Timaeus*, where he explains how a demiurge created the world out of pre-existent matter (*Timaeus* 28a6). This was unacceptable to Christian thinkers like Tertullian and Augustine, for the Christian God does not depend on anything – e.g. pre-existent matter – for His ability to create. Another pagan account of creation is found in Plotinus, who argues that creation is an extension of the One. This, too, was for a number of reasons unacceptable for Christian thinkers. Against both these notions, the Church Fathers put forth that God had created the world out of nothing (Pricopi 2018, 36-38). The theological notion of creation *ex nihilo* was thus borne out of an engagement and contrasting with Greek philosophy.

One of the immediate and obvious consequences of this is that there is a stark difference between Creator and creation, a difference that we can call the difference between immanence and transcendence. Because creation is not an extension of God, but is created out of nothing, creation is something distinctively new and different from the Creator. The created world is not made out of God's own substance, nor from any divine matter that would have belonged together with God before the act of creation itself, but is precisely made out of nothing. It is for this very reason that Christians of any creed confess – as was decided at the council of Nicaea – that Christ is begotten, not created, by the Father. If Christ is to be said to share in the divine nature of the Father, then He cannot have been created along with the rest of the mundane reality of the world, for this reality is something different and separate from the divine reality of God (Lohse 1985, 54).

The notion of creation *ex nihilo* demarcates the difference between immanence and transcendence for Levinas as well, and demonstrates how the idea of a secular, atheist dimension to life is compatible with the idea of transcendence. The fact that the creature is created out of nothing means that it can exist completely unaware of its Creator, for rather than existing as an extension of the Divine, the creature exists independently on its own. For Levinas, therefore, creation *ex nihilo* opens, paradoxically, for an atheist existence in a secular world (*TI* 102-105). I live, on the one hand, completely ignorant of God. Furthermore, this godless horizon does not, for Levinas, suffer from this godlessness, but is rather endowed with its own, self-sufficient meaning; enjoyment and happiness. When I eat the fruits of creation, there is no need for this fruit to refer to its Creator, for it was created to exist on its

own, just like me. In other words, Levinas sees the absolute separation between Creator and creation as a good thing.

The early Church also recognized and sought to defend the dogma of the *goodness of creation*. The dogmatic position of the Church has always been that, as stated in Genesis, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). In fact, a combination of these two dogmas can be said to express both the question that this thesis poses, and the answer it tried to provide. The question is: how does the immanent, created order of the world relate to its transcendent Creator? One of the principal claims of this thesis is that creation exists, at least in part, as wholly separate and without need of any reference to God for its goodness. This is what I call *the goodness of creation out of nothing*.

The need to defend this thesis, however, testifies to the fact that the Church has not always thought so. Turning to the question of asceticism in the early Church, we will see how the early Church found it necessary to defend the dogma of the goodness of creation; for in the idea that *abstaining from* the goods of creation could be a means of orienting oneself *towards* that which transcends the world, this dogma found itself threatened.

Chapter I – Asceticism and Enjoyment in the early Church

a) The question of creation and asceticism

What is the relationship between Creator and creation? Furthermore, how should we, human beings created in the image of God, relate to either of them? I seek to defend the thesis that humans should relate to creation as an end in itself. God created us to enjoy our lives on earth and find happiness in it, and the notion that something nevertheless transcends life does not need to be in conflict with this affirmation of earthly life.

In this chapter, I want to demonstrate why this thesis needs defending. I want to do this by giving a brief historical outline of the rise to prominence of the ascetic ideal in the early Church. The question of the relation between asceticism and Christianity has become the object of intense discussion in recent decades, seeing interest from a multitude of fields such as history, philosophy, religious studies, medieval studies and theology (see e.g. Roberts 1996, 403 / Krawiec 2009, 765). This rich field challenges the idea that there is any single coherent practice of asceticism, testifying instead to a complicated notion that has appeared in different forms and for different reasons throughout history. In the following, I will only be able to give a brief outline of how asceticism manifested itself in the ancient world in terms of the continuities and discontinuities between ancient Greco-Roman asceticism and asceticism in the early Church.³

For all its complexity, however, I nevertheless also believe that it is possible to identify a continuous problematic regarding the question of asceticism as it becomes manifest in the Christian tradition. It is a question of “the proper Christian attitude towards creation” (Hunter 2007, 39), and this question must be contextualized in the terms we have established so far in this thesis – the relation between immanence and transcendence. In this brief outline,

³ I rely in particular on the philosophical studies of Michel Foucault in his series *The History of Sexuality*, the historian Peter Brown’s landmark work *The Body and Society: Men, Women & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* and the theologian David G. Hunter’s *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*, in addition to some other works.

therefore, I wish to demonstrate that the controversies surrounding asceticism in the early Church relates to, at least in one sense, the tension between immanence and transcendence identified by Charles Taylor in medieval Christianity;

On one hand, the Christian faith pointed towards a self-transcendence, a turning of life towards something beyond ordinary human flourishing...On the other, the institutions and practices of mediaeval society...were at least partly attuned to foster at least some human flourishing. This sets up a tension, between the demands of the total transformation which the faith calls to, and the requirements of ordinary ongoing human life. (Taylor 2007, 44)

On the one hand is the characteristically cyclical, because regenerative, rhythm of ordinary life. My body is oriented around the cycle of needs and their satisfaction, and the land on which I depend for food is oriented around the cycles of the season, to which I must attend if I am to cultivate the land. Finally, every human generation is only regenerated through sexual reproduction. Life grows out of and is bound to a regenerative cycle of life and death. It is the transience of life, subject as it is to passing away. We could call this the immanent, familiar, embodied and worldly existence of the water in the well.

On the other hand, you have the revelation of the good news that the old has been made anew, the promise that death has been conquered by the Eternal God reaching back into His creation in order to save it. This salvation is open to those who are ready to drop everything and follow Christ, not even sparing time to bury their dead (Matthew 8:22). We could call this the new and revealed transcendent existence of the Living Water.

The tension between these two arose already in the early Church, and especially in terms of the question of marriage, a topic that will occupy us a lot in the discussion that follows, as it was of great interest to the Church fathers and furthermore is of great interest to the abovementioned contemporary research. In terms of the interests of this thesis, however, marriage is one example of a general debate surrounding worldly goods, where the topics of e.g. foods and wine are equally relevant. The question is why and in what way some early Christian thinkers saw the turning *away from* creation as an ideal or even necessary practice in order to orient oneself *towards* transcendence.

This short story about asceticism in the early Church ends with the man who himself would settle the issue for the time to come, namely Augustine. His theology of marriage

managed to strike a balance between those that idealized celibacy on the one hand, and those that saw this idealization as a threat to the goodness of creation on the other. In doing so, however, I believe Augustine left behind a troubling legacy for the question of enjoyment, for it is in a sense by excluding enjoyment from the goodness of marriage that he managed to strike this balance. This way of thinking also seems to manifest in his understanding of other worldly, embodied practices, such as eating, drinking and even hearing. Although I will not argue to present any definitive interpretation of the legendary Church father, I do believe that I will be able to demonstrate one possible interpretation of Augustine that gives weight to Nietzsche's accusation against Christianity that we turn to in chapter II. What this interpretation entails is a view of worldly existence that sees it as a "pilgrimage *through* life" (*Confessions* XI.ii), and thus nothing to get attached to as I move forward to what awaits me in the life to come.

b) Asceticism in the Greco-Roman world

In order to understand Christian asceticism, however, it is absolutely necessary to begin with a discussion of asceticism in the Greco-Roman world. This is not only in order to avoid the simplistic caricature of the pre-Christian world, and to appreciate the level of continuity that there was between these cultures as regards asceticism, but also in order to get at what is unique about Christian asceticism. In other words, the uniqueness of Christian asceticism only comes to light when we juxtapose it to the strong continuity it has with pagan asceticism.

The literature on this subject is very much in agreement that Christianity grew out of a world that already valued asceticism highly. Peter Brown writes that there is "little support to the widespread romantic notion that the pre-Christian Roman world was a sunny 'Eden of the unrepressed'" (Brown 2008, 21). Michel Foucault notes that when apologists like Justin or Athenagoras wrote to pagans about how sexual relations should be limited to the goal of reproduction, and that to seek pleasure in such an act was ill-advised, they did so not to convert these pagans, but rather to justify themselves *to* them: "Christians needed to disarm by displaying forms of conduct that pagans already recognized and valued highly" (Foucault 2021, 3). Contrary to popular belief, Christianity was not preceded by a culture with lax attitudes to the pleasures of the body, but one seriously concerned with them.

The popular myth of a pre-Christian hedonistic paradise probably follows, at least in part, from the difficulty of understanding how different the pre-modern world actually was, a difference that touches on the reality of the body itself. In our contemporary times, more

people die from obesity than starvation, and grocery stores will make sure that their shelves are overfilled with fresh produce even if it leads to significant waste, simply because on-shelf availability has been shown to be crucial in order to retain customers. This is, however, a quite new scenario: “Until recently most humans lived on the very edge of the biological poverty line, below which people succumb to malnutrition and hunger” (Harari 2015, 3). Life existed in a much more precarious balance. This was certainly the case for people living in ancient Rome: “Citizens of the Roman Empire at its height, in the second century A.D, were born into the world with an average life expectancy of less than twenty-five years” (Brown 6, 2008). There was a thin line between life and death, with a possible famine, plague or war always lurking around the corner. Sex for pleasure was therefore a luxury reserved for the elite and eccentric, whereas for most of the population, sex was considered a duty to reproduce. In this society, “Pressure on the young women was inexorable” (Brown 6, 2008); they had to birth an average of five children to uphold the population of Rome. The people of our past had to be much more thoughtful as to how they spent the limited energy of their bodies.

Far from relishing in limitless pleasures, therefore, the people of the ancient world were in fact very much concerned with how to manage their bodies. Asceticism was an ideal to the ancient Greeks “the theme of an *askēsis*, as a practical training that was indispensable in order for an individual to form himself as a moral subject, was important – emphasized even – in classical Greek thought” (Foucault 1985, 77). It was a moral ideal to be in control of your bodily desires, and Greek society expected their men to be able to practice such control, a control that had to be continually cultivated and maintained. In order to practice this asceticism, Greeks had to be aware of the dangerous potential inherent to the experience of enjoyment. Albeit a natural aspect of the functions of the body, the feeling of pleasure constituted a dangerous seduction that could lure the subject to pursue a bodily function beyond its intended goal; “Nature had invested human beings with this necessary and redoubtable force, which was always on the point of overshooting the objective that was set for it.” (Foucault 1985, 50). This was a danger inherent to all aspects of life, from sex to eating, drinking and exercising. We find, therefore, already in ancient Greek society the idea to mistrust the charm of enjoyment.

It is, however, crucial to understand *why* the Greeks were fearful of the dangerous allure of bodily pleasures. That the allure of enjoyment threatened to overshoot its objective

was first of all a threat to the self-mastery that a free, Greek man expected to be able to exercise over himself;

If it was so important to govern desires and pleasures, if the use one made of them constituted such a crucial ethical problem, this was not because the Greeks hoped to preserve or regain an original innocence...it was because they wanted to be free and to be able to remain so. (Foucault 1985, 78)

The danger of enjoyment consisted in its potential to sway the subject's control over itself, and the ascetic ideal meant to cultivate and practice this control. To be in control of your body and ward of its tendency for excess meant that you were a master over yourself.

This mastery over oneself was furthermore deeply tied to the government of the state. It was a question of legitimizing one's rule over others, which of course had to begin with one's own rule over oneself, for "since people prefer to have slaves who are not intemperate, all the more when it comes to choosing a leader, "should we choose one whom we know to be the slave of the belly, or of wine, or lust, or sleep?" (Foucault 1985, 61). Greek men were to exercise the same control over themselves as they were to exercise over their households and over the general populace. In terms of state rule, we find both rebellions against despots and the self-justifications of kings justified with reference to the absence/presence of the self-control asceticism cultivated (Foucault 1985, 81). This meant that the ascetic ideal was a particular rather than universal precept, and was to be followed accordingly. A king would – ideally – live according to much harder precepts than an ordinary citizen.⁴

It was therefore a particular and gendered class that was expected to practice any self-management at all; free male citizens. In fact, the idea of 'self-control' was itself gendered. To be in active rule of yourself was a masculine characteristic, while being passive and submissive was the female role. Even in cases where women were expected to exercise a degree of self-mastery, this was seen as them partaking in a masculine characteristic; conversely, men who lacked self-control were feminine (Foucault 1985, 83). Asceticism was the ideal of self-mastery by which authority of the patriarchal Greek state was justified. To be

⁴ As an adult, at least, for the strict expectations that leaders were supposed to live up to was not contradicted by being preceded by a more frivolous, youthful period; "Even Marcus Aurelius, a paragon of public sobriety, had 'given way to amatory passions' for a requisite, short time" (Brown 2008, 29)

a citizen – as opposed to slaves, women and children – was to be a free master over yourself and others, and the higher up the ladder you went, the more self-control was expected.

Greek morality of enjoyment was therefore contingent on a social hierarchy; it did not apply “just to anyone but particularly to those who had rank, status, and responsibility in the city.” (Foucault 1985, 61). It was a luxurious activity reserved for the privileged elite, aiming at cultivating and self-enhancing the subject, and intertwined with the government of the *polis*. The reason behind the fear for excess of enjoyment sprung out of this system; over-enjoying prohibited self-mastery and delegitimized authority. This was, once again, a fear of a *natural* force; “Foods, wines, and relations with women and boys constituted analogous ethical material; they brought forces into play that were natural, but that always tended to be excessive” (Foucault 1985, 51). The precarious state in which nature had placed man required the practice of asceticism, lest he would submit to the rule of the body and its desire for pleasure.

Also the Romans valued asceticism highly. The Vestal Virgins of Rome were a legendary institution of selected women that were to maintain the city’s holy fire and to remain chaste until their thirties, and who were idealized for this chastity. Some men castrated themselves and lived as eunuchs, and were commended for this; it was believed that ejaculation of semen led to a loss of vitality, and so self-castration was thought to have a vital potential for athletes in particular (Brown 2008, 19).

As were the case with the Greeks, however, all these different forms of asceticism were meant to reinforce the natural order. Male eunuchs self-castrated in order to enhance their bodily vitality, and Vestal Virgins served to remind women that their natural purpose was childbirth; “They were the exceptions that reinforced the rule” (Brown 2008, 9). Also the strict precepts that surrounded reproduction has to be contextualized in view of the natural order it was supposed to maintain. Men and women of the elite were told by doctors and philosophers that their every move and thought during intercourse was of incredible importance for their offspring;

At the moment of intercourse, the bodies of the elite must not be allowed to set up so much as a single, random eddy in the solemn stream that flowed from generation to generation through the marriage bed. (Brown 2008, 21)

Entangled in bed, the Roman elite were reproducing the life of Roman society, and they had to attend to it with the strictness and care that this grand responsibility required. Love-making was no frivolous activity embarked on for the fun of it.

Or, sex with your *wife* was no frivolous activity. There was for example no contradiction for a man of the elite to take extreme care in how he approached sex with his wife, while sleeping around thoughtlessly with the slaves of his household, which the male master of the house could do with as he pleased (Brown 2008, 23). It was therefore also the case in Roman culture that the ascetic ideals and practices were contingent on a multitude of flexible factors and designed for a particular selection of the populace. While the doctors and philosophers who designed these strict precepts formulated them as universal ideals, “In reality they wrote for the privileged few” (Brown 2008, 24).

The picture that emerges from the Greco-Roman world is of a culture not with lax attitudes to the issue of the pleasures of the body, but of one with strict regimens to regulate their dangers and excesses. These ascetic regimens were furthermore undertaken to uphold and maintain the precarious but natural order of the world. The need for asceticism followed from observations about the dangerous but natural tendencies of the body, and from the hierarchical organization of society; “Human society was built on the hierarchies and orders thought to be dictated by nature. The free, self-mastering male stood atop this hierarchy and displayed this mastery through his asceticism” (Roberts 1996, 413). Asceticism was bound to and maintained the natural order.

One aspect of the ancient world that might strike a modern reader as strange is this equation made between the social and natural order. We are used to differentiating between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, so that when we hear about e.g. the famous Desert Fathers, Christians who abandoned all possessions and moved out into the desert, we could easily interpret their actions in view of the romantic notion of abandoning the corruption of society in order to get closer to the untouched, uncivilized nature. This is however not the case:

Like their Greek counterparts, Christian thinkers saw Greco-Roman society as an extension of nature, part of the chain of being; however, since Christians sought to escape this ‘nature’, the transformation of body and soul could be accomplished only through some sort of distancing from society. (Roberts 1996, 413)

The Christians of the early Church also saw the order of society and the order of nature as intertwined in the great chain of being, or the order of the world. In contrast to their pagan predecessors, however, Christians did not practice asceticism to uphold this order, but rather to *rupture* it.

c) Christian Asceticism

There is both continuity and discontinuity between the asceticism of the pre and post-Christian ancient world. Christianity grew out of a Greco-Roman world and adapted many of its ascetic ideals and practices. Clement of Alexandria was drawing on a long, ancient tradition when he made use of the hare and hyena as examples of sexual deviancy (Foucault 2021, 19), and when Augustine made note of the unique intensity of sexual pleasure (*The City of God* XIV.xvi), he repeated an observation that the famous pagan doctor Galen had made before him (Brown 2008, 17). In terms of the idea that reproduction was the proper objective of sex, there was no disagreement between the pagans and the Christians (Foucault 2021, 15).

Nevertheless, there is also something distinctively new in the Christian attitude to asceticism, a newness already visible in the apostolic age. This newness furthermore concerned the question of transcendence, and appears already in the Letters of Paul.

But did the Greeks and Romans not believe in things that transcended the sensible world, like the soul? They did, and a key aspect of asceticism was for the soul to remain ruler over the body. As such ‘soul’ and ‘body’ fit into a hierarchy – both natural and social –, connected in the previously mentioned great chain of being. For someone like Paul, however, this hierarchy was eclipsed by something that went beyond it;

The hierarchy of body and soul, which linked man both to the gods above and to the animal world below in the benign and differentiated order of an eternal universe, concerned Paul not in the slightest. The universe itself was about to be transformed by the power of God. (Brown 2008, 48)

Paul lived with imminent expectations of the Second Coming, a coming that would signal the transcendent rupture of everything familiar. The ordinary social hierarchies in which people had previously understood themselves had fallen, for “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). For Paul, therefore, it was not a question of inheriting and preserving an order, but a

question of its radical reevaluation; “The new life of the risen Jesus stood for a challenging discontinuity between the old and the new” (Brown 2008, 50).

How should the faithful Christian conduct him or herself in the meantime? Paul did not adopt the Gnostic attitude of ‘anything goes’, but rather expected the flock of Christ to live up to excellent standards of decency and not, for example, “take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute” (1 Cor 6:15). More interesting, however, is the questions which his community posed to him. In the seventh chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul laid out some general advice on how Christians should relate to the question of marriage, a short chapter that would be decisive for future discussions of the topic within the Church – Augustine cites it very frequently (*The Good of Marriage* X-XI). According to Brown, however, newer research shows that Paul actually wrote this chapter on the backfoot, attempting to mediate between the most extreme ambitions of the Corinth community and the order of the pagan world they still lived in (Brown 2008, 53). Paul opens the chapter by responding to a claim; “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is well for a man not to touch a woman’” (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul agrees with this claim to a point, but also makes great effort to stress that the Lord does not require married households to separate or to live in continence, nor prohibits the unmarried to marry. Even if abstinence is to be preferred, Paul does not expect his average follower to be able to live according to such a strict precept, and finds it better for men and women to marry in order to contain their bodily desires within the marriage. He thus concludes pragmatically that “he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better” (1 Cor. 7:38).

According to Brown, Paul made this compromise for a number of reasons, chief among them being to not alienate the still young church from its pagan surroundings. To abandon marriage completely would without doubt make Christianity wholly incompatible with the Roman world, whose current order and future continuation depended on married households. Nevertheless, Paul also admits to the reason why continence is better than married life;

The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. (1 Cor. 7:32-34)

To be married means to have your attention focused on the natural order of the world. It entails fidelity to all the duties associated with maintaining and continuing the world as it is, to orient yourself to child-making, child-birthing and child-raising, to questions of education and inheritance. It means to be concerned with making the budget for your household to go around, to be concerned with your occupation and rank, and with the hierarchy within which those two has sense. While Paul understood the necessity of retaining these structures, he also understood how they divided the singular attention that the faithful ideally should direct towards the transcendent calling of Christ.

As the apocalyptic expectations of the Apostolic Age faded, and we enter the Patristic Age, “Christianity had to develop an organizational structure that reflected a permanent earthly presence” (Cherry 2018, 89). This meant that more permanent solutions to the above conflict had to be found, a conflict whose continuation we can sense in the attempts to quell it. There is a group of Pauline letters – the First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus – that most scholars now agree were not written by Paul himself, and in fact were written after his death. Interestingly for our sake, they seem to have been written with anti-ascetic purposes in mind. Paul himself had left the question of marriage in an ambiguous state, neither condoning nor rejecting it, and this ambiguity had to be answered by forging Pauline letters that reinforced the goodness of marriage and the Christian duty to conform to the hierarchy of the household (Brown 2008, 57-58 / Hunter 2007, 92-93 / Cherry 2018, 94-95).

These anti-ascetic measures were taken simultaneously with the growing popularity of *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which told of the young woman Thecla who abandoned her earlier pagan life by refusing to marry, and accompanied Paul on his journeys (Brown 2008, 5-6 / Cherry 2018, 95-96). Thecla was idealized for her celibacy. The Thecla narrative became immensely popular, and inspired a host of women to refuse marriage and remain celibate in order to follow the transcendent calling of Christ (Cherry 2018, 96).

Thecla’s story is a reminder of the potentially liberating power of asceticism, which has been recognized by more recent studies on ascetic practices, (Roberts 1996, 403). The Christian women who rejected marriage were in fact breaking with the patriarchal order of Greco-Roman society, which otherwise subjected women to male control from birth to grave, first as servants to their fathers and brothers, and then to their husbands in their marital home. To follow the Christian calling presented an unprecedented alternative to these ascetic women; “They remained unmarried, not under the control of a husband. And they were

travelers, not staying at home under the authority of their fathers and brothers.” (Cherry 2018, 88). They could break with this *familiar order* – or the *order of the family* – by orienting themselves wholeheartedly to the transcendent message that brought in the new that would surpass this order.⁵ Sexual abstinence was extremely potent, for if “The means by which society was continued could be abandoned” (Brown 2008, 64), then perhaps this society itself could be overturned.

On the one hand, therefore, asceticism constituted a completely new ladder by which people from the bottom trenches of society could launch themselves into new positions that would ordinarily never be available to them, guarded as they were by the need for ‘family connections’. On the other hand, most Christians lived in ordinary households they could not simply abandon (Brown 2008, 138). As the ascetic ideal rose to prominence within the Church, these married Christians were increasingly seen as a lower class of Christians, many steps below the celibates on the staircase that lead to heaven (Hunter 2007, 115). These developments came for a number of reasons to a peak in the later fourth century (Hunter 2007, 2). One of the reasons was probably that Christianity had become the state religion of the Roman empire at this time, which meant that the persecutions of Christians had ended. With the experience of martyrdom disappearing from the Christian horizon, asceticism came to be seen as inseparable from an ideal Christian life.

This created, however, a host of problems, which led to, amongst other things, the Jovinian controversy of the fourth century. Jovinian would be deemed a heretic by the Church, but David G. Hunter has recently argued that Jovinian was motivated by anti-heretical concerns, chief among them the preservation of the dogma of the goodness of creation;

[In both the case of fasting and sexual renunciation], Jovinian maintained that the excessive practice of asceticism – or, to be more precise, the elevation of ascetic over non-ascetic practices – ran the risk of impugning the value and purpose of creation. (Hunter 2007, 40)

⁵ Brown also takes note of this dual meaning of the word ‘familiar’ (Brown 2008, 89). These meanings can be fruitfully explored. ‘Familiar relations’ are those we recognize, those with which we already have intimacy, in contrast to the otherness and newness of strangers.

For Jovinian, the elevation and exaltation of asceticism within the Church threatened to devalue creation completely. Why would he have created the goods of the world if we were not meant to receive them in thanksgiving? Did God not create us in such a way that the continuation of the human race depended on intercourse? For Jovinian, baptism, not celibacy, should serve as the essential qualifier of whether you were Christian or not (Hunter 2008, 31). He was deemed a heretic for his anti-ascetic positions, most famously by Jerome in his *Adversus Jovinianum*. Jerome's condemnation of Jovinian was so extreme, however, that it "verged on a complete rejection of marriage" (Hunter 2018, 153). It therefore sparked the need for a defense in the other direction and to find a mediating position, a task that fell on, amongst others, Augustine (Hunter 2007, 244-245).

d) Augustine and Asceticism

Augustine tries to save marriage, paradoxically, through a renewed interpretation of original sin. It is paradoxical because Augustine is trying to argue that marriage, sexual intercourse and reproduction belongs to the goodness of creation, but can only do so by also assigning sexuality to the fallenness of the human condition.

In short, Augustine uses his theory of original sin to separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to sex. He demarcates what the goods of marriage are, namely offspring, fidelity and sacrament, and this demarcation would be defining for the Western Church for a long time (Hunter 2007, 286). On the other hand, he also determines human sexuality as a fundamentally broken and corrupted phenomenon. He did this to meet the demands of the ascetic movement of the Church, for it is with reference to the fallen nature of sex that Augustine can explain, within his own theology, why celibacy is ideal to marriage. Nevertheless, it is also with reference to his theory of original sin that, I believe, it is most pertinent to ask "Whether or not Augustine ultimately embraced the Gnostic contempt for the body, this became his legacy" (Cherry 2018, 143). Augustine saves sex by separating lust and pleasure from it. With this follows a new and uniquely Christian reason for the fear of enjoyment's allurements.

In contrast to his predecessors, Augustine argues that Adam and Eve were sexual beings also in their pre-fallen, paradisaic state (Brown 2008, 399). God did create Adam and Eve as man and woman, equipped with sexual organs, with the intention that they should reproduce. The difference between the wheat and the chaff is therefore the difference between how sex worked previous to the fall, and how it worked after it; "one is the good of marriage,

which continues to be present in marriage even after the fall; the other is the original sin, which marriage did not create and does not now create, but which marriage now finds to be a fact” (*Letter 6 to Atticus IV*). In other words, sex exhibits currently both the good parts that were intended from creation, and the corrupted parts, that followed the fall. What is the difference? Augustine explains;

in paradise there was no concupiscence of the flesh, which we feel at work in stormy, disordered desires against our will, even when there is no need...there would still have been the concupiscence of marriage there, which served the peaceful love of the spouses and commands the genitals to procreate, just as the will commands the hands and feet to do their proper work. (*Letter 6 to Atticus VII*)

Humans were intended to procreate also in paradise, but without the lustful desire that makes us enjoy sex ‘even when there is no need’, that is, even when it is not for the sake of procreation. In this state, we would control our sexual organs in the way we otherwise control our hands and feet. Adam would have been able to steer his penis up and down in the same way I move my arm up and down, and Eve would have been able to lubricate her vaginal walls merely by willing them to do so. In our fallen state, however, our sexual organs follows our lust rather than our will, and seeks pleasure in addition to the proper objective of reproduction.

Thus whereas sexual intercourse could be operated in a seemingly mechanical manner prior to the fall, it has now become entangled in the corruptive cycle of lustful desires and their satisfaction;

this lust not only takes possession of the whole body and outward members, but also makes itself felt within, and moves the whole man with a passion in which mental emotion is mingled with bodily appetite, so that the pleasure (*voluptas*) which results is the greatest of all bodily pleasures. So possessing indeed is this pleasure, that at the moment of time in which it is consummated, all mental activity is suspended. (*The City of God XIV.xvi*)

The corruption of our bodies has made sexual pleasure something we lust after, and has thus installed itself as an objective in itself. Augustine goes on to ask – rhetorically! – who would

not prefer to be able to procreate without depending on these faulty bodily desires, instead being able to control the act through their volition, “in the same way as his other members serve him for their respective ends?” (*The City of God* XIV.xvi). Interestingly, he notes, this fault of the corrupted body can also come to hinder those who seek out sex for its unlawful delights, “so that though lust rages in the mind, it stirs not the body” (*The City of God* XIV.xvi). In other words, those who lust for sex for its pleasures alone are also condemned to relying on genitals that does not yield to their command in the same way my arms and feet do.

Why, then, did our bodily nature become corrupted? Augustine is sure to clarify that God did not, initially at least, create us in this way; we were created wholly good and sinless, with bodies unmoved by illicit lust. The body is therefore the receptacle of sin, but not its cause; “We are then burdened with this corruptible body; but...the cause of this burdensomeness is not the nature and substance of the body” (*The City of God* XIV.iii). Rather, it is the soul;

For the corruption of the body, which weighs down the soul, is not the cause but the punishment of the first sin; and it was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful, but the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible. (*The City of God* XIV.iii)

The origin of sin is the prideful soul of man, which disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Despite having been prohibited by God, and solely because of his own desire to be like God, Adam ate the apple from the tree of wisdom, and thus condemned all future generations to the state of sin. In fact, the sin of Adam’s soul is reflected in the punishment our bodies now suffer from; for in the same way we disobeyed God, our bodies now disobey us (*The City of God* XIV.xv).

Crucially, this allows Augustine to separate between the goodness of creation and the sinfulness of our bodies;

No doubt the two are generated simultaneously – both nature and nature’s corruption; one of which is good, the other evil. The one comes to us from the bounty of the Creator, the other is contracted from the condemnation of our origin; the one has its cause in the good-will of the Supreme God, the other in the depraved will of the first man; the one exhibits God as the maker of the

creature, the other exhibits God as the punishment of disobedience. (On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin II.xxxviii)

In terms of sexual intercourse, this does indeed belong to the goodness of creation, and bears witness to the fact that God wants us to increase and multiply the human race. In their pre-corrupted state, our sexual organs could carry out this objective in a purely willed manner, without dependence on the lust for illicit pleasures. This makes it possible for Augustine to answer both Jovinian and Jerome; the goodness of marriage should be practiced and defended by Christians, but chastity is still a crucial virtue, for it fights against the sinful excesses that the fall has introduced to sexual intercourse. Thus, although virginity is still superior to marriage, married couples can partake in the struggle against the flesh.

With this, Augustine was able to both respect the status asceticism had acquired within the Church and defend the goodness of creation that this selfsame ascetic ideal had come to threaten. He does this, however, at a great cost. The Greeks and Romans were also, as we have seen, anxious about the intense pleasure of sex. They also argued that men and women had to exercise an amount of self-asceticism with regards to these pleasures. These pleasures were nevertheless *natural* parts of sexual activity, and their tendency towards excess testified simply to the precarious state of nature. Augustine, on the other hand, alienates the pleasures of sex from the act itself. The lust for pleasure accompanying sex does not naturally belong to it, but are *foreign invaders* that should ideally not belong to sex at all. In my vigilant chastity, therefore, I am not only practicing self-mastery over and against the allure of the natural enjoyment that accompanies most bodily activities, but guarding against the *corruption of nature* that has made lust and pleasure the accomplice of such activities.

Is this only the case for the pleasures of sex? Augustine's position on this issue is much less developed, but there are certainly clues that suggest that he interprets the other pleasures of the body under the same schema. One clue is the title for chapter 16 in book XIV of *The City of God*, from which I have already made some quotations: 'Of the evil of lust, A Word Which, Though Applicable to Many Vices, is Specifically Appropriated to Sexual Uncleaness'. In other words, the evils of lust are especially pertinent when it comes to sex, but have other applications as well. Another clue can be found in *The Good of Marriage*, where Augustine in one place compares virginity to fasting, saying that in the same way marriage is not preferable to virginity, feasting is not preferable to fasting (*The Good of Marriage VIII*).

More importantly, Augustine repeats a very similar form of argumentation in the latter half of book ten of *Confessions*, which concerns the divine command “to control our bodily desires” (*Confessions* X.xxix). Augustine begins with a discussion of sexual continence, but goes on to discuss “another evil which we meet with day by day” (*Confessions* X.xxxi), namely eating and drinking. Just as with intercourse, Augustine states that the activity itself is not sinful, for God has created the gifts that relieve thirst and hunger. Nevertheless, “the snare of concupiscence” (*Confessions* X.xxxi) awaits us here as well, and thus requires our vigilant attention;

although the purpose of eating and drinking is to preserve health, in its train there follows an ominous kind of enjoyment (*voluptas*), which often tries to outstrip it, so that it is really for the sake of pleasure that I do what I claim to do and mean to do for the sake of my health. Moreover, health and enjoyment have not the same requirements, for what is sufficient for health is not enough for enjoyment, and it is often hard to tell whether the body, which must be cared for, requires further nourishment, or whether we are being deceived by the allurements of greed demanding to be gratified. (*Confessions* X.xxxi)

There is, on the one hand, some overlap with the earlier ascetic practices of the Greeks that we surveyed earlier. Enjoyment is feared because its allure can lead the activity away from its ‘proper objective’ (health). Augustine also fears “becoming its captive” (*Confessions* X.xxxi), mirroring the pagan fear of becoming a slave to your belly. There is, however, also something quite new here, namely the idea that enjoyment is a *foreign element* in the act of eating; it is an ominous element that *deceives* us into making the activity *about* enjoyment (‘so that it is really for the sake of pleasure’). Enjoyment is therefore not simply a natural danger that can lead the activity of eating to excess; it is an alien presence that corrupts this activity. Thus he names it precisely an *evil*, and the consequence of overeating is not lack of self-control; in response to his inability to control himself, Augustine exclaims “I am a poor sinner” (*Confessions* X.xxxi).

The same struggle is identified in the pleasures of sound and sight. Beautiful hymns have their proper objective in inspiring worship, but they also lead to “the gratification of my senses” (*Confessions* X.xxxiii), which can lead us away from this proper objective; “when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, this is a grievous sin”

(*Confessions* X.xxxiii). Why a grievous sin? Because this pleasure *corrupts* the objective, is at odds with it, will install itself there if we are not constantly beware its possible invasion. This allure must, again, be separated from the goodness of creation, something Augustine makes clear when talking about the pleasures of sight;

The eyes delight in beautiful shapes of different sorts and bright and attractive colours. I would not have these things take possession of my soul. Let God possess it, he who made them all. He made them all very good (Gen. 1:31), but it is he who is my Good, not they. (*Confessions* X.xxxiv)

A peculiar dilemma; God made all these ‘beautiful shapes and attractive colors’ *very good*, but to delight in them is not good, is in fact a temptation to be avoided. The creation is thus very good, but to *enjoy* it is to abuse this goodness. This strange sort of abstinence against even pleasant sights seems to only make sense against the backdrop of this theory of original sin, where lust and enjoyment comes to corrupt an activity that would ideally do without them.

If Augustine’s understanding of sexuality and original sin can be expanded to his understanding of bodily desires and enjoyment in general, then it absolutely fails, I believe, to defend the dogma of the goodness of creation. In stark contrast, it displays a worrying hostility against the most basic affirmation of our embodied, worldly existence – the enjoyment of it. We enjoy food because it is good for us, and the pleasures of sex not only testifies to the fact that our bodies were made to do this, but should be appreciated as an objective of the act itself. *Enjoyment belongs to the goodness of creation* – it is, in fact, constitutive of it. Or so I intend to argue.

e) The tension in Christianity

Is Augustine a life-negating thinker? Is he one of those ‘priestly types’ Nietzsche will describe in the next chapter that only confess to love God because of a hatred for life? I do not think so. Augustine’s works also testifies to a love of creation with a genuine desire to affirm the goodness of creation, a desire he presents beautifully himself;

What shall I say of the numberless kinds of food to alleviate hunger, and the variety of seasonings to stimulate appetite...? How many natural appliances

are there for preserving and restoring health! How grateful is the alternation of day and night! how pleasant the breezes that cool the air! how abundant the supply of clothing furnished us by trees and animals! Who can enumerate all the blessings we enjoy? (The City of God XXII.xxiv)

Augustine is also clearly motivated by the dogma of the goodness of creation, and seeks to describe the plentiful creation that God has gifted to the blessed and wretched alike. I do not have the slightest doubt that Augustine is genuine in wanting to do this. It is, however, for that very reason so interesting to ask why it becomes difficult for him.

For in addition to the above affirmation of creation, Augustine is also the source of one of the most famous articulations of what I would call a ‘wayfarer’-theology of creation, that sees life on earth as primarily a pilgrimage towards some other and more important destination;

O lord, have mercy on me and grant what I desire. For, as I believe, this longing of mine does not come from a desire for earthly things, for gold and silver, precious stones and fine garments, worldly honours and power, sensual pleasures or the things which are needed for my body and for my pilgrimage through life. (Confessions XI.ii)

This metaphor of a pilgrimage could be interpreted as a question of priorities, a question of what I take to be most important in life. That I should value God over gold and silver does not necessarily lead to a devaluation of gold, but only the ordering of it in a just hierarchy. If read alongside the above discussion of enjoyment, however, I believe that an interpretation opens up that is hostile to life, giving sustenance to Nietzsche’s suspicions and threatening yet again the goodness of creation.

This concerns above all Augustine’s infamous distinction between *uti* and *frui*, ordinarily translated as ‘use’ and ‘enjoyment’. Although this translation must be accompanied by some caveats, as we shall see shortly, I also believe that this distinction lends itself readily to the sort of life-negating interpretation of the relation between immanence and transcendence that we have been discussing, where my orientation *towards* transcendence depends on a detachment *from* immanence. Augustine discusses this distinction in two places, most famously in *On Christian Doctrine*;

There are some things which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, and some whose function is both to enjoy and use. Those which are to be enjoyed make us happy; those which are to be used assist us and give us a boost, so to speak, as we press on towards our happiness, so that we may reach and hold fast to the things which make us happy. And we, placed as we are among things of both kinds, both enjoy and use them; but if we choose to enjoy things that are to be used, our advance is impeded and sometimes even diverted, and we are held back, or even put off, from attaining things which are to be enjoyed, because we are hamstrung by our love of lower things.

To enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love – if indeed it is something that ought to be loved. (The improper use of something should be termed abuse.) Suppose we were travelers who could live happily only in our homeland, and because our absence made us unhappy we wished to put an end to our misery and return there: we would need transport by land or sea which we could use to travel to our homeland, the object of our enjoyment. But if we were fascinated by the delights of the journey and the actual travelling, we would be perversely enjoying things that we should be using; and we would be reluctant to finish our journey quickly, being ensnared in the wrong kind of pleasure and estranged from the homeland whose pleasures could make us happy. So in this mortal life we are like travelers away from our Lord [2 Cor. 5:6]: if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world [cf. 1Cor. 7:31], not enjoy it, in order to discern ‘the invisible attributes of God, which are understood through what has been made’ [Rom. 1:20], or, in other words, to derive eternal and spiritual value from corporeal and temporal things.

The things which are to be enjoyed, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit... (On Christian Teaching I.iii-v).

Many of the dichotomies between the immanent and the transcendence that we have surveyed so far are at display in this famous passage. There is the difference between the lower and the higher, between the temporally transient and the eternal, and the body and the spirit. The higher, spiritual and eternal dimension of God is separated from the lower, corporeal and temporal dimension of earthly life, and instructions are given as to how to relate correctly to

either of them; enjoy, that is, value for its own sake only God, and use, that is, value earthly things only in reference to God. The picture Augustine draws here goes against the main intention of this thesis, which is to argue that creation should be affirmed as valuable and desirable for its *own* sake, and not simply as a waiting-room for something grander to come.

In the massive amount of literature on this passage, there are many attempts to defend Augustine's distinction from this seemingly life-devaluing implication. Alexander Duponte contends that *uti* and *frui* are not so easily translated to our contemporary understanding of 'use' and 'enjoyment', for the terms had a much richer and broader potential meanings in classical Latin; "In some cases *uti* can even mean 'to experience, to enjoy, to undergo'. In opposite side, *frui* may sometimes stand for 'to get advantage or profit from, to be at someone's benefit'" (Duponte 2004, 483). It is crucial to note that in the above discussions about the pleasures of sex, food, etc., it is the Latin term *voluptas* that is used, and not *frui*.

Nevertheless, also Duponte admits to the referential meaning of *uti* that this thesis seeks to oppose, at least when it comes to the worldly goods of creation. Duponte argues that Augustine relies on the broader meaning of *uti* when talking about the *uti* of other people, something that led to Augustine being accused in more contemporary times of not respecting other peoples as ends in themselves. Duponte argues that Augustine makes use of "the relational and non-utilitarian meaning that was available in Latin" (Duponte 2004, 484) when discussion the *uti* of other people. When it comes to worldly goods, however, Duponte seems to believe that it is the instrumental meaning which is intended, which he defends;

That we may not love the things of this world, does not mean that we may have contempt for them. *Usus* is not bad in se, it is actually morally valuable because it helps us to reach God. *Usus* becomes bad when it happens out of a wrong orientation. (Duponte 2004, 484)

One could say that worldly goods are valued quite highly by Augustine, for when correctly used, they serve our ultimate purpose; our orientation towards God. To be useful is, after all, not a bad thing. Duponte seems to arrive at a similar position to Perry Cahall, who elucidates Augustine's *uti/frui*-distinction in view of Augustine's idea of the 'order of love' (Cahall 2005, 117). Cahall does confirm that Augustine's understanding of the proper relation to creation is to appropriate it always in view of God, and not for its own sake, but argues that

the main lesson from this distinction is “that nothing we love can take the place of our ultimate end, who is God” (Cahall 2005, 118). It is a question of priority.

Another defense against the notion that the *uti/frui*-distinction leads to “a devaluation of corporal reality” (Burchill-Limb 2006, 187) consists in attempting to frame the relationship between the transient and the eternal as a conjunctive rather than disjunctive one. It is true that worldly goods have a limited value in comparison to the Infinite Goodness of God, but it is nevertheless through the visible world that we can catch sight and trace back to the Invisible Creator. Creation is thus the lower reality that we must necessarily move through in order to reach the Higher one, and its lower, limited status is thus not in opposition, but rather the condition for attending to the Glory of the Absolute; “the very sense of being proportionally small and functionally restricted in relation to one's creator is itself the cause of wonder at belonging to the whole body of creation” (Burchill-Limb 2006, 190). It is by appreciating one's status as finite that one gains the first clue to turn towards the Infinite, and by realizing the necessity of this approach, we might relieve the pejorative sense that ‘finitude’ otherwise could come to have.

There are certainly a number of ways in which Augustine can be defended against denigrating the world, and the aim of this chapter is not to settle the question one way or another. I do, however, aim to take the accusation seriously, and on that note, there is something I find peculiarly shared in the above defenses. Even if the created world can be determined as valuable in its usefulness, or in the way its depth leaves a trace of its Creator, it will still be the case that the *enjoyment* of the world is prohibited. To enjoy the world would be to value it for its own sake rather than for its use, or it would be to remain at a surface level instead of attending to its immeasurable depth. In either case, the successful defense of the goodness of creation depends on the exclusion of its pleasures.

Rather than seeing it as ‘appreciating creation in its usefulness’, ‘orienting goods in a hierarchy’ or ‘appreciating my finitude’, Augustine's schema can also be interpreted as a renunciation of the world as enjoyable; and this renunciation can furthermore be seen as a requisite for orienting oneself towards what transcends creation. Finally, tying this discussion up with the insights gained from the discussion of original sin, it could be said that it is precisely enjoyability that belongs to the corrupted fallenness of creation.

I do not propose that this should be seen as *the* interpretation of the *uti/frui*-distinction, but rather that the distinction also lends itself to this sort of interpretation. Additionally, this interpretation testifies, for me, not to any pure, unadulterated Christian hostility to creation,

but, I repeat again, the *tension* between immanence and transcendence that the Christian faith can lead to. On my reading, Augustine's *uti/frui*-distinction should be read not only as a 'turning-towards' transcendence by 'turning-away' from immanence, but also as an attempt to save the goodness of creation by emphasizing its usefulness. Augustine sees the orientation towards God as the ultimate meaning of the Christian faith, but he nevertheless seeks to also affirm our worldly existence. It is the tension between these two goals, I believe, that puts him in such an awkward situation.

This tension was not one he established himself, but one he inherited from the number of controversies surrounding the ascetic ideal and the dogma of the goodness of creation that we have surveyed in this chapter. The early Church strikes me as an emerging rupture, a rebellion with everything that surrounded it, ready to follow Christ anywhere, only to find that it still existed in the world. Brown sees Augustine as the theologian who is able to bring the Church back to and settle itself within the world (Brown 2008, 399). Christianity will, however, perhaps never be comfortably 'settled in the world', and the tension inherent to Augustine's theology could be seen as following from him having to take on this task.

I therefore agree with what Charles Taylor says about Augustine's *uti/frui*-distinction. Taylor contextualizes the distinction with the tension that, as stated at the outset of this chapter, he sees as continuing into medieval Christianity. The tension manifests itself in the way the Church decided to organize itself in the early middle ages (500-1000 A.D.), an organizational structure we now can recognize as decisively influenced by the prominence the ascetic ideal gained in the Patristic age preceding it. This is the division of the Christian community into an ordinary laity and an elevated clergy, a division that is clearly distinguished by the level of participation in the ordinary world. The larger Christian community continued to promulgate the ordinary rhythm of the world on the one hand, and participate in Church services on Sunday's on the other, where they entered a Holy Room differentiated from their own ordinary households, managed by a class of people who themselves had cut ties with the rhythms of ordinary life. Charles Taylor calls it an organization of society according to "several speeds". (Taylor 2007, 62), one following the regenerative, seasonal speed of the earth, and the other the quite different 'speed' of the Eternal. According to this kind of schema, the clergy renounces the transience of worldly life in order to attain a more privileged access to that which transcends the world, and the laity gets to share the fruits of this spiritual labor by attending service and receiving blessings and

the Eucharist from these spiritually elevated people. In return, the laity provides the Church with the fruits of their own earthly labor.

Charles Taylor argues that this was a compromise that it became more and more difficult for the laity to live with. The everyday of the general populace was centered around the cultivation of the land and the regeneration of the family, but this familiar center was also eclipsed by a higher meaning that lay completely beyond it;

for the ordinary householder this answer seems to require something paradoxical: living in all the practices and institutions of flourishing, but at the same time not fully in them. Being in them but not of them; being in them, but yet at a distance, ready to lose them. Augustine put it: use the things of this world, but don't enjoy them; *uti, not frui*. Or do it all for the glory of God, in the Loyala-Calvin formulation. (Taylor 2007, 81).

It is this tension between orienting oneself both towards immanence and transcendence that I believe best describes the tension inherent to Augustine and Christianity as a whole. Christianity has never, at least officially, swayed from the dogma of the goodness of creation, but upholding it has been difficult. Furthermore, the conflict has often come down to a question of enjoyment. Bodily enjoyment exhibits one of the primary ways in which we find ourselves attached to the world, and has in all likelihood been the target of much ascetic renunciation for precisely that reason.

Finally, and important for the chapter to come, the reason why Christianity gets into this tense conflict is not, I believe, because of any externality that Christianity could simply expunge. Christianity gets into trouble because its faith in transcendence requires, somehow, a departure from the old, familiar world for the sake of the new good, the 'good news'. This thesis will defend the idea that belief in something which radically transcends our immanent reality does not necessitate a rejection of immanence.

On that note, I wonder if Bonnie Kent is not correct in her observation regarding Augustine's ethics. Kent argues, correctly I believe, that Augustine models his ethics on eudaimonism, the Aristotelian ethics that sees ethics as the question of the ultimate good, which is the *Summum Bonum* of God for Augustine (Kent 2001, 205). Kent questions, however, if this ethics is compatible with the message of the Gospel;

Christ did not command us to seek happiness or to love ourselves. How, then, can the Gospel be reconciled with eudaimonistic ethics? If Christians seek God as the provider of complete, everlasting happiness, do they love God for himself or merely as the source of their own satisfaction? If the latter, do they truly love God, or do they only love themselves? (Kent 2001, 212)

The *uti/frui*-distinction fits perfectly into the eudaimonistic picture of orienting ourselves towards our Highest Good, our Ultimate Happiness. But is my relation to God best explained as one concerning flourishing and fruition? In this thesis, I will defend, with Levinas, the idea that transcendence has nothing to do with enjoyment and happiness. *It is precisely for this reason that it will be possible to identify enjoyment and happiness as correctly demarcating our relation with the immanence of the created world.* The difference between the water in the well and the Living Water Jesus offers is not the difference between a smaller and greater happiness, but rather between happiness and something entirely different than it.

To arrive at Levinas, however, we must first move through Nietzsche, who would not approvingly to much of what was said in the above. The idea that transcendence could lead to a renunciation of worldly life would not surprise him, but rather make him ask rhetorically what other purpose faith in transcendence has ever played. It would furthermore not come as a shock for him to hear that this renunciation has often manifested itself as a suspicion and hostility towards *pleasure*, for it is in attacking this so seemingly innocent affirmation of the goodness of our bodies that Christianity finds opportunity to stage its most brutal attack on life itself. Finally, he would add, the actual affirmation of this life must begin, first of all, by affirming that this life is *all* there is. In order to understand what Nietzsche means by ‘all there is’, however, even someone like Kant will have to re-evaluate what he thinks about the human condition.

Before this, how about a fun fact?

f) An afterthought

In the last quote from Taylor above, he ends with a reference to Ignatius Loyola and John Calvin, comparing Augustine’s *uti/frui*-distinction with their idea of acting in the world ‘for the glory of God’. This should remind us that, for Taylor at least, the tension we have described so far does not end in the middle ages, but continues also with the reformation and counter-reformation, where it finds its meaning transformed. While the reformation signals

the end of the multi-speed system and a flattening of the Church hierarchy, the tension between ordinary and Church/Monastery-life does not disappear, but is relocated in the individual believer, where it becomes a question of self-discipline.

This is, according to Taylor, essential for the development of the modern state. Whereas the medieval Church saw Christians separated into clergy and laity, the reformed Church requires that every Christian take responsibility for their own transformation in faith. This is a crucial presupposition for the modern state and its desire to transform everyone into an effective citizen (Taylor 2007, 82).

I say this to add on a final little afterthought regarding Augustine and how we ought to understand what we have come to learn about him in the above. While seeming at times extremely harsh in his recommendations regarding ascetic practices, we are wisely reminded that Augustine lived in a time when the modern nation state did not exist, and thus where the loftiness of the ascetic ideal appears bleak compared with the possibility of enforcing it. It should therefore not surprise us that, when faced with the case of “a young clergyman who was accused of having once seduced a nun while staying at her parent’s home”, Augustine appeared “surprisingly unruffled” (Brown 2008, 397). That a young man could fall for such a temptation struck Augustine as completely natural, and did not entail for him that this young man should be precluded from serving in the Church. A congregation located in the countryside, as was the case for Augustine, could in either way not be so picky! You cannot expect every priest to be a saint!

Chapter II – Transcendent Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life

The aim of this thesis is to think the relationship between immanence and transcendence in such a way that the dimension of immanence is affirmed as valuable in itself. Worldly life cannot simply be a pilgrimage from this life to the next, but must have a value and purpose of its own. The question of enjoyment seems to be an entryway into this discussion in two different ways. First, the affirmation of enjoyment provides life with a purpose that, albeit seemingly trivial, is definitely able to affirm life as valuable in itself. In fact, the very experience of enjoyment seems to be an affirmation of whatever is enjoyed. Second, precisely because enjoyment constitutes such a basic affirmation of life, the *denial* of enjoyment appears as a potent way to express one's detachment from it. We cannot escape the facticity of our worldliness, but by denying the enjoyability of our bodies, ascetics seem to find a venue through which they can *turn-away* from the world in order to *turn-towards* transcendence.

While the early church wanted to preserve the dogma of the goodness of creation, this ascetic orientation certainly placed immanence and transcendence in a tense relationship. Turning to Nietzsche, we find a thorough interrogation of the ascetic orientation that Nietzsche believes lies at the bottom of the Christian faith in transcendence. It is an interrogation from which I believe this thesis can learn two important things. First, what does it mean to affirm life as valuable in itself? Second, how and why does transcendence manifest itself in opposition to immanence?

a) The Accusation against Christianity

Looking back on history and on the tradition of asceticism, what did the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche see? He saw, first of all, something that excited and intrigued him. It struck him as a puzzle: "How is the negation of the will *possible*? How is the saint possible?" (BGE 45). To Nietzsche, "an ascetic life is a self-contradiction" (GM 87). What struck him in it? As an atheist, someone who believed not only that God was dead but that he never existed – and who believed furthermore that life in its essence and unfolding is only will to power –, the

question was how it could have come to be that, in very simple terms, someone gained *power* by *making themselves weaker*;

To this day, the most powerful people have still bowed down in veneration before the saint, as the riddle of self-conquest and deliberate, final, renunciation: why have they bowed down like this? They sensed a superior force in the saint and, as it were, behind the question-mark of his frail and pathetic appearance, a force that wants to test itself through this sort of conquest. (BGE 48, my italics)

The ascetic saint has made himself weak, frail, starved. He is an almost corpse-like figure; simultaneously he is venerated, gains authority, gives commands, etc. Or should we say that he *receives* commands, receives *Commandments*? This is the answer the saint would give himself, of course; namely that his frailty on earth is equal to his strength with God; his detachment from life prepares him for the *afterlife*; his denial of *immanence* expresses his yearning for *transcendence*. And does this not express something truthful about the Christian faith? For the paradox of the ascetic is for Nietzsche very much present in “that horrible paradox of a ‘God on the Cross’” (*GM* 19), the paradox of the highest in the lowest, of the strongest in the weakest, of the Almighty God hanging as a criminal on the cross – “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor. 1:25).

Is this not where the dignity of the Christian faith rests? Not for Nietzsche – it is *precisely here* that he finds it necessary to hold his nose, lest the disgusting smell of the Christian overwhelm him. In contrast to any dignity, it is here that Nietzsche finds evidence and reason for his *accusation* against Christianity, an accusation he formally declares at the end of *The Anti-Christ*; “I *condemn* Christianity, I indict the Christian church on the most terrible charges an accuser has ever had in his mouth” (*AC* 65). What are these charges? That Christianity wages a war on life itself, decries happiness and embraces despair, that it has contempt and hatred for the world, and, moreover, that it is *nothing but* this hatred;

From the very outset Christianity was essentially and pervasively the feeling of disgust and weariness which life felt for life, a feeling which merely disguised, hid and decked itself out in its belief in ‘another’ or ‘better’ life. Hatred of the ‘world’, a curse on the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a

Beyond (*Jenseits*) invented in order to better defame the Here-and-Now (*Diesseits*), fundamentally a desire for nothingness, for the end, for rest, for the ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths’ (*BoT* 9)

Christianity is, argues Nietzsche, primarily a *hatred of the here-and-now*, a *hostility to life*. Its most intelligent gesture will have been to veil this hatred under the beautiful name – ‘love of God’. This is the core of his accusation. When the radical atheist Nietzsche looks back on history, attempting to answer Ivan Karamazov’s question of how “such a notion – the notion of the necessity of God – could creep into the head of such a wild and wicked animal as man” (Dostoevsky 2021, 249), then Nietzsche’s answer to the riddle is this; “The concept ‘God’ invented as a counter-concept to life...The concept of the ‘beyond’, the ‘true world’, invented to devalue the *only* world there is” (*EH* 373-374/150). The Christian faith is a defamation of the world. Crucially, he finds his answer – that Christianity is hostility to life –in the Christian ‘fear of beauty and sensuality’, in the way it curses the passions.

In the terms we have established so far, then, Nietzsche sees Christianity as waging war on *immanence* – life, the world, the body, etc. – in virtue of *transcendence* – the afterlife, the otherworldly, God, the spirit, etc. The tension that we identified between creation and Creator in the preceding chapter would have a very natural explanation, for the very purpose of the idea of ‘God’ would be to *oppose* creation. By placing a transcendent world above the immanent one, Christianity has sought to devalue the immanent world as something lower. This ‘transcendence’ is, however, nothing but an invention, simply a negation of immanence. This is one of the reasons why Nietzsche, in the above, calls it a ‘desire for nothingness’, or as he puts it more famously at the end of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, “a *will to nothingness*” (*GM* 123). That it is *belief* in nothingness is one thing, but Nietzsche’s accusation goes further; the Christian faith expresses a *will* to nothingness. For whatever reason, Christianity yearns for nothingness, yearns to negate, devalue and vilify reality.

In this way, Nietzsche turns the traditional understanding of nihilism on its head. A more traditional perspective on nihilism is found in Dostoevsky, who sees the faltering of traditional, religious values as the unfolding of nihilism. Whereas the world previously was guided by moral values that gave life meaning and purpose, and separated right from wrong, the advent of atheism has led to the disappearance of these values and left us with *nothing* to believe in. The character of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, for example, is a typical Dostoevskian nihilist, who after having become familiar with secular modern theories like

naturalism and social Darwinism, decides that everything – even murder! – is permitted (Galounis 2020, 238-241).

For Nietzsche, in contrast, it is the Christian who is the nihilist par excellence; “Nihilist and Christian: this rhymes, it does more than just rhyme...” (AC 62).⁶ It is Christianity that devalues the world, and it does so by positing a higher and transcendent value above it, a transcendence that is ‘nothing but’ the lie through which immanence is negated. Christianity will not have been the only metaphysical construction to do so, nor will this nihilism necessarily have ended with the death of God, but for now, the important thing is to keep our eye on Nietzsche’s accusation against Christianity. I have elected to call this *transcendent nihilism*. That is, Nietzsche accuses Christianity of being transcendent nihilism. To Nietzsche’s ear, this term would be a tautology, for ‘transcendence’ is precisely ‘nothing’, but I have decided on it to emphasize this aspect of his accusation. ‘Transcendent nihilism’ is furthermore another way to express ‘hostility to life’ – Christianity negates life in view of a (fictitious) transcendent because it is hostile to life.

What, then, is the alternative? If Christianity is transcendent nihilism (negation of immanence/hostility to life), then what Nietzsche pursues is life’s *affirmation*. Or, in other terms, Nietzsche wants to say ‘yes!’ to life where Christianity says ‘no!’ Christianity is the “eternal ‘no!’” (BoT 9) to life, a denial and negation of life that pretends that its flight *from* the world is headed *towards* somewhere else. Nietzsche, on the contrary, seeks to affirm and say ‘yes!’ to life, two things that are in fact the same; the German term *zu Bejahen* (to affirm) means to ‘say yes’ or ‘to yessify’. This idea of life-affirmation is posited in terms of the eternal recurrence of the same (*die Ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen*), the famous idea that Nietzsche posits as a challenge to his readers;

the ideal of the most high-spirited, vital, world-affirming (weltbejahendsten) individual, who has learned not just to accept and go along with what was and what is, but who wants it again just as it was and is through all eternity, insatiably shouting da capo not just to himself but to the whole play and performance... (BGE 50-51)

⁶ It rhymes in German (*Nihilist und Christ*)

To desire the eternal recurrence of the same; this would be an absolute affirmation of immanence that not only accepts that this world is all there is, but upon realizing it furthermore *wants* this immanence, *wills* it. Nietzsche's affirmation of life is therefore, on his own account, as anti-Christian as it gets. Christianity is unable and unwilling to affirm reality, and therefore negates it instead, turning towards God in their flight from the real. Nietzsche, on the other hand, seeks to affirm life in its absolute immanence, and say 'yes!' to the fact that this life is all there is. He brings along Dionysus – the Greek god of wine – with him on his life-affirming quest, and thus presents, at the end of *Ecce Homo*, his philosophical project with the question; "Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the crucified...*" (EH 151).

This is then, in a very condensed form, the Nietzschean accusation against Christianity that this thesis wishes to take seriously. Transcendence does not only make an affirmation of worldly life impossible, but is in fact nothing more than an excuse to reject it; transcendence is nothing but hostility to immanence, the opposite of or the negation of immanence. There is much more we must come to terms with if we are to understand Nietzsche's accusation in its full depth. What is Nietzsche's method? How does he argue that he of all people is able to uncover the Christian deception? Why is it still necessary to 'affirm immanence' if Kantian philosophy already signals a 'turn to immanence', as we saw in the introduction? And why does Nietzsche make use of an explicit Biblical reference – *ecce homo*, 'Here is the man' (John 19:5) – in order to announce his anti-Christian philosophy?

We will return to all of these and many other questions, but first we must answer the most pressing one; how does Nietzsche's accusation against Christianity relate to the topic of *enjoyment*? In terms of life's affirmation, the relevance of this notion will be clarified at a later point. For now, however, we will discuss enjoyment as it relates to Nietzsche's accusation against Christianity. The accusation is that Christianity is transcendent nihilism, or hostility to life, and denial of enjoyment is for him one of the most important *symptoms* of transcendent nihilism; "A radical antagonism, a deadly hostility, to the senses (*die Sinnlichkeit*) is a telling symptom: it raises suspicions about the overall state of anyone who is excessive like this" (ToI 172-173). If, upon your traversal of history, you come upon people who are hostile to the *enjoyment of the senses*, then you have found a clue, argues Nietzsche, that points you towards that strange phenomenon of transcendent nihilism – of life turning on itself.

But is Nietzsche in fact talking about *enjoyment* of the senses in the above? This is what I intend to argue. I will only be able to give it a partial delineation for now, and hope

that the reader sticks with me to see this preliminary delineation being fleshed out in the rest of the chapter.

First it must be noted that when I talk about enjoyment in this chapter, what I am talking about is enjoyment *of the senses*. What I have in mind is what Nietzsche discusses when accuses Christianity; “it is Christian to hate the *senses (die Sinne)*, to hate enjoyment of the senses (*die Freuden der Sinne*), to hate joy (*Freude*) in general...” (AC 18). *Die Sinne* should here not be understood in terms of ‘mind’, but as *Sinnlichkeit*, a term Nietzsche uses frequently when discussing Christianity’s hostility to life. *Sinnlichkeit* is most often translated as ‘sensuality’ by Nietzsche’s translators, which is quite fair; Nietzsche would not be foreign to the sexual undertones of that translation. Nevertheless, we should also keep in mind the Kantian notion of *Sinnlichkeit*, better translated as ‘sensibility’, which covers the broader notion of ‘the sensible’ as distinguished from ‘the thought’.⁷ This allows us to apprehend the broader category that Nietzsche invokes when he, for example, describes Christianity as “a curse on the passions (*Affekte*), fear of beauty (*Schönheit*) and sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*)” (BoT 9). I am, in my reading, treating all these different notions together, for what is being discussed in all three instances is *the senses of the body*, the body’s sensibility or sensuality.

When I talk about enjoyment in this chapter, therefore, I am talking about the enjoyment of *the senses*. But why *enjoyment* of the senses? Nietzsche does not specify in all of the above citations that it is the enjoyment of the senses that Christianity is hostile towards, but this seems to me to be very much implied. Or, implied in some form. When Nietzsche talks about the Christian fear of the senses, he always talks about how it fears e.g. ‘beauty and sensuality’, that is, those instances where sensuality befalls me pleasantly in some way or other. This could be the enjoyment of food, the appreciation of a beautiful sight or the satisfactory feeling of the strength of your arm. These are all instances where I feel the wellness of my body, where my body likes or enjoys what is going on, and sort of leads me on to proceed further, prodding me; ‘yes! this is right! your body was indeed made to do this!’

⁷ In Kant, *Sinnlichkeit* is a key term in the transcendental aesthetic, which concerns how objects are received in intuition in contrast to how these objects are synthesized by thought. It is used to describe the ability of being affected by objects; “Die Fähigkeit, (Rezeptivität) Vorstellungen durch die Art, wie wir von Gegenständen affiziert werden, zu bekommen, heißt **Sinnlichkeit**“ (Kant 1966, 80), translated as **Sensibility** in the Cambridge edition (Kant 1998, 172). The transcendental aesthetic reveals the *a priori* forms of sensibility, which are time and space.

Furthermore, I argue, Nietzsche's description of the Christian 'hostility to the senses' only makes sense if we presuppose that it entails 'hostility to the *enjoyment* of the senses'. This is because the hostility to the senses *is also a sensuous phenomenon*. When Nietzsche talks about 'the hostility to the senses' being a revealing symptom, he is talking about the ascetic ideal, and, more importantly, the ascetic's *practice*, which is, of course, a *bodily, sensuous practice*. The ascetic who willfully neglects his body averts all of its pleasantries, but for this very reason he also seeks out and affirms the *failure, weakness and suffering of the body*;

here, the green eye of spite turns on physiological growth itself, in particular the manifestation of this in beauty (Schönheit) and joy (Freude); while satisfaction (Wohlgefallen) is looked for and found in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of self-hood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice. (GM 87)

It is the beauty and joy of the body that the ascetic targets in particular, in all those instances where the body affirms and enjoys itself. What instead satisfies me – or, as a more literal and extensive translation would have had it, that which *befalls me well* ('*das hat mir wohl gefällt*') – is suffering, ugliness, misfortune, etc. In other words, there is an inversion of enjoyment and suffering here; the ascetic averts the pleasantries of the body, but finds its suffering pleasing; "whatever hurts life the most is called 'true', and whatever improves, increases, affirms, justifies life or makes it triumph is called 'false'" (AC 8). To 'enjoy suffering' and to 'suffer enjoyment' – this inversion is, for Nietzsche, where the inversion of transcendence and immanence takes place in a body.

This is the broad spectrum that I will attempt to cover with the notion of 'enjoyment of the senses' in this chapter. It is, in general, the experience of when my body befalls me well; not only when I enjoy a good meal, but also when I am able to jump a fence, breath in the fresh air of the mountains, or seduce a good looking fella with my feminine charms. It is to have a 'spring in your steps', to feel the health, growth and the wellbeing of the body in general – and to feel how the body says 'yes!' to itself in all these instances.

Conversely, the *hostility* towards the enjoyment of the senses also manifests in a broader spectrum of phenomena than simply self-flagellation and walking on nails. It is also present in the phenomenon Nietzsche observes as to how the Church relates to "the hysteria

of an old maid (*Jungfer*)...in such cases, the church often declares the woman to be a saint” (BGE 47-48). ‘Maid’ must here not be understood as ‘female servant’, but rather in its more archaic meaning as ‘virgin’ – which is also the archaic meaning of the German term *Jungfer*. The idea is that an ‘old female virgin’ is someone who has spilt her youth; she has gone through her life without having been able to fulfill her ‘natural purpose’ of seducing a man and having children (archaic meanings indeed!). The combination of unfulfilled instincts and the sudden realization that the time to fulfill these instincts has passed leads to hysteria – but the church sanctifies her! Why? Because as a *failed and contradictory nature*, the church sees something holy in her. This sanctification of a ‘failed nature’ is a part of Nietzsche’s analysis of the Christian hostility to the body, and therefore, as the above attempts to demonstrate, the hostility to the *enjoyment* of the body, hostility to the well-befalling of my body. That the old maid has failed to reproduce, and her nature turns on itself in hysteria due to this, befalls the priest well; for him, this failure testifies to something holy.

