SHIFTING BOUNDARIES
An Ontology of with-being

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Declaration

I declare that to the best of my knowledge, unless where cited, this thesis is my original work.

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Thesis Abstract

Shifting Boundaries-An Ontology of with-being

The significance of ontological inquiry is in the midst of a radical shift that began in the 20th Century with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, in re-opening the question of being, *die Seinsfrage*, challenged many of the metaphysical assumptions underpinning traditional approaches to ontology and in doing so re-conceptualised the notion of ontology itself. This re-conceptualisation has re-invigorated philosophical investigations into the understanding of the human, the world and the relationship between the two, which has in turn impacted in the areas of ethics and politics. In short, ontology can no longer be conceived of naively as one science amongst others; instead ontology, ethics and politics must be thought together.

Of critical importance to this thesis will be an examination of how alternative approaches to ontology conceive of the 'conjunction' or spacing of being; that is, how these various approaches think relationality. I will argue that traditional approaches, going back as far as Aristotle, are concerned with what I will call 'and-being'. That is, they typically conceive of the world as containing a range of distinct entities which are then brought into conjunction, after the fact. Relationality, in this way, is appended to existing beings, or to use Jean-Luc Nancy's phrase 'across the whole history of philosophy, being-with is subordinated to being'[1].

The problem is that the 'with' conjunction is reduced, or simplified, to the 'and' conjunction, which commits a certain violence to 'with' relationality because the 'and' grounds a different set of logical, ethical and political relations. More specifically, and-being tends to fix beings and create distance between them, whereas with-being emphasises proximity, co-respondence and fluidity—'and-being' tends to make static and rigid ontological distinctions, whereas 'with-being' is concerned with openness, movement and shifting boundaries.

This thesis explores the ontological shift to 'with-being' inspired by Martin Heidegger and the ethical and political development of with-being through the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy.

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[1]Nancy, Jean-Luc *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, p32

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Introduction – The Primacy of the 'with'

> Philosophy is, in sum, the thinking of being-with…It is just as much a question of doing justice to the essential reasons for why, across the whole history of philosophy, being-with is subordinated to Being and, at the same time and according to this very subordination, is always asserting its problem as the very problem of Being. In sum, being-with is Being's own most problem.
>
> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*[1]

The significance of ontological inquiry is in the midst of a radical shift that began in the 20th Century with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, in re-opening the question of being, *die Seinsfrage*, challenged many of the metaphysical assumptions underpinning traditional approaches to ontology and in doing so re-conceptualised the notion of ontology itself. This re-conceptualisation has re-invigorated philosophical investigations into the understanding of the human, the world and the relationship between the two, which have in turn impacted in the areas of ethics and politics. In short, ontology can no longer be conceived of naively as one science amongst others; instead ontology, ethics and politics must be thought together. This, of course, would seem a large claim to some philosophers, particularly those who still have sympathies for the traditional understanding of ontology and its metaphysical presuppositions. Further, others may find it hard to give up on traditional ontology because it grounds various approaches to ethics and politics such as deontology, utilitarianism, contract theory and classical liberalism. However, there are many thinkers such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Ernesto Laclau, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-

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[1]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2000, p32

Luc Nancy who think the claim obvious and justify Carsten Strathausen's conclusion that 'the term "ontology" occupies an increasingly prominent place in current politico-philosophical discourse'.[2] Regardless, the aims of this thesis are to outline the concerns with traditional approaches to ontology, trace the ripples of the ontological shift since Heidegger, and to explore the ways that ontology, ethics and politics are inextricably linked through with-being.

Of critical importance to this thesis will be to examine how alternative approaches to ontology conceive of the 'conjunction', or spacing of being, differently; that is, how these various approaches think about relationality. I will argue that traditional approaches, going back as far as Aristotle, are concerned with what I will call 'and-being'. That is, they typically conceive of the world as containing a range of distinct entities which can be brought into conjunction, after the fact, according to various laws: for example the laws of nature. Relationality, in this way, is appended to existing beings. Or to use Jean-Luc Nancy's phrase 'across the whole history of philosophy, being-with is subordinated to being'.

The alternative, which can be found in Heidegger's philosophy, and which Nancy, amongst others, champions, is to think being first and foremost relationally; that is, it is only on the basis of relationality that world and entities exist as such. I will refer to those ontologies that are concerned with being starting from relationality as with-being. It is important for the sake of clarity to emphasise that the term with-being is meant to encompass the conjunction or spacing of all of being. As such, it is to be distinguished from Heidegger's term *mitsein*, or being-with, which describes the

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[2]Strathausen, C 'A Critique of Neo-Left Ontology' in *Postmodern Culture* 16(3), 2006, p1

relationship between human beings. *Mitsein,* in this way, should be considered a subset, albeit an important one, of with-being. Nancy in particular has a tendency to use being-with in both senses, which can lead to confusion; a confusion I hope to avoid in this thesis with this terminological distinction.

Returning then to Nancy's assertion that 'being-with is subordinated to being'; although he is indeed referring to the narrower category of *mitsein* in this instance, I would suggest that this subordination also applies to the broader concept of with-being. The problem in both cases is that the 'with' conjunction is reduced, or simplified, to the 'and' conjunction, which commits a certain violence to 'with' relationality because the 'and' invokes a different set of logical relations. More specifically, and-being tends to fix beings and create distance between them, whereas with-being emphasises proximity, co-respondence and fluidity—and-being tends to make static and rigid ontological distinctions, whereas with-being is concerned with openness, movement and shifting boundaries.

What I am concerned about is how these different ontological assumptions (whether explicit or assumed) capture relationality and in doing so effect the very relations which they try to capture. In this way, the violent reduction of with-being to and-being, I will argue, harms relationality itself. The claim is, that the difference between these two types of ontology is more than just of abstract philosophical interest, but that ontology (whether explicit or assumed) is intimately linked to our practical engagement with the world and each other. It is this claim and the implications of this claim that I will examine in this thesis.

In developing my argument, I will begin in chapter 1 by outlining the ontological understanding of and-being, beginning with Aristotle, and tracing the thread of and-being through the philosophical tradition to the time of Heidegger. I will then provide an overview of the ontological ripples that began with Heidegger and introduce two of the key figures, who both interfere with and multiply these ripples, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy. These philosophers are particularly important to the question of with-being, and their engagement with Heidegger will prove important in terms of fleshing out the ethical and political significance of with-being.

In my second chapter, I will turn to the question of the violence of and-being. I will examine in more detail the logic of and-being and its implications for the epistemological, ethical and political traditions. In doing so I will demonstrate the inherent problems in reducing with-being to and-being and establish an impetus for a re-examination of ontology and the ontological conjunction.

Having established a need to rethink ontology and with-being, in chapters 3 and 4, I will turn to the first of three philosophers whom I will examine in some detail in terms of this task; Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, I will argue, presents a radical paradigm shift in our thinking of ontology and relationality that re-opens the question of with-being. In particular, his fundamental ontology and existential analysis of Da-sein introduces a dynamism and performativity into the relationship between the human and world which is missing from traditional essentialist ontologies, such as Aristotle's, which harbour the fixity and distance of the Platonic forms.

However, Heidegger's philosophy suffers from a lacuna when it comes to human relations and the ethical and political import of his shift. His analysis of *mitsein* is underdeveloped and is subordinated to his analysis of individual Da-sein and the historic engagement with the destiny of being consistent with the German romantic tradition. In chapter 5, we will consider some of the criticisms that can be levelled at Heidegger's philosophy in relation to our project and in particular, those that have relevance for the ethical and the political. This will lead us to a consideration of Emmanuel Levinas.

Levinas sees in Heidegger's philosophy the same kind of violence that we have suggested is contained in and-being—indeed for Levinas it is ontology itself that contains this possibility. In this way, Levinas considers Heidegger to be a continuation of, rather than a break from, the tradition. In chapters 6 and 7, I will explore the relationship between Heidegger and Levinas and Levinas's own attempts to discover an ethical imperative in the 'with'; an 'otherwise than being'. The main contribution of Levinas is a deeper exploration of our relationship with other people and his introduction of the notion of alterity as a basis for ethics.

However, Levinas's contribution is itself not without problems. I will argue, consistent with Nancy, that Levinas's insistence on the transcendence of the Other creates an onto-theology that itself does a violence to the plurality of existence. In chapter 8, I will consider Nancy's return to ontology in the form of being singular plural. I will show that Nancy's ontological prioritisation of the 'with' in with-being overcomes some of the problems of both Heidegger and Levinas by introducing the positive aspects of alterity into the world without the need for a transcendent God.

This move in turn, will open up the question of the political and community in a more fundamental way.

Finally, I will conclude by surveying the shifts we have described throughout the thesis and consider the implications and questions that these new understandings of with-being raise. A critical question will be the extent to which an ontology of with-being can overcome the violence inherent in and-being. Equally critical will be the outstanding issues that my analysis of with-being raises and possible directions for future research.

Chapter 1 – Ontological Ripples

> There is a certain kind of Science whose remit is the real qua the real and the things
> pertaining to that which is per se. This science is not the same as any of the
> departmental disciplines. For none of these latter engages in this general speculation
> about that which is qua that which is.
>
> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*[1]

> On the foundation of the Greek point of departure for the interpretation of being a
> dogma has taken shape which not only declares that the question of the meaning of
> being is superfluous but sanctions its neglect.
>
> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*[2]

Prior to any theorising, human beings might be said to encounter the world on the

basis of what Husserl called the natural attitude. That is, on a day to day basis we

encounter a world populated by a variety of things—trees, desks, animals, sun,

moon, stars, people and so on. As Husserl puts it:

> I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly
> becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of
> it: that signifies above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that
> I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so
> forth…corporeal physical things are simply there for me 'on
> hand'…Animate beings too, human beings, let us say are
> immediately there for me.[3]

Thus, if one were to ask the philosophically naïve person the ontological question

'what is', the likely response would be either a list of specific entities in the world, or

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[1]Aristotle *The Metaphysics*. Translated by Hugh Lawson Tancred, London: Penguin 1998, p79
[2]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh, Albany: State University of New
York Press, 1996
[3]Husserl, E *Ideas I*. Translated by F Kersten, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1982, p51

a generalised appeal to corporeal physical 'things'. They would take this basic ontological understanding for granted and interact with the world accordingly.

Philosophers and scientists however, since the time of the early Greek philosophers, have sought to delve deeper into this question of 'what is'. They have tried to understand both the specific nature of these 'things' and the general nature of what it means to be a 'thing' in the first place. The answers to these more fundamental questions have become known as the science of ontology, and as Aristotle puts it, this is a science whose 'remit is the real *qua* the real and the things pertaining to that which "is" *per se*'.[4] The early Greek philosophers such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Plato and, of course, Aristotle himself, took ontology very seriously and developed different ideas around the cause of being, the basic composition or elements of 'things', non-being, the possibility of change and related topics. For these philosophers ontology was still an open and debatable field of philosophical investigation. But since Aristotle, Heidegger suggests, the question of being has largely been forgotten. While I think this is somewhat of an overstatement by Heidegger, since there are certainly philosophers since Aristotle who have considered ontological questions, for example Spinoza and Bergson, he does draw our attention to an epoch largely dominated by epistemological questions and a certain, often presupposed, ontological understanding of being as beings that can be found in Aristotle and the natural attitude. So how and why does Aristotle develop this ontological understanding?

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[4]Aristotle *Metaphysics,* p79

1.1 The displacement of ontology

Aristotle suggests that 'all men long to know'.[5] Reasoning and deeper ontological understandings build on our experience and lead to wisdom.

> The man of experience is thought to be wiser than the man who has just any perception of a subject, the craftsman wiser than the man of experience, the designer wiser than the artisan and the theoretical sciences wiser than the productive ones.[6]

Two things, however, emerge from this hierarchy of wisdom. The first is the priority given to the science of ontology, which because of its generality and foundational nature, is the most profound area of philosophical investigation. The second is that Aristotle considers ontology a question of theoretical knowledge to be pursued through contemplation as a part of the way of life of the philosopher. This *vita contemplativa* finds the philosopher:

> Devoted to inquiry into and contemplation of, things eternal, whose everlasting beauty can neither be brought about through the producing interference of man nor changed through his consumption of them.[7]

Ontological wisdom, for Aristotle, is thus to be found in 'man's' search for, and independent access to, the principles and causes that reveal the eternal beauty of the world. In short, the human is given God-like observer status which can be used to discover the truth about the world and the 'things' in it. In this way, Aristotle

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[5]Aristotle *Metaphysics*, p4
[6]Aristotle *Metaphysics*, p6
[7]Arendt, H *The Human Condition*. Second edition, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p13

prioritises *theoria* over *praxis* and knowledge over other human action which may interfere with the world. He even goes so far as to suggest such theorising need not have any practical purpose at all, but be mere 'indulgence' and still count as wisdom and be admired 'because of its very uselessness'.[8]

For Aristotle, the ontological imperative is already underwritten by our natural inclination to search for knowledge, wisdom and eternal truth. Aristotle, by privileging the theoretical, and already assuming a knower/known distinction, is prioritising epistemology over ontology which is driven by an epistemological gap between the knower and what it is possible to know. Aristotle is searching for the *logos* of an *ontos*, and thus, while ontological knowledge is the highest form of wisdom, it is still subordinated to the epistemological quest.

This emphasis on epistemology and the distance between the knower and the known is made even greater by the results of Aristotle's ontological analysis. In the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle adopts as a starting point the natural attitude towards the world and develops a hylemorphic ontology proposing that, fundamentally, entities are substance composed of matter and form. While there are nine other categories of being, such as quality and quantity, these other categories are all manifested through being as substance. In this way, entities, including humans, are radically separated from each other by their substantive presence; with each presence 'containing' an essence, composed of various characteristics that it manifests, and that can be accessed by the wise philosopher. In this way, as Heidegger points out in his *Letter on Humanism,* Aristotle, like those after him, maintains Plato's split between

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[8]Aristotle *Metaphysics*, p6

essentia and *existentia* with the former taking precedence over the latter. What becomes important, is to discover the essential nature of the entities that populate the world and to conceptualise and categorise them. Existence, in general, is taken for granted. Clearly something must exist for its essence to be examined, but existence itself becomes a trivial bipolar predicate—either an entity is there to be examined or it isn't. Further, existence in the particular is inconsequential, that is, what is important philosophically is to know the essence of trees rather than whether a particular tree exists. The actual existence of a particular tree is independent of the possibility of trees in general. In this way too, the actual existence of a particular knower is independent of the other entities and their essences which the knower seeks to know. Thus, the epistemological gap has been widened further by the ontological separation and fixing of individual entities made up of substance.

If we accept Aristotle's ontological account based on the assumption of the natural attitude, then the critical philosophical questions of interest become epistemological and empirical ones. How can one entity, the knower, come to 'know' the world and the other entities in it, and how can the knower be certain of this knowledge? In other words how can we be sure that we have bridged the gap between knower and known effectively?

Returning to the question of the conjunction in Aristotle, we can make two observations. The first is that Aristotle's ontology clearly fits our description of an and-ontology. That is, Aristotle's ontology contains an understanding of with-being that is subordinated to being. By assuming the natural attitude, he accepts that first there exist these entities or beings in the world and then they come into contact—

relationality is added on to their being after the fact. Put differently, first there is 'this being' then there is 'that being' and then there is 'this *and* that being together'.

The second observation, is that we can already begin to see the emergence of various philosophical questions and problems that arise with an and-ontology through Aristotle's prioritisation of theory over praxis, knowledge over other action, and essence over existence. These dichotomous distinctions separate the human entity as knower from the other entities in the world, creating what I have called the epistemological gap. This gap manifests itself in the various conundrums that have faced the epistemological tradition—notably in the persistent forms of dualism and scepticism.

To begin to draw out these problems of the ontological reduction of with-being to and-being as it presents itself in epistemology, we briefly consider Descartes who widens this epistemological gap into a chasm.

1.1.1 The epistemological gap and scepticism

In Aristotle we saw the prioritisation of the epistemological imperative over the ontological and the development of an 'and' ontology that introduces an epistemological gap between the knower and the known. Yet for many of the Greeks, including Aristotle, this epistemological gap was not recognised because knowing was an engaged realist activity (a kind of empiricism) in contrast to what it becomes in later epistemological developments: Rene Descartes is a particular case in point. In Descartes we see a fundamental challenge to an empirical approach to knowledge

and truth and with it a widening of the epistemological gap through a strong

inside/outside or subject/object distinction, eventually resulting in a mind/body

(world) dualism.

Descartes, in *The Meditations*, like Parmenides, highlights the fallibility of the senses

as a way of calling into question the empirical path to certain knowledge *(scientia)*.

Seeking a mathematical certainty to our knowledge, Descartes employs a radical

scepticism to shear away the layers of experiential uncertainty to arrive at the logical

certainty of the existence of the *Cogito*. Of course, this epistemological strategy is

only made possible through the same kind of ontological 'and' assumptions as

Aristotle. That is, Descartes accepts and makes explicit the epistemological gap

between the knower and known, and the separation of the 'internal' thinking life of

the subject from the 'external' objective world, and via the sceptical method, widens

it even further. It should be noted, however, that it is only on the basis of the

separation and spacing of entities in and-being, that the sceptic, through the sceptical

method, has a crack that they can pry open. But once this gap is taken for granted,

scepticism, as Descartes shows, can blow the and-being of the world apart. That is,

there is no 'and' at all but only a solipsism with all the 'ands' really being a

reflection of the solipsist's mind— or at least put there by an evil demon.

It is worth recalling that although a radical scepticism and solipsism are possible

outcomes of Descartes' thought, these were not Descartes' projects. Indeed,

Descartes, as we mentioned, was attempting to find solid ground for our very belief

in and-being relations and the truth of these relations. In essence, he was implicitly

grappling with the problem of the reduction of with-being to and-being and so

exposes the 'and' conjunction and the prioritisation of being at its very heart. That is,

if we assume the ontological gap of the 'and' that underpins the epistemological gap, then the problem of the 'with' will always manifest itself as a need to explain the links between self-contained beings. In the case of Descartes, it manifests itself in the difficulty in obtaining certain knowledge, *scientia*, of the world from the seemingly isolated position of a singular existence. Put differently, we might express the problem as how to prove the existence of an 'other' if we start from the 'one'. In starting with the *Cogito,* Descartes shows us just how difficult this task can be, and not many philosophers today are convinced by his solution of appealing to a benevolent God to avoid solipsism. However, this solution is somewhat instructive, in that Descartes found the only way to solve the problem was to invoke the power of a pre-existing other that was able to underwrite our and-being. In a sense, this points the way to a potential solution, which is to reinstitute with-being, or a different kind of conjunction, as the primordial ontological condition. This is the potential solution that this thesis is attempting to explore.

Descartes' philosophy, then, highlights the problem of an and-ontology through its wedging open of the epistemological gap. It exposes a range of dichotomies and dualisms that still litter the landscape of the fields of epistemology and the philosophy of mind. In particular the problem of radical scepticism employed by Descartes is pursued to its logical limit by David Hume in his *Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning the principles of morals*[9], which importantly prompted Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*[10], to postulate a different understanding of our relationship with world to try and overcome the scepticism

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[9]Hume, D *Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning the principles of morals.* 3rd edition. Reprinted from the posthumous edition of 1777 and edited with introduction, comparative table of contents, and analytical index by LA Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975
[10]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason.* Translated by Norman Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan Press limited, 1929

created by the epistemological gap. This new understanding also provides the impetus to take ontology in a new direction.

1.1.2 Kant's active epistemology

I have argued that ontology, as understood by Aristotle, is the contemplation of the fundamental principles and causes of being understood as and-being. As such, Aristotle's approach takes for granted the natural attitude which encounters the world as collection of entities. This opens an ontological gap between entities which in turn grounds the epistemological gap that haunts the epistemological tradition in the form of scepticism, dualism and the various dichotomies that arise from a radical fixing and separation of entities. However, I have alluded to the fact that we cannot take this approach and these assumptions for granted. Instead, I have argued that we need to return to the question of with-being so as to re-conceive being, beginning with relationality. In the history of philosophy, as a continuation of the epistemological tradition, an important event that opens the possibility of such a return is Kant's so called Copernican revolution.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a response to the radical scepticism that had emerged in Descartes and Hume before him, Kant reconceptualises the relationship between the human and the world through his introduction of the active subject. That is, rather than the world being out there for the subject to discover independent and separate to it, the phenomenal world, the only world the subject has access to, emerges from the application of the pure concepts of the understanding (or categories) through judgement (the schemata) to sense impressions received through

intuition. Both the pure concepts and intuition are powers of the subject themselves, and thus world emerges, and is ordered, through the subject's active employment of these powers to the flux of movement and sensation that it encounters.

> But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not
> follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that
> even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive
> through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge
> (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from
> itself.[11]

These faculties thus provide for the 'pure schema of possible experience' which makes up the world, objective reality and truth.[12] Kant's solution to epistemological scepticism is to re-conceive the relationship between subject and object and our understanding of world. The categories, which for Aristotle were part of a pre-constituted world waiting to be discovered by the wise philosopher, are now a part of the philosopher's own subjectivity as their faculty for understanding. Objects then, emerge from the synthetic application of the categories of the understanding to the material provided to the subject by sensory intuition. Thus, the fundamental principles of the world are no longer contained wholly in an external world *per se*, but also in the structure of human understanding itself.

This is a double blow for Aristotle's conception of ontology because it means the ontological truths discovered about the world are really truths related to the structure of our own understanding, and we don't even have the possibility of independent access to the so-called 'things in themselves', either through philosophical contemplation or by divine proclamation. Thus, Kant provides an opening to revisit

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[11]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, B1
[12]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, A237

the nature of the question of being itself, with our own relationship to being as the primary focus.

In the literature there are two possible approaches to such ontological questioning that rests on the much debated interpretation of Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena. The first, focusing on Kant's epistemological project in *Critique of Pure Reason*, would suggest that epistemology and ontology collapse into one another. This is because for all intents and purposes the truth of our knowledge is indistinguishable from the true nature of the phenomenal world—the only world which we have access to and in which we could with certainty make ontological claims. It only makes sense to talk about existence in terms of the 'things as they appear' and we can make no sensible claims about the existence of 'things in themselves'. On this view, the noumenal, acts as a negative limiting concept epistemologically and has no ontological grounding in anything like a 'noumenal world'.[13] The argument for this position might proceed along the following lines.

First, it is clear from Kant's outline of his project at the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that he is concerned with the limits and application of pure reason to the fields to which it may be validly applied.

> For the chief question is always simply this:- what and how much
> can the understanding and reason know apart from all experience?[14]

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[13]See for instance Justus Hartnack's *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*. Translated by M Holmes Hartshore, London: Macmillan, 1968, pp89-90 for a straightforward articulation of this position, and/or Henry Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004 for a more elaborate development of this position.
[14]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axvii

His motivation for asking this question is also clear. He wishes to attack

metaphysics. He wants to demonstrate that the kind of reasoning employed in

metaphysical arguments, such as scepticism, for example, uses reason outside its

remit and is therefore misguided, mistaken and unsupportable. Kant's critique, on

this account, is fundamentally an epistemological project.

Second, in the context of this project, Kant outlines, as discussed, his view of the

active subject and the faculties that this subject brings to bear on the flux of sensation

so as to experience the phenomenal world. But he recognises that this human way of

knowing has its limitations and invokes the noumenal to act as a limiting

epistemological concept:

> For we cannot assert of sensibility that it is the sole possible kind of
> intuition. The concept of a noumenon is necessary, to prevent sensible
> intuition from being extended to things in themselves, and thus to
> limit the objective validity of sensible knowledge. The remaining
> things, to which it does not apply, are entitled noumena, in order to
> show that this knowledge cannot extend its domain over everything
> which the understanding thinks. But none the less we are unable to
> comprehend how such noumena can be possible, and the domain that
> lies out beyond the sphere of appearances is for us empty.[15]

This limit has a number of important features and functions in the context of Kant's

philosophy. It can be used as a response to metaphysics in the sense that Kant can

argue that metaphysics makes claims about the noumenal which are pure speculation

and are outside the scope of reason. This of course, is strictly in keeping with his

original project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It also leaves room for God and other

ways of knowing that are different from ours, and finally, although it leaves room for

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[15]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, B310

other ways of knowing, for us the noumena is simply a null set—or at least a set that contains only one element; the unknowable.

Third, using this epistemological understanding, he does not propose another world separate from our world. At worst, he admits different perspectives or ways of accessing the one world in the context of epistemology. Kant himself addresses just this question of world in the following:

> The division of objects into phenomena and noumena, and the world into a world of the senses and a world of the understanding, is therefore quite inadmissible in the positive sense, although the distinction of concepts as sensible and intellectual is certainly legitimate.[16]

With this understanding of the phenomenal world in mind, we can see several shifts from the Aristotelian or Greek understanding of world, ontology and being. We have come some way to reducing if not breaking down the knowing subject/world separation. The world is no longer simply out there for us to discover, but emerges from the interaction of knowing subject and flux of sensations. The categories and structure of being are no longer located external to the subject but are now a part of the subject themselves. Ontology now becomes as much a discovery of human beings as it does of the discovery of the nature of things given to us by a separate objective world. It also starts us down the path of considering the relationship between subject and object rather than simply taking for granted this dichotomy.[17]

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[16]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, B311
[17]See Rae Langton's *Kantian Humility*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 as an example of someone who wants to maintain a traditional and-ontology i.e. continue to claim that there are 'things' in the noumena, while recognising the relational aspects that Kant's analysis reveals. Her strategy is to distinguish between two types of properties in the world which encompass both phenomena and noumena: intrinsic properties, which exist in the things themselves and relational properties that exist and are the basis of the phenomenal. She thus wants to give ontological significance to the noumena

However, this first approach does not take into account the full body of Kant's work

and in particular the kind of practical and moral reasoning Kant outlines in his

Critique of Practical Reasoning and *Critique of Judgement*. In these works it

becomes clear that pure reason is only one feature of what it is to be human and that

Kant does want to make more concrete ontological and metaphysical claims in

relation to the noumena and the noumenal aspects of the human. Further, the space

left for God, human freedom and the sublime, rather than simply being a holding

place for metaphysical oddities, turns out to contain elements necessary for our moral

and aesthetic existence that underwrites our humanity and even our ability to employ

pure reason. The bottom line for human dignity for Kant is our existence and

freedom as moral agents, not our capacity for pure reason.

On this account then, the noumenal is more than a limiting concept and is only a null

set from the perspective of sensible comprehension. We cannot 'know' the noumenal

in the sense of 'the objective validity of sensible knowledge' but this does not mean

that 'the remaining things' do not exist. Thus, we can see at least two types of

conjunction emerging from Kant: one that produces sensible comprehension, and;

one that underwrites this comprehension and enables a practical and moral encounter

with the world and each other. This second account, rather than collapsing ontology

and epistemology together creates two levels of ontological questioning. The first

relating to what exists in the phenomenal world of sensible knowledge, where

ontology and epistemology collapse, and the second concerned with general

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but in a way that I think falls short of the full ontological implications of Kant's work as recognised in the work of Heidegger in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. 5th edition translated by Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997 or 'Kant's Thesis about Being' in *Pathmarks*. Edited by William McNeill, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, for instance.

ontological issues surrounding the noumenal and its relationship to the phenomenal world. It is in relation to this second set of ontological issues that Heidegger, Nancy and Levinas, the three philosophers who will be the focus of this thesis, still engage with Kant because these issues are particularly important and relevant to the question of with-being.

There are two fundamental problems with Kant's ontological orientation that these philosophers address. The first is that Kant himself does not fully pursue the ontological implications of his own thinking, and this is clearly evident in his maintenance of the distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal and the ambiguities that surrounds it. The second is that Kant still retains too much of an understanding of ontology as and-being. This is clearly evident in his adoption of Aristotle's categories, his conception of the human being as a rational sovereign subject, and his phenomena/noumena distinction. In a sense, Kant's attempt to overcome scepticism simply shifts many of the problems of and-being into the active subject and their phenomenal world, and in addition displaces the 'and' of scepticism onto the noumena that either refuses to admit sceptical questions, by ruling them out of place as metaphysical questions, or begs the question as to the relationship between the phenomenal world and the noumena, which might create a larger ontological gap if not a dualism. This, of course, is a subject still of much debate. In this sense, the relationship between with-being and and-being are only implicitly and inadequately addressed in Kant's philosophy. Nevertheless, what becomes clear from Kant's Copernican revolution is that a new way of thinking about what it means to be human, and the existence of world, is necessary if we are to address the problems of the epistemological tradition. Further, what is required is a focus not on any

particular epistemological problem, but a rethinking of the ontological assumptions which ground the whole epistemological enterprise. These assumptions take the form of and-being, and it is this approach to ontology that ultimately needs to be rethought.

1.1.3 Overcoming epistemology

This need to rethink the ontological grounding of epistemology becomes clear in light of the various 20th Century attacks on traditional epistemology since Kant— from the continent, in figures such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and later within the tradition itself, in figures such as Rorty and Quine. It is such attacks that lead Charles Taylor in his article 'Overcoming Epistemology' to suggest 'epistemology once the pride of modern philosophy, seems in a bad way these days'.[18] The problem from Taylor's perspective is to identify what it is about the epistemological tradition that we are trying to overcome.

