

SENSIBILITY AND SUBJECTIVITY: LEVINAS' TRAUMATIC SUBJECT

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The importance of Levinas' notions of sensibility and subjectivity are evident in the revision of phenomenological method by current phenomenologists such as Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry. The criticisms of key tenants of classical phenomenology, intentionality and reduction, are of a particular note. However, there are problems with Levinas' characterization of subjectivity as essentially sensible. In "Totality and Infinity" and "Otherwise than Being", Levinas criticizes and recasts a traditional notion of subjectivity, particularly the notion of the subject as the first and foremost rational subject. The subject in Levinas' works is characterized more by its sensibility and affectedness than by its capacity to reason or affect its world. Levinas ties rationality to economy and suggests an alternative notion of reason that leads to his analysis of the ethical relation as the face-to-face encounter. The 'origin' of the social relation is located not in our capacity to know but rather in a sensibility that is diametrically opposed to the reason understood as economy. I argue that the opposition in Levinas' thought between reason and sensibility is problematic and essentially leads to a self-conflicted subject. In fact, it would seem that violence characterizes the subject's self-relation and, thus, is also inscribed at the base of the social relation. Rather than overcoming a problematic tendency to dualistic thought in philosophy Levinas merely reverses traditional hierarchies of reason/emotion, subject/object and self/other.

Keywords: Levinas, Sensibility/Affectivity, Comprehension/Reason, Subjectivity, the Other, Violence.

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Introduction

This paper explores Levinas' account of subjectivity in his two major works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. My main aim in this paper is not to disagree with certain validity to Levinas' view of the meaning of ethics but rather with the method he employs to reach this meaning and with the essential asymmetry at the heart of intersubjectivity he endorses. Levinas' "method" navigates within a phenomenological framework. He reworks the two key methodical tools of phenomenology: reduction and intentionality.

While Levinas never clearly states that he is working within a phenomenological reduction, his analysis of subjectivity suggests a regression from the subject of enjoyment to the "origin" of subjectivity in the face-to-face encounter with the Other. Intentionality, as "consciousness of" which for Husserl suggested a correlation and reciprocity between terms and entailed a necessary distance or separation between terms, is recast through the notions of affectivity and immediacy. The notion of consciousness as intentional in classical phenomenology was meant

to describe, not construct, the temporal and inherently dyadic nature of our lived experiences. Levinas recasts intentionality to express experiences that fall outside an "objective intentionality", i.e. experiences that do not fit into the subject/object dichotomy. While I fully agree that there is room within phenomenology for intentionality other than an intentionality of act or objectivity, I do not agree with what Levinas suggests as an essentially *non-intentional relationship* – the relationship with the Other. I also take exception to an odd reduction at work within Levinas' later works which aims to get below Husserl's phenomenological and transcendental reductions and Heidegger's 'existential' reduction to reveal a foundational level of the institution of the subject from a passivity/sensibility void of any kind of comprehension or activity. I argue that the kind of "origin" of subjectivity Levinas aims to reveal is untenable. There is no getting below the intentional relation, other than through an abstract account, and this one can do only in the kind of thinking and theorizing Levinas criticizes in his notions of totalitarianism and economy.

Implicit in Levinas's project is the aim to unravel the traditional dualities of reason/sense (emotion), passivity/activity, interiority/exteriority and the Same/Other by attempting to think outside of dualistic thought altogether. I argue that Levinas does not succeed in moving out of dualistic thought. In fact, rather than radically breaking out of dualistic thought with its attendant hierarchies, Levinas merely reverses the traditional dualities he deals with. His reformulation of subjectivity as a divided subject, the subject of enjoyment and the subject of Desire, recasts the traditional notion of a rational subject into a subject that is first and foremost a sensing subject. Reason and sensibility are thoroughly separated from each other – the sensing subject is not the subject of thought, at least not a thought tied to any traditional views of rationality. However, reason of a sort does return in Levinas' thought in the form of Truth and Justice tied to a particularly Platonic notion of the Good. More dangerously, the subject of

thought/reason is presented as essentially violent – knowledge of any kind is viewed through an optics of "totality." Passivity *essentially* defines subjectivity, not activity. There is also a hierarchical sensibility at work within subjectivity – the subject of enjoyment is little more than an "animal" merrily appropriating the world around her, while the subject of Desire is characterized by an obligation and responsibility that she does not choose and cannot understand or comprehend in any way. The subject moves between the "animal" and "human".