Nietzsche, then, does not only argue that there is a *tension* between transcendence and immanence, argues not only that belief in transcendence is irreconcilable with an affirmation of worldly life as valuable in itself; Nietzsche in fact argues that belief in transcendence is *nothing but an expression of a hostility to this life*. This is the core and the cutting edge of his accusation against Christianity. How does he arrive at it? In the above, I hope to have been able to present Nietzsche’s accusation, but I believe myself far from having been able to unpack it. This is what we will be doing in the rest of this chapter. The guiding question in this explication will be one that the reader might have asked themselves from the above; *why would anyone ever yearn for nothingness?* In fact, what does this even mean? The denial of enjoyment will be a crucial symptom which it will be necessary to interrogate in order to get to the bottom of this riddle.

b) Interpreting Nietzsche – Will to Power

In my interpretation of Nietzsche, I am predominantly interested in the negative moment of his philosophy, that is, his accusation against Christianity. As Heidegger writes, however, “Nietzsche’s atheism is something altogether his own” (NII 66), and this is why his accusation is particularly interesting. Nietzsche is not a typical atheist, accusing Christianity from afar in view of measures it cannot recognize itself in (e.g. judging the Bible for not being a scientific document), but a thinker who gets intimately familiar with what he believes is the core of Christianity. I am very much in agreement with the assessment of René Girard

when he writes that Nietzsche is “the thinker who discovered the anthropological key to Christianity: its vocation of concern for victims” (Girard 2001, 171). While this does not make Nietzsche sympathetic to Christianity, it does demonstrate that his accusation is based on analysis that engages with Christianity on its own premises.

In order to understand the depth of Nietzsche’s accusation, therefore, we do well to familiarize ourselves somewhat with his method. I say ‘somewhat’, however, because this is an infamously complicated question. Derrida argues heavily for the irreducible plurality of Nietzsche’s work, lacking not only a unifying method but also “a guiding meaning, a fundamental project or even a formal feature (of writing or speech)” (Derrida 1994, 20). For Derrida, the most important thing to keep in mind when reading Nietzsche is the irreducible openness of his writings. Deleuze, on the other hand, defends “the rigour of [Nietzsche’s] philosophy, whose systematic precision is wrongly suspected” (Deleuze 2006, 52). Heidegger is somewhere in the middle – he argues that Nietzsche’s philosophy consists of five major rubrics (*nihilism, revaluation of all values hitherto, will to power, eternal recurrence of the same* and *Overman*), all of which can serve as an entry point into his philosophy, insofar as “in each case it is a perspective that defines the whole” (*NIV* 9). The unity or ‘wholeness’ of Nietzsche’s philosophy is therefore, strangely enough, available from a number of distinct perspectives. Karl Löwith seems to be saying something similar when saying that “The systematic character of Nietzsche’s philosophy results from the specific way in which Nietzsche sets about, persists in, and carries out his philosophical experiment” (Löwith 1997, 11). That is, Nietzsche’s philosophy is *systematic* because it is *experimental*; it is Nietzsche’s ability to venture out upon open seas that unites his project.

In view of the question of whether there is a system or method that unites Nietzsche’s writings, Derrida is obviously the most radical one, but I respect his gesture. It is for Derrida above all important to avoid forcing “his name into the straitjacket of an interpretation that is too strong to be able to account for him” (Derrida 1994, 21). The attempt to pin Nietzsche down once and for all is to lack an openness to the surprising twists and turns of his writings. He describes his own writings as circumbinary planets, illuminated by differently colored stars; “our actions shine with different colors in turn, they are rarely unambiguous, - and it happens often enough that we perform *multi-colored* actions” (*JGB/BGE* 152/110). Nietzsche’s writings are ambiguous, they lend themselves to surprising subversions. Furthermore, his writings are not simply straightforward, pensive communications; Nietzsche *does* things with his texts, e.g. he *challenges* and *seduces* his readers.

You will therefore often find that in your attempt to get a grip on Nietzsche, he will have slipped away from your grasp. This should, however, not be seen as antithetical to the grip. Nietzsche can only slip away from the grip of his readers if they first got a hold on him – whatever else would he slip away from? In attempting to get an entry into Nietzsche’s works and understanding how they work, therefore, we shall take our cue from Heidegger, getting our grasp on Nietzsche from the perspective of one of the major rubrics of his work – *will to power*. For Nietzsche, as Heidegger correctly notes, everything is will to power; “The utterance of [Nietzsche’s] metaphysics, that is, of the determination of beings as a whole, reads: *Life is will to power*” (NIII 18). One way to approach Nietzsche’s philosophy is to read it as the proclamation that worldly life is nothing but will to power. This would in fact be an extension of the idea or challenge of the eternal recurrence of the same we mentioned in the previous paragraph; to affirm life in its absolute immanence is to affirm that life is nothing but the will to power.

What does it mean that life is will to power? It means, in one sense, simply that a body, insofar as it is alive, always seeks “to grow, spread, grab, win dominance, – not out of any morality or immorality, but because it is *alive*, and because life *is* precisely will to power” (JGB/BGE 207-208/153). Nietzsche places this drive for power over that of self-preservation. A living body must of course safeguard its conditions of preservation in order to stay alive, but to live is not simply to survive; it is rather to *enhance* your strength and *grow stronger*; “Above all, a living thing wants to *discharge* its strength – life itself is will to power –: self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences* of this” (BGE 15). The preservation of life is secondary to the enhancement of life, to the will to power that seeks always to grow stronger. A healthy body is a body still in growth.

Methodologically speaking, then, Nietzsche’s method of interpretation consists in reducing everything to a question of the will to power. This is for example how he approaches philosophy, one of the other principled targets of his writings, understood by Nietzsche not as ‘love for’ but rather *will to truth* (BGE 5). What in us wills truth? Why did it appear convenient and necessary that, at one point in human history, a class of people called ‘philosophers’ would appear to claim and consequently gain authority over people and what they should do with their lives? And why should we continue to value this will? These are the sort of questions Nietzsche asks.

Nietzsche’s method of interpretation thus entails interrogating the history of ideas – religious practices and ideas, philosophical systems, institutions, traditions, etc. – with the aim

of figuring out what sort of force seeks to preserve and enhance itself in it. This is the true sense of Nietzsche's perspectivism. For Nietzsche, the possibility of any perspective depends on there being something that *wills* this perspective, something that is able to affirm itself in it;

Strictly speaking, there is no 'presuppositionless' knowledge, the thought of such a thing is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a 'faith' always has to be there first, for knowledge to win from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a right to exist. (GM 114-115)

For life to be able to see something, to be able to orient itself in a particular direction and delimit a certain phenomenon in an intelligible way, it must first of all have an *interest* in doing so. Knowledge gains a direction through the perspective of the force that has an interest in 'this or that' being true. Does this mean that knowledge is simply an illusion? Not necessarily: it means simply that certain forms of life have a vested interest in understanding some things, and turning away from others.

Nietzsche, however, does the very opposite of turning away; his method consists in inhabiting the different forces of history, of getting familiar with their different perspectives. This is why his philosophy is irreducibly pluralistic, or as Deleuze puts it; "Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be understood without taking his essential pluralism into account" (Deleuze 2006, 4). This seemingly contradictory postulate in a sense summarizes our current methodological discussion, poised as it is between the idea of a single method (the will to power) and the irreducible multiplicity of Nietzsche's philosophy; for how can there be an *essential pluralism*? Does not the idea of an 'essence' imply the oneness of whatever it is an essence? We would ordinarily assume that an essence is that which makes a thing that one thing and not another type of thing. An essence should describe the singular identity of a thing rather than its inherent pluralism.

It is, however, precisely because we interpret it as 'will to power' that Nietzsche's philosophy must be understood as an 'essential pluralism', for "The being of a force is plural, it would be absolutely absurd to think about force in the singular" (Deleuze 2006, 6). A force always exerts itself in strife, acting upon another force or being acted upon by another force. There is only a play of forces when there exists a manifold, where different forces are united by being opposed to each other. The immanence of life as will to power is therefore

necessarily a manifold, for a force can only compete and conquer if there are other forces that can both resist and made to subject themselves.

Furthermore, complex 'things' like traditions and institutions are never invested by only one single force, and to interpret a tradition is therefore to assess the different forces pervading it, for "A thing has as many senses as there are forces capable of taking possession of it" (Deleuze 2006, 4). A thing is interpreted by the many forces attempting to gain power over it, with these forces weighing whether and to what extent they have a natural affinity with this thing, whether it is a thing that can serve the enhancement of its power. By interrogating history as the will to power, therefore, Nietzsche's philosophy becomes essentially pluralistic, for it surveys history by interrogating the different forces at play in it;

There is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival 'knowing'; the more affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the more eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity'. (GM 89)

For Nietzsche, objectivity does not consist in eliminating perspectives, 'cleaning house' to only allow the one, neutral and sanitized 'perspective' of science to show forth, but rather inhabiting as many perspectives as possible, illuminating a single object (i.e. Christianity) from as many perspectives as possible. But is Christianity an object or a force? We have simply described Christianity as 'the will to nothingness', but it would be more correct to say that the will to nothingness is Christianity's *predominant instinct*. Or, rather, it is the predominant instinct of those *types* who finds their home within the church.

This is another crucial aspect of Nietzsche's approach, namely *typology*, which Deleuze identifies as one of the most fundamental aspects of Nietzsche's method (Deleuze 2006, 75). It is this in view of this aspect of his method that Nietzsche often refers to himself as a psychologist, and it is as such that he turns to history; as an infinite resource of profiles to be interrogated;

The human soul and its limits, the scope of human inner experience to date, the heights, depths, and range of these experiences, the entire history of the soul *so far* and its still unexhausted possibilities: these are the predestined

hunting grounds for a born psychologist and lover of the ‘great hunt’. (*BGE* 43)

The typological approach consists in analyzing a variety of different affects that constitute a certain type. It asks “what are the forces which take hold of a given thing, what is the will that possesses it? Which one is expressed, manifested and even hidden in it?” (Deleuze 2006, 77).⁸ The forces which affects and constitutes a type belong to a manifold of large complexes: “A type is a reality which is simultaneously biological, physical, historical, social and political” (Deleuze 2006, 115). A type is constituted by a complexity of forces acting in and through it, speaking through it.

The typological method relates to how Nietzsche generally understands the will, being “something *complicated*, something unified only in a word” (*BGE* 18). Although it is constituted by the manifold of complexes we saw above, Nietzsche nevertheless has a decisive interpretative key which allows him to identify the particularity of the will of each type. For a type is in no way accidentally produced, some random, disorganized result, but rather constituted by a *hierarchy* of forces which possesses them. This is what Nietzsche looks for when he approaches a certain type, e.g. the philosopher, for “there is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is* – which means, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand with respect to each other” (*BGE* 9). The ‘order of rank’ will itself be determined by whatever is the philosophers predominant instinct, and this will determine “how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about” (*BGE* 8).

These hierarchies become distinctly visible in systematic phenomena such as philosophical and theological works or religious and political organizations, as the inner logic of preferences and priorities reveals for Nietzsche the psychological profile which elects ‘this over that’, e.g. spirit over flesh, reason over emotion, etc. When Nietzsche thus notes that “psychology is again on the path to the fundamental problems” (*BGE* 24), what this means is that psychology is not only apt to understand the psyches of individual persons; traditions, philosophical and religious systems, and history in general must be analyzed psychologically. These larger units should be analyzed in view of their types. For example, the organized

⁸ Deleuze writes ‘things’ in this quote because he is not referring only to types, but other kinds of phenomena

tradition of (transcendent-nihilistic) Judeo-Christian religiosity is analyzed in view of its types, the ascetic being the central one, but also the priest, the saint, etc., who share important characteristics with the ascetic (Nietzsche talks about ‘the ascetic priest’, and also describes saints as having ascetic characteristics). The origin of philosophy is on its end approached through the type of Socrates.

c) History and Innocence

Understanding Nietzsche’s approach in terms of will to power, then, we see how he approaches the history of religion, philosophy, etc. always in view of what *drives* them, both in the multiplicity of forces at work and in the predominant instincts that organizes and defines them. It is in view of this that Nietzsche also understands the transcendent nihilism of Christianity; “Doesn’t it seem as if, for eighteen centuries, Europe was dominated by the single will to turn humanity into a *sublime abortion (Missgeburt)?*” (BGE 57). Transcendent nihilism has determined western civilization as its predominant instinct, the most possessive force in the hierarchy of forces. In the case of transcendent nihilism’s dominance, however, the result is abortive, a monstrosity, a freak of nature. Christianity leads to the ‘fail of birth’, the very opposite of life. When Christianity becomes the dominant instinct, life becomes castrated.

Life had balls at some point, however, which clues us into the decidedly historical nature of Nietzsche’s approach. Transcendent nihilism is a historical development. This follows, first, from the fact that transcendent nihilism is not only a *devaluation*, but a *revaluation* of life. The Judeo-Christian tradition has stood “all valuations *on their head*” (BGE 56), it ventured on “radical revaluation of their values” (GM 17). Who are ‘they’, and what was ‘their values’? They are the nobles, whose life-affirming evaluation Nietzsche believes preceded transcendent nihilism. Transcendent nihilism arises when the slave’s evaluation gains the upper hand on the noble evaluation. This is Nietzsche’s general understanding of history: “There is a *master morality* and a *slave morality*” (BGE 153), and for some reason, the most common historical trajectory is to go from the former to the latter.

In fact, nihilism is not only ‘the most common trajectory’ of history, but history as such, what has driven history so far. This means that it is not only the Judeo-Christian tradition that has participated in the unfolding of transcendent nihilism;

[Nietzsche] does not make nihilism a historical event, it is rather the element of history as such, the motor of universal history, the famous ‘historical meaning’ or ‘meaning of history’ which at one time found its most adequate manifestation in Christianity. And when Nietzsche undertakes the critique of nihilism he makes nihilism the presupposition of all metaphysics rather than the expression of a particular metaphysics: there is no metaphysics which does not judge and depreciate life in the name of a supra-sensible world. (Deleuze 2006, 34)

Judaism and Christianity are not alone in devaluing and negating the world; also Buddhism, the Platonic tradition in philosophy, Stoicism and the modern enlightenment are described as nihilistic evaluations by Nietzsche. Conversely, the noble evaluation has also existed in different forms; “Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings” (*GM* 23-24), all life-affirming evaluations that have, for some reason, been re-evaluated by the nihilists.⁹ While Nietzsche is most interested in the destiny of Europe, and its nihilistic determination at the hands of western philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition, the history of nihilism in general spans much wider.

As Deleuze points out, these nihilistic traditions can also be referred to as the tradition of metaphysics, which seeks to argue for something that is above or becomes before (*meta*) the world (*physis*). On this note, we will be learning something important about Nietzsche by juxtaposing Deleuze’s interpretation above with that of Heidegger, who in the following quote seems to be saying something quite similar;

Nietzsche uses nihilism as the name for the historical movement that he was first to recognize and that already governed the previous century while defining the century to come, the movement whose essential interpretation he concentrates in the terse sentence: ‘God is dead’. That is to say, the ‘Christian God’ has lost His power over beings and over the determination of man. ‘Christian God’ also stands for the ‘transcendent’ in general in its various meanings – for ‘ideals’ and ‘norms’, ‘principles’ and ‘rules’, ‘ends’ and

⁹ The fact that Nietzsche adds ‘Arabian nobility’ here points towards the reason why I will be consistently using the term ‘Judeo-Christian’ to address the tradition Nietzsche accuses. While I believe that the term ‘Abrahamic tradition’ would normally be more accurate, this is not the case for Nietzsche, for he in fact asserts that Islam is a *noble* culture, and therefore distinct from the nihilism of both Judaism and Christianity (*AC* 63)

‘values’ which are set ‘above’ the being, in order to give being as a whole a purpose, an order, and – as it is succinctly expresses – ‘meaning’. Nihilism is that historical process whereby the dominance of the ‘transcendent’ becomes null and void, so that all being loses its worth and meaning. (NIV 4)

Heidegger’s interpretation has both some similarities and dissimilarities with the interpretation we have been laying out so far. The Christian God is, on the one hand, a stand in for ‘the transcendent in general’, that is, for the whole tradition of metaphysics that has placed something ‘above’ the world. The various meanings of ‘transcendence’ are seen as determining or evaluating the world. Crucially, however, Heidegger sees these evaluations as giving a *purpose* or *meaning* to being, and sees nihilism as the process by which these evaluations fall away, so that being is left as meaningless. This is quite different from how we have discussed Nietzsche’s nihilism so far. Heidegger seems to be favoring a more traditional understanding of nihilism that we discussed in the above with reference to Dostoevsky and Raskolnikov, as the falling-away of those values and norms that previously gave life meaning, purpose and a moral direction – Heidegger in fact quotes Dostoevsky right before the passage quoted above.

I align myself with Deleuze against Heidegger on this interpretative point, and it will be worthwhile to dwell a while in explaining why, for the difference matters. If metaphysics, in its various forms, *gives* meaning to life, then it would seem that life *required* this meaning beforehand. This is in fact what Heidegger argues:

man seeks a ‘meaning’ in all events...this search for ‘meaning’ is frustrated...he cannot accept possible disappointment in this matter with indifference, but is troubled and endangered, even shattered by it in his very substance. (NIV 31)

According to Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche, man suffers from a lack of meaning. He suffers because he cannot circumvent the need to find a purpose, but simultaneously, “all ‘becoming’ achieves *nothing*, attains nothing in the sense of the *pure* realization of those *absolute* purposes” (NIV 32). Man’s search for meaning is thus essentially frustrated, for man is first of all doomed to seek a meaning or purpose behind all events, but every effort to do so

amounts, in the end, to ‘nothing’, just as the Christian determination was shown to amount to nothing with the death of God.

Deleuze, in contrast, says that ‘there is no *metaphysics* which does not judge and depreciate life in the name of a *supra-sensible* world’. In other words, metaphysics does not *give* meaning to life but precisely devaluates it. This means that the ‘meaning’ metaphysics imposes on the world is not needed, does not follow from an inherent flaw or lack to life that meaning comes to fill, but proceeds from a ‘yearning for nothingness’, from a need to *devalue and negate* life; “The will to nothingness from the beginning, inspires all the values that are called ‘superior’ to life” (Deleuze 2006, 97). Transcendent nihilism, far from giving life a purpose, in fact vilifies it.

It is for this reason that I favor Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche here, for it preserves what I will call *life’s innocence*. This notion is important to this thesis, for it builds a bridge between Nietzsche’s idea of life’s affirmation and the Levinasian analysis of enjoyment that will follow in the succeeding chapters. As Jean-Michel Longneaux notes, there is a clear convergence between Nietzsche and Levinas regarding enjoyment and innocence;

For Nietzsche as for Levinas, [the subjectivity of enjoyment] is given as ‘exploitation’, a pure egoism that, because it stands back from all representation, will proclaim itself innocent, being ultimately but the play of life itself. (Longneaux 2009, 51)

Nietzsche’s idea of life and Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment both argue that the ‘here-below’ does not suffer from any fault, contradiction or lack – it is sufficient and valuable in itself. This is of course of crucial importance to the present thesis, which seeks to affirm worldly life as valuable and meaningful in itself, and not simply as a pitstop on the journey towards an other destination.

The demarcation of life as innocent is in fact one aspect of Nietzsche’s thought that I believe characterizes the mature thought of Nietzsche, or what Löwith calls “Nietzsche’s genuine philosophy” (Löwith 1997, 23). For Löwith, this is the period between *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and ending with *Ecce Homo* – it is here that we find *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morality*, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, many of Nietzsche’s most famous works. These are the works that we will be occupied with in this chapter.

What, however, is meant with the idea of Nietzsche's genuine philosophy? What developments did his thinking go through from its earlier to later stages? The idea of life's innocence is, as said, an excellent way to demarcate this development. This can be seen with reference to how the later Nietzsche would criticize his younger self for the positions he held in his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. In his first publication, Nietzsche explored the birth and death of the ancient Greek tragedy, a genre he praised as the highest form of art. Nietzsche argued that the Greek tragedy developed through a struggle between two natural but conflicting drives, the Apolline and Dionysiac;

the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the *Apolline* and the *Dionysiac* in much the same way as reproduction depends on there being two sexes which co-exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation... These two very different drives (*Triebe*) exist side by side, mostly in open conflict... until eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic 'Will', they appear paired and, in this pairing, finally engender a work of art which is Dionysiac and Apolline in equal measure: Attic tragedy. (*BoT* 14)

Nietzsche describes the Apolline drive as the human desire to present things as beautifully ordered, which renders life manageable and livable for human beings (*BoT* 16). Apollo is the image-making god who makes sense of reality by introducing limits to it. Dionysus, on the other hand, is the god of music, rhythm and dance, where lines become blurred. Enthralled by Dionysus, I am not able to make sense of the world, but lose myself to it in ecstasy (*BoT* 18). These two drives are in conflict. Dionysus blurs the lines put up by Apollo by overflowing them, thus breaking down the order of the world that Apollo built up. When the subject recovers from the Dionysiac ecstasy, however, the need for Apollo re-emerges, for the intoxication of Dionysus comes with the worst hangover imaginable; "as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion; the fruit of those states is an ascetic, will-negating mood" (*BoT* 40). The overflow of Dionysus is impossible to bear without re-introducing the sense-making of Apollo again; but this sense-making will with time be torn down by Dionysus again.

It is the Greek tragedy that, according to Nietzsche, is able to reconcile these two inherently opposed drives. The surprising reconciliation of these two opposing drives is

achieved in tragedy through “the objectification of a Dionysiac state...the Apolline embodiment of Dionysiac insights and effects” (*BoT* 44). The tragedy is the miracle of capturing in an Apolline form the overflowing, ecstatic reality of the Dionysiac. It thus gives humankind peace and “metaphysical solace (*Troste*)” (*BoT* 41), a solace that early Nietzsche hoped would return to his own time with the rebirth of the tragedy, and help usher in a new cultural revolution in Europe (*BoT* 88).

This is then the picture that Nietzsche offered in *The Birth of Tragedy*: human nature is torn between its primordial ecstatic overflowing, the need to limit this vile ecstasy, the continues struggle of this inherent, natural paradox, and finally, the cure, redemption and solace to be found in the solution to the paradox, found in the tragedy. The aesthetical perspective then justifies life by giving it comfort and rest from its natural distress. The conflict between Dionysus and Apollo is redeemed in the tragedy. But to believe this, that life must be *comforted*? That life is first and foremostly an *illness*, for which we need a remedy? In regards to this comfort, the older Nietzsche asks his younger self;

‘Would it not be necessary?’...No, three times no, you young Romantics; it should *not* be necessary! But it is very probable that it will *end* like this, that *you* will end like this, namely ‘comforted’, as it is written, despite all your training of yourselves for what is grave and terrifying, ‘metaphysically comforted’, ending, in short, as Romantics end, namely as *Christians*... (*BoT* 12)

This idea that life must be comforted goes wholly against the primary instinct of the later Nietzsche, who will argue that the vitality of the ancient nobility is tied to their innocence. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, however, he argued that life is *itself* inherently paradoxical; the Apollonian and Dionysiac drives are interpreted as springing forth and belonging to life itself, but as a contradiction which needs resolving. As Deleuze writes, “*The Birth of Tragedy* is developed in the shadow of the Christian dialectic; justification, redemption and reconciliation” (Deleuze 2006, 11).

By making life inherently conflicting in such a way that it needs reconciliation and solace, the younger Nietzsche robs life of its innocence. The early Nietzsche is therefore subject to the later Nietzsche’s critique of oppositional thinking of understanding the world in

terms of opposites that must be redeemed, as a contradiction to be solved. Nietzsche described this way of thinking as such:

‘How could anything originate out of its opposite? Truth from error, for instance? Or the will to truth from the will to deception? Or selfless action from self-interest?...Things of the highest value must have another, separate origin of their own, - they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, from this mad chaos of confusion and desire. Look instead to the lap of being, the everlasting, the hidden God, the ‘thing-in-itself’ – this is where their ground must be, and nowhere else!’ (Nietzsche BGE 5-6)

The metaphysical or oppositional thinker sees life as inherently contradictory, and therefore a problem to which a solution must be found. But as life itself cannot provide this – as it is a ‘seductive, deceptive, lowly world of confusion and desire’ – the solution must be found *elsewhere, beyond* life itself. This is the way of thinking that Nietzsche believed transcendent nihilism had made commonplace, while hiding its genius deception. For those who think in the way described above, that life entails contradictions whose solutions cannot be found in the lowly, earthly realm, have already fallen prey to the trick; they have accepted the premise that life *must be seen* as something contradictory, and thus lowly, imperfect, etc. Unsurprisingly, transcendent nihilism stands as a particularly devious example of such oppositional thinking.

Against this way of thinking, Nietzsche suggests his own; “we can doubt, first, whether opposites even exist...It could even be possible that whatever gives value to those good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same” (BGE 6). This is Nietzsche’s aim of life-affirmation: to make us see that all those things that have come to be seen as inherently contradictory in fact all belong to the necessary, existing conditions of life. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, however, life was seen as *already being* inherently contradictory, and therefore belongs to the same problematic way of thinking the later Nietzsche desired to overcome. The early Nietzsche believed that life required redemption, but the late Nietzsche desired to free it from this requirement, whose emergence in Europe he tracked back to western philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Crucial to the development of

transcendent nihilism, then, is to sneak such contradictions and paradoxes into a previously innocent life.

d) The Noble Evaluation

What did life look like in its innocence? In Nietzsche, to ask this question would be akin to asking; how did the nobility evaluate what was good? This is the evaluation that Nietzsche argues Christianity later reevaluated. In other words, the noble evaluation of life is the one Nietzsche believed Christianity became hostile to. It is therefore obviously crucial to understand.

‘Nobility’ is a term that must not be misunderstood: it does not refer to anyone who would call themselves noble, and not everyone who were nobles called themselves this. As said above, Nietzsche mentions a number of different historical peoples (“Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings” (*GM* 23-24) when describing the nobles, different historical peoples that are unified in their valuation of life, which must be understood in its precise context. It is not simply that the noble share a set of values and the rabble another, but that their *modes of evaluation* are completely different:

the notion of value implies a *critical* reversal. On the one hand, values appear or are given as principles: and evaluation presupposes values on the basis of which phenomena are appraised. But, on the other hand and more profoundly, it is values which presuppose evaluations, ‘perspectives of appraisal’, from which their own value is derived. (Deleuze 2006, 1)

We commonly understand that in order to make an evaluation of a phenomenon, we need a set of values to serve as criteria for that value-judgement. People are appraised or condemned in a society in view of the shared values of their culture – they are called ‘decent’ or ‘indecent’ on the basis of a set of values that define decency and indecency. More fundamentally, however, the possibility of finding something or someone valuable or worthless depends on the possibility of evaluation, the ground from which one can deem something valuable or not. This is not first and foremost a theoretical possibility: “Evaluations, in essence, are not values but ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate” (Deleuze 2006, 1). There is not one single form of life to which different

sets of values are available; different perspectives of evaluations follows from different forms of life.

This is very true in regards to the noble and the rabble: their essentially different evaluations follow from different forms of life. Fundamentally, it is a question of the hierarchy of *active* or *reactive* forces in a single body. The noble manifests a predominately active force, which means that it begins with its own affirmation: “all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying ‘yes’ to itself” (*GM* 20). Activity takes itself as its own origin, meaning that it does not wait to be prodded or nudged in order to move, but moves by its own accord. It evaluates thus creatively, as its valuations follows from nothing else than its own affirmations;

The noble type of person feels that he determines value, he does not need anyone’s approval, he judges that ‘what is harmful to me is harmful in itself’, he knows that he is the one who gives honor to things in the first place, he creates values. (BGE 154)

The noble evaluation generates and inaugurates values that originate in the noble and affirms him.¹⁰ In contrast to oppositional thinking, the value or meaning of what is good is not drawn from anywhere else. The noble does not posit some external measure of evaluation by which he deems himself valuable, but draws his goodness only from himself.

The activity of the noble is therefore essentially instinctual, pre-reflective and pre-cultural. While “Consciousness is essentially reactive” (Deleuze 2006, 41), the activity of the noble does not need conscious reflections to establish its evaluations: “the noble one...conceives the basic idea ‘good’ by himself, in advance and spontaneously” (*GM* 23). Seeing as the activity of the noble is pre-reflective, there is no justification required for the nobles evaluations. The noble does not give himself reasons to justify his activity, but is this reason himself: “Honourable things, like honourable people, do not go around with their reasons in their hand...Nothing with real value needs to be proved first” (*ToI* 164). In contrast to a value who’s validity is asserted in a reflection upon itself, the noble evaluates instinctively. The noble does not need any tricks to demonstrate his value: the proof is in the pudding, as they say.

¹⁰ Do they thus appear as if ‘out of nothing’, creation *ex nihilo*?

As the evaluation of what is 'good' follows from the spontaneous affirmation of the noble himself, the following evaluation of what is 'bad' becomes something quite secondary, "an afterthought, an aside, a complementary colour" (*GM* 23). The noble barely pays attention to those he distances himself to, for the movement that establishes the distance originates from his own self-assertion. The noble elevates himself:

The pathos of nobility and distance, as I said, the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to those 'below' – that is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad'. (*GM* 12)

This is the origin of aristocratic society, of those who places themselves above others not in the Hegelian schema of the play of dialectics, but through a conquest of goods they saw as good in themselves. The noble elevates himself – only looking back does he notice, in a complementary after-thought, that others are below him.

Nietzsche attaches a huge importance to the noble evaluation and the distance it produces for his idea of life. It is only insofar as the aristocrats have imposed their rule that human life has ever *grown*: "Every enhancement (*Erhöhung*) so far in the type 'man' has been the work of an aristocratic society" (*BGE* 151). Any enhancement is precisely a 'heightening' (*Höhung*), an increase through elevation. Growth is expansion through conquest, an imperialism of the self. Any force that embodies the will to power must "want to grow, spread, grab, win dominance, – not out of any morality or immorality, but because it is *alive*, and because life *is* precisely will to power" (*BGE* 153). To live is to grow, and to grow is to expand and to elevate oneself. Life has only grown through expansion, and only as growth is life alive.

Such growth has of course never been delicate: "you cannot entertain any humanitarian illusions about how an aristocratic society originates (and any elevation of the type 'man' will presuppose an aristocratic society -): the truth is harsh. Let us not be deceived about how every higher culture on earth has *begun!*" (*BGE* 151). Nietzsche's repetition of this platitude – that life is harsh – bears many meanings here, none which resound with the ordinary understanding of it. Life is not harsh because it's unfair: such talk emanates from a perspective *after* the re-evaluation. It is rather that harshness belongs to the very unfolding of life itself. In this sense, life understood as will to power is not 'natural' in the ordinary sense

of the term, as the unfolding of certain characteristics that lies already prepared in its seed. In the case of the noble Greeks, for example, Nietzsche saw the numerous and terribly violent wars between the city-states as the process through which the lively Greek nobility grew. Their greatness did not lay dormant in their nature: “The magnificent, supple physicality, the bold realism and immoralism characteristic of the Hellenes was a *necessity*, not a ‘nature’” (*ToI* 226). Life is not what it is from the outset, but *becomes* life through its harshness.

Nietzsche therefore always sees the disappearance of ‘harsh conditions’ as a threat to life. This is one of the primary reasons why he is antagonistic towards modern Europe and its belief in democracy. Democracy is, for Nietzsche, a flattening of reality, an attempt to place everyone on ‘equal footing’, and thus the very opposite of enhancement and elevation. In arguing for the revitalization of noble values today, therefore, Nietzsche is not satisfied with arguing that a healthy aristocracy is necessary for the general health of the society; in contrast, the noble should consider their own elevation over others as the primary aim;

the essential feature of a good, healthy aristocracy is that it does not feel that it is a function...but instead feels itself to be the meaning and highest justification...and consequently, that it accepts in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who have to be pushed down and shrunk into incomplete human beings, into slaves, into tools, all for the sake of the aristocracy. (BGE 152)

Nietzsche gives himself no leeway here. He explicitly and intentionally eliminates the potential recourse to the argument that a privileging of aristocracy is, in the end, beneficial for the populace in general. The aristocracy should, in a healthy society, sacrifice those below them *for their own sake*, for only so can the will to power as *Erhöhung* be affirmed.

While this might seem grotesque and reprehensible to the modern reader, Nietzsche’s question is why it ever came to be considered such. For him, to protest this amounts to a ridiculous protest against life itself – a denial of life –, for there “is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off the little lambs...It is just absurd to ask strength *not* to express itself as strength, *not* to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master” (*GM* 26). Such thinking derives, for Nietzsche, from that paradoxical way of thinking of the revaluation we shall soon turn our attention to. For now, however, we must understand that Nietzsche

sees such harsh expression of force as the very unfolding of life itself: “life itself is *essentially* a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting” (*BGE* 153). Life lives as growth, and growth grows by expanding itself outward and eliminating what is other than it, digesting its otherness.

One might want to interrupt Nietzsche here and ask how he can possibly justify such outrageous and deplorable statements, but this would be to miss his point entirely. The unconscious, spontaneous, *active* evaluation of the noble – all this bespeaks a way of living that lacks any concern with *justification*, with being *justified* by some external standard of measure. The noble feels no need to justify himself, and not only in the moral sense; neither does he have to reason himself to the conclusion that he is noble; “The ‘well-born’ *felt* they were ‘the happy’; they did not need first of all to construct their happiness artificially” (*GM* 21) The noble never really had to think about why they were noble, or whether it is ‘just’. The noble evaluation is therefore innocent in an amoral rather than immoral sense; it is innocent because its mode of evaluation is completely foreign to any question of justification. It proceeds from itself and affirms itself.

While most will have a hard time stomaching the picture of life that emerges from Nietzsche’s writings, is it nevertheless not the case that there is a truth to what Nietzsche says? Does the strength of the arm not affirm itself as valuable in its capacity to lift and carry? Does not a young, healthy body say ‘yes!’ to itself as it graciously leaps forward? The body enjoys its ‘I can’, takes pleasure in being capable and strong – one does not have to be a biologicistic reductionist to recognize this. Philosophically speaking, the ‘goodness’ of this enjoyable strength does not come from anywhere else, from ‘an elsewhere’ – from transcendence – but is wholly immanent to its own self-affirmation. The strength of the arm feels the goodness of its strength without this goodness ever having come into question; it does not have to justify this goodness. Despite its cruelty, therefore, there is something in the Nietzschean affirmation of life that this thesis nevertheless seeks to draw inspiration from; the affirmation of an evaluation of the goodness of worldly life that sees life as valuable in itself.

The noble never really had to think about why he is noble. In addition to strength, vitality and affirmation, therefore, there is also – surprisingly? – a certain natural naivety that accompanies the noble; “the noble man is confident and frank with himself (γενναῖος, ‘of noble birth’, underlines the nuance ‘upright’ (*aufrichtig*) and probably ‘naïve’ as well)” (*GM* 22). *Aufrichtig* is here literally and quite correctly translated as ‘upright’ here. It can also be

translated as 'sincere', but this only clarifies their belonging; a sincere person is precisely an upright person, someone who does not have to twist and bend their words but who says straight out what they have to say. Why is such a person probably naïve as well? Because they never had to beat around the bush in order to prove themselves; they went straight into the wilderness and *confronted* whatever game was hiding there. The noble looks straight ahead; the resentful characters we now turn to, however, are master of the *side-eye*, accustomed to looking at the noble from the sideline, unable to prove their worth straightforwardly, and thus having to resort to *deception* and *tricks*.

This noble naivety is important for two reasons. It is important first because it explains, in part, how the rabble managed to get an upper hand on the noble. The history of nihilism is, for Nietzsche, a history of deception, of the coming-of-age of a will to power that required trickery and lies in order to position itself on top. Secondly, this also explains why we can never return to a noble lifestyle, even if we can draw on it for inspiration. Why? Because of what we are doing right here, at this very moment, and because of the critical, defining role it plays in our day and age. Whereas the activity of the noble is unconscious and spontaneous, the *reactive* force of the slave has thinking, writing, ideas, philosophy, and everything else that belongs properly to *consciousness* as "a condition of existence of the first rank" (*GM* 22). The noble might have pondered philosophical questions, but not out of a necessity – thinking is above all a luxury for the noble. For those who require other round-about means to gain power, however, thinking, pondering and defining are crucial necessities.

This is part of why the history of nihilism becomes, necessarily, a hidden history; for the history we know is the history of consciousness, that is, history such as consciousness has deemed to determine it; "It is inevitable that consciousness sees the organism from its own point of view and understands it in its own way; that is to say, reactively" (Deleuze 2006, 41). Consciousness has pushed itself to the forefront, and interprets everything according to its own evaluation, valuing greatly that which affirms and enhances its existence, and denying whatever decreases it.

But is not philosophy primarily a (re)activity of consciousness? And is Nietzsche not himself a philosopher? Exactly – the fact that Nietzsche must take up *philosophy* in order to accomplish his project of will to power demonstrates why there is no going back, demonstrates to what extent the reactive forces of consciousness has come to dominate and govern how we evaluate life. His project is therefore something quite extraordinary and contradictory, for he is the first to have theoretically grasped that life is nothing but will to

power; “- Although this is an innovation at the level of theory, - at the level of reality, it is the *primal fact* of all history” (*JGB* 153). Consciousness, philosophy and the search for meaning all commence from the forces of resentment, and belong thus to the nihilistic devaluation of life. Nietzsche is thus using philosophy against itself, in order for it to overcome itself.

e) Philosophy and the ugliness of Socrates

If we now understand what Nietzsche understands by the innocence of life, it is time to uncover the origin of what is an almost incomprehensible mystery to Nietzsche, namely how life ever came to be seen as a paradox. We have seen how Nietzsche reproached his earlier self for thinking about life as a paradox in *The Birth of Tragedy*. One aspect of that work that nevertheless remained continuous for Nietzsche was the claim that *philosophy* was the beginning of the downfall of the Greek society, and it did so by using clever tricks to castrate the noble forces that had until then dominated that society.

The Birth of Tragedy was able to discover the beginning of Greek nihilism through its interrogation of the type of Socrates. As Deleuze points out regarding *The Birth of Tragedy*, “the true opposition is not the wholly dialectical one between Dionysus and Apollo, but the deeper one between Dionysus and Socrates” (Deleuze 2006, 13). In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche identified Socrates as the one who, along with Euripides, killed the tragedy. The homicide was accidental in a sense; Socrates and Euripides ended the tragedy through their profound misunderstanding of the genre (*BoT* 64). This profound misunderstanding followed from the idea that the question of the tragedy should be posed as a question of understanding it at all. The true artist did not seek understanding; he rather *abdicated* from the confinements of the individual subject, and in contrast let higher inspirations speak through him (*BoT* 30). The work of the artist, like the noble, is pre-reflective and unconscious. This, however, was unacceptable for Socrates, who was of the completely opposite conviction; “Everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful” and “Everything must be conscious in order to be good” (*BoT* 64). The fault that Socrates pretends to identify with his interlocutors is that they are not able to succinctly rationalize why they believe what they believe. For Socrates, something is only valuable if it can be expressed and grasped by knowledge.

This is what Euripides picked up on, and subsequently used for the writing of his tragic plays. He therefore added a prologue at the beginning and a *deus ex machina* at the end of his plays, to ensure that the audience understood what was happening on the scene, and consequently to make the intellectual comprehension the aim of the tragedy itself. The

audience were no longer supposed to lose and immerse themselves in the play, but rather to critically grasp it. “As a poet, Euripides is thus the echo of his conscious perceptions” (*BoT* 63) rather than his unconscious instincts.

The audience went happily along with this transformation, for by making conscious apprehension the purpose of the tragedy, the audience could pretend to be placed on the same level as the master-poets by seeing themselves as their ‘critics’. By transforming the tragedy in this way, however, Euripides brought it to its suicide (*BoT* 54). The tragedy was no longer proceeded from and towards instinctual and affirmative life itself, but rather to its comprehension, and justification in comprehension. This inversion equates to the one Nietzsche saw in the character of Socrates himself;

Whereas in the case of all productive people instinct is precisely the creative-affirmative force and consciousness makes critical and warning gestures, in the case of Socrates, by contrast, instinct becomes the critic and consciousness the creator – a true monstrosity *per defectum!* (*BoT* 66)

Nietzsche is here referring to Socrates’ famous inspirations, in which he in a sudden flash feels that the gods warn him of some wrongdoing, as when in *Phaedrus* he is warned not to let Phaedrus go without giving him a third speech (*Phaedrus* 242b-c). For Nietzsche, this spelled an inversion of the natural order, in which conscious reason has the role of warning, of calculating risks and in general calling for restriction and caution when needed, while the productive, affirmative activity which moves forward stems from the natural instinct for life itself. In Socrates, this is put on its head; instinct warns, and *reason* is given the role of deciding and establishing what should be considered pursuable and valuable. *Instinctive life is here itself no longer the basis of evaluation; life is evaluated and judged from ‘elsewhere’*. This is already transcendent nihilism, although in a subtle and not yet fully developed form. Life has however already been robbed of its innocent self-justification, and rather asked to justify itself before another court. And who holds the key to this ‘elsewhere’, who wields the gavel in this court house? Socrates of course!

In order to elevate himself to this position as judge, Socrates obviously had to establish that the ‘sensible world’ was flawed, full of faulty appearances. By doing this, Socrates could introduce himself as the one who “believed that he was obliged to correct existence” (*BoT* 66). Reality of course only needs the philosopher’s correction if there is

something wrong with it. He must therefore argue that the instinctual unfolding of the will to power is paradoxical, that its unrestrained expansion bumps into some *other* principle according to which life must be judged;

Everyone puts contradiction into the will and also the will into contradiction... Thus philosophers promise the will a limitation, a rational or contractual limitation which is the only thing which will be able to make it livable and resolve contradiction. (Deleuze 2006, 83)

The philosopher offers both the poison and the cure. Importantly, the poison comes first. Life must be made to seem contradictory, conflicting, opposed; and this must be presented as something bad, something in need of resolution. This is then the toxic equation Nietzsche believes Socrates introduced to ancient Greece: “Socratic equation of reason = virtue = happiness: the most bizarre of all equations, which is opposed to all the instincts of the earlier Greeks.” (*ToI* 163). He was able to introduce it through his trickery of course – his Socratic irony –, which the straightforward nobility of Greece was not used to. This trickery consisted in part by constructing philosophical dialogue as a contest between combatants; “He fascinated by appealing to the agonistic drive of the Greeks” (*ToI* 165). As we said before, a new force can only appear by wearing the mask of the previous.

But what is this instinct of Socrates? From where comes the idea and need to pretend reality needs correction? The early Nietzsche had not yet discovered the answer to this, but the later Nietzsche realized it; people who seeks to ‘correct’ reality are themselves failures, pieces of gone wrong (*AC* 13). In other words, a *slave*. This is indeed what the later Nietzsche argues; “Socrates was descended from the lowest segment of society: Socrates was plebeian. We know, we can still see how ugly he was. But ugliness, an objection in itself, was almost a refutation for the Greeks” (*ToI* 163). This belongs to the well-known trope that Socrates was a repulsive and unpleasant person, who gained authority not naturally by his supple physicality or social position, but through his bothersome philosophical questioning. This is how Nietzsche understands the (un)nature of Socrates; “Dialectics is a type of *self-defence* used only by people who do not have any other weapons. You would need to be in a position to *enforce* your right” (*ToI* 164). Socrates turned to philosophy because, in regards to natural, instinctual life itself, he was a failure. And are there not traces of this in the Platonic dialogues

themselves? Consider the opening of the *Republic*, which begins by Socrates and his friend Glaucon being approached by the group that will become his interlocutors for the dialogue;

Polemarchus said: It looks to me, Socrates, as if you two are starting off for Athens.

It looks the way it is, then, I said.

Do you see how many we are? he said.

I do.

Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here.

Isn't there another alternative, namely, that we persuade you to let us go?

But could you persuade us, if we won't listen?

Certainly not, Glaucon said.

Well, we won't listen; you'd better make up your mind to that. (*Republic*, 327c, my italics)

But they did indeed end up listening. In fact, if Derrida is correct in saying that we are living “At the moment when the fundamental conceptual system produced by the Greco-European adventure is in the process of taking over all of humanity” (Derrida 2001, 101), we would be justified in saying that the entire *world* ended up listening. So much for ‘larger numbers’!

The event of philosophy figures as one example of the revaluations of the noble life-affirmation for Nietzsche, but is for him in a sense only the preparation for a much bigger catastrophe:

In the great disaster of Christianity, Plato represents that ambiguity and fascination (called an ‘ideal’) that made it possible for the nobler natures of antiquity to misunderstand themselves and step out onto the bridge that leads to the ‘cross’... (ToI 225)

Plato’s idealism was a preparatory step in what would become a full flight from reality, the surprising defeat of the Greek nobility at the hand of the plebeian Socrates, who for Nietzsche was rightfully condemned for the corruption of aristocratic youths like Plato. In the larger scheme of history, however, the biggest surprise would be that of the battle of “‘Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome’: - up to now, there has been no greater event than *this* battle, *this*

question, *this* contradiction of mortal enemies” (GM 33). It is with great and appalled astonishment that Nietzsche looks back at this history, for “This is very remarkable: without a doubt Rome has been defeated” (GM 34). To understand this defeat, we will have to investigate the secret powers of the ascetic priest.

f) Between Philosophical and Priestly Asceticism

While Socratic and Platonic philosophy already signals a move towards transcendent nihilism, the nihilistic hostility towards life is for Nietzsche nowhere more present for Nietzsche than in the ascetic ideal. Here something quite impossible occurs; “A self-contradiction such as that which seems to occur in the ascetic, ‘life *against* life, is – so much is obvious – seen from the physiological, not just the psychological standpoint, simply nonsense” (GM 89). Why would people willingly seek to *decrease* their health, willingly make themselves poorer, uglier, dirtier, etc.? Or, as we have posed the question, who yearns for nothingness?

But is this not a hopelessly reductive account of asceticism? It surely is, and Nietzsche is himself the farthest from supporting it; in fact, his analysis of asceticism is a perfect example of the ‘essential pluralism’ of his approach and the idea that “A thing has as many senses as there are forces capable of taking possession of it” (Deleuze 2006, 4). Opening his essay on the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche begins his questionnaire into the meaning of the ascetic ideal by interrogating the different types that have turned to asceticism for the sake of their own affirmation;

What do ascetic ideals mean? – With artists, nothing, or too many different things; with philosophers and scholars, something like a nose and sense for the most favourable conditions of higher intellectuality; with women, at most, one more seductive charm, a little morbidezza on fair flesh, the angelic expression on a pretty, fat animal... (GM 69)

To understand asceticism is to interpret it in view of the different forces that seeks to express themselves in it; in how these different types seek to find in it some way to affirm, preserve and enhance themselves. According to Nietzsche, a variety of different forces have affinity with asceticism, which makes it a particularly interesting phenomenon. For whatever reason,

the practice of asceticism has been a necessary condition for the growth of many strange plants.

Nietzsche's multifaceted interpretation of asceticism therefore in a way predicted the future development of studies on asceticism. As Tyler Roberts notes in his essay on Nietzsche and asceticism, earlier approaches, like those of Max Weber, Foucault and Mary Daly, interpreted asceticism primarily in terms of the 'iron cage' of modernity and the various practices of self-disciplining and self-denial it depends on. Asceticism was therefore seen as primarily an inhibiting, denying practice. More contemporary studies on asceticism, however, have turned their attention to the empowering and liberating possibilities that are also latent in the ascetic tradition (Roberts 1996, 403). Such an approach, Roberts points out, was already present in Nietzsche; asceticism can be both a self-denying and self-affirming practice (Roberts 1996, 404). To see asceticism in all its forms as simply denial of life is therefore to misunderstand it.

But what else is asceticism about than denial, renunciation and abstention? This is, of course, the essence of asceticism, but the plain fact is that to deny one's own body of its most basic and natural needs can be a way of strengthening those same needs. For example, the practice of periodical fasting can serve to sharpen and thereby strengthen one's instinct for hunger (*BGE* 110). Also in relation to the asceticism of chastity can practices of abstinence help strengthen a bodily relation; "For there is not, necessarily, an antithesis between chastity and sensuality; every good marriage, every real affair of the heart transcends this antithesis" (*GM* 71). The requirement of remaining chaste until your wedding night makes it an event worthy of anticipating, and not just because of the time period; it is also the question of establishing a *taboo* that is later to be transgressed. In general, drawing lines or establishing laws also creates the desire to transgress these lines, as Paul noted long ago (Rom. 7:7). In addition to enhancing hunger and sensuality, asceticism can also be a venture through which individuals seek so enhance their own strength;

The most spiritual people, being the strongest, find their happiness where other people would find their downfall: in labyrinths, in harshness towards themselves and towards others, in trials; they take pleasure in self-overcoming: asceticism is their nature, requirement, instinct. (*AC* 59)

Here, asceticism becomes a trial to be overcome, a test to affirm your mastery over yourself in contrast to the slavery to the belly in which too many find themselves subservient. It is not a question of denying your body in general, but to not become a slave to its every impulse. We surely see traces of this in the Greek ascetic tradition that we surveyed with Foucault in chapter one; that too was an asceticism that expressed a desire to become master over oneself rather than a hostility to life.

Far from only denying life, then, the ascetic ideal can also serve to affirm life. This is above all true for the question of the *philosopher*, whose ambiguous status in Nietzsche's works attains more clarity when we situate it in the context of asceticism, for "There are crucial links between Nietzsche's asceticism and his vision of philosophy" (Roberts 1996, 408). As we have seen, Nietzsche interprets philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Kant almost in the same way as Judeo-Christianity, that is, as manifestations of transcendent nihilism. At the same time, however, Nietzsche also appeals to the coming of future philosopher for his hopes that Europe will overcome the nihilistic instinct that has come to dominate it, and commission the revaluation necessary for affirming life in its immanence. This ambiguity testifies to the fact that the possibility of the philosopher has been conditioned on wearing the ascetic's mask;

Has the brightly coloured, dangerous winged-insect, the 'spirit' that the caterpillar hid within itself, really thrown off the monk's habit and emerged into the light, thanks to a sunnier, warmer and more enlightened world? Is there enough pride, daring, courage, self-confidence, will of spirit, will to take responsibility, freedom of will, for 'the philosopher' on earth to be really – possible?..." (GM 86)

The philosopher has needed this mask of the ascetic, needed its dirt-ragged robe and solitary confinement. It has furthermore not been possible to simply *pretend*; "philosophy does not throw off its ascetic mask as it grows up; in a way it must believe in this mask" (Deleuze 2006, 5). Philosophy has lived as asceticism, has been a slow-growing plant that could only grow in its environment; and that it sheds this mask is therefore far from given.

What was it that the philosopher needed in the ascetic? A key term which Nietzsche himself emphasizes in this context is "*independence*" (GM 78), and the question then becomes exactly what the philosopher needs independence from. On the one hand, it is the

fast-paced bumble and rattle of the social and political world, but additionally – and closer to our interests – it is an independency of bodily matters; “freedom from compulsion...clear heads...good thin, clear, free, dry air...bowels regular and under control, busy as a milling mechanism but *remote*” (*GM 79*, my italics). Healthy asceticism allows for a productive disregard of the body: it keeps it at a distance, ‘remote’, and therefore frees up the mind to occupy itself with other tasks. A minimalization of bodily needs and functions here serves to maximize other areas of human potential. Asceticism is in this sense first and foremostly a freedom from one’s one body, an abstinence from the bodily matters you become more and more dependent on the more you engage with them. In a similar way in which the solitude of asceticism frees you from the daily squabbles of political bickering and the intrigues of social life, asceticism of the body slims the participation in the whirlwind of cravings and pleasures, and the subsequent troubles which necessarily follow (the hangover after a night out, tummy-aches and other ‘bad bowel movements’, all the intimate dilemmas of sex, etc.). Such healthy asceticism has been absolutely necessary for the breeding of the philosopher.

In the case of the philosopher, then, asceticism serves to affirm his predominant instinct; “[it] is *not*...out of virtue, out of a creditable will to moderation and simplicity, but because their supreme master *so* demands” (*GM 81*). The philosopher needs the independence that an ascetic lifestyle can provide, and thus affirms himself as a philosopher by putting on the mask of the ascetic. This is what the ascetic ideal *meant* for the philosopher, and its meaning here is far from life-denying; “[the philosopher] does *not* deny ‘existence’ by doing so, but rather affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence” (*GM 78*). In this sense, the philosopher does not have asceticism as an ideal; the philosopher’s ideal remains philosophy itself, and the ascetic mask is only worn to affirm this predominant instinct. What about those, however, who has asceticism as their ideal, as their predominant instinct?

In this case, fasting, chastity and other forms of abstinence are not undertaken in order to enhance or prepare another facet of life. In contrast, what is cultivated is the denial of the body. Here a will unfolds that “becomes more self-assured and triumphant to the same degree as its own condition, the physiological capacity to live, *decreases*” (*GM 87*). The decrease of bodily mass, the unfulfilled sexual instincts, the learned aversion to the inherent pleasantness of the remaining necessary bodily functions; in the case of the ascetic nihilist, these are sought after not for the sake of affirming some other function, but for the sake of this denial itself. Furthermore, there is a *system* to this denial, seeking out power “not over something in life, but over life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions” (*GM 87*). Ascetic

nihilism always seeks to deny life where it would otherwise affirm itself. It becomes hostile at the precise moment when life befalls the body well, when it feels itself as strong, beautiful, happy, comfortable, etc. This is what we have called the hostility towards the enjoyment of the senses. It is an instinct to seek out everything that affirms life in order to systematically deny it, which expresses and becomes expressed in “a deep disgust for themselves, for the world, for all life...[they] hurt themselves as much as possible out of pleasure (*Vergnügen*) in hurting; - probably their only pleasure (*Vergnügen*)” (*GM* 87). It is a reversion of the most natural tendencies of the body; it is a negation of everything affirmative and an affirmation of everything negative. It is likely to “throw suspicion on the delight (*Glück*) in beauty” (*BGE* 56) because beauty is something that would otherwise befall me well. In other words, the enjoyment of something, in the broad definition we have given it in this chapter, is itself perceived to be a principled argument *against* something. Does it feel good? Then you *should* deny it!

It is therefore with regards the hostility towards enjoyment that we are able to separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to asceticism. In contrast to those who periodically deny certain cravings of the body in order to affirm something else, ascetic nihilists have the denial of everything affirmative as the goal in itself. Their resentment seeks everything affirmative, everything that befalls the body well, that the body says ‘yes!’ to – in short, everything enjoyable, just in order to deny it. Here, worldly life itself becomes the target, and targeted in its ‘most profound conditions’ - life is denied in all the instances that it grows, enhances itself and thus says *yes* to itself, and on the contrary always sought after in the instances where it *fails*, where it says *no*. This is an instinct that has become dominant that is hostile to life *in itself*, hostile to life *in general*. A negation of the entirety of existence comes to display itself here, a hostility to *immanence in general*.

But is this not a dishonest presentation of the matter? The ascetic would of course not say that he hates life, but rather that he *loves God*, and that his turning-away from immanence facilitates his turning-towards transcendence. Nietzsche is of course aware of this; “The ascetic priest is the incarnate wish for being otherwise (*Anders-sein*), being elsewhere (*Anderswo-sein*)” (*GM* 89-90). It is the idea of transcendence that justifies the ascetic’s denial of life. For someone like Nietzsche, however, who accepts only immanence, and sees any idea of transcendence as a forgery, what does this desire for the ‘otherwise’ appear as? As something much less metaphysical and in fact quite natural:

Who are the only people motivated to lie their way out of reality? People who suffer from it. But to suffer from reality means that you are a piece of reality that has gone wrong (*verunglückte Wirklichkeit*)... (AC 13)

There are people who certainly long to be otherwise because they are, in the eyes of the *only world there is*, failures. They are weak, ugly, poor and in general impotent and defected. They are failures according to the standards of the only life there is. As failures, they have nowhere to turn. So where do they turn? *Against life itself*.

For Nietzsche, therefore, the answer to the question of who would seek out asceticism as an end in itself are those who, because they are failures of life, would seek to affirm the failure of life itself. In denying and hurting their bodies, they seek to mimic the condition of life they want to preserve, that is, a sick life. Christianity is a religion by the weak for the weak: by worshipping weakness, Christians affirm themselves;

In fact, they take sides with the failures as a matter of principle, as religions of the suffering. They give rights to all those who suffer life like a disease, and they want to make every other feeling for life seem wrong and become impossible. (BGE 56)

Those who suffer are the holy ones, the meek shall inherit the earth, those who are last *here* will become first *elsewhere*! Therefore, success, strength and wellness in *this* life is already a sign of sin, of not belonging to that ‘other’, holier world above this one. Such a religion will necessarily turn hostile towards enjoyment itself, for it is by their suffering that they are distinguished as holy ‘in the eyes of God’. What the religious types find in asceticism, therefore, is something quite different than the philosopher; it is the slave who makes an “attempt to see themselves as ‘too good’ for this world”, the priest who has it as “their best instrument of power” and the saint who through asceticism can “rest in nothingness (‘God’)” (GM 69). In asking who would hold asceticism as an ideal, we catch sight of a will that does not seek to affirm and enhance its particular existence, but which rather affirms itself by *waging war against existence as a whole*. In other words, a will to nothingness appears – a will to negate the entirety of reality.

g) The Slave Evaluation

We are getting closer, but have not yet reached the core of Nietzsche's accusation, for some questions still remain. What, for instance, does a 'will to nothingness' really mean? And what role does the idea of transcendence play in it? Furthermore, have we truly gotten to the bottom of why the denial of enjoyment is so important to the minutest of differences here?

First, we must remember again the importance of the question of evaluation, for it is the Christian mode of evaluation that has produced the idea of transcendence, and thus finds it for some reason necessary. We saw already how the noble begin their evaluation with an affirmative 'yes', to themselves, and the question then becomes how a *slave* would begin *his* evaluation;

What if people who were violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, exhausted, and unsure of themselves were to moralize: what type of moral valuations would they have? A pessimistic suspicion of the whole condition of humanity would probably find its expression, perhaps a condemnation of humanity along with its condition. (BGE 155)

Seeds falling on bad soil will not yield good fruits (Mark 4). An evaluation beginning from the decrepit and diseased will not look favorably on existence, will not value it as a blessing but rather feel *contempt* for the world. They have only known the wrong side of the boot, and consequently, that's how they interpret the world; as the underside of a boot. They will therefore wish for an 'elsewhere', but will *in reality* have no other direction to which they can turn with their frustrations than the earth that is. It will therefore seek to devalue reality, which is the specificity of its evaluation; its evaluation is a *devaluation*.

But we have to be more precise than this in order to understand the exact procedure of transcendent nihilism, for the slave does in fact not first desire an elsewhere and then directs his hatred towards the world; *it is the other way around*. In contrast to the noble, who begins by actively affirming himself, which is the basis of his evaluation, the slave begins reactively by *negating the master*;

Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself, slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside', 'other', 'non-self': and this 'no' is its creative deed. (GM 20)

The creative gesture of slave-morality has its basis in a rejection, a denial, a ‘no’ to the noble and his evaluation. The evaluation of the slave begins with his resentment against the noble. This is why it is transcendent nihilism, a negation; “Such a force denies all that it is not and makes this negation its own essence and the principle of existence” (Deleuze 2006, 9). The slave posits his evaluation in opposition to the noble, that is, as its opposite. The slave defines himself as the opposite of the master.

But what is negated with the noble? For Nietzsche, it is life itself, namely, life as it is alive, growing, enhancing, dominating, etc. The noble evaluation is an affirmative evaluation, and the slave evaluation is nothing but a negation of the noble, thus a negation of life’s affirmation. This is why it seeks out the enjoyment of the senses: “The instinct of *ressentiment* said no to everything on earth that represented the *ascending* movement of life: success, power, beauty, self-affirmation” (AC 21). It says ‘no!’ to the very ‘yes!’ of life; it is this very hostility and opposition to worldly life. For Nietzsche, this is all weakness is and can be. There is no higher court in which the weak failures of life could appeal to get restitution, for to be a failure means nothing more than to have missed out on what life is supposed to be about. You got eaten instead of getting to eat.

Taking note of this, we get closer to the *transcendent* in ‘transcendent nihilism’, for now its purpose and correct place in the order of procedure appears. The idea of transcendence, of a ‘higher court’, is secondary, a product of the negation, but it is simultaneously absolutely essential for this negation, for resentment could only say no to life “by becoming ingenious and inventing *another* world, a world that viewed *affirmation of life* as evil, as intrinsically reprehensible” (AC 21). Transcendence is the imagined higher court from which a condemnation of reality can proceed, the manufactured measure by which the world is devaluated. The will to nothingness is a form of life that turns on life itself, and because there is nothing beyond life, the will against life is a will to nothing. The transcendence that is set ‘above’ this life is itself nothing but a necessary fiction of this will.

This is furthermore connects into what we discussed regarding the naivety of the noble and the cleverness of Socrates. For Nietzsche, the intellectual tradition – the tradition that concerns itself with ‘principles’, ‘ideas’, ‘norms’, ‘meaning’, etc. – is intimately tied up to the history of nihilism understood as devaluation. While contemplating intellectual matters can be a fun pastime for the noble, it essential for the slave’s survival; “A race of such men of *ressentiment* will inevitably end up *cleverer* (*klüger*) than any noble race...as a condition of

existence of the first rank” (*GM 22*). Not able to draw their power from the world that is, they must draw it from ‘the realm of ideas’, the true motivation for every so-called ‘lover of wisdom’; “He wants life to become virtuous, to correct itself and to correct appearance, for it to serve as the way to the other world” (Deleuze 2006, 96). This other world, this ‘elsewhere’, is nothing more than the ‘flight-from’ the ‘here-and-now’, but it can only flee by falsifying life, by thinking contradictions into life that are not there.

The religious person is only a more extreme version of this movement. The philosopher argues that worldly life suffers from faulty, sensual appearances, and that the true and complete world lies behind it; the philosopher must therefore ‘correct’ the world. There is a discrepancy between the incomplete world of appearances and the complete world of ideas. For the Christian, however, there is not simply a discrepancy between the complete/incomplete; Christian transcendence, born out of hostility to life, is posited in opposition to the world, as the negation of worldly existence. Immanence is therefore not simply the less perfect variant of transcendence, but its absolute anti-thesis. Nietzsche explains this by determining the difference between the Christian notion of transcendence and the world of dreams;

This entirely fictitious world can be distinguished from the world of dreams (to the detriment of the former) in that dreams reflect reality while Christianity falsifies, devalues, and negates reality. (*AC 13*)

Transcendence is here not reality’s correction, but its definitive reversal, the counter or the opposite to the real. This is why it is revealed as life against life. The Christian God develops from the struggle of life with itself, of life turning on itself and negating itself. Negative theology is therefore correct beyond the reason it would give itself; it is only possible to say what God is ‘not’ because God is the absolute opposite of everything that *is*.

The lie called God is therefore an especially dangerous lie, more dangerous than that of the philosophers, for it seeks to launch an attack on reality as a whole. Crucial to this attack, as we have mentioned, is that it does not present itself as an attack, but as love – love of God. Furthermore, they must themselves believe in this lie, learn to believe the lie to unleash its full force;

Where belief is necessary. – Nothing is more rare among moralists and saints than honesty; they might say the opposite, they might even *believe* it. Because if a belief is more useful, effective, convincing than *conscious* hypocrisy, hypocrisy will instinctively and immediately become *innocence*: first principle for understanding great saints. (*ToI* 216-217)

‘Love of God’ covers over ‘hatred of life’, which this ‘love’ can never admit to itself, just as it depends on presenting reality as its opposite (as a false reality contrasted with the true reality of God). Thus, the cleverest trick of the priestly type is “the art of *falling for your own forgeries*” (*AC* 11). The dominant instinct of a force will deceive itself if this implies a more favorable condition for its domination. This is again why Nietzsche feels the need to proceed suspiciously in his investigations; he cannot in any shape or form trust Christianity’s self-determination as the religion of love; this lie – and another negation – hides the true core of Christianity as a religion founded on the deep hatred of life.

Transcendence therefore plays a crucial role in the will to nothingness; it facilitates this attack on life by covering it over, by twisting it, by pretending that this hate is in fact a form of love. This aspect of the Christian faith is more sharply outlined when compared to Buddhism. Nietzsche says that both Christianity and Buddhism “belong together as nihilistic religions – they are religions of decadence”, but he immediately follows by adding that Christianity ought to have a “debt of gratitude for the fact that these two can now be *compared*. – Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity” (*AC* 16). While Buddhism still is a sign of decadency and decline, it is much healthier than Christianity, which can be explained on the basis of its realism, contra the lie of transcendence in Christianity’s nihilism. “Buddhism is the only really *positivistic* religion in history; even in its epistemology (a strict phenomenalism -) it has stopped saying ‘war against *sin*’ and instead, giving reality its dues, says ‘war against *suffering*’” (*AC* 16). Buddhism acknowledges that life includes suffering, and therefore it attempts, in a very calm matter, to ‘cool’ life down to its least irate state. Knowing that scratching an itch only leads to the itch returning even stronger, eventually bridging over to pain, the Buddhist elects rather to distance himself from the whole process as much as possible; “moderation and careful diet; caution as far as liquor is concerned; caution when it comes to all affects that create bile or raise the blood temperature; no *worrying* about either yourself or other people” (*AC* 17).

Buddhism is therefore a sort of ‘phenomenology of Christianity’, saying straightforwardly and thus allowing to appear that which Christianity finds it necessary to life about. Buddhism is praised because of its ‘strict phenomenalism’; “it just says what it thinks: ‘I suffer’” (AC 19). Buddhism therefore retains and confirms the originary meaning of the experiences of pleasure and pain, and simply draws its conclusions from them. It is, as was also said above honest, adding no interpretive layer onto the experience to justify the numbing of it. Buddhism is still nihilism in a comparable way to Christianity; “the yearning for a *unio mystica* with God is the Buddhist yearning for nothingness, Nirvana” (GM 16), but it is nihilistic *explicitly*; it states its goal of achieving *anatta* (non-self) and *sunyata* (emptiness).