> In some circles it is becoming a new orthodoxy that the whole
> enterprise from Descartes, through Locke and Kant, and pursued by
> various nineteenth and twentieth-century succession movements
> was a mistake. What is becoming less and less clear, however, is
> what exactly it means to overcome the epistemological standpoint
> or to repudiate the enterprise. Just what is one trying to deny?[19]

In response to this question Taylor himself examines a number of elements of the epistemological tradition that one might want to overcome: foundationalism; representationalism; epistemology as certainty; sovereign subjectivity; and a transcendent view from no-where; and he agrees that more work could be done in

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[18]Taylor, C 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995, p1
[19]Taylor, C 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *Philosophical Arguments*, p2

these problematic areas. He also recognises that developments in these areas could have important moral and political implications. That is, the interrogation of certain aspects of traditional epistemology could re-open the question of how we relate to ourselves, others and the world. However, despite his sympathy with a critique of traditional epistemology and its implications, he does not see this as leading to a necessary rejection of the epistemological project. Taylor, in fact, sees two possible ways to interpret and pursue this critique: either, as a continuation of the epistemological project, in an attempt to 'further the demand for self-clarity about our nature as knowing agents';[20] or as a Nietzschean inspired rejection of 'the very aspiration for truth as this is usually understood'.[21] Taylor, both in this essay and his other works, seems to favour the former, and in doing so, retains a certain priority for truth and the notion of progress. On this understanding, the critique, in the name of overcoming epistemology, would be nothing more than an epistemological correction. That is, the critique would entail simply replacing a 'false' piece of knowledge, in this case about epistemology, with a 'true' one. But this seems to maintain the relationship between *logos* and *ontos* that we saw in Aristotle, and doesn't take seriously 'the risk' that Nietzsche thinks is required in questioning the value of truth:

> Suppose we want truth: why not rather untruth? And uncertainty?
> Even ignorance?
>
> The problem of the value of truth came before us—or was it we
> who came before the problem? Who of us is Oedipus here? Who the
> Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question
> marks.[22]

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[20]Taylor, C 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *Philosophical Arguments*, p14
[21]Taylor, C 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *Philosophical Arguments*, p16
[22]Nietzsche, F 'Beyond Good and Evil' in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: The Modern Library, 2000, p199

Nietzsche's words suggests we cannot take the priority of 'truth as it is usually understood' for granted and encourages us to look at the very relationship between truth, the world and human being. This implies a deeper ontological critique that might not be recoverable in terms of the traditional epistemological project resting as it does, on an and-ontology. Instead, it requires a re-engagement with the question of the relationality at the heart of being, or with-being.

In this thesis, we will consider three moments in this deconstruction of and-being and the exploration of with-being through the works of Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Nancy. Each moment will build on the others and will flesh out the dimensions of with-being in its ontological, ethical and political significance. Before we begin looking in detail at each of these philosophers, we will first have a broad look at what is at stake in each moment. We will begin by looking at the philosophy of Martin Heidegger who fundamentally challenges the traditional reduction of being to and-being and begins the exploration of being in terms of its relationality.

1.2 Heidegger's recovery of an ontology of with-being

You will recall that our fundamental concern about and-being, based on the natural attitude, was its tendency to fix beings and radically separate entities from each other. Heidegger's philosophy creates a fundamental shift in our understanding of ontology by re-examining the question of being (*die Seinsfrage*) in such a way that it explicitly re-opens the question of with-being in general, and in particular, human

finitude and the relationship with the (everyday) world. The basic elements of this

shift are put in place in the early Heidegger of *Being and Time*, and although some

would argue Heidegger's later philosophy changed radically after *die Kehre* and the

events of the Second World War, these elements and his general project did not. So

what are these elements?

A key element of this shift was to introduce the notion of the ontological difference.

According to Heidegger, historically, ontological enquiry at the level of metaphysics,

contains the assumption that when we are talking about being, we are talking about

the entities we encounter in the world—that is, and-being. In *Being and Time*,

Heidegger suggests that this prejudice has led to the forgetting or dismissal of the

question of being. This is because: being is taken to be a universal concept that is

already contained in beings; the concept of being, separate from these beings is

indefinable; and being is the self-evident concept used in the knowing and

predication of beings that requires no further explanation. This understanding of

'being as beings' and its implications for our relationship with the world, the

multitude of things in it, and each other does of course reveal something about being,

but for Heidegger this is an everyday understanding that leaves the deeper questions

about the meaning of being in general 'at the same time shrouded in darkness'.[23]

Heidegger instead insists that we can and should make a distinction between the

being of beings and the beings themselves. The effect of this ontological distinction

is to re-open and re-orientate our ontological questioning. That is, there is something

(or more accurately on Heidegger's understanding no-thing) beyond the beings

themselves that requires ontological investigation. At this stage, of course, being as

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[23]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh, Albany: State University of New
York Press, 1996, H4

separate from beings is only a space for enquiry, but it is a space that promises to be filled through Heidegger's analysis.

Heidegger argues that given we are interested in the being of beings, then it is beings that must be 'interrogated in the question of being'.[24] However, of all the beings that could be interrogated, he further argues that it is human being that must be investigated first. This is consistent with Kant's approach, which as we have seen, also examined the contribution of human beings to the emergence of the phenomenal world. It is also consistent with the phenomenological method inherited from Husserl, who bracketed the phenomenal world so as to investigate the consciousness of human beings who experience the world. That is, all these approaches start with human beings because they recognise it is human beings who adopt the natural attitude and are concerned about the beings in the world and the question of being. However, for Heidegger, it is not a matter of looking at the consciousness of human beings, or for the *a priori* structures of the human being that make knowledge possible, but more broadly at what it is about human beings that enables them to have a world.

Importantly for Heidegger, although his analysis has now turned to a particular entity, his ontological enquiry, because of the ontological difference, is aimed at the way of being of the human rather than a scientific examination of the human as a substantial thing in the world. To mark this distinction, Heidegger uses the term Dasein to refer to the way of being of the human. Indeed, this is a critical point when contrasting his project with that of Kant's as well as Husserl's. It is clear that all

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[24]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H6

three are looking for the essence of what it is to be human, however, both Kant and

Husserl are looking at the human as a being that possesses various faculties and

capacities (intuition, understanding, consciousness, etc.). In this sense, the being of

the human being is still considered in the same categorical way as any other object.

Heidegger, on the other hand, wants to consider Da-sein in its existence, which he

claims is a more fundamental analysis of the being of the human being. The

existential analytic of Da-sein, is thus aimed at exposing the unique way of being of

human being, which is its essence. In this way, he also seeks to bring essence and

existence, which Plato and Aristotle split asunder, back together again. He uses the

word *ek-sistence* to signify this unification of essence and existence that is Da-sein's

way of being. Heidegger refers to this analytic of the *ek-sistence* of Da-sein as

fundamental ontology. Fundamental ontology is to be contrasted with the ontic

which is the study and ontological questioning of beings in the categorical sense—

that is, and-being.

> Thus fundamental ontology, from which alone all other ontologies
> can originate, must be sought in the existential analysis of Da-
> sein.[25]

While we will examine the results of Heidegger's existential analytic in more detail

in chapters 3 and 4, it is worth noting a central feature of Heidegger's work that

distinguishes it from those traditional and-ontologies we have considered. This is the

inextricable unity of Da-sein's relationship with world. In the 1929-30 lecture course,

The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics – which Eugen Fink thought should have

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[25]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H13

been published before all others[26] – Heidegger asks 'What kind of 'and' is it that links these terms *(world and individuated Dasein)*?'[27] Heidegger's ontological analysis of how the human way of being (Da-sein) and world are linked, fundamentally re-conceptualises this 'and' as a 'with' and in so doing brings Da-sein back into direct relation with the world. This with-being is explored in *Being and Time* as the worldliness of Da-sein, in 'On the Essence of Ground' as Da-sein's being-in-the-world, and in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* as 'man is world forming'.[28] In each case, having a world emerges from Da-sein's unique *ek-sistence* in the openness of being.

> According to what we have said, being-in is not a 'quality' which Da-sein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, *without* which it could *be* just as well as it could with it. It is not the case that human being 'is' and then on top of that has a relation of being to the 'world' which it sometimes takes upon itself. Da-sein is never 'initially' a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in the mood to take up a 'relation' to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is possible only *because*, as being-in-the-world, Da-sein is as it is.[29]

This fundamental engagement and participation in world forming is in sharp contrast with more traditional understandings of the relationship between the human being and world. Rather than the human being and other entities pre-existing and being separated from each other by an ontological and epistemological gap, human beings fundamentally exist in their essence as ontological beings. This conjunction of being-in-the-world means that neither can be thought without the other, which is radically

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[26]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis. Heidegger tells us of this in his 1975 dedication to Eugen Fink.
[27]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p170. My inserted italics
[28]Heidegger, M 'On the Essence of Ground' in *Pathmarks*. Edited by William McNeill, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998
[29]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H57

different to how the human and world came together in and-being. In particular, the epistemological gap between subject and object, knower and known, closes because Da-sein always finds itself engaged with and understanding of the world. This means that knowledge and truth never arise from a disengaged view from nowhere because Da-sein's engagement with world is always situated and contingent. Thinking itself is already an action that engages with the world, in fact it is, according to Heidegger, the action par excellence.

> Thinking does not become action because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts in so far as it thinks. Such action is presumably the simplest and at the same time the highest because it concerns the relation of being to humans.[30]

Thinking, then, starts to take on some ambiguity in Heidegger's account that has led to some debate in the literature. On the one hand, particularly in the later Heidegger, thinking as the highest action, and the term he uses for it 'letting be', is often seen as a return to Aristotle's *vita contemplativa*. But, on the other hand, unlike Aristotle, contemplation as action, is not an access to the beauty of things eternal, but a way of engaging with the world, which of necessity involves the 'interference of man' and the changing of the world. Heideggerian thinking in this sense is performative and calls for a re-evaluation of the relationship between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. It is this performative dimension that, following Hannah Arendt's analysis in *The Human Condition*, involves both a re-prioritisation of action and a reconsideration of the relationship between ontology and our ethical and political engagement with other human beings. Heidegger himself, we will argue, perhaps because of the ambiguity surrounding the place of thinking in his philosophy, does

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[30]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p239

not go far enough in this direction in terms of realising the ethical and political significance of his re-thinking of with-being. This lacuna is something that will be much debated and explored by other philosophers.

Heidegger then, has shifted the level of ontological enquiry beyond the first order ontic level of and-being, which fixes and separates beings into categories, to a second order ontological analysis of Da-sein and how its way of being makes such ontic understandings of the world possible, and in doing so has re-invigorated the ontological question of with-being. He thus begins to break down the ontological tradition of and-being and lays the groundwork for those that follow, including Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy, who make their own distinctive contributions to the question of the 'with'. In particular, Levinas raises the question of ethics in relation to Heidegger and with-being, and Nancy addresses the issue of the political and community.

1.3 Otherwise than being

Perhaps one of the most controversial issues surrounding Heidegger's philosophy is the question of the ethical implications of his ideas. This question has been complicated by the fact of his engagement with Nazism, the ethical and moral atrocities committed by this regime, and his subsequent silence on the horrors of the camps. The complication arises because the moral behaviour of Heidegger the man influences the way many commentators approach Heidegger the philosopher. The suggestion seems to be that if Heidegger the man was involved in immoral behaviours and events, then this must be reflected in his philosophy. Thus,

consideration of Heidegger's philosophy is often undertaken with the pre-conceived

suspicion that there must be an ethical deficit reflective of the moral deficits in the

man himself. This is reinforced by the fact that Heidegger's philosophy says little

explicitly about normative ethics (which for Heidegger would be an ontic question)

and that even the question of originary ethics, along with ontology – including the

transcendental ontology of *Being and Time* – is apparently subordinated in his latter

works to the question of the truth of being.

> The thinking that inquires into the truth of being and so defines the
> human being's essential abode from being and toward being is
> neither ethics nor ontology. Thus the question about the relation of
> each to the other no longer has any basis in this sphere.[31]

The conclusion that one may be tempted to draw using this line of reasoning, is that

Heidegger's philosophy is at best a-ethical if not unethical. It is this neglect of ethics

and indeed Heidegger's subordination of human relations to a relationship with the

truth of being, that lead Levinas to fundamentally reject Heidegger's philosophy and

his prioritisation of ontology and *die Seinsfrage*. In fact, the whole body of Levinas's

work could be seen as a reaction against Heidegger and as a clear attempt to counter

the ethical and social deficiencies that Levinas saw in Heidegger's philosophy.

Levinas reveals as much in the titles of his two major philosophical works *Totality*

and Infinity and perhaps more self evidently in *Otherwise than Being.*

Nevertheless, despite his disagreements with Heidegger, Levinas was never short of

praise for the work of Heidegger, particularly the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. In

Ethics and Infinity, Levinas describes *Being and Time* as one of the four or five

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[31]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p271

greatest works in philosophy along with Plato's *Phaedrus*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* and Bergson's *Time and Free Will*. Indeed, he draws attention to several of the features of the Heideggerian paradigm shift that he greatly admires. Firstly, the bringing alive of being as a verb with the Heideggerian shift from beings to being, and from human beings as entities to Dasein as a way of being.

> With Heidegger, 'verbality' was awakened in the word being, what is event in it, the 'happening' of being. It is as if things and all that is 'set a style of being', 'made a profession of being'. Heidegger accustomed us to this verbal sonority.[32]

Secondly, Heidegger reawakens a positive relationship with time and the history of philosophy. Rather than simply absorbing the ideas of past philosophers, Heidegger brings these philosophers back alive. And finally, Levinas likes Heidegger's reintroduction of the affective through his idea of attunement and his exploration of anxiety. The affective will play a significant role in Levinas's own philosophical investigations.

In general, then, he praises Heidegger for his contribution to phenomenology, existentialism and ontology. So where is the problem?

Levinas thinks that being, the 'there is', contains a dread that expresses itself in many forms. Firstly, he argues, rather than being offering the abundance of the Heideggerian gift, being shows itself as an impersonal 'it'.

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[32]Levinas, E *Ethics and Infinity*. Translated by Richard Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2000

> I insist in the fact that on the impersonality of the 'there is': 'there is' as 'it rains', or 'its night'. And there is neither joy nor abundance: it is a noise returning after every negation of that noise.[33]

Secondly, Levinas is concerned that Heidegger's notion of Da-sein, despite its significant shift away from traditional understandings of subjectivity, is still too egoistic. That is, *Being and Time* describes Da-sein as having a 'mineness', individuality and resolute authenticity that Levinas reads as a sovereign ego, whose relationship with other people is always mediated through being and its interest in its own being.

And thirdly, because Da-sein's relationship with others is always mediated by being, it is also a totalitarian enterprise. That is, the infinite is constantly reduced to the finite as it is 'said' into being.

> Ontology as first philosophy is an ontology of power...Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny.[34]

All these features, for Levinas, add up to existence in being as a kind of lonely solipsistic enterprise with no place for ethics — that is a primordial ethical relationship with other people.

There is thus an imperative for Levinas to escape this dread that is contained in Heidegger's ontology, which perhaps Levinas too easily conflates with Heidegger's

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[33]Levinas, E *Ethics and Infinity*, p48
[34]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005, pp46-47

involvement with National Socialism and the extermination of the Jews that Levinas experienced so personally.[35] Regardless, Levinas's philosophy signals another important shift in our understanding of with-being and its place in the human condition. For Levinas, the thinking of being and being-with, even if 'to think is no longer to contemplate but to commit oneself, to be engulfed by that which one thinks, to be involved' in 'the dramatic event of being-in-the-world',[36] is still trapped in the imperative of an Aristotelian *logos* and 'what is called its haecceity (Da) is only the description of the essence of truth, of the condition of the very understanding of being.'[37] Levinas in contrast suggests that there is a 'with' that comes before ontology and comprehension that is always in excess of any representation or understanding. This 'with' is a uniquely human relation which emerges in our linguistic invocation of the Other and an ethical demand in the face of the Other.

> The relation with the Other (*autrui*) is not therefore ontology. This tie to the Other (*autrui*), which does not reduce itself to the representation of the Other (*autrui*) but rather to his invocation, where invocation is not preceded by comprehension, we call religion. The essence of discourse is prayer. What distinguishes thought aiming at an object from the tie with a person is that the latter is articulated in the vocative: what is named is at the same time that which is called.[38]

For Levinas an encounter with the Other is an encounter with infinity. This is because the Other can never be totally encompassed on the plane of being; something will always escape a finite reduction of the Other to sensation, knowledge of them, or

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[35]Both his parents, his brothers and many of his relatives were murdered in the Nazi-inspired genocide in the Ukraine.
[36]Levinas, E 'Is Ontology Fundamental' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, p4
[37]Levinas, E 'Is Ontology Fundamental' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p5
[38]Levinas, E 'Is Ontology Fundamental' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p8

ontological description. Rather, to encounter the Other is an affective encounter with

an infinite mystery that Levinas in *Time and the Other* likens to the encounter with

death. Furthermore, the Other demands a response that calls the egoistic 'I' and its

freedom into question. The Other signifies an end of mastery because one can never

master the infinite. It is thus an asymmetric and non-reciprocal relationship that

always exceeds any finite power to respond. Note importantly that the Other is not

another ego.

> The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I
> myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's
> character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the
> Others very alterity. The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor,
> the widow and the orphan, whereas I am the rich or the powerful.[39]

It is in this 'with', this personal encounter with the Other, that comes before both

epistemology and ontology, that Levinas locates the possibility of ethics as first

philosophy. But this ethics is not a kind of normative ethics such as deontology or

utilitarianism, the encounter with the Other is perhaps more the possibility of ethics

or the ethical moment of the 'with'. Levinas calls this 'with' proximity, which he

insists is outside of conjunction altogether in so far as the conjunction occurs in

language and in being. Or another way to think of it would be that proximity

ambiguously is both the 'with' and 'and'. The 'with' in that there is direct

unmediated contact with another human being, and the 'and' in that this contact at

the same time confirms the absolute distance between us, or the alterity of this Other.

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[39]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*. Translated by Richard Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University
Press, 1987, p83

It is through an exploration of Levinasian proximity that we will consider whether there can be a 'with' without with-being and the relationship between ontology and ethics. One point that will become apparent is that neither Heideggerian ontology nor Levinasian ethics deal adequately with the plurality of with-being and its implications for community and politics. For this we will turn to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy.

1.4 Plurality and politics

Jean-Luc Nancy indicates that Heidegger's fundamental ontology 'has put us on the way to where we are, together, whether we know it or not'.[40] That is, as I have already indicated, Heidegger's philosophy explicitly raises the question of with-being and *mitsein*, and at least to some extent, has overcome the and-being implicit in Aristotle and the epistemological tradition. The importance of Heidegger in Nancy's thought can be seen in all of Nancy's work, but is particularly evident in his later works such as *The Experience of Freedom* and *Being Singular Plural.*[41] In these works, Nancy is concerned with continuing the kind of existential and ontological investigations that began in Heidegger's philosophy and in engaging with the fundamental questions posed by Heidegger about Da-sein and its relationships with the world, other Da-sein, and being. However, while Nancy often takes Heidegger's thinking as a starting point, rather than simply incrementally building on Heidegger's position, Nancy's philosophy offers a further paradigmatic shift that requires us to rethink the ontological analytic from first principles. This shift demands that we give priority to the 'with' in with-being.

[40]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p26
[41]Nancy, J *The Experience of Freedom*. Translated by Bridget McDonald, Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1993. The original French version was published in 1988.

According to Nancy, no one, including Heidegger, 'has radically thematised the "with" as the essential trait of being'. Therefore, the importance of Nancy's philosophy is to move us beyond a thinking 'beginning from the one, or the other' or 'beginning with their togetherness, understood now as the One, now as the Other', to a 'thinking, absolutely and without reserve, beginning from the 'with', as the proper essence of one whose Being is nothing other than with-one-another.'[42] In other words, Nancy suggests that both Heidegger's being and Levinas's otherwise than being, despite their contributions to the thinking of with-being, still reduce, in different ways, the 'with' to an 'and', and fail to do complete justice to the primacy of our with-being in its plurality. In Heidegger's case he gives too much priority to the singular 'One' of Da-sein, and in Levinas's case he gives too much priority to the singular and divine 'Other'. In both cases, the plurality of with-being and our being-with-one-another is underdeveloped, or in a sense comes after the singular. Nancy attempts to capture this thematic in his book *Being Singular Plural*, and it is a theme that Nancy explores and utilises throughout his philosophy, from investigating community through to understanding art. Nancy's philosophical shift then, towards the development of a co-existential analytic as first philosophy, is the third radical development in our understanding of an ontology of with-being that will be explored in this thesis. In particular, we will focus on a place where Nancy's ontology has a resonance that is largely underdeveloped in Heidegger and Levinas, namely the question of community and the political.

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[42]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p34

As suggested, in terms of Nancy's underlying philosophical development of with-being as being singular plural, we can contrast his basic claim with that of Heidegger and Levinas. In the case of Heidegger, Nancy argues that Heidegger's analysis of the everyday and being-in-the-world ignores the fundamental diversity that Da-sein encounters.

> One cannot affirm that the meaning of Being must express itself
> starting from everydayness and then begin by neglecting the general
> differentiation of the everyday, its constantly renewed rupture, its
> intimate discord, its polymorphy and its polyphony, its relief and its
> variety.[43]

That is, Heidegger's analysis, despite its advances over traditional metaphysics, still stresses unity and singularity over 'polymorphy' and 'polyphony' in a number of ways. Firstly, there is the fact that world can only be encountered as a unified whole organised around Da-sein's in-order-to. That is, according to Heidegger, Da-sein always discovers itself in a world populated by beings that are connected in their being via a web of relations organised around Da-sein's future projected possibilities. This wholeness of world, for Nancy, ignores the fact that world is an ontological spacing of differences and alterity that constantly shifts and surprises through its excess over any projected unification. In Nancy's world, there must be room for strangeness and invasion as well as attunement and understanding.

Secondly, Heidegger, like many of his time, saw a crisis in German *Kultur* due to the inherent dangers of modern society. In particular, there was the threat that proper intellectual endeavour would be replaced by the numbing and levelling thinking of the common which Heidegger called *das Man* (or the One). In *Being and Time* this

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[43]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p9

mob mentality is contrasted to authentic individuality which is to be won by a recognition of one's finitude through Heidegger's striking analysis of being-towards-death. However, as Nancy points out, on both sides of this analysis we have a prioritisation of the singular that seems to oppose the individual to society in fairly traditional terms. Nancy's assertion would be that there never is the singular *das Man* at the societal level and likewise there never is a whole Da-sein at the individual level. In both cases we need to understand *mitsein* ontologically as being singular plural.

Finally, this tendency towards unity and wholeness also carries over into Heidegger's analysis of the historicity of Da-sein. Here Heidegger's references to terms like *Volk*, destiny, and *epoche,* seem to subsume individual Da-sein in the almost deterministic playing out of the history of being.[44] Indeed, many, such as Richard Wolin in *The Politics of Being, The Heidegger Controversy* and *Heidegger's Children* attribute Heidegger's Nazi engagement, in part, to a romantic desire to recapture the destiny of the German *Volk* by heroically reinstituting authentic German traditions.[45] This tendency is even more evident in the later Heidegger where the focus of his philosophy shifts from the fundamental ontology of Da-sein to the question of the historical revelation of being more generally.

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[44]See Johannes Fritsche, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger's Being and Time.* Columbia and Princeton: University Presses of California, 1999 for a detailed discussion of this subsumption of individual Da-sein under the collective.
[45]Wolin, R *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader.* 2nd Edition, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993 and *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001

Heidegger, then, despite his contribution to the exploration of with-being, still

prioritises unity, in the forms of authentic individuality and the historical collective,

too much to do full justice to the 'with' in terms of its plurality.

In many ways, the criticisms just raised support Levinas's critique of the totalitarian

nature of Heidegger's philosophy. In its constant concern with the 'one', Heidegger's

philosophy leaves no room for the 'Other' and even reduces the Other to the same.

Indeed, Nancy, as we will see in chapter 8, agrees with much of Levinas's analysis of

alterity. Nancy's objection to Levinas is his insistence on the transcendence of the

Other in a form of monotheism. Levinas's ontotheology creates two fundamental

problems for Nancy. The first is that through his appeal to transcendence, Levinas

places the Other outside of the world and being. This introduces a strange ambiguity

to our encounter with others in the sense that they are both corporeal and somehow

transubstantiate into God. Nancy wants to avoid the philosophical problems that arise

from this ambiguity by locating alterity firmly in the world. The challenge for Nancy

will be whether he can reinvent with-being so that it can account for alterity in a way

that won't be open to the same kind of critique that Levinas levels at Heidegger.

The second problem with Levinas's account for Nancy is that the fundamental

ethical moment, the encounter with God, is singular. That is, Levinas's monotheism

just as surely as Heidegger's authentic individuality, forgets the plural nature of our

everyday existence. It is never the case that I encounter one Other, but am always

exposed to other Others in their plurality. While Levinas certainly addresses this to

some extent in his examination of the entrance of a third party, Nancy is right in his

criticism that Levinas subordinates the relation with the plural to the singular. This, of course, will have particular significance in the realm of community and politics.

For Nancy, *mitsein* in both Heidegger and Levinas, needs to be rethought in terms of sharing and community, themes that Nancy develops strongly in a range of places but most explicitly in *The Inoperative Community*.[46] Here we find a fundamental rejection of traditional notions of society and community that rest on the logic of and-being—that is, notions of community that rest on either a collection of atomistic individuals coming together for a common cause or project, or those that appeal to a nostalgia for some kind of Christian communion. In this way, Nancy rejects social contract theories, all forms of communitarianism, and even traditional liberalism as the basis for community. All these understandings of community have totalitarian tendencies for Nancy because they all operate on the logic of the one, which doesn't admit plurality. This becomes very obvious in the violence that takes place when any attempt is made to make a particular vision of community immanent, where community very quickly develops structures and boundaries that need to be preserved at all costs both against the enemy without and the enemy within. In place of these formulations, Nancy offers an agonistic community of plurality, unified by its members' finite being-in-common, whose political responsibility it is to resist any attempts to create community as a work through an openness to alterity and an open-ended communication and sharing of existence.

The implications of this 'retreat of the political' forced by the ontological re-consideration of with-being are still to be adequately thought through. What will

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[46]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*. Translated by Peter Connor, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001

become clear through our analysis of with-being, is that we can no longer conceive of ontology as some kind of neutral, 'view from nowhere' study of beings out there in the world. Instead any answer to *die Seinsfrage* is a performative engagement with the shifting boundaries of with-being that has ethical as well as political significance.

In this chapter I have outlined the broad positions of each of the key players and the issues that are of relevance to the question of relationality and development of an ontology of with-being. Of central concern is the role that the assumption of and-being has played in the philosophical tradition and how historically this led to a narrow understanding of relationality that has only recently been challenged by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy. The interest of these philosophers in with-being is not simply to solve an abstract philosophical problem that has haunted the tradition, but is a real concern with the implications of the assumption of and-being for what it means to be human, and how, as humans, we relate to each other and the world. In particular, they are all, in different ways, concerned with the potential violence inherent in and-being.

Chapter 2 will focus on this issue of the violence of and-being, both as an attempt to demonstrate what is at stake in challenging this ontological approach and as a motivation to pursue the different kind of understanding of ontology offered by these thinkers.

Chapter 2 – The Violence of and-being

> For no very good reason, three of these principles have been singled out by tradition under the name of the 'Laws of Thought'.
>
> They are as follows:
> 1. The law of identity: 'Whatever is, is.'
> 2. The law of contradiction: 'Nothing can both be and not be.'
> 3. The law of excluded middle: 'Everything must either be or not be.'
>
> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*[1]

> But an important feature of all these critiques is that they establish a new moral outlook through overturning the modern conception of knowledge. They don't simply register their dissidence from the anthropological beliefs associated with this conception, but show the foundations of these beliefs to be unsound, based as they are in an untenable construal of knowledge.
>
> Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*[2]

In my first chapter, I described the ontological reduction of with-being to and-being and suggested that this reduction is implicit in the history of philosophy most notably in the epistemological tradition. Further, I suggested that the metaphysical assumptions involved in this reduction also underpin many aspects of our modern society and our common ways of relating to the world and each other. In other words, this ontological comportment has ethical and political implications that remain hidden because the logic of and-being separates out these three domains of philosophy. In this sense, I want to claim that and-being contains a double violence: firstly the reduction of the 'with' to an 'and' potentially manifests itself in real tangible violence at the ethical and political level in the forms of murder and war; and secondly, by covering over the importance of these ontological assumptions in framing our relationality, it closes off alternative possibilities for thinking,

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[1] Russell, B *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962
[2] Taylor, C 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *Philosophical Arguments*, p9

performing and relating differently. This chapter then, is about exploring the implicit

logic of and-being and justifying this rather dramatic claim that and-being is

complicit in certain forms of ethical and political violence.