I suggest that Levinas' divided subject is a subject at war with herself. The authentic subject of Desire must renounce the animal complacency of the other self, the subject of enjoyment. She must devour the will in order to ascend to the infinity of the Other's face. Ethics is instituted in the subjugation of the Same (i.e. the subject) to the Other. In such a view, war is the condition, the ground, for Ethics. Rather than move out of dualistic thought Levinas merely reverses the hierarchies he isolates within the thinking of "totality".

Part One: Enjoyment and Insecurity

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas suggests that the subject is firstly a subject of enjoyment, a subject determined by consumption. The subject, in this view, is a being that appropriates things in the world making them her *own*, Levinas calls this subject the Same. The Same designates a tendency in Western philosophy to characterize subjectivity as a being which subsumes all otherness into hegemonic sameness. Levinas (1969: 21–22) ties this to a bankruptcy of ethics and to the equation of ethics and politics, where politics is understood as the play of power. Politics as the play of power has as its aim the domination over all otherness. Ethics tied to power acts in a subsidiary role as the justifier of totalitarian politics aimed at oppression and subjugation. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas presents the history of Western philosophy as "totalizing." By "totality" Levinas understands a tendency in phil-

osophical thinking to reduce difference(s) to identity, an identity which he associates with a certain view of subjectivity. This reductionism within philosophy mirrors a similar tendency in politics to reduce individuals to a “numerical multiplicity,” this is to reduce a plurality of individuals to the “State” (Levinas 1969: 42–48; 122–127; 220–226). Levinas associates philosophy and politics and then claims that both lead to violence – war. In opposition to “totality” Levinas presents the idea of infinity (borrowed largely from Descartes’s *Meditations*) and the face-to-face encounter that discloses the *meaning* of Ethics. The meaning of Ethics in a nutshell is the responsibility we each *should* have to the “Other”. The “Other” is epitomized not by those we are familiar with and *know* but by the stranger or neighbour who is destitute and calls on us to respond to her plight. Peace, in such thinking, is reduced to the avoidance of war but of course this is only on the assumption that the natural state of humankind is war and that peace is nothing more than a deferral of this state. Levinas wants to redeem the meaning of peace through a rethinking of ethics as the first philosophy. Peace is tied to responsibility and is given priority over totalitarianism (i.e. politics) (Levinas 1969: 220–226). War is always a possibility but not the *condition* of peace; in fact, war presupposes the peace, discourse; and, so, ethics (Levinas 1969: 150) and peace, discourse and ethics are not symmetrical relations between persons but essentially *asymmetrical* relations between *unequals* arranged in a hierarchy.

Levinas’ first step in reforming peace is to show that the subject is first and foremost a subject of enjoyment. The subject enjoys what she lives from, the air one breathes, the water she drinks, the food she eats and of course the earth that supports her: life is good (Levinas 1969: 144–147). The intentionality of act which Levinas claims is the only explicit intentionality Husserl operates within suggests a kind of representationalism. Essentially, Levinas is critical of a definition of intentionality that assumes sensations are animated by an act of consciousness, which is, of course a criticism of the structure

of intentionality that we find in Husserl’s early works. The subject receives sensations which are meaningless till one performs an act of meaning bestowing upon them – in such a view the immediacy *with which* and emotive ways *in which* things are given to us in lived experiences are reduced to a cognitive or perceptual model. According to Levinas, this view cannot sufficiently describe experiences outside an objective paradigm – experiences such as the satisfaction of hunger. Levinas’ descriptions of erotic love, enjoyment and vulnerability aim at describing just these kinds of experiences. In a similar vein to Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Levinas suggests that in the immediacy of walking, talking or eating I am not first a conscious being that imposes order on my universe but a subject immersed in the world and my projects. My relationships to the things around me are infused by my emotive life – my needs and desires, my fears and prejudices. Without stating it in these terms Levinas is essentially describing a distinction that current phenomenologists, such as Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry, will make between a phenomenon, which would fall into the matter/form structure of intentionality, and a phenomenality that *precedes* the intentional relation – the passivity of our initial exposure to the world, others and even ourselves – this would be a description of the pre-cognitive immanent content of experience. The subject of enjoyment lives at home with herself, she is self-satisfied and self-sufficient. Levinas claims that the psyche of enjoyment “maintains itself all by itself”. Levinas ties this self-sufficiency to “atheism” and correlates this atheism with need. Atheism is also the enactment of a free will – the being that wills a suspension of belief in what is prior to her and her “cause” – the Other. The transition to the Other (the face) is a transition to Desire, which is radically differentiated from the need of enjoyment (Levinas 1969: 54). However, life also causes insecurity; the very elements that sustain us can withdraw into “nothingness” leaving us destitute and hungry. The “nothingness” Levinas refers to is the “uncertainty of the future”. Levinas explains “labour” as the ability to secure en-