In contrast to this, Christianity posits the illusion of God as the true reality. Nothingness is here presented as what actually exists, or as what existed primordially, and through which *this* existence (earthly, bodily, etc.) is to be determined and understood. The difference between Buddhist and Christian nihilism is precisely that the latter is *transcendent* nihilism; while Buddhism is an honest admission of exhaustion due to earthly existence, Christianity is an attack on the earth through the transcendent, construed as earth’s opposite. This attack is launched with the weapon of interpretation: worldly existence is interpreted and determined through the posited transcendent. It is as interpretation that Christianity is capable of its total revaluation; the ascetic denial of enjoyment is interpreted not as an attack on life, but rather as worship of God. By positing its self-denial as the fulfillment of a higher, transcendent purpose, Christianity was able to do more than merely express a tiredness at life; it established a counter-concept from which life was to be (d)evaluated.

We have thus defined both the ‘transcendent’ and the ‘nihilism’ in transcendent nihilism. Christianity is accused of being transcendent *nihilism* because it negates reality, because it posits its own evaluation from the first in *opposition* against life – life against life – , but because there is *nothing but* life, the will that *opposes* life is essentially yearning for nothingness. The *transcendent* is the product, the vehicle and the cover-up in this operation. ‘Transcendence’ results, first, from the negation, and is thus its product; second, it makes the operation possible, positing itself as the measure by which this world is condemned; third, it covers over the operation by calling it ‘love of God’ instead of ‘hatred of life’.

Finally, we have also discovered the reason for why such an instinct of ‘life against life’ could ever occur, and of the kind of people in whom this instinct becomes predominant. Every slander against life originates in sick, weak and ugly forms of life; “*the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life*” (GM 89). The ascetic

ideal, or transcendent nihilism, is an expression of will to power, namely, that form of life whose condition of preservation depends on the will to nothingness. They enforce their will by revaluation life, by making life appear as the very opposite of what it is;

‘Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, - whereas you, the noble and powerful, are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!’ (GM 17-18)

The slaves casts a curse on life, treating wellness itself as a symptom of being snakebit. To be a failure, on the other hand, is a sign that you have been elected, that you will stand first in line where you stand last now. Everything is turned on its head.

This is again why the denial of enjoyment is so important for transcendent nihilism. The Judeo-Christian reversal of all values (from “strength/health = good” & “weakness/sickness = bad” to the absolute opposite) correspond to a reversal of the very experience of joy and pain on an experiential level; joy is *experienced* as a sin, and pain is *experienced* as a positive affirmation of one’s own world-view. While the lie of God serves as “the formula for every slander against the ‘here and now’, for every lie about the ‘beyond’!” (AC 16), it is in the practice of denying enjoyment that this formula becomes more than theoretical. Moreover, the theory can here only derive from practice: it is only in view of the positive affirmation of life that enjoyment itself entails that life can be denied. It is by denying enjoyment, beauty and strength while cultivating suffering, ugliness and weakness that transcendent nihilism *can* deny life, in its entirety and on principle.

This is something essentially different from fearing the transience of life, which many commentators on Nietzsche take as the real root of the metaphysical nihilism or the two-room thinking he opposes. Andrea Rehberg, for example, argues that the motivation behind fabricating a transcendent world is that “it is supposed to be a realm immune from the very elements which characterize our earthly existence, namely material decomposition, disintegration and death” (Rehberg 2011, 142). The realm of the eternal is posited out of an incapacity to deal with the fact that life is transient, that our bodies “grow, age, die and decompose, and that whatever is in time must sooner or later pass away” (Rehberg 2011, 142). Transcendence would thus be an evasion from the impermanent nature of life and the

inevitability of death. This is surely one motivation for the belief in transcendence in history, but it is important to note that it is, for Nietzsche, not the primary reason, and in fact not the reason whose genealogy we have been tracing so far; for what we have been tracing is not a fear of death, but precisely a hostility towards life; “The *sickliness* of the type of human being that has lived up till now, at least of the tamed human, the physiological struggle of human beings with death (to be more exact: with disgust at life, with exhaustion and with the wish for the ‘end’)” (GM 89). Nietzsche adds that, to be more exact, the Jews and Christians are not afraid of the end, but *yearns* for the end – wills nothingness –, and *this* is their predominant instinct. This is the difference between escapism and evasion. Evasion is evasion of death, the anxious inability to face the insuperable fact of death. Escapism, in contrast, feels *the present itself as intolerable*, and thus seeks a “way of holding up under the pressure of existence (*Druck des Daseins auszuhalten*)” (BGE 156). It is not the fear that this life will end that inspires escapism, but rather the experience that life is already hell, and furthermore a hell *for you*, because of who *you* are. Some people will be enjoying the same life you are suffering; how insufferable is that!

And this is why it is a hostility towards the *enjoyment* of the senses. A fear of transience and death is a fear that, in the middle of a healthy life, becomes so occupied with this fear that it is unable to enjoy the fruits of life. It is, however, not hostile to this enjoyment; it is rather that it is unable to forget that after spring and summer comes fall and winter; it is unable to accept that this enjoyment will not last forever. Fear of transience and evasion of death *clings to life*, is unable to let go. The nihilistic hostility to life, in contrast, hates life in its fullness and presence, that is, hates life *at its peak*, “as though health, success, strength, pride and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities for which penance, bitter penance will one day be exacted” (GM 92). It hates life in its beauty and strength, when life is living, when it is growing and enhancing itself; or as we have termed it, when life ‘befalls me well’ or is enjoyable, in the broad sense we have given this notion in this chapter. The hostility towards it is expressed in the disgruntled priest who, upon seeing the village beauty flowering in her youth, senses a strong *hatred* towards this self-satisfied existence. He thus takes her aside and reproaches her for finding satisfaction in her beauty; he reminds her - and finds *his* satisfaction in reminding her - that *already now*, her beauty only testifies to the old-age to come, to the frailty and shortness of life. It is to see rot in the blossoming of life itself, an inversion of life – life against life.

It is due to this un-nature, this attack on life itself and its most essential conditions, that Nietzsche cannot accept any talk of transcendent nihilism simply being the ‘stronger force’. For one is perhaps tempted to ask if Judeo-Christianity should not simply be declared the victor despite their dirty tricks, that those who align most truly with the will to power are those who are ready to win by any means necessary. Did not Judea conquer Rome? And how can a thinker like Nietzsche measure the worth of a force by anything else than the success of a conquest? Derrida seems to be making this argument;

When Nietzsche says that the strong have been made slaves by the weak, this means that the strong are weak, that Nietzsche comes to the rescue of the strong because they are weaker than the weak. (Derrida 1994, 31)

But there are different kinds of victories. The victory of the noble proceeds, as we have seen, as the enhancement of its force; it conquers through growth, which means that it conquers through living. The triumph of reactive forces, however, “proceed in an entirely different way – they decompose; *they separate active force from what it can do*; they take away a part or almost all of its power” (Deleuze 2006, 57). Transcendent nihilism is abortive and castrating. Reactive forces trick active forces into doubting the exertion of their own force, condemns enhancement through a lie. This is why the dominance of the Christian instinct leads to a ‘sublime abortion’, and why its victory is as far from affirming the will to power as humanly possible. Deleuze very correctly points out that, for Nietzsche, while it might be true that reactive forces can come to dominate active forces, this domination is still distinguished as ‘noble’ or ‘base’; “*High and noble* designate, for Nietzsche, the superiority of active forces, their affinity with affirmation, their tendency to ascend, their lightness. *Low and base* designate the triumph of reactive forces, their affinity with the negative, their heaviness or clumsiness” (Deleuze 2006, 86). The Judeo-Christian tradition has won, but its victory means that life has become a *burden*, something heavy that we merely tolerate and survive. The difference between the noble and slave evaluation of life cannot be measured simply in terms of whose got the upper hand; the quality of the forces which dominate in each instance are different.

h) The Condemnation of Christianity

In accusing Christianity of being transcendent nihilism, or the hostility towards enjoyment of life, Nietzsche accuses Christianity not of being afraid of death, but being afraid of *life*. This is why enjoyment itself becomes the target. To find pleasure *itself* to be the objection, to abstain from enjoyment for the reason that it is enjoyable – this is to find the body saying ‘yes!’ to itself objectionable, to find life’s own self-affirmation objectionable.

Is such a trajectory of Christendom not visible in history? Does it not seem that Christianity, in some instances at least, have manifested itself as a turning-away from the enjoyment of immanence in order to turn towards transcendence? And when it has, does it not seem that it has done so according to its own meaning? In chapter I, the prominence gained by the ascetic ideal seemed to commence from the belief that Christ had turned upside-down every familiar evaluation and made everything old new. This is what Nietzsche calls the Judeo-Christian revaluation. It is a revaluation commencing from the weak, repeating after Paul; “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2. Cor 12:9). The power of Christ – this is what Nietzsche believes to have revealed as nothing but a hostility to strength, a hostility that due to the weakness of its bearer must turn to cunning, and thus *seduces* the strong with a revelatory promise; ‘these wounds you see upon me, my weak and fragile stature – although it might make me seem as if I belong last in line, this very weakness is a sign of what is to come, of how I will be *first* in the life to come!’

This being said, what does this thesis wish to learn from Nietzsche’s accusation? The matter is an intricate one. On the one hand, I do believe Nietzsche has identified something crucial and inherent to Christianity. I would again refer to René Girard and his claim that Nietzsche discovers the Judeo-Christian ‘concern for the victim’ as its most fundamental value. It is furthermore the value in view of which everything else is revaluated. The fact that God reveals Godself as a lowly, Jewish carpenter hanging on the cross implies that the evaluations that humanity has been guided by so far must be reversed; God is present at the very bottom of the hierarchy the world recognizes. He is a criminal in a peripheral Roman colony, condemned to a form of execution reserved for non-Roman citizens.

But should we then end our concern for victims? Is that what Nietzsche argues? One should at least recognize that this is a *possible* interpretation of Nietzsche, and that it furthermore can lead down dark paths. After WWII, the Nazi regime in Germany and the Holocaust, there was an obvious desire and need to defend Nietzsche from the Nazi-

interpretation of his works, an interpretation that had Hitler himself stare down a bust of Nietzsche in proud declaration that the Overman had come. While Nietzsche is not reducible to this interpretation, it is nevertheless possible, and Derrida warns against the easy dismissal of this possibility; “There are... discursive elements in Nietzsche that lend themselves to Nazi re-appropriation; one can discern a lineage from Nietzsche to Nazism, and this cannot be ignored” (Derrida 1994, 25-26). Girard also identifies this lineage, and shows furthermore that even the most perspectival readings of Nietzsche since have never again tried to relativize the value we put on the concern for victims;

We hear repeated in every way that we no longer have an absolute. But the inability of Nietzsche and Hitler to demolish the concern for victims and then later the embarrassed silence of the latter day Nietzscheans show for sure that this concern is not relative. It is our absolute. (Girard 2001, 177)

In whatever way one credits Nietzsche for having ended our naivety and pulled the rug from under our feet whenever we seemed to be standing on solid ground, *this* aspect of his philosophy is never taken too seriously. The struggle between slave-morality and master-morality is made out to be an internalized struggle of my own heart. Sure, it can also be read in this way, but is it possible to say that this is the only way it can be read?

No, it is not simply the internal struggle with myself that Nietzsche targets with his critique; *it is the idea of victimhood in general*. Nietzsche attacks the very idea that ‘to be a victim’ imparts some sort of ethical imperative, and he does so by arguing that ‘victimhood’ is the seductive illusion of the disadvantaged to sneak a contradiction into the naïve, innocent conscience of the strong;

These worm-eaten physiological casualties are all people of resentment...when will they actually achieve their...revenge? Doubtless if they succeeded in showing their own misery, in fact all misery, on to the conscience of the happy: so that the latter eventually start to be ashamed of their happiness and perhaps say to one another: ‘It’s a disgrace to be happy! There is too much misery!’... (GM 92-93)

To Nietzsche, the appeal of the weak to the strong consists in them showing of their open, bleeding wounds and hoping that this will make the happy and strong feel bad about

themselves. They flaunt their injuries and traumas, anticipating the disgust they will invoke in the noble, making them sick to their stomachs. This is where Nietzsche finds it necessary to hold his nose when confronted with a Christian: “against *great nausea at humankind!* Against *deep compassion (Mitleid) for human beings!...*” (GM 93). Jews and Christians want you to *suffer with them*, to make *their* suffering yours as well. They present this as a transcendent imperative: God has commanded us to care for the suffering of others. How, then, would one cut through this illusion? It would be to recognize that all a wound is, is a vulnerability, and that a vulnerability is nothing but an opening for your sword to penetrate. To be weak means nothing more than to be easy to strike down. When striking with your swords, aim for the soft spots.

To be frank, this thesis does not consider the above to be an illusion. It sees the ethical imperative in the appeal as transcendent insofar as it does not commence from the way in which the world works; seen from the world, the wound is nothing but another weakness to be exploited in the perpetual war of my interest against that of others. To see this conflict *interrupted* is, I argue, to accept a transcendent revelation of *something else*, not the eternal recurrence of the same but an *alterity*, the trace of a Commandment commencing as if from *elsewhere*.

Why, then, the above? Why consider Nietzsche’s accusation at all if it is to be denied simply on the basis of faith? It is precisely because this thesis seeks to take the idea of a transcendent ethical imperative seriously that it seeks to engage with Nietzsche’s critique. For if the core of Christianity consists in a revaluation, in seeing the strength of God in the weakness of Christ, then does it not, like Nietzsche says, pose the danger of devaluing the world?

For it is when we take the idea of transcendence seriously that the danger transcendence poses become apparent. Transcendence threatens to become a *worship of weakness*, positing its conception of transcendence in *opposition* to immanence. If the last shall become the first, if being weak and denied in this life itself is the sign of the blessings you are to receive in the next life, then how do you avoid positing transcendence as the opposite or the reversal of worldly life? A re-versal is unintelligible without the first turn (*vertere*) – we can turn away from the world because we are from the first turned-towards it. This is what we saw in the introduction as well. The revelation of the ‘good news’ is unintelligible without the familiarity of the world, for the announcement of the Bread of Life only makes sense for someone who knows what worldly bread is. But if the meaning of the

‘new’ contra the ‘old’ is only thought as the turning-upside-down of the old, if transcendence only has sense in its opposition to immanence, then does it not necessarily devalue immanence?

If the relationship between transcendence and immanence is thought as such, then the denial of enjoyment makes perfect sense. Enjoyment affirms my relationship with my body and with worldly life in general, is the place where my body and subjectivity intersects in a non-conflicting ‘yes!’ to each other. There is thus no place where a ‘no!’ becomes more potent than here, for to say ‘no!’ to enjoyment is to say ‘no!’ to the ‘yes!’-saying to the world. It is to *deny* the *affirmation* of life, and as we have seen in this chapter, life is life precisely in its self-affirmation. If enjoyment then serves as the natural and instinctual affirmation of immanence, and if transcendence is thought as the reversal or opposite of immanence, then it is not incoherent to formulate transcendence as a no-saying to immanence, a no-saying that finds its ultimate expression in a no to enjoyment.

If this is the case, however, then transcendence is a negation of immanence. Transcendence would be a negative reaction to the active affirmation inherent to immanence itself, a no-saying to the way life says yes to itself. The idea of an ‘elsewhere’, of something *new* revealing itself to the *old*, would only be intelligible as the opposite of the here-and-below. Immanence and transcendence would then be necessarily in conflict, a conflict all the more necessary for transcendence, for it would be this conflict that feeds and sustains the very meaning of transcendence. Transcendence would only be possible to think by making the immanence of life conflicted, presenting itself as the choice between either continuing to live according to the bonds that enchain us to this world, or breaking those chains and devoting oneself to the turning-towards transcendence. ‘You live for this world, I live for the next’ – this would be what separates the believer from the faithless.

By taking transcendence seriously, Nietzsche’s challenge remains relevant, for precisely *as transcendence*, this belief threatens to devalue the world. It is a question of whether transcendence can be thought as anything else than the opposite of immanence. Is the ‘new’ intelligible as more than the reversal of the ‘old’? Can transcendence be thought as otherwise than as what conflicts with immanence? Is there a meaning to transcendence beyond being a ‘no’ to the world? Nietzsche’s accusation against Christianity remains relevant on this point. The revelation of transcendence is only intelligible insofar as it refers itself, somehow, to the immanence of the world (bread/Bread of life). Can it refer itself to immanence as something else than its negation?

Moving on to Levinas, there are two primary things we ought to keep from Nietzsche for the sake of the overarching goal of this thesis, which is to think the relationship between immanence and transcendence in such a way that immanence can be affirmed as valuable in itself.

The first is the noble evaluation of life, which, despite its possible cruelty, presents life as innocent. Immanence has to be valuable in a way that is completely immanent to it, and this seems to be present in that natural, instinctual self-affirmation that the enjoyment of life consists of. A healthy sprint, the goodness of a glass of wine, the happiness of giving yourself over to dancing – these experiences seem to draw their goodness from nowhere else than themselves. They affirm themselves, they say ‘yes!’ to themselves, because they ‘befall me well’ with no prior conflict. I believe such an affirmation of life’s innocence is available in Levinas as well.

The second is the challenge the belief in transcendence poses to such an affirmation. It is, simply put, very easy to think transcendence in opposition to immanence. Transcendence becomes then a mere product of the negation of immanence. This, too, is a problem Levinas is very much aware of.

i) Pro and Contra the Garden

I want to end this chapter, however, with a brief discussion of an aspect of life’s affirmation that Levinas does not share with Nietzsche. This difference can be approached through the following question: does Nietzsche’s affirmation of life amount to an affirmation of *complacency*? This is not the case, first because Nietzsche positions himself against hedonists, utilitarians and other who would measure life simply as a quest to increase pleasure and decrease pain (e.g. *BGE* 116 / *GS* 38). Such a worldview leads necessarily to complacency, and Nietzsche believed that such a degenerate complacency was taking hold of Europe in his time. In fact, he believed that what was happening in Europe mirrored the degeneration of the ancient Greeks; “might not the ‘Greek cheerfulness’ (*Heiterkeit*) of later Hellenism be simply the red flush across the evening sky?” (*BoT* 4). The cheerful, happy complacency of the Greeks *after* the city-states had ended their decades long perpetual conflicts would be the sun setting on the greatness of the Hellenes for Nietzsche – it would be a sign of decadence. For life is far from complacency to Nietzsche, for the “*Dionysian task*” Nietzsche wants to prepare us for is one that must find “the *joy even in destruction*” (*EH* 349/134). It is “the most profound strife” (*NII* 49), as Heidegger recognizes.

Although we have spelled out some of our disagreements with Heidegger in the above, I do believe he correctly assesses Nietzsche on this particular point. Nietzsche sees the greatness of humanity and its great health not in the cheerfulness of complacent happiness, but in “The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – don’t you know that *this* discipline has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far?” (*BGE* 116-117). This refers to will to power as the fundamental characteristic of human life (as well as life in general), which must be understood in relation to Nietzsche’s understanding of humans as “*the still undetermined animals*” (*BGE* 56). Humanity is still not determined, as it carries the potential within itself to determine itself anew, and therefore *overcome* the nihilistic determination which has characterized Europe. The curious being of the human is that in it, “*creature and creator are combined*” (*BGE* 117), meaning that humanity can overcome its past determinations through new ones, thereby growing and as such affirming the continuous movement of will to power. Such self-transformatory action is however the very opposite of the ‘stand-still’ of Hedonism and Buddhism, firstly because it desires movement, transformation and creation of something new (and stronger), and secondly because this transformation cannot avoid, but must include suffering; “There has to be an eternal ‘agony of the woman in labour’ so that there can be an eternal joy of creation, so that the will to life can eternally affirm itself” (*ToI* 228). The joy which affirms both enjoyment and suffering affirms the continuous development of will to power, of ever-growing strength.

If life must be this joy even in destruction, if life only ever grows and enhances itself through struggle and war, then Nietzsche’s affirmation of life must go completely against the idea of complacency. The complacency of cheerful happiness covers over this essential strife, which Heidegger recognizes in a polemic against the garden;

[Zarathustra] knows that a cheerful (heitere) loveliness and gentle humor settle over the terrifying thing that being genuinely (eigentlich) is; that being can conceal itself behind semblances in what is talked about. In truth, of course, the world is no garden, and for Zarathustra it dare not be one, especially if by ‘garden’ we mean an enchanting haven for the flight from being. (NII 52)

The garden is enchanting, yes, but it is essentially the realm of facades and ornaments that cover up the harsh reality – that being is war! – underneath it. The garden is comfortable, a

place to retreat from the terrifying reality; and for that very reason, Nietzsche and Heidegger has something against it. Life is not about being comforted, for to seek comfort is nothing but a *flight-from* the authenticity of war. As Roberts notes, this is another aspect of asceticism that Nietzsche affirms; “Nietzsche's ‘natural asceticism’ involves, in other words, a cultivation of spirit through a struggle of ‘nature’ with and against itself” (Roberts 1996, 406). The ascetic who is at war with himself has some life-affirming potential for Nietzsche because he cultivates the struggle and strife that life essentially is.

The noble evaluation, understood as an evaluation that does not suffer from a lack of meaning but evaluates itself as good beginning and ending from itself, is what Heidegger most profoundly misunderstands in Nietzsche. The idea of human existence as a ‘yet undetermined animal’, however, and the idea that the everyday complacency of the garden covers over this essential and authentic indeterminateness of human existence, is very close to Heidegger. It overlaps with what Heidegger calls the *Un-zuhause* of Dasein, its ‘not-being-at-home’, which makes Dasein anxious, and which Dasein thus turns away from.

Remarkably, therefore, we find in Heidegger an interpretation *that would unite Augustine and Nietzsche on their shared hostility against enjoyment*. In describing Augustine’s analysis of pleasure (*Voluptas*) in *Confessions*, in which Augustine, as we saw in chapter I, laments the daily temptations of the delights of foods and drinks, Heidegger concludes: “Again, a characteristic meditation intervenes and urges toward what is decisive” (PRL 160). Heidegger interprets Augustine’s struggle with the temptations of worldly goods as an attempt to not let the world turn him away from what is authentic and decisive in existence. When Augustine thus describes how the need for food deceives me, seeking to exploit an uncertainty in me that wants me to enjoy food beyond the necessary and for the sake of indulgence alone, Heidegger reads this as the pleasures of food seeking to cover up this fundamental uncertainty;

One’s own uncertainty is exploited for the sake of comfort. – It is the facticity in which I maintain myself and give [myself] ‘existence’ which pushes itself into my ‘authentic’ existing. Uncertainty, danger, possibility... ‘Conflict’.
Uncertainty of the decision... (PRL 160)

Heidegger approves of Augustine’s asceticism insofar as it maintains a *struggle*, an uncertainty that preserves a fundamental and authentic *conflict* at the center of existence. To

allow oneself to rest comfortably in the pleasures of the everyday is to cover over and turn away from this essential strife. Derrida notes how essential this idea of strife is to Heidegger: “*Polemos* (war)...means this unity of unveiling and dissimulation as movement of history” (Derrida 2016, 199). History is moved by the struggle of different forces and their determinations, so that the progress of humanity itself depends on conflict and war. This is the uncomfortable reality human beings turn away from in their pursuit of happiness and a comfortable life.

I take note of this because of the Levinasian analysis to follow in the coming chapters, for it is here that Levinas presents his challenge to Heidegger and the philosophical tradition he summarizes. Two quotes from the opening of the preface to *Totality and Infinity* will suffice to demonstrate that Levinas is very much aware of the Nietzschean and Heideggerian insights we have discussed in the above. First off, on morality: “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality” (TI 21). Is morality, as Nietzsche claims, a trickery? A deceitful force? Or is the ethical imperative sincere? It is crucial to figure this out, especially for the next point;

We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real...The trial by force is the test of the real. (TI 21)

Philosophers from long ago has interpreted the unfolding of history as an essential struggle between competing forces, with no ‘outside’ or ‘otherwise’ to pose an alternative to war. Ethics itself becomes reduced here to a force at play in this eternal conflict. This is the seemingly self-evident philosophical truth that Levinas seeks to challenge with his own ethical philosophy.

Crucially, Levinas’ analysis of *enjoyment* plays a decisive role in this project. It is an analysis that, as I have foreshadowed, converges with Nietzsche’s analysis of the noble evaluation when it comes to the affirmation of life as valuable in itself, without the need for an external justification. It furthermore converses with Nietzsche’s philosophy by positing a relationship between immanence and transcendence that is not oppositional. Both these aspects are of course of decisive importance to this thesis.

In this context, however, what I want to emphasize is one thing Levinas does not share with Nietzsche and Heidegger, namely his affirmation of the *complacency* of life. For Levinas, the everydayness of a comfortable life is far from an inauthentic flight from the ‘harsh truth’ of being, but is, in a sense, the meaning of life. Human life is love of life, which comes to expression in the very human tendency to decorate and beautify the world we live in. We do not simply live life, we celebrate it! The garden that Nietzsche and Heidegger opposes is therefore embraced by Levinas. It is a comfortable resort, a haven I have made *pleasant* by ornamenting it in order to make it an enjoyable space to live in. Life in the garden is no lie to Levinas, but the sincere enjoyment of a life that is *at home* in the world. We are at home in the world – this is Levinas’ position against Heidegger and all philosophies that agree with him at this point.

But how, then, does Levinas understand that uncertainty and indecisiveness which opens up for change and transformation in history? How does he reckon with the seemingly true insight that man is an unfinished animal that continues to wrestle with the question of how to determine itself? For Nietzsche and Heidegger, this is the authentic strife at the bottom of being that ‘the life in the garden’ is a turning-away from. For Levinas, the complacency of life in the garden is not inauthentic, but sincerely enjoyable. Life is, in one sense, nothing more than life in the garden. But this life is interrupted by the *other human being* who bothers me, disturbs the complacency of my life. It is the ethical interruption of the Other that makes humanity an unfinished project, that sustains the life of the questionability that both opens the possibility of determinations while simultaneously preventing them from stagnating.

There is therefore a critique of complacency in Levinas’ work as well, for a complacent attitude can certainly cover over my responsibility to others. But importantly, complacency does not cover up this responsibility because it is inauthentic. Happiness is not insincere; *there is simply more to life than happiness, namely ethics or transcendence*. And for that reason, Levinas’ philosophy does not forbid a return to complacency and comfort, which remains the ultimate end of life. Enjoyment and transcendence are not opposites; transcendence *transcends* the enjoyment of life, which remains sufficient unto itself.

Chapter III – The Development of the Analysis of Enjoyment in the early Levinas

In the two last preceding chapters, we have explored how the ascetics of the early Church and Nietzsche understood the relation between immanence and transcendence. The ascetics argued that turning oneself towards transcendence required a turning-away from worldly enjoyment. Proximity to the Transcendent and attachment to the world are diametrically opposed, and a detachment from earthly pleasures is thus necessary. Nietzsche, more drastically, argued that ‘transcendence’ is nothing but the hostility towards the world by those who suffer more from it than they enjoy it. For Nietzsche, the ‘turn-towards’ transcendence is simply a deceptive gesture meant to hide the more fundamental fact of one’s desire to flee from reality.

For both, the relation between immanence and transcendence is thought as an opposition; either as the conflict between my pilgrimage towards transcendence and the seductive temptations of worldly immanence (Augustine), or because ‘transcendence’ is nothing but the negation of immanence borne out of a hostility towards life (Nietzsche). They also converge on the role enjoyment plays in these operations. Because enjoyment constitutes a positive affirmation of my attachment to the world, hostility towards and abstaining from enjoyment becomes the ultimate expression of my opposition to immanence, whether in view of a real transcendence or not.

We now turn towards the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, the protagonist of this thesis, and his analysis of enjoyment and its relation with transcendence. It is in Levinas’s philosophy that we find, I argue, a way to understand the relation between immanence and transcendence that does not determine them as opposites. Crucially, this is achieved in large part due to Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment. For whereas Augustine argued that life in the world is a pilgrimage towards our true home (God), Levinas argues that the phenomenon of enjoyment testifies to the fact that we are *at home in the world*; our relationship with transcendence refers to something beyond the question of where I am at home.

More precisely, this is what Levinas will conclude in his *mature* analysis of enjoyment, which commences with the publication of his first major work, *Totality and*

Infinity. The analysis of that work is the topic of the next chapter. In this chapter, we will be tracking the development of Levinas' original thought in the earlier works preceding *Totality and Infinity*. This will be necessary to track how Levinas' understanding of enjoyment develops. It will furthermore be necessary in order to trace two other related topics, namely the question of *subjectivity* and what I will call *the critique of philosophy of finitude*.

All of these three topics will furthermore be juxtaposed with another element of Levinas' philosophy that is there from the beginning of his original thought, namely its engagement with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. We saw in the last chapter that Heidegger is able to unite Augustine and Nietzsche in their antagonism against the complacency of life in the garden, which Heidegger sees as a flight-from the essential strife that existence authentically is. This is connected with the fact that Heidegger, like Augustine, does not believe we are at home in the world. While Levinas inherits much from his former teacher, he nevertheless seeks to overcome Heidegger by positing that we are in fact at home in the world. This question of being or not being at home in the world is one that is intimately linked with the themes of subjectivity, finitude and enjoyment.

1. Finitude and Complacency

a) The development of Levinas' philosophy

Before going into more detailed analyses of Levinas' earlier works, we need a sense of the overarching development of his thought, a topic on which there are differing opinions in the commentary literature. The very first works written by Levinas were exegetical works on the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, like *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (1930) and 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology' (1932), in which a clear enthusiasm for Heidegger's philosophy is visible. The works with which this chapter is occupied announce the beginning of Levinas' original thought, and testify to a need to depart from Heidegger (Peperzak 1993, 12). When seeking to understand the development Levinas' thought goes through in these earlier works, the focus has unsurprisingly mainly been on the topic of transcendence. Most commentators agree that Levinas' later works are the fruition of a seed that is visible already from his earliest original works, especially from *On Escape* (1935) and onwards. What they argue is that Levinas' philosophy begins already in its earliest stages as a search for transcendence, and that this search follows his thinking until its full fruition in the later works (e.g. Rolland 2003, 3/Bernasconi 2005, 101/Critchley 2015, 27/Marion 2019, 9/Thomassen 2017, 33). While Levinas uses other denominations than

‘transcendence’ in earlier works – such as “the need for *excedence*” (*OE* 54) –, the goal of ‘getting out of being’, of finding that which transcends being in general, remains continuous, as do certain definitive traits used to describe transcendence (such as a ‘need or desire that cannot be satisfied’). Levinas’ search for transcendence begins as a “pure demand” (Rolland 2003, 4) for such an outside or alternative to being, a search that guides Levinas’ thinking and leads to the discoveries of the later works.

Commentators disagree, however, on the question of whether a significant shift takes place regarding how Levinas thinks transcendence with the transition to his mature thought with *Totality and Infinity*. Robert Bernasconi for example argues that the discovery of *ethics* as the true meaning of transcendence was a surprise for Levinas, so that “Like Columbus, he set foot on a continent different from the one he was looking for” (Bernasconi 2005, 101). Ethics turned out to be the perfect fit for the formal notion of transcendence that Levinas had been developing, but the young Levinas was not aware of this when developing the notion in his earlier works. Moreover, the discovery of transcendence as ethics did not only find a suitable hand for an already fitted glove, but implied a change in how transcendence ought to be thought (Bernasconi 2005, 115). On the other end, others argue that ethics and sociality were topics present much earlier on (Thomassen 2017, 34). Already in *Existence and Existents* we find reference to the idea that what is beyond Being is the Good (*EE* 15&23), and both that work and *Time and the Other* includes discussions of the Other and sociality. The transition to the ‘mature thought’ of *Totality and Infinity* would then not imply a shift in how transcendence was thought, but more like a more elaborate explication of an already introduced theme.

Both sides agree that the later works accomplish a task that was set out in the earlier, but they disagree on whether the accomplishment meant a rethinking of the task. The question is, in a sense, whether *Totality and Infinity* accomplished the thinking of an escape or exit from being, the possibility of which the earliest works were only capable to formulate preliminary, or if the transition to *Totality and Infinity* meant that transcendence is no longer thought in terms of escape or exit; in other words, if thinking transcendence as ethics is different from thinking it as an exit or escape. I tend to agree with the latter. While the formal structure of transcendence was present in most aspects from the beginning, the concretization of that structure in *Totality and Infinity* changes the character and significance of transcendence. I will, however, argue this not with a discussion centered around transcendence itself. Rather, I will show how a focused discussion on the analysis of

enjoyment in Levinas, and its development from the earlier to the later works, demonstrates not only that such a shift in the thinking of transcendence takes place, but also why this change only becomes possible through a change in the analysis of enjoyment.

For enjoyment is also a topic that is present in Levinas from the very beginning. This is evident from, among other things, the presence of a discussion of the Platonic theory of pleasure in almost all his major works (e.g. *OE* 62-63, *EE* 39, *TI* 114-116). We saw in the introduction how Levinas' analysis of enjoyment challenged the Platonic theory of pleasure, but the first time Levinas references Plato's theory, he in fact agrees with it. This testifies to the fact that analysis of enjoyment goes through a development which entails a decisive shift from its earliest interpretations. I identify three different stages of the analysis, where enjoyment goes from being interpreted as disappointment (*On Escape*), then as compensation (*Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*), and finally as happiness (*Totality and Infinity*).¹¹

In this chapter, we will be dealing with four works prior to *Totality and Infinity*. More precisely, we will be dealing with 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', *On Escape*, *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*. The reason for this is, on the one hand, to trace the development of the analysis of enjoyment itself. On the other hand, however, it is necessary because of two other topics that develop alongside the analysis of enjoyment. These are the abovementioned topics of *subjectivity* and what I will call Levinas' *critique of philosophies of finitude*. It is necessary to unpack the development of these topics alongside that of enjoyment because all these three topics will become intertwined in Levinas' mature analysis of enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity*. This trifold development is furthermore what, I intend to show, allows Levinas to think the relation between immanence and transcendence in a non-oppositional manner. It is therefore of the utmost importance to the present thesis.

b) Subjectivity and the Critique of the philosophies of finitude

The first thing we must do to understand the topic of subjectivity and the critique of philosophies of finitude is how they relate to another generally acknowledged topic in

¹¹ But am I justified in calling this three stages of the same analysis when the earlier works discuss 'pleasure' (*plaisir*) whereas the later works discusses 'enjoyment' (*jouissance*)? I argue that I am justified precisely in virtue of the abovementioned references Levinas makes to the Platonic theory of pleasure, which demonstrate that, while using different words, Levinas is invoking the same phenomenon

Levinas' thought, namely his critique of ontology. It is a well-recognized notion that Levinas' philosophy contains a critique of ontology. The essence of this critique is that a philosophy that only recognizes ontology makes the thought of the transcendent Other possible. Levinas eclipses ontological philosophy by placing ethics as first philosophy. This broaches over the issue too quickly, however, failing to recognize that Levinas' critique of ontology entails a rethinking of ontology; for ethics can be first philosophy *only within a certain ontology*. In other words, there is a *certain* conception of ontology that necessarily leads to the neutralization of the Other. It is, as Raoul Moati argues in his recently published *Levinas and the Night of Being*, a question of catching sight of "a transcendence hitherto unnoticed within the fully developed work of being" (Moati 2017, xvi). As I intend to show, the critique of the philosophies of finitude constitutes one element of the Levinasian rethinking of ontology.

Another crucial element is the question of subjectivity. As Moati also notes, a correct understanding of how Levinas thinks transcendence in *Totality and Infinity* depends on a thorough understanding of the way in which that work defines subjectivity, a condition Moati argues has been overlooked in the commentary literature (Moati 2017, 182). It is thus important to note that the theme of subjectivity is also one Levinas was occupied with since the beginning of his original thought (Capili 2011, 677). More precisely, Levinas concern with subjectivity is intimately tied to the critique of philosophies of finitude.

What, then, is this philosophy of finitude that Levinas criticizes? It concerns a certain way to determine the subject as finite, and furthermore a way to determine the relation between the finite subject and its infinite source, which will have determined it as finite. This is closely related to the tendency of thinking immanence and transcendence as opposites. Levinas criticizes the philosophy of finitude for having determined the relation between the finite subject and Infinity in terms "of unity which is affirmed from Parmenides to Spinoza to Hegel" (*TI* 102). The separation between the finite subject and its infinite source is interpreted as a broken unity. To be a finite subject is therefore to be lacking the Infinite, and the distance that separates the creature from its Creator is the distance of the fall. The yearning for transcendence becomes the desire to transcend the limits of the faulty, worldly existence in which we find ourselves – a quest for re-unification. We recognize this motif from Augustine and his delineation of worldly existence as a pilgrimage towards God, who is our true home to which our restless hearts yearn to return; but we also find it in Plato, who interprets erotic love as the nostalgic desire of the soul to return to the heavens where it once saw the Idea of Beauty in its pure form (*Phaedrus* 247a-248e). In both cases, finite subjectivity signifies a

tarnished unity, a fallen, lowly and limited state of being, whereas transcendence signifies a desire to overcome these limits and be re-united with the Infinite. The separation between them is interpreted as the fall itself.

To determine separation as a fall is to set immanence and transcendence in opposition to each other, for to be an immanent and finite being can have no positive meaning on its own according to this schema. To be finite means to be in a state of being-limited, and this status only gains its meaning from the Perfect state to be achieved in transcendence, where these limits are overcome. To be finite is thus simply the opposite of the Infinite. An immanence yearning to transcend its limits is an immanence that owes its meaning to what it is not – immanence is determined as not-yet-transcendent.

As Bernasconi notes, it was from Heidegger that Levinas first received the idea that “concern with transcendence, as communion with an infinite being, had to be abandoned” (Bernasconi 2005, 102). Heidegger had already realized that finitude had been historically interpreted as a severed relation to the Infinite source that would ground it. In contrast, Heidegger thinks the finitude of Dasein *without the Infinite*. Finitude is not finite in relation to an Infinite, but paradoxically to its own finitude. It is the nothingness at the heart of human existence – the opacity of our origins, the falling-away of the world in anxiety, our not-being-at-home in the world and our being-towards-death – that is both its primary concern but also the wellspring of its existence, which propels it forth into the world.

Heidegger thus thinks the finitude of Dasein without any relation to Infinity. In a strange turn of events, therefore, Heidegger continues to draw on the Augustinian interpretation of worldliness without its reference to God. In *On The Essence of Ground*, Heidegger explores Augustine’s distinction between the meaning of ‘world’ understood as ‘creation in general’ and ‘worldly people who delight and dwell in the world’, and sees in it a recognition that ‘the world’ is not simply an object opposed to which stands a subject, but “the decisive ‘how’ in accordance with which human Dasein assumes a stance and maintains itself in relations to beings” (EG 113). Augustine’s interpretation of worldliness does not determine the world as a thing, but gives us an analysis of our being-in-the-world, albeit in a rudimentary fashion.

For Heidegger, it is only insofar as Augustine remains in an ascetic *struggle* with the world and its alluring pleasures that he will have been able to retain this insight. This follows first from what we saw above, namely that the being of Dasein existence is determined by its finitude, its not-being-at-home and being-towards-death. Dasein holds within it the possibility

to relate to its own being either authentically or inauthentically, and it most frequently does so inauthentically, which entails losing itself to the world; “Dasein tends to understand its own being (*Sein*) in terms of *the* being (*Seienden*) to which it is essentially, continually, and most closely related – the ‘world’” (*BT* 15-16). This is the average everydayness of Dasein, in which it relates to its own being “in the mode of fleeing *from* it and of forgetting *it*” (*BT* 43), that is inauthentically. It furthermore flees from itself through entanglement/falling prey (*Verfallen*) with/to the world in the everyday, where it loses itself. It is thus insofar as Augustine refrains from losing himself to the churning of the everyday and its worldly pleasures, and rather retains himself in a *struggle* with the everyday, that he will, for Heidegger, stay clear of the dispersion into the various pulls of the world and remain gathered, collected, and thus turned-towards that which is decisive and essential. It is thus no surprise that Heidegger interprets pleasure as belonging to the inauthenticity of Dasein (*BT* 42).

In the same way that Heidegger thinks the finitude of Dasein without the Infinite, therefore, he also thinks the *fallenness* of existence without humanity ever having ‘fallen from’ anywhere. To be sure, this fallenness does not have the same normative implications it had for Augustine, as is also the case for the distinction between authentic/inauthentic in general. Nevertheless, with regards to the above, we can still ask; does Heidegger not continue the tradition of understanding *finitude as lack*? Finite Dasein lacks a secure ground for its existence, and stands face to face with its ultimate limit – death and nothingness. Finite Dasein is thus both fundamentally constituted by its lacks and limits, and also finds these limits and lacks its primary concern. Dasein’s ecstatic transcendence – its thrownness and projections – follows from this finitude and the concern with it: its authentic futural projection follows from the awareness of and concern with the possibility of its impossibility, its death.

For Levinas, Heidegger’s notion of Dasein corresponds with a general tendency in the contemporary thought of his time to think the subject as finite and ecstatic. It is a trend he varyingly refers to as “Modern philosophy” (*EE* 73 & 97), “contemporary philosophy” (*TO* 58) or “philosophers of existence” (*TI* 111), but what remains consistent across these references is the notion that contemporary thought understands the subject as essentially structured by its ecstasy, both in a temporal and spatial sense. Subjectivity is not to be defined by the way in which it is gathered in its self-presence in the present, but rather by the fact that it is ecstatic, temporally and spatially beyond and ahead of itself. It is displaced by its ‘being-over-there’ as much as it is ‘here’, and broken up by a past and future it cannot integrate into

its present. This is furthermore a notion of the subject that determines it as essentially finite, for since it is always behind and ahead of itself, it cannot fully master its presence and present but is limited by an environment it cannot entirely distinguish from itself, and a past and future it cannot integrate. The general trend Levinas identifies, then, is a notion of subjectivity where the themes of ecstasy and finitude are interlinked. Subjectivity is therefore not finite because its unity with Infinity has been broken, but because it is broken up by the finitude of space and time itself.

Levinas accepts the critique of the traditional understanding of the separation between the finite and Infinite as a broken unity, but he also protests against the modern understanding of ecstatic subjectivity as a finitude without infinity, an understanding he believes sacrifices the “very subjectivity” (*EE* 97) of the subject. In question is not whether the subject is defined by factors external to it, which Levinas also acknowledges. It is rather a question of whether the *essence of subjectivity* is defined by its ecstasy (as the moderns believe) or by its *independency and sovereignty*. Levinas sets himself apart from his own contemporaries – and also *our* contemporaries, I believe¹² – by arguing for the latter; “Levinas’ account of the existent explicitly aims to *counter* the characteristic forms of the ‘dissolution of subject’ that he identifies with much of modern philosophy” (Boothroyd 2009, 153). In contrast to thinking the subject as always behind or ahead of itself, Levinas determines subjectivity as *a beginning in itself*. The essence of subjectivity is not to be located in its spatial and temporal displacement; in contrast, it “consists in being the *subject* of its own becoming” (*EE* 97). This means to understand the subject as primarily an independent sovereignty in existence, defined essentially not by being situated in a (temporal and spatial) environment it extends into, but rather in its ability to *master* its distance to those surroundings. While Levinas is aware that he cannot accomplish this with “a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian” (*EE* 19), one part of his “profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy” (*EE* 19) is a re-thinking of subjectivity as characterized primarily by a self-sufficient interiority rather than as ecstatic finitude.

As with his search for transcendence, Levinas’ quest for an understanding of subjectivity defined in view of its sovereign independency vis-à-vis the world begins as an aspiration that he does not yet have the capacity to think properly within his first publications.

¹² I would argue that this is what is generally meant with the popular term ‘situatedness’, which seeks to emphasize that the subject always already finds itself in a situation that exceeds it and is prior to it.

It goes through multiple developments, but importantly for our concern, *it finds its completion in the analysis of the complacency of the enjoying ego*. This happens with the analysis of enjoyment as happiness in *Totality and Infinity*, which achieves the thought of a subject (ego) that is self-sufficient rather than finite, and which accomplishes an interiority rather than being ecstatic. It is furthermore the achievement of this thinking of subjectivity which allows Levinas to think separation and thus transcendence differently than as a broken unity.

I have focused on one strand of Levinas' criticism of ontology, clustered around finitude and broken union, but there is another strand of this critique that, namely Levinas' critique of ontology as primarily a concern with the imperialism of the totality, which makes the thought of the absolutely Other impossible. How do they relate? The key insight here is to understand that the critique of ontology and the critique of the philosophy of finitude are intimately linked here, *for an imperialistic ontology is one which is incapable of interpreting that which is other to it otherwise than as lack*. This is what unites the traditional and contemporary philosophers of finitude, namely an interpretation of finitude as a 'state of lacking' or 'state of being limited', regardless of whether they think there is something beyond that limit which can satisfy that lack or not.

When Levinas arrives at his mature philosophy in *Totality and Infinity*, he opens it by stating that "The true life is absent.' But we are in the world" (TI 33). This is an assertion that counters both the traditional and modern philosophers of finitude. Levinas holds that there is transcendence, there is something beyond or absent, but it is not opposed to nor determines me as finite in the sense of lack. I am, as a subject, not lacking anything, but at home in a worldly life that is agreeable to me. Rather than lack, it is from this position of sufficiency that Levinas asks questions about transcendence.

In this chapter, we will untangle the road that leads to *Totality and Infinity* and its mature analysis of enjoyment, a road that includes not only the development of the analysis of enjoyment, but also the interrelated themes we have discussed above. This concerns above all the critique of philosophies of finitude, which determines subjectivity and its relation to the world inherently as lack, and Levinas' notion of subjectivity as a 'beginning in the self', which counter the ecstatic notion of subjectivity of the philosophers of finitude. Levinas understood from early on that the philosophy of finitude would have to be overcome in order to think transcendence correctly, but it was only much later that he realized that the analysis of enjoyment was the right candidate to do it. In juxtaposing the developments of these

themes therefore – enjoyment and critique of finitude – we will see both how they are kept apart in the early works, but also how they fuse in the later work to come.

2. ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’ and *On Escape*

a) ‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’ (1934)

Levinas’ concern with the notion of a separated subject, independent of its surroundings, appears very early on, even if it at first was more in the sense of what has been lost.

‘Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism’ is in an obituary to the idea of a freedom of the spirit over and against the world, the “feeling that man is absolutely free in his relations with the world and the possibilities that solicit action from him” (*RPH* 64). Tracking the development of this conception of the freedom of the spirit through the idea of remorse in Judaism and salvation through the Cross in Christianity – both ideas which posit that a subject can be redeemed of its enchainment to history – Levinas ties the link to modern philosophy and the liberal ideology it underpins: “The whole philosophical and political thought of modern times tends to place the human spirit on a plane that is superior to reality, and so creates a gulf between man and the world” (*RPH* 66). There is an independence of the spirit vis-à-vis reality, and this is what constitutes freedom: the self is not immediately determined by its surroundings, but has a relational freedom to them. It has thus the possibility of deciding on how to relate to what impresses itself on it. In modern philosophy, that part of the spirit which has this freedom is reason: freedom mediates one’s relation to the world through (rational/moral/aesthetic) judgement. “In place of liberation through grace there is autonomy, but the Judeo-Christian leitmotif of freedom pervades this autonomy” (*RPH* 66).

Marxism challenges the autonomy of judgement by interpreting it as primarily produced by material conditions (*RPH* 67), but also retains it in the possibility of freeing “oneself of the fatalism entailed by that situation” (*RPH* 67). Marxism signals a certain rupture, but does not completely break with the idea of the freedom of the spirit.

It is however the collapse of the difference between the self and the body that for Levinas more than anything poses a threat to the European notion of human freedom. The Western spirit has always been discontent with the body, precisely because it appeared for it as a chain (*RPH* 69). This is certainly one aspect of the ascetic tradition. While much of modern and late-modern philosophy has prided itself on the recovery of the dignity of the body, Levinas is here working in the opposite direction, identifying that the dangers of a full identification with one’s body is the new conception of authenticity and loyalty found in

Hitlerism, where “To be truly oneself...means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining” (*RPH* 69). Here, the only authentic ‘free’ choice is to accept how one is always already determined prior to one’s own initiative. The only thing one can and should do, according to Hitlerism, is to carry one’s determinations with pride; to try to establish a critical relation with them is simply a frivolous illusion of the confused liberal mind.

Despite the emphasis on freedom of the spirit, this text is not, as Simon Critchley points out, a defense of liberalism, but rather an attempt to move beyond its failure: “How might one respond to Hitlerism beyond liberalism? That is Levinas’ question here” (Critchley 2015, 31). The point is not to safeguard liberalism from the threat of Hitlerism, but rather to show that Hitlerism poses a challenge that liberalism is unable to meet. For the idea of a separated, free floating subject loses its legitimacy also *due to its distance*; the subject that can always flippantly retreat from any confrontation or commitment appears disingenuous (*RPH* 69-70). The light-hearted irony of degenerate liberalism never commits whole-heartedly to an ideal or takes anything too serious, but always reserves the right to be skeptic and ironic. In the face of this inauthenticity, Hitlerism presents itself as the affirmation of an authentic bond to the ‘blood and soil of our ancestors’.

What Levinas is therefore after is to attain what is admirable in liberalism without returning to a naïve philosophical standpoint that sees the subject as if floating above the world (Critchley 2015, 60). The admirable legacy of liberalism is the idea of an independent, separated subject, not immediately defined and determined by its enchainment to a body and a world, but capable of retaining a distance to it. This subjectivity, however, must take account of “our enrootedness, our being riveted in the factual life of the world” (Critchley 2015, 33). Heidegger plays a crucial role here, being the one who has uncovered the pre-theoretical enrootedness of Dasein which makes a return to a Kantian or Husserlian notion of a purely theoretical subject impossible. The independence and sovereignty of the theoretical subject cannot be separated from the pre-reflective situatedness in which it finds itself, its being-in-the-world.

According to Critchley, Levinas therefore accepts the Heideggerian challenge of beginning with a subject enrooted and riveted to the world. While I agree with Critchley that Levinas passes through Heidegger’s notion of facticity to arrive at his own philosophical alternative (Critchley 2015, 59), I contest the way in which this happens at one crucial point. Critchley postulates that “The question Levinas’ work poses is the following: *can there be a*

drama beyond the tragedy of finitude?” (Critchley 2015, 25), which, however, is only half true. While Levinas does believe that Heidegger’s philosophy leaves us in a tragic situation, this is not the tragedy of *finitude*, but of *presence*. This is the tragedy of enchainment that is revealed by pain:

in the impasse of physical pain, is it not the case that the sick man experiences the indivisible simplicity of his being when he turns over in his bed of suffering to find a position that gives him peace? Can we not say that analysis reveals in pain the spirit's opposition to this pain, a rebellion or refusal to remain within it and consequently an attempt to go beyond it? But is it not the case that this attempt is characterized from the very beginning as desperate? Does not the rebelling spirit remain ineluctably locked within pain? And is it not this despair that constitutes the very foundation of pain? (RPH 68)

Those who wish to establish an authentic and non-ambiguous coherence between spirit and body will not wish to contemplate on the *struggle* inherent to pain, where pain is experienced as pain because of one’s desperate hope to be free from it, revealing thus a conflict at the bottom of our seemingly simple embodiedness (RPH 68). It is this struggle that Levinas elaborates further in his essay *On Escape* – a struggle, however, not characterized by *finitude*, but by the *full presence of being*. This is the first necessary step to move beyond the philosophies of finitude, for it will show that the drama of the subject corresponds not to its limits and lacks, but rather to how the subject is encumbered by its own self-sufficiency.

b) *On Escape*

On Escape continues the analysis of pain and the relation between the body and the self above through a discussion of the identity of the I, which simply in virtue of existing as itself reveals not a formal tautology, but a drama: “In the identity of the I, the identity of being reveals its nature as enchainment, for it appears in the form of suffering and invites us to escape” (OE 55). There is a duality in the identity of the I in relation to itself, coming to expression in the fact that this situation is experienced as desperate; it seeks beyond itself due to the very fact that it is chained to itself.

The experience of nausea is a privileged site to catch sight of this phenomena, for there one experiences simultaneously the wish to be relieved of it and the impossibility of

getting out of it. Of course, once the nausea has passed I can look back and say ‘it has passed’, and one who already knows this can say to herself, while being nauseous, that it will pass. But this says very little of the phenomenality of ‘being nauseous’ itself; in its own moment, the bodily experience of nausea is both ‘I want to get away from this’ and ‘I cannot get away from this’. One undergoes nausea unwillingly, and moreover, the fact that I want to get away but cannot get away is what makes up the experience of nausea. This experience can be modified by *a posteriori* experiences, but they would be modifications upon an original phenomena. In nausea, what concerns me is the inevitable burden of having to continue being nauseous.

More importantly, however, this experience reveals how an existent is bound to its existence. The distinction between existent/existence is one Levinas inherits from Heidegger and the latter’s ontological difference, with the term ‘existence’ referring to Being (*Sein*), and ‘existent’ to being (*seiende*). While there is a difference between the existent and its existence, however, the analysis of nausea also reveals how this difference, in a certain sense, collapses; “For what constitutes the relationship between nausea and us is nausea itself” (*OE* 68). In nausea, there is no difference between what I experience and the existence of what I am experiencing. Nausea exists in and as my experience of it; the statements ‘experiencing nausea’ and ‘being nauseous’ are synonymous. Furthermore, nausea is no voluntary daydreaming of the mind, but a state in which I unwillingly subsist in; nausea persists against my desire that it will end. Nausea thus reveals the situation of me being bound by the very presence of myself to myself, the existence of the existent’s existence in its pure self-presence. It is, however, a tense identity, for the experience bears also in it “a refusal to remain there, an effort to get out” (*OE* 66). The question of the presence of “being qua being” or “pure being” (*OE* 56) – Levinas’ pursuit in this text – is thus revealed as weight and enchainment that simultaneously points to a (possible) outside in the need for escape. It is thus beginning with the perfect self-presence of being that it becomes possible for Levinas to give a provisional formulation of transcendence.

On Escape contains Levinas’ first explicit treatment of our three main themes: the critique of the philosophy of finitude, enjoyment and transcendence. Their significance can only be understood when we see how these topics relate to each other. His critique of the philosophy of finitude, which we will begin with, takes place in tandem with a close but critical dialogue with Heidegger. It is for example impossible not to detect the implicit reference to Heidegger in the following quote: “The I that wants to get out of itself does not

flee itself as a limited being. It is not the fact that life is the choice and, consequently, the sacrifice of numerous possibilities that will never be realized that incites us to escape” (*OE* 55). In other words, the need for escape, explicated above, arises not due to the limitation on my being of having to choose between my possibilities for being, and thus sacrificing and losing many such possibilities; it is the pure presence of being that incites this need, as in the case of nausea. It is not a concern for the beings I can lose, but claustrophobia over a lack of distance from being.

The difference Levinas is suggesting here is between a concern *for* my existence, due to a limitation on it or the possibility of losing it, contra a concern *with* existence in its general presence, thus existence qua existence. It is a question of whether the human tragedy is a tragedy *within* finite being, where I am concerned with the beings that I lack, or *with* being in its full presence, where my concern is not about ‘some other’ being but being itself. Levinas’ argument is that the ‘need for escape’ belongs to the latter category; this “need will allow us to discover, not a limitation of that being that desires to surpass its limits in order to enrich and fulfill itself, but rather the purity of the fact of being, which already looks like an escape” (*OE* 57). In other words, the tautological fact of pure being is of itself revolting, meaning that the ‘need for escape’ here elucidated cannot be the need for another existent that would relieve the suffering subject, or a less limited existence, but a need that desires beyond being in general.

Levinas thus distinguishes himself from the philosophers of existence by locating the troublesome quandaries of human life not in being’s absence, in its lack or in its opacity, but rather in its pure presence, in the very event of its self-positing; “the presence of being as such...is an experience of its powerlessness...That powerlessness therefore appears neither as a limit to being nor as the expression of a finite being” (*OE* 69). It is not the fact that I am a finite being that cannot comprehend my mysterious origins, nor that there are regions of being that are closed off to me; it is in virtue of existence itself that I am unsettled.

Existential philosophy locates the fundamental worry of human existence in its finitude: it is the limits of existence, its lacks and inevitable end that concerns the human being. Levinas is pursuing an idea going in the opposite direction. Not only is he not interpreting the presence rather than the absence as the fundamental worry of the human being, but he is furthermore locating the original relation to being not in the paradoxical possibility of a finite being, which due to its limitations and inescapable end has an open relation to itself, but rather in the perfect and complete self-positing of being to itself; “What

is, is. The fact of being is always already perfect... That there might have been a birth or a death in no way affects the absolute character of an assertion that refers only to itself" (*OE* 57). The presence of being to itself, or the identity between the existent and its existence, is perfect of itself, for "The very fact of existence refers only to itself" (*OE* 56-57). There is nothing lacking here, and the goal of Levinas' essay is therefore "to show that there is in need something other than a lack" (*OE* 56). Need does not necessarily, or perhaps even primarily refer to the finite character of human life, where the human being is defined in terms of what is lacking or absent from it.

The need for escape – the preliminary definition of transcendence, or exceedance, that this work operates with – is thus only intelligible once we move beyond the tragedy of finitude and grasp the tragedy of enchainment instead. It is because Levinas is able to locate a trouble in life that does not arise from a limit or lack within being, but which arises rather from bare existence qua existence, that he is able to distinguish a need that is not a need *for* some being, but beyond being altogether.

It is within this context that Levinas' first discussion on enjoyment takes place. It begins with a discussion of the satisfaction of needs, which would seem to point to an interpretation of the human condition in view of its limited nature, where human need is the satisfaction of some lack. Levinas argues against this on the basis of two observations.

Firstly, the experience of suffering a need does not point to a determinate object, but is of itself indeterminate (*OE* 58). Levinas is of course aware that we often do have determinate objects in mind when in need; the awareness of such objects, however, does not belong to the experience itself, but follows from "extrinsic experiences and lessons" (*OE* 59) that teach us how a need can be met. The question of the internal unfolding of need itself has, however, then not been answered, and Levinas argues that the correct description of its phenomenality is the pure "attempt to get out without knowing where one is going" in which the "ignorance qualifies the very essence of this attempt" (*OE* 59). In suffering need, one wishes for this suffering to stop, to get out of it.

Secondly, "the satisfaction of a need does not destroy it. Not only are needs reborn, but disappointment also follows their satisfaction" (*OE* 59). The satisfaction of a need does not meet the demand made at the bottom of need itself; satisfaction is fundamentally inadequate to need (*OE* 60). That is, what need, according to Levinas, originally asks for – a 'getting out' – does not find its solution in satisfaction, for not only do needs return, but in reaching satisfaction itself, satisfaction disappoints.

In order to argue for this last point, however, Levinas sees it necessary with a more particular analysis of the phenomena of need's satisfaction, pleasure. Pleasure is described by Levinas as procedural in its phenomenality:

Pleasure appears as it develops. It is neither there as a whole, nor does it happen all at once... This is a movement that does not tend toward a goal, for it has no end. It exists wholly in the enlargement of its own amplitude. (OE 61)

Pleasure always seeks more pleasure, and this is what constitutes its phenomenality; pleasure is pleasurable in its continuous enlargement. Therefore, pleasure has the dual characteristics of instantaneous development; it is "nothing less than a concentration in the instant... But it is precisely the instant that is split up in pleasure" (OE 61). While "pain is concentration" (OE 61), that is, a concentration of the instant – the experience of being nailed to the present – pleasure is a swaying of the present, the feeling of one's presence becoming light. In pain, I cannot help but to be in the moment; in pleasure, the moment "loses its solidity and its consistency, and each of its parts is enriched with new potentialities for swooning as the ecstasy intensifies" (OE 61). Enjoyment is an indulging in the present, welcoming new intensifications of this lightness of being, which, *because pure being is here understood essentially as a weight*, is a lightness from being.

It would seem then that pleasure could meet the criteria set by the demand of the need to escape, as a possible getting-out of being, and this is acknowledged by Levinas. He sees in the phenomena of pleasure "so many traits that describe the promise of escape contained in pleasure's essence" (OE 61), because of how it seems to break up the instant rather than conforming us to it. He concludes however that "it is a deceptive escape" (OE 62), for the analysis of its procedural phenomenality reveals that it is pleasure only insofar as it is still developing, that is, always chasing its own fulfillment. The feeling of pleasure is like a promise of getting-out of being, in the lightness that ecstasy brings, but once satisfied, the subject returns to the ineluctable present. This relates to Levinas' general critique of ecstasy. As Critchley has observed: "For Levinas, *ekstasis* always falls back and you find yourself existing once again" (Critchley 2015, 54). Enjoyment pretends to satisfy, but cannot satisfy the need for escape; its essence lies in always remaining at the verge of escape, before returning to the present.

Levinas therefore concludes with his first mention of the Platonic theory of pleasure, noting that “antiquity’s notion of mixed pleasures contains a great part of truth” (OE 62). Pleasure is a mixture not because it is mixed with pain, or because of how it, externally viewed, fits into the long span of a lifetime, but because of its deceptive nature of its own “internal unfolding” (OE 63), which leads necessarily to disappointment. The disappointment that follows pleasure belongs to pleasure, for it follows essentially from the promise that pleasure gives. Promise and disappointment are mixed in pleasure: on its own grounds, enjoyment both sets up and fails to deliver on its promise.

Interestingly, then, Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment begins with him siding with Plato against enjoyment, determining it as essentially disappointing and therefore a mixture of pleasure and pain. This in fact goes together, even more curiously, with an affirmation of asceticism;

What gives the human condition all its importance is precisely this inadequacy of satisfaction to need. The justification of certain ascetic tendencies lies there: the mortifications of fasting are not only agreeable to God; they bring us closer to the situation that is the fundamental event of our being: the need for escape. (OE 60)

In asceticism, I attend to and cultivate the fact that the need for escape is a need and a yearning that no worldly good can satisfy. It testifies to the purity of this need that is not of this world, but beyond it. Furthermore, as a ‘need for escape’, it converges perfectly with Nietzsche’s notion of nihilistic asceticism as the yearning for a “*way out of reality*” (AC 13). Levinas identifies in asceticism the same aspect that Nietzsche identified with nihilistic asceticism; it is not an asceticism aiming at transforming or enhancing some other facet of the world, but which orients itself beyond the world entirely. It is transcendence.

Nietzsche would not accept this, of course, but that is not the point. The point is that Levinas and Nietzsche converge on a recognition of an aspect of asceticism that tends wholly beyond the world, whether it fictitious or not – which is the crucial difference between Nietzsche and Levinas. Their position is therefore different from what Heidegger recognizes in Augustine’s asceticism, for what Heidegger recognizes there is a certain comportment *to the world* rather than a movement that tends beyond it.

For Nietzsche and Levinas, the ascetic need to escape cannot be satisfied with the world. It is therefore by juxtaposing this need to escape and the promise of pleasure to satisfy it that Levinas first arrives at a understanding of our need for transcendence that he will stick with and continue to unfold throughout his work, namely that the need for transcendence is *insatiable*. In *On Escape*, it was demonstrated by showing that pleasure disappoints when it is seen as trying to satisfy the need to escape. What Levinas will discover later is that pleasure only leads to disappointment when we, wrongly, interpret it as a substitute for transcendence. In *On Escape*, enjoyment must be interpreted as deception and disappointment because the distinction between *need* and *desire* has not yet been developed. In *Totality and Infinity*, however, Levinas will distinguish between ‘needs’ and ‘desires’ by arguing that the former are characterized precisely by the fact that they can become satisfied; “The desires one can satisfy resemble metaphysical desire only in the *deception of satisfaction* or in the *exasperation of non-satisfaction* and desire which constitutes voluptuousness itself” (TI 34, emphasis added). It is then the ‘deception of satisfaction’ and the ‘exasperation of non-satisfaction’ which leads Levinas in *On Escape* to himself confuse need with desire, for the true character of desire is revealed in these two insufficiencies, while the true character of *need* is revealed in how it suffices to itself.

It is furthermore in view of this development that we can understand another similar and highly important (dis)continuity in Levinas, namely his rejection of an interpretation of *need as lack*. In *On Escape*, need is not interpreted as lack because it is characterized by an agony over the perfect and complete presence of existence to itself, and is therefore not in need of any existing thing it lacks, but tends rather purely beyond being. Furthermore, the need’s attempt to satiate itself with the world results only in disappointment, demonstrating yet again that this need is not ‘of this world’. Levinas begins from a situation not defined by some original deficiency, some incomprehensible mystery or insurmountable limitation that propagates us into the world; rather, Levinas begins from a present existent for whom nothing is lacking. As we move on, however, we will see that this situation in which ‘nothing is lacking’ will change from *enchainment* to *enjoyment*.

3. Existence and Existents

a) Weariness, Effort and the Present

Existence and Existents (1947) both continues and develops on the themes found in *On Escape*. It furthers the critique against the philosophy of finitude and develops Levinas’

understanding of subjectivity significantly. Here comes, however, also wholly new stages of Levinas' thinking, his famous conception of *il y a*. Furthermore we find, as Magdalene Thomassen puts it, "the first allusions to a path that opens up towards what will later be the first breach in being, signaling that it is in the dimension of sociality that a possibility of exit will emerge" (Thomassen 2017, 39). For my particular interests, it is of decisive importance that the phenomena of enjoyment receives a new interpretation here, one that does not see it as disappointment but appreciates it in its sincerity. But while both the analysis of enjoyment and of transcendence in this work is a step on the ladder towards *Totality and Infinity*, enjoyment still retains a similar *structural* position to what it had in *On Escape*. This is because *Existence and Existents* continues to interpret subjectivity through the lens of enchainment, which means that although enjoyment does not disappoint, it neither goes beyond being a mere *compensation*.

Nevertheless, even if subjectivity is still interpreted as enchainment, the notion of subjectivity also goes through a crucial development in *Existence and Existents*. For it is in this work that Levinas begins to think subjectivity as a *beginning in itself*, a sovereignty that rather than being defined by its ecstasy is defined by the mastery of its self-presence;

[this work] sets out to approach the idea of Being in general in its impersonality so as to then be able to analyze the notion of the present and of position, in which a being, a subject, an existent, arises in impersonal Being, through a hypostasis. (EE 19)

While Levinas remains indebted to Heidegger's ontological difference between Being/existence and being/existent, the Heideggerian priority has been reversed; the analysis does not ask about the existence of the existent, but rather how, from impersonal, anonymous existence, something like an existent could be possible. This possibility is furthermore approached in terms of how a subject acquires a 'present and position' rather than in its thrownness and projection, or in other words, how the subject begins from itself. It is therefore a notion of subjectivity that goes against the trend of defining subjectivity as ecstatic finitude.