The theme of violence is of course a common one in late 20th century philosophy as

various thinkers subject the philosophical, ethical and political tradition to critique

and deconstruction. Indeed if there is anything that unites the many and diverse

philosophers that are grouped under the far too generalised heading of post-

modernism it is their attempts to 'wage war on totality' and 'witness the

unpresentable' as Lyotard somewhat ironically puts it in the final sentence of 'What

is Postmodernism'.[3] Further, such a war might be considered a 'just war' or a war for

justice because as Taylor remarks in his *Philosophical Arguments* what is at stake in

overturning the modern conception of knowledge is 'a new moral outlook'.

This chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive exploration or survey of traditional

philosophers or their arguments but rather a consideration of the logic of and-being

behind these claims and some of the sites of contestation. By undertaking such a

consideration I hope to present sufficient argument and evidence so that the reader

will be motivated to reconsider the ontological question of relationality which will be

the subject of the rest of the thesis.

I will approach this task in three stages. I will begin by considering the basic logic by

which an and-being approach to relationality operates. I will then explore how this

logic manifests itself in an understanding of human being and the human beings'

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[3]Lyotard, J 'Answering the Question: What is Post-modernism?' in *The Post-modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p82

relationship with world; and finally, I will examine how this logic of and-being traditionally plays out in the areas of ethics and politics. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the very real way that these ontological assumptions manifest themselves in certain forms of violence.

2.1 To be or not to be

In *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* Martin Heidegger argues for the intimate link between logic, thinking and ontology.[4] Using the same type of reasoning as in *Being and Time* Heidegger suggests:

> Thinking is an activity of Da-sein and is thereby a way of being—of being as a being, Da-sein, toward other beings. If thinking becomes our theme, then ontological relationships become thereby thematic.[5]

If this is the case then thinking must be thought of as a performative relationship with world. What then does the traditional logic of thinking that is linked to an ontology of and-being tell us about our current ways of relating?

The logic of 'and' relationality is captured well in the 'Laws of Thought' of traditional logic. These are summarised by Bertrand Russell as: the law of identity; the law of contradiction; and the law of the excluded middle. To these laws might be added the law of sufficient reason that is at the centre of Leibniz's philosophy. Indeed it is Leibniz who Heidegger examines in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* as the pivotal figure in logic. Further it is the Leibnizian monad that best

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[4]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic.* Translated by Michael Heim, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
[5]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p27

captures the relational implications of this logic – the logic of and-being – in ontological terms:

> The essence of substance resides in its being a monad. Genuine being has the character of the simple 'unit' of the individual, of what stands by itself. To anticipate, the monad is that which simply originally unifies and which individuates in advance.[6]

It is this logic of the 'simple "unit"' that 'stands by itself' that is at the heart of what might be called the tyranny of the one and which I will argue is the source of the violence to which I have alluded. To see that this is the case let us consider the traditional laws of thought in more detail.

At the centre of the logic of the monad is the law of identity. The law of identity according to Russell states that 'whatever is, is'. This, as we suggested in the last chapter, reduces existence to a simple predicate that adds nothing to the subject. For example to say 'the car "is"' tells us nothing more than the car is objectively present: or to say 'the car is red' tells us nothing more than 'red car' with the predicate red being included or contained in the subject car.[7] In this way, ontology, in so far as it explores 'presence' at this ontic level, becomes concerned with the essences and inessences of these identities. Thus, in this search for singular identities, we already see the beginnings of an internal/external distinction and an unbridgeable ontological gap between monads. The essences of these identities become even more separate and distinct through the law of contradiction ('nothing can both be and not be'); and the law of excluded middle ('everything must either be or not be').

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[6]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p73
[7]Heidegger refers to this as a theory of Inclusion see *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p31

The second law of thought, the law of contradiction, introduces a profoundly static

element into the ontology of and-being. That is, by excluding the possibility of

simultaneously being and not being this law nominalises being and ignores the verbal

significance of becoming which, as Hegel explores, is the unity of being and nothing.

> As their unity, becoming is the true expression of the result of being
> and nothing; it is not just the unity of being and nothing but it is
> inward unrest- a unity which in its self-relation is not simply
> motionless, but which, in virtue of the diversity of being and nothing
> which it contains, is inwardly turned against itself.[8]

In legislating for motionlessness, the law of contradiction fails to explore the kind of

ontological movement of the Hegelian dialectic and thus violates motion in general.

This violation is even more apparent in the law of excluded middle which reduces

being to beings and invokes an ontology of solid presence or substance. According to

this law everything must either be or not be—there is a forced choice between either

being present or not. An identity cannot be half present or half absent

simultaneously, and it must be one or the other. For example there either is a car

present or there isn't a car, a car cannot be half present—it either is or it is not. To be

sure, we sometimes say there is 'half a car' if we see a car wreck for example, but

this is a linguistic turn of phrase rather than a logical claim consistent with an

ontology of presence. The 'half' here does not qualify the existence of a whole car

and is better considered as a part of the description of a different whole object that is

present i.e. 'half a car'. Philosophers of language would make this clearer by

replacing this subclause with a variable representing it as the singular subject of a

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[8]Hegel, G *The Encyclopaedia Logic*. Translated by TF Geraets, WA Suchting and HS Harris,
Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1991, p143

sentence. Similarly, predicates are either contained in the subject or not. The car either is red or it is not. If it is not then a different predicate or set of predicates applies.

Based on these laws, we have already seen a logic that is focused on forcing singular self-contained distinctions that separate and fix presences. That is, the identity and differences captured by such a logic cannot tolerate ambiguity or fuzziness but must each time separate out a self-contained one, which is different from a self-contained other. The boundaries drawn around these unities have sharp edges and are digital in nature. In short we have the logic of the Monad. So what has become of relationality in the context of this logic? We have already noted that the relationship between subject and predicate is one of inessence or inclusion, however the logic of the relations between monads – whether mereological relations or relations between entities – still requires explanation.

As we mentioned in our previous chapter, the logic of and-being means that relationality is built on after the fact. In classical logic this is represented by the various operator symbols connecting variables e.g. p and q, p or q, etc. So there first exists a p and a q and then the relationship between them is indicated. Further, if 'p and q' was added into a longer logical sentence it would be bracketed to indicate this conjunction was to be considered as a unit. This approach to relationality, with its concern to maintain singular identities, is thus evident in three ways. It can be exposed: as the collection and interaction of pre-existing singular presences within a particular level of the categorical hierarchy e.g. p and q; as an additive union that forms a new singular presence at a higher level (p and q); and as a break down of a

singular presence into a number of presences forming a lower level of the hierarchy e.g. there exists a *p such that x and z*. The logic of the hierarchy means that we can continue to extend the hierarchy either up or down by unifying lower level presences into a higher level presence or by breaking down a higher level presence into lower level presences by making finer and finer ontological distinctions. The tyranny of the one becomes acutely evident at either end of the ontological hierarchy where everything becomes a part of the One, God, or spherical being, or else is reducible to a singular type of fundamental particle or matter. Regardless, the singular, self-contained and unified identity always holds sway—it is the logic of logical atomism that Russell's *Principia Mathematica* and *Problems of Philosophy* capture so well.

Finally, let us turn to Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason which might be stated as 'nothing happens without a reason' or put differently, all contingent facts must be grounded in necessity. Leibniz himself uses this principle as the basis for an argument that God created the best possible world, but the broader implication of this principle is an unending search for foundation and certainty which is built into the epistemological tradition. This search, perhaps more than any of the laws of logic plainly implicates human need and the human condition. Or to return to Heidegger, the search for reason and ground, is a human way of being that is a performative relationship with world. However, the terms of this relationship are in a large part already set by the logic we have been exploring. That is, the privileging of the singular, fixity and distance, a tendency towards forced reduction, and the problem of ground are all evident in traditional conceptions of what it is to be human.

As presences in the world, humans are on a par with the other beings, and yet they have the capacity to encounter other presences and each other differently to other beings. If we wish to understand this difference on the basis of and-being, then we need to discover the predicates or characteristics of the human essence, which set it apart from the other beings in the world. While there have been many and varied answers provided during this search to find what is special about humans, the dominant understanding in the philosophical tradition can be characterised as some variation on an autonomous rational animal capable of speaking, thinking and acting as an agent in the world—in short, a sovereign subject.

2.2 The human being as sovereign subject

Our assertion, based on the logic of and-being, is that the tradition has generally conceived of the human being as a sovereign subject. The essence of the sovereign subject is in its capacity to transcend the other objects in the world so as to think about them, speak about them and act upon them. Often accompanying these capacities is some notion of freedom that enables the sovereign subject to operate according to its own laws, over and above the laws of nature which govern other objects, and which open it to ethical and political considerations and responsibilities. However, because, following the logic of and-being, each individual sovereign subject is radically separated from the other objects in the world, including other people, an ontological gap opens up that needs to be overcome if these self-contained entities are to interact with anything at all—the 'and' needs to be built on and explained. That is, knowing, speaking and acting, which are all relational functions,

need to bridge the chasm between human subject and world.[9] Further, there are only three places to look for this bridge: internal to the subject; external in the world; or in some kind of law or medium that links the two. Typically, the relational function itself becomes split down the middle in an active/passive dichotomy that mirrors the binary nature of the subject/object distinction giving rise to many philosophical problems. Let us consider each relational function in turn to see how these forms of relationality have typically played out in the tradition.

2.2.1 The knowing subject

In the case of the knowing subject, we have already suggested that the ontological gap between entities becomes evident as an epistemological gap between knower and known, when the capacity (and desire) to know becomes the special defining trait of what it is to be human. That is, the human entity, as one of its defining characteristics, is an entity that seeks out knowledge about other entities for its own practical purposes or simply to gain wisdom. But how can the knower bridge the epistemological gap? Traditionally, there have been two answers to this question: empiricism and rationalism. Both suffer from problems arising from the epistemological gap but approach these problems from different angles.

The epistemological problem, as we have seen, occurs at two levels. The first stems from trying to explain how the nature of the outside corresponds to knowledge on the

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[9]Note the distinction between these different modes of relationality will be challenged in this thesis as I begin to reconsider the fundamental ontology of with-being. However, often under the assumption of and-being these characteristics or powers of the sovereign subject are considered separately. In particular, thinking and acting are often distinguished based on the internal/external dichotomy and the apparent capacity for thinking to occur independently of action and not to be objectively manifest in the external world.

inside of the knowing subject. Or to put it differently, how the ideas within the subject relate to the reality out in the world. The second order question is, once we have this explanation, how can the subject know that they have successfully bridged that gap (an instance of the problem of ground). The obvious places to start, given our metaphysical constraints, are to consider the essence of the object, the essence of the subject, or a set of laws linking both. The empirical approach suggests that we start with the objects outside the subject and consider how these objects affect the subject so that they can be experienced. The epistemological difficulty is to account for how information that originates outside of the subject is internalised. The usual explanation is that objects, through the senses, impinge on the subject in such a way that they create an internal change in conditions that passes for knowledge. The problem as Descartes and many others have shown, however, arises at the second level of questioning. That is, how can the empiricist know that their internal state gives them access to the truth of the outside? Indeed, based on experience, the senses prove to be fallible. Thus, scepticism calls into question whether experience can be a reliable source of knowledge of the world.

The second approach is a reflective-rationalist turn, led by Descartes, where knowledge and certainty are to be found in the examination of our own ideas through logic and reason. Of course, Descartes also introduces another ontological distinction between the human as 'thinking thing' and the human 'as body' but this addition of another entity doesn't change the fundamental metaphysical assumptions of the 'and' ontology. Indeed, I would argue that Descartes' mind/body dualism simply extends the problems of and-being. Regardless, Descartes is faced with the opposite problem to empiricism, namely: if we start from inside the subject, how do we get back to

external reality with any certainty? Descartes does not give us a plausible solution, and his mind/body dualism has plagued the philosophy of the mind ever since.

Both paths of knowledge, then, expose the problem of a strong subject/object distinction (consistent with the law of identity) that translates into an internal/external distinction when one particular object, the human, is recognised as having the special characteristic of a rich inner mental realm separate to the world of which it has knowledge (Leibniz's law of inclusion). Charles Taylor captures these issues in his description of the epistemological construal of the knowing subject:

> That construal offers an account of stages of the knower consisting of an ultimately incoherent amalgam of two features: (a) these states (the ideas) are self-enclosed, in the sense that they can be accurately identified and described in abstraction from the 'outside' world (this is, of course, essential to the whole rationalist thrust of reflexive testing of the grounds of knowledge); and (b) they nevertheless point toward and represent things in the outside world.[10]

The incoherence that Taylor points to emerges directly from the problem of and-being manifested in the radical separation of subject and object. Further, this notion of the epistemological subject leads to the twin problems of scepticism and truth as certainty. That is, because of the gap between knower and known and the mediated nature of our knowledge, truth claims at some level always seem to be open to scepticism. This is not very palatable for an ontology that deals in fixed presences and essences that persist over time and hold universally. Thus the problem of foundational truth and certainty, and how the subject can ground its knowledge, is an endemic one for epistemology. It is also a problem that can never be solved because the problem itself is grounded in the 'and' ontology and the metaphysics of the

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[10]Taylor, C 'Overcoming Epistemology' in *Philosophical Arguments*, p9

subject that arises from it. This becomes more evident when we consider what such a ground would need to be like.

2.2.1.1 Vestiges of Platonic truth

Richard Campbell in his article 'The Covert Metaphysics of the Clash between "Analytic" and "Continental" Philosophy' argues that one of the key differences between so called analytic and continental philosophy is the vestige of a hidden Platonism in the former's understanding of truth. That is, despite the developments and complexities of modern-day analytic philosophies, such as the philosophy of language, there is still a desire to find a view from nowhere that will give the philosopher access to eternal and universal truths.

> Although these philosophers now typically assume that the bearer
> of truth is some linguistically structured item, they continue to
> maintain the distinctively Platonic theses that truth is timeless,
> unchanging and perspectively neutral. They might hold empiricist
> or naturalist views of knowledge and meaning, and furiously debate
> about correspondence, pragmatist, and redundancy theories of truth,
> and so on, but they implicitly assume that the truth of the 'best'
> theories upon which they believe the succession of theories to be
> converging is not itself a historical phenomenon; these theories
> would be timelessly true in authentically Platonic style.[11]

This search for a timeless truth, independent of the knower, implicitly follows from the logic of and-being that we have been exploring. That is, if ontology at the ontic level is the categorisation of what 'is', which in turn means the identification and categorisation of fixed essences as they present themselves in accordance with the constraints of classical logic, then the knower is constantly trying to ground his or

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[11]Campbell, R 'The Covert Metaphysics of the Clash between 'Analytic' and 'Continental' Philosophy' in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9(2), 2001, p344

her thoughts, feelings and ideas about the known, from which they are radically separated, in a way that cannot admit any ambiguity. However, because of the epistemological gap, neither rationalism nor empiricism has the resources to provide such a ground. To see that the truth of and-being has these features and that rationalism and empiricism fail in providing such a ground, let us look at what finding such a ground would entail.

The first point to notice is that the ground must be found either internal to the subject in the way their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and ideas relate to one another, or external to the subject in the world and the entities it contains. The former is the rationalism of Descartes, and the latter an empiricist approach. Regardless of which path we take, the grounds of truth are independent of the individual subject. In the case of rationalism, the truth is grounded in the rules or essence of rational thought which, while being a characteristic or power of the human as 'thinking thing', is independent of any particular human existence. As we have already noted, the separation between essence and existence in Aristotle's 'and' ontology means that the essence of the human genus can be considered independently of an instantiation of such an essence in a human existent. In this way, rational thought can be reflected upon and itself be taken as an immanent presence that may or may not be present in a particular subject or a particular thought. In the case of empiricism, the truth is grounded in the 'things in themselves', but because entities are radically unified and separated, the truth of their essence is also separated—it is internal to each entity. This means that while the epistemological subject might discover this essence, it must be a passive discovery (usually through sensations and the senses), in the sense

that it cannot change this essence in a fundamental way. As Frege puts it in a remark cited by Campbell in the same article:

> If being true is thus independent of being acknowledged by somebody or other, then the set of laws of truth are not psychological laws; they are boundary stones set in an eternal foundation, which our thought can overflow but never displace.[12]

This independence of the ground of truth from the subject in turn leads to a third necessary characteristic of such a ground, namely its universality. Whether the ground of truth is to be found internal to the subject in its rationality or external to the subject in the world itself, it must be universal. That is, the independence of the truth from the particular subject guarantees that all subjects that share the relevant characteristics can in principle access the truth and it will be the same for all these subjects. That is, they will have used universally sound reasoning and logic to deduce a truth, or the characteristics of the objects in the world will have causally impacted on fully operational senses under normal conditions to create the appropriate sensations.

Finally, this ground would also be timeless in that universal truths exist not just independently of individual subjects at a point in time but for the same subject through time and for different subjects existing at different times. For example, once the essence of humanity is discovered in its truth, it does not need to be rediscovered but is assumed to persist through time independent of historical contingency.

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[12]Frege, G *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic: Exposition of the System.* Translated by M Furth, Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964, p13 (Campbell's article, p347)

Of course, if these four necessary conditions could be met, that is, if a universal and independent ground for truth could be located in either the essence of human subjectivity or in the objective world and persist through time; then not only would the subject have a sound basis for truth claims, but these claims would equate to the ability of the subject to gain a view from nowhere. Or put differently, the subject would have an access to truth that isn't impacted upon by any contingency or peculiarity relating to an individual subject. The epistemological subject, if it could ground its knowledge in this way, would truly transcend the world.

However, as the persistence of scepticism demonstrates, the hope of establishing the kinds of grounds that we have been discussing, appears forlorn. This is because regardless of where we locate these grounds, whether inside the human entity as subject or outside in the objective world, we still need to explain the correspondence between the two. But the tyranny of the one makes any such correspondence difficult if not impossible. No matter how many characteristics are built into either the subject or object, or no matter how many intermediate objects are identified between the two, correspondence, if we start from the one, will always be mediated and leave an ontological and epistemological gap that can be exploited by the sceptic. Scepticism then is also a necessary part of and-being and the knowing relation. But what is the significance of scepticism?

In the epistemological tradition, scepticism is seen as a threat to the fundamental project of establishing the certainty of a timeless, unchanging and perspectively neutral truth. The typical responses to this threat have been to engage in some fancy footwork from within the framework of logic to find a credible answer to scepticism

and recover the epistemological project.[13] However, perhaps the significance of

scepticism is not in the logical paradox it exposes. Perhaps as Stanley Cavell's well-

known work, *The Claim of Reason,* argues, scepticism challenges the very priority of

the epistemological project and the knowing relation in favour of an

acknowledgement of other people complete with accompanying moral

implications.[14] That is, Cavell, building on Wittgenstein's work, suggests the 'truth

in scepticism' is the truth of exteriority and in particular the engaged practice of our

public language games and engagement with other people. In this way, the 'truth of

scepticism' exposes a certain violence in both the sceptic and the non-sceptical

epistemologist who are both engaged in the metaphysics of and-being and the

knowing relationship. Cavell argues that to persist in bad faith with the sceptical

question while someone is in pain, for instance by asking them 'how they know for

certain they are in pain?', is simply a failure of humanity on the part of the sceptic.

Similarly, to mediate our relation to others through the lens of knowledge also risks a

reductive violence and the kind of solipsism evident when scepticism plays out in the

problem of other minds.[15] It is to encounter the world, its objects and other people in

terms of the same.[16]

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[13]See *Skepticism: a Contemporary Reader* edited by Keith Derox and Ted A Warfield, New York:
Oxford University Press, 1999; for some of the more common responses to scepticism.
[14]Cavell, S, *The Claim of Reason.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1979
[15]This issue comes out in the traditional philosophy of mind literature as a particular version of
scepticism. The problem has been around since Descartes' separation of mind and body and persists as
long as we make a sharp distinction between the rich internal world of the subject and the reality of
the external world. Sartre, who also realises 'the problem of other minds' is potentially a problem for
his own strong ontological distinction between the for-itself and the in-itself in *Being and Nothingness*
describes it as follows: 'My body as a thing in the world and the Other's body are the necessary
intermediaries between the Other's consciousness and mine. The Other's soul is therefore separated
from mine by all the distance which separates first my soul from my body, then my body from the
Other's body, and finally the Other's body from his soul.' It should be clear from this description that
once we place an absolute distance between the thoughts inside one self-contained person and the
thoughts inside another separate self-contained person then we have a problem from both perspectives
about the existence of thoughts in the other.
[16]This, of course, is the fundamental claim about violence in relation to the Western tradition made by
Emmanuel Levinas which we explore further in future chapters.

All this points us towards a closer examination of the other two modes of relating to

the world via speaking and acting. However, as we will see, as long as these ways of

relating are understood on the basis of and-being, they cannot avoid the tyranny of

the one and indeed may be complicit in even more tangible manifestations of

violence.

2.2.2 The speaking subject

The common view of language based on the traditional logic of the sovereign subject

is that it is a tool for communication between subjects about the world, to be

employed in line with the intentionality of those subjects. Edward Sapir, a 20th

Century American anthropologist in his book *Language: An Introduction to the*

Study of Speech defines it as follows:

> Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of
> communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system
> of voluntarily produced symbols.[17]

In this way, like thinking, it is a power located on the subject side of the

subject/object divide even though it is meant to mediate between the subject and

world and enable subjects to communicate with each other. Two questions

immediately arise on this account: what is the relationship between language,

generated internal to the subject, and the objects in the external world; and how does

it facilitate communication between subjects? In both cases, the ontological gap and

scepticism as its corollary again cannot be avoided. While I cannot hope to give a

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[17]Sapir, E *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York: Courier Dover Publications,
2004, p5

complete account of the history of the philosophy of language, I hope to at least

demonstrate that the linguistic turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, as it plays out in the

analytic tradition, does not solve the philosophical problems that arise in those

philosophies characterised by and-being.

2.2.2.1 Language and reality

The relationship between language and the world has long plagued philosophers of

language. Early philosophers of language such as Frege, Russell and the early

Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* saw a very close and direct correspondence between

language and the world. All three viewed language as representational, with some

kind of symbolic correspondence between language and the 'real world' that it

represents. As linguistic beings we thus employ or use language as a medium to

connect our internal thoughts to objects in the world. But the introduction of

language as a link between subject and world does not close the gap between ideas

and reality but merely creates further gaps and/or ignores large parts of linguistic

communication. In the case of Frege, thoughts and ideas are distinct from sense,

which in turn is distinct from reference. Ideas are strictly idiosyncratic and occur

inside the subject.

> The idea is subjective: one man's idea is not that of another. There
> results, as a matter of course, a variety of differences in the ideas
> associated with the same sense.[18]

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[18]Frege, G 'On Sense and Reference' in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob
Frege*. Editors Peter Greach and Max Black, Oxford: Blackwell, 1952, pp56-78

Ideas, then, must be translated into the signs of language, which ideally have both sense and reference. However, it should be noted that because 'of the uncertain connexion of ideas with words' a gap and source of mistranslation has already arisen.[19] A gap that also raises the question of the relationship between thought and language. Further, this gap is repeated on the side of the hearer as well as the speaker when decoding language back into thoughts. But this is not the end of the story. There is also room for scepticism between the expression of sense and the referent that it designates. The sceptic may well ask how you know that a particular sentence has a reference as well as sense. That is, how do you know that the sign actually points to something in the real world. Frege acknowledges this objection but merely brackets the problem by adding the reservation 'provided such a reference exists'.[20] However, it is the existence of such reference (the objective) that determines the truth or otherwise of a sentence. That is, judgements, or claims to truth, seek to move from thought through sense to reference. It is the successful correspondence of thoughts to reference (reality) that determines truth. Clearly then, on Frege's account of language, rather than closing the epistemological gap we have merely multiplied it several times.

Russell's theory of knowledge and much acclaimed theory of definite descriptions, as espoused in the *Problems of Philosophy*, fares little better than Frege's in terms of the assumption of and-being. According to Russell, knowledge of things is of two kinds, knowledge by acquaintance (those things of which we have direct awareness such as sense data, memories, introspection and universal concepts) and knowledge by description (those things that we know only indirectly through knowledge of

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[19]Frege, G 'On Sense and Reference', p61
[20]Frege, G 'On Sense and Reference', p62

truths about the object which are derived from our direct acquaintance with sense

data, etc. about the object). In the first case, the truth of the beliefs about the things

we are acquainted with is self-evident by definition. In the second case, the truth of

descriptions is decided by analysing the complex linguistic description to reveal a

series of simple singular symbols, the truth of which can be verified by acquaintance.

> The analysis of apparently complex things such as we started with
> [Piccadilly, Rumania, Twelfth Night and Socrates] can be reduced,
> by various means, to the analysis of facts which are apparently
> about those things. Therefore it is with the analysis of these facts
> that one's consideration of the problem of complexity must begin,
> and not with the analysis of apparently complex things.[21]

Ultimately, language and facts are structured hierarchically and subject to a logical

atomism that is underwritten by an indirect realism. This, of course, admits the

problem of and-being on two levels. The first is that it is assumed that descriptions

can be both synthesised and analysed by the subject into atomic parts with nothing

left over—the tyranny of the one. The second is that Russell's direct acquaintance

simply assumes that sense impressions, memories, etc. are unproblematically linked

to the reality of objects in the world without engaging with the kind of sceptical

problems we have described.

What becomes obvious from these early forays into the philosophy of language is

that the shift in focus from objects in the world, to sentences and propositions does

little to overcome the epistemological gap because the link between the subject and

object is merely mirrored in the relationship between language as object and objects

in the world. Additionally, the link between thoughts and language also needs to be

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[21]Russell, B 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism' from lectures delivered in 1918 and published as a series of articles by *the Monist* in the volumes for 1918 and 1919, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, p9

explained. So while the relationships we are concerned with have changed, they are all subject to the same logic of and-being.

2.2.2.2 The inconvenience of language

Perhaps of even greater concern in this tradition is the attempt by philosophers of language to purify natural language in order to discover formal languages which would then form the proper ambit of philosophical investigation. While this is true of Frege and Russell, it is stated more colourfully by the early Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*.

> Most propositions and questions, that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false, but senseless. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, but only state their senselessness. Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language.
>
> (They are of the same kind as the question of whether the Good is more or less identical to the Beautiful?)
>
> And so it is not to be wondered at that the deepest problems are really *no* problems.[22]

Not only does this approach blithely condemn a whole range of philosophical areas of investigation to senselessness, typically such areas as ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics, but it ignores the import of that large part of language which is not concerned with propositional truth. Indeed, as Wittgenstein realised, even at this early stage, his own treatise fell into this realm of senselessness.

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[22]Wittgenstein, L *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p63

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me
> finally recognises them as senseless, when he has climbed out
> through them, on them, and over them. (He must so to speak throw
> away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)
>
> He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world
> rightly.
>
> Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.[23]

Thus, lest we too quickly equate senseless with worthless and see this admission by

Wittgenstein as undermining his own project, we must recognise that, at least for

Wittgenstein, some of these senseless things are important in seeing the world

rightly. Perhaps it is this recognition that explains the shift in thinking in the later

Wittgenstein.

Regardless, this quest for a formal language can be seen as an extreme case of tunnel

vision, where what counts as the objects of philosophical consideration are only

those matters that conform, or can be made to conform, to the purified logic of and-

being in linguistic form. The violent consequences of such a language game or

indeed of language games in general are explored by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The*

Differend: Phrases in Dispute. The problem according to Lyotard is that the implicit

or explicit rules of a particular Genre of discourse are always partial and will limit

the capacity to encounter that which cannot enter such a discourse, which can in turn

lead to injustice. As Lyotard suggests:

> A case of the differend between two parties takes place when the
> 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of
> one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not
> signified in that idiom.[24]

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[23]Wittgenstein, L *Tractatus*, p189
[24]Lyotard, J *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, p9

In attempting to create a formal language philosophers are not only risking the differend in the usual sense that all language games involve differends, but are deliberately invoking a language of exclusion to which they will give priority.

There have, of course, been many advances in the philosophy of language and epistemology since these first tentative steps, that perhaps address to a greater or lesser extent some of the issues I have raised. Nevertheless, I suggest that unless such advances engage with the very metaphysics that underpins this approach, then from the perspective of with-being, they should be condemned as mere epicycles built upon reductive and restrictive foundations.[25]

This leaves us only to explore the third way that traditionally a subject has of relating to its world, that of acting.