joyment (Levinas 1969: 146). So, while we are subject to nature (i.e. elements) through our labour we can assure ourselves a measure of security. Labour is also the first step towards society since it entails possession which gives rise to economy. And, without possession and economy, the trappings of "society", the subject could not move beyond her enjoyment to the height of the Other. In one sense the "dwelling" or the "home" already require possession, already presuppose an economy at work (Levinas 1969: 157). This exposition of the subject of enjoyment should not be understood as if it unfolded in a linear or historical time (i.e. the subject of enjoyment *precedes* the subject of ethics), rather the movement is one of coming to self-consciousness (or, at the very least to a higher order of consciousness than that in which the subject of enjoyment lives). The movement from the subject of enjoyment to the subject of Desire is an internalized affair and in one sense operates outside of time/temporality altogether. Ethics is, then, a way for a self-interested subject, an interiorized and separated being, to move towards goodness and altruism. However, Levinas also indicates that from the moment of birth we are already steeped in altruism. Since the "home" already "refers us to...the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcome in itself – the feminine being" (Levinas 1969: 157). Levinas claims:

In the happiness of enjoyment is enacted the individuation, the auto-personification, the substantialization, and the independence of the self, a forgetting of the infinite depths of the past and the instinct that resumes them. Enjoyment is the very production of a being that is born, that breaks the tranquil eternity of its seminal or uterine existence to enclose itself in a person, who in living from the world lives at home with itself (1969: 147).

The notion of separation is crucial for Levinas, without it the distance he wants to maintain between the Same and the Other would collapse. The Other cannot be "irreducible" (and the relation with the Same be one of asymmetry) if the self is not enclosed, solitary, separated. There is an ethical exigency that drives the necessity of

this separation: ethics is only possible beginning with the "I". Responsibility is not shared or reciprocal for Levinas (1969: 245), it is the affair of an "I", an "I" that no one can assist or accept responsibility for. The basis of this lone responsibility is in the sensibility that lies at the heart of an isolated subject. The subject in appropriating the things of the world, making them her own, in a sense lives in the immanence of enjoyment this appropriation assures. One lives within the sensibility of the enjoyment and not, as it were, *in opposition to or correlation with the things of the world*. There is also a reformulation of epistemology and politics at work here – truth and justice are not objectively rendered (however, this does not mean they are subjective.) Reason cleansed of any problematic residues of adequation, apodicticity or evidence, discloses a realm of Truth and Justice beyond all discourse on Being (Levinas 1969: 90–91). It would seem the passage to the Other requires not just a transcending of oneself (I forgo my "satisfaction"/need) but also a transcending of any objective or universal notions of truth and justice through a Desire that leads to Truth and Justice paradoxically beyond and of *this world*. The Other acts to found the Same, retrospectively in the order of time, but first in the order of causality (i.e. birth, maternity and fecundity already attest to the sense in which we are all "created") (Levinas 1969: 49–50). The claim is that the real Truth and Justice are not something we can articulate (and this view shares affinities with Plato's claim in his *Seventh Letter*.) However, reason purified of its instrumental excesses can give us an idea of an infinite Truth and Justice. However, this idea of infinity *shows* itself, though not "visibly" in the face and can be *heard* in discourse with the Other and not in the realm of the subject of enjoyment who lives within a system of totality and economy (Levinas 1969: 60–64). Essentially, through an odd sort of "reduction", Levinas's position leads to the conclusion that the foundation of ethics *and* epistemology is not in the ego as a content but as an idea that overflows the ego – Infinity. The basis of all objectivity is found not in the kind of certitude that assures eternal

knowledge (i.e. a reduction to a static world) but in the ethical exigency that founds *real* knowledge as *justification* before certitude (Levinas 1969: 90). Before we are the type of creatures that represent and appropriate, we are first and foremost creatures that are called upon to justify themselves – epistemology and politics are only possible on the basis of ethics. Levinas states:

Justice would not be possible without the singularity, the unicity of subjectivity. In this justice subjectivity does not figure as a formal reason, but as individuality; formal reason is incarnate in a being only in the measure that it loses its election and is equivalent to all the others. Formal reason is incarnate only in a being that does not have the strength to suppose that, under the visible that is history, there is the invisible that is judgement (1969: 246).

The idea of infinity is the ground of representational thought, as its motivation, if not as its end or goal. The call to justify ourselves requires a separated, lone subject that is as irreducible as the Other that calls it to justice (i.e. none of us can be one of many – an instance of the universal, each of us is singular, an ipseity) (Levinas 1969: 118). Separation is not the process of a being becoming rational but is the condition of a subject immersed in enjoyment.

My satisfaction is not something I can share; I am so immersed in my happiness or enjoyment, in the immanence of interiority that no other can come to break the spell. This makes sense since the joy with which I, for example, devour a mango, the varied sensations, texture, taste, smell, the pleasures that flow through me, are not something I can share with another, even the one who sits beside me enraptured with his own satisfaction. What is interesting about Levinas' account is that separation is not attributed to a rational sphere of life but to the affective sphere. My separation is affected at the moment I am born, not as I become more and more of a "thinking" rational creature. Yet, there is a possible objection to this view, one inspired by my observations of my five month old nephew, Arjun. Arjun is in many ways the epitome of enjoyment, there does not appear to be a lot

of "thought" to his appropriation of the world (though he does have the capacity to learn and arguably this already implies the beginnings of thought). Everything that he comes into contact with is something to touch, to chew on, to suck, to pull, the world is at his disposal, even those of us enamoured by him and at his beck and call. Yet, I recently observed an interesting transition to the level of appropriation that seems to entail more than Levinas seems to suggest in the relationship of the subject to the elements. Already a discrimination that Levinas' notion of sensibility does not deal with is seeping into little Arjun's enjoyment. He has just recently started eating solids and the look on his face as he is introduced to new foods is far from enjoyment, instead you can almost see an attempt to *comprehend* this new texture and flavour, his look of confusion and consternation is palpable. He applies the same kind of concentration to new surroundings or new toys. In Levinas' perspective the attempt to understand is distinct from the sensibility of our initial exposure to things or the world. But isn't it possible that there is a more intimate relationship between sensibility and comprehension than Levinas allows? While Levinas captures the elusive immediacy of our contact with the world (and this immediacy is evident in our contact with Others as well), does this 'reduction' to a sphere of sensibility *abstract* from our concrete experience where comprehension is woven into our sensibility in a way that is inseparable (*other than through an act of abstraction*)? Before Arjun even has a verbal language with which to express the world, he already seems to *comprehend it through sensibility*. Arjun's introduction to new sensations already at an operative level makes use of a rudimentary capability to differentiate and assess options and I would suggest this is the beginning of all comprehension, in fact of our capacity to reason. If 'reason' or the comprehension that Levinas wants to associate with "totalitarianism" already infuses sensibility, the reduction to the sphere of sensibility offers at best an abstraction of lived experience. It offers insight into a sphere of passivity but without an

account of our activity, our taking up of enjoyment, it offers a one-sided account of our actual experience. What is more troubling is that Levinas is seeking an *origin* of the meaning of experience, of ethics, *through this one-sided abstraction*. My point is not just that sensation requires some kind of fully cognitive overlay to be meaningful but that there is an interweaving of sensation and cognition in even the simplest experiences. Whether this can be said of higher levels of sensibility such as the higher levels of the emotive sphere or not is crucial to the distinction that Levinas maintains between the subject of enjoyment and the subject of Desire. If Levinas maintains a unique intentionality at work in enjoyment, the transition to the face to face encounter breaks out intentionality altogether. The sensibility of enjoyment is radically differentiated from the sensibility of Desire.