Existence and Existents then takes a decisive step with regards to *On Escape*: Levinas is now asking about the possibility of the subject, how a subject arises in and begins from itself. He furthermore connects this possibility with another theme that will only grow in

relevance, and which we mentioned briefly in the introduction; namely the notion of “creation *ex nihilo*” (EE 18). This notion describes the beginning in the self for Levinas, for a self created out of nothing must not only have a cause (being-created), but must also have the possibility of taking on the effect of this cause; “For a being which has a beginning not only must a cause which creates it be found, but also *what in it receives* existence must be explained” (EE 18, my emphasis). The created subject must therefore, paradoxically, be independent of its creator, for having its existence created out of nothing, it alone provides the instant in which this existence can be received and mastered; “in the instant of its upsurge, the instant of creation, an act over its Being, a subject’s mastery over its attribute” (EE 18). Creation *ex nihilo* thus describes the paradoxical way in which a subject that has been created nevertheless begins from itself; “an incomparable event, prior to the participation in existence, an event of birth” (EE 22). This is a notion that *Totality and Infinity* clearly inherits from *Existence and Existents*.

This is, as said, a very paradoxical idea. A new beginning in the self in each instant as the precondition for the existence of that instant? An existent preceding its existence in order to receive it and take it on? What seems as a logical contradiction, however – and the move that follows is quintessential of Levinasian philosophy¹³ –, is according to Levinas already taking place in concrete experience, and thus demonstrable by the phenomenological method: “the truth of this ‘duality’, the effecting of this takeover, are attested to by certain moments in human existence where the adherence to an existent appears like a cleaving” (EE 22). The experience of enchainment, which is lived as a revolt against this enchainment, testifies to the continuous effort of an existent having to take on its existence. We return to themes familiar from *On Escape*, although fatigue and indolence rather than nausea are the phenomena to be investigated (EE 24).

It is the everyday experience of work that each effort is as necessary as the next: “human labor and effort are a way of following the work being done step by step” (EE 32). An automated machine must only be turned on once for it to work automatically until its task is complete or runs out of energy, but human labor is not done in ‘one go’ like this. In

¹³ The type of analysis Levinas is engaging here is what Moati calls “Nocturnal Phenomenology” (Moati 2017, 19) and Tom Sparrow calls “A philosophy of the night” (Sparrow 2013, 13). While they disagree on whether this approach can properly be called phenomenology, the point is the same; the analysis of certain phenomena cannot be done with reference to how these experiences are intelligible to us, but rather in how they overflow and oppose our ordinary forms of access and intelligibility

contrast, every moment of work requires a renewed effort; I continue in my task only insofar as I begin anew in each and every moment of it, taking up my task again and again. This is furthermore not only true of work, but of life in general, where my existence never continues automatically, but requires me to continue to take it on. Fatigue takes place as a tiredness over the inescapable fact of this condemnation: “Weariness is the impossible refusal of this ultimate obligation” (*EE 25*). Fatigue and weariness expresses a hopeless refusal against the necessity of continuing to effort, for although there is no alternative – no ‘way out’ – from my enchainment to existence, this fact still *unwillingly* encumbers me. Weariness is an “aversion to effort” (*EE 25*), an exhaustion at the commitment existence requires of me. It is in this weariness that the duality of the instant reveals itself. The instant is a cleavage because it does not proceed impulsively but binds me to it; but to ‘be bound to’ existence only has sense if I somehow resist this bind i.e. if my being-bound is not simple but conflicted due to my struggle with it. This is what comes to light in the experience of fatigue.

Indolence, an attempted refusal of the instant, attests to this bond even more clearly; “Indolence is essentially tied up with the beginning of an action: the stirring, the getting up” (*EE 26*). The refusal to begin, to get up and take the next step, lies at the bottom the beginning as the simultaneous rebellion against and subservience to the instant. The delay it thus testifies to, however, is what allows us to “catch sight of the operation of assuming which the existence that is taken up already always involves” (*EE 35*). In fatigue and indolence on one end, and in effort on the other, the same phenomena is discovered: the instant is not simple, but complex, as if burdened with itself. The existence of the existent in the instant takes place as a drama, as an event, where an existent must commit to its existence, disclosed in the fatigue over this commitment.

The analysis of the weight and corresponding fatigue of taking on one’s existence reveals the duality of the instant, suspended between the having-to-take-on the weight of existence, and the resistance to this having-to. Reversely, the analysis of the instant reveals the weight of being enchainment to oneself. This is the very opposite of ‘the tragedy of finitude’ that properly belongs to Heidegger’s philosophy:

The concept which appears to preside over the Heideggerian interpretation of human existence is that of existence conceived as ecstasy – which is only possible as an ecstasy toward the end. It consequently situates the tragic

element in existence in this finitude and in the nothingness into which man is thrown insofar as he exists. (EE 19)

It is because Dasein is determined as ecstatic – always moving beyond itself – that its limits become its definitive tragedy. A being defined by such an expansionist projecting will always find itself troubled by its restraints and deficiencies, and thus what Dasein finds ‘evil’ is the limitations of its existence and the anxiety of the possibility of losing its existence: “evil is always defect, that is, deficiency, lack of being: nothingness” (EE 20).¹⁴ The tragedy is that things are going to end.

In contrast, Levinas asks if not the weight of the instant revealed in effort testifies to a different experience at the bottom of human existence:

Concern is not, as Heidegger thinks, the very act of being on the brink of nothingness; it is rather imposed by the solidity of a being that begins and is already encumbered with the excess of itself. (EE 27)

The concern revealed in fatigue and indolence is not that of a finite being, concerned with its limits, but a concern with that minimal presence of existence that cannot be shaken off, that perfect, completed circle signified by the fact that “one is oneself” (EE 28), whose tenseness is derived from the need to, but impossibility of refusing it. Even the victorious existent that completes its projects is still bound to the present of fatigue; it still has to effort in taking up its existence in the following instant. And the tragedy is revealed in weariness, where even the effort to give it up ties the existent to its existence: “its bitter essence is due to the fact that it is a desertion which attests to the contract sealed with existence” (EE 29). The attempt to rebel confirms the bondage.

Against what he sees as the predominant position in the tradition of philosophy, a position Heidegger perhaps is the ultimate expression of, Levinas asks if not “Existence of itself harbors something tragic which is not only there because of its finitude” (EE 20). Contrary to identifying the possible nothingness of one’s existence as the troubling concern, Levinas asks; “Is there some sort of underlying evil in its very positivity?” (EE 20). In other

¹⁴ Is this an allusion to the thought of Augustine? It could be, but it could also not be, for insofar as Augustine defines evil as a lack of *the Good* rather than a lack of being, the Church Father could possibly be quite close to Levinas, because the latter defines the Good as precisely beyond being.

words, could not the pure presence of existence be a horror in itself? This is the possibility Levinas spells out with his notion of *il y a* ('there is'), a notion that he suggests should be compared with Heidegger's notion of anxiety, in order to clarify both their proximity and difference (*EE* 19-20). It is the difference that is of greatest interests to us, however, a difference that concerns the critique of the philosophies of finitude. For whereas Heideggerian anxiety is anxious over its finitude, of how it *lacks* a secure grounding in existence, Levinas' notion of 'there is' describes a paralyzing horror at the inescapable presence of existence.

b) Anxiety and *Il y a* ('there is')

Levinas' notion of 'there is' and Heidegger's notion are in proximity first because they are both meditations on *nothingness*, on those peculiar moments in life where it seems that life has nothing to offer. Attending to existence reduced to its nothingness, however, both philosophers agree that this 'nothingness' is still 'something'. Levinas describes it in this way:

Let us imagine all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness. One cannot put this return to nothingness outside of all events. But what of this nothingness itself?...This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable 'consummation' of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term there is. The there is, inasmuch as it resists personal form, is 'being in general'. (*EE* 57)

There is nothing, but yet this 'nothing' is still 'something', and this 'something' still presses on, refuses to disappear. It is this experience of the 'there is' that reveals 'being in general'; in the anonymous rustling of indeterminate being, being qua being is what impresses itself.

Heidegger's analysis of anxiety purports to reveal something equally fundamental. *Being and Time* sets out to accomplish the analytic of Dasein in order to prepare for the question of the meaning of being (*BT* 17), and the particular attunement of anxiety is supposed to be "The kind of disclosure in which Dasein brings itself before itself" (*BT* 176), in other words, the mood in which Dasein authentically discloses itself. Turning to Heidegger's analysis of anxiety, the similarities with Levinas' analysis of 'there is' emerge:

When anxiety has subsided, in our everyday way of talking we are accustomed to say ‘it was really nothing.’ This way of talking, indeed, gets at what it was ontically...That about which anxiety is anxious is not innerworldly things at hand. But this not any thing at hand, which is all that everyday, circumspect discourse understands, is not completely nothing. The nothing of handiness is grounded in the primordial ‘something’, in the world. (BT 181)

Anxiety is anxious about ‘nothing’, but this ‘nothing’ is not completely ‘nothing’, and this is what constitutes the positive phenomena of anxiety; that in the attunement to the world in its nothingness, it still remains as ‘something’. By saying that ‘it was really nothing’, everyday talk has in fact, albeit unbeknownst to itself, expressed something positively about what faces us in anxiety.

There are a multitude of other similarities between the two notions. They both refer to the formlessness with which existence can impress itself on us, for “What anxiety is about is completely indefinite...The fact that what is threatening is *nowhere* characterizes what anxiety is about” (BT 180). The indeterminateness of anxiety, the fact that is unable to point to the source of its anxiety, characterizes its uniqueness. Similarly, the horror at ‘there is’ does not follow from any particular being, and in fact follows from there not being any such particular being to point to; “There is no determined being, anything can count for anything else. In this ambiguity the menace of pure and simple presence, of the *there is*, takes form” (EE 59). Things dissolve into each other, lose their form and become indistinguishable, and this constitutes the pure horror of it.

The indeterminateness of anxiety and ‘there is’ furthermore makes any orientation in existence impossible. I am cut off from the way in which I ordinarily access the world in its recognizable familiarity; “In anxiety, the things at hand in the surrounding world sink away...The ‘world’ can offer nothing more” (BT 181). I lose the grip with which I am ordinarily able to hold on to the world. Similarly, ‘there is’ suspends my control over existence; “Instead of serving as our means of access to being, nocturnal space delivers us over to being” (EE 59). I am no longer mastering the world at a comfortable distance, but find myself delivered over to it, handed over to it.

Anxiety and ‘there is’ thus refer to something quite approximate; an experience that cannot really be called an ‘experience’, because it is more like the breakdown of experience, the disorientation of existence impressing itself on in its nothingness. Nevertheless, already in

the above, certain dissimilarities begin to show themselves. For whereas anxiety describes the way in which the world withdraws or falls away, leaving me dizzy at the abyss of existence, 'there is' paralyzes me with the acuteness of its presence and its refusal to go away. This is the difference between a worry over finitude, over what is absent or lacking in existence, and a worry over existence in its perfect presence.

To say that Heideggerian anxiety is anxiety over an absence is, however, a statement that must be clarified, for it would seem that Heidegger guards himself against it; "the nothing and nowhere does not signify the absence of the world" (BT 181). Quite to the contrary, Heidegger believes that what impresses itself on us in anxiety is the world in its worldliness; "the world in its worldliness is all that obtrudes (*aufdrängt*) itself" (BT 181). And again: "In the dark there is emphatically 'nothing' to see, although the world is *still* 'there' *more* obtrusively (*aufdringlicher*)" (BT 183). But how can the world impress itself on in its indeterminate, disoriented nothingness? Is the world not the very opposite of 'nothing'? This follows from the fact that Heidegger believes, as said above, that anxiety discloses Dasein to itself in its authentic, ontological structure which first makes its relation to a 'world' (more precisely, its being-in-the-world) possible, namely its "*pure, thrown potentiality for being*" (BT 182). Dasein is a pure and thus indeterminate potentiality, which is why Dasein can be open to the world. This is what is disclosed in anxiety: "Anxiety brings Dasein before *its being free for...* the authenticity of its being as possibility which it always already is" (BT 182).

It is, however, simultaneously the *source* of this anxiety, and thus something Dasein ordinarily tries to turn away from. This relates to what Heidegger finds relevant in Augustine. As previously stated, Heidegger overtakes the Augustinian notion of fallenness without its reference to God. He does so because Dasein also has a tendency to lose itself to the world in its flight, not from God, but from the nothingness of its pure potentiality for being;

It is not a flight from innerworldly beings, but precisely toward them as the beings among which taking care of things, lost in the they, can linger in tranquillized familiarity (*beruhigter Vertrautheit*). Entangled flight into the being-at-home of publicness is flight from not-being-at-home, that is, from the uncanniness which lies in Dasein as thrown, as being-in-the-world entrusted to itself in its being. (BT 183)

For both Augustine and Heidegger, the human/Dasein is not-at-home in the world; but whereas Augustine argues this because he believes God is our true home, Heidegger argues it because he believes that a fundamental homelessness belongs to the primordial finitude of existence, a finitude without reference to Infinity. Because of the homelessness of this pure potentiality, and the anxiety it inspires, Dasein seeks refuge in the world and determinate objects it finds there. Dasein would rather lose itself to the determinate beings of the world than to face the authenticity of its own existence. It is for this same reason that Heidegger defines enjoyment as inauthentic; to be lost in pleasure is to turn-away-from the authentic struggle of existence.

It is for this reason that I characterize Heideggerian anxiety as a worry over absence and lack. Anxiety is anxious over the world in its withdrawal, over how I lose my grip on it, because I seek to hold onto determinate things in the way that I access them in the familiarity of the everyday in my flight from my own indeterminate potential. Anxiety is fear over a nothingness that is, true enough, not a simple or formal absence, but still a nothingness in terms of an *abyss*, the facticity of Dasein not knowing its ‘whence or wither’ (*Wohin oder Woher*), the brute facticity of “the that of its there (*das Daß seines Da*), which stares directly at it with the inexorability of an enigma” (*BT* 132). Anxiety is dizzy at the bottomlessness of existence, of the lack of a secure ground, the fact that a foundation in being is absent.¹⁵

The Levinasian notion ‘there is’, on the other hand, is, as said, a horror at the paralyzing presence of being. It is true that it also constitutes a disorientation, a loss off access to the world, but it is not this loss itself which horrifies the existent, but rather the ‘something’ that is left and which still *presses on*: “this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence” (*EE* 58). It is here not a question of the obscurity or indeterminateness of presence, but what Nietzsche calls “the pressure of existence (*Druck des Daseins*)” (*BGE* 156), and Falque calls “the resistance of presence” (*Falque forthcoming*, 2). The tragedy is not first and foremost that intelligible forms are lacking, but that something remains after they are gone, the horror that this nothingness is something. The real misfortune is thus not that our access to being is closed off in *il y a* ; the positive experience of terror is

¹⁵ One can ask if Heidegger’s notion of onto-theology, as the determination of God/Being as ‘the supreme, eternal, absolute being’, only makes sense against this background, for such a Supreme Being would be desirable to those who fear the rootlessness of existence, and thus need an inescapable, undeniable present at the center to which they can cling.

that unintelligible being does *not* disappear; “the insecurity does not come from the things of the day world which the night conceals; it is due just to the fact that nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens” (EE 59). It is nothingness in these different varieties of *presencing* (approaching, coming, threatening) that constitutes its horror. Rather than a fear of losing grip, a spiraling nausea over the abyss of one’s own emptiness, the Levinasian subject dissipated by the ‘there is’ is riveted to existence, incapable of being nothing, and dreading the persistency of being more than anything:

the horror of the night ‘with no exits’ which ‘does not answer’ is an irremissible existence. ‘Tomorrow, alas! one will still have to live’ – a tomorrow contained in the infinity of today. There is horror or immortality, perpetuity of the drama of existence, necessity of forever taking on its burden.
(EE 63)

The existent riveted to its existence in the *il y a* does not fear openness, but *longs for an opening*, for an exit from existence, which even death cannot give (EE 61). There is here not a question of finitude, of existence slipping away or moving towards an inevitable end, but of a presence that gives no “indication that it cannot *not* exist...that I cannot *not* bear” (Falque *forthcoming*, 2). Or, to repeat what Nietzsche said, this is “a struggle of human beings with death (*to be more exact*: with disgust at life, with exhaustion and with the wish for the ‘end’)” (GM 89, my emphasis). For Levinas as well, the tragedy of life is not a struggle with death, but with being overencumbered with life itself – life exhausted at life.

While the metaphor of ‘walls closing in’ could be used to describe this imprisonment in being, it could just as easily give the wrong impression, for the terror of *il y a* is that there is no limit beyond which we could imagine an alternative. It encompasses every limit and lack, any outside and inside: “it does not even make it possible to distinguish these” (EE 57). Nevertheless, the metaphor captures one aspect aptly, namely the impossibility of finding any alternative to Being, which reveals the true tragedy that “being has no outlets” (EE 64). Being is a prison not because it has walls, but because its limitless and permeating universality means that nothing is distinct from it.

When Critchley thus notes that Levinas interprets Heidegger’s notion of facticity as the tragedy of enchainment, which propels him on the search for an escape (Critchley 2015, 46), it is crucial to add that Levinas accomplishes this by opposing his own interpretation of

the tragedy in human existence with that of Heidegger.¹⁶ Existence is tragic *not* “because it is finite. It is, on the contrary, the infinity of existence that is consumed in an instant, the fatality in which its freedom is concealed as in a winter landscape where frozen beings are captive of themselves” (EE 78). It is therefore not because “We find ourselves thrown and the beginning point or the origin is something that recedes from us” (Critchley 2015, 59) that existence is tragic. Critchley fails to recognize that, for Levinas, the tragedy of existence does not refer to thrownness: the tragedy of enchainment must be understood exactly in contrast to the tragedy of thrownness.

Dasein finds itself dizzy at the hole at the bottom of its being. It is over and against this pure opening or abyss, this clearing in being on the basis of which, for Heidegger, something like being-in-the-world is possible, that anxiety is anxious. While it is the openness of being-in-the-world that obtrudes itself, this is for Heidegger nothing like an immutable, inescapable presence, but pure potentiality. Thus Levinas concludes:

The pure nothingness revealed by anxiety in Heidegger’s analysis does not constitute the ‘there is’. There is horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being; there is being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a ‘something’. (EE 62)

The difference is whether the absence or the presence of being troubles us; fear *of* being (present) or fear *for* being (absent). This difference remains after we made the above clarifications, which now allows us to see this fundamental difference clearly. As Falque puts it: “The *Il y a*...is not found...in nothingness or forgetfulness, as with death, but rather in an *anonymous presence which invades us* to the point where sometimes we prefer non-existence to the ‘resistance of this presence’” (Falque *forthcoming*, 6). Rather than anxiety over the opening, we have horror at being trapped. Horror at presence rather than anxiety over absence. It is claustrophobia, fear of the *closeness* of being.

Levinas’ uncovering of presence rather than absence as the fundamental tragedy of existence should, however, not be read as a rejection of Heidegger’s analysis. Bernasconi

¹⁶ But does Heidegger have a notion of tragedy? Does Heidegger interpret Dasein’s anxiety over nothingness as tragic? For Levinas, it seems, a notion of tragedy is implicit in Heidegger; Dasein can only be anxious of its not-being-at-home and its being-toward-death because what it finds concerning or tragic is the limits and lacks of existence

makes this point with regards to Levinas' criticism of ecstatic subjectivity: "Levinas' criticism of Heidegger's ecstatic conception of transcendence as a 'being outside oneself' is not that there is no such movement, but that it should not be considered the original mode of existence" (Bernasconi 2005, 107). The same holds for the difference between the tragedy of absence and presence, as Levinas himself writes: "It is because the *there is* has such a complete hold on us that we cannot take nothingness and death lightly, and we tremble before them" (*EE* 20). The fact of being fastened to existence means that we cannot escape our fears and anxieties, just as little as we can escape pain or nausea in his earlier analyses. The poor depressed youth who lie in bed worrying about what they are supposed to do with their life, if they are capable of it, or if everything will turn out wrong, find themselves exhausted by the riveting fact that they are *stuck* with all these questions. The insomnia of inescapable presence underlies anxiety and gives it its weight.

Death then, however, ends up not being a dizziness over a horrifying nothingness, the Heideggerian possibility of impossibility. Rather, death becomes a deceptive escape who's reality in truth affirms our bondage to existence: "All we feel is that rope that rivets us to ourselves. Death is impossible...Death is the impossibility of possibility" (Critchley 2015, 57).¹⁷ Death is no sweet release, no transcendence to another state of existence, but only the excruciating presence of the painful moments preceding it.

c) Hypostasis

The duality or cleavage attested to in the experiences of weariness and indolence did however not only reveal that there exists a concern with the weight of presence, but also the existence of an *existent* who efforts in 'taking on' this existence, a theme that develops a lot in this work. In line with his general opposition to what we have dubbed the philosophy of finitude, Levinas seeks to develop his notion of subjectivity in its interiority and sovereignty rather than as an ecstatic finitude.

The existent tears itself away from the anonymous flow of existence, or more precisely *is* this tearing-away, the possibility of a substantivity distinguishing itself from the pure verballity of *il y a*: "the apparition of a substantive...signifies the suspension of the anonymous *there is*, the apparition of a private domain, of a noun" (*EE* 82-83). This

¹⁷ This formulation refers to how Levinas reverses the Heideggerian formula of death ("Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein" (*BT* 241))

suspension manifests in the possibility of a retreat of consciousness in unconsciousness, of rest and sleep, which is the positive function unconsciousness plays in the life of consciousness: “in its very élan consciousness becomes fatigued and interrupts itself, has a recourse against itself” (EE 67). Unconsciousness should not be understood as an opposite to consciousness, as non-freedom contra freedom or hidden contra visible; consciousness *rests* in unconsciousness, and thus lives through it: “it is a participation in life by non-participation” (EE 69).

The possibility for consciousness to rest attests to another fundamental characteristic of consciousness, namely it is a localized event, the existence of a *place* – not in objective space, but in the substantivity of consciousness as concrete. Whereas Heidegger’s thought of Dasein seeks to overcome the Cartesian subject, Levinas refers the discovery of the substantivity of consciousness to “the profound teaching of the Cartesian *cogito*...in discovering thought as a substance, that is, as something posited” (EE 68). More precisely; it follows from the Husserlian interpretation of the Cartesian discovery. This can be seen in the more – hehe – ‘substantive’ account of this notion in Levinas’ doctoral thesis, where he attributes the discovery to Husserl’s re-interpretation of Descartes famous *cogito ergo sum*:

for Husserl, the absoluteness of consciousness means more than the indubitability of internal perception. This absoluteness does not concern only the truths pertaining to consciousness and their certainty but also the very existence of consciousness itself. (TTI 28)

The absolute indubitability of consciousness includes its factual existence as a *substance*, a point which Levinas in fact emphasizes, and which it is important for us to understand, especially as it relates to the critique of the philosophy of finitude. For Levinas describes subjectivity as “a being which, contrary to the ecstaticism of contemporary thought, is in a certain sense a substance” (EE 81). Levinas does not veer away from the implications of this word, saying of the Cartesian *cogito* that “The word *thing* is here admirably exact” (EE 68). The substantivity or thingliness of subjectivity refers to the fact that consciousness takes place, here and now. Consciousness is localized, or more precisely is this localization, which makes it possible for it to withdraw into itself; it can participate or retreat, stand up or lie down. This locality cannot be understood as an attribute of an already existing consciousness, which would float free if it were independent of its place, the problem identified with

liberalism and pre-Heideggerian philosophy in 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism'. Rather, "it is out of position, out of an immobility, that consciousness comes to itself" (*EE* 70). Consciousness is possible only as substantive and localized, as a concrete place that can open or close itself to the world and thus makes a certain distance to the world possible.

Levinas' thinking of the enrootedness of the subject must be distinguished from that of Heidegger, however, for the possibility of this place precedes any relation to the world. It is thus different from the analysis of the *Da* (there) of Heidegger's *Dasein*, for rather than thrownness, "It is the very fact that consciousness is an origin, that it starts from itself, that it is an *existent*" (*EE* 71). Levinas' notion of the 'here' of consciousness is tied up with the idea of a beginning in the self, revealed in the tense non-formal dialectic of the instant, which arises out of itself to arrive at itself (*EE* 76-77). The instant, beginning anew each instant, comes about as its own origin. This is the concrete possibility of an existent taking on its existence. The subject is a substance because it separates itself from the anonymous verbality of the pure flow of existence. The existent thus originally emerges without reference to the world; as we shall shortly see, this work will designate that relationship as enjoyment.

One crucial aspect of the existent must, however, be accounted for. While the possibility of the existent signifies a break with the terror of *il y a*, it is nevertheless not an escape from it. In this rupture, where an existent distinguishes itself from existence by the rebound movement of taking it on, it nonetheless returns to the factual enchainment of its existence "The hypostasis, in participating in the *there is*, finds itself again to be a solitude, in the definitiveness of the bond with which the ego is chained to its self" (*EE* 84). In the riveting of itself to its own being, in which I am "an existence that is definitively *one*" (*EE* 85), the desperate and impossible hope for an outlet from Being still persists.

d) Worldliness and Enjoyment

Both the subject dissipated by the *il y a* and the arisen existent of the hypostasis remains independent of a relation to the world. The basic feature of this relationship, or our worldliness, is shown to consist in enjoyment; "Theophile Gautier's line 'I am one of those for whom the external world exists' expresses that joyous appetite for things which constitutes being in the world" (*EE* 37). Our relation to the world is first and foremost a

wanting for the world, a desire for it, which is the term Levinas will use in this text.¹⁸ Most importantly, in contrast to what it was in *On Escape*, enjoyment is shown not to disappoint but rather to be a sincere relationship that aims at and satisfies itself with what it wants; “In desiring I am not concerned with being but am absorbed with the desirable, with an object that will completely slake my desire” (*EE* 37). The satisfactions of one’s desire is thus not a disappointment in regards to that desire, as Levinas argued earlier, for here the sincerity of wanting what one wants is what characterizes desire. Our desires are simple and sincere, and they constitute our worldliness positively; we are in the world to slake our thirst, satisfy our hunger, and rest comfortably – and when this is achieved, we have gotten what we set out for. In contrast to Nietzsche and Heidegger, Levinas sees life in the world as a garden, or it aspires to be one.

Existence and Existent marks a clear development from *On Escape* in two respects. Firstly, while pleasure had no intentional object in *On Escape*, but was understood as a pure need for escape, this later work identifies the worldliness of enjoyment as the place where I have intentional objects that I desire. Secondly, the discussion of Plato’s theory of pleasure takes a decisive step here: “The Platonic theory of negative pleasures, preceded by a lack, fails to recognize the promise of the desirable which desire itself bears within itself like a joy” (*EE* 39). In *On Escape*, Plato’s theory held true for Levinas, as satisfaction there promised to achieve something it could not, thus a mix of expectations and disappointments. Here, however, Levinas gives Plato’s theory of mixed pleasures the same treatment it will receive in *Totality and Infinity*; what Plato sees as a pain mixed in pleasure in the condition of need is in fact something the self takes pleasure in; “he is happy for his needs” (*TI* 114).

This analysis is again happening in a close, critical conversation with Heidegger. What Levinas here defines as our worldliness, our being-in-the-world, is both inspired by and contrasted to that of Heidegger, and thus another example of what Levinas refers to when he says that his philosophy does not wish to return to a pre-Heideggerian state while also wishing to move beyond Heidegger (*EE* 19). In the case of our worldliness, Levinas recognizes “the effort to separate the notion of the world from the notion of a sum of objects...one of the most profound discoveries of Heideggerian philosophy” (*EE* 42), referring to the distinction Heidegger makes with regard to the categorical and existential

¹⁸ And not to be confused with the metaphysical Desire he will distinguish from enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity*

‘being-in’, the former applicable to objectively present beings, and the latter to Dasein (*BT* 54). Dasein is not ‘in’ the world in the same way a table is within a room;

As an existential, ‘being together with’ the world never means anything like the being-objectively-present-together of things that occur. There is no such thing as the ‘being next to each other’ of a being called ‘Dasein’ with another being called ‘world’. (*BT* 55)

Dasein is not in the world in the same way a rock lies next to another rock; I find myself in a world, I am woven into the world by means of practices and references of meaning, I am on my way to somewhere or coming from somewhere, I lie down in the world, I am weary of the world, and so on. All these different relational possibilities depend, however, on already being-in-the-world, and thus on the ontological structure of this possibility; it is a matter of the world as world, or how the world worlds – worldliness.

Levinas credits first Husserl with having made such an investigation possible, but ties it up with Heidegger’s investigation into worldliness; the *epoché* suspends the natural attitude and allows “a reflection that is genuinely philosophical, in which the meaning of the ‘natural attitude’ itself – that is, of the world – can be discovered” (*EE* 42). The same structure of argumentation can be recognized in Heidegger’s distinction between the four different meanings we can apprehend of the word ‘world’, where the fourth definition – worldliness – names that which is presupposed when one talks about the world as that *in* which things are objectively present (*BT* 64-65). The question of how different objects are encountered, different environments dwelt in and different situations acted must be answered on the basis of the worldliness ‘in’ which this is possible.

The question of worldliness refers to the way in which different relations to things in the world is possible: “Things at hand are encountered within the world. The being of these beings, handiness, is thus ontologically related to the world and worldliness” (*BT* 81); or, in Levinas words: “The most striking difference [from the instant] concerns the very fact that in the world we are dealing with objects” (*EE* 37). The question of how we relate to objects must be answered in reference to the worldliness in which these relations take place.

One obvious difference between Heidegger and Levinas is that Levinas argues for the possibility of experiences or events of being – the instant and ‘there is’ – which is prior to or independent of a world, while it is for Heidegger impossible to speak of Dasein as not always

already being-in-the-world. The difference that concerns us here, however, is how both describe the possibility of relations within the world. Jean-Michel Salanskis argues that the unappreciated novelty of Levinas' notion of worldliness in *Existence and Existents* is that it seeks to explicate our basic worldliness *without* reference to intentionality or our relation to Being (Salanskis 2010, 54).

Being-in-the-world is for Heidegger fundamentally a 'taking care'; "its being toward the world is essentially taking care" (BT 57), and thus belongs to the ontological structure of Dasein, the being which in its being is concerned about itself. The 'things at hand' of the world reveal or open themselves to Dasein on the basis of their use and thus their reference; "Beings are discovered with regard to the fact that they are referred, as those beings which they are, to something. They are relevant *together with* something else" (BT 82). Every intelligible object refers of itself beyond itself in view of the ontological structure that makes its being possible, obtaining its meaning from the entirety of the referential horizon to which it belongs;

the thing at hand which we call a hammer has to do with hammering, the hammering has to do with fastening something, fastening something has to do with protection against bad weather. This protection 'is' for the sake of providing shelter for Dasein, that is, for the sake of a possibility of its being.
(BT 82, my emphasis)

Beings have the meaning of their being in view of the-sake-for-which they refer to, and "the for-the-sake-of-which always concerns the being of *Dasein* which is essentially concerned *about* this being itself in its being" (BT 83). Existence is thrown and futural projection; being-in-the-world is to have come from somewhere and be underway to somewhere, and it is on this basis – or within its context – that beings can reveal themselves.

For Levinas, however, there is no such incessant movement of references always pointing beyond themselves. Existence stops and rests: "For a soldier his bread, jacket and bed are not 'material'; they do not exist 'for...', but are ends" (EE 43). Objects do not always point beyond themselves, but are also present as definite ends in and of themselves. This shows forth above all in enjoyment: "In eating and enjoyment, the *referring structure* that intimately connects any being to the world and *significance* network in Heidegger does not occur" (Salanskis 2010, 54-55). Pleasure is inherently non-referential, or perhaps self-

referential, needing, as Nietzsche's noble evaluation, no external reference or justification. Enjoyment achieves its satisfaction without any reference to the question of Being. This is revealed in the *sincerity* of satisfaction;

What characterizes this relationship is a complete correspondence between desire and its satisfaction. Desire knows perfectly well what it wants. And food makes possible the full realization of its intention. (EE 43)

In what would be a scandal to contemporary philosophy, Levinas defends the existence of a simple and straightforward compulsion that seeks out reaches exactly what it wants. There are to be sure conditions for desire; unconscious presuppositions which configure *what* I desire; our underlying biology; a distance between me and the desired object, or need, which makes consumption possible, etc. In regards to the last one, a temporal order is inscribed as the possibility of future satisfactions. These presuppositions do, however, not corrupt the sincere satisfaction which is achieved by them; the very phenomenality of enjoyment testifies to the unique possibility of remaining happily ignorant of its conditions. Desire loses none of its sincerity, for whatever conditions it does not alter its own satisfaction.

What enjoyment achieves is thus achieved independently of any destiny or drama that existence might otherwise contain. Enjoyment, and thus, for Levinas, our worldliness, draws its meaning not from the depths of our origins or our inevitable end; "To be in the world is precisely to be freed from the last implications of the instinct to exist" (EE 44). Worldliness as the sincerity of desire and satisfaction is a place where the self finds little victories all the time. For Heidegger, "Dasein is always somehow directed and underway" (BT 78), while for Levinas, the human relation in the world is characterized by continuously finding small places to rest under "the shade of his figtree and grape arbor" (EE 44) for pause and comfort.

This structure of being-in-the-world is not a concern for our own existence, for eating is not a *concern* for eating; it is eating. The concern which for Dasein opens it up to each potentiality of its horizon refers in the end to something else, i.e. being-towards-death. For Levinas, enjoyment is characterized by having no other reference; "We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk" (EE 44). In our sincere absorption in the world, there is no hidden movement that would need to reach its end in order for it to be complete, or which it always runs up against as the limit which informs it

by throwing it back at itself. The simplicity of living is sufficient unto itself. The sincerity of happiness is lost on those find this simpleton attitude as shallow and plain, a garden covering over a more authentic relation to existence. In response to Heidegger's determination of enjoyment as belonging to the inauthentic everyday of Dasein, Levinas counters: "To call it everyday and condemn it as inauthentic is to fail to recognize the sincerity of hunger and thirst" (EE 45). Life is about, as the saying goes, taking it *easy*. You are truly 'living your life' when you enjoy yourself in good company with a jug of beer; there is not another goal on top of this that needs to be reached. Enjoyment affirms the innocence of life as it appeared for Nietzsche in the noble evaluation, in no need of external justification.

On the topic of authenticity and inauthenticity, it has been a recurring debate regarding Heidegger whether these terms should be understood purely descriptively – as Heidegger himself wanted – or as containing and intending normative implications. I comment on this only to show that whichever of these claims is true, Levinas' point holds; also when understood only descriptively, it is wrong – argues Levinas – to interpret the sincerity of enjoyment as inauthentic, for it is in fact sincere. The satisfaction eating finds is not an escape from something else, not a turning-away from something, but a simple and honest turning-towards what one wants; satisfaction. Enjoyment is independence, because what it achieves it achieves in isolation. Enjoyment is an honest egoism, which judges its accomplishment ultimately only with reference to itself, regardless of the fact that external factors condition the variant possibilities of enjoyment. It belongs to the pre-moral innocence of life.

One can wonder if the topic of enjoyment often is often overlooked because of its simplicity. But enjoyment is precisely *not a problem*, and thus does not become an object of 'problematization'. This is especially true of the continental tradition of philosophy that grows out of Heidegger, always on the lookout for discrepancies, divergencies and whatever *tension* seemingly lurks – teeming – beneath the pretty façade of the ordered garden. For anxious philosophers, always ready to pull the rug away under the feet of people too used to comfort, enjoyment becomes a blind spot due to its simplicity.

e) Enjoyment as Compensation

The development from *On Escape* to *Existence and Existents* is radical. Levinas has gone from a determination of enjoyment as deception and disappointment to apprehending it in its sincerity, a development which puts us much closer to *Totality and Infinity*. As we saw, however, *Existence and Existents* does not see in the hypostasis of the existent an escape from

the *il y a*. Subjectivity is therefore still interpreted according to the schema of enchainment, defined not by its finitude but by its imprisonment in Being. Therefore, the subject of the hypostasis in *Existence and Existents* still has “The hope for an order where the enchainment to oneself involved in the present would be broken” (*EE* 89).

As enjoyment is here still interpreted in reference to an enchained subject, it remains defined in terms of it. Enjoyment does not achieve that wholly self-sufficient complacency it will be identified with in *Totality and Infinity*, but is interpreted as *compensation*. This means that enjoyment neither deceives and disappoints the subject by giving promises it cannot hold – for enjoyment has now been identified in its sincerity – nor accomplishes the release from the enchainment of oneself to oneself. Rather, it offers small breaks within the ontological adventure of the hypostasis: “The effort of the present lifts of the weight of the present. It bears in itself the echo of desire, and objects are given to it ‘for its trouble’” (*EE* 90). The reward of taking on one’s existence in the instant, the reward of effort, is the fruits of one’s labor. One is not released from but rewarded for existing. The pleasurable leisure of daily life compensates for the work existence requires.

Is pleasure then not a ‘turning-away’ from the harshness of existence? One might reproach Levinas here and ask if his criticism of Heidegger was truly fair, for it seems here that Levinas is doing the same thing; “The alternation of effort and leisure” which “makes up the time of the world” (*EE* 90) seem to be a situation in which the enjoying existent flees the confrontation with its authentic ontological structure, which for Levinas is the hypostasis. This is, however, to misunderstand the precise meaning of compensation. The sincerely desirable rewards of one’s effort “do not release the torsion of the instant upon itself; they compensate for it” (*EE* 90). The fact that enjoyment is not inauthentic but sincere is crucial for this possibility. I am not released by being rewarded worldly goods, and they therefore do not constitute a salvation for “The irreparable” (*EE* 89) in existence. Because I sincerely desire these goods, however, they nevertheless serve as economic compensation: “The world is the possibility of wages. In the sincerity of intentions which excludes all equivocation, the ego is naïve” (*EE* 90). Garnering one’s wages does not redeem the suffering of the present, but I’ll surely take it. For it is only because of my sincere appreciation of material goods that they have the possibility of enabling me to – through ignorance rather than any form of reconciliation – forget what is irreparable in existence. The ‘naïve ego’ – a theme that will gain importance for Levinas as his thought develops – is not inauthentic, for that would imply that it enjoyed its worldliness only because that allowed it to escape its fate. Neither does

enjoyment allow for such an escape, nor does it deceive me; it compensates me. The boss who knows that he has treated his employee unfairly gives her a bonus and says, as the idiom goes, ‘Here’s a little something for your trouble’. What he hopes for is not that this will redeem the past, but that she will accept the bribe and ‘move on’.

From his definition of the worldliness of enjoyment as compensation, Levinas argues further that this worldliness must be considered as secular (*EE* 90). His argumentation for this follows from the fact that, within the grander scheme of existence, our worldliness constitutes a dimension of life – but not yet life itself – that can stay ignorant off such larger questions:

in the ontological adventure the world is an episode which, far from deserving to be called a fall, has its own equilibrium, harmony and positive ontological function: the possibility of extracting oneself from anonymous being. (*EE* 45, my emphasis)

In regards to what matters more in existence overall, enjoyment is not a fall or failure to live up to what is ‘higher’ or more authentic in life – whether we regard the theological or Heideggerian notion of ‘fall’ – but an episode that accomplishes what it sets out to do based on its own premises. In the sincerity of the intentions of our desires, enjoyment signifies “the self-sufficiency of the world and contentment. The world is profane and secular” (*EE* 41), because it is independent on any outside justification – divine or otherwise – for its gratings, and capable of remaining unbothered by whatever drama existence might otherwise entail. It is, as Nietzsche would have recognized, the requirement of external justifications that introduce conflict and opposition into the innocence of life, but enjoyment is foreign to this requirement.

The notion of the world understood as secular is one that will be continued in *Totality and Infinity*. Another continuous theme is Levinas’ own conception of a finitude without infinity. We have seen so far that Levinas rejects any depiction of human existence that identifies a lack or limit of human existence as the fundamental condition for that existence. There is, however, another way to think finitude, which takes its cue from a teleological rather than existential understanding of the term ‘end’ (Latin: *finis*, French: *fin*). Finite existence is an existence towards ends: “The desirable is a terminus, an end” (*EE* 37). Here the meaning of a ‘finite being’ is not that it has an end that functions as its ultimate limit, but rather that the being in question is the goal of a teleological intention that that becomes *finished* when it is

satisfied: “The reality of a thing is indeed constituted by its finality. As the end of an intention, a thing is a goal, a limit, an ultimate” (EE 38). The meaning of finite existence is not that it has an end that limits it, but that it reaches multiple ends in its lifetime, that it seeks out and finds little ends that serve as the accomplishment of the goal that was set out in the search for it. Or, as Levinas says in *Totality and Infinity*, “Finition without reference to the infinite, finition without limitation, is the relation with the end [fin] as a goal” (TI 136). The difference between being-at-home-in-the-world in terms of enjoyment and the not-being-at-home of the thrown Dasein which is being-towards-death is the difference between having achievable goals that ends and a being constituted ontologically by having an end as its limit.

Despite novelties, the analysis of enjoyment in *Existence and Existents* remains bound to the structure of the earlier works in general. Enjoyment is still the possibility of ‘extracting oneself from anonymous being’ which however amounts only to a compensation from the still looming horror of the ‘there is’. Being oneself is enchainment, and transcendence is therefore still the question “of saving oneself” (EE 93). Thus, enjoyment is in this work seen as belonging to the dimension of life, and not as the fundamental constitution of life itself: “Of course we do not live in order to eat, but it is not really true to say that we eat in order to live; we eat because we are hungry” (EE 37). The formulation strikingly demonstrates how the analysis of enjoyment as compensation works as a middle-ground between the analysis of enjoyment as deception in *On Escape* and as happiness in *Totality and Infinity*, for regarding the above quote, it is precisely on that point that Levinas will go all the way in the later work: “We live from ‘good soup’, air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc... We live from them” (TI 110). The analysis of ‘living from’ in *Totality and Infinity* will reveal that it is in enjoyment and happiness, rather than through the hypostasis, that the existent emerges.

This however poses an interpretative problem. If Levinas’ notion of *il y a* in his early thought is constitutive for his conception of how the existent arises – as tearing itself away from the *il y a* – while his later conception of the existent bases itself on the analysis of enjoyment instead rather than the *il y a*, then the question becomes what status Levinas’ notion of *il y a* has in Levinas’ thought from *Totality and Infinity* and forward. As Tom Sparrow puts it, “It depends, I think, on whether the *il y a* is, ontologically speaking, *first* either a menace to the already separated existent or the divine source of its separation” (Sparrow 2013, 18). According to my interpretation, the answer to this question depends on whether we put it to the early or later Levinas. The earlier does indeed see *il y a* as the ‘divine source’ of this separation, but the later, however, does not.

4. *Time and the Other*

a) Solitude, Escape, Independence and Enjoyment

In the final work before *Totality and Infinity*, we do not find any radical developments in terms of enjoyment and the subject, the themes we have been most concerned with. *Time and the Other* (1947) introduces the topic of temporality as a relation to the Other into Levinas' project, but in terms of enjoyment and the critique of the philosophy of finitude, he sticks to his already established position. We therefore find a delineation of subjectivity that, while seeking to understand it in terms of its sovereignty, still interprets it as enchained and thus seeking salvation. Rather than locating the beginning of subjectivity in its always already being-constituted by its relations and worldliness, Levinas analyzes the ontological structure of the isolated self: "One can exchange everything between beings except existing. In this sense, to be is to be isolated by existing. Inasmuch as I am, I am a monad" (TO 42). Levinas is elucidating an isolated interiority that is characterized most fundamentally by its independence and distance from the world, rather than how it is constituted always already by being thrown into this world.

As in *Existence and Existents*, this work investigates the possibility of the subject in terms of the ontological adventure, where a substantive existent emerges from the pure verbiage of anonymous Being, 'there is'. *Time and the Other* thus repeats the analysis of the 'there is', emphasizing again how, rather than being anxious over nothingness, it is the all-encompassing perseverance of Being that terrorizes us, propagating both the need for and impossibility of escape; "It consists in promoting a notion of being without nothingness, which leaves no hole and permits no escape" (TO 50). The possibility of the subject is on its end again posited as a "rupture of the anonymous vigilance of the *there is*" (TO 51). Furthermore, this possibility is framed as both the mastery of an existent over its existence and its solitude (TO 52). This leads Levinas to a conception of solitude he believes is distinct from the ones of his contemporaries, for rather than interpreting solitude as a lack of sociality, he sees in it an achieved unity of the self-mastery over existence. It must therefore not be understood simply as despair but also in terms of "a virility, a pride and a sovereignty" (TO 55). Solitude is not simply or even primarily a failure in existence, measured by what is absent from it, but a proud independence in existence. As Richard A. Cohen adds in a footnote to the English translation, "Levinas is emphasizing here that [the existent's solitude] ought not therefore to be understood solely in terms of what it *lacks*. The existent *is* separate"

(TO 55). I would go further – it is not only that the existent should not be understood *solely* in terms of what it lacks, but not even primarily. The essence of subjectivity is its sovereignty.¹⁹

Nevertheless, while not being defined in terms of what it lacks, the isolated existent is still interpreted as “the tragedy of solitude” (TO 57), due to its enchainment to itself, which constitutes its being-overencumbered by its own materiality. It is thus an existent still defined by the motive of salvation (TO 58). The motive of salvation is again put into discussion with everyday enjoyment where “the material structure of the subject is to a *certain* extent overcome” (TO 62, my emphasis) due to the interruption of the self’s return to itself in enchainment that is accomplished by the sincere intention of hunger that can seek out what it wants and satisfy itself with it. This sincere movement is again identified with the alternative conception of finitude: “The uttermost finality of eating is contained in food” (TO 63). Enjoyment does, however, not break the enchainment to existence – this condition is only to a ‘certain extent overcome’ – but constitutes a dimension of life where it can be happily ignored (TO 64). *Time and the Other* thus repeats the intermediate position that was found in *Existence and Existents* almost verbatim: “It is perhaps not correct to say that we live to eat, but it is no more correct to say that we eat to live” (TO 63). In the ontological adventure of the hypostasis in which an existent raises but is chained to its existence is still the primary schema within which this work interprets enjoyment. It is still a compensation for existing.

It is true that *Time and the Other* moves much closer to a description of the Other qua Other as it is finally achieved in *Totality and Infinity*, but the search for the encounter still happens within the structure of the movement that the early works operate out of. Thus, while many of the fundamentals are there – like the idea of a movement that does not return to the self – the framing of the issue is different than the one to come:

Life could only become the path of redemption if, in its struggle with matter, it encounters an event that stops its everyday transcendence from falling back upon a point that is always the same. (TO 66, my emphasis)

¹⁹ I do have one half-disagreement with Cohen, however. While Cohen is correct in pointing out that the analysis of the existent’s solitude in *Time and the Other* is related to the analysis of the enjoying ego in *Totality and Infinity*, I believe that the analysis of the later work introduces something new which entails a departure from the notion of hypostasis. I intend to show this in the next chapter.

The encounter is still framed as a 'path to redemption', beginning thus with a self who needs to be redeemed. The self that needs redemption is a struggling self, the enchained self, weighed down by "the subject's materiality – materiality being its enchainment to itself" (*TO* 62). While this work therefore, similarly to *Existence and Existents*, gives a certain amount of recognition to the dimension of worldly needs and their satisfaction, it still interprets existence as a tragedy that calls for a salvation.

The attempt at striking a compromise between valuing materiality while holding onto the idea of enchainment in this work is made explicit by Levinas: "we want both to recognize material life and its triumph over the anonymity of existing, and the tragic finality to which it is bound by its very freedom" (*TO* 62). *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* appears then as an intermediary position between *On Escape* and *Totality and Infinity*. Material life is a compensatory victory for an existent that nevertheless finds itself enchained, and thus still seeking salvation. The subject is sovereign, but bound to a tragedy to which enjoyment can only provide temporary relief.

b) Enjoyment, Subjectivity and Finitude

In this chapter, we have traced the development of Levinas' early thought, with a special focus on the topics of enjoyment, subjectivity, and the critique of philosophies of finitude. In terms of enjoyment, we have seen that it is a topic present from the beginning of Levinas' original thought, and that its meaning changes from disappointment to compensation. In terms of subjectivity, we have seen that Levinas' rejects the ecstatic notion of subjectivity in favor of a sovereign subject that begins from itself. In terms of finitude, we have seen that Levinas provides an alternative to the idea that the fundamental drama of existence concerns a lack or limit inherent to existence, namely that the full and perfect presence of being can be a problem on its own.

These three thematical thread become intertwined in *Totality and Infinity*. In terms of enjoyment, the final step is taken; enjoyment is not only a momentary compensation but a self-sufficient complacency lacking nothing. In terms of subjectivity, the subject is seen as capable of beginning from itself because it can enjoy, and is therefore cast not as enchained, but as happy. In terms of the critique of finitude, finally, the 'fullness of existence' is determined not as the tragedy of enchainment, but as the happiness of enjoyment.

It will then not only be the case that the analysis of enjoyment takes its final and decisive step, but also that the two other thematical threads we have been tracking find their

completion in the mature analysis of enjoyment. Finally, the analysis of enjoyment itself will only be possible in virtue of the conception of subjectivity as a beginning in itself and the critique of philosophies of finitude. For the mature analysis of enjoyment incorporates all of these elements together in an analysis that posits, against Heidegger, that we are in fact happily at home in the world.

The happiness of being at home in the world – in this formulation, we find encapsulated one of the primary goals of the present thesis, namely to arrive at an understanding of our worldly immanence that deems it as valuable in itself. It is, in other words, in the next chapter that we find achieved a phenomenological account of *the goodness of creation ex nihilo*, that is, the goodness of creation on its own terms, without any reference or need for an external justification. This is the topic to which we now turn.

Chapter IV – The Garden of Life: Enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity*

In the last chapter, we followed the development of Levinas' philosophy so far as *Time and the Other*. We traced the development of three themes; the theme of enjoyment, subjectivity and what I have called the critique of the philosophy of finitude. Philosophies of finitude were shown to converge on the general idea that worldly existence is demarcated by a lack. Finite existence in the world is a fallen state, understood either as having fallen from a more perfect state (Augustine), or as belonging to the always already fallenness of human existence (Heidegger). In either case, the fundamental relation to the world is determined as an essential insufficiency, a non-belonging. In losing myself in the world, I turn away either from God or from the anxious bottomlessness of existence.

In contrast, Levinas presented, through his analysis of nausea and *il y a*, the notion of a yearning that did not follow from the falling-away of the world, of losing grip, fear of absence, but rather a horror at the perfect *fullness* of existence. The need for escape or salvation that arises from this enchainment is fundamentally different from anxiety over the abyss. It resembles rather the situation of the slave as described by Nietzsche, not worried about the *transience* of life but hostile to *life itself in its unfolding*. The need for escape is different from the uncanniness of not-being-at-home, for it bemoans not the absence but the presence of life, and thus yearns *beyond* the world.

But does Levinas then not repeat the mistake that we warned against in the chapter on Nietzsche, that is, positing transcendence as an anti-thesis to everything that exists? By presenting transcendence as 'need for escape' and 'the quest for salvation', transcendence is only intelligible in contradistinction to the enchainment to the present. It surfaces only in the experience of horror as the desire for this horror to subside; that is, it signifies *negatively*. One can ask if any other significance is possible when transcendence is traced back to an originary tension in the subject between being enchained and urging to escape. The Levinasian conception of the has so far only depicted subjectivity as a tragedy – if not the tragedy of finitude, then the tragedy of enchainment. It is only in reference to this tragedy that transcendence gains meaning.

In the present chapter, I will turn to Levinas next work, *Totality and Infinity*, in order to trace significant development of his understanding of enjoyment and the enjoying subject. In *Totality and Infinity*, the critique of the philosophy of finitude and the attempt to think the subject as a beginning in itself is with the firm declaration that “‘The truth is absent.’ But we are in the world” (TI 33). The statement is a rewriting of a poem by Arthur Rimbaud, “The true life is absent. We are not in the world,” where Levinas takes the liberty of changing the second line. What does Levinas intend by stating that we are, to the contrary, in fact in the world? It must be understood, I believe, as a subversion of the Heideggerian theme of alienation as uncanniness (again, *Un-heimlichkeit*, that is, un-homeliness). Heidegger, of course, also believes that we are ‘in’ the world, but for him, the familiar orientation of the world in the everyday is secondary to the more primordial phenomenon of not-being-at-home (BT 183). When seeking to subvert the Heideggerian sentiment of alienation by stating that we are in fact in the world, therefore, Levinas is stating that our being-in-the-world is a being at home in the world; and being-at-home means precisely to find worldly life agreeable and enjoyable, as the site of our happiness. Whereas Augustine, Nietzsche and Heidegger all see complacency as a façade covering-over something more fundamental, Levinas counters by asserting that *life in the world is a garden*.

This does not mean that life in the garden cannot be interrupted, that conflict might not arrive and unsettle its tranquil peace. But the question of transcendence changes dramatically if we position it as the interruption of a primordial agreeability of life. Then this interruption must not necessarily be thought as the negation or opposition to the goodness of this life, but as a testament to something beyond it. Before turning to what interrupts this life, which will be the theme of the next chapter, we must unpack Levinas’ mature analysis of enjoyment as it appears in *Totality and Infinity*. It is an analysis that defines subjectivity not as tragic enchainment, but as happy complacency. In doing so, it overcomes the philosophies of finitude by demonstrating that needs and lack belong to the unfolding of life as the possibility of satisfaction. Rather than signifying a fallen state, our worldliness constitutes a dimension of self-sufficiency. The separation between immanence and transcendence – between Creator and creation, the familiar and the new – therefore has a positive signification, namely as an independent dimension that is the very site of happiness. Happiness belongs to the world, constitutes worldliness, and what, possibly, lies beyond it, cannot be measured in terms of it.

a) Separation and Beginning: The Question of Structure in Levinas' Thought

Turning to *Totality and Infinity*, the first question we must address is in fact that of separation, and more precisely its relation to the question of *structure* in Levinas' thought; for this work is in fact structured around the possibility of a beginning in the self, and thus of separation.

The reason why this needs to be demonstrated is because of the common – and according to Dino Galetti faulty – perception that Levinas' thought cannot and should not be comprehended structurally (Galetti 2016, 509-510). Part of this argumentation follows from Derrida's famous assertion that “Levinas writing...forbids the prosaic disembodiment into conceptual frameworks that is the first violence of all commentary” (Derrida 2001, 397-398). Levinas' thought would refuse such conceptualization due to the very nature of the ‘theme’ of his work, namely the non-thematizable Other. Derrida argues instead that Levinas' thought lies in between art and philosophy, where the same themes are revisited like waves breaking again and again upon the same shore, which nevertheless “renews and enriches” the ‘themes’ revisited (Derrida 2001, 398). A similar perspective is expressed by James R. Mensch when commenting that *Totality and Infinity* works as a “spiraling motion...[revisiting] previous themes, viewing them in different contexts in order to clarify them. This way of proceeding gives the book its nonsystematic character” (Mensch 2015, 3).

Such a reading of *Totality and Infinity* is certainly not without merit, and also Galetti, who wishes to argue for a rigorous structure in Levinas' thought – a rigor he claims Levinas himself argued for – , nevertheless admits that Levinas' thought does not make up a system (Galetti 2015, 531). The disposition of *Totality and Infinity* can certainly appear confusing, at least at a first glance. The first section treats the themes of the Same and the Other in conjunction, before the Same is treated for itself in section II, the Other for itself in section III, section IV treating fecundity and *eros* that in a sense collapses the strict separation between ethics and enjoyment that was established in the previous sections, before the conclusion returns to repeat and add onto the general argument of the whole book. Furthermore, as Mensch explains, “Terms, when they initially appear, are frequently opaque” (Mensch 2015, 3), gaining a fuller description only later in the work.

Nevertheless, although the nature of Levinas' work perhaps prevents it from making up a system, it does certainly have a structure. Galetti, who argues that the structure of Levinas' thought in *Totality and Infinity* must be identified in terms of how Levinas rigorously develops the idea of Infinity (Galetti 2015, 531), has an ally in Raoul Moati, who

also argues for a methodological, structured reading of that work. I believe Moati's interpretation of this structure is very illuminating, and I will explicate it in what follows.

To begin, Moati understands the relations between the different sections of the work in a very specific way. He argues that section I presents the main terms of the work – the Same and the Other – as pure formal notions, whereas section II and III aim to deformalize and concretize these same terms (Moati 2017, 24). In order to understand this structure, however, it is necessary to understand what Levinas means by the term 'concretization', which Moati explains in terms of a 'nocturnal phenomenology' (Moati 2017, 19). As Moati explains, Levinas begins with the Husserlian notion of a noetico-noematic intentionality, which distinguishes between the thought and the thinking of it, what appears and the appearing of it, etc. The thinking of a thought is what ordinarily delineates it as something comprehensible, but Levinas seeks to describe those events that exceed and overflow this intentionality by being non-adequate to the thought that thinks them (Moati 2017, 20). Such events escape *elucidation*, that is, the possibility of becoming intelligible and illuminated in the way that representational intentionality comprehends objects. That events are incomprehensible as such does not however necessarily entail that they escape all description: it is a question of "demonstrating that the intuitionism of [representational intentionality] no longer has the monopoly on the concrete" (Moati 2017, 21).

What this means is to speak of the possibility of events that can be sought out only "in concretization and unintelligible outside of it" (Moati 2017, 21). It is a question of events that, when faithfully described, appear as unintelligible and incomprehensible to formal thought, but nevertheless concretely accomplished. This is what Levinas means by a non-analytical deduction; the deduction of nocturnal events that are formally unintelligible, but nevertheless concrete. The concretization of the formal terms of the Same and the Other is thus to be arrived at in this way, and this structure of Levinas' thinking relates directly to the question of what is meant by describing enjoyment as a 'beginning of the self'. For enjoyment constitutes a beginning in the self in a concrete way that nevertheless appears unintelligible to formal thought.²⁰

²⁰ This is in fact the same type of argument Levinas uses in *Existence and Existents* when describing the duality of the instant as a beginning in the self, that we discussed in III3a. They also share in both relating to Levinas' interpretation of the notion of creation *ex nihilo*.

This responds to another structural question that has plagued commentators of *Totality and Infinity* from the beginning is how the relation between the dimension of enjoyment and ethics is to be understood. Section II describes the enjoying ego as independent and self-sufficient, and section III describes the ethical relation of sociality that arises with the encounter of the other human being. But does the encounter with the Other happen one day, within egoistic life, and then opens a pre-ethical self to ethics and society? Or is Levinas perhaps describing the very phenomena of ‘growing up’, where becoming mature means to develop the possibility of thinking beyond oneself? Or perhaps, as Michael L. Morgan suggests in his *Cambridge introduction to Levinas*, we should understand it as similar to how Thomas Hobbes divides between the state of nature and civil society, never truly apart, but nevertheless best described independently in order to communicate their distinct characteristics in a clear manner? On this last view, “Levinas is giving an account of various features of human experience that are manifest in actual life but can be best illuminated by means of a narrative form, a genetical story” (Morgan 2011, 37).

Levinas himself makes clear that the analysis of enjoyment and ethics in isolation “does not render the concrete man. In reality man has already the idea of infinity” (TI 139). Life is never actually lived outside of a ‘mixture’ of the different dimensions of enjoyment and ethics. Nevertheless, the two different dimensions are best described independently. As Moati makes clear with his notion of nocturnal events, however, it is not only the case that they are ‘best described’ in isolation; the structure of separation in fact *requires* such a division. In other words, the division of section II and III does not serve a simple pedagogical purpose, *but a strict methodological one*.

When I talk of the ‘beginning of the self’, either as hypostasis out of the *il y a* or the concretization of the happy ego by enjoyment, in reference to what order is it the beginning? A chronological order? Or a logical order? Whichever sense of beginning we are talking about, the order of *Totality and Infinity* makes it seem as if a naïve, pre-ethical ego first exists alone, and then is met with the Other. This is, however, not the only approach to be found in *Totality and Infinity*; Levinas also explicitly states that his investigation, which he presents as a “defense of subjectivity”, will approach the subject “as founded in the idea of infinity” (TI 26). In other words, Levinas understands the concrete human being *not* as ‘prior to’ – in one sense at least – the idea of Infinity, but always already founded by it. This relates, as Moati also notes, to concrete man; “the concrete human being already possesses the idea of the infinite...he or she is always, already in a relation with the Other” (Moati 2017, 107). Thus,

the idea of a pre-ethical ego is, in one sense, an illusion; the Same is always already moved by the metaphysical Desire.

It then might be legitimately be “asked why the concretization of the same, within the self separated from the Other, describes the self as not yet possessing the idea of the infinite” (Moati 2017, 107). This relates to the above discussion, of how events that seem unintelligible to logical thought might nevertheless be concretely produced, and be deducible from their concretization. What appears and might even be an illusion is exactly what is produced in the concretization of the ego;

The cause of being is thought or known by its effect as though it were posterior to its effect. We speak lightly of the possibility of this ‘as though’, which is taken to indicate an illusion. But this illusion is not unfounded; it constitutes a positive event...Separation is not reflected in thought, but produced by it. For in it the After or the Effect conditions the Before or the Cause: the Before appears and is only welcomed. (TI 54)

The Before is welcomed afterwards: what appears as a paradox to formal thought nevertheless describes, according to Levinas, the separation which is achieved through the independence of the concrete ego. The ego is thus a beginning in this formally paradoxical sense; it achieves a beginning from itself in the ignorance of its cause. This “does not mean that it is *causa sui*, but rather that it can live *as though* it were independent of any prior cause” (Moati 2017, 35); and the fact that it *can live like this* means that what appears impossible for formal thought nevertheless concretely takes place. This is what enjoyment achieves. The naïve complacency of the ego is its wellspring.

It is for this reason that Levinas finds it not only pedagogically convenient, but in fact *methodologically necessary* to describe the enjoying ego ‘as though’ it was independent of the idea of Infinity, because this ‘as though’ refers to a concrete event in being in which this independence is achieved; “This descriptive isolation takes its signification from the fact that the relation between the same and the other is achieved by way of separation” (Moati 2017, 107). A faithful, phenomenological description of *die Sache selbst* requires it. Or inversely, the concretization of an independent ego opens for the possibility of a description of this ego in its achieved independence; the description of the same “does not systematically require the invocation of the other term from which it is separated in order to be described” (Moati 2017,

107), because it positively concretizes itself as a separate interiority. The independence of the ego opens up and requires a description of it in isolation.

The ‘beginning in the self’, therefore, refers not to a logical or chronological, but a *phenomenological* order, namely, the concrete unfolding of the event of subjectivity itself. The possibility of separation, of thinking a relation between terms not as participation, makes it “necessary that a being, though it be part of a whole, derive its being from itself” (TI 61). Enjoyment concretizes this. The achievement of enjoyment signals a clean slate, an “instant of sheer youth” (TI 54) where the self begins from itself and itself only, even if this appears as an illusion to logical thought. Far from being unorganized, the structure of *Totality and Infinity* reflects the concrete possibility of separation.

b) Separation and Creation

There is, however, yet another reason why it is important to clarify the structure of *Totality and Infinity* as it pertains to the structure of separation. It relates to what Moati calls “two seemingly contradictory theses: on the one hand, an alterity ‘prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the Same’ (TI 38-39), and on the other, an “alterity [that] is possible only starting from me’ (TI 40)” (Moati 2017, 33). In other words, the encounter with the Other is on the one end completely unpredictable, not foreseen in any way by a condition in the Same, and on the other end only possible starting from the same, from “a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure, to serve as an *entry* into the relation, to be the same not relatively but absolutely” (TI 36). Is the Same then a condition for the encounter or not?

This has partially been explained already: the absolute point of departure, the beginning of the self, is achieved in an ego that remains wholly independent, even of its own cause. In addition, however, it is through gaining such an independence that the Same and the Other *can* be separated terms. This relates to the traditional way in which the relation between separated terms has been thought that we discussed in the preceding chapter (III1b), namely as a broken unity, where the finite being, in its fallen state, seeks reunification. This traditional conception of finitude can only determine the relation to Infinity as the need to fill a lack:

To conceive separation as a fall or privation or provisional rupture of the totality is to know no other separation than that evinced by need. Need indicates void and lack in the needy one, its dependence on the exterior, the

insufficiency of the needy being precisely in that it does not entirely possess its being and consequently is not strictly speaking separate. (TI 102)

A finite being longing to return is not truly separate from the Infinite, which is its other half; and this ‘other half’ is thus not truly *other*, for it makes up the finite being by being what it lacks. A subjectivity understood as a ‘beginning in itself’, on the other hand, provides a point of departure from which an encounter with the absolutely Other first becomes intelligible. The Same is a condition for the encounter with the Other in the sense that it has *no need* for the Other. If there was a need corresponding to a lack between the Same and the Other, then we could properly speak of a nostalgia for a return, because the Same would then be conceived in its dependence on a cause due to a lack. It is therefore through the analysis of enjoyment that the philosophies of finitude are criticized in *Totality and Infinity*, for the enjoyable complacency of the Same is self-sufficient rather than finite, and must therefore not relate to what is other to it as a lack.

The analysis of the enjoying ego is therefore of outmost importance, for only starting from the independent interiority of the ego can the idea of Infinity be correctly thought as strictly separate. The idea of Infinity can only reveal itself to an independent being. The Same is a condition, paradoxically, by having nothing to do with the Other, and it has nothing to do with the Other because it lives as a concrete, self-sufficient and independent subject. As Moati notes, the importance of this conception of subjectivity is lost when Levinas’ philosophy is simply presented as a critique of ontology, for this forgets that the Levinasian conception of subjectivity provides another ontological starting point;

Indeed the fundamental aim of *Totality and Infinity* is not so much to denounce the failure of philosophically traditional ontology to take into account the infinite alterity of the Other as it is to accuse that tradition of holding to a perfectly vague conception of subjectivity. (Moati 2017, 182)

While it is true that Levinas also aims to criticize ontology, the point of emphasizing Levinas’ own ontological project – the analysis of the independent, enjoying ego – is to demonstrate that “they constitute two aspects of the same diagnosis” (Moati 2017, 182). The second aim has been underappreciated in the crucial role it serves to make transcendence possible, for Levinas’ critique of the tradition of ontology also concerns how their thinking of subjectivity

left it too ‘perfectly vague’ for transcendence to be properly thought. It is by thinking the concrete self-sufficiency of the subject, or by affirming the goodness of our worldliness, that Levinas opens the possibility of a renewed understanding of transcendence.