2.2.3 The acting subject

So far, I have considered how the logic of and-being carries over into our understanding of what it means to be a thinking and speaking subject. I will now consider how this same logic manifests itself in the way human beings relate to the world as acting subjects. This is particularly important to our concern with the violence of and-being and its ethical and political implications, because unlike thinking and even to some extent speaking, which might be considered passive powers of the subject, acting, in a very self evident way, impacts on the other things

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[25]Clearly, this is a large claim that would require specific engagement with such advances to be sustained—a task which is well beyond the scope of this thesis and indeed beyond my current knowledge of developments in the philosophy of language.

in the world so as to change them. That is, while it is usually assumed that thinking is

necessary for action, it is also assumed that thinking can occur independently from

action and need not impinge directly on the essence of the other objects in the

world.[26] Action, as a human activity, is also usually distinguished from other

interactions between entities in the world because of the intentionality that underpins

it. That is, while other objects simply bump into each other according to some kind

of natural laws that are independent of them (even most animals are usually

considered conditioned by such laws through instinct, reflex, etc.), human beings

have the capacity to reflect upon possible courses of action and choose between

them. In short, this power to choose is a special form of human activity that seems to

operate in accordance with a different set of laws to the other objects in the world. Or

put differently, the reasons underpinning the necessity of human action are of a

different kind to the rest of the natural world. As Kant puts it:

> *Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are
> rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it
> can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as
> *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all nonrational
> beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien
> causes.[27]

For Kant, then, what makes the human being special is the property of a will that

operates according to the laws of freedom, as opposed to nonrational beings that are

moved by alien forces through causality and natural necessity. Further, for Kant, it is

only because the human being possesses freedom that morality, duty and

responsibility are possible. This basic view put by Kant is not unusual and indeed

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[26]Of course, with the break down of and-being and a strong internal/external dichotomy this
distinction between thinking and action will also be challenged in due course in this thesis.
[27]Kant, I *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Edited by Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1997, 4.447

similar assumptions underpin classical liberalism such as that espoused by John Stuart Mill, and much of the legal, economic and social theories extant in Western societies.

However, while it is a common assumption, either implicitly or explicitly, that human beings possess free will, it is far from uncontested in philosophical circles. Indeed, the problem of free will, whether it be in its religious form in the face of an omnipotent and omniscient God, or in its scientific form in the face of a deterministic universe, continues to plague philosophy—as free will and determinism not only seem to contradict each other, but also lead to internal inconsistencies.

Again turning to Kant, we see these problems well articulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the third antinomy.[28] In favour of free will Kant suggests that the natural law of cause and effect leads to an infinite regress. That is, if every cause is itself an effect then there is the problem as to how the chain began. Lest we follow the chain back to infinity, Kant suggests there must be another type of causality, or at the very least a first cause, that must be absolutely spontaneous. In favour of determinism, Kant argues that the concept of a first beginning or freedom goes beyond our experience and is only mere speculation. That is, it seems contrary to the principle of sufficient reason because we would have a contingent event (a human action) that would seem to have no necessary reason. Further, such causality would be beyond this world and would introduce a kind of arbitrariness into the world which would challenge the natural laws of causality. His resolution to this antinomy is indeed to claim that freedom and free will are 'out of this world'. To make sense of this we

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[28]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, A444-A451

must return to the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal world, or the world of appearances, and the noumena, or things in themselves.

For Kant, the phenomenal world is indeed deterministic, but it is at least possible that freedom and free will could exist in the things in themselves. That is, things as they appear to – or are understood by – us, are the result of categories applied to sensations received through passive intuition. Behind these sensations and the phenomena as they appear as objects are things in themselves that our understanding never has access to. This logic also applies to human beings. That is, there is the phenomenal aspect of the human being, or a phenomenal self, that appears in accordance and conformity to the laws of nature. But there is also a noumenal aspect to the human being to which we do not have access, and that conceivably has its own laws of causality and the possibility of spontaneous freedom.

> Although beyond this constitution of his own subject, made up of nothing but appearances, he must necessarily assume something else lying at their basis, namely his ego as it may be constituted in itself; and thus as regards mere perception and receptivity he must count himself as belonging to the world of sense, but with regard to what there may be of pure activity in him (what reaches consciousness immediately and not through affection of the senses) he must count himself as belonging to the intellectual world, of which however he has no further cognizance.[29]

This allows Kant to support a form of compatibilism. That is, he can maintain that determinism and free will can both hold together. Although note that we can never know or understand freedom or its laws in the same way that we understand natural laws on Kant's account. What this claim amounts to, as we discussed in chapter 1, is the ontological claim that existence goes beyond the traditional laws of logic and the

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[29]Kant, I *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:451

ontology of and-being, even if we can make no empirical knowledge claims about such existence.

However, whether we accept Kant's argument, support a different form of compatibilism, or hold that free will and determinism are incompatible, the problem arises at least in part because of the logic of and-being. That is, because of the radical separation of entities and the internal/external distinction, interaction between entities must be accounted for either on the basis of their essence or the essence of something outside them—because the interaction is built on after the fact and the entities exist independently of the interaction, then the interaction itself must be somehow initiated or powered from either within or without. If it is from without, then changes in the entity are caused, if it is from within, then either the cause/effect pathway is more complex or there is some form of self-determination or freedom with all the problems that this proposes for traditional metaphysics.

Despite the traditional philosophical issues raised by this dichotomy, in terms of with-being there are more pressing problems with the notion of free will or agency as a power of the sovereign subject than logical inconsistencies with deterministic accounts. I want to argue that the desire for and ideal of freedom is a response to, and is evidence of, an anxiety over with-being. That is, it is a good example of Nancy's claim that with-being is being's ownmost problem. Further, the logic of traditional freedom, when taken to its extreme, leads to a violent rejection of contingent relationality not just at the abstract level but in our concrete relations with other human beings. To see that this is the case, we will consider how the concept of freedom plays out in the liberal tradition.

2.2.3.1 The ambiguity of freedom – an anxious response to relationality

What I seek to demonstrate in this section is that traditional liberal accounts of freedom harbour a certain ambiguity in terms of relationality: on the one hand, concepts such as freedom represent struggles for independence and self-determination, a striving to break with, or transcend relations; on the other hand such struggles themselves tacitly attest to the very relations they seek to escape.

Isaiah Berlin in his book *Four Essays on Liberty* gives us a good starting point for an understanding of the traditional liberal concept of freedom.[30] In particular, his essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' gives us two understandings of freedom – positive and negative freedom – that are often invoked by theorists of freedom. Negative freedom is defined by Berlin as 'the area in which a man can act unobstructed by others'[31] while positive liberty 'derives from the sense of the individual to be his own master'.[32]

Berlin acknowledges that these two understandings of freedom are closely related but would like to maintain a distinction between them and the types of questions they invoke: 'Over what area am I master?'; and 'Who is master?', respectively.[33] However, I tend to agree with philosophers such as Charles Taylor and Paul Patton,

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[30]Berlin, I *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969
[31]Berlin, I 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in *Four Essays on Liberty*, p122
[32]Berlin, I 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in *Four Essays on Liberty*, p131. Note this second definition is in a similar vein to Kant, although for Berlin, in the liberal tradition, freedom is the capacity to follow one's own desires and interests rather than to rationally self-legislate. Thus, from a Kantian perspective this liberal freedom is not true freedom because desires and interests introduce heteronomy. However, in another sense, it is both more free and more violent because one's desires and interests are not bound by the moral law and a shared rationality. The liberal subject is a true egoist whose moral code must be based on an ethical egoism .
[33]Berlin, I Introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty*, pxliii

that negative liberty only makes real sense in the context of a presupposed positive liberty. That is, for something to count as an imposition, it must impede or change an agent's behaviour from the course it would have pursued if left to its own self-determination. In this way, both positive and negative liberty are concerned with the power an individual agent has in relation to its actions, it is just that while negative liberty is concerned with removing external powers in opposition to the power of the agent, positive liberty is concerned with the scope and foundation of the power of the agent itself.

Freedom, thus takes the form of the pre-existing power of the individual and, in true Hobbesian tradition, social and political interactions between individuals pit one freedom against another's freedom. Levinas suggests that with this kind of freedom 'there can be no other relationship than that of submission or enslavement. In both cases, one of the two freedoms is annihilated'.[34] Given this kind of understanding of our relations with others, it is not surprising that the individual would desire to escape this outside influence of other people in the form of a negative freedom—freedom-from; or increase the sphere of their own freedom-to; and in the process reduce others' positive freedom.

Rousseau in *The Confessions* captures this search for escape in negative freedom:

> I could no longer see any greatness or beauty except in being free and virtuous, superior to fortune and man's opinion, and independent of all external circumstances.[35]

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[34]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p87
[35]Rousseau, J-J *The Confessions*. Translated by JM Cohen, London: Penguin Books, 1953, Book Eight, 1750-52, p332

But to achieve independence 'of all external circumstances' is to deny and negate our relations with others altogether. To realise absolute negative freedom is to become a solipsistic and isolated being that is impervious to external powers and influences through its radical, dualistic separation from the outside. For this being there would only be a private sphere and to all intents and purposes there would be no society for them—the world would be theirs but for them alone. Their world would refuse to admit others who may affect them for fear that these others would impinge upon their liberty.

The alternative of absolute positive freedom is just as problematic. The positively free sovereign subject recognises that they have the power to interact with the external world and to influence its course through willing, thinking and acting. Priority is given to projects and intentions based on their desires, needs, choices and decisions. Even actions that could be said to consider the projects of others can only be mediated and derivative. That is, even if the sovereign ego decides to take on somebody else's project or behave altruistically, they must first take on the project as their own. This is the understanding behind the claim by many liberal theorists of a psychological egoism where people act primarily on self-interest. Responsibility and obligation themselves can only be assumed through choice and through positive freedom. Thus, again positive freedom denies relations with others at a fundamental level. The response to others as opposing powers is to dominate, master, or destroy them such that they are totalised under the power of the individual. The positively free liberal subject then, adopts a utilitarian attitude to external relations relative to its own projects in the world. In short, positive freedom is the self-grounding of a subject aspiring to become a totalitarian God who plays with the world in its own

image. This subject is afraid of the threat to its own power posed by others and so wants to stand above the world and have its actions grounded in an originary act of willing.

Both positive and negative freedom when considered as absolute ends motivate the sovereign ego to escape from relationship with others and usurp the world. Either by making the boundaries of their world impervious to the influence of others, or by subsuming others using their power to make the whole world their own. Although this escape and denial is ultimately impossible because of the fundamental fact of contingent relationality, it none the less sets up a certain anxiety towards others that is often the basis for violence and murder.

So far I have outlined the basic logic of and-being and how this logic is contained in the notion of the sovereign subject and the relational powers of thought, speech and action. I have highlighted the sites that have raised difficult philosophical conundrums for the tradition and how these sites harbour the potential for violence at a fairly abstract level. I would now like to turn to the traditional disciplines of ethics and politics and further trace how this logic of and-being and its embodiment in the sovereign subject plays out in more tangible and practical ways.

2.3 Ethical action

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents us with the following version of the traditional ethical question: 'what ought I to do'.[36] The way this question is posed reveals several important aspects of the traditional ethical problem and the 'and' metaphysics it assumes. Firstly, it assumes the kind of sovereign subject we have already outlined. That is, there exists a self-contained individual entity who can transcend their worldly situation and the other objects in the world and freely choose between a range of possible actions. The problem confronting such a subject is which course of action to choose.

Secondly, the word 'ought' here plays a very important role in that it implies that all these action vectors are not equal and that there is a 'right' answer to the problem of choice. That is, there is a sufficient reason as to why one or another of these actions should be chosen (the problem of ground yet again). Now of course, there might be any number of reasons upon which to base such a choice: self-interest; desire; amount of effort; accordance with the law; perceived outcome and so on, however, because we are dealing with an 'ought' and ethics here, not just any reason will do. The reason has to be a particularly compelling one such that it forms an imperative or command that the individual 'ought' to follow even if it is against their own first order desires or other reasons would recommend different courses of action—i.e. it must have normative force.

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[36]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, A805/B833

And, finally, the normative stand point is typically independent of individual subjects or specific contingencies and is thus, like truth, timeless, unchanging and perspectively neutral—it is categorical in nature.

The subject matter of traditional cognitivist normative ethical theories such as deontology and utilitarianism has been to formulate a set of principles or rules that can be applied consciously to any situation and by any subject to determine the 'good' course of action that they 'ought' to pursue, whether or not they do. However, here a potential violence arises because suddenly a fundamentally pragmatic and relational question of 'what ought I to do?' is to be answered from an impersonal and theoretical view from no-where in a way that threatens to deny relationality altogether, or at the very least mediates our relations with others and the world.

This is clearly evident in Kant, who despite his compatibilism, at least in principle wants to keep the laws of freedom totally distinct from the laws of nature. That is, for the human being to make ethical decisions and choices on the basis of rationality and goodwill, they cannot be influenced by contingencies in any way—autonomy necessarily excludes heteronomy, including any with-being relationships.

> The will stands between its a priori principle, which is formal and its aposteriori incentive, which is material, as at a crossroads; and since it still must be determined by something, it must be determined by the formal principle of volition as such when an action is done from duty, where every material principle has been withdrawn from it.[37]

A morally free person for Kant is one whose actions are not determined by any external force or influence, or even by his/her own desires, but only through recourse

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[37]Kant, I *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:400

to reason which establishes the moral law and its attendant duties. In a sense, the

sovereign subject must transcend the world so absolutely as to absolve itself from all

possible interaction with other phenomenal entities in the world, including its own

phenomenal body. To be sure this godlike perspective is then used as the cause to re-

engage with the phenomenal world, but only on the basis of an initial escape from

with-being.[38] Further, this engagement via egoistic freedom is never a direct

engagement with other people or things in the world because it is mediated through

rationality. That is, it is rational reflection and a shared rationality that is the basis of

the interaction rather than any particularities about the situation or what is reflected

on.

But this creates a problem for the moral law itself which seems to harbour the very

real potential for violence because the moral law, based on freedom and rationality,

leaves no place for either affectivity or the exception. That this is the case is clear

from the nature – and Kant's applications of – the categorical imperative.

A good example of this is Kant's analysis of the altruistic lie in his 1797 article 'On a

Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns'.[39] Here he argues that

even when faced with the situation of lying to a murderer to save a friend one should

not lie. Lying on Kant's account is unjustifiable under any circumstances and the

philanthropic lie not only fails the test of the categorical imperative, but is based on

the false premise that we can know the ends that will result from either lying or not

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[38]This is itself problematic in terms of how such a spontaneous cause both has effect in the
phenomenal world and interacts with the natural laws of cause/effect such that phenomenal effects do
not just appear without any apparent cause. Kant does provide a complex answer in terms of
overdetermination of effects (see A533-A558) but an analysis of this account is beyond the scope of
this thesis.
[39]Kant, I *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. 3rd edition. Translated by James W Ellington,
Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993

lying. In the case in point, it is assumed that by misdirecting the murderer away from the friend's hiding place we will save the friend. However, there are any number of factors that could prove this assumption false, or mean that the lie leads to a worse outcome than the one that was being avoided: e.g. the friend might have moved from the hiding place to exactly where you redirected the murderer; the murderer in frustration at not finding the friend might go on a killing rampage; and so on. Kant's conclusion is we should do what we know for certain to be right, which is tell the murderer the truth.

While there is certainly some validity in Kant's point, many would find giving up the friend to the murderer and probable death in the name of truth to be counter-intuitive. Now while one might salvage a deontological position and make it consistent with ethical intuition in this case by invoking a hierarchy of duties and having the duty to protect life trump the duty to truth, for example, this misses the fundamental point that no universal rule or law can account adequately for the exception or the personal relation to another human being.

Indeed, traditional cognitivist approaches to ethics, in particular both deontology and utilitarianism, in the search for such a normative basis are plagued by the exception. No sooner is a new variation of these traditional theories espoused than some clever philosopher comes up with a real situation, or a thought experiment, that seems to lead to an absurd ethical outcome if the theory is applied. The fundamental problem, I would suggest, is not, as many assume, that our ethical theories are not good enough and need tweaking, but that no theory can ever do justice to the exception. All theories are reductive in this sense and mediate with-being in such a way that

they risk a violence in the very name of ethics—the meaning of the exception is yet

another instance of Nancy's intrusion of with-being.

It is these kinds of contingency problems that have led to a strand of reductivist or

eliminativist ethical theories known as non-cognitivism. Modern empiricists such as

AJ Ayer for instance adhere to an ethical emotivism, a non-cognitivist theory of

ethics that suggests calling something good or bad is really like cheering at a football

match for our favourite players—good simply being a more articulate version of

'yeah' and 'bad' a different word for 'boo'. While this seems to overcome the

problem of the exception, and also retains a certain motivation or force, it has done

so at the expense of an independent ground for such a force that cognitivist theories

of ethics such as deontology seek to establish.

The problem with both kinds of theories according to Stanley Cavell and Alexander

Sesonske is that they are looking for ground and force in the same place. That is both

strands:

> Have assumed that the normative force of ethical judgments and the
> ground of these judgements must be dealt with in the same terms;
> they have assumed one principle to explain and meet the demands
> of both the normative- and ground-conditions.[40]

This assumption is clearly evident in the is-ought problem as outlined by the

empiricist David Hume. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume comments:

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[40]Cavell, S and Sesonske, A 'Moral Theory, Ethical Judgements and Empiricism' in *Mind* 61,
O52:543-563; p550. These authors explore how this assumption plays out in terms of the
cognitivist/noncognitivist debate in ethics.

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not.[41]

But perhaps rather than the problem that Hume describes, it is this framing of the is-ought problem itself and ethical theories that start out with this distinction that is *the meta-ethical* problem that needs to be addressed. That is, as Hume frames it, he seems to give priority to the 'is' and insists the 'ought' ought to be derived from the 'is' using 'ordinary ways of reasoning'.[42] In short, ethics needs to be grounded in ontology and epistemology if it is to be justified. This might be expressed in the meta-ethical question 'is there an ought?' with its implicit demand that the 'ought' become manifest through the 'is' based on empirical observation. Perhaps this demand itself through its very persistence, performs a violence to the 'ought' that has led to the emergence of the non-cognitivist approach to ethics.

Regardless, it would seem that the traditional dispute between the cognitivists and the non-cognitivists derives from their assumption of and-being. It would seem to be a slightly modified version of the empiricist versus rationalist debate and the and-being that underpins it. Either approach seems to result in a certain violence to the ethical relation with others. The cognitivists, as we have seen, only relate to other people through the lens of their cognition and thus risk subsuming heteronomy under autonomy, while the non-cognitivists risk a purely contingent relationality to others devoid of normative ethical grounds. While Cavell and Sesonske's solution is to

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[41]Hume, D Book III, part I, Section I of his *Treatise of Human Nature*
[42]Of course working from the other direction i.e. trying to derive an 'is' from 'ought' would be just as problematic.

relax the necessity to find a single principle for both force and ground, I would suggest we need to avoid the metaphysics that frames the ethical problem and its solution in this way, and so avoid the types of violence we have been discussing.

Before we begin looking for an alternative to the and-ontology we have been exploring in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, let us first consider what the logic of and-being means for the traditional approach to politics.

2.4 The politics of and-being

So far, we have considered the logic of and-being largely in terms of the individual and the individuals relationship with world. In the final section of this chapter I would like to turn briefly to the issue of humans in society and the question of politics. Needless to say, the logic of and-being underpins the traditional notions of society. In particular, we see the law of identity, the tyranny of the one, and the logic of the hierarchy clearly evident in terms of the understanding, structures and purpose of society.

Traditionally then, primacy is given to the understanding of society as a structured collection of the kind of individual sovereign subjects that we have already explored. Anthropologist Christine Helliwell nicely summarises this atomistic view of society that she attributes to traditional Western anthropology. She draws attention to:

> Our dominant perception of the 'individual': as a highly autonomous, self-directing subject of its own meanings and experiences.

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and our view of society:

> As acting to structure, or to 'socialize', the actions of these atomistic individuals vis-à-vis one another. It does this through organizing them into discrete groups, which define and order the interactions between them.[43]

Note that this organisation, following the categorical logic of and-being, immediately leads to a hierarchy of human identities starting with the individual and moving up through the family, group, community, country, and globe. This structure is at the very heart of identity politics, with each level, in accordance with the law of the excluded middle – the 'p or not p' – maintaining strict boundaries with the corollary of a strong distinction between insiders and outsiders. Thus, the stage is already set for tensions and several sites of political violence.

The first problem to arise is the subsumption of the differences between levels of identity. That is, because broader categories of identity (such as society) must themselves be unified and exhibit sameness, the differences between the more specific identities (such as individuals) that this category applies to tend to be overlooked—the genus occludes the differences in the different species. Thus, we tend to speak, for example, of Australians as if they were a homogenous mass rather than stress the heteronomy of the different groups or individuals within Australia. This reduction of difference harbours potential violence to the lower level identities.

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[43]Helliwell, C 'Space and Sociality in a Dayak Longhouse' in *Things as they are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*. Edited by Michael Jackson, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1996, p128

One way that this comes out in the tradition is in the tension between the individual and society.

The tension between the individual and society has been well explored in traditional political philosophy typically in the liberalism versus communitarian debate: liberalism stressing the primacy of the identity and freedom of the individual over community; with communitarianism stressing the importance and primacy of the community over the individual. Or put differently, should we structure society around the individuals, or structure individuals around society? Both paths I would suggest lead to violence.

Liberalism, which sees society as simply a collection of free individuals, not only opposes the individual to society but based on the liberal conception of freedom, as I have already argued, also opposes the individual to other individuals in an antagonistic power relationship. One can imagine as Hobbes did, that such a collection of individuals could hardly be called a society at all. Thus, Hobbes describes the so-called state of nature where contact between individuals would be a free-for-all of competing interests and desires.

> During the time men live without a common Power to keep them all
> in awe, they are in a condition which is called Warre; and such a
> warre, as is of every man, against every man.[44]

Note that for any kind of society to emerge from this picture of human and-being, then relationality needs to be built on after the fact. For Hobbes, society and the state

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[44]Hobbes, T *Leviathan*. Edited by Richard Tuck, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p88

arise from this condition motivated by the inherent fear and uncertainty of the

condition, 'the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short', through a

rational trading off of the right to do what one pleases for security.[45] However, it is

an uneasy marriage where the balance of power is always precarious, as individuals

struggle for the freedom to realise their insatiable needs and desires, while

maintaining the benefits of social order.

Whether we accept the specific details of Hobbes' account or instead turn to a

Rousseau or Rawls version of the social contract, the general logic of and-being

remains, as does the tension between the individual and society in these kinds of

liberal theories of society. That is, there exists a group of like-individuals possessed

of certain properties (in particular freedom and rationality) who form a society

through rational agreement aimed at some purpose or end. Unfortunately, the

traditional alternative, communitarianism, operates according to a similar logic and

fares little better.

Communitarianism instead of emphasising the unity and identity of the individual,

stresses the significance of the community as a whole. That is, following a certain

Hegelian logic, there are not first individuals who come together in community but

rather individuals are formed through their community and relationships with each

other. However, this move, while overcoming the logical atomism of the liberal

views of society at one level is still beholden to the law of identity at the community

level. The potential violent implications of this are a prioritising of community

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[45]Hobbes, T *Leviathan*, p89. Note that Hobbes did not really think there was a state of nature
historically before human society, this description is more a technique of argument. However, it does
nicely bring out the logic of and-being and the idea that relationality is built on after the fact.

interests over individual rights, and a certain conservatism that seeks to maintain the established identity of community. As Linnell Secomb summarises the implications:

> While the communitarian view overcomes the individualism of liberalism and reveals the importance of sociality in the formation of subjectivity, it also, by prioritising society over the subject, threatens individual freedom. Moreover, this conception continues to valorize the unity of subjects and the common goals of the society and minimizes differences between, and diversity in, the projects and goals of the subjects.[46]

However, it is not just the enemy within that is a threat to the common goals and identity at the community level, but also the enemy without. That is, the law of identity at the societal level leads to tension between different societies as each tries to shore up its boundaries and maintain its uniqueness. In a way, this simply escalates Hobbes' war of everyman to a different level of identity where the issue of security and protecting borders exposes another dimension of violence.

This new dimension of violence is not simply one of a matter of scale, where going to war, totalitarian regimes, or the existence of third world poverty involves the deaths of many more people, it is also a question of legitimacy and the problem of ground.[47] That is, while identity at the individual level finds a convenient home in human embodiment, the identity and unity of community based on more abstract concepts such as purpose, principles, practices and norms is more problematic and threatens to increase the depth of violence. It tends to do this in at least two ways.

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[46]Secomb, L 'Fractured Community' in *Hypatia* 15(2), 2000: 133-150; p136
[47]See William Connolly *The Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995; for a good discussion of the problem of grounding Sovereignty. See also Derrida's 'Force of the Law: The mystical foundations of authority' in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Edited by Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson, New York: Routledge, 1992; for a good example of a more detailed discussion of violence as the foundation of law.

The first emerges from the very insecurity that the lack of a legitimate ground induces. Just as the sovereign subject champions individual freedom in its anxiety to maintain independence, so the sovereign state anxious to maintain its identity strengthens both its figurative and metaphorical boundaries by rigidly pursuing its purpose, harnessing its resources for this purpose, and sharply distinguishing its citizens from those outside it—through insecurity, security becomes a central focus.[48]

The second emerges from a failure to recognise the groundlessness and ultimate illegitimacy of fixed societal identity. That is, to assume that the purpose, norms, and practices of a particular society are foundational and thus superior to any competing perspectives. Judith Butler suggests:

> To establish a set of norms that are beyond power or force is itself a powerful and forceful conceptual practice that sublimates, disguises and extends its own power play through recourse to tropes of normative universality.[49]

This tendency we might call the originary violence of sovereign foundation.

The most obvious forms of this originary violence that emerge from the logic of and-being at this community level are parochialism and racism, but just as in the case of individual positive liberty, the us/them dichotomy of community identity contains the seeds of totalitarianism and genocide. Nowhere is this more evident than in the

[48]See Anthony Bourke's recent book *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007 for a fabulous discussion of this issue using recent international experiences to support his argument.
[49]Butler, J 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Post-modernism"' in *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Edited by Judith Butler and Joan W Scott, New York: Routledge, 1992, p7

modern day figure of the Nation State; and no better example is there of this figure in action than the United States of America. Consider this; on the 18 September 2002, the Whitehouse released *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* which in response to the insecurity caused by September 11 states:

> The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success; freedom, democracy, and free enterprise…These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society – and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom – loving people across the globe and across the ages.[50]

One cannot help but notice the totalitarian overtones both in this opening paragraph and further throughout the document. Phrases such as 'single sustainable model', 'true for every person, in every society' and 'common calling' make one wonder whether this understanding of the ideal of freedom itself is ironically another form of the totalitarianism to which it claims to be opposed. Certainly when this ideal is adopted by a sovereign nation state attempting to remake the rest of the world in its own image this is a real possibility.[51]

2.5 Beyond and-being

In conclusion then, I have argued that one can trace the logic of and-being from its metaphysical foundations through to its manifestations in the ethical and political

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[50]Opening paragraph of *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* released by the Whitehouse on the 18 September 2002
[51]Again for a good discussion of the ambiguity surrounding the United States ideal of freedom and its recent political actions see Anthony Bourke chapter 9 'Freedom's freedom' in *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence: War against the Other.*

realm. Further, I have shown that the tyranny of the one contained in the fundamental

logic of and-being can have violent manifestations, because of the separation of the

sovereign subject from other subjects and objects in the world, at the ethical and

political level. To be sure, I have only provided a sketch that does not engage with

the various nuances of the problems I have raised nor the complex attempts in the

history of philosophy to deal with these nuances. To this extent, there are a number

of questions I have left outstanding such as: are there solutions to the problems I

have raised from within a metaphysics of and-being; does and-being necessarily lead

to violence; are there positive aspects to, or manifestations of and-being; and can we

avoid and-being? These are questions that I readily acknowledge I have left

unanswered and that would need further investigation. What I do claim however, is

that I have demonstrated that the metaphysics of and-being has the potential to and

does, at least in some cases, lead to various philosophical and social problems.

Further, I would suggest that rather than dealing with these problems on a one off

basis, it would be worth returning to the ontology of relationality and re-open the

question of with-being. In other words, what is required is a paradigm shift rather

than continuing to attempt to address these issues from within the existing

paradigms. Given the potential violence inherent in at least some strands of and-

being at the ethical and political level this is more than simply an abstract exercise

and is worth pursuing even if it only reduces the potential for such violence

marginally.

Where should we turn to for such a paradigm shift? As discussed in chapter 1, one

good place to start is with the 20th century German philosopher Martin Heidegger.

While there may be other places to begin, even from within and-being itself,

Heidegger's project of re-opening the question of being through the ontological

distinction immediately begins to deconstruct and-being and has led to a radical

reconceptualisation of the relations between the human and world. As Richard

Campbell puts it:

> His *Being and Time*, I submit, is best read as a remarkably rigorous
> attempt to think through all that is involved in the following
> audacious thought experiment: suppose we are not to think of
> ourselves as things, characterised by some distinctive set of
> properties, amidst a system of other sorts of things each with their
> own independent properties. Rather, suppose we think of ourselves
> as ways of being characterized in terms of possibilities for
> becoming, who find ourselves having to act in a world where what
> we encounter are things more or less useful for our purposes.
> Because these things are first encountered and characterized in
> terms of their roles, neither they nor the world they constitute have
> independent essences apt for theoretical description.[52]

Further, what if this shift away from an understanding of the human as an entity with

fixed characteristics and powers such as thought, language and agency to

'possibilities of becoming' reveals the historical and situational contingency of our

human way of being?