Part Two: Desire and The Other

If the need is the “force” that drives the subject of enjoyment, then Desire as a longing that cannot be fulfilled is what allows the subject immersed in one’s own happiness to transcend one’s security and isolation. Desire is always for the Other, for Truth and Justice (Levinas 1969: 34; 62). Levinas states: “The Other does not affect us as what must be surmounted, enveloped, dominated, but as other, independent of us: behind every relation we could sustain with him, an absolute upsurge” (Levinas 1969: 89). This “absolute upsurge” announces the irreducibility of the Other – I encounter a face not within a representational mode of thought where the knower (i.e. cognition) affects or alters the known nor in the kind of intentionality that Levinas describes as the intentionality of enjoyment, but in a mode of letting be that allows the face to manifest itself as Other. The face is not reducible to the image of the person in front of me and Levinas is clear that there is a perceptual bias running throughout Western philosophy that misses the *way* in which an Other is manifested. Levinas claims that:

In effect, the being who speaks to me and to whom I respond or whom I interrogate does not offer himself to me, does not give himself so that I could assume this manifestation, measure it to my own interiority, and receive it as come from myself. Vision operates in this manner, totally impossible in discourse. For vision is essentially an adequation of exteriority with interiority... (1969: 295).

The Other does not appear as a phenomenon but as a call or command. Because the Other does not appear as a phenomenon, the Other metaphorically breaks out of the temporal structure within which other phenomena appear – terms like “trauma” are meant to indicate this ‘outside’ of all temporal unfolding. It is in the discourse I have with another that the face-to-face takes place and opens me to the height of the Other. In fact, Levinas goes much further, through some questionable uses of the notion of heredity, both biological (i.e. fecundity/maternity/paternity/fraternity) and causal (i.e. God), Levinas claims that the subject is a creature, a created being (Levinas 1969: 293). And, as such, owes a debt that can never be repaid except through an absolute submission, “where what is possible is not measured by a reflection on oneself, as in the for-itself” (Levinas 1981: 112). While Levinas never refers to this indebtedness of the creature as operating within an economy, his description of the relation between the Same and the Other describes a primitive (perhaps primordial?) economy at work. Since the subject of enjoyment owes her life, her happiness to an Other, she owes an immeasurable debt, a debt that even her death cannot repay. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969: 234), Levinas claims my death is not my own but for the Other, while in *Otherwise than Being* (1981: 15) he suggests “a sacrifice without reserve.” In the interval between birth and death such a subject is responsible for the Other “[a] subject is a hostage” even substituting herself for the Other by taking the Other’s burden of responsibility (Levinas 1981: 112–118). *I do not choose this responsibility*, I am elected (possibly) by the Good (Levinas 1981: 116). While the path from need

to Desire is presented as the ascent to Truth and Justice in *Totality and Infinity* (a path opened by the face), in *Otherwise than Being* the Other is discovered at the heart of subjectivity as proximity. Proximity does not signal a nearness in physical space or an approximation in thought but what Levinas calls “a restlessness, a null site, outside of the place of rest” (Levinas 1981: 82). Proximity refers to a socialized time and place so “approach, neighbourhood [and] contact” better describe it (Levinas 1981: 81). While the separation between the same and the Other was absolute in *Totality and Infinity*, in the transition to proximity the Other is inscribed within the same (as a “trace” of alterity within the subject). This should not be taken as if an intentionality of another order is at work (i.e. not “objective”, “transitive” or an intentionality of enjoyment), since this is a non-intentional relation. Levinas claims: “Proximity as a suppression of distance suppresses the distance of consciousness of...” (Levinas 1981: 89). The subject is *obsessed* with the Other and this is not a fusion of the subject and the Other but a command (i.e. a responsibility imposed upon me, a kind of traumatic advent, before I am even *self-conscious* and perhaps before I am even a subject in any sense – an ego). The subject is “one-for-the-other” (Levinas 1981: 86). Levinas (1981: 87) describes this relation as a pre-conscious experiences (my term, not Levinas’) because he wants to signal a distinction between “cognition” and a “kinship [fraternity] outside of all biology, ‘against all logic’”. Even before the economic order (i.e. politics and philosophy) comes to rend the subject into two, to make the subject *self-conscious*, the Other has already infected me through Desire. If the duality of the subject of enjoyment and the ethical subject created a war within the ego, this was because before there was any subject there was a “null site” that already left a trace of something completely foreign, the stranger, the neighbour, the Other (not known but never anonymous). The transition from the position in *Totality and Infinity* to the position of *Otherwise than Being* moves from an auto-personification (i.e. an au-