This is very important for the present thesis, for it is in this way that Levinas avoids thinking the relation between immanence and transcendence as opposites. This point is missed by Adrian Peperzak when he states that “‘Egoism’ implicitly evokes altruism as its opposite” (Peperzak 2009, 57), for Levinas’ entire point with his analysis of the ego is in fact the reverse. Rather than emerging out of a dialectic, the enjoying ego begins in itself, draws its independence from itself, and therefore does not emerge relationally in its opposition to the Other. There is therefore no “anti-Hegelian dialectic between the Same...and the...Other” (Peperzak 2009, 59), for Levinas is seeking to elucidate both the emergence of the Same and the entrance of the Other as positively separate events, whose meaning follows from their own positivity, rather than in a dialectical interplay, whether Hegelian or not. This is again why he is methodologically required to describe the concretization of the Same independently of its relation to the Other. This is attained through enjoyment and the complacency it achieves.

Finally, this point is of utmost relevance to the present thesis because of the way in which it draws on the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. As said in the introduction, one way in which the pair of ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’ can be thought is as Creator and creation, which the thought of ‘creation out of nothing’ implies; creation not an extension of the Creator, but fundamentally distinct from it. Furthermore, the *goal* of the present thesis was formulated as the aim to interlink two dogmas and affirm *the goodness of creation out of nothing*. This is what I believe Levinas’ philosophy makes possible. The structure of separation testifies to the exceptional possibility of creation *ex nihilo*:

Creation *ex nihilo* breaks with the system, posits a being outside of every system, that is, there where its freedom is possible. Creation leaves to the creature a trace of dependence, but it is an unparalleled dependence: the dependent being draws from this exceptional dependence, from this relationship, its very independence, its exteriority to the system. What is essential to created existence is not the limited character of its being, and the concrete structure is not deducible from this finitude. What is essential to created existence is its separation with regard to the Infinite. (TI 104-105)

The possibility of a separation between Creator and created that is not seen inherently as a fall implies that one sees the independence gained by the creature as a positive event, as belonging to the meaning of creation itself. *Atheism belongs to creation*, and is thus not in principle opposed to religion, but rather the paradoxical condition for it, if ‘condition’ is understood as we have discussed it in the above. For to be a condition means, in this context for creation to be *for the sake of itself*. This is the possibility enjoyment opens up.

c) Enjoyment and the Concretization of the Ego

There is much in the description of enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity* that continues from and was prepared in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, while some things change. This work will for example not think enjoyment in itself as a relation to objects and to the world, but rather locate the possibility of things and the world to the complementary dimensions of dwelling and labor.²¹ Even more importantly, there is also a radical shift in the role enjoyment plays, where enjoyment goes from being an episode within the grander ontological adventure (*EE*, 45) to becoming that adventure itself, that is, where a sovereign beginning in the self is to be located. Enjoyment is thus no longer a dimension of life, but essentially what it means to live one’s life. Life is thus no longer something I seek to escape.

In terms of what continues from the prior works, we find again the idea of a sincere need which knows what it wants and becomes satisfied when it finds it; “in need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other” (*TI* 117). This is again paired up with the critique of Plato’s theory of pleasure, which interprets need as lack: “it would be a *less*, a lack that satisfaction would make good” (*TI* 116). In contrast to this Platonic outlook, Levinas repeats the position that was already present in *Existence and Existents*, that needs do not appear as a lack for enjoyment, for it enjoys its needs. Furthermore, the new conception of finitude that we discussed in the previous chapter, where the enjoying self sees the objects of its satisfaction as ends it searches for and finds, is also repeated here: “Even if the content of life ensures my life, the means is immediately sought as an end, and the pursuit of this end becomes an end in its turn” (*TI* 111). To live as an enjoying ego means to have multiple ends, and ‘ends’ here must precisely be not be understood as

²¹ I say complementary because while dwelling and labor must be distinguished from immediate enjoyment, they still have meaning first and foremost in relation to enjoyment (see II6d)

'limit'. For these ends are reached and achieved over and over again, and is thus to be distinguished from Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world in terms of the referentiality of tools (*TI* 110), something we discussed more at length in III3d.

The critique of the philosophy of finitude also continuous. Thus the 'beginning in the self' is described as a mastery and sovereignty (*TI* 114), and as a solitude that has its identity not in belonging to a series, but in achieving an isolation outside of such series (*TI* 119). Right above we noted that need is again not interpreted as lack; furthermore, the enjoying ego is not described as ecstatic transcendence, but rather how it draws the world into its interiority: "Enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution" (*TI* 118). What is new, however, is *how* an existent gains such mastery and independence, and the shift to enjoyment as an answer to this implies not just another way to do the same thing; the result is distinctively different.

First and foremost, enjoyment is now not only seen as making up one part of life, but the fundamental constitution of what it means to live. *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* still worked with an intermediate position on this question, where the question of whether we live to eat or eat to live was presented as an ambiguous one. In *Totality and Infinity*, the identification between enjoyment and life is taken to its fullest, but with a new formulation; "We live *from* 'good soup', air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc..." (*TI* 110, my emphasis). We do not live *for* eating, but *from* it, are nourished by it. There is no isolated life that exists first by itself and secondarily goes out to eat; "These contents are lived: they feed life" (*TI* 111). What is meant by this must be understood in its precise meaning.

It is not simply that the contents that we satisfy ourselves with replete an insufficiency – although that is also true –, for this simplicity hides the complexity which makes it possible to enjoy needs. There is another movement on top of basic repletion; "there is a relation with an object and at the same time a relation with this relation which also nourishes and fills life" (*TI* 111). In other words, enjoyment constitutes a double-relation, the fact that one enjoys this relation. There is dependence and sustenance, but the additional fact that sustenance *satiates* is what makes up life. Becoming nourished does not pass neutrally, but rather joyously occupies me; I enjoy my nourishments. To be sure, the physiological drive of hunger moves me, but on top of this, I move because this hunger itself is dear to me (man is "happy for his needs" (*TI* 115)). I not only eat, but I want to eat, and the wanting supersedes, for me, the doing. Aliments therefore sustains me not only physiologically, but feeds my living as such:

“The consumption of foods is the food of life” (TI 114). For the lived experience of enjoyment, the nourishment is secondary to the enjoyment of nourishments.

Life therefore does not simply live, but revels in its life; “Life is *love of life*” (TI 112). Life lives its own self-affirmation. Enjoyment is therefore an experience whose meaningfulness is fully internal, achieved in the self-sufficient act of enjoyment itself: “Enjoyment is precisely this way the act nourishes itself with its own activity” (TI 111). There is no outside reference that endows my enjoyment with value; I find enjoyment valuable in and of itself. “Life is an existence that does not precede its essence”, as Heidegger would have it, for the essence of life is fed by living itself; “Its essence makes up its worth [*prix*]; and here value [*valeur*] constitutes being” (TI 112). Enjoyment values its satisfactions independently of any referentiality.

This self-sustaining goodness of enjoyment converges with Nietzsche’s idea of the noble evaluation, which affirms its own goodness spontaneously and instinctively. The noble does not only have a strong arm, but feels the goodness of this strength. Strength is not only an instrumental function, but is experienced in its vitality; it befalls me well, is enjoyable. This leads furthermore to the idea of the innocence of life’s self-affirmation. The enjoyment of life is self-sufficient, not drawing its justification or validation from anywhere but life itself.

We can furthermore ask if this self-affirmation of life in enjoyment is not necessary for the possibility of asceticism. Even at his strictest, Augustine had to accept that some bodily functions (eating, listening, etc.) are necessary, even if they are enjoyable. He could therefore not avoid all enjoyable actions. He could, however, detest this enjoyability, condemn and frighten at it; he could not-enjoy that he enjoyed. When Nietzsche notes that the Christian ascetic reverses the basic evaluation of our senses, positing that “whatever hurts life the most is called ‘true’, and whatever improves, increases, affirms, justifies life or makes it triumph is called ‘false’” (AC 8), does the possibility of this reversion depend on the structure of enjoyment as a double-relation? Enjoyment is primordially an enjoyment of enjoyment, a self-affirming experience, and it is only because I enjoy that I enjoy that I can also deny it, as in Augustine’s ascetism.

The structure of enjoyment as a double-relation is also what opens up the space within which the ego of a subject can arise as a beginning in itself. Enjoyment is something that concretely happens *for me*, in which *I* have a stake and maybe a steak. Enjoyment does not pass as a neutral, natural event, like a rock falling down a hill or planets revolving around the

sun; I happily *go along* with enjoyment, affirm its satisfaction with the juices of life running down my cheeks. In enjoyment, therefore, life is not anonymous; “because life is happiness it is personal” (TI 115). My corporeal relation to the world is a personal one, where I am invested, engaged and interested in the world. The possibility of an ego, a self-interest – and ‘interest’ is *always* self-interest – emerges in enjoyment. That the living of life entails a spontaneous and unconflicted self-interest – this is where Nietzsche and Levinas converge on the immanence of life.

The emergence of an ego in enjoyment, as portrayed in *Infinity and Totality*, must be distinguished from the account in *Existent and Existence* where the hypostasis produces an existent. Enjoyment is not “the event by which the act expressed by a verb became a being designated by a substantive” (EE 82) by assuming its own existence. Levinas in fact seems to make his position here explicitly in contrast to the idea of a substantive emerging from the pure verballity of Being:

The upsurge of the self beginning in enjoyment, where the substantiality of the I is apperceived not as the subject of the verb to be, but as implicated in happiness (not belonging to ontology, but to axiology) is the exaltation of the existent as such...One becomes a subject of being not by assuming being but in enjoying happiness, by the interiorization of enjoyment which is also an exaltation, an ‘above being’. (TI 119)

The existent is not a substantive that distinguishes itself from pure verballity, and it does not assume its existence, does not take it up, but appears as an elevation in regards to the level of substances. The interiority it begets is not a bearing of being, not an enchainment to existence, but rather a space opened up in its own personal consumption.

Because enjoyment enjoys substances, it is above them, for enjoyment is not a substance but enjoys them, delights happily in them, and thus relates to them with an interest that is not reducible to those substances themselves. It is therefore not an enchained existent bound to and weighed down by existence:

It is not my bearing in being, but already the exceeding of being; being itself ‘befalls’ him who can seek happiness as a new glory above substantiality; being itself is a content which makes up the happiness or unhappiness of him

who does not simply realize his nature but seeks in being a triumph inconceivable in the order of substances. (TI 113, my emphasis)

In possessing the joy of enjoyment in such a way that they make up a content for me for my own sake, I live from them above and beyond the material conditions that make them possible. This existent must therefore be understood in distinction from the enchained existent outlined in his earlier works, for in its enjoyment of its existence, it is already *above* it. It is not burdened by being, but finds a victory in exceeding the existent's own substantiality. Being 'befalls' this existent because it is from the beginning agreeable to the enjoying ego.

And it is as such that the existent finds an independence and a sovereignty in existence that seems paradoxical to formal thought;

That man could be happy for his needs indicates that in human need the physiological plane is transcended, that as soon as there is need we are outside the categories of being – even though in formal logic the structures of happiness – independence through dependence, or I, or human creature – cannot show through without contradiction. (TI 115)

Although the idea of an independence through dependence seems unintelligible, the concrete event of enjoying one's needs, of finding a joy there that is precious to me, shows that such a contradictory event is in fact realized as life itself. Life is an impossible but nevertheless achieved event in existence, where my independency, sovereignty and mastery over existence is concretized as an enjoying ego that has its needs and their satisfaction for its own sake. Life is an object of joy for the subject that lives from it.

I therefore disagree with Marc. A. Cohen's claim that Levinas description of "The separated being...satisfied, autonomous" (TI 62) in *Totality and Infinity* is "a reference to the separated subject described in *Time and the Other*" (Cohen 2014, 57). As we saw in the last chapter, the subject delineated in *Time and the Other* was still the enchained existent of the hypostasis, breaking with the anonymous flow of being by taking on its existence, which M. Cohen recognizes; "Consciousness 'ruptures' the 'there is': with consciousness subjects emerge, and subjects go on to interact with objects and persons in order to secure their material needs" (Cohen 2014, 54). However, this subject remains bound to the tragedy of materiality; it remains enchained in its solitude. It is therefore concerned with salvation: "The

fundamental question is whether and how ontological solitude can be overcome...it is identified explicitly as a concern with salvation” (Cohen 2014, 55). *Time and the Other* defines this salvation as a relation in which the solitary self achieves a relation with what is absolutely other, without losing oneself in the process (i.e. ecstasy).

Cohen’s equation of the notion of the existent in *Time and the Other* and the enjoying ego in *Totality and Infinity* is part of his argument for why the theme of salvation continues in *Totality and Infinity*, even if it is not mentioned directly by name but rather implied in the notion of the Other (Cohen 2014, 57). Cohen argues that “we overcome solitude in the ethical relationship, in the relation of serving the other” (Cohen 2014, 56). It is, however, because the enjoying ego is *not* an enchained existent concerned with salvation, but rather a happy complacency that finds its triumph *above* substantiality, that the question of transcendence takes a different form than that of salvation in *Totality and Infinity*. The metaphysical Desire that searches after the Other – which is a wording Levinas indeed uses (*TI* 62) – must be understood starting from the complacency of the ego, as “a desire in a being already happy” (*TI* 62), rather than as a quest for salvation, a quest for being saved. It is therefore crucial that we emphasize the difference between the existent of the hypostasis and the enjoying ego, for the difference between enchainment and happiness is the reason why the theme of salvation is not present in *Totality and Infinity*.

The independence achieved in this happiness is, furthermore, why I can only half-agree with Simon Critchley when he claims that Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity* affirms that “National Socialism is right in its basic intention, it’s right in its critique of disembodied liberalism. What it sees is something obscured by liberalism, it sees the elemental enrootedness of the human being” (Critchley 2015, 34-35). It is true, on the one hand, that the “notion of an idealist subject has come from the failure to recognize this overflowing of concretization” (*TI* 153). Rather, an independent and sovereign subject emerges from the soil in its living *from* the soil (from the contents of its enjoyment), instead of existing abstractly without location. The enjoying ego is not a “cleavage made in the abstract” (*TI* 115), but a concrete living. On the other hand, however, Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment also signals a partial return to liberalism; “The pathos of liberalism, which we rejoin on one side, lies in the promotion of a person inasmuch as he represents nothing further, that is, is precisely a self” (*TI* 120). What liberalism gets right about the subject is that it is an individual: it ‘represents nothing further’ because the individual begins and ends with itself, and as such is it independent and sovereign. This conception of the existent that

emerges from the analysis of enjoyment is “to be distinguished from the notion of person such as it is fabricated by the philosophy of life or race” (TI 120). In national socialism, the enrootedness of the subject in life concludes that the subject’s belonging to and dependency on life supersedes the individuality life bestows on the existent; rather than interpreting life as individual happiness, national socialism emphasizes the subservience of the existent to life itself. Participation in life is interpreted normatively as the promotion of life at the sacrifice of the individual; you should live life to enhance life in general rather than for yourself.²² The analysis of enjoyment leads in contrast to the primacy of the individual. Levinas thus contrasts his own view with that of “the philosophy of life and race” (TI 120), writing that: “The concept of happiness with the individualness it evokes, is lacking in this philosophy” (TI 120). ‘Living from’ entails an egoistic self-contraction of the subject, where it becomes a place for itself.

There is thus a relation of the self to self in the very self-interest of enjoyment. True, this self-relation has a relation to the otherness of the world from which I live, but I nourish myself from this dependency. It is therefore the way in which “the dependent being draws from this exceptional dependence...its very independence” (TI 104-105). In other words, in accordance with the method of this work as Moati explained it, the formal notion of atheistic separation finds its concretization in enjoyment. Levinas writes; “Enjoyment accomplishes the atheist separation; it deformatizes the notion of separation...the existence at home with itself of an autochthonous I” (TI 115). Enjoyment achieves a separation from the world, an interiority which masters itself, for both the possibility and fulfillment of the happiness of the ego commences from it.

Theologically speaking, we could understand this possibility as such. God creates a world that is distinctly different from Godself – *creatio ex nihilo* –, and this creation is enjoyable in itself. The creatures of this created world of course depend on having been created, but crucially, because this creation is not only distinct from the Creator but *good*, these creatures can find meaning in the goodness of creation without any reference to God. Because they are created as separate from God, and because what is created as-separate is

²² Consider for example the justification Heinrich Himmler uses to legitimize Nazi persecution of homosexuals: “all things which happen in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but impinge upon the life and death of the nation” (Himmler 1937). That homosexual relations are a source of enjoyment and happiness cannot be a relevant factor for Himmler, as long as they do not contribute to the enhancement of life in general

good, there exists the possibility of living *happily without God* as intended by creation itself. ‘Life without God’ or ‘ignorance of God’ does not necessarily entail a sinful and fallen state, for Levinas, but can also refer to the comings and goings of the ordinary everyday, in which I am not oriented towards God but to watering my plants, enjoying the nice weather and setting food on the table. The ordinary, everyday of enjoyment is atheistic, it has a self-referential evaluation that affirms its goodness without reference to a Higher purpose.

In the analysis of enjoyment, then, we find accomplished those same aims that we have seen Levinas pursuing since the beginning of his original writings: a conception of a beginning in the self. This self is conceived not as a finite being lacking the Infinite, nor as an ecstatic transcendence that is projected into the world because it is not at home in it, but rather as a self sufficient unto itself, having for itself a home in existence. Subjectivity, in its essence, is an involution, a dragging-the-world into itself, in the possibility of having it for itself, and living from that opportunity. It is not an autonomous subject – for the Law arrives from elsewhere – but an autochthonous one, ‘sprung from the land itself’ as the etymological meaning of that terms expresses.²³

Essentially for the notion of transcendence, the existent understood as the enjoying ego does not seek an outlet from existence. The beginning in the self is not first and foremost a tragedy, but a happiness. This is not to say that existence does not harbor a tragedy, but that this tragedy is not to be located in the way in which an existent emerges in the first place. Furthermore, the Desire which cannot be satisfied, not due to being an ultimate limit but by exceeding the standards of needs and their satisfaction, is not to be searched for as a release from tragedy. The existent is not trapped in existence, is not weighed down by it, does not possess a bitter self-mastery that inevitably returns to the condemnation of its own enchainment. Important to keep in mind is that neither the existent thought as tragedy nor the existent thought as happiness is thought in terms of lack; whether the self-sufficiency of the self is understood as an entrapment or exaltation in existence, there is not a question of a fundamental lack that would spring the subject towards existence. But the direction towards what lies beyond self-sufficiency changes when we go from enchainment to complacency,

²³ Levinas does at one point call it autonomous, but his choice to put “autonomous” and to specify that it is so “with respect to being” (*TI* 119) clearly shows that he uses the term there not as a strict definition, but more as an adjective to point out a characteristic of the existent.

which further directs us to the difference between the need to escape and the ethical disturbance.

The shift from the earlier writings, where the existent and its emergence were described through the analyses of nausea and enchainment, is quite astonishing. One can ask of Levinas if the abandonment of the descriptions of the inescapable horror of existence as *il y a* does not leave him with an understanding of human life as exaggeratingly paradisiacal, which is a question Peperzak asks; “Would a complete description [of the human life-world] not force us to tone down the ego-centric structure of the elemental economy of enjoyment and naïve happiness?” (Peperzak 2009, 56). Peperzak does not discuss the shift from the earlier works, but addresses *Totality and Infinity* directly by asking if the descriptions of the work does not leave out the “primitive hostilities” (Peperzak 2009, 56) of embodied life. With these earlier works in mind, the question seems even more pressing.

But does *Totality and Infinity* totally leave those prior analyses behind? There is still some talk of a breaking with the anonymous flow of existence; “all these dependencies with regard to the world, having become needs, save the instinctive being from anonymous menaces” (*TI* 116). What is this anonymous menace that the happiness of needs save us from? Or when Levinas writes that the body is “not *only* a way for the subject to be reduced to slavery” (*TI* 116, my emphasis), does this not imply that the body is *also* the possibility of such a slavery? It would seem that this provides some ground for asking whether there is a return of the notion of ‘there is’ (*il y a*) in this work, and a discussion of ‘there is’ does indeed take place in this work as well. As we shall see, however, Levinas does not ease Peperzak’s complaints; the re-emergence of ‘there is’ will not be able to disturb the fundamental happiness of the enjoying ego.

d) *Il y a* (‘there is’) and the Elements

While enjoyment is the miracle of an independency gained through a dependency, it nevertheless achieves this *through* a dependency. I enjoy what I depend on and even enjoy this dependency, but this does not completely annul this dependence; “What we live from and enjoy is not the same as that life itself” (*TI* 122). I enjoy a world that is other to me, and although I assimilate and digest its otherness for my own strength and happiness, its otherness cannot be completely suspended; “To assume exteriority is to enter into a relation with it such that the same determines the other while being determined by it” (*TI* 128). The I is conditioned by the non-I in which it lives.

In this respect, enjoyment differs from representation, which is a complete adequation between the thought and the thinking of it; “The intelligible is precisely what is entirely reducible to noemata and all of whose relations with the understanding reducible to those established by the light” (TI 124). The intelligible is, according to Levinas, that which has been scrutinized to the point that nothing is hidden, nothing left opaque; everything is made familiar in representation “without introducing alterity into it” (TI 124). The act of consciousness constitutes the object of consciousness.

Enjoyment, however, is a different type of intentionality; in fact, “It may be said that as enjoyment, intentionality advances in the reverse” (Moati 2017, 62). The intentionality of a need does not represent to itself the object it sought out, but is on contrast *fed* by this object. The fact that I can satisfy myself from the world means exactly that the satisfaction itself constitutes enjoyment; enjoyment does not constitute contents, but is constituted *from them*; “This sinking one’s teeth into the things which the act of eating involves above all measures the surplus of the reality of the aliment over every represented reality” (TI 129). This does not take away from the sincerity of enjoyment; “To sense is precisely to be sincerely content with what is sensed, to enjoy” (TI 138-139). I find, in this sense, what I seek for, but I find it because these contents can constitute the satisfaction I am looking for. ‘Living from...’ means to live *from* the contents of my enjoyment.

While enjoyment sustains a mastery over its contents, it does not possess an unassailable freedom in regards to them, but can only master a world that is already there. The autochthonous self achieves an interiority in its rootedness, but the exaltation of that interiority is still also rooted. It is this ambiguous duality that Levinas believes expresses the essence of embodiment; “To posit oneself corporeally is to touch an earth, but to do so in such a way that the touching finds itself already conditioned by the position” (TI 128). The body is the chiasm between my happiness and the materiality of the world. To be a body is both to enjoy on a level ‘above substances’, as we saw earlier, but also to be enchained to it; “The body is the elevation, but also the whole weight of position” (TI 127). There is a duality in the enjoying ego’s sovereignty.

Are we then not again returning to an existent that is bound to its existence in the mastery it has over it? Does not this talk of the *weight* of existing mirror the descriptions of *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* that I argue *Totality and Infinity* poses an alternative to? These questions are pressing. Furthermore, in virtue of the fact that the

enjoying ego is *sensible*, or more precisely *sensibility itself*, Levinas re-introduces notion of ‘there is’ (*il y a*).

Before turning to Levinas’ discussion of ‘there is’ in *Totality and Infinity*, we must begin by explaining why enjoyment is sensibility, which is important for Levinas – he calls it “the *mode* of enjoyment” (TI 135). This mode refers to the way in which enjoyment relates to the contents it lives from, namely their surface. The enjoyment of contents does not reach these contents as representation represents an object, but *contents* itself off them, which means in a sense to find satisfaction in their surface – for enjoyment seeks nothing beyond the satisfaction it finds in its contents. Levinas identifies this as the essential teaching of hedonism: “to not seek, behind the satisfaction of a need, an order relative to which alone satisfaction would acquire value; to take satisfaction, which is the very meaning of pleasure, as a term” (TI 134). Enjoyment is essentially superficial; it does not care whether it is inside or outside the matrix, as long as it is enjoying itself.

The enjoyment of the ego therefore constitutes a ‘finitude without infinity’ in quite a different way than how Heidegger conceives it. Heidegger’s ‘finitude without infinity’ is the thrownness of Dasein, restless due to its homelessness in the world and thrown back at itself due to its being-towards-death. This is, as we have argued, an existence essentially determined by what it lacks, clinging on to beings because it fears its own abyss. The enjoying ego, in contrast, is finite without a reference to infinity because it is content with its existence, and therefore does not care whether there is an infinity beyond or beneath the surfaces it enjoys;

Objects content me in their finitude, without appearing to me on a ground of infinity. The finite without the infinite is possible only as contentment. The finite as contentment is sensibility. (TI 135)

There is nothing beyond satisfaction that enjoyment seeks, no other justification it needs than the accomplishment of its happiness. Enjoyment is happy with surfaces: the tongue which laps up enjoyable goods does not yearn for anything beyond it.

It was therefore in a sense wrong when we said above that enjoyment enjoys substances, for as sensibility, enjoyment is thus not a relation to outlined objects, to things,

but to qualities and adjectives.²⁴ Levinas describes this not as a relation to the world, but to that which is even more primordial than it; the elements. The elements refers to the ‘world’ before it is something synchronized and structure within which I can orient myself, for the elemental pertains to the formlessness of being; “it is content without form” (*TI* 131). Enjoyment lives from elements, and the contents from which it lives are therefore not situated in a structure that endows them with references. There is nothing sought, but also nothing seen supporting the content-qualities of which life lives; “The element presents us as it were the reverse of reality, without origin in a being, although presenting itself in familiarity – of enjoyment – as though we were in the bowels of being” (*TI* 132). Contents spring forth from an indeterminate background within which we live, where the essence of beings are on their surface – as qualities – while its center remains opaque and nowhere, but everywhere to be found.

This indeterminate, anonymous elemental signals the return of the ‘there is’ (*il y a*). In *Totality and Infinity*, however, the ‘there is’ threatens the enjoying ego in a particular way that must be distinguished from how it horrified the existent in *Existence and Existents*. In this work, it in terms of the futural insecurity that the ‘there is’ threatens. Contents come out of nowhere:

This coming from nowhere, from ‘something’ that is not, appearing without there being anything that appears – and consequently coming always, without my being able to possess the source – delineates the future of sensibility and enjoyment. (*TI* 141)

I satisfy myself with the contents of the elemental, but I have no control over how they emerge or where they come from. In this sense, “Nourishment comes as a happy chance” (*TI* 141). Nourishment is like a gift from existence, but it emerges from an anonymous background over which I have no power. I come upon an apple tree by happenstance, pluck its delicious fruits and truly savor its delicious taste – this is the enjoyment of surface qualities, and spells out the agreeableness of life. It is, however, a happenstance, and the enjoyability of this happenstance does not tell me anything about where it came from, nor

²⁴ This is an example of something that has changed from *Existence and Existents* in regards to the analysis of enjoyment itself, for there enjoyment was described as a relation to objects (e.g. *EE* 37)

whether it will come again. 'For now' I am satisfied, in the moment that the contents sought are found, but I have no insurance for the future. To ensure such security is the work of labor, of building up stocks, which requires society, to which I will return.²⁵ In its own moment though, enjoyment faces an insecurity with which it cannot communicate, neither to negotiate nor to appeal; "Faceless gods, impersonal gods to whom one does not speak, mark the nothingness that bounds the egoism of enjoyment in the midst of its familiarity with the element" (TI 142). Simply put, the self-sufficiency of enjoyment does not provide itself with its own security.

Levinas refers this instability and unruliness of the elements to his idea of 'there is' from *Existence and Existents*: "We have described this nocturnal dimension of the future under the title *there is*" (TI 142). The futural insecurity of the elements is a dimension to which we are simply given over, rather than given to us. Furthermore, its disquietude is something we are always abutting, also in our enjoyment; "Against the anonymous *there is*, horror, trembling, and vertigo, perturbation of the I that does not coincide with itself, the happiness of enjoyment affirms the I at home with itself" (TI 143). In enjoyment, even when it has achieved its happiness, we are always already bathed in the opaque depth of the elemental, a dependence enveloping our independence.

It would then seem as if we are returning to themes quite similar to the ones in *Existence and Existents*: an existent emerging from, but nevertheless riveted to the *il y a*. There are, however, important differences between how the existent of the hypostasis tears itself from the pure verballity of the *il y a* in *Existence and Existents* and how the ego arises in the elements in *Totality and Infinity*. As the above quote states, despite horror and trembling, 'the happiness of enjoyment' nevertheless 'affirms the I at home with itself'. Therefore, while *Existence and Existents* laments an inevitable return to the *il y a* and its enchainment in solitude, *Totality and Infinity* emphasizes the victory and the last word of happiness over the elements: "Suffering at the same time despairs for being riveted to a being – and loves the being to which it is riveted...The *taedium vitae* is steeped in the love of the life it rejects; despair does not break with the ideal of joy" (TI 146). In this work, the happy ego retains a triumph over and against the *il y a*.

²⁵ This is also where Levinas will explain the condition of possibility of relations to objects (or 'things' to be more precise) and the world in this work

The reason for this triumph follows from the difference in how the relation between the existent and the *il y a* are thought with reference to the hypostasis and enjoyment respectively. In *Existence and Existents*, the existent is defined specifically in terms of the *il y a*: “Through taking position in the anonymous *there is* a subject is affirmed” (*EE* 82). The hypostasis is a substantive emerging *from pure verbality*: it emerges as an existent by distinguishing itself from the *il y a*. In *Totality and Infinity*, however, the movement is reversed: “insecurity menaces an enjoyment already happy in the element, rendered sensitive to disquietude only by this happiness” (*TI* 142). The disquietude of the elements is only meaningful for an already separated, enjoying ego. This is what I meant with my comment to Tom Sparrow in the last chapter; while *il y a* was seen as constitutive of the separation of the subject in the previous works, this work sees *il y a* as “a menace to the already separated existent” (Sparrow 2013, 18).

We must, however, make sure to interpret the relation between enjoyment and disquietude not chronologically but phenomenologically. It is not due to the temporal order of events, but *due to the essence of the event called enjoyment itself* that this distinction must be made. The disquietude of the elements remains secondary to enjoyment not because it happens after the enjoying ego has already emerged, but because it implicates enjoyment in its revolt: “Life loved is the very enjoyment of life, contentment – already appreciated in the refusal I bear against it, where contentment is refused in the name of contentment itself” (*TI* 145). I bemoan my dependency on earthly goods ‘in the name of contentment’, that is, because I want to satisfy my needs. The restless hunger uncertain of its next meal contains a reference to the goodness of that meal, and can only be restless in reference to it, but not as a logical condition – it is rather that in the *phenomenality* of this restlessness, the goodness of enjoyment is already testified to. The worry over the future insecurity of needs is worried because it is happy for these needs.

The happiness of enjoyment is therefore primary to the menacing of the *il y a* in a phenomenological sense, and this primordial sense is another way in which we can understand the convergence between Nietzsche and Levinas on the question of life and enjoyment. We saw how Nietzsche bemoaned the different metaphysical systems that introduces *opposition* into the innocence of life. For the phenomenality of enjoyment as well, we must understand that it unfolds, according to its own meaning, non-oppositionally; “The primordial positivity of enjoyment, perfectly innocent, is opposed to nothing and in this sense suffices to itself from the first” (*TI* 145). Enjoyment does not have to enter a dialectic for its

meaning, but accomplishes itself without resistance. This is why the *il y a* cannot menace its primordial agreeability, for only in reference to it and within the space it opens up does the revolt against our dependence on needs make sense. In contrast to the hypostasis, where the existent tears itself away from a generality that terrorizes it and thus opposes it, enjoyment is possible because the contents that feed it “is given from the first” (TI 145). This is again why M. Cohen – and the many others who argue this – cannot simply draw a line of continuity between the hypostasis and enjoyment. The enjoying ego relates differently to the *il y a* because of its own unfolding, which makes horror at the anonymous secondary not in the chronological order, but in the phenomenological order of the concrete: “For one cannot first posit an I and then ask if enjoyment and need run counter to it, limit it, injure it, or negate it: only in enjoyment does the I crystallize” (TI 144). The world appears as a danger to a stomach that is already set on having its fill; the insecurity of the elements worry a being already happy to live from them.

Enjoyment is, however, reminiscent of the hypostasis and the analysis of *il y a* in one crucial way: in the same way the enchained existent cannot conceive of an alternative to existence, the enjoying ego cannot conceive of an alternative to life. Thus, in Levinas’ meditation on Macbeth, the impossibility of suicide returns, although in a modified form: “It knows the impossibility of quitting life: what a tragedy! what a comedy...” (TI 146). Because the revolt of life confirms the originary agreeableness of life, there is no possible replacement for it.

Crucially, however – and this again follows from the unique structure of enjoyment –, the impossibility of conceiving of an alternative to life does *not* lead to a metaphysical desire to go beyond the world in general. Precisely because the protest against life springs from the originary affirmation of it, the escape-route of the starved, over-worked ego points *towards the world*:

The happiness of enjoyment is greater than all disquietude: whatever be the concerns for the morrow, the happiness of living – of breathing, of seeing, of feeling (“One minute more, Mr. Hangman!”) – remains in the midst of disquietude as the term proposed to every evasion from the world troubled, to intolerability, by disquietude. One flees life toward life. (TI 149)

The flight – the escape – does not tend beyond being, but goes towards life. It seems then that Levinas in this work has learned the full lesson from what was still a preliminary observation in *Existence and Existents* that “the condemned man still drinks his glass of rum” (*EE* 45). There, the glass of rum would still figure as a compensation, as a ‘why not’ in the midst of the tragedy of enchainment, where the notion of a salvation from existence is still operative. Here, however, an “agreement of happiness” (*TI* 143) predates – concretely, not chronologically – the condemnation, and thus also always returns to it. Life seeks its escape in life, in ‘one more minute’ of sensing the beauty that adorns the earth.

In the last chapter, we saw how Levinas’ affirmation of asceticism in *On Escape* converged with Nietzsche’s analysis of Judeo-Christianity as an expression of ‘life against life’. The unbearableness of life – life nauseated at life – leads to a need to escape being, a flight from reality, which asceticism testifies to and cultivates by practicing the fact that no earthly good can satisfy this need. In *Totality and Infinity*, in contrast, Levinas reverses the position. Even in its darkest hour, life escapes towards life, for life is in its primordial phenomenality a self-affirmation, a love of life; “The love of life, a relation of life with life...[is] life’s joyous access to life” (*TI* 145). Enchainment and escape is foreign to this schema, for the agreeability of life precedes any bondage, and the need for release from this bondage is not directed to any beyond, but to life itself.

This emphasizes the radicalness of the complacency Levinas defends in this work. Against whatever troubles the world might throw at me, at the bottom of my relation to the world, Levinas argues, lies a profound agreeability. This is true even with reference to the fundamental vulnerability in the ego Levinas argues is necessary for the encounter with the Other, so that “Interiority must be at the same time closed and open” (*TI* 149), for this insecurity does not tend towards the Other in the same way enchainment tends towards escape. The enjoying ego remains happy with itself, for “If the insecurity of the world that is fully agreed to in enjoyment troubles enjoyment, the insecurity can not suppress the fundamental agreeableness of life” (*TI* 150). It is because of the radical contentment of the enjoying ego that this work can delineate another transcendence than that of escape; as the ethical encounter that breaks open the happy, solitary existence of the ego.

Levinas therefore answer with a ‘no’ to Peperzak’s question of whether we should “not place greater emphasis on the ambiguity of a life that abandons itself to the elements?” (Peperzak 2009, 56). This answer follows, however, not from a disregard of that ambiguity – an ambiguity expressed by the body’s simultaneous elevation and enrootedness –, but from

Levinas' argument that life, even in its despair, turns towards life. The fundamental agreeableness to life is not dispelled by life's insecurity and possible sufferings, for it is in terms of enjoyment that the ego lives its life. Peperzak's question above is, however, not an exegetical question, but a philosophical challenge; and we could ask with Peperzak whether Levinas is correct in delineating life as an undefeatable happiness. Would something like the experience of the horror over *il y a* that he described so intimately in *Existence and Existents* even be possible in *Totality and Infinity*? Levinas does in fact discuss this possibility:

The limit case in which need prevails over enjoyment, the proletarian condition condemning to accursed labor in which the indigence of corporeal existence finds neither refuge nor leisure at home with itself, is the absurd world of *Geworfenheit*. (TI 146-147)

Life can become too much to bear, where the work put in does not justify the outcome. Needless suffering where one receives nothing or too little in return is of course possible; Levinas would be the last to deny this.

It is however a limit case, as Moati rightly points out: "Far from being either originary or existential, thrownness is the symptom of a socially disorganized world" (Moati 2017, 87). This could be the case for the farmer who, after all his diligent work and outmost effort nevertheless sees his crops fail and livestock die due to unforeseeable events outside of his control, or for the single mother working her ass off at two minimum wage jobs and still being evicted because she cannot pay her bills. Life comes with no guarantee of success. The essence of Levinas position lies however in this; even after we grant this indubitable point, *life still refers back to life*. If we wanted to give answer to the despair of the ill-starred farmer and overworked single mother, it would have to be with bread in our hands; "The Marxist views retain here their whole force, even in a different perspective. The suffering of need is not assuaged in anorexy, but in satisfaction" (TI 146). The unfortunate and exploited seek fruitful soil and fair wages; the alleviation of their distress is found in terms of the agreeableness to life that enjoyment already signifies.

e) Enjoyment and Dwelling

The disquietude of the elements and the possibility of *Geworfenheit* does not annul the love of life, but the ego nevertheless seeks to overcome this elemental security through labor and

dwelling. We do not simply accept the precariousness of an unpredictable nature, but dam our rivers, sole our shoes and stock up for the winter. In other words, the ego does not simply enjoy life, but labors and dwells in a world where it is at home not only because of the agreeability of life, but also because it *builds* a home there. Turning to the themes of labor and dwelling, we will be occupied with the same question Levinas asks, namely “How, in the midst of a life which is life from..., which enjoys elements, and which is preoccupied with overcoming the insecurity of enjoyment, is a distance to be produced?” (TI 154). This question must be asked due to the above discussion of the elements and *Geworfenheit*, where we argued that despite the insecurity of life, life always flees towards life – the rumblings of ‘there is’ cannot dispel the fundamental agreeability of life. Labor and dwelling, however, seeks to ‘produce a distance’ and in a sense overcome the immediacy with which life is lived in the elements. Moreover, Levinas states that “Labor...already requires discourse and consequently the height of the other irreducible to the same, the presence of the Other” (TI 117). In other words, labor and dwelling are only possible for an ego opened by the ethical relation.

Does this then mean that the theme of salvation from *Existence and Existents* makes its return in *Totality and Infinity*, just as Marc Cohen argued? For according to the above, it could seem as if the Other comes to pull the Same out of the mire of the elements, saving it from the anonymous menace of the ‘there is’ and providing it with the possibilities of labor and dwelling. This would go squarely against the reading I has so far proposed, one that has argued that the analysis of enjoyment leads to a completely self-sufficient ego that, because its needs are satisfied, “can henceforth turn to what it does not lack” (TI 117). Furthermore, it would seem to entail a disengagement from the agreeability of life in the elements, which I in the above argued was not the case. This is a concern Levinas shares: “The I would thereby lose the confirmation which as life from...and enjoyment of... it receives in the element which nourishes it” (TI 154). It is therefore, both for us and for Levinas, a question if the distance achieved in labor and dwelling signals a departure from life in its pure enjoyability, or whether it continues to confirm it. As I intend to show, the latter is the case.

Dwelling and labor do in a sense disengage the immediacy of enjoyment. More precisely, they postpone enjoyment (TI 157). Dwelling and labor entails taking stock, gathering, collecting and saving the contents of its enjoyment. It is not a savoring of the enjoyed contents, but more like that life-oriented type of asceticism that we discussed in the chapter on Nietzsche (IIf); a temporary fast for the sake of eating. This sort of asceticism does

not deny the goods it abstains from, but in contrast enhances the enjoyment, both in terms of intensity (it sharpens the hunger, as Nietzsche says) and predictability. Dwelling is therefore neither immediate enjoyment nor its rejection, but the building up of a reservoir, which allows the exercise of a mastery over the unpredictability of the elements.

This possibility of a stockpile is one of the ways in which labor and dwelling overcomes the insecurity of the elements, by managing its enjoyment through rations. Additionally, labor accesses the elements in a new and different way; “The things that come to be possessed through labor are inscribed within a duration that was missing in a direct relation to the element” (Moati 2017, 93). Labor approaches the elements not in their surface-quality as pure, sensible adjectives, but discovers them as substances;

The labor that draws the things from the elements in which I am steeped discovers durable substances, but forthwith suspends the independence of their durable being by acquiring them as movable goods, transportable, put in reserve, deposited in the home. (TI 157)

Sensible enjoyment relates to the surface of the elemental, that is, to adjectives and qualities, whereas labor discovers and masters bounded substances. It is therefore able to wrestle from them the independency that the elements retained vis-à-vis the ego in virtue of being foreign and unpredictable; “Through the transformation of the element into things, labor assures the passage from enjoyment...to the possession of things that are durable because they are substantial” (Moati 2017, 94). The immediacy of elemental enjoyment contains a futural insecurity due to the opaqueness of the enjoyed contents, coming as ‘a stroke of luck’, but this obstacle is overcome by the laboring hand which is able to furnish substances out of the elemental qualities.

It is for this reason that the laboring hand in the strict sense does not relate to the elements; in its mode of access, “Labor will...draw things from the elements and thus *discover* the world” (TI 156-157). Strictly speaking, the world only becomes world through the access of labor and dwelling.²⁶ In contrast to the immediate enjoyment of the elements, labor and the possession of substances in a home opens up unto a world of forests and rivers,

²⁶ This work therefore develops on *Existence and Existents* by developing a distinction between immediate enjoyment and labor in view of which we can understand the relation to a world.

cities and fields. It learns to navigate terrains and to follow the seasons, or to understand a market and the chain of supply and demand. More fundamentally, as we saw above, labor reaches the world in its substantiality, that is, qua *things*. While enjoyment enjoys sensible qualities, labor holds in possession delimited entities: “possession com-prehends the being of the existent, and only thus does the thing arise. Ontology is a relation with things which makes things manifest” (TI 158).²⁷ Out of the indefinite anonymity of the elemental, the hand pulls forth an identifiable, manifest thing.

Because it reaches things qua things, the laboring can hand take stock and move things into its home: “A thing is a movable – a *furnishing* [*meuble*]” (TI 161). The furnishing of a home is possible because the dwelling ego, withdrawn from the immediacy of the elements, masters the world in its substantiality, as usable things that can be detached and stored in cupboards. Such a substantiality of a clearly delimited thing is not made possible by virtue of the thematization and objectification that Levinas attributes to language understood as the metaphysical relation. It is simply as a possible possession, discovered by the hand that seizes control over the elements, which comprehends the thing in its solidity and predictability. The hiker who takes hold of a solid, balanced and appropriately lengthy piece of wood comprehends it as a walking stick – a ‘thing’ – not by abstracting from the purely sensible to an intelligible concept, but by understanding it as a stick in the very grip that seeks out and feels the solidity and balance it provides against the unruliness of the elements.

Importantly, labor and dwelling are not opposed to the self-sufficiency of the enjoying ego. This mastery of the world of objects which places itself above the immediacy of elemental enjoyment is not opposed to it, but in fact grows out of, secures and thus yet again affirms the primordial agreeableness of life. Mastery secures enjoyment:

The power of the hand that grasps or tears up or crushes or kneads relates the element, not to an infinity by relation to which the thing would be defined, but to an end in the sense of a goal, to the goal of need. (TI 160)

It is with needs in mind that one plows the soil, dams the river and forms a pot out of clay. The work of cultivating the earth and building one’s settlement establishes a distance between

²⁷ As noted previously, Levinas’ philosophy cannot simply be understood as a critique of ontology without taking into account his own notion of it, which the above quote testifies to (see III1b and IVb for more on this)

me and the unruliness of the elements, but it withdraws not by abandoning, but by mastering. This is the ambiguous distancing of dwelling, which Levinas sees captured in the windows of a house “that makes possible a look that dominates, a look of him who escapes looks” (*TI* 156). The window separates me from the world in a way that yet again secures my access to the world. I remain in connection but also at a distance, because my relation to the world is mediated by a border I constructed in order to keep it both at bay and accessible. “Human beings are thus neither thrown into existence nor subtracted from it in a position of absolute retreat” (Moati 2017, 91), but attain a mastery over the life they live from.

This is important, for the reason for why the distance established in the dwelling must be understood in terms of this ambiguous belonging/withdrawing concerns the question of enjoyment and its self-sufficiency. The precariousness of existence in the elements surely threatens enjoyment, as the needs from which enjoyment satiates itself become an uncertainty for the ego. Levinas is, however, very careful in making sure that we understand this uncertainty correctly, and the danger he senses is that it would be interpreted in either the classical or contemporary schema of finitude:

Enjoyment is wholly nourished by the outside it inhabits, but its agreeableness manifests its sovereignty, a sovereignty as foreign to the freedom of a *causa sui*, which nothing outside could affect, as to the Heideggerian *Geworfenheit*, which, caught up in the other that limits it and negates it, suffers from this alterity as much as would an idealist freedom. (*TI* 163-164)

The finite subject – which traditional philosophy, theology and philosophers of existence only think differently insofar as it is finitude with or without infinity – relates to the world as a limit. For the idealist subject, the embodied existence of enjoyment as a happy dependency on a world that is other to me limits the freedom of the subject. Heidegger overcomes the naivety of an idealist position which cannot account for the enrootedness of human existence, but the idea of thrownness nevertheless continues the notion of the alterity of a world in which I lose myself, and therefore suffer from.

Even though he determines our worldliness as primordially one of agreeableness, Levinas also recognizes the precarious state of being-in-the-world. I content myself of its otherness, I live from it, but to enjoy is also “to stand on the earth, to be in the *other*, and thus to be encumbered by one’s body” (*TI* 164). As stated in the previous section (IVd), the body

constitutes the ambiguity of being both exalted and enrooted in the enjoyment of life, and this is the ambiguity labor continues to struggle with – it tries to master our dependency on the otherness of the world. But the crucial insight is that the primordial agreeableness of enjoyment is not undermined by this, and is in fact why this precariousness cannot be understood as a limit; “This ever possible inversion of life cannot be stated in terms of limited or finite freedom” (*TI* 164). That I depend on the world, and that I must build a home to ward off its unpredictable nature, does not limit me but is inscribed within the primordial goodness of life, for “What is necessary to my existence in order to subsist interests my existence” (*TI* 164). I depend on the world, yes, but the fact that enjoyment finds through this dependency its exceptional independency means that this dependency cannot be determined as limit, for the preservation of my own life is of interest to me. The lone farmer scouring a plot of uncultivated land surely sees many hurdles and obstacles, but the labor which will be required to cultivate it is not a limit, but ‘part of the game’; it belongs to the horizon within which this plot of land can be a home. The uncertainty of the elemental therefore does not introduce a conflict into the fundamental agreeability of life, for “Its adhesion to the world in which it risks being lost is precisely, and at the same time, that by which it defends itself and is at home with itself” (*TI* 165). To say that my dependency on the world limits me would be like saying that the rules of chess limits my ability to play it, which is ridiculous, for there would be no chess to play without those rules.

The distance from the elements produced by dwelling and labor therefore do not dispel the fundamental agreeableness of life, but affirms it. But what about the relation to the Other and the question of salvation? As stated at the beginning of this section, labor and dwelling depend on a relation to the Other, or to transcendence. Levinas in fact makes a distinction with regards to Other here, for both the feminine Other and the metaphysical Other are required for the possibility of labor and dwelling. The feminine Other is the one who makes the home hospitable and familiar, by providing a gentle intimacy “that spreads over the face of things” (*TI* 155).²⁸ The metaphysical Other is necessary for labor and dwelling by opening up the dimension of time and thus for recollection (*TI* 166). It is recollection that makes the postponement of enjoyment and the taking of stockpiles possible.

²⁸ As Moati explains, ‘the feminine Other’ is not necessarily someone of a particular gender, but rather a mode of the Other that all others can participate in (Moati 2017, 203).

But how can we talk of the Other here, when it was argued at the beginning of this chapter that Levinas' methodological approach to enjoyment entailed describing it in isolation? There, we deemed this approach necessary for the sake of the isolated character of the phenomenon of enjoyment itself. We also noted, however, that *concrete man* never lives outside of the ethical relation, but is always already inspired by the idea of Infinity. The point was that, despite having its cause outside of itself – despite being created out of nothing –, the enjoying ego can live 'as if' it had no cause, and this 'as if' accomplishes a concrete event. This continues to be true, and is in fact something Levinas emphasizes. For while labor and dwelling testify to the precariousness of nature, and do indeed depend on being already founded on the idea of infinity, in order that they have the time available for their work, dwelling and labor also participate in the sovereign structure of separation in which the enjoying self begins and ends with nothing but itself:

the separated being can close itself up in its egoism, that is, in the very accomplishment of its isolation. And this possibility of forgetting the transcendence of the Other – of banishing with impunity all hospitality (that is, all language) from one's home, banishing the transcendental relation that alone permits the I to shut itself up in itself – evinces the absolute truth, the radicalism, of separation. (TI 172-173)

While dependent on the metaphysical relation, the dwelling ego can still live 'as if' it was independent of its cause. Dwelling in a home thus still conforms to the same egoism which defines enjoyment and happiness as an accomplishment that begins from and ends with itself, independent on any external signification which would dignify or justify that happiness. The home for Levinas is a happy home: "Levinas emphasizes...the primary sincerity of the concrete fact of dwelling" (Moati 2017, 90). Dwelling, being-at-home, conforms the ego's happiness by securing it.

Therefore, while labor and dwelling depend already on the metaphysical relation, they are – just like enjoyment and egoism – equally capable of detaching themselves from the Other. Dwelling does not entail a departure from solitude, but an affirmation of it. The analysis of dwelling and labor is in fact only meant to emphasize this even further;

the dwelling can remain sealed, closed to the other, in order to maintain the separated being in its self-containment, in an ontologically radical self-sufficiency – attesting to the breadth and depth of the separation. (Moati 2017, 90)

The enjoying ego has this unique capacity because it finds in its existence ends that are justified and satisfactory in virtue *only of itself*. And ‘only of itself’ here must be understood in its precise but contradictory meaning; on the one hand, it does not mean *really* ‘only of itself’, because the ego is still founded on the idea of Infinity, but on the other, it is *really* ‘only of itself’ in the peculiar but nevertheless concrete meaning enjoyment has. The ego lives ‘as though’ it is independent, and thus it is independent, for regardless of whatever circumstances that conditions it, enjoyment finds value in itself, transforming all its dependencies into a content of enjoyment.

It is therefore not only the case that enjoyment is secured and enhanced by the different dimensions of life that grow out of it and come to rest on top of it (labor, dwelling, etc.); enjoyment also remains a mode of access at all these different stages of life. I can enjoy not only foods and drinks, but also my work and bus rides, or picking up my kids after work. “Enjoyment – an ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being, with its materiality – embraces all relations with things” (TI 133), so that virtually everything can become an object of enjoyment. Tools are a perfect example. For Heidegger, tools testify to the referentiality of things in the world, as they refer, in their being, to the web of purposes and plans they are entangled in. Levinas counters, however, by pointing out that even these tools can be enjoyed as ends in themselves;

furnishings, the home, food, clothing are not Zeuge in the proper sense of the term: clothing serves to protect the body or to adorn it, the home to shelter it, food to restore it, but we enjoy them or suffer from them; they are ends. (TI 133)

Feeling the grip of the hammer, I enjoy the quality of the wood it is made from, and the proper weighting of the head which allows me to use it seamlessly. To let myself be occupied in using it is not absent-mindedness, not a forgetting, but an enjoyment of the wellness of the tool. This is testified to in the traditions of carving and ornating our tools, which celebrate

these tools not only as a ‘for-the-sake-of’, but as enjoyable ends in themselves. We adorn our tools, and furthermore let them adorn our home. A good pan hanging over the stove is not only useful, but decorates the home. The “throbbing of an egoism” (TI 175) therefore lives at the heart of the home. It is perhaps not the only moment of the separation, which also requires the second distancing of the dwelling; but the dwelling completes the separation by securing that originary affirmation of self-sufficiency that enjoyment already was.

f) Life in the Garden of Eden

In this chapter, we have explicated Levinas’ mature analysis of enjoyment as it appears in *Totality and Infinity*. In regards to the overarching topic of the present thesis, which is to think the relation between immanence and transcendence in a non-oppositional way, this chapter provides the positive account of immanence as enjoyment. Enjoyment attests to the primordial agreeability of my relation to the world, which we have called and Levinas also calls immanence; “I am myself, I am here, at home with myself, inhabitation, immanence in the world” (TI 138). Immanence refers to the self-sufficient dimension of life as love of life, which lives ‘as though’ it was independent of a reference to transcendence, and therefore lives independently at home in the world.

At the beginning of this chapter, we highlighted that Levinas opens *Totality and Infinity* by rewriting a line from a poem by Rimbaud, changing ‘We are not in the world’ to ‘But we are in the world’, thus electing to emphasize this fact. This is, as we have shown at different points, in contradistinction to Heidegger, who argues that the primordial structure of Dasein’s being-in-the-world is its not-being-at-home. The familiarity with which the world appears when we feel at home in it is for Heidegger a mode of the underlying un-homeliness of worldly existence; “Tranquilized, familiar (*beruhigt-vertraute*) being-in-the-world is a mode of the uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) of Dasein, not the other way around” (BT 183). The familiarity of a world in which we can trust (*vertrauen*) is secondary, a cover-up that casts a deceptive calm (*Ruhe*) over the strife and struggle that life essentially is. In this polemic against the tranquility of this familiarity, we sense Heidegger’s general opposition to ‘life in the garden’ and its complacency that we discussed at the end of chapter II (Iii). It also explains, yet again, why Heidegger elects to determine enjoyment as belonging to the inauthentic structure of Dasein. To remain in the pleasantness of a garden is to avoid a genuine confrontation with what is essential in life.

In contrast, a Levinasian analysis, I believe, demonstrates why worldly life is lived most authentically in the garden. In fact, I find that the phenomenon of gardens demonstrates perfectly what we have been trying to understand about enjoyment in this chapter. For what is a garden? It is, like the home, a place of dwelling, which means that it is a way in which human gain control over the unruliness of nature. A garden is the wilderness tamed. This is, as we said above, the second stage of the separation of the ego, or the way in which labor and dwelling overcomes the unpredictability of the elements by mastering them.

We also noted that this second distancing does not entail a radical detachment from the agreeableness of life in enjoyment, but rather secures and enhances our capacity to satisfy our needs. Furthermore, the tools we use to master nature and the home we dwell in can themselves become objects of enjoyment, like how a cooking pan can decorate a home. This, I believe, is even more visible in the phenomenon of gardens. Gardens are furnished to our enjoyment; its rose bushes and trimmed hedges are pleasant to the eye, and the apple tree provides a cool shade on the hottest days of summer. Pleasant sights, delightful smells and a nice, cool breeze – this is what makes a garden. A garden is a place of dwelling furnished for the sake of enjoyability.

The garden therefore exemplifies a general human tendency that the Levinasian analysis of enjoyment reveals, namely our tendency to not simply live in the world, but live in it in a way that brings out its enjoyability. Humans do not simply make and use tools, but adorn them by carving decorations into them;

Tools and implements, which themselves presuppose enjoyment, offer themselves to enjoyment in their turn. They are playthings (*jouets*): the fine cigarette lighter, the fine car. They are adorned by the decorative arts; they are immersed in the beautiful, where every going beyond enjoyment reverts to enjoyment. (TI 140)

Humans adorn the world they live in, for life is *love of life*. This is what Heidegger misses when he polemizes against the garden. The garden is a façade, yes, but in the meaning of an adornment; as façade, it refers to nothing but the enjoyability of life that is brought up in it. This insight has no arbitrary place in Levinas' philosophy, but expresses one of his primary theses regarding human existence; "To enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure – this is the human" (TI 133). To enjoy

without reference to anything else makes up the essence of enjoyment. This is also exemplified in occasions that call for celebration, like birthday parties, holidays or new years eve. The colorful balloons and fireworks we expend on these occasions refers to nothing else but the momentary spectacle that is spent during the celebration. Levinas' phrase that 'life is love of life' could, perhaps, be alternatively phrased as 'life is celebration of life'.

In this chapter, we have determined immanence as the self-satisfactory innocence of enjoyment. In the next chapter, we turn toward the topic Levinas is more known for, namely the metaphysical relation to the Other. Before doing so, however, it will be useful to reflect for a minute on what we can hope to have achieved by determining immanence the way in which we have done. For the determination of immanence is, after all, only half of the equation; its relation to transcendence is what really makes up the theme of the present thesis. In what way, then, does the above delineation of immanence change the approach to transcendence?

As said at the very beginning of the present thesis, the couple immanence/transcendence can be determined in a variety of ways (earth/heaven, above/below, body/spirit, etc.). One of these ways was as the difference between 'the familiar' and 'the new'. This difference was explored in relation to Christ's revelation in the Gospel of John, which worked through a certain juxtaposition between the familiar, embodied existence of the world (bread, water in the well, wine, etc.) and the revelation of the Good News (Bread of Life, Living Water, Good Wine, etc.). The bread of the world and the water in the well refers to something familiar, refers to the cyclical, regenerative ordinary comings and goings of the everyday, where I rest in a world that is recognizable, trustworthy and thus habitable for me. In comparison, we saw in chapter I how the early Church appeared as a rupture with the familiar order of the 'old world', awaiting a radical transformation that turned traditional evaluations on their head.

According to this schema, it is life in the garden which comprises the familiarity of life. In contrast to what Heidegger believed, Levinas determines this familiarity as authentic and sincere, and as testifying to the fact that we are at home in the world. But life in the garden is obviously not everything for Levinas. For life in the garden is interrupted. There is a rupture in life, an encounter with what is beyond my grasp in a radical way, transcending the horizon of familiar life. But 'rupture' is not primordial, but rather *inter-rupts* in the middle of a life lived. Rather than the familiar being the obverse side of the unfamiliar, covering it up, the familiar is interrupted by something *new*, an other and unprecedented meaning that it

could not have anticipated from the standpoint of its own worldliness. Crucially, this new meaning is, for Levinas, not in *conflict* with the meaning of the world, does not oppose it, but precisely *transcends*, which means to be ‘above’ or ‘more’ than the world rather than to enter into a dialectic with it. It is true that man does not live off bread alone, but this surplus that yearns beyond bread is transcendent because it cannot be measured in terms of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

It is by starting from the fundamental agreeability of our worldliness through the self-sufficiency of enjoyment that Levinas can approach the thematic of transcendence differently. For one could ask, when it seems that life remains unfulfilled even when one should be happy, perhaps it is not a question of happiness at all. Perhaps it is because there is something that meets us in our everyday experience which tends *beyond* happiness that life at times appears unfulfilled. And perhaps we are in the wrong if we believe that this is a desire that could ever be satisfied, a thirst that could be quenched; perhaps this is what makes life a continuous exodus, a search for something we never find, what the existentialists could be attempting to describe with their of anxiety and anguish. In this case, then, this enigma would not testify to finitude, to the lack of a ground and a belonging. Life finds a home, is able to settle, and secures for itself a ground; but while safe and secure within the four walls of your home, a sudden arrival disturbs the homely peace – not in the ways a storm can tear down your walls or earthquakes crack the ground beneath your feet, but the way a look on someone’s face can make you question your complacency and install in you an entirely new orientation than the one that grounds the being-at-home. Life on earth is a happiness that is justified by itself; what yearns beyond this is not some higher happiness, but something else than happiness entirely.

In this and the preceding chapter, we have traced the development of Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment alongside his critique of the philosophy of finitude and the development of his understanding of subjectivity as a beginning in the self. The completion of the development of subjectivity coincides with the completion of the analysis of enjoyment, for it started out as enchainment to nausea and weariness, and ended as the complacency of the enjoying ego. The significance of transcendence changes alongside it, for it is no longer to be understood as a ‘need for escape’ nor a ‘quest for salvation. Rather, the radicality of this significance comes from the fact it opens up a satisfied subject to what it never knew it could desire.

Chapter V – Immanence and Transcendence

In the preceding chapter, I presented Levinas' analysis of enjoyment as the culmination of an effort to demonstrate how subjectivity must be understood in terms of how it begins from itself, in its sovereignty. This takes place as enjoyment. Enjoyment concretizes the ego, for the possibility of satisfaction means that the ego has a content for which and from which it lives – the ego lives for-the-sake-of-itself. Although it has needs, these needs are a positive condition for its satisfaction. It is thus a finitude concerned neither with the Infinite nor with its own limitations, but rather *content*, a self-sufficient complacency that is neither absolute nor troubled by its limitations.

In the present chapter, we turn to the topic of transcendence as it appears in *Totality and Infinity*, and thus these two chapters go to the very heart of what this thesis is about; *the relation between immanence and transcendence*. It is a relation Nietzsche determined as inherently oppositional, and a relation I seek to determine otherwise. Levinas, I have promised, is the man to do it. For Levinas, it is of crucial importance that we avoid understanding transcendence as having a negative, dialectical, oppositional or allergic relation to immanence. Transcendence does not derive its meaning from a conflict with immanence; as enjoyment constitutes itself as separate, transcendence too expresses itself positively, without reference to the world. It does indeed reveal itself *within* the world “It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience” (TI 23), but as something wholly new in regards to the familiarity of the world.

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the structure of separation in Levinas' thought entails that the dimensions of immanence and transcendence can and should be described in isolation, even though we always live in both dimensions in concrete life (see IVa-b). In this chapter, too, we will see that transcendence can be described in isolation, for it reveals itself positively independent from immanence. Nevertheless, it is the *relation* between immanence and transcendence that is most important for the overarching theme of the present thesis, and that we will therefore be keeping our focus on. In that regard, we will be asking what happens with the enjoying ego when met with the transcendent Other. As we will see, the enjoyment of egoism will appear as arbitrary and unjustified vis-à-vis the Other, and the ego will learn shame. Contrary to perception, Levinas will continue to hold that this does not entail a negation of the ego, nor an allergic determination of the relation between the enjoying ego

and the ethical encounter. In fact, such an oppositional interpretation of the relation will be shown to follow from a common misunderstanding, namely the mistake of interpreting transcendence from the perspective of immanence. This misunderstanding is intimately connected to the critique of the philosophy of finitude we have been tracking, for according to my reading, *it is ultimately philosophies of finitude that misunderstand transcendence by interpreting transcendence as a limit on immanence*. To avoid this understanding will be an important task in what follows.

a) Transcendence and Immanence in Phenomenology

According to Levinas, both Husserl and Heidegger misunderstand transcendence. In fact, the two of them represent the phenomenological failure to come to terms with transcendence. For Levinas, what Husserl and Heidegger calls transcendence belongs to the dimension of immanence. This follows from the way in which immanence was defined in the last chapter. It is therefore in reference to the sovereign ego of enjoyment that Levinas makes the argument that what Husserl and Heidegger calls transcendence is, in fact, immanence.

For Husserl, ‘transcendence’ belongs in the first instance to the problem of knowledge. Husserl founds his phenomenological enterprise as a critical epistemology which places the traditional concept of transcendence in doubt, or more precisely, the transcendence of the objects of knowledge;

If we take a closer look at what is so enigmatic about knowledge, and what causes our predicament in our first reflections on the possibility of knowledge, we find that it is its transcendence. (Husserl 1999, 27)

The most fundamental puzzle concerning knowledge is the question whether what we know really apprehends something exterior to that knowing. The epistemological reduction, or *epoché*, takes the first step in overcoming this problem by bracketing of “all transcendent entities” (Husserl 1999, 30) so as to inquire only into what is phenomenally given to transcendental consciousness. Through such a method, we gain access to a varied domain of purely given phenomena that are posited beyond doubt as the question of their ‘transcendent’ existence has been excluded. We can then inquire into their essences, that is, the different and particular ways in which these phenomena are given, and thus attain at the essential way in which phenomena are given to immanent consciousness beyond doubt.

Husserl therefore brackets transcendence in one sense, namely in the sense of immanent phenomena referring to something which transcends consciousness. However, Husserl argues that it is within this realm of such an immanence that phenomenology rediscovers transcendence. Examining phenomena as they appear within the bracketed realm of purely immanent consciousness, it becomes clear that *transcendence belongs to their givenness*; “they refer to something; they relate themselves in one way or another to an objectivity” (Husserl 1999, 41). Part of the appearance of a house is to be the appearance of this or that house; the reference to an intended object belongs to the field of pure immanence. To be sure, “the reduction still brackets a certain kind of transcendence, that is, transcendence in the sense of what is not given at all” (Bough 2008, 188), but within the realm of reduced immanence, it would be pure prejudice to deny that things are given *as* transcendent. For the house that appears to immanent consciousness appears as ‘over there’ rather than e.g. ‘in my head’ – transcendence belongs to its givenness in immanence. Thus, when we return to the pure realm of givenness, all sorts of transcendencies show themselves as essentially belonging to the horizon of the purely immanent.

Husserl’s slogan ‘return to the things themselves’ is not simply a phrase, but describes the movement of his philosophical thought. We begin from the natural attitude in which transcendence is simply supposed. Moran notes that, for Husserl, “natural life cannot even pose the problem of transcendence; we are always out there in the world.” (Moran 2014, 502). While being in the natural attitude, we take for granted that we are in contact with transcendent objects but we do not understand how this is possible, nor are we able to justify it. The phenomenological reduction *returns us* to this natural attitude where transcendent objects are an obvious part of our experience, but now with understanding and justification;

Husserl conceives of the phenomenological reduction as in some sense a reduction to immanence, and, furthermore, within this phenomenologically reduced immanent sphere, we somehow discover the roots of the transcendent world. (Moran 2014, 503)

Husserl begins from the naïve assumptions of the natural attitude, which is unable to understand how the knowledge in my mind reaches external objects, demonstrates the misunderstandings and faulty assumptions of this attitude, and then reveals to us how experience includes what we were looking for the entire time; transcendent objectivities.