> Process is productive, not merely of new examples in accordance
> with patterns, but of new patterns as well as of new examples. There
> is not only change in accordance with laws. There is also a change
> of laws themselves. Reality as a whole is an historical process. Only
> if this assumption is made can man's very being be considered
> historical.[53]

What is the ontological, ethical and political significance of historical Da-sein? It is

to Heidegger's audacious thought experiment that we will turn in the next chapter for

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[52]Campbell, R 'The Covert Metaphysics of the Clash between "Analytic" and "Continental"
Philosophy', p352
[53]Fackenheim, E *Metaphysics and Historicity*. Marquette University Press: Milwaukee, 1961, p24

answers to these questions and to consider the paradigm shift in with-being that

Heidegger's philosophy promises.

Chapter 3 – The Heideggerian Revolution: Overcoming the metaphysics of and-being

> In going back to matters like truth as such, ground, concept, lawfulness, and freedom, we are seeking a philosophical logic, or better the metaphysical foundations of logic (initia logicae).
>
> We seek a return to these basic philosophical problems, and thereby a concrete entrance into philosophy itself, by way of a critical dismantling of traditional logic down to its hidden foundations.
>
> <div align="right">Martin Heidegger, The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic[1]</div>

> When in our day a philosopher expressly poses the question of being no longer as a question of essence and expressly thinks no longer in the sense of ousia or substance, we must regard this attempt as a veritable revolution.
>
> <div align="right">Werner Marx, Heidegger and the Tradition[2]</div>

In chapter 1, I began outlining the ontological problem of relationality. That is, I argued that fundamental relationality, or with-being, has been ignored or reduced to and-being through the taking for granted of something like the natural attitude as described by Husserl and its underlying logic of identities as described by logicians such as Leibnitz and later Frege and Russell. In chapter 2, I argued that this reduction to and-being and its logic has not only been the cause of a whole range of philosophical problems such as the epistemological gap, scepticism and a host of dichotomies, but is also implicated in violence at the ethical and political level. If this is right, then we have good reason, or even an imperative, to revisit the question of relationality and the ontology of with-being.

In response to this imperative I will begin 'a critical dismantling of traditional logic down to its hidden foundations' through the work of the twentieth-century

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[1]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p21
[2]Marx, W *Heidegger and the Tradition*. Translated by T Kisiel, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971, p5

philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889 –1976). The ontology that Heidegger explores

moves beyond the kind of and-ontology that we described in the last chapter towards

ontology as a way of being, or relating, peculiar to humans. As we will see, this

foundational with-being that Heidegger exposes, not only grounds and makes

possible and-being but also calls for a reconsideration of various concepts such as

truth, ground, lawfulness and freedom that traditionally have only been thought at the

level of and-being in ways that we discussed in the last chapter. In doing so, he

overcomes, at least to some extent, the distance between human existence and world

inherent in traditional notions of the sovereign subject in the form of the

epistemological gap, and reintroduces a dynamism and priority to relationality that is

missing from and-ontologies that emphasise fixed essences and eternal truths. In

short, he wants to bring Da-sein nearer to the being of the beings it encounters

everyday.

> May world in its worlding be the nearest of all nearing that nears, as
> it brings the truth of Being near to man's essence, and so gives man
> to belong to the disclosing bringing-to-pass that is a bringing into its
> own.[3]

The purpose of the next three chapters will be to unpack this strange blessing that

'world in its worlding be the nearest of all nearing that nears' through an

examination of Heidegger's radical understanding of with-being. The critical

questions to be addressed will be: how does Heidegger approach the dismantling of

and-being and reprioritise relationality; what is Heidegger's own account of the

'with'; and does Heidegger's philosophy ultimately do justice to with-being?

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[3]Heidegger, M 'The Turning' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977, p49

In answering these questions concerning the Heideggerian revolution and its

reclamation of with-being, I will begin in this chapter by outlining Heidegger's broad

project and approach to re-opening the question of with-being and the general

direction of the development of Heidegger's answer to this question from his early

philosophy typified by *Being and Time* through to his later work on the piety of

thinking. Then in chapter 4, I will trace and critically examine the milestones in

Heidegger's philosophy that mark out his attempts to explore with-being: being-in-

the-world; temporality; shepherding; and letting be (*Gelassenheit*). What will emerge

as a result of this analysis will be a genuine shift in our understanding of with-being,

together with some pressing issues that will lead us into a critique of Heidegger and a

consideration of the implications of his philosophy for ethics and politics to be taken

up in the third of our chapters on Heidegger; chapter 5.

3.1 Re-opening the question of with-being

And-being, as typified by the natural attitude and Aristotle's hylemorphic ontology,

seems self-evident. Whether it is a matter of historical contingency, or because it is

simply 'natural', and-being today is almost universally, either explicitly or implicitly,

taken for granted. It is therefore one thing to suggest a motivation for reconsidering

and-being and its logic, such as the difficulties we raised in the last chapter, and

another to sensibly re-open the question in a way that challenges 'common sense'

and at the same time generates a 'logic of its own'. Heidegger's early philosophy

goes a long way to achieving just that by four key philosophical moves: first, he

recognises and-being, or metaphysics, as a problem; then he opens a space for further

investigation by introducing the ontological difference; next he proposes the

phenomenological method as a way of investigating this difference; and finally he

identifies a place to start his analysis namely our human way of being, or Da-sein. It

is worth noting that consistent with how his philosophical position will develop,

Heidegger does not see this approach to re-opening the question of being as the only

approach.[4] However, clearly in following this approach, he believes he will expose

important aspects of with-being that are covered over or not recognised at the level

of and-being. In this chapter, let us consider his approach in more detail so we can

better understand how he begins to dismantle the logic of and-being and opens the

way for his own understanding of with-being.

3.1.1 *Die Seinsfrage* – moving beyond metaphysics

You will recall from chapter 1 that Heidegger's philosophy is fundamentally

concerned with ontology, or more specifically, with re-opening the question of being

(*die Seinsfrage*) which he believed had been ignored since the time of Aristotle. In its

ignorance, the tradition and everyday commonsense has taken for granted the natural

attitude, or the understanding of being as beings, where human beings dwell in the

objective presence of things (*Vorhandenheit*). Heidegger calls this equation of being-

with-beings metaphysics.

> Metaphysics thinks beings as beings. Wherever the question is asked
> what beings are, beings as such are in sight.[5]

This substantialist ontology, and the sciences built upon it, which enquire at the level

of 'what beings are' and that 'traces them back in their origins to another being', for

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[4] See *Being and Time,* H27 for instance, where Heidegger suggests that his inquiry may be open to a still more original enquiry.
[5] Heidegger, M 'Introduction to "What Is Metaphysics"' in *Pathmarks*, p277

Heidegger does not even engage with the question of the meaning of being because 'the being of beings is not itself a being'.[6] This distinction between being and beings is what Heidegger refers to as the ontological difference and it is this distinction that prevents us from immediately falling into prejudices – such as considering being as a predicate to be attached to entities or as a universal/existential quantifier – that have led the tradition to forget the question of being and allows us to re-open *die Seinsfrage*.

To engage with *die Seinsfrage* is for Heidegger, then, to engage with no-thing, and it is this no-thingness that is at the heart of being. That is, *die Seinsfrage*, falls outside of the domain of 'things'. In general, Heidegger is very exacting in his insistence that being is not a thing. For example, in some of his later works, such as 'On the Question of Being', written in 1955 in honour of Ernst Jünger, Heidegger takes pains to write 'being' with a line through it (the original title of the essay was 'Concerning "the Line"' [*Über 'Die Linie'*]) to indicate that being can never truly be brought to presence in the subject/predicate structure of language.[7] Thus being is outside metaphysics and we cannot find the answer to *die Seinsfrage* from within metaphysics because:

> Metaphysics does not induce being itself to speak, for metaphysics does not give thought to being in its truth, nor does it think such truth as unconcealedness, nor does it think this unconcealedness in its essence. To metaphysics the essence of truth always appears only in the already derivative form of the truth of cognitive knowledge and the truth of propositions that formulate such knowledge.[8]

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[6] Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H6
[7] Heidegger, M 'On the question of Being' in *Pathmarks*, p291
[8] Heidegger, M 'Introduction to "What is Metaphysics"' in *Pathmarks*, p280

In this sense, our everyday understanding of truth and knowledge relating to the metaphysical worldview covers over both the essence of truth itself and the truth of being because we become fixated on the calculation of beings through the 'exact thinking' of logic which we explored in the last chapter. Furthermore, Heidegger suggests, it is only through being that anything like beings and the metaphysical worldview can come to light.

> In whatever manner beings are interpreted – whether as spirit, after the fashion of spiritualism; or as matter and force, after the fashion of materialism; or as becoming and life; or as representation, will, substance, subject, or energeia; or as eternal recurrence of the same – every time, beings as beings appear in the light of being.[9]

Thus 'being' for Heidegger is the ground of metaphysics and is subject to a different level and form of enquiry. To the extent that philosophy attempts to 'experience' this ground and move away from the representation of being as beings then Heidegger suggests we have left metaphysics. It is important to note two points here.

Firstly, Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as grounded in the 'physics' of beings is in sharp contrast to the kind of understanding of metaphysics articulated in Kant or as more commonly understood in the sciences. For Kant, metaphysics is that realm where pure reason extends itself beyond its limits into questions it has no remit to answer, whereas for Heidegger, Kant's pure reason is itself metaphysics as it remains within the domain of reification and and-being. Similarly, metaphysics is also commonly understood as 'questions about reality that lie beyond or behind those capable of being tackled by the methods of science'.[10] But again for Heidegger, as

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[9]Heidegger, M 'Introduction to "What is Metaphysics" in *Pathmarks*, p278
[10]Blackburn, S *Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p240

long as science persists with an understanding of reality that is limited to beings, it
will always be metaphysical. Of course, if one adopts the definition of metaphysics
from one of these other standpoints then Heidegger's philosophy itself is pure
metaphysics, because it clearly seeks to move us beyond both the thinking and the
understanding of being as and-being that bounds the non-metaphysical under these
definitions.

Secondly, metaphysics, in its Kantian or scientific understanding, is often considered
as something to be avoided if not totally rejected. This view is expressed very
colourfully in Hume where he suggests that metaphysics (in the usual sense) should
be 'committed to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion'.[11]
In contrast, for Heidegger, this is precisely where philosophy must venture if it is to
address *die Seinsfrage*. Further, while arguing we should move beyond metaphysics,
as he defines it, Heidegger does not reject metaphysics out of hand but gives it a
place as one possible way, albeit a limited one, for humans to relate to being. Having
said that, one may immediately ask at this point what is at stake here? Why does
Heidegger see metaphysics and the kind of truths it reveals as problematic?

A good articulation of the answer to this question that Heidegger gives can be found
in the 'Introduction to "what is metaphysics"', where he suggests;

> What is to be decided is whether being itself, out of its own proper
> truth, can come to pass in a relation appropriate to the essence of
> human beings; or whether metaphysics, in turning away from its
> own ground, continues to prevent the relation of being to man from

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[11]Hume, D *Enquiries concerning human understanding*, Bk. xii, part 3

> lighting up, out of the essence of this very relation, in such a way as to bring human beings into a belonging to being.[12]

What is revealed here is a struggle within being itself. The truth of being, according to Heidegger, can only come to light through its relationship with human being. Human beings are ontically distinguished from other beings through their concern with being. No other being, states Heidegger, has this concern. Yet encountering being as beings, through metaphysics, itself emerges as a possibility from this unique relationship. That is, this is one possible way for human beings to be with the world that is grounded in being itself, even if this kind of and-being obscures, as Heidegger claims, another more primordial relationship between human beings and being. The implications of this concealment of the truth of being by this metaphysics of 'things' is as we have seen far reaching. It forms the ontological ground of a stable 'comportment' towards the world that brings with it a certain normative bearing that extends to all aspects of that world.[13] Thus our understanding of ourselves as human beings, our relationship with the world and the 'things' in it, our notions of truth and other fundamental philosophical concepts, and even an understanding of values and 'the good', contain reflections of this comportment. So, Heidegger's challenge to revisit the question of being and reject an understanding of being that reduces it to beings, is not simply a philosophical undertaking but a radical de-stabilisation of the traditional orientation towards the world and its understanding of with-being.

Heidegger's project then, is to move beyond this metaphysics of Western philosophy based on what I have called and-being to a more fundamental understanding of the relationship between being and human beings. In this way, Heidegger's project of re-

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[12]Heidegger, M 'Intro to "What is metaphysics"' in *Pathmarks*, p280
[13]Heidegger, M 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' in *Pathmarks*, p166

opening *die Seinsfrage* runs parallel with my own and promises to expose a different

kind of relationality by exploring the relationship between the human being and

being.

3.1.2 To the thing in itself

While the ontological difference makes space for the possible investigation of being

as opposed to beings, it does not give us any indication as to the method we should

use to undertake such an investigation. As we have seen in the last chapter, however,

two possible methods of discovering the truth of being seem to be ruled out from the

beginning as they start from the assumption of and-being: namely rationalism

(idealism) and empiricism (realism). Heidegger in recognition of this instead opts for

a version of phenomenology which he inherited from his mentor Husserl. In doing so

he achieves two things: first, he avoids as many theoretical or intellectual

presuppositions as possible by returning directly to the thing in itself; and secondly,

through his recognition and adoption of a version of the Husserlian notion of

intentionality, he breaks down the traditional subject/object dichotomy. That is, on

Heidegger's account, intentionality challenges the and-being ontological assumption

that the subject/object relationship is built onto a pre-existing subject (with the power

of thought) and object (a material thing), by proposing that thinking cannot be

understood in isolation from the object of the thought. Thus, epistemology and

ontology are not separate areas of investigation but are intimately linked.

> Intentionality must not be considered a special feature of psychical
> processes; rather, it must be presented as a manner in which
> something is encountered in such a way that what is encountered
> comes to the fore together with the encountering; the directing-

> oneself-at together with its specific at-what...*With this discovery of*
> *intentionality, for the first time in the whole history of philosophy*
> *the path for radical ontological research is explicitly given.*[14]

In this way thought, through phenomenology, is discovered in its direct relation with

the 'thing in itself' and it is this direct relation that is the subject of and paves the

way for ontological research.

Despite this general indebtedness to Husserl and the phenomenological method,

acknowledged in a dedication at the beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger is not

without criticisms of Husserl's development and use of phenomenology, and he

himself takes phenomenology in a somewhat different direction.[15] In particular, he

rejects Husserl's epistemological slant on phenomenology and his return to a

Cartesian construction of the subject which because of the intentional stance seems

inevitably to lead to an idealism. That is, by bracketing the natural attitude and

adopting the phenomenological stand point Husserl focuses too much on

transcendental consciousness and ignores the most obvious phenomena of our

everyday being in the world. For Heidegger, this everydayness should be the starting

point of the phenomenological investigation and the Husserlian *epoche* is already one

theoretical step too many that ignores the ontological significance of intentionality

and tends to subsume ontology within epistemology—with the things in themselves

being reduced to the intentional objects of consciousness. Instead for Heidegger, the

phenomenological directive 'to the things themselves' means precisely to begin with

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[14]Heidegger, M *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*. Edited by F-W von Herrmann, Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994, p260
[15]The extent of the difference between Heidegger's and Husserl's phenomenology is of course hotly debated in the literature. Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge, 2004 (pviii) for instance suggests Heidegger's philosophy is simply an elaboration on a Husserlian theme, while R Schacht in his article 'Husserlian and Heideggerian Phenomenology' in *Philosophical Studies* 23(5), 1972: 293-314 argues they are very different. For a more nuanced consideration of the differences see Soren Overgaard's 'Heidegger's Early Critique of Husserl' in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 11(2), 2003: 157-175.

the entities or beings we encounter in the world.[16] Further, the recognition of intentionality also implicates humans, not as transcendental subjects with the power to encounter these pre-existing entities but as always phenomenally engaged in the world with entities. What Heidegger realises is that it is this complex relational of worldly engagement that requires further exploration insofar as it grounds and exposes subject and object, rather than investigating either the subject or the object in isolation. Further, for Heidegger, this worldly engagement will ultimately go beyond both intentionality and consciousness to a more embodied and practical relationship between human and world. It is through this phenomenological understanding and approach that Heidegger hopes to bridge the epistemological gap and expose Da-sein in its nearness to being. In this respect, Heidegger's phenomenological method might better be described as a particular orientation and approach to the question of being, that goes in a different direction, and can never fulfil, Husserl's project of discovering absolute and certain foundations of knowledge in the Cartesian vein.

However, a question that I suggest we retain in the background as we examine the direction of Heidegger's phenomenology, to be more fully explored in chapter 5, is whether he succeeds in adequately thinking the relationship between Da-sein and being, or whether he also has a tendency to prioritise one or either side of this relational complex and in doing so uncomfortably shifts between a form of subjectivism and a naïve realism which fails to adequately address with-being. Indeed this is the kind of tension that many commentators suggest underlies what is known as Heidegger's turn or *die Kehre* where there is a suggestion that Heidegger shifts from prioritising Da-sein and its fundamental ontology to a prioritising of

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[16]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H28

being and its destiny. Before looking at this question of *die Kehre* in Heidegger

however, let us briefly look at why the early Heidegger prioritises Da-sein as the

place to begin his re-opening of *die Seinsfrage.*

3.1.3 A strange humanism

Consistent with his understanding of the phenomenological method, Heidegger

insists we must begin our analysis of *die Seinsfrage* starting with our everyday

encounter with the world and the beings in it. He argues that given we are interested

in the being of beings then it is beings that must be 'interrogated in the question of

being'.[17] But where specifically to start? Of all the beings that could be interrogated,

he further argues that it is human being that must be investigated first. This in itself is

not that unusual. After all, there have been numerous attempts to understand the

essence of human being. Indeed according to Heidegger:

> The beginning of metaphysics in the thought of Plato is at the same
> time the beginning of 'humanism'...In that regard, 'humanism'
> means the process that is implicated in the beginning, in the
> unfolding and in the end of metaphysics, whereby human beings, in
> differing respects, but always deliberately, move into the central
> place among beings, of course without thereby being the highest
> being.[18]

Consistent with his overcoming of metaphysics, Heidegger explicitly rejects such

humanism. In his 'Letter on Humanism'[19] Heidegger even goes to great pains to

distance himself from Sartre's claim of developing an 'existentialism as humanism'

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[17]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H6
[18]Heidegger, M 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' in *Pathmarks*, p181
[19]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, pp239-276

which Sartre also extends to Heidegger.[20] Nonetheless, something like the

prioritisation of an analysis of human being emerges at the beginning of *Being and*

Time. In 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger tries to distinguish his own strange brand

of humanism from others by suggesting it:

> is a humanism that thinks the humanity of the human being from
> nearness to being. But at the same time it is a humanism in which
> not the human being but the human being's historical essence is at
> stake in its provenance from the truth of being.[21]

Several critical points are evident from this description of his own humanism that

Heidegger himself thinks warrant a rejection of the term humanism altogether in

relation to his own philosophy. The first is that it is not a study of 'the human being'.

To understand this we must return to the ontological difference. Traditionally,

humanism, as we discussed in the last chapter, studied the essence of human beings

as if they were other objects in the world. That is, it studied them as a particular

genus of beings that were possessed of particular powers or characteristics that

differentiated them from the other entities in the world such as thinking, speaking

and acting. One of those powers that has typically arisen from and dominated

Western metaphysics, is the power of thinking and rationality.

> Here 'human being' sometimes means humanity or humankind,
> sometimes the individual or the community, and sometimes the
> people [*das Volk*] or a group of peoples. What is always at stake is
> this: to take human beings, who within the sphere of a fundamental,
> metaphysically established system of beings are defined as *animal*
> *rationale*.[22]

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[20]As outlined in his 1945 lecture and then paper 'Existentialism is a Humanism'. Translated by Carol
Macomber, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007 in which he cites Heidegger as a philosopher
supporting such a position.
[21]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks,* p261
[22]Heidegger, M 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' in *Pathmarks,* p181

Heidegger's humanism then, rejects this conception of the human as rational animal and the prioritisation of the essence of human being over its existence. Similarly, Heidegger rejects Sartre's humanism because it operates according to the same logic but by reversing the prioritisation of existence over essence.

The second critical point is that instead of some kind of power, what distinguishes human being is its unique relationship with or 'nearness to being'. In exploiting the ontological difference, this nearness is not to be thought of as the spatial proximity between two objects, but as a special way of being of human beings.

> Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being.[23]

That is, Da-sein is distinguished from other beings by its concern with its way of being and an understanding of its own being. It is ontological in the sense that its existence is constantly at issue for it, or as Heidegger puts it 'Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence'.[24]

On this account, what we need to study if we consider human beings is not some feature of the human being as a being, but 'the concern for being' that is the peculiar way of being of human beings. To mark this shift in the subject of his investigations Heidegger employs the term Da-sein, and to mark the shift in the level of investigation itself he uses the term fundamental ontology. Fundamental ontology, then, is the investigation of the way of being of human beings or Da-sein; the study

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[23]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H12
[24]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H12

of which Heidegger believes will give us an insight into the broader question of *die Seinsfrage.*

The final point worth highlighting is in regard to Heidegger's claim that 'the human being's historical essence is at stake in its provenance from the truth of being'. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, Heidegger's point is that Da-sein is a temporal and historically contingent being, and it is in this context that both world and truth need to be understood. As a way of being, Da-sein, is constant movement, its existence is always at issue and cannot be taken for granted. Likewise because worldliness is a part of this existence, world too is constantly at issue and is always moving and open to hermeneutic change. Da-sein also has the capacity to consider the structure of its own existence and the meaning of being in general. But this too is in the context of the historicity of the tradition in which it finds itself entangled. Thus, a certain understanding of the question of being is always inherited, an understanding that 'deprives Da-sein of its own leadership' and can bar 'access to those original "wellsprings" out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn'.[25] Indeed this is what Heidegger suggests has happened in terms of the forgetting of the question of being that he is seeking to rectify.

In summary then, Heidegger's strange humanism seeks to deconstruct traditional notions of what it is to be human, subjectivity and the 'I'. For Heidegger, the essence of Da-sein is in its existence. Having re-integrated essence and existence in this way,

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[25]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H20-H21

fundamental ontology takes an existential twist. Rather than seeking out fixed

categories and essences that are universal and timeless, fundamental ontology uses

the phenomenological method as a way of developing an existential analytic of the

modes of being of Da-sein. In this way, Da-sein is not to be conceived of as simply a

consciousness, as in Sartre, nor a cogito, as in Descartes and Husserl, nor as an

egocentric sovereign subject, as in many liberalist accounts such as JS Mill. Da-sein

never begins nor exists as an isolated individual at the centre of the world. Rather

Da-sein is always dispersed across time and space and is present in the multiplicity

of every embodied Da-sein.

> Da-sein's essence already contains a primordial bestrewal
> [*Streuung*], which is in a quite definite respect a dissemination
> [*Zerstreuung*]...As existing, Da-sein never relates only to a
> particular object; if it relates solely to one object, it does so only by
> turning away from other beings that are beforehand and at the same
> time appearing along with the object. This multiplicity does not
> occur because there are several objects, but conversely. This also
> holds good for comportment towards oneself...[26]

This multiplicity at the heart of the essence of Da-sein has profound implications for

the ontology of with-being and a recovery of the 'with' from the 'and' because it

inverts the ontological priority of relating. Rather than relationships emerging from

the coming together of two pre-existing and radically separated beings as in the case

of and-being – for example the epistemological subject and an object in the world –

Heidegger proposes that a web of relating pre-figures the subjects encounter with

objects and that this web is a part of the essence of existential Da-sein—multiplicity

is not merely additive but has qualitative ontological significance. It is this

multiplicity and its dimensions that Heidegger captures in his ontological description

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[26]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p138

of Da-sein as existentially being-with-the-world which is the first major milestone in

Heidegger's development of his understanding of with-being. To better understand

how this fits in with the other elements of his thought, I will now turn briefly to the

issue of *die Kehre* and the contrast between the early and later Heidegger.

3.2 The question of *die Kehre*

In the literature much has been written about the turn or reversal (*die Kehre*) in

Heidegger's philosophy from his earlier work and magnum opus *Being and Time* to

his later work usually marked by 'On the Essence of Truth' written in 1930.

However, while much has been written there is no general agreement about exactly

what characterises *die Kehre* or of its significance. Karl Löwith contrasts

Heidegger's focus on Da-sein in his early work, to a focus on the truth of being in his

later work, while William Richardson contrasts the phenomenological approach in

Heidegger's early work to a concern with thinking in his later work. Still other

contrasts are drawn between what has affectionately become known following

Löwith and Richardson as Heidegger I and II (or perhaps even III for some

commentators): an active versus passive Da-sein; a shift from there-being to being-

there; or from being-in-the-world to *Ereignis*; or perhaps from ontology to poetics

and language.[27] Likewise the purposes to which this comparison between Heidegger

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[27] A great deal has been written about *die Kehre*. Perhaps the two most important early works are Karl Löwith's 'Da-sein Resolute Unto Itself and Being which Itself Gives' in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*. Edited by Richard Wolin, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 and William Richardson's *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*. Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1963. Other accounts include Leo Strauss's *What is Political Philosophy? And other Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, Jürgen Habermas's *Philosophical-Political Profiles*. Translated by Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983, and Pöggeler's *Philosophie und Politik bei Heidegger*. Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1972. Heidegger also in his seminar held at Thor in 1969 portrays his development in three stages the 'meaning', 'truth' and 'topology' of being.

I and II is put varies. Many use it as an excuse to discount the later Heidegger's work

as incoherent and unphilosophical; some suggest it reflects Heidegger's attempt to

come to terms with his Nazi engagement and the events of World War II; others

believe it to be reflective of Heidegger's own realisation of the problems with his

early philosophy; and still others simply want to show a disconnection in

Heideggerian thought. Counter to those who would draw a sharp contrast between

the early and late Heidegger are those such as Olafson, Hemming and Ihde who

argue for a deeper unity or narrative that continues throughout Heidegger's work.

However, the basis of this unity is also not agreed upon. Don Idhe contra Richardson

argues that it is Heidegger's phenomenological approach which remains consistent;

Olafson thinks it is in Heidegger's attempt to negotiate the interdependence of

presence and existence; and Hemming sees the point of unity in the demonstration of

how Da-sein and being 'belong together'. How are we to make sense of all of these

twists in the turning?

Certainly, there is a great deal of textual evidence that can and has been reasonably

marshalled in support of all these positions. That is, certainly there were shifts in

Heidegger's terminology and focus throughout the development of his philosophy

that in and of themselves are worthy of contrast and examination. On the other hand,

while such contrasts might pick up local discontinuities, this does not rule out a

global coherence to Heidegger's work. Indeed, even many of those who make a

distinction between Heidegger I and Heidegger II, such as Richardson, accept such a

coherence at some level:

> We are in a position now to compare Heidegger I and Heidegger II,
> and we can see clearly: that the same problem preoccupies both (the

effort to overcome, sc. ground, metaphysics by endeavouring to think the sense of Being-as-truth); that in both cases the effort is to overcome the subject-object polarity by letting come to pass the negatived process of non-concealment (truth) ...[28]

Heidegger himself also insisted on such a continuity as he is at pains to point out in many of his later writings. In his 'Letter on Humanism', he explicitly maintains his commitment to the analysis of *Being and Time*. And while it is true that he also calls into question the language or some of the concepts in *Being and Time*, this is not so much to reject these totally, but so as to locate them at the start of an epochal shift away from an understanding of being as beings that needs to be further developed— and indeed is further developed in Heidegger's later philosophy. From Heidegger's own perspective then, *die Kehre* is better understood in terms of the philosophical project mapped out at the beginning of *Being and Time*. In mapping out this project Heidegger suggests that it will consist of three divisions: a fundamental ontological analysis of Da-sein; a consideration of Da-sein in the context of temporality; and a general consideration of time and being. That is, *Being and Time*, was the first two divisions of a three part work aimed at the larger project of discovering the meaning of being in general. This larger project is consistent throughout all of Heidegger's work and it is Heidegger's realisation of the limits of the language and approach in *Being and Time* that leads him not to abandon the last part of his larger project, but rather to undertake it in a different way. This is clearly articulated in Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism'.

> The adequate execution and completion of this other thinking that
> abandons subjectivity is surely made more difficult by the fact that
> in the publication of *Being and Time* the third division of the first
> part, 'Time and Being', was held back (cf. *Being and Time* H39).