to-affection) betrayed through an inherent conflict *within* the Same to the origin of this warring subject as escape from itself in the face of the Other. My “origin” first *appears* as obsession, proximity, responsibility and, eventually, my substitution for the Other. Before this origin there is nothing (Levinas 1981: 113). The meaning of ethics is otherwise than Being and beyond essence. It is only when a strange reduction (a reduction of all reductions) is accomplished that this *meaning* is revealed. In fact, Being and essence can only arise if the foundation of both is inscribed (in an immemorial past that cannot be recuperated) *within* the subject, before it ever *is* a subject, by an Other.

The ego is not just a being endowed with certain qualities called moral which it would bear as a substance bears attributes, or which it would take on as accidents in its becoming. Its exceptional uniqueness in the passivity or the passion of the self is the in-cessant event of subjection to everything, of substitution. It 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” (Levinas 1981: 117).

The origin here is described as an “anarchic passivity”, a passivity that precedes the empirical order and so the empirical ego. This passivity “more passive than all passivity” opens humanity, the subject, to “its subjection to everything, its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility” (Levinas 1981: 14). The role of the body as that which can be tortured and subjugated acts as a medium upon which passivity paradoxically acts. Levinas claims that the face is not given perceptually, it is not given to vision. If it is the vulnerability of the Other that the face exposes, it seems that the body of the Other, perceptually given, through a broadened perception that also includes more than the visual, should be my access to this vulnerability and vice versa (i.e. I am vulnerable because I am incarnate). While all this sounds rather mystical, the point is that subjectivity is intersubjectively constituted and that an ethical exigency precedes both being and essence. However, this is not the only point, this subject is not mere-

ly how or what she is because of the intersubjective world within which she becomes *herself* but is *never* oneself because of this world of Others. The Levinasian subject is a fugitive from the infectiousness of all transcendence elemental and Other, she is the subject of enjoyment and economy or one is a fugitive from herself, a fugitive who resorts to a metaphorical cannibalism of her identity, one's will. "[T]he contracting of an ego, going to the hither side of identity, gnawing away at this very identity – identity gnawing away at itself – in a remorse" (Levinas 1981: 114). In the former case she is an imperialist subject who from time to time, is master of the universe, at one with oneself, while in the latter case one transcends the empirical self and realizes her true humanity through substitution. Levinas is clear that the latter is the meaning of ethics – the ethical subject assumes the burden of responsibility not for herself but for all the Others. The self must be vigilant, must resist the temptation to rest within herself, to return to an identity with oneself. Levinas (1981: 114) actually claims that there is no identity of self if we assume this is an adequation/coinciding of self with herself. The really ethical subject is the one that suffers not just for herself but for all the others. Auto-affection, though for Levinas this is always an imperfect auto-affection infected by the transcendence of the elemental, is superseded by hetero-affection which continuously traumatizes the immanence of subjectivity.

But is this right? Levinas (1981: 117) also claims that proximity leads to substitution. And, substitution it turns out is the "putting oneself in the place of the other." In hetero-affection Levinas claims that:

I am outside of any place, in myself, on the hither side of the autonomy of auto-affection and identity resting on itself. Impassivity undergoing the weight of the other, thereby called to uniqueness, subjectivity no longer belongs to the order where the alternative of activity and passivity retains its meaning. We have to speak here of expiation as uniting identity and alterity. The ego is not an entity "capable" of expiating for the others: it is this original expiation (1981: 118).