Therefore, although Husserl clearly is indebted to Descartes, the problem for the latter is that “to discover and to abandon were the same” (Husserl 1999, 66). Descartes returns philosophy to its proper starting point, namely immanent consciousness, but because he was only concerned with whether we can *prove* that immanently given phenomena ‘really exists’, he immediately abandons this immanent field after having discovered it. Husserl, on the other hand, analyses this immanent givenness, discovering, among other things, that transcendence belongs to their givenness. Descartes prepared a bountiful buffet, but refused to eat; Husserl on the other hand is not afraid to have a taste.

This is in a sense the movement which Heidegger radicalizes in an attempt to break fully with what he sees as the enduring presence of Cartesian metaphysics in Husserl. For Heidegger, Husserl remains a Cartesian insofar as he continues a subjectivist metaphysics that Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein seeks to overcome. In the earlier stages of his thought, it is transcendence Heidegger uses to characterize this anti-subjective position: “Transcendence has to be thought as a new way of thinking human Dasein in a non-subjectivist manner” (Moran 2014, 494). Dasein’s transcendence is its always already being-in-the-world – its ecstatic thrownness –, and the Being of Dasein can thus not be understood starting from the subject. Dasein already owes its particular way of existing from its being-in-the-world (*EG* 109). In other words, Dasein “is already ‘beyond’ beings and actually functions to display or disclose Being” (Moran 2014, 497). Dasein’s comprehension of Being already entails its transcendence:

in grasping something, Dasein does not first go outside of the inner sphere in which it is initially encapsulated, but, rather, in its primary kind of being, it is always already ‘outside’ (BT 62)

We cannot pretend to begin from the immanence of consciousness in order to get ‘outside’ to transcendent objects, for in attending to what Dasein actually is, we find that Dasein always already is this ‘far beyond itself’.²⁹ Da-sein, *there*-being, is demarcated by the fact that it is not gathered in a ‘here’ but always already underway, thrown into existence.

²⁹ Heidegger is careful to distinguish this transcendence from the scholastic and Greek-Platonic understanding of the term: “rather transcendence as the ecstatic – temporality...Beyng [Seyn] has ‘thought beyond’ beyngs [Seyendes]” (*BT* 36).

Heidegger criticizes Husserl for not really having returned to the things themselves but rather to the tradition of Descartes (Moran 2014, 506), a tradition to which Kant was also still attached in his attempt to refute idealism by proving the existence of the transcendent noumenal reality (*BT* 195-196). Heidegger's own philosophy radicalizes this 'going back to the things themselves' by uncovering the deep-seated referentiality in virtue of which it is possible to ask about the meaning of Being. Nevertheless, there are clear similarities between Husserl and Heidegger on their conception of immanence and transcendence. Both thinkers identify a forgotten transcendence at the heart of our experience/existence, and this discovery reveals that the transcendental ego/Dasein is always already in contact with/constituted by what transcends it (Husserl) or by being always already transcending (Heidegger).³⁰ Both thinkers understand 'transcendence' as a basic part of the life-world of the subject or the being-in-the-world of Dasein. Furthermore, both thinkers tie this transcendence in one way or another with our knowledge and comprehension. In virtue of life's orientation, existence is transcendent.

Levinas would of course also admit that the subject, in its worldly existence, is in touch with and constituted by things and relations that are 'outside' it, or that point itself beyond itself. It has been the effort of the last chapter, however, to explain why Levinas sees these movements and relations as belonging to the immanence of the Same. In my relation to the world, I relate to something 'other' on which I depend, but this is precisely a relation that *serves me*, that opens up the possibility of enjoyment and dwelling. This is why Levinas argues that ontology never admits something wholly other to itself. Even Heidegger's referential horizon in which the *Zuhandenheit* of the hammer has meaning, refers, in the last instance, to my mastery and happiness in the world. My worldliness is for Levinas not an alienation, not a losing-myself to the world, but attests rather to my sovereignty – we are at home in the world. Ontology is therefore *not* transcendence, but refers ultimately to "the *possession* and in the *consumption* of the object" (*BPW* 7). Even if comprehension depends on ecstatic structures that carry the human existent far beyond simple subjectivity, Levinas maintains that it nevertheless serves to mediate my relation to the world in terms of my

³⁰ Moran is unsure of whether Heidegger is actually able to set himself apart from Husserl on the question of immanence and transcendence, or whether this is precisely where he aligns most closely with his former tutor (Moran 2014, 496). The counter-argument would be to say that Husserl discusses a transcendental ego in contact with transcendent entities, whereas Heidegger explicates the transcendent nature of Dasein itself.

possession and enjoyment of it. It is for this reason that Levinas argues that philosophies that posit ontology as first philosophy neutralize the ethical Other, for if the Other is to be understood primarily in view of ontology, then the Other will necessarily be reduced to the Same (*TI* 42). This would also be true of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, for which 'the Other' would have to be constituted by the transcendental ego (*TI* 211).

For some of his critics, Levinas' conception of the Same as a self-sufficient totality is an exaggeration. The problem, the critics argue, is that the dimension of the Same is simply defined as a totality, which means that, by *necessity*, anything other to it must be 'absolutely other'. Paul Ricoeur argues this, directing his critique not first against the incomprehensibility of the Other, but "against a conception of the identity of the Same, to which the otherness of the Other is diametrically opposed" (Ricoeur 1992, 335). In other words, Levinas' understanding of the Other follows necessarily from the way in which he defines the Same;

Because the Same signifies totalization and separation, the exteriority of the Other can no longer be expressed in the language of relation. The Other absolves itself from relation, in the same movement by which the Infinite draws free from Totality. (Ricoeur 1992, 336)

Because the Same has been defined as reducing all with which it stands in a relation to itself, the Other can only be truly Other by absolving herself from her relation to the Same. The incomprehensibility of the Other is only an issue for a theory of the self that interprets it as an imperialism.

Ricoeur argues that Levinas arrives at his delineation of the Same through the use of hyperbole, something he is quick to point out should not be understood as a rhetorical device, but as "the systematic practice of *excess* in philosophical argumentation" (Ricoeur 1992, 337). The Same and the Other in *Totality and Infinity* and the notion of substitution in *Otherwise than being* are all named hyperbolic or excessive by Ricoeur, but it is the hyperbole of the same, he argues, that is the root of the problem:

it is the hyperbole of separation, on the side of the Same, that appears to me to lead the hyperbole of exteriority, on the side of the other, to an impasse, unless the preeminently ethical movement of the other toward the self is made

to intersect with...the gnoseological movement of the self toward the other.
(Ricoeur 1992, 339)

For Ricoeur, it is impossible that the Other could reveal himself to the Same if this revelation did not in some way connect with the way in which the Same apprehends the Other. There must be a dialectic: the Other expresses himself to the self, but the self also recognizes the Other *as* Other. The Same can therefore not be entirely separate and independent of the Other; one must “[presuppose] a capacity of reception, of discrimination, and of recognition that, in my opinion, belongs to another philosophy of the Same” (Ricoeur 1992, 339). The relation to the Other is only possible if we account for how the Same is capable of recognizing the Other. The Levinasian account of the Same, however, leaves the Same impotent in this regard: “Separation has made interiority sterile” (Ricoeur 1992, 337).

Contrary to Ricoeur, I would say that the Levinasian conception of the Same makes it quite *virile* – the Same is an independent, sovereign ego whose interest in its own enjoyment leads it to master and build its home in the world. In it, I see, at least in part, a similarity with Nietzsche’s notion of the noble, namely in terms of how the enjoying ego/the noble relates to the world not primarily as a limit, but as a challenge to be overcome. This is a very capable self, rather than a sterile one.

It is, however, with reference to this notion of *capacity* that we can understand what Levinas entails by saying that the absolutely Other is refractory to the Same, a point I believe Ricoeur misses. For insofar as the Same has a capacity to recognize the Other, this recognition is one that, for Levinas, returns to the mastery and thus the immanence of the Same. This is where I believe that the novelty of Levinas’ approach lies. The sovereign ego does indeed relate to a world that is ‘other’ to it, as we have seen, but this otherness is precisely not a limit, does not break open the Same, but serves its enjoyment and happiness. The achievement of the enjoying ego is the way in which it is capable of “remaining the same in the midst of the other” (*TI* 45). The Same is an absolute immanence because the way in which it relates to that which is other to it, it integrates this otherness for the sake of its enjoyment, mastery and happiness.

For Ricoeur, what is lacking in Levinas’ conception of the Same is “a capacity of reception” (Ricoeur 1992, 339). But for Levinas, the very notion of ‘capacity’ belongs to the dimension of the immanence of the Same. This is above all true for the relation of knowledge, which is the one Ricoeur is discussing (‘the gnoseological movement’, ‘capacity of reception,

discrimination and recognition', etc.). For Levinas, knowledge refers to a relation of mastery, testified to in the notion of comprehension and its German equivalent, *Begreifen*, both terms that refer to the *grasp* for their etymological meaning (*prendre* in French, *greifen* in German). Knowledge enables the sovereignty of the enjoying ego: "The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism. Philosophy is an egology" (TI 44). Knowledge belongs to the possibility of the subject to shut itself up in itself, to close the door of the home while remaining at a traversable distance, the situation Levinas often refers to through the myth of Gyges. It is a self that always suffices to itself because it has the ever present capacity to reduce everything to itself, not because the world does not remain 'other' in some sense, but because the Same *masters* this relation.

But there is one aspect of knowledge that Levinas does see as belonging to the dimension of transcendence, namely the notion of *critique*, more precisely the way in which the Other criticizes me. This brings out the incompatibility of transcendence with the mastery of immanence, for to be criticized is not to be able to recognize, understand and thus master the state of 'being-criticized', but to find oneself in a situation where my mastery is *questioned*. For my mastery to be ethically challenged by the Other is not something I must have a capacity of reception in order to understand, for it is here not a question of understanding. The ethical relation is refractory to gnoseology, which always refers back to my mastery. This is what I believe Ricoeur misses.

b) Transcendence: Language and Ethics

Transcendence refers to what is absolutely and wholly beyond the grasp. Furthermore, what is beyond the grasp must *not* be understood as a 'failed grasp'. The grasp is, for Levinas, self-sufficient, and thus immanent, and it is by beginning with its self-sufficiency of this immanence that we can approach transcendence differently than Husserl and Heidegger. While transcendence must nevertheless be described in a certain contradistinction to the grasp, it is crucial to understand that this juxtaposition is not meant to delineate transcendence as the incomprehensible, but as that which is beyond the measures of the grasp entirely – not due to failure of our grasp, but to the alterity of the transcendence itself that shows up as the *wholly* Other, what *wholly* transcends. In *Totality and Infinity*, this wholly Otherness reveals itself in the face of the other human being.

In contrast to the givenness of the world, the face of the Other resists the grasp of the Same: "The face is present in its refusal to be contained" (TI 194). The choice of wording

here is essential; the face not only refuses to be contained, but is present *in* this refusal, and therefore has an irreducibly positive meaning in it. The face is not comprehended, does not turn into a content, and in fact refuses this containment – and it does so not negatively, not because the grasp fails, but because its own positive meaning which is foreign to the grasp. To experience the expression of the face is not to be able to understand it, which would be to *recognize* ‘face as face’. As Moati puts it:

The one who expresses himself or herself does not draw his or her intelligibility from the light ‘borrowed’ from intentionality and unveiling, from which the same emerges. (Moati 2017, 115)

To recognize something *as* something is to be able to understand it in view of the horizon within which it is given. I recognize a chair not only in terms of its visual qualities, but also as what I can sit on; and as being given within a classroom and the social situation it entails, I recognize the chair as where I am supposed to sit. To recognize something as something, or to comprehend it, is to perceive the object immediately in view of the referentiality within which it is situated, and which provides the meaning of its appearance. It is *Be-greifen* and *comprehension*. According to Levinas, phenomenology makes this explicit: “it is about bringing the *things-in-themselves* to the horizon of their appearing, that of their phenomenality; phenomenology means to make appear the appearing itself behind the appearing quiddity that appears” (*OG* 87). For Levinas, this belongs to the ‘I can’ of the dwelling ego; recognition is my ability to orient myself in a world in virtue of how this world becomes intelligible to me.

The Other is not given like this, is in fact not given. The Other is not intelligible in virtue of references that would endow her with a particular meaning. In contrast, the Other *expresses herself*, which means that she expresses herself independently of my horizon;

the first content of expression is the expression itself. To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. (TI 51)

The Other expresses herself, which means that her expression owes nothing to my capacity to access her; the Other maintains herself in the expression, expressing only herself. Because her self-expression owes nothing to my grasp of her, she is always more than my thought of her, an excess Levinas refers to with the idea of Infinity. The relation with the Other is a relation with the Infinite, for the Other always exceeds my thinking of her by remaining independent in her own expression.

The infinitude by which the Other withdraws from my comprehension of him has, importantly, a positive meaning. That is, the way in which the Other is refractory to my grasp is not expressed in the withdrawal from it – not in the *failure* of the grasp –, but follows from the fact that the Other *ethically* and thus *positively* contests my grasp;

The ‘resistance’ of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethics. The first revelation of the other, presupposed in all the other relations with him, does not consist in grasping him in his negative resistance and in circumventing him by ruse. I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation.
(TI 197)

The elements, unforeseeable and elusive, evades my grasp negatively. The metal handled by the blacksmith suddenly behaves unpredictably, resisting the mastery of the artisan, but this can only be measured with reference to this mastery. The ethical commandment of the Other does not resist me like this. He contests my grasp not by ruse, but by ethically challenging it. He remains positively and for this very reason *absolutely* Other in my relation to him. The independence with which the Other stands face-to-face against me is refractory to my comprehension not because I have not yet observed the Other from every possible angle, but because the ethical expression, instead of inviting to the grasp, commands me to respect his independence.

This is manifest above all in language, which Levinas sees as inextricably tied to ethics. To be in conversation means to converse with an interlocutor. It thus means to stand vis-à-vis someone who expresses themselves as themselves, that is, independently. This is something Levinas believes is revealed in the Face itself:

The face is a living presence; it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated. The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse. He who manifests himself comes, according to Plato's expression, to his own assistance. He at each moment undoes the form he presents. (TI 66)

To be in conversation is to converse with someone who stands for themselves, who represents themselves in the conversation. The meaning of what the conversation itself is about can lend its intelligibility from a variety of places; it can refer to the underlying events of the political topic we are discussing, or the history of the culture which provides the words themselves with meaning. My interlocutor, however, is not manifest in the conversation in virtue of any such externalities, but only as themselves, and absolutely so. To be present in a conversation is to manifest yourself in it, as an absolute rather than relative reference point.

The relation of language ethics opens up is therefore one in which, peculiarly, *the distance is positive*. This must be thought in distinction from how distances operate in the dimension of the Same. It might appear that also for the enjoying and sovereign ego, distances are positive, as the distance between me and the external thing is what facilitates the potency of me satisfying my need or grasping the thing. But distances here enable by opening up the possibility of traversal; its function coincides with its negation (the distance's possibility of disappearing, i.e. being traversed). The distance is itself not positive, but opens the possibility of overcoming it. For a distance to be of itself positive would mean that the distance upholds the experience by being maintained as distance, and that this distancing is itself the positivity of the experience;

a relationship that is not the disappearance of distance, not a bringing together, or...a relationship whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation, for it nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger. (TI 34)

This is what takes place in discourse as an ethical relation with alterity. To attend to the Other's expression is to respect her distance from me, for it is only insofar as she is distant that her speech has independence. The same point is in fact made with reference to enjoyment in the above quote. For one might ask, does not enjoyment 'nourish itself with its own

hunger' insofar as it loves its needs? But the enjoying ego loves its needs because it can *satisfy* them, just like the distances in the dimension of the Same have their function in being traversed. The metaphysical Desire, however, is different; here, hunger and distance have a positive meaning.

The Other is therefore the distant one: that the Other can hold her own opinions and consider mine implies that she exists at an irrecoverable distance from me, that she exists on her own; "infinitely distant from the very relation he enters, [the Other] presents himself there from the first as an absolute" (*TI* 215). That the Other absolves herself from our relation is therefore only negatively described as incomprehension: positively, it is described as her independence, her self-expression, her coming-from-herself absolutely. To listen is to listen to someone else, which means to listen to someone who is positively apart from me.

This is why discourse, for Levinas, belongs to ethics and not ontology, for a positive distance is revealed as ethics. To speak and listen to the Other is to respect their independence; conversely – but primordially –, the Other's expression consists in commanding me to keep my distance, to not transgress it. The very meaning of an interlocutor is to express this distancing as an obligation. The Other not only comes from a distance, but expresses this distance, expresses that I must not pry and push but passively and attentively receive. Such a distance is only possible as ethics: it expresses distance as an obligation to respect it, and to respect it means to uphold the distance. Murder is its ultimate transgression, and in fact, "The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill" (*TI* 198), because he, in his presence, expresses the prohibition against it.

This distance between me and the Other is not relative, but absolute, and thus inconceivable in a system of references. In a system, the distance between terms also signal their unity. A football goal is an opening in virtue of the two goal-posts that separate it. The posts are therefore not truly separated, for in constituting the unity of the goal itself, the two goal-posts belong to each other by referring to each other. The distance is also relative, for the goal begins and ends from both sides: the distance it opens up only exists in reference to the relation of each post to the other. Similarly, an antonym in a linguistic system is only different with regards to its opposite insofar as this opposite is also the antonym of the first antonym. In their opposition they reflect each other, and only gain their difference in this dialectical play of mirroring. Neither remain what they are absolutely, but only in relation to each other.

The Other is distant not relatively, but absolutely, and she can only initiate discourse because she remains absolutely herself in the relation, which is only intelligible as ethics. The

idea of an independence that resists being conquered not relatively, but absolutely, is the meaning of an ethical imperative. Ethics resists grasp because it contests it; not with a larger force but with the accusation of its expression; “the primordial *expression*, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder’” (TI 199). Ethics does not oppose me with another force, but with an imperative installing itself as *higher* than any force and the worldly logic in virtue of which forces operate. It commands me to lay down my weapons, not by forcing my hand, but by appealing to an authority that goes beyond the competition of forces. Ethics thus reveals itself as a Commandment, with an absolute rather than relative meaning. I am commanded not to murder the Other not ‘because of...’, but simply due to the Other himself and the appeal expressed in his face.

But can Levinas simply posit that the face of the Other expresses an indubitable commandment? Does he not simply claim that the epiphany of the Other reveals an absolute truth without providing arguments? It would seem that it is to this point that Levinas’ fiercest critic, Dominique Janicaud, who we briefly mentioned in the introduction, can present his most potent objection; that is, if it is not the case that “All is acquired and imposed from the outset, and this all is no little thing: nothing less than the God of the biblical tradition” (Janicaud 2000, 27). For it would seem that Levinas is here taking the Commandment of Sinai on ‘face value’ in the above.

This is, however, not the case. For Levinas’ description of the face of the Other is not an argument, neither for God nor for ethical realism. It is, rather, a phenomenology of ethics. In question here is still an experience, that is, the experience of the ethical itself. The legitimacy of Levinas’ project depends on his ability to rend this experience faithfully. Of course, things are more complicated, because the ‘phenomenon’ of the expression of the Other does not fit the notion of a phenomenon, because it is not perceptibly given and therefore impossible to represent; “Expression does not impose itself as a true representation” (TI 200). By having claimed that the expression of the Other transcends the regular schema of experiences, Levinas will be accused again of having went beyond phenomenology. But does he not get at something true by differentiating strongly between how a representation and an ethical commandment are meaningful? To recognize that I stand in a relation to the ethical is not to recognize something as ethical, in the way we might recognize something as a tool, as a thing belonging to the past, as a source of enjoyment, etc. To experience the ethical is not to comprehend it on the basis of a horizon, but to experience a rupture in the horizon, a voice coming as if from nowhere, commanding me to be ethical. To experience it is therefore not to

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understand it on the basis of its appearing, but to respond to a summon: “To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible” (TI 215). Ethics does not give itself but expresses itself as command. Whether this commandment ‘actually exists’ is not something philosophy can decide; it can only unfold its meaning. What Levinas puts forth a strong argument for, however, is that the meaning of the commandment would be that of revealing itself as an absolute, so that we would attend to it not by knowing it, but by responding to its summon. “The invoked one is not what I comprehend” (TI 69), but precisely the one I have to call upon, invoke in order to address.

Invoking the Other – this question of invocation allows us to repeat what we have said, but from the reverse side. The independence of the Other is manifest in language in terms of the absolute independence the Other expresses as my interlocutor, but also in terms of what is entailed in my approach to the Other in conversation. This approach also entails that the Other is always more than a theme, for the thematization I might use to describe her must always, in addition, be said to her. I see someone, I recognize them as Peter from that neighboring village, and comprehend his profession from his outfit; that ‘part’ of him that I speak to, however, is only accessible as speaking-to.

This ‘speaking-to’ cannot be understood in virtue of comprehension. It is not that I first recognize the Other as capable-of-receiving-speech, and then address my speech to him, as if I suddenly realized a new characteristic about an object, now open to new forms of mastery and manipulation. ‘Speaking-to’ does not consist in putting information into a receiver as I pour water into a glass, or input commands to a computer program; “the surplus of signification over representation consists in a new mode of being presented” (TI 206). ‘Speaking-to’ is to *signify*, and the intelligibility of signification refers to the experience that the Other can hear and consider what I say, which is manifest first and foremost in the independence of their expression. The Other is not a recipient, but an interlocutor, and it is the interposition of an interlocutor that makes language what it is: “That ‘something’ we call signification arises in being with language because the essence of language is the relation with the Other” (TI 207). To signify entails a movement that proceeds from myself without returning to myself; significations are oriented to the Other.

This is then the distinction by which Levinas phenomenologically separates between immanence and transcendence. Immanence refers to worldliness, and worldliness refers to mastery and enjoyment. I relate to the world through grasping and satisfying. Transcendence

refers to ethics and my relation to the Other, and this relation cannot be described as a relation of mastery and enjoyment. As language, it can rather be described as a *religious* relation, namely one of *prayer*; “The essence of discourse is prayer” (*BPW* 7). To speak to the Other is to pray for an answer, for I have no mastery and thus no guarantee in the relationship. Face to face with the Other, I can only present my hopeful appeal.

In order to arrive at this conclusion, it was necessary to begin with the analysis of enjoyment and the self-sufficient ego it provides. For this means that the relation with transcendence can be conceived otherwise than as a finite being, constituted by its limits, encountering what lies on the other side of that limit, or what will help the finite being overcome its limits. Rather, the ego is met with what can only be a surplus with regards to the entire order of the Same; not a limit to its mastery, but something else entirely.

c) The Other in the World

The epiphany of the face of the Other expresses a rupture with the world, appealing to me with a commandment that does not refer itself to the logic of forces and their interplay. But I nevertheless encounter the Other *in* the world, and the Other is therefore also *of* the world in a sense; “this new dimension opens in the sensible appearance of the face” (*TI* 198). The Other is also a sensible, worldly being of flesh and bone, occupying a place in time and space. There pertains therefore what seems like an ambiguity to his ethical commandment:

The Other who can sovereignly say no to me is exposed to the point of the sword or the revolver’s bullet, and the whole unshakeable firmness of his ‘for himself’ with that intransigent no he opposes is obliterated because the sword or the bullet has touched the ventricles or auricles of his heart. (*TI* 199)

The one who reveals an ethical commandment which prohibits murder is also very much exposed to being killed. ‘Ethical resistance’ is nothing like an invisible wall which would counter any worldly effort; as such, it would be worldly. Within the world therefore – or from a worldly perspective – ethics is unreal: “In the contexture of the world [the Other] is a quasi-nothing” (*TI* 199). The Other is otherworldly, not because he comes from another world, but because his expression is other than worldly.

The ethical commandment that ruptures the world therefore seems to be ambiguous, exposed to worldly forces while challenging them with an otherworldly resistance. The one

who commands me to not kill is also someone I can kill. Levinas also speaks of this ambivalence of the commandment as coming both from below and up on high:

Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyses my powers and from the depths of defenseless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution...a solicitation that concerns me by its destitution and its Height. (TI 199-200)

The Other who confronts me might be below me, appears often as the poor and disempowered; at the same time, the ethical commandment comes as if from up on high, presents itself as if it is issued from an authority *above* the world. Ethics is a weakness that expresses another sort of strength, a powerlessness that somehow resists power, a dignity in frailty.

We have said that it *seems* ambiguous, however, because it is, according to Levinas, far from it. In contrast, the ethical commandment presents itself as a straightforward absolute: “the very straightforwardness of the face to face” (TI 200). This command can appear ambiguous because the one who presents an absolute prohibition against murder is still exposed to murder, but this is ambiguous in another sense than how we ordinarily understand it. The ambiguity of e.g. a literary expression follows from the fact that it has multiple possible and sometimes even conflicting meanings, so that when we seem to have grasped it in view of one interpretation, another meaning has ‘slipped away’ from our grasp. Nietzsche’s writings are ambiguous in this sense. Or a political event can be ambiguous, because we are yet unable to predict what the effects of it will be. The ethical imperative, however, does not ‘slip away’ from the grasp, but *paralyzes* the grasp, presenting itself with a meaning that is wholly *other* to the logic of the grasp. The ethical epiphany cannot be understood as a deficient grasp, or otherwise said, as a lack in the comprehension of the subject. The Other is not incomprehensible because the Same *fails* to comprehend her, but because it is here not a question of comprehension.

Such straightforwardness follows from the very phenomenality of an ethical imperative. The ethical imperative is straightforward because it does not circumvent, does not refer to something else in view of which it would have meaning; its meaning is absolute rather than relative. It is absolute in the further sense that it presents no alternative; “Before the hunger of men responsibility is measured only ‘objectively’; it is irrecusable” (TI 201).

The imperative does not *suggest* that I do not murder the Other, but commands me not to. While the Other therefore is what is ‘absolutely other’, something foreign in contrast to the familiarity of the world, a movement “toward an alien outside-of-oneself, toward a yonder” (*TI* 33), this event is not mystical; “The ethical relation...cuts across every relation one could call mystical” (*TI* 202). The otherworldliness of the Other must not be interpreted in the direction of mysticism, for the Other does not come forth from a hidden world, but expresses herself. That his presence could be confused with an otherworldliness of the mystical kind comes from the fact that the Other absolves himself from my relation with him, and thus does not belong to the world proper. But to interpret this absolving as a disappearance, as the magicians rabbit suddenly disappearing back into the hat, is to misunderstand its ethical character; the Other absolves himself from me because I only respect him at a distance. His incomprehensibility lies in his ethical resistance to my grasp, which resists not by out-dueling me, “but because it transcends the register of power in general” (Moati 2017, 149). The Other resists me in the world with a resistance that is not measurable from the estimates of worldliness.

Levinas is strangely enough both very close and very far from Nietzsche here. Nietzsche, of course, recognized that the appeal to transcendence had been made from a place of powerlessness, as the analysis of slave morality reveals, for it is the powerless that must make their appeal to an authority beyond the world and the logic of ‘will to power’ that informs it. The world is governed by the logic of the self-affirmation of enjoyment and the mastery of the grasp, and those who fail to live according to these standards must therefore make their appeal to transcendence; “The ascetic priest is the incarnate wish for being otherwise (*Anders-sein*), being elsewhere (*Anderswo-sein*)” (*GM* 89-90). It is, however, precisely this appeal that he interprets as a *trick*, as a seduction that, while pretending to draw authority from a source beyond power, in fact is nothing but a deceptive manifestation of the will to power.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the opening of *Totality and Infinity* – the rewriting of Rimbaud – at length, but the opening of the *preface* of that work is equally important. Levinas states; “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality” (*TI* 21). Is morality a trick? Or does it testify to something true? The most decisive difference between Nietzsche and Levinas comes down to this question, namely, in Beals words, if “authority is separable from power” (Beals 2007, 89). For Levinas, the authority of the ethical is not another force, but something that

genuinely transcends the logic of forces. Levinas therefore converges with Nietzsche on the analysis of immanence (worldly life as innocent self-affirmation), but argues that the ethical commandment is not simply a worldly attempt to trick the powerful into castrating themselves; it is as different from worldly force that ethics is transcendent.

With regards to whether Nietzsche or Levinas is in the right here, that is, whether the ethical appeal refers to something genuine or not, it can only be said that philosophy cannot decide. Philosophy can outline the difference between the two options and their different implications, but there is no argument that can settle this question. It is perhaps here that the question of *faith* announces its relevance.

Nevertheless, even if one follows Levinas down the route of interpreting it as genuine, as the present thesis does, this does not necessarily alleviate the Nietzschean challenge. For one could ask, *if* it is the case that the ethical commandment must be understood as transcendent, does it then not risk positing itself as the opposite of Immanence? If, according to Levinas, the ethical reveals itself as above the worldly logic of force, and commands this force to subservience, does it then not negate these forces? Does Levinas not say that the Other ethically resists me? How is ‘resistance’ to be thought as something other than an opposition? It would seem that taking the imperative commencing from the destitute beggar as something Higher than the order of the world entails the sort of reversal Nietzsche identified.

The above problematic is connected, I believe, with a broader problematic that often turns up in commentary literature. Corey Beals discusses the variants of this problem under the heading of ‘Levinasian Priority’ (Beals 2007, 65-92). The question is, in a sense, that if ethics has priority over ontology in Levinas’ philosophy, does this entail “a mere reversal of priority” (Beals 2007, 67)? Does e.g. the priority of my responsibility to the Other over my own freedom entail slavery? Or does the fact that the Other is incomprehensible mean that I am completely blind in my relation to the Other? In reference to the present thesis, for whom the theme of enjoyment is most important, we can ask the following question; does the ethical resistance of the Other not entail the negation of the complacency of the ego? It would seem that “ethical agency follows from a force that incapacitates our egotistical (unethical) inclinations” (Hofmeyr 2009, 18), leading to the sort of castration of the strong that Nietzsche thinks he identifies. There is certainly language in Levinas that lends itself to this interpretation:

Freedom...is inhibited, not as countered by a resistance, but as arbitrary, guilty, and timid...Contingency, that is, the irrational, appears to it not outside of itself in the other, but within itself. It is not limitation by the other that constitutes contingency, but egoism, as unjustified of itself. (TI 203)

Although the Other expresses a command I cannot comprehend, it is nevertheless *me* who is the irrational one, and the Other the rational. While my living as ego is self-sufficient, it is also relative and baseless. I provide myself with pleasures for the sake of it; it is precisely as a pure expenditure for its own sake that enjoyment unfolds itself. To enjoy is to remain at the surface, to seek nothing more; not to try to found oneself as a Cartesian cogito, but to already be content without having to ask such questions. It lacks justification because it is foreign to it, for justification belongs to the dimension of society and the question of representation and objectivity, to which we return later.

For now, however, what does it mean to say that ethics reveals the ego to be contingent, arbitrary and violent? Does this not entail that the ego becomes limited and inhibited by the ethical commandment? It is an important part of Levinas' argumentation that this is not the case, for "The relation with the Other...is a non-allergic relation" (TI 51). Therefore, while it is the case that the enjoying ego comes to learn shame, Levinas continues to argue that this shame must not be interpreted as a *limit* upon the self. Therefore, following the critique of the philosophies of finitude we have been tracking, Levinas will hold that the lesson of shame does not poke a hole in the self-sufficiency of enjoyment; shame does not negate the ego. Otherwise said, Levinas determines the relation between immanence and transcendence non-oppositionally. How does he do this? This is the question to which we turn.

d) The Arbitrariness of the Ego

While ethics reveals to the ego that its enjoyment is arbitrary, this does not entail a negation of the ego. I do not respond to the hunger of the Other by fasting, by turning myself away from the world, as the ascetics do. The dimension of sameness is not abolished in the ethical encounter, and the Other does not ask for any abdication of myself:

The face in which the other – the absolutely other – presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority or the

thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial. (TI 203)

I encounter the Other in the world, and also as an earthly being, e.g. as hungry. The worldly surroundings of our relation are not to be departed from once ethics commences, but the world remains what the relation takes place within, even when it also ruptures this horizon; “Metaphysics, thus, does not engage in a departure from the world, but rather the overcoming of the world summoned to sensible immanence” (Moati 2017, 108). Metaphysics suggests that there is something beyond the world without suggesting a flight from it.

But does this put an end to the worry that ethics negates enjoyment? The love of life that enjoyment entails does not abstractly exist in the world, but draws this world inwards in an involution, a movement that cannot be separated from its egoism. Enjoyment is the throbbing pulse of egoism, its spontaneous forward-movement and its coiling back into its being-at-home. That the ethical encounter takes place within the world does not matter much to the pulsation of this egoism; it would still be rendered impotent if the revelation of ethics meant that the very movement of egoism by which it is defined – its outward-going and return to self – is now irredeemable from its guilt.

This is, however, still not the case. To be sure, ethics reveals egoism as arbitrary, possibly violent, and imperialistic in its unfolding. It continues, however, to be wholly necessary for the unfolding of the idea of Infinity itself, as the concrete Sameness which a face can confront. To denounce egoism would be absurd and impossible for the production of the Infinite, which requires it;

It leaves room for a process of being that is deduced from itself, that is, remains separated and capable of shutting itself up against the very appeal that has aroused it, but also capable of welcoming this face of infinity with all the resources of its egoism: economically. (TI 216)

The being that can shut its doors can also open them, and is in fact the only one who could possibly do so. For responsibility can only have meaning for a particular being with a concrete interest in their own existence. Responsibility is necessarily personal, for it is always responsibility of *someone*, and this requires “a being that lives *somewhere*, from *something*, that is, that enjoys” (TI 216). To be able to take a responsibility on one’s shoulders requires

first that one stands, as a capable and mastering ego, on this earth. The term which consists in beginning from and being content with itself (the Same) has the unique possibility of relating to that which remains absolutely exterior in the relation (the Other).

But does this not reduce the Same to a transcendental condition? Enjoyment would be necessary, yes, but as ‘necessary for-the-sake-of something else’, it would no longer be valuable in itself. In *Otherwise than being*, Levinas will argue that enjoyment should not be understood merely as a transcendental condition, arguing that “to enjoy one’s bread” is necessary “not in order to have the merit of giving it” (*OB* 72), that is, not because it would enable the subject functionally capable of giving. While that argument is given in *Otherwise than being*, I would argue it is also necessary in *Totality and Infinity*. For the analysis of enjoyment that we have been discussing so far seems to resist interpreting enjoyment as merely a condition, a stage to be overcome in the ethical relation. For the egoism of enjoyment draws its meaning and value *from itself*, and not from its role or status as condition in an ethical system. Would it in fact *be* egoism, if this egoism is modified as egoism-for-the-sake-of-the-other?

But to interpret it in such a way would be to repeat a misunderstanding we clarified in the last chapter, namely to interpret the structure of separation chronologically. There is of course not *first* an egoism that exists alone, for it *then* to be broken up by the Other. As we saw in the discussion of the notion of ‘concrete man’ (see IVa&e), the idea of Infinity has already produced the separation when the ego, in the space this opens up, deduces itself through the concretization of enjoyment. Conversely, the subject living in society retains the always-available possibility of retreating to its egoism, without this retreat having a dialectical structure, not necessarily retreating *from others*, but as one sustained by enjoyment alone. In the chronological unfolding of life, these dimensions of life occur interchangeably; I sometimes do things simply for the fun of it, and I am sometimes summoned to responsibilities whose weight comes from an absolute exteriority. The phenomenality of each of these dimensions is owed to distinctly separate logics: the difference between these dimensions is not produced dialectically, but from each dimension itself. In the same way enjoyment deduces itself, the Other expresses herself only as herself, and does so positively.

Nevertheless, this commandment reveals enjoyment as something arbitrary and unjustified. Egoism is shown to be an imperialism that encroaches on the rights of the Other. Moreover, although they are produced separately, they also occur simultaneously in concrete life, and it is to better understand this interaction that concerns this thesis most profoundly. To

this interaction, we repeat the question; does the prohibition expressed by the Other not imply an inhibition of the Same?

But what does it mean to say that the Same is inhibited by the Other? Following the etymological origin of the word 'inhibit', we are led back to the Latin verb *habere* (to hold) and the prefix *in* (in, on). The Latin verb *habitare*, and the French which Levinas uses for dwelling, *habitar*, are in fact the frequentative form of this root verb *habere*, 'to hold', giving an etymological supplement to Levinas' interpretation that 'to dwell' is primordially to master, the capacity of the hand to grasp and hold. Inhibition is thus to 'hold in' or 'hold back', to suspend this holding.

The essential question is therefore this; is the meaning of 'holding back' my weapon vis-à-vis the Other to be interpreted as a *limitation* of the ego? Does the ego in the first place have a *right* to extend its grasp into the Other's face? We have seen that ethical resistance suspends the hold of the Same not by confronting it with an unsurmountable challenge, but by questioning the possessiveness of this holding. Thus, the ethical inhibition does not reduce the capacity of the hold, but criticizes it, and through this reveals it as arbitrary. 'To inhibit' does not mean 'to limit', strange as that sounds.

To recognize the difference between inhibition and limitation is central to the understanding of Levinas, and it relates to two major and interrelated themes of his thinking we have been tracking; the critique of the philosophy of finitude and his novel interpretation of the relation between immanence and transcendence that follows from this critique. For the interpretation of inhibition as limitation follows from a philosophy that approaches transcendence from the view-point of the finite subject and the measures by which it has come to understand itself as finite, which is, in essence, its spontaneity – my free and unconditional ability to hold and grasp. To think of the absolutely Other as a limitation is to think of it as somewhere or something where the self cannot extend its hold; it thus ignores the possibility that there could be another measure than itself. Forgetting this possibility, thought is destined to perceive transcendence as the limit of thought, and its inability to think it a failure:

The predominance of a tradition that subordinates unworthiness to failure, moral generosity itself to the necessities of objective thought, is perceivable in European thought. The spontaneity of freedom is not called in question; its limitation alone is held to be tragic and to constitute a scandal. Freedom is

called in question only inasmuch as it somehow finds itself imposed upon itself: if I could have freely chosen my existence everything would be justified. The failure of my spontaneity still bereft of reason awakens reason and theory; there would have been a suffering that would be the mother of all wisdom. (TI 83)

To conclude that unworthiness is failure is to assume that the possibility of the self being critically questioned in a relation with what is always more than it – the idea of Infinity –, can only be measured from the subjective side; transcendence signals a failure to the subject because it is met with what it cannot measure. The spontaneity of freedom itself unquestioned, it follows, as Catherine Chalier puts it, that “It is only because freedom fails that man criticizes it” (Chalier 2010, 6). The self then proceeds to interpret the transcendent in virtue of its failure to grasp it; what transcends me is to be negatively determined as what I cannot know. It is furthermore from this perspective that the theory of knowledge as a ‘wounding’ finds its ground: knowledge comes about due to an inevitable erring, a fault in reason that reason seeks to cover, but also paradoxically lives from. Heideggerian philosophy is an example of this.

The Levinasian alternative is to see transcendence not as a negation of immanence, but as a surplus to it. It is to see that transcendence is incomprehensible to the knowing subject because it expresses itself in an entirely different measure; that it transcends not by lurking on the other side of the subject’s limits, but in revealing itself as that which is wholly immeasurable from the stand-point of the subject. The Other is therefore not unknowable because she is immensely difficult to understand, but because “there is no meaning in speaking here of knowledge or ignorance, for justice, the preeminent transcendence and the condition for knowing, is nowise, as one would like, a noesis correlative of a noema” (TI 89-90). This is the positive distance of the Other in discourse, who presents herself as independent in the straightforward epiphany of ethics which leaves no room for ambiguity. If it appears ambiguous, this is only because the revelation of an imperative command in experience is of another order than that of the subject’s grasp, similarly to how the metaphysical Desire is misunderstood when judged according to the measures of need. As Beals observes: “Desire is insatiable not because of limits put on our ability to find satisfaction...Rather, insatiable desire is insatiable because the category of ‘satiability’ just

does not apply to this desire” (Beals 2007, 36). That the metaphysical Desire cannot be satisfied does not testify to the limitedness of my capacities, but to its fundamental otherness.

It therefore continues to be of utmost importance to keep the terms of the metaphysical relation separate. They do occur, as we have said, simultaneously in concrete man, but do so according to wholly different measures that can only be compared to demonstrate their incomparability. To perceive the Other as a limit on my freedom is to measure transcendence according to the standards of immanence. Levinas’ philosophy of separation, on the other hand, sees the inhibition against murder as responding to an inquiry of an entirely different order. To become ashamed of one’s arbitrary brutality is to appreciate an absolute inequality between my spontaneity and the face of the Other. My unworthiness when facing the Other therefore does not signal the failure of the subject, unable to cross a certain limit, but the revelation that there is something that bears more weight than my happiness and which is immeasurable in terms of it. *Shame is a positive phenomenon.*

What Levinas is presenting here is, to repeat, not a moral argument, but a phenomenological analysis. The absolute inequality between the dimension of sameness and the dimension of ethics is reflected in experience. I’m sitting on the couch in my living room, eating pizza and drinking beer, when my significant Other storms through the door, crying. Between my self-enjoyment on the couch and her ethical summon in virtue of her mere presence, there is no equivalence, and this is obvious in experience. My self-indulgent activity, unproblematic on its own, appears completely arbitrary when faced with the needs of the Other; it does not really constitute an option to continue sitting on my couch, stuffing my face. Factually yes, there is an option, but no true closeness between the alternatives.

So, too, when in tearing down what I believe to be an abandoned apartment complex, I realize that someone is still using it for shelter. Previously that day, I might have had problems finding somewhere to plug in my equipment for electricity, or that a particular wall was made using a particular material that resists my tools. This is the opposition of the elements, always unpredictable, but possibly overcome with enough effort and strategic labor. The encounter with the lawless residents poses an opposition of an entirely different nature; an ethical dilemma. My mastery over the elements and my spontaneous expansion of my dwelling into this new territory is suddenly woken up from a naivety I did not know that it harbored. My expansion suddenly appears as an arbitrary violation, the mastery of a hand that comprehends the materiality it grasps, but which cannot justify why it should be allowed to expel these poor souls from their residency. Certainly, building permits could be produced

and the proper authorities called to handle this inconvenience, but this would be to already have entered society and justice – and perhaps at one of those points when justice seems to have been alienated from the original situation which produced it.

The incommensurability between the resistance of the elements and the ‘resistance’ of the lawless residents must be delineated according to the philosophy of separation. The laboring body which orients itself with utmost comprehension in the world of elements, complacent and secure in its own activity, appears as violent first when encountering those who prohibit that violence. In the world which is familiar to it, labor discovers nothing that truly contests it, only obstacles to be overcome; even impossible challenges, such as building a tower that would reach the stars, falls within the same register, only on the extreme end of the scale. Furthermore, it is not the point that labor in its own time is *lacking* the awareness of something which would reveal to it that its activity is already that of a violation. This would again be to misunderstand both the self-sufficiency of enjoyment and the concern for justice. For as Moati writes:

To lack something is to still inscribe oneself within a logic of completion, which reduces the relation of same and other to a totalization...Desire...can emerge only in one who no longer lacks for anything. (Moati 2017, 141)

As we have emphasized, Levinas’ delineation of metaphysical separation depends on the enjoying ego constituting itself in the self-sufficiency of contentedness. On its own, labor is not justified, simply because ‘justification’ is not a meaningful measure for its activity. The dwelling ego is not concerned with the expansionist nature of its procedure, in fact would have no way to consider it; it concerns itself with whether the new wall it recently put up will hold against the raging storms. For justice to become a concern for it, for it to wonder whether it has the *right* to put up this wall, it must stand in the acuteness of the ethical encounter. In other words, I cannot deduce morality from myself.

While this seems trivial to ordinary experience, Levinas draws a profound lesson from it. The unbridgeable gap between the resistance of the elements and the world versus the ethical resistance of the Other testifies on the one hand to two incommensurate dimensions of life. The ways I relate to things and the way I relate to others is incomparable, or rather, when I compare them, I realize their incomparability. Furthermore, the difference regards the ethical. The distance at which the Other exists from me contra the distances familiar to me in

the world is incomparable because the former is ethical, because it expresses a command that ruptures the naivety of my being by introducing something new; a critical question which asks not about the ability of my powers, but for its *raison d'être*. Finally, this ethical commandment is transcendent. Ethics resists my mastery not because it consists of an immense challenge, but because its expression refuses my grasp in its meaning. The ethical commandment can only be attended when I rise to the responsibility it calls me to rather than attempting to integrate into my horizon of intelligibility. The ethical transcends my horizon within my horizon, for rather than giving itself in view of it, it *critiques* it, questioning its entire logic.

e) Comprehension and Representation

It is because the Other questions me that I can be, argues Levinas, a philosophizing being. The whole realm of justification, of determining things objectively and giving reasons for what I do – all of this belongs to the fact that I do not only live at home in the world, but also participate in society. I will once again attempt to show that this new demand does not oppose the realm of immanence. Importantly for our sake, the entrance of the ego into society does not negate it, but rather elevates it. I will elucidate this by comparing the differences and interactions of *comprehension* and *representation* as they pertain to knowledge in Levinas' thought.

Comprehension follows from mastery. Comprehension grasps beings; it reaches out and touches reality. The curious, trying hand, unsure of what exactly it will find, nevertheless already anticipates what it seeks to find, namely that which will satisfy its needs. It searches for pliable wood, good-sized and evenly round rocks that will do well as a fence, some sturdy cardboard that can serve as shelter, etc. Thus, what comprehension grasps in the thing are truly features of the thing, but they are found in their relevance for me. This not only limits what comprehension can comprehend contra representation, but distinguishes what 'understanding qua comprehension' versus 'understanding qua representation' is. Comprehension grasps, that is, uncovers the usefulness and serviceability of things. This is the grasp of labor and dwelling that overcomes the uncertainty of the elements. Comprehension is thus an embodied phenomenon, and therefore participates in the ambiguity of the sedimented body which is both exalted above and enrooted in the world its lives from. (see IVd-e).

In contrast, representation signifies a radical detachment from the world. To represent an object is to constitute it in its clarity, so that the act of representation and the object represented are adequate to each other. In this adequation, the independence of the object is suspended, testifying to the radical freedom of representational thought;

Intelligibility, the very occurrence of representation, is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same, without introducing alterity into it; it is a free exercise of the same. (TI 124)

Representation does not ‘live from...’ the objects it represents, but suspends the represented object by presenting the object in its clarity. It is an impassive contemplation of the object, a disengaged and disinterested form of knowledge. This is in contrast to the embedded and interested groping of comprehension, which proceeds from the state of being lodged in the agreeability of the world.

If representation manifests the ‘free exercise of the same’, why does it have anything to do with society and justice, as I alluded to in the above? The question is, for Levinas, how such a suspended form of knowledge could ever come to be; it is a question of whether it is possible “to derive from commitment, from action, from care, the freedom of contemplation representation evinces” (TI 169). Levinas believes that this sort of disengagement cannot follow from the grasp of comprehension. To be sure, the comprehension of the world in terms of labor and dwelling does entail a distancing from the world, a suspension of the immediacy of life lived in the elements, as we clarified in the last chapter. But as we also took pains to explain, this distancing does not entail a suspension of the agreeableness of life. In other words, the withdrawal of the dwelling ego does not suspend, but *modifies* the engagement of the ego. It is the distance established by a window, simultaneously barrier and access (IVe).

Whereas comprehension commences out of an interested being at home in the world, representation is characterized by its disengaged, contemplative mood. Representation is a determination of the other that does not reflect back on the same, that is, a disinterested determination. The possibility of *this* form of knowledge follows, Levinas believes, from the ethical relation;

in order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know how to give what

I possess. Only thus could I situate myself absolutely above my engagement in the non-I. But for this I must encounter the indiscreet face of the Other that calls me into question. The Other – the absolutely other – paralyzes possession, which he contests by his epiphany in the face. (TI 171)

The calm, neutral assessment of objects in representational thought is something quite different from the lively activity of the enjoying, dwelling ego. It entails seeing the *thing in itself*, not as an object of enjoyment, but disregarding my position to it. This suspended status of the object in representation owes its possibility to the ethical encounter, where my possessive relation to the world is contested. The possibility of representation and charity thus go together, for to represent an object is to render it disinterestedly for the sake of someone else.

Representation must therefore be understood in its primary meaning as a giving, an offering. It is not the dialectical counterpart to the engagement of comprehension, but entails a wholly new relationship to my possessions, where this possession itself has come under question. The mastery of comprehension is a modification of my immediate enjoyment, but as a modification, it continues to serve the primordial agreeableness of life. With ethics, however, it is this fundamental agreeableness which itself becomes modified:

The act of designating modifies my relation of enjoyment and possession with things, places the things in the perspective of the Other. Utilizing a sign is therefore not limited to substituting an indirect relation for the direct relation with a thing, but permits me to render the things offerable, detach them from my own usage, alienate them, render them exterior. (TI 209)

The difference between a mediate and an immediate relation to things belongs to the difference between enjoyment and dwelling. Representation, on the other hand, is not simply an additional step, but a rendering of things in their detachment from me. My direct or indirect engagement with things is suspended and re-oriented towards the Other and others, and are thus represented in their commonality.

From Levinas' conception of representation, we are led further to his conception of objectivity, a conception I believe has something in common, surprisingly perhaps, with that of Karl Popper. The latter writes this of objectivity: "I shall therefore say that the *objectivity*

of scientific statements lies in the fact that they can be *inter-subjectively tested*' (Popper 2002, 22). Popper expands on this short definition in a footnote added to a later edition of his famous *Logic of Scientific Discovery*:

I have since generalized this formulation; for inter-subjective testing is merely a very important aspect of the more general idea of inter-subjective criticism, or in other words, of the idea of mutual control by critical discussion. (Popper 2002, 22)

Popper comes from a vastly different tradition – analytical philosophy and theory of science – and is underway with an entirely different project – that of founding science on a proper method. Nevertheless, his understanding of objectivity is very close to that of Levinas, which Levinas also argues is the view of Husserl;

Already Husserl affirmed that the objectivity of thought consists in being valid for everyone. To know objectively would therefore be to constitute my thought in such a way that it already contained a reference to the thought of others. (TI 210)

Objective thinking is essentially inter-subjective thinking. Objectivity takes place between subjects, and in a society is given the role to judge between them. To be objective is thus to distance oneself from the spontaneity of the subject, and to judge things in their accordance not with me, but with society at large. The neutrality of objectivity requires the suspension of personal interest which, as Popper argues, is only possible as inter-subjective *critical thinking*.³¹

What, however, is critical thinking? It would seem to imply that I do not presume the legitimacy of some idea, but remain open to the possibility of this idea being contested. It thus entails an openness of receiving a critique from elsewhere. Critical thinking therefore follows not first from an intimacy with the objects of thought, but with the possibility of a critical disengagement from them.

³¹ It should be mentioned that *Totality and Infinity* also includes another understanding of objectivity, which argues that the Western tradition is an objectifying one because it privileges vision and touch (TI 188).

A society in which objectivity is possible is therefore one in which this society is conceived of as something more than a conglomerate of competing forces, only striving for their own preservation and enhancement, where the state would be “a technique of social equilibrium...harmonizing antagonistic forces” (OB 159). Critical thinking presupposes that knowledge is more than the extension of my being outwards, a procedurally growing ability to grasp the world in its meaning for me. Critical thinking is reflection, which signals a different movement than that of my extension:

This objectivity is correlative not of some trait in an isolated subject, but of his relation with the Other. Objectification is produced in the very work of language, where the subject is detached from the things possessed as though it hovered over its own existence, as though it were detached from it, as though the existence it exists had not yet completely reached it. This distance is more radical than every distance in the world. (TI 209)

The objectivity Popper describes entails this ethical moment. Objectivity signals the ethical suspension of my being, of the possibility that in being there would be an encounter with what critically questions the spontaneous expansion of my interest. Rather than being the expression of the dormant comprehension pre-reflectively implicit in my situatedness in the world, language has meaning because it is “the presentation of meaning” (TI 206). This does not imply that linguistic meaning are the formulation of pre-linguistic thought, but that the very possibility of presenting meanings becomes intelligible because of the suspension of my interest: “*the being of signification consists in putting into question in an ethical relation constitutive freedom itself*” (TI 206).

For Nietzsche, it is, as we saw, impossible and meaningless to separate so-called ‘objective knowledge’ from the interests that informs it and gives it a direction (see IIb). A perspective on the world is always informed by an interest that seeks to master the world in order to preserve and expand its own interests.³² Does this not testify to a certain trend of our current political climate? The suspicion is growing that our different governing institutions – politics, universities, traditional media and the entire ‘establishment’ in general – are

³² Objectivity itself is, for him, a particular interest; its passive, neutral stance to the world expresses an exhausted force too tired to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ which therefore only seeks to mirror the world (BGE 97-99).

governed by hidden interests, ideological corruptions covered over by proposedly ‘honest intentions’ to do good and to judge neutrally. One can ask if the organization of a society in which we are supposed to trust scientists, politicians and journalists to sincerely care about truth and to work on behalf of people other than themselves does not entail and depend on the belief that there can be a *disinterested* perspective which does not seek to grow its influence in the world, but rather to attend to an obligation.

As Levinas continuously emphasizes, however, the suspension of interest must not be read as the negation of this interest. Ethics does not abolish the ego, but draws on its resources. Rather than inhibiting it, ethics opens the ego to new opportunities: “in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness” (*TI* 200). Furthermore, the entrance into a new dimension does not bear an allergic relation with the dimension of the Same, but sees this dimension transformed in a new orientation; giving. The entrance into the ethical relation does not entail a departure from dwelling:

The ‘vision’ of the face as face is a certain mode of sojourning in a home...a certain form of economic life. No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. (*TI* 172, my emphasis)

That the face cannot be approached with empty hands has a double meaning here; both the ethical imperative which commands me to not leave the Other starving, and the concrete context of the world within which transcendence reveals itself. Ethics does not make its appeal to an abstract being nor to the anxious Dasein troubled by the opaqueness of its origins, but to someone who, gathered in their home, can open their doors.

Therefore, although ethics suspends the spontaneity of the ego by criticizing it, it does not suspend the very enjoyability of the worldly goods I enjoy. Furthermore, this enjoyability is carried with in the transformative re-orientation. To give is to give of what I have: “language accomplishes the primordial putting in common – which refers to possession and presupposes economy” (*TI* 173). Abstract knowledge of things is therefore not a departure of the life-world within which they have their embodied meaning, but a re-orientation of them as a gift. Objective knowledge is the ethical dispossession of a possession, “a first donation” (*TI* 173). To understand is to provide reasons for why I believe what I believe or why I do what I

do, in the context of a society and under the obligation of the Other, who requires of me that I justify myself.

For Nietzsche, the innocence of life is ruined when its justification is demanded. We have seen that, for Levinas as well, the immanence of life unfolds without any concern for justice. It is the Other who demands that I justify myself; “this ‘action’ upon my freedom precisely puts an end to violence and contingency, and, in this sense also, founds Reason” (*TI* 203-204). Compared to participation in society where I must justify what I believe, the enjoyment of the ego is arbitrary. But this is not a *problem* for enjoyment, for the enjoyability of enjoyment does not need any external reference for its own value. The arbitrariness of my egotistical enjoyment is not opposed to the demands of justice; they constitute two separate dimensions who draws their positivity from themselves.

In fact, I would argue, a Levinasian analysis of the relation between enjoyment and ethics opens up even the possibility of *enjoying my responsibilities*. As we saw in the last chapter, enjoyment remains a possible mode of access at all stages in life (see IVe). Does this not also count for critical thinking? A journalist writing a critical piece on a city’s mishandling of a construction project is working in the spirit of the ethical; to write critically is to respond to the obligation that we should not simply assume the legitimacy of our actions, but question them, and seek to understand them in view of others. Nevertheless, the journalist would not be wrong in feeling satisfied with a particularly well-phrased description of the state of affairs, or with having done a good job finding sources. While her writing finds its primordial inspiration from ethics, she can without contradiction also enjoy her craft. A judge may go home from a day of work feeling very satisfied with having passed exceptionally neutral and just judgements in court that day. Our participation in society exists in both dimensions, both as an obligation and as a source of enjoyment, without either excluding the other.

Still, one dimension holds an absolute priority over the other – ethics has priority over ontology. If the judge finds himself in a conflict between what he wants to do and what must be done, there is a complete asymmetry between the choices. In fact, we could say that transcendence manifests itself precisely in those choices where what I want for myself conflicts with what is just. This is not a question of two allergic interests, but that of two wholly separated orders subsisting simultaneously, where one has priority not because it negates the other, but because it must be measured in completely different terms. When the journalist must decide to refrain from framing an issue in a way she knows would be

untruthful, but which would make for an elegant article, it is not because there is anything wrong with writing an elegant article in itself; it is simply that misrepresenting the facts bears so much more weight. More precisely, it is responsibility that weighs; “the irremissible weight...the severe seriousness of goodness” (*TI* 200). The gravity of seriousness follows from ethics, whereas enjoyment is playful carefreeness (*TI* 134). But the playfulness of enjoyment and the gravity of responsibility are not in conflict; they attest to different dimensions of life. Immanence and transcendence exists in this relation. It is a question of incomparable orders, and the priority of the one over the other. There is that which is beautiful, enjoyable and the source of my happiness; and then there is that which exceeds happiness, not by negating it, but by being higher than it, holier than it. The discrepancy between the immanent and the transcendent cannot be understood within the measures by which immanence comprehends and enjoys itself, but only in reference to the transcendent command.

f) Creaturehood

In the course of the present thesis, we have often evoked the distinction between Creator and creature/creation as one way to frame the relation between immanence and transcendence. We have seen that Levinas draws on the notion of creation *ex nihilo* in order to configure his structure of separation. I would like to return to this thematic through a juxtaposition with April D. Capili, who in the article ‘The Created Ego in Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*’ gives an interpretation of this relation that, although it converges at many points with the present analysis, I nevertheless also have some disagreements with. Capili relates the notion of creaturehood, correctly I believe, to the ethical critique. Due to the way she frames it, however, I believe that her analysis sometimes ends up being ontological rather than ethical.

Capili argues that the ethical critique leads the self to realize its creature status, namely “that the I can come to recognize that it is not – and can never be – its own ground” (Capili 2011, 685). The ethical critique implies that the naïve ego, which thought that it began from itself, comes to the realization that it is created. Capili makes this argument in response to an apparent contradiction in *Totality and Infinity* that we have also followed with interest;

It may appear...on the surface that there is a disjunction between the ego that arises as separate and autonomous, and the self that is awakened to its responsibility for the Other. (Capili 2011, 678)

In *Totality and Infinity*, as we have seen, Levinas both argues that the self begins from itself as a separate ego that is sovereign and independent and that the self is always already founded on the idea of Infinity. In the present thesis, we discussed this under the heading of ‘concrete man’, who lives always already in a mixture of enjoyment and ethics (see IVa).

This is only an apparent contradiction that Capili, correctly I believe, argues is solved when Levinas’ notion of creation is taken into account. For the notion of creation *ex nihilo* entails that the creature draws its own independence from its dependence on having been created: “The creature is given the space to emerge as a separate and free individual” (Capili 2011, 688). The unique structure of separation as creation allows the created self to emerge from itself, which is the possibility of the enjoying ego at home in the world. Although it depends on the metaphysical relation for the possibility of time, which allows the ego to labor and dwell and thus overcome the insecurity of the elements, this takes nothing away from its independence; it retains the possibility of shutting itself completely off from the Other, which Capili recognizes (Capili 2011, 685).

So far, I am in agreement with Capili, but it is in her account of the ethical critique that my disagreement manifests. According to Capili, the ethical encounter with transcendence entails that the separated self rediscovers its being-caused by the Other. To stand in the ethical relation is to realize that I am created: “The face reminds me of my non-primacy and my creature-status” (Capili 2011, 678). To be a creature means to have been created, or to have one’s cause outside oneself. This is what Capili argues the critique of the Other forces me to recognize: “Being critical of myself, I may see then that my freedom is not self-grounding; I can thus trace back to the very conditions of my autonomy” (Capili 2011, 685). The critique that the Other institutes awakens me to the fact that I am not my own ground, but that the possibility of my independence depends on the Other. Thus in the end, the entrance of the Other abolishes the naivety that I am my own cause: “All of these points suggest a self that can no longer claim sovereignty or total self-sufficiency” (Capili 2011, 678). The Other humbles my naïve sovereignty.

I believe that this misunderstands the sovereignty and independency achieved in enjoyment, for the ethical relation does not annul the sovereignty and self-sufficiency achieved by the ego in enjoyment and dwelling. When Levinas describes the continuing possibility of the Same shutting itself off from the Other, then we must understand that this constitutes a *positive* possibility, and one which in fact remains necessary for the encounter

itself. Capili describes this ignorance as a forgetting: “the ego forgets the original relation and may regard itself as its own principle and condition” (Capili 2011, 689). But this ‘may regard’ is the positive possibility of living ‘as if’ I did not have a cause, that is, the very possibility of a beginning in the self. This possibility is concretized as enjoyment, and due to the happiness it finds in enjoyment, the ego can remain untroubled by the discovery of a possible external origin. The complacent self is not disturbed by the realization that it has a cause outside of itself, for it draws from this dependency its independency by living ‘as if’ it began from itself.

For the same reason, I believe that Capili makes a mistake by framing the ethical critique as a question of ground. As we have seen in this chapter, the ethical encounter entails that the ego becomes questioned by the Other, which Capili also argues; “the sovereign ego’s freedom is questioned, its place and security unsettled, by the Other’s face” (Capili 2011, 688). But is it my ‘place and security’ that becomes unsettled by the Other? Capili’s framing makes it appear as if a sovereign ego that stood on solid ground suddenly had the rug pulled out from under it, revealing to it that its purported self-grounding was naïve. The realization of my creaturehood entails dispelling the ignorant belief that I am my own ground. To me, this is closer to the Heideggerian analysis of not-being-at-home, namely the unsettling realization that I do not have a secure home in being.

Levinas, I believe, describes something different with the notion of ethical critique, namely the possibility of a being which is comfortably grounded on earth being taught a concern beyond the question of ground. I am securely footed on earth, but the Other introduces a worry that transcends this worldly orientation. It is therefore something *novel*; it “comes from the heights, unforeseen, and consequently teaches its very novelty” (TI 66). An appreciation of this novelty is also something I find is lacking in Capili’s account, and due to the same problems we have been discussing. As said above, Capili describes the sovereignty of the ego as a forgetting of its cause, and the ethical encounter is therefore on the obverse side described as a reminder; “One is reminded of this in the face to face situation...made to realize one’s non-primacy” (Capili 2011, 691). The presentation of the encounter as a reminder makes sense if the ethical critique consisted in correcting the misguided belief that I am my own ground, thus returning me to a more original insight regarding how I came about. On my reading, however, it is because enjoyment concretizes the happiness and sovereignty of the ego in a radically self-sufficient way that this ego can be turned towards that which it does not lack. This is again why “the *After* or the *Effect* conditions the *Before* or the *Cause*: the *Before* appears and is only welcomed” (TI 54). The ego is created, and is thus an ‘effect’

that has its 'cause' in the Other, but this 'cause' is welcomed after the fact as something *new*; and this is possible because the enjoying ego begins from itself in its own self-sufficiency, a sufficiency that does not come into question in the face-to-face encounter.

The non-primacy I awaken to in the ethical relation is therefore not one concerning the conditions of my existence; it is not to become aware that I am a thrown subject that did not choose my birth (Capili 2011, 684). As we have shown, Levinas' discussion of subjectivity attempts to overcome this notion, and determine subjectivity in terms of what is essential to it, that is, its interiority and independence with regards to its surroundings. More importantly, transcendence is misunderstood if we regard the non-primacy of the self in this way. Rather than being ontological (i.e. concerning the constitution of the ground of my being), the non-primacy is *ethical*; "Goodness consists in taking up a position in being such that the Other counts more than myself" (TI 247). I do not rediscover my cause, but become faced by morality, which has *primacy* because it is an *imperative*. The Other is more important than me; my responsibility to the Other bears more weight than my arbitrary enjoyment.

As elaborated above, it is the ethical critique which for Levinas opens up the subject to critical thinking, objectivity and philosophy. In that respect, Capili is correct in noting that Levinas characterizes critical thinking as a tracing back "to reach that which has gone before and determines that very condition" (Capili 2011, 685). In fact, he identifies it with philosophy: "To philosophize is to trace freedom back to what lies *before* it" (TI 84-85, my emphasis). Does this not justify Capili's framing of a rediscovery of one's creaturehood? Only if we interpret the 'before' in Levinas' quote ontologically rather than ethically:

If philosophy consists in knowing critically, that is, in seeking a foundation for its freedom, in justifying it, it begins with conscience, to which the other is presented as the Other, and where the movement of thematization is inverted. But this inversion does not amount to 'knowing oneself' as a theme attended to by the other, but rather in submitting oneself to an exigency, to a morality. The Other measures me with a gaze incomparable to the gaze by which I discover him. (TI 86, my emphasis)

The non-primacy of the self, of thought and of philosophy itself to its condition, does not amount to the lack of a knowledge, the missing recognition of one's condition as created, but to the obligation that institutes my thinking. It is the newness and otherness of this obligation

that we are here trying to come to terms with, and on that note, morality must be sharply distinguished from any worry about my ground. Ethics for Levinas is what concerns me when my own self-groundedness is of no concern to me, “a luxury with respect to needs” (TI 102). For in Levinas’ philosophy, is being-grounded not a need, namely the need of the laboring ego which builds a home to dwell in? I stand on my two feet in a world that is familiar to me: to ‘have a ground’ means to be at home in the world. In distinction from this, my moral obligation to the primacy of the imperative does not concern my security and extension into the world – does not pull the rug out from under your feet – but questions the very meaning and justification of my groundedness. The realization of my creature-status therefore does not impose a worry about my ground, but a realization about my election, about what Chalier speaks of as “the ‘difficult freedom’ of one who agrees to be a creature, a creature whose existence answers a calling that is prior to it, a calling which is waiting for its answer” (Chalier 2010, 7). I stand on earth, am at home in it, am a sovereign in it – this is the worldly orientation of enjoyment. Simultaneously, I am oriented toward that which is higher and beyond the world because it raises me to a dimension that is wholly other to the world of enjoyment. It is “*the human body raised upwards, committed in the direction of height*” (TI 117).

g) Interrupting Life in the Garden

In this chapter, we have sought to explore what happens with the dimension of immanence when it encounters the transcendence of the Other. This question is important, for it asks how we ought to understand the relation between immanence and transcendence, which is the overarching theme of the present thesis. Drawing to a close, we will discuss this relationship yet again in view of the question of the complacency of life in the garden, and the interruption of this complacency due to the arrival of the Other.