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[28]Richardson, W *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, p623

> Here everything is reversed. The division in question was held back because thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turning [*Kehre*] and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics.
>
> This turning is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the locality of the dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced in the fundamental experience of the oblivion of being.[29]

Die Kehre, then, can be considered as a deepening of Heidegger's understanding of ontology itself and his approach to answering the broader question of the meaning of being through a deeper consideration of Da-sein's relationship with being. Heidegger, immediately after the above quote, refers us to the lecture 'On the Essence of Truth' for an insight into *die Kehre*. To this could be added 'The Question Concerning Technology' (first given as a lecture in 1949), 'The Turn' (first given as a lecture in 1949), and 'Time and Being' (1962) as critical to Heidegger's understanding of *die Kehre*. What is central to all these works, as pointed out by Laurence Hemming, is an attempt to understand the belonging together of Da-sein and being or in my terms, to explore the fundamental relationality of with-being.[30]

In this context, Hemming, correctly in my view, makes much of Heidegger's preface to WJ Richardson's book *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought* that presents one of the most considered analyses of a turn in Heidegger's thinking. It is also one of the few places that Heidegger himself comments on the literature about his own purported turning. Notably in this preface he suggests:

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[29]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, pp249-250
[30]Hemming, L 'Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and die Kehre' in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6(3), 1998: 393-423

> The distinction you make between Heidegger I and Heidegger II is justified only on the condition that this is kept constantly in mind: only by way of what Heidegger I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by Heidegger II. But [the thought of] Heidegger I becomes possible only if it is contained in Heidegger II.[31]

While often this quote is taken as endorsement for this distinction between Heidegger I and Heidegger II, as Lawrence points out, it could equally be considered a caution against any such distinction. If we consider Heidegger's philosophy as an epochal shift in with-being the relationship between Heidegger I and II comes to light as the development of this shift. Heidegger I provides us with a different comportment towards being that re-opens the question of being and enables the very possibility of the kinds of questions asked by Heidegger II about Da-sein's belonging to being. However, it is only because it is grounded in the fundamental relationship between Da-sein and being explored in Heidegger II that comportment and a relationship with beings as a whole of any kind are possible. If this is the case it is not until we understand the philosophy of Heidegger II that *die Kehre* moves us to a new epoch and gives us a more complete understanding of the unity and totality of Heidegger's shift in our understanding of with-being.

It is this unity of Heidegger's thought around the question of 'what it means for Da-sein and being to belong together' that will form the basis of the detailed exploration of the development of his philosophy in the next chapter rather than the claim of a radical discontinuity in Heidegger's work. Indeed, it is Heidegger's attempt to close the ontological gap and get nearer to being that I believe is the impetus behind his development. However, I would point out that this impetus arises from a certain

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[31]Heidegger, M Preface to Richardson's *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, pxxii

tension in Heidegger's work that I alluded to earlier which can be found in the very

distinction between Da-sein and being and a tendency to retain a remnant of and-

being in considering this belonging together. I believe it is this tension that

commentators indirectly identify when they make a strong distinction between

Heidegger I and Heidegger II. It is also the manifestations of this remnant of and-

being that will form our main critique of Heidegger in chapter 5. Ultimately, I find

myself agreeing with Richardson's conclusion that:

> It is perfectly obvious, then, that there is some hidden power still
> more original than Heidegger II which gives rise to both I and II.
> Let us call this primordial source the 'Ur-Heidegger'.[32]

What I will show in the next two chapters is that this primordial source is the

fundamental relationality that Heidegger is trying, but fails, to adequately come to

terms with. Heidegger I and Heidegger II are the results of grappling with

fundamental relationality starting with ontology as first philosophy and giving

primacy to Da-sein's relationship with being. What Heidegger I and II ultimately

demonstrate is that the dimensions of with-being cannot adequately be explored from

either the direction of individuated Da-sein (Heidegger I) or from the destiny of

being (Heidegger II). Indeed, as we will see, in setting up the problem in these terms

Heidegger retains certain vestiges of traditional and-being, specifically: an

ontological gap between Da-sein and being; an emphasis on wholeness and unity; a

priority of singular Da-sein over *mitsein* (our being with other people); and, the truth

of being as the currency of relationality. Thus, while Heidegger contributes greatly to

a deeper understanding and engagement with with-being, it is these vestiges of and-

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[32]Richardson, W *From Phenomenology to Thought*, p633

being that form the space for a critique of Heidegger and the philosophical developments of other philosophers such as Derrida, Levinas, and Nancy.

However, lest we jump too far ahead in looking for a primordial Ur-Heidegger, I would like to consider how far Heidegger I and Heidegger II get in developing an ontology of with-being. This is the theme of the next chapter which will trace and critically examine the milestones in Heidegger's philosophy that mark out his attempts to explore with-being: being-in-the-world; temporality; shepherding; and letting be (*Gelassenheit*).

Chapter 4 – Reclaiming the 'with'

> The above description of the meontological concept of God, however sketchy,
> suffices to show that it does indeed generate a logic of its own. Its terms alter as the
> movement proceeds; and they alter because the movement is backward as well as
> forward: that is circular. And the logical movement must be of this kind because the
> real process it describes is a self-constituting process which, in moving forward,
> integrates and re-integrates its own past into the forward movement.
>
> Emil Fackenheim, *Metaphysics and Historicity*[1]

In the last chapter, I outlined Heidegger's philosophical goal of overcoming

metaphysics and inquiring into *die Seinsfrage*, explored the ontological difference as

a means of re-opening the question of being, considered his phenomenological

method, and identified Da-sein as the starting point for his philosophical

investigations. I then argued that the development and milestones in Heidegger's

thought are unified by his attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the belonging

together of being and Da-sein—to get at primordial relationality. In this way, the

milestones in Heidegger's thought that I will explore in this chapter, can be seen as

signposts marking the distance between Da-sein and being as Heidegger attempts to

close the ontological gap that the tradition has put between them. Interestingly,

because of the phenomenological method, the first milestone, being-in-the-world,

although phenomenologically most immediate and accessible, turns out to be furthest

away from revealing the truth of the belonging together of Da-sein and being; while

the last milestone, *Gelassenheit*, exposes the primordial nearness of Da-sein to being,

but seems a long way from the everyday concerns which it grounds.

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[1]Fackenheim, E *Metaphysics and Historicity,* p33

> The human being is a creature of distance! And only by way of the real primordial distance that the human in his transcendence establishes toward all beings does the true nearness of things begin to grow in him. And only the capacity to hear into the distance summons forth the awakening of the answer of those humans who should be near.[2]

Let us then consider the journey that Heidegger's thinking takes to better understand this 'real primordial distance' that will expose 'the true nearness of things'; realising that such philosophical thinking, like Arisotle's *Metaphysics*, demands 'reflections that are far removed from any useful, practical wisdom'.[3]

4.1 Being-in-the-world

The paradigmatic shift that the early Heidegger, centred around *Being and Time, The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic,* and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics,* introduces and explores is the compound expression being-in-the-world. As already highlighted, what is at stake in this term is the very relationality between the human and world and our understanding of both terms. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger claims that philosophy fails again and again in fulfilling the task: '*the development of the idea of a "natural concept of the world"*'.[4] This is because the 'natural concept of the world' is taken for granted as the concept of the natural world and its assumption of the natural attitude. On this account, world simply equates to the sum total of entities in it and the human is a special genus amongst these others that has the power as subject to encounter the other entities as object in the classic subject/object epistemological relation. But Heidegger insists:

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[2]Heidegger, M 'Supplement: Distance and Nearness' in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic,* p220
[3]Heidegger, M *On Time and Being.* Translated by J. Stambaugh, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, pp1-2
[4]Heidegger, M *Being and Time,* H52

It is not the case that human being 'is', and then on top of that has a relation to the 'world' which it sometimes takes upon itself. Da-sein is never 'initially' a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in the mood to take up 'relation' to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is possible only *because, as being-in-the-world,* Da-sein is as it is.[5]

Note the contrast between Heidegger's being-in, or relationality, as the way of being of Da-sein as opposed to more traditional metaphysical concepts of being-in. That is, being-in in the context of the common metaphysical understanding of the natural world indicates a certain spatial and temporal relation. In terms of spatiality, we speak of something being placed in something else, on top of something else, beside something else and so on. In terms of temporality, we think of things persisting over time and in the case of the natural world we conceive of it as having existed before we were born and existing after we die. Thus, according to this metaphysics of things and its attendant spatial and temporal imagery, first there exists the natural world and then individual things, including human beings, are placed in it both spatially and temporally. However, this understanding of being-in the natural world as objective presence cannot be the last word. As Heidegger insists, no matter how many things are objectively present, they are 'worldless in themselves' they 'can never "touch" each other' nor 'be' 'together with' each other in an existential way.[6] It is only through Da-sein that anything like an understanding of the world as natural world can exist. Note that for Heidegger, this is not to adopt an idealist position. Da-sein does not create these other beings that it encounters. But it is only because of Da-sein's relationship with the world that such beings can ' "meet up" "with" Da-sein'

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[5]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H57
[6]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H55

and 'show themselves of their own accord within a *world*.[7] Note also that this relationship with a world comes before any understanding of this relationship.

Thus, primordial being-in-the-world makes possible the kind of being-in the world understood in metaphysics. The metaphysical understanding of being-in the world presupposes a subject/object relationship and thinks being-in-the-world as 'knowing' the world. But such thinking that entangles itself with the epistemological problems of a 'knowing relationship' does not get at the real phenomenon of the worldliness of the world that is constitutional of the being of Da-sein. This worldliness means that each Da-sein always dwells in a world in an existentiell sense. To distinguish the existential worldliness of Da-sein in general and the world in which an individual Da-sein dwells existentielly from the traditional concept of world, Heidegger refers to the objective presence of things in the latter as innerworldly. Innerworldly here indicates 'the category of "insidedness" that things objectively present can have with regard to one another'.[8] That is, the Cartesian spatial and temporal understanding of being-in.

If Heidegger's analysis is right, then the traditional notion of subjectivity based on the subject/object relation and being-in the world as if it were a container, simply misses this fundamental relation altogether.

> When appeal is made to the subject-object relation, especially for characterizing subjectivity, then it must be said that, in this subject-object relation and in the appeal to it, something essential is omitted and something crucial has been missed. The characteristics of this 'relation between' are omitted, the very thing to be explained. The

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[7]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H57
[8]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H56

genuine concept of subjectivity is lacking, in sofar as it goes
unnoticed that the 'relationship to' belongs to the essence of
subjectivity.[9]

Thus, for Heidegger, if we are to understand subjectivity and world we must consider

the 'relationship to' between them because they can never be considered as separate

objects. But how do we explore being-in-the-world as a unified phenomenon?

Heidegger's approach in *Being and Time* takes a familiar path:

We shall seek the worldliness of the surrounding world
(environmentally) by way of an ontological interpretation of those
beings initially encountered within the surroundings.[10]

Heidegger's overall philosophical strategy in exploring the unified phenomenon of

worldliness, is to undertake a phenomenological analysis of our everyday encounter

with beings to uncover our existential encounter with them. This means starting with

the objects that present themselves to us as innerworldly beings, or *Vorhandenheit*.

4.1.1 The unity of the worldliness of the world

Implicit in the unity of the notion being-in-the-world is that Da-sein always discovers

itself in a world. Indeed for Heidegger it is this worldliness that distinguishes Da-

sein's way of being from that of animals and inanimate objects. In the *Fundamental

Concepts of Metaphysics*, as part of his exploration of the concept of world,

Heidegger undertakes what he calls a comparative examination of the 'immediate

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[9]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p129
[10]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H66

manifest' distinctions between material objects, animals and man.[11] The critical

distinction turns out to be that 'the stone is worldless; the animal poor in world; and

man is world forming'.[12] Of course, we need to be careful not to interpret 'world

forming' as if it were a conscious act of Da-sein. This would be a return to traditional

subjectivity and a form of subjectivism. Rather, Da-sein always finds itself thrown

into relationship with a unified world not of its own making. World is revealed in the

light of a comportment towards the world that is constituted by attunement

(*Befindlichkeit*) and understanding (*Verstanden*).

> As existentials, attunement and understanding characterise the
> primordial disclosedness of being-in-the-world. In the mode of
> 'being attuned' Da-sein 'sees' possibilities in terms of which it is. In
> the projective disclosure of such possibilities, it is always already
> attuned. The project of its ownmost potentiality of being is
> delivered over to the fact of thrownness into the there.[13]

As being-in-the-world then, Da-sein always finds itself engaged in a range of

projects and interests (at work) which are revealed through attunement and

understanding. Attunement is the mood or affective relation that 'first makes possible

directing oneself toward something' and provides impetus for our being-in-the-

world.[14] Understanding reveals the possibilities that these things of interest hold in

relation to this impetus. Note however, both attunement and understanding are not

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[11]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p177
[12]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysic*, p177. Note that Heidegger's attempt to
distinguish animals from man in this way is not without its problems and has led some, for instance
Jacques Derrida in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Translated by Geoffry Bennington and
Rachel Bowlby, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; to accuse Heidegger of an
anthropocentrism. For an interesting discussion of the nuances and ambiguities around Heidegger's
treatment of the animal see Matthew Calarco's 'Heidegger's Zoontology' in *Animal Philosophy:
Essential Readings in Continental Thought*. Edited by Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton, London,
New York: Continuum, 2004 and Giorgio Agamben's *The Open*. Translated by Kevin Attell, Stanford
California: Stanford University Press, 2004
[13]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H148
[14]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H137

inner powers of a pre-existing subject but rather emerge from with-being that simultaneously exposes world and Da-sein in its 'there'.

What all this amounts to is that what characterises Da-sein's being-with-the-world is that it always cares about the world, its own way of being, and its relationship with the world. For this reason, the phenomenological examination of the objects present in the world begins with how we care for these things rather than what we know of them. Note once again that:

> This phenomenological interpretation is not a cognition of existent qualities of beings; but rather, a determination of the structure of their being.[15]

A determination that can only come to light through Da-sein and its association with these innerworldly beings in its taking care of them. But this determination is at first covered over if we encounter these things as the individual mere things of cognition. That is, if we only look at these things on the basis of a theoretical or knowing relationship (*Vorhandenheit*). To uncover the more primordial phenomenon Heidegger returns to the Greek term *pragmata* that brings alive our taking care of these things in terms of their use; they become useful things. The usefulness of a thing Heidegger terms as handiness (*Zuhandenheit*). It is in discovering its handiness that Da-sein comes to relate to the thing more primordially and comes closer to understanding the being of this being.

> The less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more actively we use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more

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[15]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H67

undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, a useful thing. The act of
hammering itself discovers the specific 'handiness' of the hammer.[16]

However, the handiness of a particular thing is never discovered in isolation. It is
always discovered in a 'manifold of references of the "in order to"', or the for-the-
sake-of-which that holds together a totality of useful things at hand (*Zuhandenheit*)
for work.[17] It is this totality that is discovered before the handiness of any individual
thing. Indeed, the more we are engaged in work, the more invisible the individual
handiness of a useful thing becomes 'in order to become really handy'.[18]

There are three things that are worth stressing in this analysis of handiness. The first
is that once again we encounter the interconnectedness and movement of
Heidegger's ontology. It is Da-sein's relationship with *Zeug* (gear) that brings to
light its being, which in turn is enmeshed in a web of references and relationships
with other useful things. It is important in this context to realise that handiness as the
being of beings is not something that is added on as an interpretation to an already
existing objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*), but rather is *'the ontological
categorical definition of beings as they are in "themselves"'*.[19] The second is that the
web of references or the handiness of any particular part goes on in the background
of Da-sein's work unnoticed until the relational web is interrupted in some way. That
is, it is not a consciously constructed web of relationships by the subject. Finally,
individual Da-sein encounters other Da-seins like itself in the context of this work
and so 'the work taken care of in each case is not only at hand in the workshop, but

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[16]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H69
[17]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H69
[18]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H69
[19]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H71

rather is the *public world.*'[20] A world in which understandings of work and the handiness are shared and available for discourse.[21]

But where has the objective presence of things gone? Remembering that Heidegger's phenomenological account must be the ground for such encounters. Da-sein seems to be at work in the world and encountering things in themselves by associating with them through their handiness and their web of references. Where is there a place for an encounter with innerworldly things as objects? According to Heidegger, this place emerges when there is a disruption to the web of references surrounding Da-sein at work. Such a disruption to the web of references can occur, for instance, when a tool breaks, when something is missing, or when something gets in the way. In these cases, labelled conspicuousness, obstrusiveness and obstinacy respectively, the useful thing fails to be ready to hand and comes to the fore in its objective presence. It becomes what is at hand. But note that this 'what is at hand' only stands out in this way through its un-usefulness in the context of this pre-existing web of references or Da-sein's being-in-the-world. Thus, Heidegger argues, *Vorhandenheit* is grounded in *Zuhandenheit*, or to put it differently, the theoretical is always grounded in Da-sein's originary being-in-the-world.

Being-in-the-world on Heidegger's account is thus the unified web of relations structured around the for-the-sake-of-which or care of Da-sein which for the most part is unconscious and inherited because of the contingent thrownness of Da-sein. However, this deconstruction of traditional notions of the subject/object distinction, world and the philosophical problems that attend them is only the beginning of the

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[20]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H71
[21]We will explore this understanding of our relationship with other people or *mitsein* in greater detail in the next chapter.

analysis of the belonging together of being and Da-sein. That is, while it exposes the

phenomenological structure of the Da-sein/world relation beyond an encounter

between beings, one can enquire further as to what makes being-in-the-world

possible. Or put differently, what is it about Da-sein's way of being that enables it to

care about world as a whole? The answer to these questions, found in Division II of

Being and Time, is the temporality of Da-sein.

4.2 Temporality

The consideration of temporality is a natural development of Heidegger's

reconceptualisation of human being as Da-sein and its being-in-the-world. That is,

the move away from human being as noun or entity with a permanent and

unchanging essence to Da-sein as verb or ek-sistence with its way of being and

relationship to world always at stake, introduces a dynamic that awakens the question

of how time and being are related. As David Wood puts it in *The Deconstruction of*

Time:

> The first half (of *Being and Time*) which offers a 'preparatory
> fundamental analysis of Dasein', postpones at every turn the
> question of the *temporal* dimension of the phenomena it deals with,
> and yet it interprets them in such a way that a temporal
> determination is what is most called for.[22]

This is clearly evident in Heidegger's analysis of thrownness, facticity and concern

with Da-sein's ownmost possibilities. Da-sein's 'thrownness' means that its

comportment towards the world is inherited and contingent revealing an ongoing

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[22]Wood, D *The Deconstruction of Time*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press
International, 1989, p150

engagement with the past; its encounter with the beings that present themselves in facticity means that it is engaged with the present; and its projection of possibilities implies an ongoing engagement with the future. However, in exploring these three aspects of time (past, present and future) Heidegger rejects the traditional view of time derived from Plato that begins with eternity and is the basis of clock time:

> The tradition regards time as a linear series of 'now' points that can be measured. Time is thereby interpreted as a modification of presence. We call 'past' what is no longer present and 'future' what is not yet present.[23]

Instead, he wants to explore primordial temporality as a part of the way of being of finite Da-sein that makes being-in-the-world possible. That is, Da-sein is not first and foremost in time, but its way of being is temporal. Indeed Da-sein's temporality plays a fundamental role in unifying a whole world by holding the web of worldly relationality together.

> The primordial phenomenon of temporality will be made secure by demonstrating that all the fundamental structures of Da-sein exposed up to now are to be basically conceived 'temporally' with regard to their possible totality, unity, and development, and as modes of the temporalizing of temporality.[24]

However, as well as its implications for the very possibility of having a world, temporality in Heidegger's philosophy also plays two other unifying roles that are derived from this fundamental role. The first is to individuate and unify Da-sein through its being-towards-death and the second, explored more in Heidegger's later work, is to allow an epochal unfolding of the destiny of being. A key to exposing and

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[23]Alweiss, L 'Heidegger and the Concept of Time' in *History of the Human Sciences* 15(3), p119
[24]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H304

understanding all three aspects of temporality are the notions of attunement and comportment. In the cases of a unified world and whole Da-sein, Heidegger undertakes a phenomenological analysis of two fundamental attunements, profound boredom and *Angst* respectively, to expose and explore the temporality of Da-sein. In the case of the destiny of being, it is the playing out of particular comportments that ground the epochs and their shifts as the history of being unfolds.

In this section, however, I will limit myself to consideration of Da-sein's ecstatic temporality for two reasons. First, as mentioned, it is Da-sein's ecstatic temporality that is the basis of Heidegger's exploration of being-towards-death and brings to light the unfolding of the destiny of being. This claim in relation to being-towards-death is not uncontroversial. Some would argue that because Heidegger treats them together in *Being and Time,* and Da-sein's finitude is so central to its existence, that they need to be considered together. For example, Lilian Alweiss in her article 'Heidegger and "the concept of time"', argues that 'the novelty of Heidegger's position is that...time finds its meaning in death'.[25] In contrast, I assert not only is it possible to consider ecstatic temporality and being-towards-death separately, but that it is desirable to do so.

That this is possible is evident from Heidegger's own work. That is, Heidegger exposes ecstatic temporality in detail in two places using two different attunements: *Angst;* and profound boredom. The first, appearing in *Being and Time*, is of course most often examined and is intimately bound up with questions of authenticity, being-towards-death, and individuality. The second, appearing in *The Fundamental*

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[25]Alweiss, L 'Heidegger and "the concept of time"' in *History of the Human Sciences*, p118

Concepts of Metaphysics examines ecstatic temporality in relation to Da-sein's

being-in-the-world and Da-sein's distinction from animals who 'are poor in world'.

It is desirable to explore this second examination of ecstatic temporality in

preference to the usual approach precisely because it does not conflate it with issues

of individuality, being-towards-death and authenticity which are three of the most

contested areas of Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time*. These areas are contested

in my view, at least in large part, because they are caught up in the question of Da-

sein's wholeness, which carries traces of the metaphysics that Heidegger is trying to

overcome; or in the context of this thesis, these elements exhibit remnants of and-

being that one can find in Heidegger's philosophy. In this way, it is not simply

Heidegger's specific analysis of individuality, being-towards-death and authenticity

that is at issue but the question of the desire for wholeness itself.

> Nonetheless it can and must be borne in mind that the question of
> wholeness *might* just be a *residual* question, one that has been left
> over from metaphysics, and that it is not the business of
> fundamental ontology (let alone anything 'after' that) to consider.[26]

Though no doubt much more could be said about this 'residual question' in

Heidegger, given that at this stage I am investigating the positive shifts in Heidegger

towards an ontology of with-being, I will content myself with considering ecstatic

temporality separately and will take up the issues of being-toward-death, the destiny

of being and wholeness in the next chapter—although, as we will discover, even

ecstatic temporality plays a certain unifying function that will ultimately prove

contentious for our ontology of with-being and for such philosophers as Levinas and

Blanchot. Nevertheless, as a minimum, Heidegger's analysis can be considered as

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[26]Wood, D *The Deconstruction of Time*, p181

one expression or possibility of existential temporality that demonstrates the intimacy of time and being in a way which is often ignored in the tradition.

4.2.1 Ecstatic temporality and the unity of world

While Heidegger addresses the issue of Da-sein's ecstatic temporality in a range of places including in his 1925 lecture course the *History of the Concept of Time*[27] and in *Being and Time,* I think the most interesting exploration occurs in his 1929-30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics,* in which he considers how the relation between man and being is different from the relation between animal and being—a difference that turns out to be a quantum difference where 'the leap from living animals to humans that speak is as large if not larger than that from the lifeless stone to the living being'.[28] In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger approaches this issue through his concept of attunement in general and in particular of the attunement of boredom. Boredom reveals what is special about man because it is an attunement that exposes attunement itself and with it Da-sein's temporality as the horizon for the possibility of world. As Giorgio Agamben puts it in *The Open* 'Da-sein is simply an animal that has learned to become bored'.[29]

What boredom reveals, according to Heidegger, is Da-sein's unique capacity to suspend its captivation in its disinhibiting ring.[30] This suspension allows Da-sein to

[27]Heidegger, M *History of the Concept of Time.* Translated by Theodore Kisiel, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992
[28]Heidegger, M *Hölderlin's 'Germanien' un 'Der Rhein'.* Edited by S Ziegler, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1980, p75
[29]Agamben, G *The Open.* Translated by Kevin Attell, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004, p70
[30]Each animal species, in its essence, is captivated by particular dis-inhibitors in the environment which sparks one of a limited range of behaviours.

act and do rather than just behave. Boredom exposes the temporal space or temporality that is fundamental to the way of being of Da-sein that allows beings and their possibilities to manifest as a whole and thus free Da-sein from the constraints and instinctual responses evoked by the disinhibitors that surround animals. We might say that Da-sein's way of being buys time — enough time, to have a world rather than simply an environment. Let us examine attunement and boredom in a little more detail to see how this might be the case.

Attunement, or mood, for Heidegger is, as we have mentioned, a fundamental existential.[31] It combines with Heideggerian understanding to determine Da-sein's comportment towards its world. The status that Heidegger gives to attunement is beyond any traditional concept of mood or feeling that might be had by a pre-existing subject or consciousness of some kind.

> For attunements are not a mere emotional event or state, in a way
> that a metal is a liquid or solid, given that attunements indeed
> belong to the being of man.[32]

Rather,

> Attunements are the fundamental ways in which we find ourselves
> disposed in such and such a way.[33]

Of course, as manners of being, these dispositions, when we discover them, are not characteristics of Da-sein. Da-sein does not have an attunement but is always attuned. It is always attuned, according to Heidegger, to world as a whole. In this

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[31] It is this renewed status of the affective that Levinas credits to Heidegger and of course takes in a different direction as we shall explore shortly.
[32] Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p65
[33] Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p67

way, attunements are always relational and essential to our being-in-the-world. Indeed, they condition the very openness to being that is Da-sein's essence. This is why Heidegger focuses on attunement when contrasting the openness of Da-sein to the openness of animals. But Heidegger's focus is not on just any attunement, but specifically that of boredom because in profound boredom it is our very indifference to and distance from the beings that we find alongside us that distinguishes us from animals who in their captivation, can never be indifferent. It is in the disposition of 'indisposition to world' of profound boredom that the other dimensions of temporality and the possibility of possibilities becomes manifest.

In his analysis of boredom Heidegger distinguishes two structural moments of boredom, 'being held in limbo' and 'being left empty' that he traces through three forms of boredom that he claims increase in profundity: being bored by...; being bored with...; and it is boring for one. Further, he claims that these two structural moments come together in the ecstatic temporality of Da-sein. While it would not be possible to undertake a complete analysis of Heidegger's position here, it is worth highlighting some aspects of profound boredom, the 'it is boring for one', and how this sharpens the contrast between the openness of man and animal.

The example of profound boredom that Heidegger provides is walking through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon.[34] This example may reflect his concerns about modern living but in any event is described too briefly to evoke the kind of intuitive understanding of profound boredom that his previous examples of

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[34]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p135

waiting at a 'tasteless station of some lonely minor railway',[35] and attending a dinner date we didn't really want to go to,[36] relating to the first and second types of boredom respectively, evoke. This could, of course, be a matter of historical contingency given cities these days do not stop or change their character on Sundays to the extent they may have on the occasion that Heidegger has in mind. However, one possibility we can imagine with a little effort, that to me demonstrates Heidegger's point, is a large city on the Sabbath as a veritable ghost town. With work for the week finished, there would be few people around and only the silent monolithic buildings and idle equipment left as relics of the industry and frantic pace of the city. This eerie emptiness in a way seems to take us out of time. Thus, the passing the time that was so apparent in being bored by and being bored with 'seems to be missing' as Heidegger puts it. Instead this eerie feeling of temporal dislocation is precisely what characterises this profound boredom. To understand the 'it is boring for one' and the significance of this temporal dislocation Heidegger returns to the two structural moments that he had previously identified in the first two types of boredom: being left empty and being held in limbo.

Why is it that this walk in the suspended world of the city leaves us empty? Well fundamentally for Heidegger it is because we suddenly find ourselves relieved of our everyday cares and concerns. That is, we are normally caught up precisely in the world of the city—it is our world. The suspension of this world separates us from our normal everyday mode of being-in-the-city-world. We are left empty with respect to this world and somehow find our 'selves' separated from this other self of our everyday existence. We are in a sense out of this world, and it appears alien to us.

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[35] Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p93
[36] Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p109

We are not engaged as a being-in-the-world but are simply there along with all the other beings. Everything is thus 'of equally great and equally little worth'.[37] Put in the language of *Being and Time*, everything is *Vorhandenheit*. Profound boredom exposes the common understanding of world that we described in the first chapter where the world is simply a collection of objects held together by the 'and'. In a fundamental way our relationship with world has broken down. It is no longer an interrelated web of relations held together in the unity of the for-the-sake-of-which. Further, the manifold of references of the in-order-to of the objects around us has also collapsed. Nothing is *Zuhanden* or *Zeug* anymore, rather everything is conspicuous and disconnected by its failure to be useful. Indifferent to the beings around us, we also encounter ourselves as such a being and find no meaning in our own existence. This is why Heidegger devotes some time in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* exploring the question of whether profound boredom is the concealed fundamental attunement of our contemporary situation.[38]

Nevertheless, in a sense this alienation can never be complete because fundamentally we are being-in-the-world rather than simply an object in it. It is only through the attunement of boredom, as a fundamental existential, that these beings present to us, refuse themselves as a whole. The 'and' relationship is derived and cannot be sustained. Thus, the state of profound boredom cannot last because ultimately we care about the world. However, we should not therefore conclude that profound boredom is some kind of temporary dysfunction. Rather in this alienation there is also a certain kind of 'transcendence' that provides an opportunity. As Heidegger puts it:

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[37]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p137
[38]See Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, pp66-77 and pp160-167

> We are not merely relieved of our everyday personality, somehow
> distant and alien to it, but simultaneously also elevated beyond the
> particular situation in each case and beyond the specific beings
> surrounding us there.[39]

In this way, profound boredom both gives us the distance to examine our everyday-being-with-the-world as a whole, and exposes Da-sein and its relationship with world in a more fundamental way. What exactly does this indifference to beings as a whole tell us of Da-sein? For Heidegger this leads us to the second structural moment of Da-sein being held in limbo.