If the passivity of substitution is a sensibility that opens subjectivity to the other before an ego comes on the scene, and this subjectivity in proximity can actually take on the other's responsibility, what comes to separate the "I" of responsibility and the Other? If no intentionality comes to distance the "I" and other, to the point where I can take his place, do we not return to a murderous auto-affection just where we should have left auto-affection once and for all? Levinas argues that it is not that the other is *subsumed* within the immanence of subjectivity but that the subject fleeing herself is now open to the other, but this seems to suggest a tyranny of the Other. It is only through a symbolic suicide and vigilant sacrifice that I can really *be* for the other. The subject in her self-destruction takes on the Other's role. Levinas (1981: 15) goes so far as to say that being Good, though this be violent, redeems the violence of alterity. Some kinds of violence are justified: the violence of the Good. Ethics and violence are not opposed.

Conclusion

Throughout Levinas' two texts we see a reversal of the dualities within traditional philosophy. However, merely reversing the hierarchical order of dualisms can do little to really reform the problems Levinas locates in politics and philosophy. If the Other were truly the infinite One who always escapes my grasp, my comprehension, I could not be responsible in any sense of the term. I could not see in the face of the stranger someone with whom I could talk, someone I could listen to. Instead, as in the fable of the tower of Babel, communication would be impossible, not because we have ears to hear but because we do not listen but because without *any common ground* there would be just noise and no discourse. And discourse for Levinas is an unthematizable saying always transformed through an interpretative violence into the said. The said is the saying of an Other viewed through the prism of the Same – it would appear that actually hear-

ing, saying in such a view would be impossible – ethics as peace would result in a complete silence. In fact, Derrida (1978: 116–117), in “Violence and Metaphysics” suggests that peace in Levinas’ sense is silence. Though Derrida’s argument is more nuanced and suggests that discourse, in which he accepts a kind of violence, is motivated by a telos of peace.

Levinas’ descriptions of a level of experience characterized by sensibility and a paradoxical immanence always infected with a transcendence that resists appropriation are insightful but there is a danger in suggesting a foundational role for such a level of experience. The notion of “origin” in classical phenomenology is tied to the genesis of meaning within experience, a genesis that is revealed by a method that recognizes the importance of *and* limitations to abstractions, while also realizing that its work

is retrospective and re-constructive. If “totality” is tied to dualist thought with its inherent hierarchies, the way out of such violence cannot be in merely reversing the dualities of politics and philosophy and instituting new hierarchies, since this would merely be a return to totalitarianism.

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JAUSMINGUMAS IR SUBJEKTYVUMAS: LEVINO TRAUMINIS SUBJEKTAS

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Levino vartojamų jausmingumo ir subjektyvumo sąvokų svarba tampa akivaizdi analizuojant šiuolaikinių fenomenologų, tokių kaip Jean-Luc Marion ir Michel Henry, fenomenologinio metodo reviziją. Ypač minėtina kertinių klasikinės fenomenologijos temų – intencionalumo ir redukcijos – kritika. Tačiau problemiškas ir pats Levino pateikiamas subjektyvumo kaip jausmingumo apibūdinimas. *Totalybėje ir Begalybėje* bei *Kitaip nei Būtis* Levinas kritikuoja ir pataiso tradicinę subjektyvumo sampratą, pirmiausia subjekto kaip racionalios esybės pateikimą. Anot Levino, subjektui būdingesnis jausminis jautrumas nei gebėjimas samprotauti ir paveikti savo pasaulį. Levinas susieja racionalumą su išskaičiavimu ir pasiūlo alternatyvią mąstymo sampratą, kuri veda prie jo paties pateiktos etinės santykio kaip susidūrimo „veidu į veidą“ analizės. Socialinių santykių „kilmė“ glūdi ne mūsų sugebėjime pažinti, bet veikiau jausmingume, kuris yra diametraliai priešingas protui, suprantamam kaip išskaičiavimas. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad Levino filosofijoje išskylanti opozicija tarp protingumo ir jausmingumo yra problemiška ir iš esmės veda prie savi-konfliktiško subjekto. Tai reikštų, kad subjekto santykį su pačiu savimi charakterizuoja prievarta, kartu sudarydama socialinių santykių pagrindą. Todėl, užuot įveikęs problemiškas dualistines filosofijos tendencijas, Levinas paprasčiausiai apverčia tradicines proto/emocijų, subjekto/objekto bei savasties/Kito hierarchijas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Levinas, jausmingumas/afektacija, supratimas/protas, subjektyvumas, Kitas, prievarta.

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