Life in the garden is the agreeableness of enjoyment. It is a paradisial innocence, pre-moral rather than immoral. It is nature cultivated in an ornamental and decorative fashion, its beauty brought out for the sake of enjoyment. As we have continued to emphasize, this pleasant façade is not a covering-over something else, but refers only to itself. Life in the garden is the pure expenditure of enjoyment, and for this reason radically immanent. Enjoying myself complacently and lazily in the garden, I am not turning-away-from something else, but simply enjoying myself non-conflictingly.

The sudden and surprising presence of someone else in the garden signals something wholly new, and requires an orientation equally novel. Whereas the enjoyability and security of the garden allows me to complacently rest in myself, my relation to the Other is a movement that does not return to me. I *attend* to the Other, and to attend to the Other is to do so patiently, always remaining on the verge, awaiting what they are going to say or do next; “in patience the will breaks through the crust of its egoism and as it were displaces its center of gravity outside of itself, to will as Desire and Goodness limited by nothing” (*TI* 239). The Goodness of patience consists in the fact that I await the Other without knowing what comes next. This is different from the patience of the gardener who, after having planted a sapling in early spring, patiently awaits the young plant to grow; for this is a calculated patience, oriented towards the harvest. It is an investment expecting returns. The patience of goodness, in contrast, is patient vis-à-vis that which it cannot control – the Other.

Patience – the etymological root of this word is the Latin *patientia*, ‘the quality of suffering or enduring’. Patience is a suffering in contrast to the enjoyment of the garden, and the encounter itself is an interruption of my innocent complacency. The attention which the Other requires entails a gravity foreign to the delightful leisure of the garden. To enjoy is to relax, but to be ethical is to straighten ones back and be attentive, to stand wakefully as guard for the Other.

The radical difference between enjoyment and ethics, and the primacy of the one over the other, can easily lead to an understanding of them that determines them as opposites. Enjoyment is the lightness of play, whereas ethics is the seriousness of gravity. Enjoyment is arbitrary and nonchalant, whereas ethics requires that I justify myself and give reasons for what I do. Furthermore, in the ethical relation, I learn to be ashamed at myself. Does it then not seem as if the ethical interruption of my life in the garden also condemns this life? And is it not precisely the Height of this transcendence which casts the shadow of this condemnation upon the ‘here-below’ of worldly life?

It has been the effort of this chapter to show that the contrary is true; immanence and transcendence are not opposed. Rather, the incommensurable discrepancy between the two dimensions, as described above, testifies to why transcendence must not be understood oppositionally if it is to be understood at all. For the primacy of transcendence over immanence – its Height and gravity – means that it is *more* than immanence, that it exceeds it, and that it cannot be measured according to the standards of the world. Transcendence is not

dialectically constituted in its opposition to immanence, but in contrast introduces something wholly new.

Nevertheless, transcendence announces its rupture within immanence; the Other interrupts me *in* the garden. How, then, does the encounter transform the garden and my relation to it? On one hand, it changes nothing. The relation between the dimensions of enjoyment and ethics are, as we have continued to emphasize, not to be interpreted chronologically; we do not ‘begin’ in the dimension of immanence and then ‘end up’ in the dimension of transcendence. Rather, the garden of Eden bespeaks an always available dimension of human life.

On the other hand, it changes a lot. My mastery over the world and the continuous expansion of my dwelling can become a violent imperialism. My garden, which on its own was pre-morally innocent, can suddenly appear as encroaching on the Other, as if I had stolen land from them. Or it can become a site of welcome, a place I invite the Other into, and where the delights of the garden become gifts for the Other.

Egoism is thus of itself neither violence nor charity, but an indeterminate potency for both. *This follows from egoism not being dialectically constituted.* It is because egoism originally has no other meaning than that it provides itself that it becomes malleable for multiple modifications by the ethical. The way in which I orient myself to the world in enjoyment and mastery is internally consistent, for it is a movement that begins from and returns to itself. The dimension of immanence is meaningful without any reference to transcendence, and the encounter with the Other is unpredictable precisely because there is nothing in immanence that would foreshadow this encounter. As Moati writes, “shame...is not inherent in egoism as such” (Moati 2017, 138). Shame is not a possibility in the garden; it would have no meaning there. It only has meaning in my relation to the Other.

In this chapter, we have attempted to show that transcendence does not oppose immanence, and that to determine their relation as oppositional would be a misunderstanding of transcendence in view of immanence. This is a misunderstanding which arises when transcendence is interpreted as corresponding to a lack or fault in immanence. Levinas is able to determine the relation between immanence and transcendence otherwise by showing that both owe their meanings to their own internal logic. The immanence of enjoyment is self-sufficient because of the way it draws its happiness and independence from itself, whereas transcendence constitutes its own meaning positively due to the fact that the Other expresses themselves only in virtue of themselves. On its own, egoism is neither violence nor charity,

for these notions are foreign to it; it is face-to-face with the Other that this worldly orientation becomes an indeterminate potency for either.

According to this schema, the notion that we are expelled from paradise would not entail a condemnation of earthly life, but would rather testify to the fact that human life is more than a concern with happiness. The human is not only at home in the world, but also oriented upwards, towards the Height of the divine. These two orientations are not in conflict, but bears witness to two incommensurable yet simultaneous dimensions of human life.

Chapter VI – Enjoyment and Sacrifice

In the final chapter of this thesis, we turn to what is recognized as the second of Levinas' main works, *Otherwise than Being*. It is a work that, as we shall see, spends a lot less time on enjoyment than did *Totality and Infinity*. Nevertheless, as I intend to demonstrate, enjoyment also plays an essential role in *Otherwise than Being*. In fact, the first quote we encountered from Levinas in the introduction of the present thesis is from *Otherwise than Being*, and concerns enjoyment and its relation to sacrifice. 'Sacrifice' is one of the headings under which Levinas discusses transcendence in *Otherwise than Being*, and it is a notion that is deeply tied to the phenomenon of enjoyment;

It is the passivity of being-for-another, which is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat. But for this one has to first enjoy one's bread, not in order to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give oneself in giving it. (OB 72)

To enjoy is to begin from and to return to oneself in a self-sufficient complacency. It is to enjoy one's bread as an embodied and earthly creature of the world. The ego is independent and sovereign in this enjoyment. Additionally, however, I also sacrifice my bread to the Other in a movement that does not return to me. This is a movement that both requires my prior complacency and which cannot be measured in terms of it, for the goodness of sacrifice lies in the fact that the ego is not worried that this movement does not return to it, but sees something *better* in this wholly new orientation.

The above quote testifies to what I will attempt to demonstrate in this chapter, namely that the structure of separation continues to operate in *Otherwise than Being*. The structure of separation testifies both to the fact that the conscious ego enjoys a sovereign independence, and that the subject is in relation to what transcends this self-sufficiency without being opposed to it. I will do so by exploring how enjoyment, separation and the notion of creation *ex nihilo* continues to play their roles in *Otherwise than Being*, and thus perhaps be able to present a reading of this work that illuminates different aspects of it than what has normally caught the attention of commentators.

We will also revisit the relation between Levinas and Nietzsche in this chapter, and in virtue of a question that I believe is present in one of the epigraphs Levinas has chosen for *Otherwise than Being*. It is a quote from Pascal, which in full reads as such; “Mine, thine. – ‘This dog is mine,’ said those poor children; ‘that is my place in the sun.’ Here is the beginning and the image of the usurpation of all the earth” (*Pensées* 295). To have something for yourself, something you personally own – it is through this enjoyability of possession that I first begin from myself and have a place for myself on earth, underneath the sun. But is this boundless expansion of my interest all there is, or is it possible to speak genuinely of a *disinterest*? This would be the difference between a world ruled only by the immanence of interest (Nietzsche), and a world in contact with what transcends it without negating it (Levinas).

a) From *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*

Turning our focus to *Otherwise than Being*, the main interpretative task that will preoccupy us will be, as said, the question of whether the analysis of enjoyment and the structure of separation it opens up continues to operate in this later work. We will therefore begin with a general description of the overarching theme of *Otherwise than Being*, and subsequently move on to a general overview of the scholarly debate regarding continuity and discontinuity between that work and *Totality and Infinity*. There is, of course, an overarching continuity between the two works in terms of its main theme, recognized by everyone. The main topic of *Otherwise than Being* is that which has been arguably Levinas’ theme since *On Escape*, namely transcendence, which is clear from the title alone. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas asks: “If transcendence has meaning” (*OB* 3), then how does this meaning signify? This signification will once again be identified with ethics.

The change between the two works is by Richard Cohen explained as a change in focus, that is, a change in regards to where this ethical transcendence is sought; “*Totality and Infinity* is focused on ethical alterity, *Otherwise than Being* on ethical subjectivity” (Cohen 1998, xii). Whereas the earlier work focuses on the ethical revelation of the Face of the Other, the later focuses on what it means that a subject is responsible. Let us first take a look at how this theme of ‘ethical subjectivity’ is presented in *Otherwise than Being*.

To be a responsible subject is described as being a hostage, to be summoned forth by the Other. It is a responsibility that elects me rather than me electing it, summoning me forth from my inwardness in an exposure Levinas calls the structure of the-one-for-the-other. This

structure is not simply a characteristic of the subject, but the very meaning and structure of subjectivity;

The subjectivity of the subject, as being subject to everything, is a pre-originary susceptibility, before all freedom and outside of every present. It is accused in uneasiness or the unconditionality of the accusative, in the ‘here I am’ (me voici) which is obedience to the glory of the Infinite that orders me to the other (OB 146)

To be a unique ‘I’ means, paradoxically, to be despite myself and for the other – for it is as responding ‘here I am’ that I am a unique subject. I am the one who answers to a summon I cannot decline, and it is this very impossibility of slipping away that constitutes my singularity; no one else can take on the responsibility I bear.

This theme of ethical subjectivity is furthermore explicated in terms of language and temporality. In regards to language, the difference between immanence and transcendence is discussed in terms of the responsibility of saying and the ontology of the said. In terms of our discussion of language in *Totality and Infinity* in the last chapter, we could say that the difference between ‘saying’ and ‘said’ corresponds to the difference between thematization and ‘speaking-to’ the Other (see Vb). Saying is the responsibility of a subject, “the very signifyingness of signification” (OB 5) in my proximity to my neighbor, where I am summoned to respond, or more precisely, where I in fact find myself always already responding to the Other in the exposure of myself in responsibility.

Whereas saying signifies a movement of me emptying myself for the other, the said is the synchrony of language. The said is ontology, the possibility of assembling and manifesting intelligible ideas and determinations. Language must be understood both as a saying and as a said, consisting of two irreducible yet non-allergic significations; the themes and topics in which the different meanings of language become manifest, and the ethical saying of these themes to the Other. The relation between saying and the said is one of the most important themes of the book, and thus difficult to summarize, but three points ought to be mentioned; 1) saying is, due to its transcendence, irreducible to becoming a theme in the said, 2) saying nevertheless *can* become manifest (as it does in Levinas’ own work), albeit at a betrayal, and 3) the fact that language becomes a said is not a tragedy, “do not attest to some

fall of the saying” (*OB* 6), but is required by my responsibility to not only the Other but also to others, or the fact that we live in a society.

Saying and said also correspond to two distinct yet intertwined temporalities. The time of the said is the present, “the privileged time of truth and being” (*OB* 133). The theme of ‘the present’ in this work is related to certain topics we have been tracking, namely the critique of philosophies of finitude and the interpretation of subjectivity as ecstatic that follows.

According to e.g. Heidegger, the self-presence of Dasein is only possible due to its ecstatic constitution, which means that Dasein must be out-of-phase with itself in order to be in the present moment. This is the Heideggerian notion of transcendence we discussed earlier (*Va*). Levinas also recognizes such an out-of-phase as necessary for the present, but argues, yet again, that this does not leave the order of the Same;

In the remission or détente of time, the same (le Même) modified retains itself on the verge of losing itself, is inscribed in memory and is identified, is said... These rediscoveries are an identification – of this as this or as that. (*OB* 36)

The ontology or the said of language, where beings come to meaning through temporalization, serves the synchronization of meaning, the manifestation of intelligibility. Levinas therefore both recognizes how the present only comes about due to an erring, and ties this up to the unfolding of essence; but against Heidegger, Levinas proposes that this schema never leaves or transcends the present, but enables it; “equality to self which is always being – the *Sein* – whatever the attempts to separate it from the present” (*OG* 82). Being is presencing through an original differentiation, but the differentiation is best understood not as transcending the present, but in virtue of how it makes the present possible.

Saying, on the other hand, belongs to the temporality of a responsibility always too late; “In proximity is heard a command come as though from an immemorial past, which was never present” (*OB* 88). The summon that calls me to speak up and say ‘here I am!’ is heard retrospectively in my own answer, in this ‘here I am!’; “the command is stated by the mouth of him it commands” (*OB* 147). Transcendence is thus past in a sense absolutely irreducible to the present; “The non-present here is invisible, separated (or sacred) and thus a non-origin, an-archival” (*OB* 11). This is different from the present out-of-phase with itself, for this past is wholly foreign to the present, does not tend toward it like the past recuperated in

representation. It follows rather from the strange situation of having been elected to a responsibility that did not start in my initiative.

The presence of the said and the immemorial past of saying are thus intertwined, irreducible and non-allergic. I am summoned to my presence, to my 'here I am' *as* responsible, but this responsibility signifies out of an election that is both irreducible to my present and inspires it. Levinas calls this diachrony. The diachrony of the subject and its language lies in its belonging to two times, the presence of thematization and the immemorial past of my summon. I am both gathered in my own self-presence, and turned inside-out by my vulnerable exposure to the other; I am both at rest and restless. The main trajectory of *Otherwise than Being* is an exploration of this diachrony, with one of the main questions being how this diachrony can be posited thematically in language and philosophy without being reduced to the synchrony of the present (see e.g. *OB* 155).

This being said, we could summarize the main theme and trajectory of *Otherwise than being* as an analysis of ethical subjectivity as the diachrony of saying and the said. Important for this thesis, I will argue that *the structure of separation is to be found operating at the heart of this diachrony*. Saying and the said, the immemorial past and the synchrony of the present, being and transcendence – these are intertwined, yet they remain irreducible to each other. Or so I will argue. This argument depends, however, on a continuity between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* as regards this structure. It is furthermore challenged by interpretations that sees the progress of the later work as the overcoming of what some commentators deem a simplistic and perhaps even ontological separation of immanence and transcendence in the earlier work. We will unfold these interpretations by turning to the question of whether *Otherwise than Being* is discontinuous with *Totality and Infinity* because the former overcomes the 'ontological language' of the latter.

b) Overcoming Ontological Language

The question of ontological language relates to a more general scholarly debate surrounding *Otherwise than Being*. Should it be seen as a continuation of *Totality and Infinity* or as a significantly new project that seeks to overcome perceived flaws of the earlier work? No one doubts that there is a clear continuity: transcendence, ethics and the other human being are still the primary themes, and the exploration of these themes through an analysis of subjectivity, language and temporality is far from foreign to these themes. The question is, however, if this is first and foremost a shift in focus, an exploration of the same themes in a

different field, or if Levinas decides on this approach because he had come to realize that the prior approach of *Totality and Infinity* had failed to do justice to his theme.

Let me start by elaborating on the first interpretation that takes *Otherwise than Being* as an expansion of *Totality and Infinity*. Cohen, who belongs to this camp, sees the shift from ethical alterity to ethical subjectivity as primarily a shift in focus. He recognizes that there are new themes being explored here, but argues that this must be understood as “a process [of] amplification, augmentation, expansion...A sentence becomes a section, which in turn expands into an entire chapter” (Cohen 2000, xi). As Levinas’ work progresses, themes that were merely hinted at in earlier works become more fully developed in the later ones. My claim is that the analysis of the diachrony of the subject should be read as an expansion of the idea of ‘concrete man’ (see IVa-b). We discussed this theme as it appeared in *Totality and Infinity*. We saw that, although the dimensions of the Same and the Other could be described independently due to the nature of the structure of separation, concrete man is nevertheless always already founded on the idea of Infinity. In the case of the Same, it was possible to describe it in isolation because although it is in reality founded on the idea of Infinity, it can live *as though* it were independent of it, a possibility that is concretized in the enjoying ego, drawing its reason and resources from itself. This leads to the difficult temporal structure of *Totality and Infinity*, where “the *After* or the *Effect* conditions the *Before* or the *Cause*” (*TI* 54).

In *Otherwise than Being*, I believe, Levinas shifts his focus from the analysis of these dimensions in their separation to an analysis of them in their intertwining. He analyzes the transcendence of ethics as it manifests in concrete man, that is, as always already obsessed by responsibility. In this diachrony, I argue, separation and its elementary features are retained. This means on the one hand that, as we saw above, that “The non-present here is invisible, separated (or sacred) and thus a non-origin, an-archival” (*OB* 11). On the other hand, it means that the self retains its independence and possibility of ignorance even in its obsession.

But perhaps the shift to ethical subjectivity implies something more, namely a flaw in how the separation between the Same and the Other was thought in *Totality and Infinity*? According to the second camp of interpretations, the idea would be that whereas *Totality and Infinity* described immanence and transcendence as separate moments, *Otherwise than Being* overcomes the discrepancy inherent to this approach by analyzing subjectivity as transcendence-in-immanence. I see this approach turning up in the commentary literature in relation to the discussion of *the ontological language of Totality and Infinity*.

What I mean by ‘Ontological language’ here is not simply the said, but rather a vague idea in the commentary literature that *Otherwise than Being* overcomes the ontological language of *Totality and Infinity* – in fact, it would be this overcoming that constitutes the discontinuity between the two works. It seems to me, however, that there is a confusion as to precisely what is ontological about the language of *Totality and Infinity*. Part of this confusion probably stems from the dual source of this problematic.

One source is Levinas himself. There are two places where Levinas mentions the ontological language of *Totality and Infinity*, one in a sort of philosophical pamphlet called ‘Signature’ that later re-appeared as the concluding chapter of *Difficult Freedom*, and the other a section in ‘Questions and Answers’, appearing in *Of God Who Comes To Mind*. In both places, Levinas states that the language of *Totality and Infinity* had to be ontological first and foremost to avoid the pitfalls of psychologism; as a result, however, it ended up insufficient in its ability to describe transcendence as irreducible to thematization and beyond being (*DF* 295 & *OG* 82).

The above comments made by Levinas are quite short and appear not in his philosophical works, but in oral discussions and pamphlets, and are therefore not very developed. In contrast, the other major source for the problematic of ‘ontological language’ comes from Derrida’s critique of Levinas in the lengthy essay ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, an essay that is primarily focused on *Totality and Infinity*. It is a widely shared opinion that *Otherwise than Being* must be read at least in part as a response to this essay (see e.g. Critchley & Bernasconi 1991, xii-xiii / Peperzak 1993, 209). Furthermore, Derrida’s essay is generally read as critiquing the ontological language of *Totality and Infinity*; “The general thrust of ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ is to insist on Levinas’s dependence on Western ontology, even (perhaps especially) in his attempt to break with it.” (Bernasconi 1988, 15). According to these observations, *Otherwise than Being* should be read as responding to ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ by overcoming the ontological language in *Totality and Infinity*.

I have discussed Derrida’s essay more at length elsewhere (Rolfsen 2022), but I will summarize the insights most relevant to us here. In ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, Derrida is primarily interested in the non-thematizable status of the Other, the way in which Levinas argues that the Other “can be enclosed within no category or totality...[resisting] every philosophemes” (Derrida 2001, 103). As we saw in the last chapter, the absolute independence of the Other vis-à-vis me means that she escapes any category I try to place her in. The Other transcends because her self-expression is always more than my understanding

of her. What interests Derrida, however, is the fact that Levinas himself must philosophically express this. The Other is beyond the understanding of philosophy, but Levinas must formulate this 'beyond'; and in the necessity of having to formulate the *idea* of the Other, it seems that the ontological comprehension of language signals its return. For the intelligibility of any possible idea presupposes some categories, such as 'appearing' and 'being', without which formulation becomes impossible and unintelligible. In Levinas' attempt to describe what absolutely ruptures comprehension, then, Derrida points to "Some unlimited power of envelopment, by which he who attempts to repel it would always already be *overtaken*" (Derrida 2001, 139). This 'unlimited power' would be the necessity of philosophical categories that announce themselves as necessarily implied even in the thought that tries to break with philosophy, namely the Absolutely Other. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, Derrida sees a positive possibility in Levinas' project. For by having demonstrated that it is *impossible* to formulate the thought of the Absolutely Other within philosophy, Levinas will also, according to Derrida, have demonstrated that philosophy is limited in its capacity; the all-encompassing nature of philosophy means that it cannot relate to that which is absolutely other to it. Derrida therefore concludes by noting that "the totally-other...[reawakens] the logos to its origin as to its mortality, its other" (Derrida 2001, 190).

I generally agree with the notion that *Otherwise than Being* should be read at least in part as a response to Derrida's critique in 'Violence and Metaphysics', and I will therefore recount briefly how I understand both Derrida's critique and Levinas' response. On the one hand, it must be noted that Derrida's depiction of Levinas leads to an interpretation of transcendence that we in the present thesis have been trying to avoid, that is, an interpretation of transcendence as limit or lack. For the thought of the absolutely Other is for Derrida only possible in reference to the impossibility of thinking it, and he thus describes it as an "incapacitation" (Derrida 2001, 190) on philosophy. This means that transcendence can only be determined negatively, that is, in the failure of philosophy to grasp it, and as we have seen, Levinas is very adamant on the point that the Other must be understood positively rather than negatively. On the other hand, however, does Derrida then not point out a paradox that Levinas must respond to? For if Levinas wants to write a *philosophy* expressing the idea of the Other, and thus make 'the Other' an understandable notion to his readers, then is Levinas not making 'the Other' a comprehensible, communicable theme? And if the Other is truly beyond comprehension, will this philosophical project only be possible in virtue of being impossible, as Derrida argues?

This is what I believe the problematic of ontological language consists in, and I believe Levinas responds to this critique in *Otherwise than Being*. He does so through the topic of the necessity of a betrayal in language when describing transcendence, for “In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal” (*OB* 6). Every saying must become a said, thus betraying its meaning by becoming manifest in the ontology of the said. Levinas thus accepts the critique, admitting that the thought of transcendence must become manifest in the ontology of language, albeit by a betrayal. *Otherwise than Being* nevertheless maintains the position from *Totality and Infinity* in continuing to argue that transcendence has a positive meaning, even if it can only be approached negatively within philosophy; “logic interrupted by the structures of what is *beyond being* which show themselves in it does not confer a dialectical structure to philosophical propositions” (*OB* 187). The fact that what transcends can only show itself in the ontology of language by breaking with it does not ‘confer a dialectical structure’ to what is shown, that is, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that transcendence is opposed to the ontology it breaks with. I believe Jill Robbins presents a similar interpretation of what the question of overcoming ontological language entails when writing that *Otherwise than Being* should be read as “a putting into question of the very closure of philosophical discourse itself” (Robbins 2001, 3).

What is important for the present discussion is the notion that *Otherwise than Being* responds to Derrida’s critique by overcoming ontological language. On that note, the above makes clear that Derrida’s critique concerns the possibility of formulating transcendence; the *problem* with ontological language is that it makes the formulation of the absolutely Other impossible. Derrida’s focus is therefore on the question of transcendence, and not on enjoyment. Derrida in fact explicitly states in a footnote that he will not be able to tackle the themes of “interiority, economy, enjoyment, habitation” (Derrida 2001, 402) in his essay.

The problem of ontological language identified by Derrida must therefore be distinguished with the problem e.g. Peperzak argues that “ideas and formulations that in *Totality and Infinity* were still too dependent upon the ontological tradition are now purified” (Peperzak 1993, 212) in *Otherwise than Being*. Peperzak argues that “the overcoming of ontology” was already underway in *Totality and Infinity*, but that this work was still operating with “two different languages” (Peperzak 1993, 202-203), one of them being ontological. What he has in mind is a number of ontological metaphors that Levinas employs in *Totality and Infinity* in describing the Other and the ethical relation, such as “Being is exteriority” (*TI* 241

290), “The curvature of space” (*TI* 291), and the Other understood as “the ultimate event of being” (*TI* 26). This is a different problem than the Derrida discusses in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’. For Derrida, ontology announces itself at the exact opposite moment; it is precisely when Levinas wants to speak of *transcendence* that the necessity of ontological language appears. Derrida is not worried that Levinas wrongly uses ontological metaphors when he should be using transcendent ones; what interests Derrida is that Levinas tries to describe transcendence, and that in this attempt, the ontology of language announces its necessity. Whereas Peperzak sees the language of *Totality and Infinity* as still too ontological because it employs too many ontological metaphors, Derrida argues that Levinas’ language is revealed as ontological when it attempts to speak of transcendence.

The reason why I mention this here is because one possible interpretation of what the problematic ontological language of *Totality and Infinity*’ is supposed to entail seems to concern what this thesis has been focusing on, namely the analysis of enjoyment and the structure of separation it enables. Raoul Moati’s reading of the earlier work, for example – a reading I have been very inspired by –, presents itself as a *defense* of the ‘ontological project’ of the earlier work against *Otherwise than being* (Moati 2017, xvi). Another example is Bettina Bergo, who ties the problem of ontological language and its overcoming to both the use of ontological metaphors observed by Peperzak and also Derrida’s essay (Bergo 2005, 164). The problem of *Totality and Infinity* is described by her in terms of how that work depended on the separation of needs and Desire:

the dual openness of the ‘subject’ in *Totality and Infinity* to both the better-than-being of enjoyment and to the ‘transcendence’ of metaphysical desire...created the impression of a hierarchical ascent within ontology, even as it set about to step outside of being itself. (Bergo 2000, 74)

By separating the description of worldly needs and metaphysical Desire in different sections, *Totality and Infinity* would, according to this interpretation, have produced the image of different stages of life, as if I first lived my life only as an ego to then be opened up by the Other. *Otherwise than Being* would overcome this stark separation between the ego and ethics by changing the focus of the analysis to an always already obsessed subject; “a subject fissioned into self-‘I’ or self and other-in-the-same...as transcendence-in-immanence” (Bergo 2005, 165). The description of subjectivity as always already transcendence-in-immanence

would overcome ontological language, for here, “the binaries of ontico-metaphysical desire...are given up” (Bergo 2000, 76).³³

For Bergo, then, contra Cohen, the shift from ‘ethical alterity’ to ‘ethical subjectivity’ is not only a shift in focus, but a new strategy to overcome insufficiencies of the earlier work. To be sure, Bergo still appreciates a more important continuity, namely that of ethics, transcendence and the other, but the fact that this becomes the transcendence-in-immanence of an obsessed subject must be understood as an overcoming of “the empirical and dialectical aspects of the need-Desire duality” (Bergo 2000, 77) that *Totality and Infinity* operates with.

Another example of this sort of interpretation is found, I believe, in Fabio Ciaramelli’s ‘Levinas’ ethical discourse: Between individuation and universality’. Ciaramelli here argues that Levinas’ philosophical struggle is to describe a responsibility that is both unique and particular while also being universal and imperative, and he sees *Totality and Infinity* as still restrained by its use of ontological language, whereas *Otherwise than Being* moves beyond this ontological language (Ciaramelli 1991, 86).

This is seen as achieved through the aforementioned shift of the later work to ethical subjectivity: “*Otherwise than Being* succeeds in renouncing ipseity in general, because it gives up ontological language and shifts its focus from the ego to *me*” (Ciaramelli 1991, 90). The reason why *Totality and Infinity* was not able to describe subjectivity in its uniqueness is precisely because the ego is described in the analysis of enjoyment as constituting itself. This leads to an account of the ego in general, which is why, Ciaramelli argues, Derrida reproached Levinas for presupposing an ‘ego in general’ for the possibility of the other ego (Ciaramelli 1991, 89-90).³⁴ By giving up the description of subjectivity as ontologically separate and shifting to a description that assesses subjectivity in its always already being obsessed, *Otherwise than being* departs from the ontological language of the prior work: “Here the subject does not go forward to meet the other in the world outside and, similarly, the other is no longer the stranger coming from beyond to the ontologically separated psyche/subject” (Ciaramelli 1991, 90).

³³ ‘Ontic desire’ refers here to the needs of enjoyment.

³⁴ I completely disagree with this. Derrida invokes the necessity of speaking of the Other as ‘another ego’ not because of Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment leads to an account of “ipseity in general” (Ciaramelli 1991, 90), but because Levinas describes the Other *not* as an alter ego, something Derrida, with Husserl, argues is impossible (Derrida 2001, 153-157). Again, it is when Levinas tries to describe transcendence that he, for Derrida, gets entangled in ontological language

For both Bergo and Ciaramelli, then, the shift to ethical subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* is understood as a step undertaken by Levinas to overcome the ontological language of *Totality and Infinity*, and what is overcome is the idea of a self-constituting, independent ego of enjoyment and the structure of separation it opens up. Whereas the earlier work separated too clearly between immanence and transcendence, the later work describes transcendence-in-immanence, subjectivity understood as the-one-for-the-other.

This is the interpretation that I want to challenge. To begin, I feel that both Bergo and Ciaramelli make the mistake of interpreting the relation between the Same and the Other chronologically in the above. Bergo talks of a ‘hierarchical ascent within ontology’, and Ciaramelli of ‘the subject going forward to meet the other in the world outside’, thus talking as if the Same ever existed outside its being-founded on the idea of Infinity, that is, as if Levinas did not recognize the existence of concrete man. But, according to my interpretation, Levinas’ point is that, in its concrete relation to the Other, the Same is able to draw its own independency and live complacently for itself. It is from this self-sufficiency that transcendence can be understood in its significance.

At least in *Totality and Infinity*. What remains to be examined is whether this holds true in *Otherwise than Being* as well. I intend to demonstrate that the structure of separation continues to operate at the heart of the diachrony between saying and the said. Through a discussion of the analysis of enjoyment, the notion of creation and the mastery of thematizing consciousness, I will argue that *Otherwise than Being* continues to champion a subject defined by its complacency and independency. The ethical subject, the main focus of *Otherwise than Being*, a subject “inspired by the other”, is described as “torn up from my beginning in myself” (*OB* 144). To be torn up, to be vulnerably exposed and to sacrifice myself to the Other – this presupposes the non-oppositional complacency of the Same (*le Même*), a notion Levinas continues to make use of in *Otherwise than being* (see e.g. *OB* 26/125/141/144/152). It will therefore yet again be the case that the self enjoys an independency and complacency it draws from itself, even if Levinas begins his analysis in this work with an always already restless, ethical subject – a restlessness that, because it does not negate the complacency of the subject, can signify as “better than rest” (*OB* 54).

c) Enjoyment in *Otherwise than Being*

Let me begin by addressing whether the analysis of enjoyment itself is continuous between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. As previously said, Levinas spends much less

time on the topic of enjoyment in *Otherwise than Being*. There are three places in which he discusses it at some length; in chapter II, part 4d ‘Patience, Corporeality, Sensibility’, chapter III part 1, ‘Sensibility and Cognition’, and finally in chapter III part 4, ‘Enjoyment’. It is in the last part that the discussion of enjoyment is most focused on enjoyment, but this short subchapter only spans two and a half pages. In total, there are perhaps six pages in total devoted to the theme of enjoyment in the entire work, with some mentions here and there. The shortness of these descriptions must testify, I believe, to one of two possibilities. The first possibility would be that Levinas considers the theme of enjoyment dealt with in *Totality and Infinity*, and that he would refer readers of *Otherwise than Being* still curious about this subject to the earlier work. The other possibility would be that the analysis of enjoyment no longer plays an important role in his philosophical project. Whichever is the case, it is first worth asking; do these short descriptions confirm or depart from what Levinas said about enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity*?

In general, I find that the analysis of enjoyment in *Otherwise than Being* – the little of it there is – follows *Totality and Infinity* almost to the letter. The first obvious and perhaps most important continuous aspect is that enjoyment is described as the way in which a first identification of myself with myself takes place:

The taste is the way a sensible subject becomes a volume, or the irreducible event in which the spatial phenomenon of biting becomes the identification called me, in which it becomes me through the life that lives from its very life in a *frueri vivendi*. (OB 73, my emphasis)

Enjoyment is that through which an identity is first established, the materialization of a subject which is not an ethereal idea (the idealist subject) but ‘a volume’, a presence filling itself with its surroundings. It is a ‘living from...’ life, the way in which life finds value in living itself. This, as we have discussed, is only possible as enjoyment.

This primordial identification is furthermore understood as the self-identification of the *ego*; “The complacency of subjectivity, a complacency experienced for itself, is its very ‘egoity’, its substantiality” (OB 64). The possibility of this egoism is furthermore described as an involution, in terms of how the ego is able to withdraw into itself; “enjoyment is the singularization of an ego in its coiling back upon itself...it is the very movement of egoism” (OB 73). The movement of egoism is the way in which I relate to myself in enjoyment; not by

consciously representing myself to myself, but in terms of enjoying myself. The notion of the enjoying ego therefore persists in this work, and continues to be described and emphasized in its complacency; “a complacency of complacency...the identity in enjoyment” (OB 74). To be an ego is to live complacently, satisfying myself with the satisfaction of living from...

The concretization of this ego depends, yet again, on the ‘doubling of relations’ constitutive of enjoyment, the enjoyment that ‘life lives from its very life’, which is a description that is repeated and emphasized as pivotal to the formation of the self;

Before any reflection, any return upon oneself, enjoyment is an enjoying of enjoyment, always wanting with regard to itself, filling itself with these lacks for which contentment is promised, satisfying itself already with this impatient process of satisfaction, enjoying its own appetite. (OB 73, my emphasis)

This quote repeats one of the main features of enjoyment that we can recognize from *Totality and Infinity*, namely that the ego has a positive relationship with its needs, ‘filling itself with these lacks’. This is the double-movement – the doubling of relations – which is constitutive of enjoyment as a ‘love of needs’. I do not only enjoy, but enjoy that I enjoy, and I am therefore happy that I have needs, for they open the possibility of satisfaction. Life is therefore not only the circle of exhaustion of satisfaction, but the additional fact that the ego loves this circle and lives from it (see IVc).

Enjoyment, “the same that is at rest, the life that enjoys life” (OB 54), is furthermore described in its sincerity. Enjoyment must be understood in terms of satisfaction, and satisfaction cannot be deceived; it knows very well when it has been satisfied and when it has not;

To fill, to satisfy, is the sense of the savor, and it is precisely to leap over the images, aspects, reflections or silhouettes, phantoms, phantasms, the hides of things that are enough for the consciousness of... The emptiness of hunger is emptier than all curiosity, cannot be compensated for with the mere hearsay of what it demands. (OB 72)

Whereas representational thought always bears skepticism in the back of its mind as an ever-present possibility, suspicious that the objects it represents could differ from their

representation, enjoyment finds exactly what it seeks. It “does not have to surmount infinite regression, that vertigo of the understanding” (*TI* 136), but becomes satisfied; the possibility of satisfaction is the possibility of an intention to be wholly content from the end it aims at. This is the experience of enjoyment.

The difference of enjoyment from representational thought refers to another continuous theme between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, namely the question of sensibility. As we saw in *Totality and Infinity*, sensibility was the mode of access of enjoyment, which is not an access to substances, but to the adjective qualities of being, their surface level. Here also, it is made clear that enjoyment is not the enjoyment of distinct objects; “Savor inasmuch as it satisfies a hunger, savor as quenching, is a breaking up of the form of a phenomenon which becomes amorphous and turns into ‘prime matter’” (*OB* 73). This is the elemental, “the ease of enjoyment” as “the sinking into the depths of the element” (*OB* 64). Enjoyment enjoys not ‘objects of enjoyment’, but qualities, adjectives not predicated on a substance; even when enjoyment turns toward a ‘thing’, for example in the enjoyment of tools, it reduces these things to prime matter, contending itself off its surface qualities.

Otherwise than Being thus continues and in fact even develops further a general restitution of sensibility within phenomenology. Already in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argued that phenomenology in general had made a mistake by arguing that sensations are always sensations belonging to a ‘consciousness of...’ something, always sensation of an intentional object; “color is always extended and objective, the color of a dress, a lawn, a wall”, an analysis that fails “to recognize the plane on which the sensible life is lived as enjoyment” (*TI* 187), where qualities (like color, taste, etc.) are enjoyed purely as qualities, with no reference to the object they would be a quality of. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas continues to argue that sensibility cannot be reduced to the role it plays in consciousness, for the way in which consciousness relates to its object is not the same in which the sensible is sensed; “The difference between the sensible and an idea is not the difference between more or less exact cognitions or between cognitions of the individual and of the universal” (*OB* 62). We too quickly understand sensibility as sense data, as sensations transmitting small pockets of information. Sensibility is then understood in its ability to fulfill intentions and make phenomena manifest, transmitting the redness of a car, the hardness of a wall, the savory smell of a dish, etc. According to this theory, sensibility would be a pre-reflective *knowledge*, a temporary grasp that reflective, conscious knowledge brings into a full clarity.

While Levinas admits that sensibility also conveys meaning, he argues that this “would not constitute the sole or even the dominant signification of the sensible” (*OB* 63). The signification proper to sensibility should not be understood in terms of knowledge; this other type of signification resists becoming an information not because it is “an opaque element resistant to the luminousness of the intelligible” which would leave it still “defined in terms of light and sight” (*OB* 63), for “the enjoying or suffering which these sensations are do not *signify* like knowings, even if their signification shows itself in knowing” (*OB* 66). Rather, the sensibility of e.g. enjoyment involves a signification that does not concern itself with knowing what it enjoys; it is the enjoyment itself which constitutes the sensibility of it. To know and to enjoy are completely different in their meaning.

Levinas is aware of the general recognition of this point. The knowledge of e.g. an activity is of course to be distinguished from the activity itself; there is a difference between what a book about running expresses and the actual act of running. In terms of sensibility, this would be called the difference “between a representational content and the content called affective” (*OB* 66). In its attempts to describe this affective content, however, the tradition of philosophy shows a tendency, argues Levinas, of again making this content into a form of knowledge. Sensibility is determined in terms of how it orients us to our own reality, how it illuminates my relation to the world of objects, how it makes certain phenomena accessible, etc. The signification of sensibility that Levinas wants to uncover is one that does not refer to comprehensibility, accessibility, availability, intelligibility, etc.

This is clearly shown in enjoyment. Enjoyment has its significance in the tasting of food, in the savory bite into a delicious bit of fried sushi. To eat sushi is not to ‘comprehend’ it; the meaning or Being of sushi does not become ‘accessible’ to me through the sensibility of enjoyment, in the same way we might say that the meaning of a hammer is accessible to me through a pre-reflective referentiality. Heidegger’s analysis of *Zuhandenheit* shows how the toolness of a hammer is available and comprehensible on the basis of a world in which projects exists that endows ‘hammering’ with meaning.

The meaning of eating, however, is not meaningful on the basis of being accessible; my tongue does not seek out to understand what this bite of sushi is – the Being of sushi –, but to taste its savoriness, to gulp it down and become satisfied from it. This is why enjoyment does not suffer from ‘the vertigos of understanding’ – it does not seek access to the meaning of a phenomena, but to taste and satisfy itself with savor;

Matter carries on, ‘does its job’ of being matter, ‘materializes’ in the satisfaction, which fills an emptiness before putting itself into a form and presenting itself to the knowing of this materiality and the possession of it in the form of goods. Tasting is first satisfaction. Matter ‘materializes’ in satisfaction, which, over and beyond any intentional relationship of cognition or possession, of ‘taking into one’s hands’, means ‘biting into...’ (OB 73)

The difference between knowing something and tasting something cannot be measured along the same grid; it is the difference between the immediate and the mediate. To know something is always for the intelligibility of what something is to be disclosed to me – the disclosing of the Being of this being – and for this disclosure to be possible for me. In enjoyment, I am not concerned with what something is, but with how it tastes – the adjectives rather than the substance. Sensibility relates to its content not in the reflective mood of contemplation, but in the immediacy of satisfaction.

Immediacy, sincerity and complacency all relates to what we have called the primordial agreeableness of life. Life is agreeable in a primordial sense because the satisfaction in enjoyment is sincere (not a turning-away from something else), immediate (not mediate, not valuable in reference to anything external) and thus complacent (happily self-satisfied). The complacency achieved in enjoyment therefore continues to be an innocent, non-oppositional one, and this is yet again deemed important for the possibility of transcendence and ethics;

Enjoyment in its ability to be complacent in itself, exempt from dialectical tensions, is the condition of the for-the-other involved in sensibility, and in its vulnerability as an exposure to the other. (OB 74)

Enjoyment works as a condition precisely in the absence of any ‘dialectical tension’ which is the very character of complacency, achieved positively in and from itself. The exposure exhibited by signifying for-the-other presupposes this complacency of the ego, for only an ego that is content with itself can radically empty itself for-the-other; “to be torn from oneself despite oneself has meaning only as a being torn from the complacency in oneself characteristic of enjoyment” (OB 74). The character of subjectivity being a ‘despite oneself’, a radical dis-interest – notions so important in this work – is only possible starting from an

equally radical complacency, an interest in the preservation (and perhaps expansion) of one's being, the 'for oneself' of enjoyment.

Furthermore, it is essential that this 'for oneself' is enjoyment. Enjoyment is a condition for ethics on the one hand because responsibility "has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood" (*OB* 74), but furthermore because of the *enjoyability* of enjoyment, because of the specific way in which a self relates to itself in the happiness of enjoyment. The self can give of itself, sacrifice itself for-the-other, only insofar as it has something to give that is dear to it. The sacrifice is not indifferent, for the ego has savored it fully in its enjoyment of it; it is "the bread from one's mouth" (*OB* 79) that is given. Enjoyment is therefore a condition not because a being has gained a certain ability that allows it to be ethical, but because the self-sufficient complacency of enjoyment makes this giving a sacrifice; "one has to first enjoy one's bread, not in order to have the merit [i.e. transcendental capacity] of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give oneself in giving it" (*OB* 72). I only give myself in sacrifice by offering up what is dearest to me.

This characteristic of complacency was shown to be essential in our analysis of enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity*. Because it enjoys its needs, the enjoying ego is a finitude without infinity that is not determined by its limits, but by the way in which it is self-sufficient by finding 'little ends' in its life that fills and satisfies it (see IVd). This furthermore leads to the structure of separation, in which an existent can live radically independent of its cause, and thus have a relation to transcendence that signifies not as a return of a lost being to its home, of a fallen being re-entering paradise, but rather as the opening of one's home to a surprise visit of a stranger that no item or feature of the home could predict. In regards to the home, the short description of enjoyment in *Otherwise than Being* gives a short reference also to the phenomena of dwelling and being-at-home; signifying for-the-other is "the openness, not only of one's pocketbook, but of the doors of one's home" (*OB* 74).

We opened this section with the question of why Levinas devotes so much less time to the topic of enjoyment in *Otherwise than Being*. Having now surveyed the shorter analysis as it appears in this work, and its striking similarity to the one of *Totality and Infinity*, it seems that one possible answer to this question would be that Levinas believed the topic had already been satisfyingly explicated in *Totality and Infinity*, and that a reader of *Otherwise than being* curious to learn more about that specific topic should be referred to the earlier work. In fact, *Otherwise than Being* explicitly refers to the analysis of enjoyment in *Totality and Infinity* in

two places; in footnote nr. 42 to chapter II and footnote nr. 8 to chapter III – the latter footnote appears at the end of the subchapter entitled ‘Enjoyment’.

The first footnote gives the most support for this interpretation, reading simply “On life as enjoyment, cf. *Totality and Infinity*” (OB 191). The latter footnote, however, introduces some grounds for doubt. The footnote reads: “In *Totality and Infinity* the sensible was interpreted in the sense of consumption and enjoyment” (OB 191). What the footnote indicates is that, in contrast to *Totality and Infinity*, where enjoyment constituted the primary meaning of sensibility, *Otherwise than Being* interprets sensibility as both enjoyment and suffering; “The signification proper to the sensible has to be described in terms of enjoyment and wounding” (OB 62-63). But how can the sensible ego be defined in terms of its complacency if sensibility is simultaneously and equally enjoyment and wounding?

It is, first, because ‘wounding’ and ‘suffering’ does here not refer to the resistance of the elements that we discussed in previous chapters, but my vulnerability vis-à-vis the Other, the vulnerability of my suffering exposure to the Other. It is “the very possibility of offering, suffering and trauma...the for-the-other involved in saying” (OB 50). The sensibility of suffering therefore does not refer to the material suffering of the elements, but an *ethical* suffering. Furthermore, as ‘ethical suffering’, it should be understood in terms of the concreteness of man in which two simultaneous but irreducibly separate phenomenologies take place;

The immediacy of the sensible...is the exposure to wounding and to enjoyment, an exposure to wounding in enjoyment, which enables the wound to reach the subjectivity of the subject complacent in itself and positing itself for itself. (OB 64)

The ethical subjectivity *Otherwise than Being* seeks to describe, a subjectivity we could summarize under the heading of *sacrifice*, is a subjectivity both complacent and obsessed, both at rest and restless; and this obsession and restlessness is only meaningful precisely because of the non-dialectical complacency of enjoyment. The enjoying ego is an involution into myself, whereas my suffering for-the-other “is like an inversion of the *conatus* of *esse*, a having been offered without any holding back, a not finding any protection in any consistency or identity of state” (OB 75). The ethicality of subjectivity is an emptying of myself, therefore presupposing a prior gathering.

If *Otherwise than Being* should be understood as a delineation of transcendence as transcendence-in-immanence, then we should also understand that at the heart of this diachrony, the structure of separation is upheld. For the complacency of the enjoying ego can be turned inside-out because its 'inside' remains innocent in its self-sufficient. Levinas emphasizes yet again the non-allergic relation between the transcendence of exposure and the immanence of complacency; "this vulnerability...presupposes enjoyment differently than as its antithesis" (*OB* 64). Ethical subjectivity understood as the transcendence-in-immanence of the-one-for-the-other does not depart from the happy independence of the ego, but continues to presuppose it in the same way; as a complacency exempt from dialectical tensions, because it suffices to itself in the insuperable agreeableness of "life loving life even in suicide" (*OB* 64). Just as the condemned man still drinks his rum, and the one about to be executed begs the hangman for one more minute of breathing of fresh air, this work continues to affirm an agreeableness of life so primordial that it is affirmed even in suicide. It thus continues the essential insights regarding enjoyment and its constitutive role for the self that were already present in *Totality and Infinity*.

d) Creation and Separation in *Otherwise than Being*

If the general theme of *Otherwise than Being* can be described as an analysis of ethical subjectivity understood as the diachrony of saying and the said, it is important to note that vulnerability, exposure and suffering belong to the transcendence of saying, as an emptying of oneself for the Other with no hope for return;

Saying is communication...as exposure...It is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability. (*OB* 48)

Saying responds to an ethical summon, a summon that assigns me to responsibility before I have the possibility of saying 'yes' or 'no'. As saying, subjectivity is always already the vulnerable exposure which breaks open the complacent rest of the ego. It is the restlessness of responsibility, which curiously enough is better than rest, 'better' here referring to the ethical goodness of responsibility.

But does Levinas not also say that responsibility constitutes the very subjectivity of the subject? If this subjectivity is restlessness, is this not the very opposite of the structure of

separation in *Totality and Infinity*? There, the ego was said to be at home in the world, which meant that the subject stands securely on earth, albeit also oriented upwards. If *Otherwise than Being* argues that subjectivity is inherently restless, is this not something different from being at home in the world?

As we also said, however, *Otherwise than being* argues that the summon to responsibility that makes subjectivity restless belongs to an immemorial past. That the past is immemorial means that it remains irreducibly *separate* from the self-presence of the subject. In its exposure, therefore, the restless subject is torn up from itself in a fashion that leads Levinas to invoke a theme we have become quite familiar with; creation *ex nihilo*;

[The passivity of saying] was made in an irrecuperable time which the present, represented in recall, does not equal, in a time of birth or creation, of which nature or creation retains a trace, unconvertible into a memory...The oneself is a creature, but an orphan by birth or an atheist no doubt ignorant of its Creator, for if it knew it it would again be taking up its commencement. (OB 104-105)

The passivity of saying must be explained in terms of creation because of its irreducibility to the present of the same. Because responsibility comes from an immemorial past which will never be present, what causes the self will never be present to the self. The subjectivity of the subject is to be an unique I. But to be an 'I' means to respond 'here I am!' to an ethical summon, a summon that only reverberates as a trace in the response to it. The I therefore remains wholly separate from what caused it, for "what is called to being answers to a call that could not have reached it since, brought out of nothingness, it obeyed before hearing the order" (OB 113).

Even if this work analyzes subjectivity as always already transcendence-in-immanence, therefore, the structure of separation continues to operate within it. To be a creature is to be cut off from your own Creation, and thus the possibility of remaining an atheist, ignorant of its Creator. Although the subjectivity of the subject arises as the 'I' of 'here I am', it remains possible to retreat to those secure measures which "protects the ego...already slipped away from the responsibilities to which I – always contrasting with the ego – am bound" (OB 92). The ego remains the possibility of retreating into the complacency

of existence, which is yet again deemed essential for the very possibility of saying as exposure;

There is indeed an insurmountable ambiguity there: the incarnate ego, the ego of flesh and blood, can lose its signification, be affirmed as an animal in its conatus and its joy. It is a dog that recognizes as its own Ulysses coming to take possession of his goods. But this ambiguity is the condition of vulnerability itself, that is, of sensibility as signification. For it is in the measure that sensibility is complacent in itself, is coiled over upon itself, is an ego, that in its benevolence for the other it remains for the other, despite itself, non-act, signification for the other and not for itself. (OB 79-80)

The sensible ego can lose its signification (i.e. its signifying as the-one-for-the-other), and the possibility of this loss is necessary for this very signification; for to be despite-oneself is only possible if the ego is primordially for itself in its own happiness. The possibility of complacency must be so radical that the ego can live as if it was not dependent on being inspired by the other, for only this radical complacency can become an equally radical vulnerability and exposure. Just as in *Totality and Infinity*, therefore, the idea of Infinity requires the atheism of the self to such a radical degree “that the idea of infinity could be forgotten” (TI 181).

It is furthermore in relation to the enjoyability of enjoyment that this is made possible, for due to the non-dialectical, innocent way of its unfolding, it is something to which the ego can always return and begin anew. As already noted in *Totality and Infinity*, enjoyment is an “instant of sheer youth” (TI 54), always ready to affirm the agreeableness of life anew. Also in *Otherwise than Being*, and in reference to the simultaneousness of suffering and enjoyment in sensibility, Levinas refers yet again to the youthfulness of enjoyment;

This immediacy is first of all the ease of enjoyment, more immediate than drinking, the sinking into the depths of the element, into its incomparable freshness, a plenitude and a fulfilment. (OB 64, my emphasis)

The fact that this immediacy ‘is first of all enjoyment’ is not some formal condition, but follows from the phenomenality of enjoyment, being an ‘incomparable freshness’, which is tied up to it being ‘a plenitude and fulfilment’. Enjoyment is itself the rumored fountain of

youth; it is a well you can draw from again and again because it is structured around its own renewal. This is again because “Satisfaction satisfies itself with satisfaction” (OB 73), meaning that the ego satisfies itself with the circle of needs and their satisfaction. The structure of enjoyment enjoying enjoyment is why it is always fresh, always beginning anew. Even in old age, in the sunset of life, a good cup of coffee never manages to disappoint.

Even if this work therefore begins its analysis with an always already obsessed subject, restless in its responsibility to the Other, “enjoyment in its very isolation” (OB 55) still subsists. The I is indeed created, summoned by a summon that remains irreducibly immemorial, but my “creature status...this hither side older than the plot of egoism woven in the *conatus* of being” (OB 92) does not exclude the possibility of the weaving of this *conatus*, which precisely weaves itself. A plot of egoism still subsists in the diachrony of saying and the said, and the self-sufficient complacency of this plot remains necessary for the meaning of restlessness, for to be restless means that a prior rest is disturbed.

This self-sufficiency is not only true of the complacency of the ego, but of the mastery of consciousness as well. It should first be noted that the ego and consciousness must be understood as different due to something we discussed previously, namely the fact that the enjoying ego relates not to distinct objectives, but elemental qualities. In contrast, relates to distinct objects; “Consciousness is always correlative with a theme, a present represented, a theme put before me, a being which is a phenomenon” (OB 25). Consciousness is, as the theory of intentionality makes clear, always ‘consciousness of...’ something. Consciousness is furthermore implicated in the drama in a way that the enjoying ego is not, for consciousness answers to the requirements of justice that follows from living in a society (OB 157-159). Consciousness is both comprehension and representation, that is, both a mastery over what I know and the requirement of having to justify myself in front of others (see Ve).

As mastery, then, consciousness also participates with the ego in the movement of the Same, and is thus defined in terms of how it is able to gather itself and begin from itself in its independency. Consciousness relates to the said, which is, as we said, the way in which the intelligible is grasped in the present; “In the relationships with beings, which we call consciousness, we identify beings across the dispersion of silhouettes in which they appear” (OB 99). This opening is furthermore not some passive receptivity, but an assertion; “it proclaims and establishes this as that” (OB 35). Consciousness states being, draws it into its gathering by naming it and thus opening it by making it intelligible. Although this opening depends on an being out-of-phase, a fission in time, this loss only opens itself up to

recollection and thus mastery. The advent of being is thus no adventure: “It is never dangerous; it is self-possession, sovereignty, ἀρχή (*arche*)” (OB 99). Consciousness masters being by *ordering* it, a word which must here be understood both as categorization and command.

Consciousness thus manifests itself in the way in which it exhibits a mastery over the themes and ideas it synchronizes. This mastery is not simply passive contemplation, but the investment of an interest that seeks to secure itself; “The given enters into a thought which recognizes in it or invests it with its own project, and thus exercises a mastery over it” (OB 101). This venture does not fail, but is able to gather itself up. It therefore exercises a mastery over mastery, that is, it masters the very conditions under which it is possible to synchronize a theme in the present;

Subjectivity then shows itself as an ego, capable of a present, capable of a beginning, an act of intelligence and of freedom going back to a principle and a beginning, a subject opposed to an object – an ego which, for Fichte is an origin of itself. (OB 162-163)

The subjectivity of the conscious ego is independent because it is capable, for the fact that it masters a capacity for comprehending and representing means that it can rest securely in its own abilities, and thus begin from itself. The knowing self begins in itself because it draws from itself the powers through which it commences: “The *for itself* in consciousness is thus the very power which a being exercises upon itself, its will, its sovereignty” (OB 102). Knowledge implies that we are autonomous in the Kantian sense, drawing the laws that governs us from ourselves. To decree the laws by which you are to be governed to yourself – this is the very meaning of sovereignty, a notion *Otherwise than Being* does not renounce.

To describe this capacity for knowledge in its finitude is to misunderstand its self-sufficiency. True, the subject does not know everything, but it precisely knows this; it is aware of its own finitude. Even as finite, the knowing self remains absolute, for it can disclose the borders of its finitude. It can scope the edges of the knowable and state ‘here we can know with this and this certainty, while with regards to this phenomena, things are much more uncertain’. There is a strong power of certainty in this ability to identify and determine uncertainty, for the principles by which you determine the certainty or uncertainty of any

claim rest within yourself. It is “the land of truth” from which Kant can securely assess the “broad and stormy ocean” that surrounds it (Kant 1998, 354).

But is the idea that the conscious ego begins from itself in conflict with the idea that the subjectivity of the subject consists in responding to an immemorial summon? There is only conflict between these notions if we fail to take the notion of creation *ex nihilo* and the structure of separation into account, which entails both that I am created, and thus depend on a cause, and that I am able to draw my own independence from this dependence and begin from myself. The conscious ego is its own origin, is in fact the very origin of origin. What is before the origin, however – the pre-originary –, comes prior to this because its signification does not lend itself to the present and the initiative that masters it; “it is prior to the will’s initiative (prior to the origin)” (*OB* 118). The subject can therefore both be its own origin *and* the following can be true: “The oneself has not issued from its own initiative, as it claims in the plays and figures of consciousness on the way to the unity of an Idea” (*OB* 105). The transcendence of responsibility is not to be found in the mastery of presence it opens up. Such is the structure of separation, or diachrony, or creation. Creation out of nothing is “reverting of heteronomy into autonomy” (*OB* 148), the way in which consciousness draws its independence out of its dependence. Far from departing from *Totality and Infinity*, this restates and expands on the temporal structure of separation already posited in the earlier work; “Knowledge as a critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can arise only in a being that has an origin prior to its origin – that is created” (*TI* 85). ‘An origin prior to its origin’ – this is the pre-originary status of a being created out of nothing.

e) Separation and Transcendence

The structure of separation as creation *ex nihilo* entails, on the one hand, that the subject can draw its own independence and self-sufficiency because it has been created out of nothing. On the other hand, it entails another starting point from which the question of transcendence can be approached. If the Same is conceived as self-sufficiency, then what transcends it can be thought otherwise than as lack. This is the position of *Totality and Infinity*, and the position which, I argue, *Otherwise than Being* continues to champion. The transcendence-in-immanence of ethical subjectivity does not entail that the conscious ego is faulty or lacking. The restlessness of ethical obsession must not be thought as in opposition or a negation of rest, but, as we have said, as *better* than rest. That sacrifice is better than rest means that the turning myself inside-out-for-the-other is not in conflict with the gathering-in-onese of the

Same, but testifies to the goodness of sacrifice beyond the question of one's own complacency and security.

Goodness is therefore immeasurable in terms of the standards of the conscious ego. The conscious ego rests in its own complacency and is secure in its own mastery, but is at the same time summoned to a responsibility it can never grasp. This incapacity is, however, not a fault of the grasp; "The-one-for-the-other is not a lack of intuition, but the surplus of responsibility" (OB 100). This surplus cannot be conceived as a limit on the ability of consciousness to synchronize themes, as if the ego's mastery suddenly became aware that something slipped away from it. It is rather because the signification of saying as exposure is wholly foreign to these measures; it "escapes any *principle*, origin, will" (OB 101). My exposure to another in transcendence must not be understood as the failure of mastery, but as something wholly other to the notions of origin and mastery in terms of which I secure my own sovereignty.

Nevertheless, this exposure must also, in another sense, be understood as the loss of rest and security, for it is this rest and security that I sacrifice. The complacency of my rest and the satiety of my enjoyment is what makes a sacrifice a sacrifice, for it is only a sacrifice insofar as I sacrifice something I value. The transcendence of saying entails the loss of my complacency and security. What Levinas argues, however, is that this loss must not be understood as the defining feature of sacrifice. This can be seen with reference to communication, which Levinas interprets as belonging to saying, and thus to exposure and sacrifice;

Communication is an adventure of a subjectivity, different from that which is dominated by the concern to recover itself, different from that of coinciding in consciousness; it will involve uncertainty...Communication with the other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run. These words take on their strong sense when, instead of only designating the lack of certainty, they express the gratuity of sacrifice. (OB 120)

To take on and respond to the summons of responsibility is to speak up rather than remaining silent; in expressing myself in responsibility, I expose myself rather than remaining closed up in the certainty and security of my self-coinciding. In consciousness, I remain master over my words by my capability to trace their meaning back to the principle by which I determined

their meaning. In saying, I resign these words to a fate outside of my control without abdicating from those words, for I still stand accountable for them.

It is only insofar as I am a conscious subject capable and concerned with the certainty of my words and of my world that saying understood as exposure can be a risk. The consciousness certain and content in its own world-view, where arguments have been settled and things are 'in their place', is nevertheless committed to a saying where this security cannot be guaranteed because this saying does not measure itself in terms of guarantees. Here, I partake in a dialogue not to satisfy my need for security but because it is demanded of me. This 'fine risk' that I am obligated to take presupposes the agreeableness of my complacency, for it is only risky in reference to the security it breaks up, and only a sacrifice in virtue of my natural inclination to security. In the same way 'giving the bread out of my mouth' becomes a sacrifice because the enjoying ego is complacent, the vulnerable exposure of saying is a 'fine risk' because consciousness is security.

It is, however, precisely a *fine* risk, a point Levinas stresses; "In a fine risk to be run, the word 'fine' has not been thought about enough. It is as antithetical to certainty, and indeed to consciousness, that these terms take on their positive meaning, and are not the expression of a makeshift" (*OB* 120).³⁵ That the risk is fine means that the risk cannot be evaluated as a lack of certainty; my vulnerable exposure to the Other is not a failure of consciousness, nor a security breach. It is rather the fact that knowing or not-knowing does not have priority when it comes to responsibility: "This responsibility commits me, and does so before any truth and any certainty, making the question of trust and norms an *idle* question" (*OB* 120). Consciousness does not only fluctuate between being able and not being able to grasp the world in terms of comprehension, but finds itself implicated in a plot where these measures are not only inadequate, but wholly irrelevant. The signification of risking my security by speaking up involves a positive goodness that cannot be described merely as the obverse or absence of security and certainty.

This is what the structure of separation does for Levinas' notion of transcendence. Transcendence gives itself in a wholly different way than the way in which phenomena are disclosed in consciousness and the said, for transcendence does not correspond to a lack or

³⁵ The choice of words by Levinas is unfortunate I believe, for it seems that the positivity of sacrifice is precisely *not* antithetical to certainty if we understand that word in the way we have so far this thesis; that is, sacrifice is not the opposite of certainty or its negation, but has its own positivity

failure of consciousness. If the thematizing self was not independent and sovereign, then what escapes its mastery could only be thought of as corresponding to the failure of that mastery. Responsibility is, however, not allergic to what it transcends, does not escape comprehension through opposition, for that would imply that transcendence was a knowledge simply incredibly difficult to comprehend.

This is an argument that we can recognize from *Totality and Infinity*, and the above should therefore make clear that this argument is to be found in *Otherwise than Being* as well. Transcendence does not evade my mastery because my mastery in this instance faces a too powerful foe:

Not out of weakness; to what could not be contained there corresponds no capacity. The non-present is in-comprehensible by reason of its immensity or its 'superlative' humility or, for example, its goodness, which is the superlative itself. The non-present here is invisible, separated (or sacred) and thus a non-origin, an-archival. (OB 11)

What transcends mastery is higher than it without appealing to its measures; like the appeal of a starved stranger, below me in every hierarchy the world recognizes, but nonetheless expressing an imperative coming from above. The non-present of immemorial responsibility is not the dialectical opposite of the present, but a surplus, an excess. The immemorial responsibility is therefore precisely *separate*; what is incommensurable to the present without being the negation of it is what is separate from it in the positive understanding of this word, where this separation is not a broken unity to be restored but the holiness of the holy.

Against Bergo and Ciaramelli, therefore, I have argued that the structure of separation continues from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. This entails further that the reduced space given to the analysis of enjoyment in this later work means that Levinas presupposes the more complete analysis in his earlier account. For the shorter analysis that remains not only repeats the same description of enjoyment, but this analysis also continues to play the same role it previously did. The sovereignty of a complacent ego is not abandoned, but continued, for restlessness and sacrifice would not be truly restless and sacrificial if the complacency of enjoyment was not genuinely satisfied and happy for this satisfaction.

On the other end, the transcendence of sacrifice can truly be described as transcendent because its positive meaning does not refer to a lack in the complacency of egoism, but as the

goodness of sacrifice. My vulnerable exposure to the Other cannot be understood negatively as my lack of control, but must be understood with reference to the goodness of responsibility for-the-other;

This passivity, this undeclinability due to a responsibility that cannot be declined, this for-the-other, could not be treated in terms of finitude in the pejorative or tragic sense of the term, a congenital and lamentable powerlessness to detach oneself from oneself and reflect totally on oneself. Proximity or fraternity is neither a troubled tranquility in a subject that wants to be absolute and alone, nor the makeshift of an impossible confusion. Is it not, in its restlessness and emptying and diachrony, better than all the rest, all the plenitude of an instant arrested? (OB 92)

To interpret sacrifice as ‘finitude in the pejorative or tragic sense’ means to interpret it in view of the philosophies of finitude we have been tracking, that is, as a fault, failure or limit on the self. It would interpret it in terms of my powerlessness, or in terms of how its involuntary nature limits my freedom, or how I become exposed and unprotected in this relation. Sacrifice and exposure are, of course, on the one hand restless rather than complacent, and vulnerable rather than secure. But is sacrifice to be understood in terms of any of these insecurities? It seems rather that sacrifice is most often understood as good despite these uncertainties; sacrifice is a ‘risk worth taking’, *not* because I can predict that things will be going well, but because the risk is worth it despite the uncertainties. In holding out my hands, offering myself to the Other, a goodness becomes manifest that cannot be measured by the insecurity it entails, but only as an excess to this insecurity.

Or this could be the case. Levinas is aware of the possible transgression he commits when he asks whether this restlessness of responsibility is better than rest; “The word *better*, and the Good it expresses, which turns up here, perhaps makes all our discussion suspect of being ‘ideology’” (OB 93). It risks being ideology because ‘the goodness of sacrifice’ cannot be philosophically demonstrated, for its meaning entails a departure from the security of consciousness, where themes can be explicated and demonstrated. To say that sacrifice is good, therefore, can appear as a mere opinion based on an ideological belief; one has to be already convinced that there is a goodness in humans being responsible for each other in order to agree, with Levinas, that there is a goodness in being vulnerably exposed for-the-sake-of-

the-other. I believe this refers to the same impossibility we pointed to in the last chapter, namely the impossibility of deciding, within philosophy, whether the ethical imperative is genuine (Levinas) or not (Nietzsche) (see Vc).

Levinas therefore cannot demonstrate that responsibility is, in fact, good, and compares this “desire to settle things and not let oneself be abused by ‘nothingness’” (*OB* 94) with the desire to know whether God exists or not. Is there a meaning to sacrifice? It is equally impossible to answer this question as it is to answer whether God exists or not. Nevertheless, it is possible, as Levinas does, to approach responsibility as good, and then ask what this would entail; and this would entail that there is a goodness in letting-go of my security, and in offering myself to the Other. This would be a goodness that would transcend the concern for guarantees. I am in a sense blind in my relation to the Other, for transcendence is, due to its transcendence, refractory to knowing and thus any ‘guarantee’ of its goodness. To say, therefore, that sacrifice signifies as more than “the lack of certainty...[expressing] the gratuity of sacrifice” (*OB* 120), is therefore to commit oneself without guarantee. I believe Levinas touches on this in one of his discussions of the Holocaust:

Auschwitz has a meaning if God demands a love which is completely without promise...The meaning of Auschwitz is a suffering, a faith completely without promise. This means gratuitous. And then I say to myself: but this costs really too much – not for God, but for humanity. (*RB* 260).