Our indifference to beings as a whole exposes Da-sein's possibilities of doing and acting i.e. its possibilities of being-in-the-world. Paradoxically, it exposes these possibilities for Da-sein by their very absence. That is, Da-sein's way of being is a doing and acting that is held in suspension in profound boredom and therefore becomes apparent—like a constant background noise that only registers when it stops. Da-sein thus finds itself in limbo without these possibilities, remembering that it is these possibilities that distinguish the human from the animal. But how is it that Da-sein can be left empty and indifferent to the array of beings before it, which still reveal themselves as a whole, but leave Da-sein in limbo, without any interest in doing and acting? This is where Heidegger thinks that:

> This 'it is boring for one' first brings the self in all its nakedness to
> itself as the self that is there and has taken over the being-there of its
> Da-sein.[40]

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[39]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p137
[40]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p143

And what we find according to Heidegger is our ecstatic temporality which creates the space of our being-there. The suspension of the everyday world as a whole and the distance or elevation that this entails, enables Da-sein to encounter its naked self as temporality and being-there—thus re-opening the question of the for-the-sake-of-which that it must answer and take responsibility for, to regain the mode of its being-in-the-world and its capacity to do and act. It is this exposure and interrogation that profound boredom puts to Da-sein.

Like being, temporality is exposed as a nothing. As a temporal gap or horizon that is waiting to be filled. We are engaged planners who have the three perspectives of respect, retrospect and prospect (present, having-been and future) but with nothing that currently shows itself in these dimensions because of our indifference. The beings that are around us are still there but do not enter into these dimensions in their full existential significance—they hold no temporal interest or possibilities for us. However, the possibility of possibilities which is temporal Da-sein itself is apparent and, in Heidegger's words, entrances us.

> What entrances is nothing other than the temporal horizon. Time entrances Da-sein, not as the time which has remained standing as distinct from flowing, but rather the time beyond such flowing and its standing, the time which in each case Da-sein itself as a whole is. This whole time entrances as a horizon. Entranced by time, Da-sein cannot find its way to those beings that announce themselves in the telling refusal of themselves as a whole precisely within this horizon of entrancing time.[41]

Our own temporal way of being, then, entrances us in such a way that this possibility of possibilities precludes us from engagement with the possibilities themselves in

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[41]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p147

terms of doing and acting. However, this possibility of possibilities reveals Da-sein's

temporality and the relationship between past, present and future.

The most important thing it reveals is Da-sein's temporal horizon that is ecstatically

held open by all three tenses of temporality: past, present and future which must be

thought together. The structure of care and being-in-the-world of necessity requires

all three tenses, and while certain existentiell understandings of time might focus on

one or other of these tenses, the possibility of possibility that profound boredom

exposes requires the unity of past, present and future. That is, when we consider what

would be required to have the possibility of possibilities we discover all three tenses

as necessary and hermeneutically linked. Most obviously, possibility implies a

coming or a future. For Da-sein to have potentialities and possibilities it must project

itself forward or be ahead of itself in its existence. Yet such a being ahead of itself

assumes that Da-sein has already factically found itself as a having-been thrown into

the there. It is the past for Heidegger that provides the 'grist for the mill' as it were,

that gives a contingent content for future projection. This is both a return to, and a

hermeneutical modification of the past. Further, these two dimensions always reveal

and engage with the being of the beings rendered in the third temporal dimension of

presence. Put more specifically in terms of care: Da-sein always finds itself

entangled with things in a world (the present), to which it is already attuned (the

past), and with an understanding of its possibilities (the future). Further, there is a

mutual dependency between these moments such that:

> Every understanding has its mood. Every attunement understands.
> Attuned understanding has the characteristic of entanglement...The
> actual temporal constitution of these phenomena always leads back

to that one temporality that holds within itself the possible structural unity of understanding, attunement, entanglement and discourse.[42]

Interestingly, according to Heidegger, the attunement of profound boredom that we have been analysing entrances Da-sein with the understanding of the very possibility of Da-sein's temporal possibilities, through the entangled characteristic of suspended entanglement. How do we break this entrancement? Heidegger here appeals to a reflexive logic that allows Da-sein through the revelation of its temporal nature to resolutely take on the freedom that the possibility of possibilities allows. That is, once Da-sein, in the moment of vision (*die Augenblick*) recognises the ontic priority of Da-sein's ontological way of being as a temporal being-there (rather than simply something present at hand) amongst beings with ontic possibilities, it again opens itself to a world as a whole and to engaging with these ontic possibilities through acting and doing. Or put slightly differently, in caring about its own temporality and turning ecstatic temporality upon itself, Da-sein frees itself from entrancement.

What this analysis reveals is a further step away from the everyday encounter with being as beings towards an understanding of how Da-sein and being belong together. That is, by exploring the ontological difference, Heidegger reveals Da-sein's being-in-the-world as the basic constitution of Da-sein and as the ground for any possible encounter with beings whatsoever. This was the first step we explored in our last section. In this section, Heidegger has taken a second step through his exploration of Da-sein's temporality which in turn grounds, or makes possible, Da-sein's being-in-the-world through the temporal horizon. But as yet we have not reached being.

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[42]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H335

This analysis of the early Heidegger has a tendency to be all on the side of, or at least from the perspective of, Da-sein. This, of course, is the basis of various critiques of Heidegger that would highlight his failure to fully break away from metaphysics. A failure (or at least a failure of language) that Heidegger himself acknowledges in various places including most famously in his 'Letter on Humanism' and also in his *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)* where he suggests that Da-sein's transcendence as being-in-the-world 'still presupposes an under and this side [*Unten und Diesseits*] and is in danger of still being misinterpreted after all as the action of an "I" and a subject'.[43] That is, the being of the beings that reveal themselves in-the-world within the horizon of Da-sein's ecstatic temporality seem to depend too much on Da-sein. This is despite the fact that Heidegger defines the transcendence of Da-sein's being-in-the-world as the passage across, or an opening towards beings.[44] The problem is that even this formulation retains too much similarity to the structure of intentionality and a traditional relational structure between two 'things'—even if Da-sein and the being of these beings are not substantial entities as such. It is not until the later Heidegger that Da-sein's belonging to being changes its topology from a passage to a clearing as nicely described in Jeff Malpas' article 'Heidegger's .Topology of Being':

> Heidegger now elaborates a structure that is the structure of the *Da* of the *Sein*, the *topos* of being. Da-sein is the opened, cleared realm,

[43]Heidegger, M *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*. Translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p226
[44]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, pp165-167. Note Heidegger rejects traditional notions of transcendence reflective of and-being: namely epistemological transcendence which requires 'a passageway between the interior and exterior of a box by leaping over or pressing through the wall of the box'; and the theological concept of transcendence which indicates 'what lies beyond the contingent'. For a fuller exploration of the issue of transcendence in Heidegger's philosophy see *Transcendental Heidegger*. Edited by Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas, Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2007. Also Daniel Dahlstrom in 'Heidegger's Transcendetalism' in *Research and Phenomenology* 35, 2005: 29-54 gives an account of the remnants of transcendentalism in Heidegger's later philosophy.

the 'between' that unites as well as differentiates the elements of
world, thereby allowing the world itself to open (indeed the world is
this disclosive opening), revealing the things that stand within that
world, giving to humans the possibility of a history and a future.[45]

This topological move certainly reconfigures the belonging together of Da-sein and

being and shifts the emphasis onto revelation. Further, as an opening or clearing, the

structuring role of the way of being of Da-sein, evident in being-in-the-world, is

more understated, if present at all. Instead, human beings are open to receiving, or

being 'given', the revelation or truth of being. However, I am not sure this settles the

issue. The real issue is that the early Heidegger has attempted to find a way into the

'with' of the belonging together of Da-sein and being through one of the poles that

are exposed in this relation rather than exploring the relation directly. The question

remains as to whether the emphasis on the truth of being in the later Heidegger does

not simply approach from the opposite pole and also fail to think the 'with'

adequately. To investigate this question we will consider Heidegger's topological

shift further through Heidegger's exploration of Da-sein as the shepherd of being in

'Letter on Humanism', and the roles of language and thinking that Heidegger argues

are necessary if Da-sein is to remain open and 'let beings be'.

4.3 Shepherding

In 'Letter on Humanism' we learn from Heidegger that Da-sein's most proper

essence is to dwell in the openness of being as a shepherd that simply 'lets being be'

in such a way that the truth of being emerges. Before we consider this metaphor of

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[45]Malpas, J 'Heidegger's Topology of Being' in *Transcendental Heidegger*

Da-sein as shepherd, it is important that we gain an understanding of what Heidegger means by the truth of being.

4.3.1 Truth as *aletheia*

Heidegger explores the issue of truth and the truth of being in many places including in *Being and Time*, in his 1930 article 'On the Essence of Truth', and in his 1931-32 lecture course published as *Heidegger:The Essence of Truth*. In all three pieces Heidegger is concerned with showing that traditional concepts of truth such as propositional truth and truth as correspondence are grounded in truth as unconcealment (or *aletheia*), which is nothing other than the openness of Da-sein to an encounter with beings as its being-in-the-world. That is, 'Da-sein is "in the truth"' in the sense that its way of being is a disclosing and discovering of beings through its engagement with being.[46] Propositional truth, on the other hand, points to what is discovered and is thus derivative of this more primordial discovering.

However, Heidegger's linking of truth as *aletheia* with Da-sein's being-in-the-world radically destabilises any traditional Platonic notion of truth as timeless, unchanging and perspectively neutral. We must recall here the contingent nature of being-in-the-world and that it is structured around Da-sein's cares, which are in turn grounded in Da-sein's ecstatic temporality. That is, truth is relative to Da-sein in two ways: firstly, 'there is [*gibt es*] truth only insofar as Da-sein is and as long as it is';[47] and secondly, disclosure is always in the context of a particular comportment of Da-sein which can vary—'Comportment stands open to beings. Every open relatedness is a

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[46]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H221
[47]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H226

comportment. Man's open stance varies depending on the kind of beings and the way of comportment.'[48] From this relativity, however, Heidegger insists we should not conclude that truth is subjective, for what Da-sein discloses through its belonging to being are the beings in themselves insofar as they relate to Da-sein. Perhaps rather than relativity, we would do better to think of truth as relational because rather than Da-sein existing and then truth emerging from Da-sein's engagement with being, truth emerges from Da-sein's belonging to being. In this way, truth is hermeneutical and is constantly emerging as Da-sein's discovering and disclosing continues as its way of being.

Another important implication of this relationality is the notion of untruth as concealment. That is, because, for Heidegger, beings are always disclosed in a particular comportment and because disclosure is always open to further disclosure, every unconcealing is also a concealing. It is a concealing because Da-sein risks losing itself in what is disclosed and forgets the possibility of further disclosure. In a sense, through its engagement with disclosed beings, Da-sein locks itself into a particular comportment that covers over or closes off originary disclosure.

> The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible. This persistence has its unwitting support in that bearing by which Da-sein not only ek-sists but also at the same time in-sists, i.e. holds fast to what is offered by beings, as if they were open of and in themselves.
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> As eksistent, Da-sein is insistent. Even in insistent existence the mystery holds sway, but as a forgotten and hence 'unessential' essence of truth.[49]

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[48]Heidegger, M 'On the Essence of Truth' in *Pathmarks*, p141
[49]Heidegger, M 'On the Essence of Truth' in *Pathmarks*, p150

Thus, Da-sein is not only always in truth but in untruth which is a part of truth's essence. And it is the necessary tension between the two that 'keeps Da-sein in need by this perpetual turning to and fro'.[50] The danger for Heidegger is the displacement of *aletheia* onto objective truth which forgets Da-sein's complicity in truth and allows 'to-ing and fro-ing', or the essence of truth to stagnate—a danger that is not only relevant to individual Da-sein but as Heidegger explores in his later work, to historic Da-sein as well.

A good example of the dynamics at work here can be found in Heidegger's exploration of essence of technology in 'The Question Concerning Technology'. In this essay he argues that the modern everyday understanding of and comportment towards technology as a means to a human end hides the true essence of technology as *Gestell* (Enframing). Enframing demands that everything (including man himself) be made to stand-by either at hand or in the service of further ordering. In this way, everything is regulated and secured as standing-reserve and is calculable in terms of its utility. The problem, as Heidegger sees it, is that this comportment hinders man from encountering himself in his essence as ek-sistent Da-sein and thus from further encounters with the truth of being itself. He argues:

> Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to
> himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man
> into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this
> ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of
> revealing.[51]

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[50]Heidegger, M 'On the Essence of Truth' in *Pathmarks*, p151
[51]Heidegger, M 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p27

So by being lost in this comportment of Enframing there are three dimensions to the problem. The first is that it means Da-sein encounters itself and all beings in the terms of this comportment: calculability; utility; regulation; and mastery. The second is that this is the only way that beings can be revealed to Da-sein—this is the only 'truth' of their being that Da-sein can encounter. And thirdly, the essence of technology, and the danger of Enframing itself is not encountered.

Fortunately, the relationship between Da-sein and being cannot be broken and even this misdirection is itself a revealing of being that has the momentum of the destiny of being. All paths eventually lead Da-sein back to its rightful dwelling in the openness of being and an authentic relationship with the truth of being which, though obfuscated, is always in the Da (there) of Da-sein.

Thus, the saving power is also contained in the danger and can surmount the danger. Heidegger believes the twin essence of this danger is captured in the following quote from Hölderlin's Hymn 'Patmos' that is mentioned in both 'The Essay Concerning Technology' and 'The Turning': 'But where danger is, grows, the saving power also'.[52] So on this understanding, even though the destiny of being through Da-sein is trapped in a particular comportment, at some point even while engaging in the terms of this comportment suddenly 'being clears itself and lights up', reminiscent of Heraclitus' lightning strike, and reveals the danger of that comportment for what it is.[53] This coming to presence of the danger itself, as for example Heidegger's insight (*Einblick*) into the essence of technology, brings 'a turning about of the oblivion of

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[52]Heidegger, M 'The Turning', p42 and 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p28
[53]Heidegger, M 'The Turning' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p44

Being into the *truth* of Being'.[54] It is this turning that Heidegger refers to and

understands as *die Kehre* rather than the commentary about a radical change between

a Heidegger I and a Heidegger II. Note that Da-sein cannot simply will its way back

to the clearing or force a path. Da-sein cannot save itself. This possibility of a return

is inherent in the destiny of being.

> Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human
> achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can
> ponder the fact that all saving power must be a higher essence than
> that what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.[55]

This emphasis on Da-sein's inability through its own activity to counter the danger is

one of the most notable differences between the early and late Heidegger in this area.

While in the early Heidegger we have already moved away from traditional notions

of subjectivity and action in relation to truth, there is a further development in the

later Heidegger in the centre of the locus of truth which emerges in the literature as a

distinction between an active and passive Da-sein. For example, in *Being and Time*

Heidegger talks of truth being 'wrested from beings' through a 'kind of robbery'[56]

while the later Heidegger, describes the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) in terms of

a gift, and thinking as a kind of thanking.[57] This gift is something that man receives

from being rather than something that man appropriates or can place in front of

himself. Thus, it is man who is appropriated and 'belongs to appropriation'[58] and

indeed like the early analysis of untruth 'Being vanishes in appropriation'.[59] While I

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[54]Heidegger, M 'The Turning' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p44
[55]Heidegger, M 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, pp33-34
[56]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H222
[57]See for instance Heidegger, M *What is Called Thinking*. Translated by Wieck and Gray, New York: Harper and Row, 1968, p139
[58]Heidegger, M 'Time and Being' in *On Time and Being*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, p23
[59]Heidegger, M 'Time and Being' in *On Time and Being*, p21

think this distinction is somewhat overstated, I believe it is because Heidegger

approaches the belonging together of Da-sein and being from the two poles of an

'and' relationship that this problem and potential criticism arises.

Regardless, what emerges from this analysis of truth as *aletheia* is something like an

imperative for Da-sein to be true to its fundamental belonging to being by adopting a

comportment that will allow it to dwell in the openness of being and 'let beings be'.

This comportment Heidegger describes using the metaphor of the shepherd in 'Letter

on Humanism' and it will ultimately involve a different kind of language, and a

different kind of thinking from both the metaphysical tradition and the early

Heidegger.

4.3.2 The way of the shepherd

What does it mean to dwell in the openness of being? The simple answer to this is to

be in the way of Da-sein. Da-sein by definition for Heidegger dwells in the openness

of being. And yet as we have seen, not all dwelling is equal. Some ways of being,

though made possible by Da-sein's belonging to being, obscure this relationship and

the primordial disclosure this entails. In some ways this cannot be avoided because

all comportments are concealing as well as revealing; however, certain

comportments (perhaps meta-comportments) according to Heidegger apparently do

more justice to Da-sein's originary dwelling. The case in point is the comportment of

man as the shepherd of being which measures up to the dignity of man, which can be

sharply contrasted to man as the lord of beings which conceals this potential dignity.

At stake in this contrast is a reconceptualisation of subjectivity and the relationship

of man to being. It is thus a good way to summarise some of the key shifts in our understanding of with-being that Heidegger's philosophy assays. So let us speculate in light of Heidegger's philosophy on what the important characteristics that distinguish the lord (or owner of the sheep) from the one who guards and tends might be.

The first is that the shepherd is there for the sake of the sheep. Its care is directed externally towards the well-being of the sheep, to let them be as sheep. The lord, or owner, on the other hand, believes the sheep are there for the sake of the lord. They are at hand for the use of the lord as they sees fit. The sheep are not left to be as sheep in the fullness of their being, but are held in standing reserve, at hand for the lord's projects. The second is that the shepherd-subject is called into being in relation to the sheep. The sheep, by virtue of the essence of their being, call for guarding and protecting. It is the response to this call that is the essence of the shepherd. Without this call there would be no shepherd-subject. Likewise, without the shepherd, the truth of being of the sheep would not come to light. In this way, it is the very relationship between shepherd and sheep that allows the identity and difference of both to simultaneously emerge. The subjectivity of the lord, however, is seen as independent of the sheep. The lord could still be a lord without the sheep, he/she is a separated unified subject-thing in their own right—note this is in fact not the case as even the lord only exists as lord provided they can comport toward things in standing reserve; if there were no such things there would also be no lordship. Lords in this way too are called into being through their relations. Thirdly, although the shepherd-subject is called into being in relation to the sheep, it is in no way passive. It must actively tend to shepherding through various methods or ways of engaging with the

sheep. It is called into being through active relating, or to use Heidegger's language, its essence is its way of being in its shepherding, not in its factical existence. The lord on the other hand first factically exists as a subject-thing and then brings power, techniques, and methods to bear on the sheep to achieve the master's own ends. Finally, the shepherd is free in its shepherding to the extent that its way of being remains true to its guarding of the sheep. If the shepherd should fall asleep or otherwise be distracted, the sheep could wander off or be taken by a wolf and the shepherd would have failed in its shepherding—at that point it was not free in its shepherding. However, the freedom of the shepherd while engaged in shepherding as a way of being is also a finite freedom. The possibilities for shepherding are limited by the being of the sheep and the mortality of the shepherd themselves. The lord on the other hand sees freedom as a part of their essence, and their possessions as subject to that freedom.

In considering Da-sein in the context of this metaphor then, we can begin to see how the various dichotomies of and-being break down in the role of the shepherd. The subjectivity of Da-sein is beyond the terms of an ego subject and a subject/object distinction. Da-sein is not forced to choose between active and passive. Its way of being is a genuine engagement, a with-being that occurs on a number of levels rather than encountering 'things' and their representations. In short, neither being nor Da-sein are given primacy in this way of being together; rather, it is a mutually maintaining/sustaining relationship that discloses the truth of being including the identity and difference between Da-sein and being—Da-sein and being belong together. Nevertheless, while this shepherding way of being for Da-sein, ek-sistence, is its essence, it also contains the seeds of a forgetfulness, or in-sistence, that can lead

it into the comportment of a lord. So a problem remains as to how Da-sein can be in this shepherding relationship without forgetting and slipping into a metaphysical comportment. Indeed can Da-sein ever totally avoid the metaphysical comportment and stay close to being, or will there always be an ontological gap? Heidegger's answer to this problem is to champion a different kind of thinking (or active relating) that characterises the way of being in which Da-sein can dwell in the openness of being and let being be.

What does such a thinking look like and is it possible at all? Certainly it is different from the philosophical approach used in *Being and Time* and Heidegger's earlier writings. Heidegger recognises this and calls into question the status of ontology itself.

> 'Ontology' itself, however, whether transcendental or precritical, is subject to critique, not because it thinks the being of beings and in doing so reduces being to a concept, but because it does not think the truth of being and so fails to recognize that there is a thinking more rigorous than conceptual thinking.[60]

It is this non-conceptual kind of thinking that the later Heidegger looks to as the fundamental belonging together of being and the essence of human being. Further this thinking, though non-conceptual, is still intimately linked with language. 'Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language.'[61] This thinking of course does not think being as beings and does not set being up as an object. Likewise, it is different from the traditional understanding of

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[60]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p271
[61]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p239

thinking as *techne*—a process of deliberation in service to doing and making, according to Plato and Aristotle.[62] It is also not conceptualisation or theory. Such understandings of thinking take us down the path of philosophy as a science and a continued focus on being as beings, which conceals the truth of being. But Heidegger suggests that only the thinking and speaking of science is objectifying. In our everyday experience thinking is broader and more primordial. As early as 1927, in his essay 'Phenomenology and Theology', he gives two examples that demonstrate the possibility of a different kind of thinking. The first is when we take delight in a blossoming rose, and the second when we see the beauty in the statue of Apollo in the museum. It is this kind of poetic thinking that for Heidegger brings us into contact with the truth of being in general.

> Poetic thinking is being in the presence of…and for the god. Presence means: simple willingness that wills nothing, counts on no successful outcome. Being in the presence of…purely letting the gods presence be said.[63]

Note four important characteristics of such poetic thinking. The first is that it is a letting be, 'it is a willingness that wills nothing'. Secondly, in this letting be it is open to receive the truth of being as being presences itself. The third is that this presence is 'said' or comes about through language; and lastly it is a type of language that almost seems to channel the presence of being in an unmediated way. In this way, our relationship to this kind of language, as well as to poetic thinking, is very different from a view in which we possess the power to use language in its grammatical and logical sense. Heidegger is defining language in a way that goes beyond any notion of subject or symbolic functioning—a theme explored much more by Derrida. It is

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[62]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p240
[63]Heidegger, M 'Phenomenology and Theology' in *Pathmarks*, p61

more than just another tool valued for its utility in our day to day concerns. It opens

up Da-sein to the truth of being.

> Is the human being that being that has language in its possession? Or
> is it language that 'has' human beings, insofar as they belong to, pay
> heed to language, which first opens up the world to them and at the
> same time thereby their dwelling in the world?[64]

Poetic language, through its intimate access to being in general, is larger than any

individual Da-sein and provides individual Da-sein with this direct link to being in

general and the worldliness of the world itself. The concept of language as the

dwelling, home, or house for Da-sein is frequently used in the 'Letter on Humanism'

and Heidegger's later work to phenomenally describe this tripartite

interconnectedness.

> Language is the house of Being. In its home human beings dwell.
> Those who think and those who create words are the guardians of
> this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of
> being in so far as they bring this manifestation to language and
> preserve it in language through their saying.[65]

A special place is reserved in this relationship for those, such as writers and poets,

who engage with language on this level, because it is their thinking and creating of

language that manifests being for the rest of us—thus, Heidegger's exploration of

Hölderlin in his later work. Until we begin to immerse ourselves in thinking and

speaking in this way, we are probably only operating out of the average

everydayness of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity.[66] This average everyday

encounter with language and being is the way we first encounter them as we are

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[64]Heidegger, M 'Phenomenology and Theology' in *Pathmarks*, p59
[65]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p249
[66]See Heidegger, M 'The Everyday Being of the there and the Falling Prey of Da-sein' in *Being and Time*, H167-180, for an explanation of these terms.

thrown into the world. That is, we inherit a pre-existing worldliness or understanding of being in general through the linguistic house we are born into and learn as a child. To further our understanding of the truth of being requires us to go beyond this average everyday understanding and think being in linguistic terms in a more primordial way.

> Everything depends on this alone, that the truth of Being come to language and that thinking attain this language. Perhaps then language requires much less precipitate expression than proper silence.[67]

Thus, the shepherd of being turns out to be a poet; a poet whose primordial thinking and language is different from the scientist and metaphysician because it takes us beyond representation and propositional truth into what Heidegger calls 'the heart's space' in 'Why Poets?'.[68] In this space, according to Heidegger, the poet has the potential to move beyond an absorption with self-assertion or lordship over beings and remembers a relationship with beings and being, beyond logic and calculation, that returns us to the openness of being—that is, brings us nearer to being. But even if we accept that there is a justifiable and sustainable distinction between the language and thinking of the metaphysician and the poet, can the gap between Da-sein and being ever be closed? Heidegger suggests that when viewed from the language of metaphysics:

> In truth we cannot then even continue to say that 'being' and 'the human being' 'are' the Same in the sense that *they* belong together;

[67]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, pp261-262. Note the embryonic stirrings of the unsayable and silence. Themes that will be picked up by later philosophers such as Levinas and Derrida.
[68]Heidegger, M 'Why Poets?' in *Off the Beaten Track*. Translated and edited by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p229

for when we say it in *this* way, we continue to let both subsist independently.[69]

The focus then of the remainder of this chapter will be to come to terms with the kind of language and thinking that the later Heidegger proposes takes us beyond an understanding of the belonging together of Da-sein and being that lets both subsist independently as and-being, to an understanding of belonging aimed at a more primordial with-being—a belonging beyond metaphysical understandings of the conjunction.

4.4 Poetic thinking and the linguistic turn

Heidegger's essay entitled '*Die Sprache*' or 'Language' published in 1959 (based on a 1950 lecture) gives us a good insight into the issues surrounding language and meaning that derive from the attempt to overcome the metaphysical comportment and lordly use of language and move towards an understanding of language as the house of being, and Da-sein as shepherd and poet.

In this lecture he begins, and certainly not uniquely, by attesting to the importance of language to human way of being as that which separates us from animals and plants.

> Only speech enables man to be the living being he is as man. It is as one who speaks that man is—man.[70]

However, one should already suspect – from his deconstruction of subjectivity and understanding of Da-sein as a way of being – that Heidegger's answer to the question

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[69]Heidegger, M 'On the Question of Being' in *Pathmarks*, p309
[70]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p189

'what is language?' and his understanding of the relationship between Da-sein and language, will take an unusual twist relative to the metaphysical tradition. Traditionally we might say 'man speaks'. That is, as Heidegger describes it, the usual conception of language has three characteristics: speech is an activity or power of man; speaking is the expression of something internal to the speaker that is spoken to externalise it; speech is a presentation and representation of the real and unreal. In contrast, Heidegger, who sees language as intimately involved with Da-sein's openness to the truth of being, wants to reverse the priority and suggest that 'language speaks'.

> This is why we ponder the question, 'what about language itself?'
> This is why we ask 'in what way does language occur as language?'
> We answer: Language speaks. Is this seriously an answer?
> Presumably—that is, when it becomes clear what speaking is.[71]

Even Heidegger himself here acknowledges the initial strangeness of this claim about language in his rhetorical question 'is this seriously an answer?' Certainly, from the traditional understanding this phrase 'language speaks' appears a nonsense. Man speaks language, language does not speak man. But the latter is precisely what Heidegger will argue. Indeed, put more strongly still man's very existence is reliant upon language.

> It is language that first brings man about, brings him into existence.
> Understood in this way, man would be bespoken by language.[72]

Of course, one must remember for Heidegger that existence has a very specific meaning, namely existence as being-in-the-world, which if we recall exposes a

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[71]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p190
[72]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p192

perspective on Da-sein as well as the other beings. Heidegger's point is that without language, there would be no belonging together of Da-sein and being; no being-in-the-world, and therefore, man would not be brought to presence to himself—man would not exist. So how exactly is it that language speaks and how is this related to Da-sein and being?

Heidegger here turns to poetry as an example of the pure spoken and in this essay he chooses to examine a particular poem called 'A Winter Evening' written by George Trakal—although, consistent with his phrase 'language speaks', Heidegger insists from the start that the author is unimportant.

> Who the author is remains unimportant here, as with every other masterful poem. The mastery consists in this, that the poem can deny the poet's person and name.[73]

That is, the poem can speak for itself, and further, exceeds any intentionality that the author may have had in writing the poem i.e. it is the poem that is masterful, not the poet. The poem 'A Winter Evening' is chosen as an example of poetic speaking because what this poems speaks, according to Heidegger's analysis, is precisely how language speaks.