The gratuity of sacrifice is like a responsibility without promise. The goodness of responsibility is not attested for in terms of rewards, recognition or positive outcomes. In other words, karma does not exist; or rather, it only exists as a worldly incentive structure that has no metaphysical guarantee of functioning, and which can and often do become corrupt, turning into parodies of themselves. The goodness of responsibility is not measured in terms of the goodness of the world.

The conscious ego rests complacently and securely in the world. In contrast with it, responsibility appears as if it is ‘for nothing’, transcendent nihilism in the Nietzschean sense. Nevertheless, despite its uncertainty and restlessness with regards to the world, responsibility signifies positively in its own goodness. To live despite yourself, for others, even when no one is looking – we understand at the very least what it means that this is good. It would be a

goodness that cannot be measured in terms of the world. It nevertheless also does not oppose itself to the world. It disturbs the complacent life in the garden, to be sure, but not to condemn it; rather, it seems to signify a goodness above and beyond worldly concerns, a goodness Levinas captures with the term *glory*;

Glory is glorified by the subject's coming out of the dark corner of the 'as-for-me', which, like the thickets of Paradise in which Adam hid himself upon hearing the voice of the eternal God traversing the garden from the side from which the day comes, offered a hiding-place from the assination, in which the position of the ego at the beginning, and the very possibility of origin, is shaken. (OB 144)

That human beings are concerned with *more* than life in the garden does not signify in opposition to the complacency of enjoyment, but that humans are more than animals and occupied with more than worldly concerns. It is transcendence; transcendence is thought properly when it is allowed to signify as the 'more' or 'above' that glory testifies to. Humans become more than what they are when they step out of the garden and take on the responsibility of an otherworldly summon. To 'step out of the garden' would here not mean to leave garden life behind, but to risk one's complacency for-the-sake-of-the-other in addition to being complacent. It is transcendence-in-immanence, for one remains standing on earth, or in the garden, but oriented upwards. In other words, one stands upright on earth, upright in response to a responsibility without promise, which despite its lack of guarantees has its positive meaning in the seriousness which this uprightness entails; "in its uprightness a consciousness is not only naivety and opinion" (OB 120). To stand upright on earth, as if committed to a responsibility emanating from a time before creation, testifies to a notion of transcendence that does not oppose but rather orients us to the world while simultaneously being more than it.

f) Immanence and Transcendence

The above reading of *Otherwise than Being* has attempted to demonstrate that the analysis of enjoyment and the structure of separation continues to inform how this work understands transcendence. Even if subjectivity is approached here as always already restless – as transcendence-in-immanence –, a sovereign, complacent ego still remains capable of

gathering itself in its own origin, and begin from itself. There is, however, another reading I believe at least appears to be possible, and one I further believe is irreconcilable with my own. On this reading, *Otherwise than Being* opts for an unhappy subjectivity rescued by the Other in a return to the salvation theme of *Existence and Existents*. Consciousness is not complacent, but riveted to itself, and is freed by the signification of saying:

Substitution frees the subject from ennui, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distractions of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out. (OB 124)

The most likely reading of this passage suggests that not only is the self not complacent, but the enjoyment it seeks is a *distraction* – perhaps an inauthentic turning-away from its ennui? – to the reality of enchainment. According to this schema, it would seem that we must infer that responsibility is liberation, the breaking up of a unity that seeks to be broken up, because the solidity of its being has also become an unbearable weight. By living for-the-other, the subject goes beyond itself, and thus escapes its enchainment to itself.

From whence this need? Why does Levinas also in this work claim that we are riveted and enchained to being? This follows from consciousness and its power for thematization, which allows being to reveal itself and be determined in the said. This ontological structuring of the world turns into the anonymous rustling of the *il y a* when the signification of saying is forgotten:

the imperturbable essence, equal and indifferent to all responsibility which it henceforth encompasses, turns, as in insomnia, from this neutrality and equality into monotony, anonymity, insignificance, into an incessant buzzing that nothing can now stop and which absorbs all signification...the horrifying there is behind all finality proper to the thematizing ego, which cannot sink into the essences it thematizes. (OB 163)

The mastery which thematizing consciousness achieves through comprehension becomes an anonymous meaninglessness. The meanings which phenomena attain in the ontological structure of the said lose themselves, both finding and losing their significance in the relativity of the system. The knowing consciousness continues to move in this system without

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knowing why, and falls finally into obscurity: “The incessant murmur of the *there is* strikes with absurdity the active transcendental ego, beginning and present” (OB 164). Absurdity is the price of the said without saying.

This is a reading that goes against my own. On this view, the mastery of consciousness does not lead to the security of rest in the complacent ego, but turns on consciousness. Mastery would be a double edged sword which, due to the way it exhibits beings in synchronization, loses itself to the relativity of the system it has made manifest, a system whose anonymity comes to terrorize the subject.

To me, this would be to yet again make the subject a faulty finitude, and transcendence its rescue. The riveted subject that seeks to loosen its chains goes towards transcendence as if towards salvation. I have on my own reading attempted to go in a different direction. Nevertheless, there is one version of this schema that is closer to my own reading, and which might let us understand a theme that my thesis has for the most part sought to overcome, that is, contempt for the world. In this contempt, even the innocence of enjoyment can take on a gruesome appearance.

For the horror of the anonymous, when all signification falls away, seems to me to pertain also to another scenario that Levinas presents, namely *the totality of war*. We have in the above, and in the preceding chapter as well, made clear that the sincerity of the ethical summon cannot be guaranteed. Levinas does in fact ask if we are duped by morality, and the possibility of this was found in Nietzsche, who sees the appeal of the victim and the disinterested morality it proclaims as a deception, covering over a hidden interest which seeks to gain power by setting forth such a morality. The Nietzschean alternative, then, is that the notion of dis-interest is an illusion, a subtle manipulation that does nothing but testify to the truth that will to power is *all there is*. This is a possibility Levinas discusses:

Being’s interest takes dramatic form in egoisms struggling with one another, each against all, in the multiplicity of allergic egoisms which are at war with one another and are thus together. War is the deed or drama of the essence’s interest...the extreme synchronism of war...Here is extreme contemporaneousness, or immanence. (OB 4)

To accept nothing but immanence is to acknowledge nothing but interests and their unfolding, an unfolding that can only happen as war. The different egos are allergic to each other

because the other ego's interest conflict with and counteract my own; each ego presents a limit and danger to the ego of another. They are thus related to each other in terms of this allergy, or together in conflict. There is no outside to this conflict, for also the parties that declare themselves neutral participate in it; neutrality is here only what best serves their interest. Only opportunistic alliances and political compromises are possible.

In the totality of war, language loses the sincerity of its significations. Saying as responsibility entails sincerity; "This exposure is the frankness, sincerity, veracity, of saying" (*OB* 15). To expose oneself without holding back means precisely to not hide anything, but to denude oneself vis-à-vis the Other. In war, however, every word is a possible manipulation, a deception or distraction made by an interest that has found it more advantageous to remain hidden rather than reveal itself. One trusts what the other says only if one can calculate that their interests align, for the time being, with your own. For the time being only, however, for there is no sincere declaration of trust in war; under every agreement to peace, the tension of a possible conflict stirs. All talk of trust is emptied of its sincerity, becoming a thin veil stretched over the reality of war in order to give the pretense of peace.

Such a vision of the world comes to the fore, I believe, in the movie 'The Platform' (*El Hoyo*) (2019), a movie that portrays a contempt for the world, even the innocence of enjoyment. The film revolves around a strange prison divided into vertical levels, with two prisoners on each level. In the middle is a hole, through which the prisoners can look up and down at each other. Each day, a platform descends through this hole, beginning at the top and ending at the bottom. The platform carries a magnificent feast, a luxury banquet of a variety of delicious foods and drinks. The ones at the top eat first, but there is not enough food for everyone, so that those at the bottom are left starving. Each month, the prisoners are randomly assigned to a new level.

This hole represents a world of total immanence, of humanity reduced to animality, which is made manifest, among other places, in the movie's portrayal of discourse. When the main character Goreng first awakes in his cell, he asks his cellmate Trimagasi if he knows "what the hole entails?" Trimagasi, answering as if answering the question of the meaning of life, says "It's obvious. Eating". He then makes a note on the uselessness of trying to speak to those below and above him. When Goreng first attempts to speak to those below, Trimagasi interrupts:

Don't speak to the people below (Trimagasi)

Why? (Goreng)

Because they're down below (Trimagasi)

When Goreng then turns his head upwards, Trimagasi interrupts again:

The people above won't answer you (Trimagasi)

Why? (Goreng)

Because they are above, obviously (Trimagasi)

After this, Trimagasi refuses to share any other information with Goreng before Goreng can provide Trimagasi something of value himself. He reduces their discourse to the play of interest, where nothing is given in pure gratuity, but only strategically and economically. This is of course the same reason for why it is useless to speak to those below and above; those below can only gain something from you, while you can gain nothing back, and those above stand in the same relation, only in reverse. This is the synchrony of war, where we are all together in the allergy of conflict in relations that are reversible.

The verticality of the hole represents, both metaphorically and physically, the injustice of the world. Through an arbitrary process, some end up on the top and some at the bottom. As the platform descends, some feast and some starve. When the platform with the food first arrives to the main character of the film, Goreng, the director presents us with a horrific vision – Goreng notes that “It's disgusting”. He and his cellmate, Trimagasi, an elderly and stubborn man, are on level 48, which means 94 people have eaten before them. The traces of these anonymous others are left all over the half-eaten food; fingermarks in the cake, trays that have been spilt, spit. They are eating leftovers, which here functions sort of like artifacts in the Heideggerian sense; precisely as ‘leftovers’, they are literally imprinted with the ‘having-been-there’ of the people above them.

Imprinted in not any sense however. The grotesque nature of food becomes visible in these leftovers. Trimagasi immediately starts feasting himself, devouring the leftovers like a wild animal. The film presents the eating of food in its animality. There are no table manners, no need for plates and cutlery. The precarious and incomprehensible situation of possibly being stationed at a low level the next month awakens the instincts of self-preservation, and the prisoners eat as much as they can get their fingers on while they have the chance. For this

very reason, those at the bottom are left with nothing. The animal reigns in the hierarchy of the world.

‘The Platform’ thus exhibits, in the modern day, the contempt for the world. Food itself, the most basic, natural and innocent manifestation of enjoyment, is made to appear disgusting. But is it not a wonder that we can become disgusted at this? The simplest of pleasures, the pleasure of food – a pleasure “exempt from dialectical tensions” (*OB* 74) – can become a disgusting sight, and not because the food is disagreeable to us. A particular food might be disagreeable to me because I know what it does to my stomach, but in the case of the transcendence of injustice, it is the primordial agreeableness of the world that becomes troubled. Levinas very correctly observes that we do not only enjoy, but enjoy that we enjoy; the whole circle of needs and their replenishment is enjoyable to us. It is, however, the very pleasure of pleasure that seems to rot away when faced with the injustice of the world. Enjoyability as enjoyability, or beauty in its prime, sours.

This is then the absurdity in which the world appears when deprived of all significance, reduced to the play of interest. But to find this contemptuous is to still attest to transcendence. When enjoyability sours in this way, it does not do so because of anything stemming from the world. It seems rather that the world in its worldliness becomes contested by a significance irreducible to it, but which still relates to it, still impresses itself on it – like the beggar below me in the hierarchy of the world whose face reveals an imperative coming from high. This height of the imperative is neither the vertical spatiality of the world nor a mere negation of it. It is otherworldly, not understood as ‘another world’, but as other than worldliness, otherwise than being.

‘Contemptuous’ is furthermore not the only or even primary way in which transcendence relates to the immanence of worldly life. For in the phenomenon of sacrifice, what transcends the world still draws positively from it. Sacrifice depends on the complacency of enjoyment ‘exempt of dialectical tensions’, which because it enjoys can sacrifice something it holds dear, “to give it with one’s heart, to give oneself in giving it” (*OB* 72). In contrast to the self-relating movement of enjoyment, sacrifice is to be exposed, “giving to the other the bread from one’s mouth” (*OB* 79). ‘From one’s mouth’, that is, as one is enjoying it. It is the bread already in my mouth feeding me that I give away. This is the form of subjectivity, which is “a being divesting itself, emptying itself of its being, turning itself inside out, and if it can be put thus, the fact of ‘otherwise than being’” (*OB* 117). Otherwise

than being, for contrary to the interest of essence, this is the possibility of a disinterest, for-the-other rather than for-itself.

This is a non-oppositional relation, for the sense of sacrificing, the giving of the bread in my mouth to the Other, does not signify as the absence of the bread in my mouth, and is furthermore not the opposite of me enjoying the bread myself. Taking for-myself and giving to-the-other are not opposites, for to give to the Other is an excess to the order of the world. It signifies not as the negation of my enjoyment, but as something better than it, something more important than it; the goodness of responsibility. To empty myself is not merely the reverse of gathering myself: “It is always to empty oneself anew of oneself, to absolve oneself, like in a hemophiliac’s hemorrhage” (*OB* 92). A ‘hemophiliac’s hemorrhage’, that is, someone who loves to bleed, someone happy for suffering-for-the-other. Sacrifice has its significance in sacrifice, in the goodness of responding to an ethical summon, the fine risk of venturing forth when I could have stayed complacent. Restlessness does not negate complacency because it exceeds it, because it is better than rest. Our restlessness signifies positively as responsibility, not simply as the absence of rest.

And it is for precisely this reason that the enjoyability of bread is both maintained and transformed in sacrifice. Sacrifice requires that I sacrifice something I enjoy, something dear to me, so that to sacrifice it is despite-myself. It is, however, in the goodness of giving it to the Other that this despite-myself itself has sense. Or otherwise put, it is for the sake that this other should have this good that I sacrifice it. That the Other’s enjoyment could be more important to me than my own, that it could in fact be *better*; this exceeds enjoyment without negating it. For enjoyability here retains its meaning while it is carried over to another meaning. The enjoyability of enjoyment is never in question and is in fact presupposed both by complacency and sacrifice. The bread, the example par excellence of our worldly embodiment, is transformed and gains a new signification in sacrifice.

The Levinasian transcendence-in-immanence of responsibility does therefore not detach itself from the world. It does not refer us to our ‘true home’ beyond this world (Augustine) nor simply negates this world for the sake of an imaginary one (Nietzsche), for transcendence regards us as worldly beings, and rather than departing us from our worldliness re-orientates it. For in terms of the unjust vertical hierarchy of the world discussed above, to help those who are, as Tom Waits sings, ‘Way down in the hole’, requires that we return to the world. “The suffering of need is not assuaged in anorexy, but in satisfaction” (*TI* 146), as Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*.

The difference between being human and simply being an animal is that I am not only concerned about my preservation and happiness, but also implicated in a discourse about matters more grave. Even if the elements trouble it, the animal has a simple and peaceful existence; the human, however, is not at peace with itself. Heidegger interprets this ‘not-being-at-peace’ in view of its worldliness, as the alienation of Dasein, its not-being-at-home. If our worldliness is originally the agreeableness of enjoyment, however, this ‘not-being-at-peace’ must be understood differently; “this impossibility of being together is the trace of the diachrony of the-one-for-the-other” (*OB* 79). The fact that I am a worldly creature at odds with itself does not pertain to the world itself, but testifies to an inspiration; “I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired” (*OB* 114). It is not alienating because it does not annul my subjectivity nor orient me away from my body; rather it holds me to myself as the one responsible for-the-other. To be a soul in a body does not signify as a quarrel between my body and my soul, strangers to each other; it is rather that I am in my life aware of something else, something irreducible to my embodiment; “The animation of a body by a soul only articulates the-one-for-the-other in subjectivity” (*OB* 79). The soul is for Levinas the awareness of responsibility.

We are animals. We are flesh and blood brewing with the instinct to live, to consume the world and find ‘our place in the sun’. We are also ashamed of our animality. For too long, this shame has been attributed to our animality itself, as if the problem was that our worldly being was from the start deformed and degenerate. Humanity would have become ashamed because our animality is deformed. What this shame in truth refers to, however, is the ethical commandment of the Other. I become ashamed because my being encroaches on the being of others.

Levinas’ ethical philosophy follows not only from the experience of standing vis-à-vis the Other, but also from his observations about the history of philosophy. Philosophy progresses in an ever more intensified self-critique. Any identification, any conditional we rely on and take for granted, comes under attack; everything can be questioned and turned on its head. Does this signify, in the Heideggerian sense, as the primordial erring or war of being that breaks open the world so it could show itself? Or does it signify a humanity critical of itself? Levinas understood and empathized with the contemporary French thought of his time, today called post-modernism, which deconstructed the foundational corner stones of modernity, above all the notion of the human subject. For Levinas, our humanity shines forth

the strongest in the critique of humanism: “Humanism has to be denounced only because it is not sufficiently human” (*OB* 128).

To be without ground is not the thrownness of Dasein, but an ethical suspense; I am grounded in the world, but I must criticize my very existence. The world is secular and good. It is the plenitude of earth, both the warmth of summer and the freezing cold of winter to be sure, but it invites to living in either case, to mastery and enjoyment. Levinas’ philosophy of enjoyment opens the possibility of seeing the distraughtness of humanity as testifying not to a ‘broken world’, but to the fact that existence is not the primary worry of human beings; “What is at stake for the self, in its being, is not to be. Beyond egoism and altruism it is the religiosity of the self” (*OB* 117). The world is questionable not because of the world, but in virtue of what transcends it. That there could be trouble in paradise follows from the intervention of conscience.

Conclusion: Should we eat pancakes at funerals?

In this thesis, we have been asking how enjoyment relates to transcendence. Enjoyment has been interpreted as a constitutive and essential aspect of our worldly, embodied and immanent nature, so the question of the relation between enjoyment and transcendence has been understood as the relation between immanence and transcendence in general – the earthly and the heavenly, the worldly and the otherworldly, creation and the Creator, the familiar and the new, body and spirit, etc.

One of the ways this relation has been understood is as oppositional; immanence and transcendence are opposites or in conflict with each other. This comes to expression in the practice of the ascetic ideal, which believes that proximity to transcendence is gained by detaching oneself from the worldly. Augustine sees life on earth as a pilgrimage towards God, and I turn towards God by not becoming lost to the world. Enjoyment plays a crucial role here. Precisely because enjoyment is a basic and positive affirmation of myself as a body and as embedded in the world, the *denial* of enjoyment becomes a potent tool through which to turn away from the world in general. This is why Nietzsche saw hostility towards enjoyment as an especially revealing symptom of the Christian hatred of the world in general. For him, transcendence understood as the love for God is *nothing* but the hatred of immanence, which is why he sees transcendence and nihilism as intrinsically connected.

While we did not agree with Nietzsche that transcendence necessarily leads to a rejection of life, we did agree that it is one of its possible outcomes. Furthermore, this outcome does not accidentally follow from belief in transcendence, but is rather inherent to it. By siding with the poor and the weak, Christianity has the potential to become a religion worshipping poverty and weakness. This leads to a general hostility to the very growth which Nietzsche correctly argues is necessary for life to be life.

We therefore turned to the philosophy of Levinas for an alternative way to understand the relation between immanence and transcendence. Levinas' analysis of enjoyment understands it as the most basic aspect of my being-in-the-world. I relate to the world in virtue of the different ways it can satisfy my needs, and the resistance of the world's otherness is overcome by my mastery. Even when I am unable to overcome it, the answer is not a flight

from life, for needs are not assuaged by anorexy, but by satisfaction. Levinas thus understands our being-in-the-world as fundamentally different from how Heidegger understands it, for rather than being originally finite due to being always-already thrown into the world, life is in fact primarily agreeable, and I am thus at home in the world.

Because life begins as a self-satisfied complacency, Levinas can also provide a difference answer to the presence of a disquietude in life. This follows from the ethical relation to the Other human being which, in contrast to enjoyment, arouses a metaphysical Desire in me that can never be quenched. The ethical relation is something wholly different from the relations of satisfaction and mastery, for it corresponds to no prior need and meets me with a resistance that cannot be surmounted by any degree of power. The ethical relation rather transcends, goes infinitely outwards without returning, but, strangely enough, this is not a tragedy. It rather expresses the goodness of the Other's independence vis-à-vis me, which arouses me to responsibility, language and society.

Levinas sees the enjoyment of life as the secular and atheist dimension of life. Enjoyment is a possibility in being that draws its possibility from itself, and is therefore independent to the larger drama of existence. I can enjoy the happiness of my life without any reference to God, and this constitutes its goodness. In other words, we could say that Levinas gives a phenomenological basis for the idea of the goodness of creation *ex nihilo*. God creates the world both as separate from God and also as good, and this would mean that the goodness of creation belongs to creation itself, without the need for a reference to God. Creation should therefore be enjoyed *for its own sake*, and not as a waiting-room for what is to come.

Furthermore, for Levinas, the fact that enjoyment and transcendence are separate does not mean that they are in opposition. Transcendence transcends because it corresponds to wholly different measures than enjoyment; it is a relation of neither satisfaction nor of mastery, but of ethics. In contrast to my interest in my own being, my obligation to the Other follows from a disinterestedness that, although it has to be described negatively, corresponds to the positivity of the ethical obligation I receive from the Other, and the goodness of this obligation. I cannot meet this obligation, however, with empty hands, but only by giving and sacrificing that which I enjoy. Here, enjoyment both retains its meaning and finds it transformed. It is, on the one hand, precisely the enjoyability of my gifts that make them gifts; if they were not enjoyable to the Other as well, I would not be doing them a favor. On the other hand, by becoming a gift, the meaning of what I enjoy is completely transformed. It turns from a 'for-me' to a 'for-the-other', a distinction which for Levinas is the very

difference between immanence and transcendence. In charity and sacrifice, therefore, the bread I eat becomes something more than what it ordinarily is; and this more is not in opposition to, but rather conditioned on the ordinary meaning of bread as enjoyment.

a) Good Wine

I therefore hoped to arrive at what I promised at the outset of this thesis, namely a conception of the created world and earthly life as an end in itself wherein which transcendence is still meaningful. Life is not a pilgrimage towards another destination, but there is nevertheless something that transcends. In other words, life is valuable for its own sake simultaneously as there is something more. This is what I would call a way to interpret the relation between immanence and transcendence as non-oppositional.

I also said that I hoped for this interpretation to be of use for Christian theology. In the conclusion of this thesis, I intend to outline this potential. One of the ways in which I argued that the relation between immanence and transcendence could also be understood was with reference to the play on double meanings in the Gospel of John. This would be the difference between the water in the well and the Living Water, or the bread that feeds the five-thousand and the Bread of Life. One signifies the embodied reality we are familiar with as worldly beings, and the other signifies the transcendent truth that God announces in the Incarnate Christ. The ‘good news’ of the Gospel thus uses the familiarity of our bodies as a key reference to announce itself. I must be familiar with what ‘water’ and ‘bread’ is in order to relate to the new revelation of Living Water and the Bread of Life.

Another instance of this – and the one we will be focusing on in this conclusion – is the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at the Wedding at Cana (John 2). When the wedding runs out of wine, Jesus allows the festivities to continue by turning six jars of water into wine, which is then brought out to the ruler of the feast for a taste. The ruler of the feast notes that the bridegroom has, contrary to customs, saved the good wine for last; this indicates that Christ is the ‘good wine’ that comes at the end rather than at the beginning, which itself is contrary to the Greco-Roman idea that society degenerates from the golden age to the bronze (Neyrey 2007, 68).

Falque writes in regards to the Eucharist: “have we not forgotten, indeed, deliberately left out, all that there could also have been of *joy*, or of *pleasure* and *interior* rapture in the eucharist sacrifice as such?” (Falque 2016b, 225). This is the same question I want to ask with regards to the wedding at Cana. Considering that Christ announces himself as the good wine,

have we taken seriously enough the fact that the *enjoyability* of wine is a positive condition for the revelation? ‘Good wine’ means, on a very basic, embodied level simply *wine that tastes good*. This is made explicit by the fact that the ruler of the feast in fact tastes the wine, and then announces its goodness. The goodness of enjoyability thus serves, somehow, to announce the Goodness of Christ.

In accordance with the general argument of this thesis, I will argue that the enjoyability serves as a positive condition for Christ’s announcement as the good wine. I will do so through an interpretation of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In one of its central chapters, this novel enters into an explicit and lengthy dialogue with John 2:1-11, and it results in, I will argue, an interpretation of Christ as the good wine that ties it into the themes of enjoyment, transcendence and life’s affirmation or rejection. I intend to bring out these themes in Dostoevsky through a Nietzschean and Levinasian analysis of the work, for both these philosophers that we have been relying on so far in this thesis saw Dostoevsky as a crucial inspiration. Nietzsche writes of him; “Dostoevsky, by the way, the only psychologist who had anything to teach me” (*ToI* 219), and Levinas says that it was “above all Dostoevsky” (*RB* 28) who pushed him towards studying philosophy. The latter furthermore placed an extra importance on a quote from a character from *The Brothers Karamazov* – the elder Zosima’s dictum “that each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all” (Dostoevsky 2021, 306) –, a quote Levinas would often repeat, and in which he saw expressed the asymmetrical nature of responsibility.³⁶

In Dostoevsky, therefore, I believe there lies an unique opportunity to bring both Nietzsche and Levinas into a dialogue concerning the question of what it means that Christ announces himself as the good wine. On the one hand, Dostoevsky’s novels are known for being both philosophical and theological, and thus bridges the gap between these two disciplines. On the other, in their shared admiration for Dostoevsky, this author also bridges the gap between the atheist Nietzsche and the Jewish Levinas and an explicitly Christological theme. It must be noted that this is a *bridge*, and thus it must seek to respect, as Falque would have stressed, the fact that we stand on different riverbanks (see introduction, c). Nevertheless, in the meeting of the philosophical perspectives we have explored so far and the

³⁶ To be precise, the quote in fact belongs to Zosima’s older brother Markel, but it is Zosima who retells this quote when narrating his childhood – as we shall soon see, this is a perfect example of the polyphonic nature of Dostoevsky’s novels that Mikhail Bakhtin discusses

Dostoevskian interpretation of the wedding at Cana, I do believe that there is beyond doubt a convergence of themes, such that this exchange can bear fruits that might even turn into good wine.

b) The Thirst for Life and the Problem of Evil

The Brothers Karamazov is a novel about three brothers – Dmitri, Ivan and Alyosha – and their father, Fyodor. The oldest brother (Dmitri) and the father are caught up in a scandalous conflict surrounding the voluptuous seductress Grushenka, who both of them are heads over heels in love with. Halfway through the novel, Fyodor is murdered, but although Dmitri had nothing to do with it, he is falsely accused and condemned for the murder. Add to that the fact that Dmitri is already engaged to another woman – Katerina – who his brother Ivan is also in love with, and you will begin to catch sight of the messiness of the Karamazov-family that Dostoevsky paints in this novel.

Dostoevsky is, however, perhaps most known for how his works engage psychological, philosophical and theological themes, and *The Brothers Karamazov* is far from an exception in this regard. We would be well advised, however, to avoid misunderstanding Dostoevsky's works as philosophical novels; "What he wrote were not novels with an idea...but *novels about the idea*" (Bakhtin 1984, 23). He did so, argues Bakhtin, by employing a polyphonic or multi-voiced writing technique, where the perspective of the character rather than the author is primary. The themes of the novel are not explored from the viewpoint of the author, but from the viewpoint of the different characters, who all voice their different perspectives on the events that unfold in the novel (like the scandalous behavior of father and sons, or the murder of the father).

The main philosophic-theological theme the novel is known for – its intense discussion of the problem of evil – is no exception. It is in a conversation with his younger brother Alyosha that the middle-brother Ivan presents his argument against God, which bases itself on the useless suffering of children. This suffering is an injustice that, argues Ivan, cannot be justified, and it leads him to reject God. Or, more precisely, "It's not God that I do not accept, you understand, it is this world of God's, created by God, that I do not accept and cannot agree to accept" (Dostoevsky 2021, 250). Ivan thus rejects *creation*, and does so in a double sense. He rejects the created world rather than God, but he also rejects it on the basis that it should have been created by a good and loving God, an idea he finds incompatible with the suffering of children. Finally, he also rejects the idea of a *redemption* of this suffering,

protesting against the idea that “the hind lie down with the lion, and the murdered man rise up and embrace his murderer” (Dostoevsky 2021, 259).

In the context of this thesis, it might seem paradoxical that it is one of literature’s most famous atheists – Ivan Karamazov – that ends up rejecting life, for it has rather been those who believe in transcendence that throughout the present thesis have been suspected with this particular crime. It is therefore necessary to clarify that, according to himself at least, Ivan is not simply an atheist. He proclaims that “I accept God, not only willingly, but moreover I also accept his wisdom and his purpose” (Dostoevsky 2021, 250). Also with regards to the hind and the lion, Ivan confesses that he wants it all to pass as such; he desires the redemptive hallelujah that will justify everything that has taken place on earth. It is therefore, in a sense, with reference to transcendence that Ivan rejects the world. What he rejects is precisely that, in addition to the world, there should also be some justified purpose or redemptive plan accompanying it. For this reason, there lies a rather Nietzschean formula on the other side of Ivan’s rejection; “Everything is permitted” (Dostoevsky 2021, 280). Either the useless suffering of children is wrong, and then there is nothing that could justify why it nevertheless takes place; or there is no justice, and so this useless suffering amounts to a natural and thus neutral phenomenon.

The customary path from the above would be, especially considering that I am approaching with a Nietzschean and Levinasian perspective here, the question of whether there can be meaning in this suffering. Nietzsche claims that it is the “meaninglessness of suffering, *not* the suffering” (*GM* 123) that humanity cannot stand; as long as man can find meaning in his suffering, he will even seek it out! It is, however, in this case not simply a question of finding meaning in *my* suffering, but rather a question of what Levinas in *Useless Suffering* calls “the unjustifiable suffering of the Other” (*US* 159), which for Levinas leads to another kind of suffering; suffering the Other’s suffering, which Levinas describes as “the suffering that is sought after by Dostoevsky’s characters” (*US* 166). The conversation between Ivan and Alyosha is a perfect example at this; at a certain point in their conversation, while Ivan is recounting the gruesome tales of children being tortured, Ivan asks Alyosha if he should stop; the latter responds; “Never mind, I want to suffer, too” (Dostoevsky 2021, 257). Is this a will to suffering that, as Nietzsche would argue, amounts to a will to nothingness? Or is it the nobility of a suffering for-the-other that, for Levinas, testifies to the meaning of goodness even after the Holocaust and the end of theodicy?

There is, however, an alternative interpretative path we can take; for interestingly enough, this infamous exchange between Ivan and Alyosha is in fact both preceded and succeeded by discussions about enjoyment and the affirmation of life. Before they begin discussing the problem of evil, the first topic brought to the table is in fact that of enjoyment;

‘I’ll order some fish soup for you, or something – you don’t live on tea alone, do you?’ cried Ivan, apparently terribly pleased that he had managed to lure Alyosha. He himself had already finished dinner and was having tea.

‘I’ll have fish soup, and then tea, I’m hungry’, Alyosha said cheerfully.

‘And cherry preserve? They have it here. Do you remember how you loved cherry preserve at Polenov’s when you were little?’

‘You remember that? I’ll have preserve, too, I still love it’ (Dostoevsky 2021, 243)

When the two brothers first meet, they celebrate their reunion with cherry preserve, a luxurious treat that Dostoevsky does not invoke accidentally; the same treat will later be used as an accusation against another character. Cherry preserve – a sugary luxury, an indulgent excess – expresses perfectly what the Levinasian analysis of enjoyment has taught us. Enjoyment is nothing but the excessive for the sake of the excessive; it is “pure expenditure” (*TI* 133), pure exhaustion, the sincerity of enjoyment for the sake of enjoyment alone. Alyosha mentions that he will ‘have preserve *too*’ addition, because he wants to enjoy beyond the necessary, which is what enjoyment is; enjoyment is by its nature excessive rather than necessary.

This leads into a discussion of the importance of joy for the affirmation of life. The novel revolves as said around the scandalous conflict between a father and son for a seductress. This indecent love triangle reflects what is known as a Karamazov family trait, which Ivan describes to Alyosha; “True, it’s a feature of the Karamazovs, to some extent, this thirst for life despite all; it must be sitting in you, too; but why is it base?” (Dostoevsky 2021, 244). Indeed, why is it base? For while this thirst for life is also what leads to the scandalous behavior of father and son, all three brothers agree that this will to life is necessary in order to affirm life. Dmitri confesses that “I feel a joy without which the world cannot stand and be” (Dostoevsky 2021, 114), and Ivan proclaims that even if existence cannot be justified, “still I would want to live, and as long as I have bent to this cup, I will not tear myself from it until

I've drunk it all! (Dostoevsky 2021, 244). Even the young and prudent novice Alyosha responds to his brother that "I think that everyone should love life before everything else in the world" (Dostoevsky 2021, 245). All three brothers express aspects of life's affirmation that Nietzsche would recognize. Dmitri notes that 'the world cannot stand to be' without this joy, reflecting the Nietzschean insight that life is only alive when it says 'yes!' to itself, when it joyously affirms itself. Alyosha goes as far that life should be loved even before its meaning – and perhaps, Nietzsche would add, even before its truth? Finally, Ivan's mention of the *cup* invokes without doubt the image of Dionysus, the god of wine – put perhaps also the cup at the marriage of Cana?

On the other end of the conversation, after Ivan has made his argument for the problem of evil, the discussion turns to life's *rejection*. Precisely because he rejects God's creation, Ivan is unable to affirm life; "One cannot live by rebellion, and I want to live" (Dostoevsky 2021, 261). Here becomes visible the "disgust at life" (*GM* 89) that Nietzsche believed lay at the bottom of the Judeo-Christian faith. The unjustifiable uselessness of suffering leads to a nausea that makes life appear as incomprehensible, disgusting madness that I for the life of me will not consent to. In other words, I say no to life. Ivan tries to appeal to "The Karamazov force...the force of the Karamazov baseness" (Dostoevsky 2021, 280), but in the end, it is clear to both brothers that this force has lost some of its potential.

The question of rejecting or affirming life is thus framed in the context of enjoyment and the will to live. The linking of these themes is also formulated in another way, namely as the question of why we should eat pancakes at funerals. The question is posed with regard to the funeral of Ilyushechka, a young boy that kind of works like a concrete test case for the problem of evil. Ilyusha is a young, innocent boy who dies uselessly from disease. On their way to the memorial dinner, another young boy – Kolya – says to Alyosha; "It's all so strange, Karamazov, such grief, and then pancakes all of a sudden – how unnatural it all is in our religion!" (Dostoevsky 2021, 820). Indeed, why eat pancakes at a funeral? How can one yet again return to the sweetness of enjoyment when the world has fallen into ruins? To return would be necessary to affirm life, but enjoyment becomes somehow *distasteful* due to grief. Grief is a transcendent love, a love that love's someone in their absence, and thus goes beyond the world. It can therefore also prohibit a return to life. Is this perhaps one way to understand Nietzsche's claim that transcendence devalues immanence?

Alyosha is, however, able to give an answer to Kolya, and this answer is found in a chapter where Alyosha undergoes a life-changing experience while listening to John 2:1-10.

At the end of the chapter, Alyosha falls down to earth on his knees, kissing the earth and vowing “to love it unto ages of ages” (Dostoevsky 2021, 384). Alyosha has in other words been able to affirm life, and he arrives at this realization in a dialogue where the themes of the novel are brought into conversation with the question of what it means that Jesus is the good wine.

c) Loving the Other’s Happiness

Alyosha listens to ‘The Wedding at Cana’ being recited during a burial ritual. The one being buried is the elder Zosima, Alyosha’s teacher whom he loved very much. Alyosha drifts into a sort of half-sleep while listening, and the recitations gets mixed in with his own interior monologue. Or, more precisely speaking, an interior *dialogue*. This somewhat contradictory notion is what Bakhtin uses to explain what is a very Dostoevskian literary device; even when characters are only talking or thinking to themselves, these ‘monologues’ are in fact written in such a way that they repeat and respond to other characters in the novel (Bakhtin 1984, 74). The monologue that Alyosha has while listening to the Gospel of John is a perfected and perhaps even exceptional example of this, for here, Alyosha does not only enter a dialogue with a number of the novel’s key characters, but also with the Bible.

There are in total four recitations and four inner monologues, but I skip ahead to the second one;

‘And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine...’, Alyosha heard.

‘Ah, yes, I’ve been missing it and I didn’t want to miss it, I love that passage: it’s Cana of Galilee, the first miracle...Ah, that miracle, ah, that lovely miracle! Not grief, but men’s joy Christ visited when he worked his first miracle, he helped men’s joy...’He who loves men, loves their joy...’ The dead man used to repeat it all the time, it was one of his main thoughts...One cannot live without joy, says Mitya...Yes, Mitya...All that is true and beautiful is always full of all-forgiveness – that, too, he used to say...’ (Dostoevsky 2021, 382)

We recognize Dmitri’s quote from before; ‘One cannot live without joy’, an affirmation of life in its joyfulness is necessary for life. It is, however, in Zosima’s proclamation that I believe Alyosha finds his answer, namely, that ‘He who loves men, loves their joy’. This

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dictum opens up the possibility of a *transcendent affirmation of life*, which in its own turn leads to *an announcement of transcendence in immanence*. The transcendence of love affirms joy, for to love is to love the other's happiness. On the other hand, earthly happiness becomes that in which the transcendence of love announces itself, the good wine.

First, 'to love joy' would be a transcendent affirmation of it because Zosima sees love as transcendent in a very Levinasian way. Zosima's ideal of love is "a love that is infinite, universal, and that knows no satiety" (Dostoevsky 2021, 174). It 'knows no satiety' because it, when correctly understood, does not seek it. True love is not concerned with satisfaction, and thus infinitely patient, which is in contrast to the love of daydreams; "Love in dreams thirsts for immediate action, quickly performed, and with everyone watching" (Dostoevsky 2021, 61). Levinas too distinguishes the metaphysical Desire for the Other by contrasting it with the needs of enjoyment; whereas needs become satisfied, the metaphysical desire is unquenchable, and thus opens upon infinity (*TI* 33-34). For both, then, my relation to the other human being expresses an unsatiable, infinite relation, understood either as love or responsibility. Love is therefore altogether different than enjoyment; it is not of this world but transcends this world – a miracle on earth.

At the same time, love loves enjoyment, tends towards happiness. Zosima's embrace of happiness is one of his most profiled characteristics, and it is brought out through a juxtaposition of Zosima with another character, Father Ferapont, described as "an adversary of the elder Zosima" (Dostoevsky 2021, 176). Ferapont exemplifies what Nietzsche called the ascetic ideal. He is an astute and somewhat raving mad ascetic that lives in isolation from the rest of the monastery and their daily routines in a small cottage at the periphery of the monastery. He abides by a strict fast and claims to be in almost daily conversation with the Holy Spirit, which his followers finds completely natural; "no wonder that such a great faster as Father Ferapont should 'behold marvels'" (Dostoevsky 2021, 180). In other words, Father Ferapont and his followers are of the conviction that access *to* transcendence depends on a detachment *from* the world.

This sort of thinking is what the present thesis has called a misunderstanding of transcendence; for Ferapont's notion of transcendence is nothing but a negation of the world. It is, however, not only Ferapont and his followers who misunderstand transcendence; at a crucial point in the novel, Zosima's followers come to misunderstand it as well. It is repeatedly stated that Zosima is considered "an unquestionable and great saint" (Dostoevsky 2021, 348) by both the local clergy and laity, and for this very reason, there is "some unheard-

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of and ‘unseemly’ excitement and impatient expectation” (Dostoevsky 2021, 347) surrounding his death. It has been made clear to us from the beginning that Zosima will die at some point, but those who misunderstand his holiness believe that some miracle must occur at the death of such a saint. Quite the opposite happens, however; the body in fact smells very bad! This leads to even Zosima’s followers turning on him, for they take the deceased elders’ odor of corruption as a sign that “Clearly God’s judgment is not as man’s” (Dostoevsky 2021, 352).

Father Ferapont and his followers take advantage of this turn of the tide, and, unsurprisingly, the accusation they level against Zosima is exactly that he embraced happiness. This is where *cherry preserve* makes its conspicuous re-appearance;

‘He taught unrighteousness; he taught that life is great joy and not tearful humility’ ... ‘He was not strict in fasting, allowed himself sweets, had cherry preserve with his tea, and liked it very much, ladies used to send it to him. What is a monk doing giving tea parties?’ (Dostoevsky 2021, 354, my italics)

Zosima is accused for not having contempt for the world, for seeing worldliness as a ‘great joy’ rather than a sorrowful humiliation. He is furthermore accused for having cherry preserve and ‘liking it very much’. This expresses something crucial Levinas says about enjoyment, namely that it is a double relation; enjoyment not only enjoys, but enjoys that it enjoys (*TI* 112-114). This is a truth recognized by all ascetics; also Augustine recognized that the necessary act of eating involved an unavoidable enjoyment, but the fact that I enjoy that I enjoy opens up the possibility of not-enjoying that I enjoy. The fact that Zosima enjoyed that he enjoyed is here brought out against him as the height of his sin; the sin of not only indulging in worldly goods, but embracing this indulging!

When Father Ferapont himself arrives at the scene, he both repeats and intensifies the above accusation. Ferapont interprets Zosima’s bodily decay as a sign of the latter’s embracement of enjoyment and happiness, and thus establishes a connection between the transience of enjoyment and the transience of life;

‘He did not keep the fasts as befits a monk, therefore this sign has come. That’s plain enough, it’s a sin to conceal it!’ The fanatic, maddened by his zeal, got himself going and would not be still. ‘He loved candies, the ladies used to

bring him candies in their pockets, he was a tea sipper, a glutton, filling his stomach with sweets and his mind with arrogant thoughts...That is why he suffers this shame...' (Dostoevsky 2021, 356)

For Father Ferapont, the rotting corpse of Zosima reveals the rotten truth of worldly enjoyment. Just as the beauty of youth and the strength of the arm will fade away, and just as pleasure itself only lasts for a time before fading away, so too the body fades away. The seductive, deceptive and momentary pleasure of enjoyment hides its true essence; that it is nothing but bodily rot. That is why Ferapont abstains from it; by forming no attachments with the transience of the world, and only orienting himself towards the eternal and unchanging God, he prevents the decay and rot of transient pleasures to take control of his body. The odor of corruption of Zosima, however, displays his attachment to the transient pleasures of life.

Does this not display one of the attitudes taken towards enjoyment in the history of the Church? And does this hostility towards enjoyment not display a hostility to the world? Hostility towards enjoyment was for Nietzsche one of the most important symptoms for his diagnosis that Christianity is a hatred towards life. Enjoyment becomes the target because enjoyment is, in its natural meaning, an affirmation of the world and of my body. Additionally, because it is, as Levinas says, a double-relation – I enjoy enjoyment – it is also open to being denied; I can deny my own enjoyment, as father Ferapont does.

But what is Father Ferapont doing? If Ferapont represents one possibility of the Christian faith, then it is beyond doubt the possibility of Christianity that also Levinas criticizes in the polemic text *Place and Utopia*. Levinas here reproaches the 'man of utopia' who's response to the transcendent summon is to desire to be immediately transposed to another reality where all the contradictions of *this* reality have been absolved. While still on this earth, then, the man of utopia will "deny the place where it is incumbent on me to do something, to look for an anchorite's salvation" (*DF* 100). Ferapont is such an anchorite, whose religious calling implies a complete detachment not only from the world but also from society. He is the kind of man who "prefers the joy of solitary salvation" (*DF* 101) to the more complex and difficult but at the very least substantial summon to responsibility in the real world.

Finally, it might be the case that, as Ferapont accuses Zosima of a sin of the flesh, Ferapont himself reflects the Augustinian insight that the true sin begins in the soul. Ferapont ends his tirade by bemoaning the fact that the local laity and clergy considered Zosima holier

than himself. That is, his harsh abstinence has not received the recognition he feels it should deserve. Does this not express both the sin of vanity and of envy?

If Father Ferapont represents one possibility of Christianity, then Zosima represents another. In contrast to isolation, Zosima receives visitors from near and far away, patiently listens to their stories and shares his advice, and it is for this very reason that he is considered holy. One of the primary wisdoms he shares regards precisely enjoyment and happiness;

For people are created for happiness, and he who is completely happy can at once be deemed worthy of saying to himself: 'I have fulfilled God's commandment on this earth'. All the righteous, all the saints, all the holy martyrs were happy. (Dostoevsky 2021, 58)

In contrast to Ferapont, Zosima sees worldly enjoyment as in conflict with transcendence, but rather as the very purpose of our created nature. Life should not be abstained from, but lived and affirmed in its living, for "Life is *love of life*" (TI 112), as Levinas would say.

This happiness furthermore works in tandem with the transcendence of love. This is for example the case with sacrifice, which shows yet another convergence between Zosima and Levinas. Levinas notes that responsibility is only possible between beings of flesh and bone, for in order that my gift to the other be a sacrifice, I must have enjoyed it first (OB 72-74). Zosima uses the same logic when answering the question, 'What is hell?' Zosima's answer is that it is to arrive in the afterlife and suffer the state of no longer being able to love; and the reason why one would be unable to love in heaven is precisely because love is only possible, as Levinas would say, 'among beings of flesh and bone':

For he sees clearly and says to himself: 'Now I have knowledge, and though I thirst to love, there will be no great deed in my love, no sacrifice, for my earthly life is over, and Abraham will not come with a drop of living water (that is, with a renewed gift of the former life, earthly and active) to cool the flame of the thirst for spiritual love that is burning in me now, since I scorned it on earth... Though I would gladly give my life for others, it is not possible now, for the life I could have sacrificed for love is gone... (Dostoevsky 2021, 342)

The unfortunate egoist who arrives in heaven without ever having loved now finds the path to love being blocked, for real love requires real sacrifice; and real sacrifice is only possible for an embodied, earthly being. To love the other is to love their happiness, and I could only do so on earth, the very site of happiness.

Enjoyment is, however, not simply a condition for love, but to love means to love others in their happiness. This provides an answer to Nietzsche's perhaps most crucial accusation against Christianity; as the worship of the 'God on the Cross', Christianity "has made an ideal out of whatever *contradicts* the preservation...of...life" (AC 5). Nietzsche sees Christianity as a *love of poverty*. At the Wedding at Cana, however, Dostoevsky sees Christ primarily loving the happiness of the poor;

'...Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.'

'Do it...Joy, the joy of some poor, very poor people...Why, of course they were poor, if there wasn't even enough wine for the wedding. Historians write that the people living around the lake of Gennesaret and in all those parts were the poorest people imaginable...And the other great heart of the other great being, who was there, too, his mother, knew that he came down then not just for his great and awful deed, but that his heart was also open to the simple, guileless merrymaking of some untaught, untaught and artless beings, who lovingly invited him to their poor marriage feast. 'Mine hour is not yet come', he says with a quiet smile (he must have smiled meekly to her)...Indeed, was it to increase the wine at poor weddings that he came down to earth? Yet he went and did what she asked...Ah, he's reading again. (Dostoevsky 2021, 382)

Christ's love of humans manifests in his openness 'to the simple, guileless merrymaking' of some poor, peripheral folk. Christ loves the poor, but he does not love their poverty; in contrast, he fills up their cup. As Levinas says, "The suffering of need is not assuaged in anorexia, but in satisfaction" (TI 146). Love for the poor does not manifest itself in the anorexic Father Ferapont, whose answer is to reject the world; rather, 'to love men is to love their happiness'.

That is, to love the happiness *also* of the poor. The transcendent affirmation of happiness comes to life in the oldest brother Dmitri, the seductress Grushenka and what I call ‘the Wedding at Mokroye’. Dmitri is the one who wins Grushenka’s hand in the end, and they celebrate their love in a scene very analogous to the wedding at Cana. Mokroye, the place they hold their celebration, is a poor town, populated by outsiders in Russian society (gypsies and jews) and ruled by the brutal Trifon who has enslaved the local populace through debt. Dmitri, however, “presents the peasants with ‘cigarettes and Rhine wine’” (Dostoevsky 2021, 459), which Trifon, a man of the world, finds despicable; “I’d give them a knee in the backside, every one of them, and tell them to count it an honor – that’s what they’re like!” (Dostoevsky 2021, 459). As a man of worldly wisdom, Trifon is aware of his own position and that of those below him, and to him there is nothing more natural than to reinforce this hierarchy. The fact that Dmitri does not reinforce it but rather contradicts it seems to offend Trifon; Dmitri makes a mockery out of this hierarchy!

Dmitri is generally presented as a foolish character, known for wasting all his money on ridiculous sprees whenever he has some cash in his hand, but this is clearly an instance of *holy foolishness*, a tradition that has deep roots in Russian orthodoxy, and that Dostoevsky was well known for employing (Williams 2018, 6). Dmitri is not organizing an ordinary social event, inviting the finest guests he can find and presenting *them* with Rhine wine in order to impress them, but gives for the sake of giving, gaining nothing in return; pure gratuity, pure giving, transcendent love. This pure giving without expecting returns is deemed foolish by Trifon, but Dmitri’s foolishness in fact makes a fool out of Trifon, for “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1. Cor. 1:20)?

Love thus both affirms enjoyment and finds its expression in it through gifts and sacrifices. This is therefore both a *transcendent affirmation of immanence* and *transcendence being announced in immanence*. The transcendence of love can only come to expression in ordinary, worldly things, in bread and wine; on the other hand, however, by participating in the transcendence of love, worldly enjoyment gains an additional affirmation that it could not have achieved on its own.

Finally, the allegory between ‘The Wedding at Cana’ and the wedding at Mokroye announces something transcendent in something immanent in yet another way, namely the happy promise of heaven as reconciliation and communion. At the height of her ecstasy, Grushenka turns into a Mary Magdalene – a sinful woman who has come to share in divine wisdom. The wisdom she repeats is that of Zosima; “The world is a good place. We may be

bad, but the world is a good place” (Dostoevsky 2021, 467). We are guilty towards each other, and therefore we must feel shame, but creation is indeed good, the world is good, life is good. And why is this goodness so manifest here, at “an orgy, a feast of feasts” (Dostoevsky 2021, 458)? Because here, everyone is invited to share in happiness. Grushenka calls everyone to herself, even two men who offended her terribly earlier; “Mitya, why aren’t they coming? Let everyone come...to watch. Call them, too...the locked-up ones...” (Dostoevsky 2021, 467). The invitation to forgive and be reconciled is stretched out with a cup in hand. They refuse, and Grushenka bemoans that they won’t make peace, but this only sharpens the inclination that there *should* be peace among them and among everyone, and that this peace would be a happiness worthy of great celebration.

Another character, Maximov, is also present at this ‘wedding’, and his presence suggests also, perhaps, the promise of a heavenly reunion. Maximov is usually read as the family father Fyodor’s literary double (Matzner-Gore 2014, 423). Dmitri and Fyodor have been locked in an irreconcilable conflict from the beginning of the novel, and unbeknownst to Dmitri, his father is dead at the time of this celebration. Their relationship therefore stands as a test-case of a conflict that was never resolved. At this ‘wedding’, however, Dostoevsky draws attention to the fact that while Maximov is making an ass out of himself, Dmitri alone acts lovingly towards him (Dostoevsky 2021, 462).

Perhaps this points to the possibility of a happy reconciliation in the afterlife? This possibility takes us to the final recitation of the wedding at Cana. After having heard that “*Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now*” (Dostoevsky 2021, 383), Alyosha drifts into a vision of the marriage at Cana, where he sees his beloved elder once more; “Why, he is in the coffin...But here, too...He has gotten up, he’s seen me, he’s coming over...Lord!” (Dostoevsky 2021, 383). The vision of the resurrected elder becomes a vision of heaven understood as the happy promise of new wine:

‘I, too, my dear, I, too, have been called, called and chosen,’ the quiet voice spoke over him... ‘We are making merry’, the little wizened man continued, ‘we are drinking new wine, the wine of a new and great joy. See how many guests there are?...And do you see our Sun, do you see him?...Do not be afraid of him. Awful is his greatness before us, terrible is his loftiness, yet he is boundlessly merciful, he became like us out of love, and he is making merry

with us, turning water into wine, that the joy of the guests may not end. He is waiting for new guests, he is ceaselessly calling new guests, now and unto ages of ages. See, they are bringing the new wine, the vessels are being brought in... (Dostoevsky 2021, 383-384)

Here, in contrast to Nietzsche's accusation, the vision of the afterlife does *not* lead to a negation of life. Rather, it is in the goodness of wine – the goodness of Dionysus, we could say – that this vision is announced, and its announcement utilizes this goodness positively. The vision of heaven is not opposed to earthly happiness, but is announced in it; it is the promise that God will refill the cup of life with new wine.

Consequently, it also leads to a transcendent affirmation of immanence. It is after this vision that Alyosha runs out runs down into the monastery garden, falls to his knees and kisses the earth, “kissing it, weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and he vowed to ecstatically love it, to love it unto ages of ages” (Dostoevsky 2021, 384). In this affirmation, I believe, Alyosha finds his own answer to the question of why we should eat pancakes at funerals.

d) Pancakes, Funerals and the Afterlife

The final chapter of the novel concerns the funeral of the young child Ilyushechka, and concludes with a speech given by Alyosha to Ilyusha's friends right before the memorial dinner. These young boys were not always friends of Ilyusha, but in fact used to bully him; Alyosha intervened, however, and reconciled Ilyusha and these boys. Quite cruelly, then, Alyosha re-unites these boys with Ilyusha and teaches them to love him right before he dies. He furthermore teaches them to *keep* loving him, even now, when that love only turns to grief “let us always remember how we buried the poor boy, whom we once threw stones at and whom afterwards we all came to love so much” (Dostoevsky 2021, 821). But why love when there is nothing left in it besides grief? Grieving is a transcendent sort of love, a love which loves when there is absolutely nothing to be gained in return. This love has meaning, but it threatens in its very transcendence to refuse a return to life; “Such grief does not even want consolation; it is nourished by the sense of its unquenchableness” (Dostoevsky 2021, 51). Alyosha must therefore warn the boys to “not be afraid of life!” (Dostoevsky 2021, 823), for such grief can indeed lead to a stand-still – to the impossibility of moving on –, and, as Nietzsche would have said, life needs to be *moving* in order to be life.

It is in this context that one of the young boys Kolya expresses his puzzlement to Alyosha; “It’s all so strange, Karamazov, such grief, and then pancakes all of a sudden – how unnatural it all is in our religion!” (Dostoevsky 2021, 820). Indeed, why eat pancakes at a funeral? Alyosha’s answer is far from a new theodicy. It is generally said of *The Brothers Karamazov* that it does not give an answer to Ivan’s question, and therefore fits into the Levinasian theme of the end of theodicy. Nevertheless, the novel ends with the hope for heaven which simultaneously affirms earth;

‘Karamazov!’ cried Kolya, ‘can it really be true as religion says, that we shall all rise from the dead, and come to life, and see one another again, and everyone, and Ilyushechka?’

‘Certainly we shall rise, certainly we shall see and gladly, joyfully tell one another all that has been,’ Alyosha replied, half laughing, half in ecstasy.

‘Ah, how that will be!’ burst from Kolya.

‘Well, and now let’s end our speeches and go to his memorial dinner. Don’t be disturbed that we’ll be eating pancakes. It’s an ancient, eternal thing, and there’s good in that, too,’ laughed Alyosha. ‘Well, let’s go! And we go like this now, hand in hand.’

‘And eternally so, all our lives hand in hand! Hurrah for Karamazov!’ Kolya cried once more ecstatically, and once more all the boys joined in his exclamation. (Dostoevsky 2021, 823)

From where does this joyful hope in heaven originate? It is, I think, a childish belief that follows from loving the happiness of others. It is a love as stubborn as it is vulnerable, refusing, in the face of reality, that the other is simply dead, and thus hopes, despite all, for a reunion. It is because love reveals it as true that we *should* see each other again, that sinners and their victims *should* be reconciled, that heaven is meaningful on earth (‘Ah, how that will be!’). Love tends towards a happy ending because love loves happiness, even in the face of irredeemable suffering.

Precisely as the promise of a happy ending, however, as the promise of a future *merrymaking*, this vision does not preclude but leads to a returning affirmation of life. The heart hopes for heaven for the same reason that it affirms living; it loves happiness. The affirmation of the world and the belief in heaven go hand in hand here, like Alyosha and the boys. *The Brothers Karamazov* is the story of a broken but life-loving family with a thirst

despite all, and the novel ends with an affirmation, with the young children joyously exclaiming ‘Hurrah for Karamazov!’

Having invoked the question of the *afterlife*, we have the opportunity to address an issue that the present thesis has not yet made account for. The present thesis has asked about the relation between immanence and transcendence, and it has for the most part been a philosophical enterprise, but at least at the outset of this venture, it was said that this question was asked in a Christian context. We began by asking about the difference between the water in the well and the Living Water that Christ announces himself as, and continued by exploring the discussions regarding asceticism in the early Church. Thereafter we accounted for Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity. After that, however, most of the present thesis has been dedicated to an exploration of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who was of Jewish faith. With Dostoevsky, we have returned to a Christian context yet again, and especially with the discussions regarding the Good Wine at the Wedding at Cana. Is there a conflict here?

It should perhaps first be asked whether Levinas would welcome the invitation to drink from the cup of Good Wine, and it would seem that he would have his reservations; for the meaning of this cup as it has been laid out in the above is as a reconciliation and communion in the afterlife. Philosophically, Levinas would perhaps protest that this evokes the imagery of “the factitious transcendence of worlds behind the scenes, of the Heavenly City gravitating in the skies over the terrestrial city” (*OB* 4). This notion of ‘transcendence’ would be nothing than a prettied up ontology, as if the otherwise than being was simply another type of being, and the otherworldly simply another world. This philosophical protest would be furthermore supported by Levinas’ polemic against Christianity in his explicitly Judaic texts. In the previous mentioned *Place and Utopia*, Levinas protests that the belief in an utopia, where all the distress and suffering of real life would be resolved in a grand hallelujah, leads possibly to a neglect of our responsibilities in the here-and-now;

The faith that moves mountains and conceives of a world without slaves immediately transports itself to utopia, separating the reign of God from the reign of Caesar. This reassures Caesar... To speak of law is not to remain at the stage surpassed by the Redemption. To speak of Redemption in a world that remains without justice is to forget that the soul is not the demand for immortality but the impossibility of assassinating, and that consequently the spirit is the proper concern of a just society. (*DF* 101)

Levinas recognizes the transcendence of the law, of the commandment that reveals itself in the face of the Other and that summons us to responsibility here on earth. This is a transcendence that does not lead us away from the world, but that rather summons us to a reorientation within it. This is, as we saw in the last chapter, a responsibility without promise; the goodness of it does not refer to the rewards of the afterlife, but to a goodness that is beyond the worldly measures of investments and rewards. For those whose belief in God refers to that which would come ‘after’ this life on this earth, therefore, Levinas responds; “The ethical order does not prepare us for the Divinity; it is the very accession to the Divinity. All the rest is a dream” (*DF* 102).

In invoking the term ‘dream’, one can get the feeling that Levinas sees the belief in the redemption of the afterlife as somewhat naïve and perhaps even childish – and the hope in the afterlife is by Dostoevsky put in the mouth of a child – Kolya – in the above (‘Ah, how that will be!’). Levinas does indeed seem to promote the notion of maturity, both in his philosophical and religious texts. In regards to the latter, Levinas writes of ‘A religion for Adults’, which entails an end to the infantile obsession with the mystery of the Sacred, and rather the acceptance that “election is made up not of privileges but of responsibilities” (*DF* 21). The gravity of responsibility is to be contrasted with the carefreeness of play, and Levinas’ critique must be said to be quite fair if belief in heaven leads to an abnegation of responsibility in life on earth, because one supposes that all will be redeemed in the end.

I do not believe that the Dostoevskian hope for heaven necessarily falls into this trap, first because Dostoevsky does not present it as a theodicy that would justify suffering on earth, and secondly because he does not allow it to become an abnegation of responsibility – Alyosha says to the children “How good life is when you do something good and rightful!” (Dostoevsky 2021, 823). Nevertheless, with reference to the maturity of responsibility and the childlike hope for heaven, there does seem to be a significant difference between Levinas and Dostoevsky; for this childlike surrender in hoping that someone else will save us and restore what has been broken is different than taking it upon one’s own shoulders. Falque touches upon this difference in his own engagement with Levinas when noting the difference between how the notion of the messiah is interpreted between Judaism and Christianity. Levinas’ interpretation of the messiah is closely linked with his philosophical notion of substitution, where I am the messiah by taking on responsibility and substituting myself for-the-other. In regards to this, Falque notes; “Certainly there is ‘substitution’ for the Christian, but precisely

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a substitution, a single one – and it is not me who substitutes (‘The Messiah is Myself’), but *the Son* who uniquely bears that responsibility” (Falque 2018, 94). Christ substitutes himself for me, takes my place and lifts my burdens onto his own shoulders.

This difference should not be understood in terms of completion, as if Christ added the final puzzle that Judaism was unable to provide by itself. As Falque writes, it is a question of “a recognition of proper difference” (Falque 2018, 95). The hope in redemption does not supersede the law, as Levinas says, and this means above all that a Christian belief in Christ substituting himself for me cannot replace my substitution for the Other in responsibility.³⁷ Nevertheless, I do believe that the childish surrender in the hope for redemption also can speak meaningfully to my relation to the Other, and can do so without entailing a negation of or flight from reality. In fact, as we have seen with Dostoevsky, the vision of heaven as a future merrymaking has a positive relation to the goodness of worldly happiness.

The joy of redemption is first of all not something that only belongs to life after death, but something that can also be meaningfully experienced in this life. The tale of the prodigal son in Luke 15, for example, is most often read as referring to my relationship with God; just as the prodigal son has fallen away from his father, we have fallen away from our Heavenly Father; and just as the prodigal son is welcomed back into the abode of his father, we will be welcomed back into the abode of God. But the parable of the prodigal son also has a very obvious earthly meaning, that of a lost son who returns to and is welcomed by his father. It is furthermore one that is recognizable in many other ‘ordinary’ settings, such as the recovery of someone who had been thought lost forever to addiction, or the reconciliation between two family members who everyone thought were forever locked in an irreconcilable conflict.

The joy over the return of a lost son, the recovery of an addict or the reconciliation between two family members is something that cannot be accounted for merely with reference to the worldly happiness of enjoyment. It is somehow implicated in the drama of transcendence, but differently than as a question of responsibility. For face-to-face with the son who has by his own volition left my household, the addict who must, in the end, help themselves, or the two family members who refuse to see eye to eye, it is not necessarily a

³⁷ It should be made clear regarding this discussion that things are more complicated than can be made account of here; for what is being juxtaposed here is after all *Levinas’ Judaism* and *Dostoevsky’s* (and to a lesser extent Falque’s) *Christianity*. And there can of course be different interpretations of both traditions; as my secondary supervisor (Magdalene Thomassen) has suggested for example, the notion of ‘imitatio Christi’ points to another interpretation of my relation of Christ as one of imitating Christ’s act of responsibility.

question of responsibility, for the resolution to these crises can be completely beyond my control. I am therefore exposed not as responsible, but as a helpless child. When they return, recover or reconcile, this is experienced as a miracle; not like those supernatural miracles Ferapont claims to witness, but the miracle grace – for this return was not something that I brought about. The miracle of redemption in my earthly life is the resolution of a crisis in the life of those who I both love and cannot control.

This joy is furthermore different from responsibility because it is not restless, but joyful; it rejoices that the distress is at an end. I am happy and rejoice that my son has returned to me. But my happiness in these scenarios is again not explicable simply in terms of the carefree happiness of enjoyment, for it also has a *gravity* to it, though in a different sense than the gravity of responsibility. It is rather the profoundness of gratitude, a gratitude that rejoices with both tears and laughter.

With regards to the belief in heaven, then, does this not refer to the hope that the children that did not return, the addicts that did not recover and the conflicts that were not reconciled on earth could be redeemed in a time yet to come? This could appear as an empty promise to those still embroiled in the distressful crises of the world, and should serve as no excuse to lax our strict attention while still on earth. But it is not a *meaningless* hope, and furthermore not one opposed to the happiness of earthly life. It would be a great joy to see these evils redeemed in a possible life to come, but it would also be a happiness; for the hope in redemption is born out of love, and love always loves the Other's happiness. It would be a reconciliation and communion worth both rejoice and celebration if, despite everything that has happened on earth, God were to refill our vessels with good wine.

It is in fact both in terms of celebration and rejoice that the father welcomes the return of his son: “we had to celebrate (*euphrainō*) and rejoice (*khairō*), because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (Luke 15:32). Bultmann notes with regard to *euphrainō* that the general use of the word testifies to it being perceived as an inner process, and that the object of such celebratory joy “can be things or events that refer to superficial (*äußere*) and corporal (*leibliche*) well-being (*Wohlsein*), especially on those situations in which the mood of communal cheerfulness (*Heiterkeit*) comes alive” (Bultmann 1935, 770, my translation).³⁸ Hanz Conzelmann notes with regard to

³⁸ «Gegenstände der Freude können Dinge oder Ereignisse Sein, die das äußere leibliche Wohlsein betreffen, bes solche Situationen, in denen die Stimmung gemeinschaftlicher Heiterkeit lebendig wird“ (Kittel 1935, 770)

the second term, *khairō*, that it was generally used to express a higher joy, the joy of being fully surrendered; “It tends beyond itself” (Conzelmann 1935, 350, my translation).³⁹ It is not the happiness of the ego, which as enjoyment begins and returns to the self, but a joy which relates to that which goes beyond. Falque writes with regard to these two terms as they appear in the parable of the prodigal son that “The joy of those who ‘rejoice’ does not...negate the happiness of those who ‘celebrate’ but goes beyond it and includes it” (Falque 2012, 120). The worldly meaning of *euphrainō* is not opposed by the joy of *khairō* but finds itself included and elevated in it; it transcends worldly enjoyment without opposing it. The rejoice of the lost son’s return is celebrated by slaying the fatted calf. Just as with the Bread of Life, Living Water and Good Wine, then, we find yet again the meaning of transcendence being announced in the goodness of our embodied, worldly enjoyment.

³⁹ «Sie tendiert über sich selbst hinaus“ (Conzelmann 1935, 350)

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