A Winter Evening

Window with falling snow is arrayed,
Long tolls the vesper bell,
The house is provided well,
The table is for many laid.

Wandering ones, more than a few,
Come to the doors on darksome courses.

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[73]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p195

Golden blooms the tree of graces
Drawing up the earth's cool dew.

Wanderer quietly steps within;
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,
Upon the table bread and wine.

It turns out that for Heidegger language speaks in the mode of calling just as the house calls to the wanderer—it calls 'the presence of what was previously uncalled into nearness'.[74] And what is called turns out to be the intimacy between Da-sein, world and things such that they are unified in their 'dif-ference'. That is, there is a between world and things called dif-ference.

> The dif-ference carries out world in its worlding, carries out things
> in their thinging. Thus carrying them out, it carries them toward one
> another. The dif-ference does not mediate after the fact by
> connecting world and things through a middle added to them. Being
> the middle, it first determines world and things in their presence, i.e.
> in their being toward one another, whose unity it carries out.[75]

Language then bids dif-ference to 'disclosingly appropriate things into bearing a world; it disclosingly appropriates world into the granting of things'.[76] Interestingly, drawing on the poem, this intimacy between world and things disclosed in language is marked by pain —Trakal's line is 'Pain has turned the threshold to stone'[77] – or in Heidegger's words, 'The seam that binds their being toward one another is pain'.[78] Playing on Heidegger's earlier use of the term '*gebaren*', this pain turns out to be the birth pangs of world and things. Language speaks world and things into existence. It

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[74]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p198
[75]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p202
[76]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p203
[77]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p204
[78]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p205

is in this sense that language is the house of being for Heidegger and that Da-sein's

speaking is dependent on language directly speaking being.

> The way in which mortals, called out of the dif-ference into the dif-
> ference, speak on their own part, is by responding. Mortal speech
> must first of all have listened to the command, in the form of which
> the stillness of the dif-ference calls world and things into the rift of
> its onefold simplicity.[79]

On the other hand, language needs Da-sein to resonate its own speaking because as

we have mentioned it is only Da-sein that is linguistic—the house and its gifts would

have no meaning if not for the wanderer. However, being linguistic does not

guarantee that Da-sein speaks. Da-sein speaks only if it is listening to what language,

or being, is saying.

> Man speaks only as he responds to language.
> Language speaks.
> Its speaking speaks for us in what has been spoken.[80]

So not everything we utter is speaking for Heidegger. The everyday language of idle

chatter, or the objective language of science for example are deficient in their

speaking—perhaps they simply pass by the outside of the house or treat its contents

as an inventory or as possessions to be used and mastered. It takes the poet or

thinker, according to Heidegger, to properly listen and respond to the 'the peal of

stillness' that language speaks—'the wanderer quietly steps within'. However:

> Poetry proper is never merely the higher mode of everyday
> language. It is rather the reverse; everyday language is a forgotten

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[79]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p209
[80]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p210

and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a
call any longer.[81]

What Heidegger means by suggesting that everyday language is a 'used-up poem',

links up with his notions of truth and presence as both revealing and concealing

which in turn are linked to the movement inherent in the belonging together of Da-

sein and being. That is, because language is the house of being, all language speaks

and reveals something of the truth of being. The problem with everyday language is

that it has ossified in its truth and has ceased revealing anything new. It has become a

closed and fixed world that is deaf to what language still has to say. Language has

not stopped speaking, it is simply that Da-sein has stopped listening and engaging

with the mystery. In short, having already been said, language risks becoming an

innerworldly thing which conceals its essential nearness to being in its speaking.[82]

Therefore, it is not so much that the poet and thinker have a different type or style of

language – indeed poetic speaking isn't limited to poetry – but that in their

comportment and thinking they are openly and actively engaged with the process of

revelation, rather than getting lost in the products of this revelation. That is, they are

intimately involved in giving birth to, and changing the world through their

belonging to being.

Language, in this sense, is not the final word. It would seem there is still some

distance between Da-sein and being in that language alone is not enough to ensure

Da-sein's nearness to being. It is only when Da-sein listens to and responds in the

right way that Da-sein dwells in the openness of being. We can rightly push

Heidegger to give a better description of the kind of thinking and comportment that

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[81]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p208
[82]Note this sounds very similar to Levinas's distinction between the saying and the said. A point I will
explore in chapter 7.

the poet or thinker needs to adopt to hear the 'peal of stillness' of language and 'let beings be'. It is for that reason that we turn to Heidegger's notion of releasement.

4.5 *Gelassenheit*

Language, for Heidegger, as we have seen, is the house of being. However, it is only through listening to the command of the peal of stillness and responding in 'anticipation in reserve' that Da-sein authentically hears being as dif-ference.[83] It is only in this authentic hearing that Da-sein can 'let beings be' as a shepherd. But such a hearing is not so much an aural act as a mode of thinking—an engaged meditative thinking that Heidegger terms 'releasement' or *Gelassenheit*. One of the clearest articulations of *Gelassenheit* is contained in Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*, which was first published in German in 1959.[84] It consists of two parts: a Memorial Address dedicated to Conradin Kreutzer, a German composer, and a conversational dialogue between a scholar, a scientist and a teacher that dates back to notes from 1944-45.

The Memorial Address gives a reasonably accessible account of what is at stake for Heidegger in identifying this form of meditative thinking and distinguishing it from other forms of thinking, in particular the calculative thinking associated with modern technology which we discussed in relation to 'The Question Concerning Technology' essay. There is a real fear for Heidegger that 'the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and

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[83]Heidegger, M 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p210
[84]I will refer to the English version Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*. Translated by Anderson and Freund, New York: Harper and Row, 1966

practiced as the only way of thinking'.[85] Indeed one might find some evidence that

would justify this fear in current demands to translate the value of so many things

including the environment, art, human labour and even human life into economic

calculations. Put in Lyotardian terms, the fear might be that a single totalising

language game might come to dominate all our thinking leaving no room for the

Differend or discourse outside of this language game.[86] Note also the word

'captivate' which echoes Heidegger's description of the relationship between the

animal and its environment. In a real sense, by engaging in calculative thinking we

are returning to a very limited encounter with the environment around us. To be sure,

this is still worldly; but it is a very small world where, as John Anderson puts it in his

introduction to *Discourse on Thinking*, 'the clear realism of animal life, the sharp and

realistic view, the unsentimental outlook quick to take advantage of circumstances to

attain an end' holds sway.[87] Not surprisingly then, according to Heidegger, such an

outcome would deny the special nature of man as a meditative being. What becomes

urgent is to recall the practice of meditative thinking and in doing so save the nature

of man.

> Therefore, the issue is the saving of man's essential nature.
> Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive.[88]

The Memorial Address clearly articulates this issue and also gives us a reasonably

clear account of what calculative thinking is:

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[85]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p56
[86]Lyotard, J-F *The Differend*. Translated by George Van Den Abbeele, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 and *The Postmodern Condition*.
[87]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p12
[88]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p56

Its peculiarity consists in the fact that whenever we plan, research, and organize, we always reckon with conditions that are given. We take them into account with the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we can count on definite results. This thinking is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economic possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself.[89]

And its outcome:

The world now appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry.[90]

However, it only gives us hints at what the endangered meditative thinking might be in terms of a 'releasement towards things and an openness to mystery'.[91] The real work done in articulating the notion of meditative thinking and this phrase are left to the second conversational part of the *Discourse on Thinking*. The first thing that strikes the reader about this part is the style itself. Rather than simply stating or arguing for his philosophical position, Heidegger attempts to have us experience meditative thinking through the conversation of three interlocutors who themselves are engaged in meditative thinking about meditative thinking. In this way, the style to a large extent mirrors its content. What then does this style reveal about meditative thinking?

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[89]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p46
[90]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p50
[91]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p55

Let us first consider the three interlocutors. There are two ways that one could view these three interlocutors and their conversation. The first is that it is a conversation between three different people: a scientist; a scholar; and a teacher. This seems to be the obvious interpretation given by William Lovitts and followed by Barbara Dalle Pezze in her article 'Heidegger on Gelassenheit'.[92] On this interpretation, the scientist is someone who employs calculative and representational thinking, the scholar is someone who employs logic and typically employs metaphysical thinking; while the teacher is the voice of Heidegger the thinker who engages in hermeneutical meditative thinking. It should be noted, however, that from the outset all three seem to be quite open to different ways of thinking and in particular the scientist and scholar seem to be able to go beyond the modes of thinking that they normally employ. Regardless, the most important point in considering them as separate interlocutors is the implication that meditative thinking either requires or is assisted by *mitsein*. As Dalle Pezze puts it:

> In the dialogue our receptiveness opens up and we become more prepared to wait. The tendency of affirmation weakens and the truth of what occurs finds its way to us. During a conversation 'something else' is allowed to be; it regains time and space in our existence.[93]

This understanding opens the way for a much greater role of dialogue and a shared engagement with 'letting being be' than Heidegger is usually credited with, as we will explore in the next chapter. Indeed, we will criticise him for not exploring our sociality further. We will argue that, based on his analysis of concepts like being-

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[92]Lovitts, W and Brundage, H *Modern Technology in the Heideggerian Perspective. VolII* Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press and Dalle Pezze, B 'Heidegger on Gelassenheit' in *Minerva* 10, 2006: 94-122
[93]Dalle Pezze, B 'Heidegger on Gelassenheit', p102

towards-death and authenticity, for Heidegger, philosophy as an engagement with the question of being is ultimately a singular and lonely enterprise.

With this in mind, I would like to give a different interpretation of the conversation that would reinforce this critique, namely that all three modes of thinking are different aspects of Heidegger's own thinking. That is, rather than a conversation between different interlocutors, Heidegger is having a conversation with himself. In support of this one might suggest that the three thinkers seem far too co-operative and agreeable to be separate people. Indeed, by the end of the discourse, all three seem happy that the conversation has run its course and they have made substantial progress in discovering the nature of meditative thinking. If they were separate thinkers then at the very least we might wonder whether we have just witnessed an example of group think.[94] One might go further still and suggest that while the conversation gives the appearance of a free-flowing discourse or a stream-of-consciousness internal dialogue, it is rather too well crafted and structured to be other than a writer's technique. Consistent with the tendency we have already seen in Heidegger, there seems to be too much unity of thought and not enough room for discord and genuine novelty to enter the conversation. With this caveat in mind, let us consider what emerges as the experience of meditative thinking, or *Gelassenheit*.

What quickly becomes apparent is that meditative thinking, like the pain of linguistic dif-ference, is no easy task. Although our three conversationalists are clearly accomplished thinkers in their own ways – scientist, scholar and teacher – they all find the subject matter difficult and perplexing. Not surprisingly, the reader who is

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[94]The term was coined in 1952 by William H Whyte in *Fortune* magazine

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trying to follow them similarly has no easy task, as we also are following the twists

and turns of the conversationalist's experience of meditative thinking. Indeed, we are

warned of this in the Memorial Address: 'meditative thinking does not just happen

by itself anymore than does calculative thinking. At times it requires greater effort. It

demands more practice. It is in need of even more delicate care than any other

genuine craft.'[95] And again in the conversation itself:

> Scholar: We need this guidance, because our conversation becomes
> ever more difficult.
> Teacher: If by difficult you mean the unaccustomed task which
> consists in weaning ourself from will.[96]

One of the difficult things about meditative thinking then is this 'weaning ourself

from will' which will enable the releasement towards things that was the first

element of *Gelassenheit*. It is interesting in this context to consider the

conversational style employed here as opposed to an expository philosophical

approach. Heidegger seems to recognise that reading an exposition may not

challenge the will sufficiently. It is too easy to interpret the text from inside one's

own worldview and engage with the text as an object in the world in relation to one's

own web of relations. This is particularly the case when one engages in an analytic

critique of a text where one is concerned with finding points of agreement and

disagreement. Conversation, and perhaps even the conversational style, on the other

hand, seems to provide more of an opportunity to avoid this tendency. The

protagonists, through direct engagement, are perhaps more willing to wean

themselves from their will. This is, of course, not guaranteed. We have all been

involved in conversations where one party or another is only concerned with pushing

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[95]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, pp46-47
[96]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p60

their own opinion, but perhaps these should only nominally be regarded as

conversations, and that 'true' conversation necessarily involves a relaxing of the will

and an encounter with exteriority, or that which is beyond will. Indeed, the one thing

that all three thinkers in Heidegger's conversation have in common, despite their

different ways of thinking, is their willingness to 'not will' in relation to the

conversation.

> Teacher: Can you tell us how this is so?
> Scientist: I'll be glad to try, providing I don't have to run the risk
> that you will at once pin me down to particular words.
> Teacher: In our conversations, we don't usually do that.
> Scholar: Rather, we see to it that we move freely in the realm of
> words.
> Teacher: Because a word does not and never can re-present
> anything; but signifies something, that is, shows something in its
> range of expressibility.[97]

Note this not willing is still an acting for Heidegger but a higher acting which is

beyond the traditional active/passive dichotomy which operates at the level of the

will. I am tempted to phrase this as an activity more active than all activity to borrow

the form of the well known Levinasian phrase in relation to passivity which we will

return to in our chapter on Levinas. Indeed, this higher activity itself has more than a

trace of passivity in that one of its keynotes is waiting—a waiting not for something

in particular but a waiting upon an unknown revelation. Further, in *Discourse for*

Thinking, this waiting takes the form of a conversation where the thinkers, in giving

their thoughts and words free rein, give the play of dialogue a priority over their own

wills—they let language speak. One of the interesting things about this is that

Heidegger uses our linguistic sociality as a way of disrupting our usual wilful

encounter with world to expose the horizon of world and the region beyond it that

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[97]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p69

makes world possible. That is, meditative thinking or releasement takes us beyond

our transcendental relation to the horizon that exposes world, to the very event of the

birth of world itself out of what Heidegger calls the mystery.

> Scientist: Releasement is indeed the release of oneself from
> transcendental re-presentation and so a relinquishing of the willing of
> a horizon. Such relinquishing no longer stems from a willing, except
> that the occasion for releasing oneself to belonging to that-which-
> regions requires a trace of willing. This trace, however, vanishes
> while releasing oneself and is completely extinguished in
> releasement.[98]

Releasement, while initially involving the trace of willing in terms of a resolve to the

destruction of worldly willing, leaves us in a space or region before the ontological in

which things are determined in-themselves free from the distorting and concealing

aspects of Da-sein's worldly willing. It is in this sense that Da-sein is open to the

mystery and can directly encounter the truth of being, which is independent of man's

subjectivity.

> Teacher: Assuredly, and I mean this: the nature of man is released
> to that which regions and is used accordingly, for this reason alone—
> that man of himself has no power over truth and it remains
> independent of him. Truth's nature can come forth independently of
> man only because the nature of man (as releasement to that which
> regions) is used by that which regions in regioning both with
> respect to man and to sustain determining. Evidently truth's
> independence from man is a relation to human nature, a relation
> which rests on the regioning of human nature into that which
> regions.[99]

So just how far have we come and what does it mean that truth's independence from

man is a relation to human nature? Well, one might see this as the completion of the

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[98]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, pp79-80
[99]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p84

phenomenological project, a breaking down of the ontological and epistemological

gap and a recovery of realism. That is, Heidegger's formulation is an attempt to

break down the 'and' once and for all. Ultimately, the thing itself does not need to be

banished to the noumena, or bracketed off, because meditative thinking is a direct

engagement with the thing itself, where it is revealed in-itself. However, this

revelation contains a paradox. As revelation is a coming-to-presence, Da-sein only

nears the truth of the in-itself at the expense of distancing itself from the space that

allows the revelation which Heidegger refers to as the that-which-regions.

> Scientist: Then That-which-regions itself would be nearing and
> distancing.
> Scholar: That-which-regions itself would be the nearness of
> distance, and the distance of nearness...
> Scientist: ...a characterisation which should not be thought of
> dialectically...[100]

This is what Heidegger means by truth is revealing and concealing. It is also part of

the reason why the truth of this revelation is not a return to an eternal and universal

Platonic truth. The other part is that revelation has a history, and any revelation is not

a view from nowhere, but a gradual unfolding of the truth of being. Together these

conceptions of truth and revelation lead to a hermeneutical engagement with that-

which-regions, which Heidegger sometimes describes as a to-ing and fro-ing. But as

long as Dasein continues to engage with that-which-regions through meditative

thinking or *Gelassenheit,* it avoids slipping permanently into 'and' thinking and

'moves into nearness' with the in-itself by remaining open to exteriority and the

mystery it contains.[101] Ultimately, for Heidegger, despite the necessity of anticipation

in Da-sein's ecstatic temporality and worldliness, Da-sein must always maintain a

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[100]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p86
[101]Heidegger, M *Discourse on Thinking*, p89

certain reserve towards the world and things as they present themselves so as to leave

a space for further releasement. It is here that many commentators turn to

Heidegger's relationship and similarities to Meister Eckhart in an attempt to better

understand *Gelassenheit* and Da-sein's belonging together with being. For instance,

John Caputo suggests based on Eckhart's teachings that:

> The mystical life of the soul with God is a model for the relation of
> Dasein to Being in the later Heidegger. Being – like God – gives
> itself, bestows its 'favors' upon man. Dasein – like the soul – can
> only prepare itself for Being's gift by staying open.[102]

That is, for Heidegger, the 'with' of with-being can never be determined definitively

at the ontic level, but is rather at the ontological level, Da-sein's very openness and

hermeneutical engagement with the truth of being. It is in this sense that Da-sein and

being belong together.

4.6 The tension of belonging

In this chapter, I have sought to outline the very radical understanding of ontology

explored by Martin Heidegger, which, I have argued challenges the traditional logic

of and-being and instigates a fundamental shift in our understanding of with-being.

Heidegger's recognition of the ontological difference and his exploration of Da-sein

as being-in-the-world deconstructs traditional notions of subjectivity and the

subject/object distinction, and in doing so closes the epistemological gap. In thinking

Da-sein and world together, Heidegger overcomes the 'tyranny' of distance

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[102]Caputo, J 'The Rose is Without Why: the later Heidegger' in *Philosophy Today*, Spring 1971, p8.
For a much fuller account of the relationship between Heidegger and Meister Eckhart see Reiner
Schürmann's 'Heidegger and Meister Eckhart on Releasement' in *Research in Phenomenology* 3,
1973: 95-119

characteristic of and-being and focuses our attention on the relationality of this unified phenomenon. Intimately bound up in this relationality is Da-sein's ecstatic temporality, which even more radically overcomes the ossifying fixity of and-being that leads to a concentration on what is 'present' and the discovery of eternal essences separated from existence. Through Heidegger's examination of Da-sein's thrownness (past) and projection (future) he exposes the historically contingent movement of Da-sein's existence and the truth that this existence reveals. This introduces a different logic to with-being that Emil Fackenheim, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, describes as 'a self-constituting process which, in moving forward, integrates and re-integrates its own past into the forward movement'.

Thus, in the early Heidegger we already have the seeds of the paradigmatic shift away from and-being. However, as we have seen, this examination of Da-sein is aimed at answering *die Seinsfrage* which is ultimately to be found in the belonging together of Da-sein and being. And it is a deeper consideration of this belonging together of Da-sein and being, with the emphasis on being, that drives the philosophy of the later Heidegger rather than a radical philosophical about-turn in his position. It is the insight of Heidegger I that recognises the traditional metaphysical comportment contains the 'danger' of concealing the belonging together of Da-sein and being. This enables Heidegger II to explore the nature of this conjunction more fully. This is why Heidegger laments, when considering the commentary on *die Kehre*, that:

No allowance is made for reflection on the fact that a good number of years are needed before the thinking through of so decisive a matter can find its way into the clear.[103]

And further suggests that:

The thinking of the reversal results from the fact that I stayed with the matter-for-thought [of] 'Being and Time', sc. by inquiring into that perspective which already in *Being and Time* (p39) was designated as 'Time and Being'.[104]

And finally concludes that:

Contrary [to what is generally supposed] the question of *Being and Time* is decisively ful-filled in the thinking of the reversal. He alone can ful-fill who has the vision of fullness.[105]

This fulfilment, as we have described, is the imperative for Da-sein to return to its home in the openness of being so it can become the shepherd of the truth of being. This shepherding involves the revelation of beings as they are in themselves, in language, through meditative thinking, or *Gelassenheit*. This thinking is a performative engagement with being that suspends Da-sein's willing and 'lets being be' or 'lets the thing thing'. Note that what Heidegger refers to as *Das Ding* in his later work is not a scientific or material object, a representation, or even the ready-to-hand of the early Heidegger—it cannot be possessed by man. In this way:

Something is set free that was retained within the network of references to things and purposes. A grip is loosened, a contraction of the fingers slackens. Apprehension turns into ease and

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[103]Heidegger, M Forward to *Heidegger through Phenomenology to Thought*, pXVI
[104]Heidegger, M Forward to *Heidegger through Phenomenology to Thought*, pXVI
[105]Heidegger, M Forward to *Heidegger through Phenomenology to Thought*, pXVIII

poise...Man ceases to possess, and the thing is freed into its own being.[106]

What all this signifies is an important shift in register in our understanding of with-being. Relationality is no longer the 'and' conjunction between one or more self-contained beings that is built-on after the fact. Further, the human is no longer simply one of these beings whose peculiar essence is to transcend these other beings and manipulate them through the powers of thought, speech and act. Heidegger has shown us that this lordly comportment and the violence it implies is a danger that covers over Da-sein's open participation in the 'with'—a conjunction that itself has no fixed essence, but is an unmediated engagement with 'the thing in itself' that constantly gives birth and rebirth to the truth of being and to world. As David Wood puts it:

> Heidegger could be said to have found the truth of the will-to-power in the ineliminable performativity of philosophy, that philosophy cannot ultimately be about..., it must itself eventuate. And it eventuates as a form of self-transformation, one marked by 'life', 'affirmation', 'creativity' precisely to the extent that it draws us back into the truth of *Ereignis*.[107]

While this chapter was concerned with describing the positive trajectory of Heidegger's milestones in bringing Da-sein and being closer together, I have also flagged certain tensions in this belonging that warrant further investigation and critical engagement because they seem to retain vestiges of and-being.

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[106]Schürmann, R 'Heidegger and Meister Eckhart on Releasement' in *Research and Phenomenology*, p101
[107]Wood, D 'Reading and Writing After Heidegger: Glimpses of Being in Dasein's Development' in *Contretemps* 3, July 2002, p38

The first is the tendency to maintain an ontological gap between Da-sein and being that is captured in the question how can it be that 'the understanding of *being is itself a determination of Da-sein*'[108] and at the same time '*the human being is rather "thrown" by being itself* into the truth of being' (my emphasis)?[109] In short, this question seems to expose a remnant of the idealist/realist dichotomy and a search for ground that has haunted the tradition. In a sense, Heidegger is still struggling with the problem he finds in Husserl. That is, as we have already mentioned, while Husserl recognised the intimacy of the intentional relation between subject and object, his focus on human consciousness and subjectivity prevented him from adequately exploring the object of intentionality and this relationality itself. Thus, he tended to ground phenomenology in consciousness leading towards a form of idealism. However, Heidegger too has a tendency to approach the belonging together of Da-sein and being from either pole and in doing so risks flipping between idealism and realism; perhaps as Lazslo Versenyi suggests to give Da-sein (or perhaps the belonging together of Da-sein and being) 'the firm foundation it lacked in the self-founding efforts of the existentialistic analysis'.[110] In the literature this becomes apparent in the active/passive dichotomy that is often used to make a radical distinction or even point out a flat contradiction between Heidegger I and Heidegger II. While I don't think this distinction is as stark as some of the literature would argue, perhaps it does indicate that Heidegger needs to focus more on the relationality rather than the relata and cease looking for a stable ground for the truth of being.

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[108]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H12
[109] Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p252
[110]Versenyi, L *Heidegger, Being and Truth*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, p142

The second tension is between wholeness and dispersion, or perhaps – slightly

differently – between identity and difference. Despite Heidegger's insistence on the

dispersion of Da-sein, *mitsein*, dif-ference and so on, there is a strong tendency in

Heidegger to emphasise wholeness and unity. For example, *Being and Time*

describes the structural whole of Da-sein, Da-sein always finds itself in world as a

whole, Da-sein is with being as a whole, and there is the unity of temporal ecstasis.

Now in some cases it could be argued that this wholeness is an attempt to capture the

intimate relationship between terms which present themselves as a unified

phenomenon—such as Da-sein's being-in-the-world for instance. But it might also

be, as David Wood suggests in relation to Da-sein's wholeness, a remnant in

Heidegger of the demand for a certain type of philosophical account—an account

that wants to maintain some version of a unified subject for instance?[111] Does

Heidegger simply fail to embrace the radical implications in terms of dispersion and

discontinuity of his deconstruction of subjectivity?

The third tension I would like to highlight follows on from the last: it is the tension

between *mitsein* and individuated Da-sein. Put simply, although Heidegger explicitly

states that Da-sein is primordially *mitsein*, does not Heidegger continue to give an

unwarranted priority to individuated Da-sein and its engagement with being? You

will recall in our discussion of *Gelassenheit* that despite the pre-requisite of language

(which would imply *mitsein*) and the exposition of *Gelassenheit* through the

conversation of three interlocutors, that first and foremost, openness to being is a

somewhat personal affair as Heidegger himself exhibits in his own philosophising.

That is, meditative thinking is primarily the way of being of an individuated and

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[111]Wood, D *The Deconstruction of Time*, pp171-173

authentic Da-sein. To be sure, others can assist or we can think meditatively together, but this seems to be more as the result of a common project rather than the product of *mitsein*. It is worth considering whether a much higher priority should be given to *mitsein* in an exploration of with-being, or indeed if it should not be the starting point of such an exploration.

Finally, there is the priority that Heidegger gives to truth and Unconcealment as the belonging together of Da-sein and being. Now certainly we must grant that Heidegger's *aletheia* is a long way from standard accounts of truth and in particular the Platonic theses that truth is timeless, unchanging and perspectively neutral; however, can *aletheia* be the sole or priority basis for our responding to the mystery? Why not rather love or desire or any number of the other attunements of Da-sein? To prioritise truth and revelation as the proper abode of Da-sein may do an injustice to other forms of relationality. To his credit, Heidegger does not ignore these affections and indeed recognises them as necessary conditions for revelation; but in the unity of the temporal ecstasis and historic temporality he seems to subordinate them to truth as revelation. This subordination requires further consideration.

This leads us to the next chapter where I will explore these tensions of belonging in more detail, both as the basis of a critique of Heidegger and to provide an impetus for a continued consideration of with-being in the areas of ethics and politics with Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy.

Chapter 5 – Traces of and-being

> One has to work terribly hard in each case to bring out the dispersal, the dispersion, or the dissemination. I spend my time doing that! One must expend tremendous effort to reach disruption, or the interruption that I think you rightly want to accord Heidegger. But in each case my sense is that one has to work against enormous resistance; and, in that sense, I would be more inclined to stress the kind of structural tendency in Heidegger towards a reconstruction of the same. It is still one thing, in itself, still a certain oneness, or a certain privileged unity which is confirmed from beginning to end.
>
> Christopher Fynsk, Discussion at the end of *'Heidegger after Derrida'* by David Wood

> I think we underestimate the problem of actually accounting for sameness, and that is one of the things that Heidegger is trying to do. And if you say: in doing that he domesticates the abyss, or makes light of it, or appropriates it, or always tames it, I think you are in a sense being unfair.
>
> David Wood, Reply to Fynsk in the Discussion at the end of *'Heidegger after Derrida'*[1]

In the last chapter, we explored the radical shifts that Heidegger introduced in our understanding of with-being. In particular, we noted that Heidegger's reinvigoration of the question of being and investigation of the ontological difference enabled him to get behind the everyday 'and' ontology of presence, assumed by the epistemological tradition, and examine Da-sein's being-in-the-world and the fundamental belonging together of Da-sein and being, that opens up the possibility of Da-sein's worldly relations. Ultimately, it is Da-sein's existence in its shepherding of being that is its unique essence, and which differentiates Da-sein's way of being from the other beings such as animals and things that it encounters. To stay true to this essence, according to Heidegger, requires a poetic thinking and language that is not bound up in the quest for power and control that manifests itself in the modern day reduction of *logos* to the logic of categorical representation and truth of

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[1] Wood, D 'Heidegger after Derrida' in *Research and Phenomenology* 17, 1987: 103-116

propositional statements, but rather is able as it were, to let beings speak for themselves.

There are, of course, many aspects of Heidegger's philosophy that could be, and which have been, critiqued by those engaging with Heidegger's work. However, the issue which lies behind many of these critiques, and especially the more important ones in my view, is the possibility of traces of the metaphysics of and-being in Heidegger's philosophy. Interestingly, criticism arises from both sides of the spectrum: those who think that there is not enough and-being in Heidegger's thought, particularly his later thought, which is often criticised for falling away into poetic mysticism; and those who think, usually referring mainly to the early Heidegger, that he has failed to fully overcome metaphysics and retains vestiges of the sovereign subject and the like. It should be clear from my last chapter and the general tenet of this thesis that I will be concerned with the second tranche of critiques that claim Heidegger, to his philosophy's detriment, retains traces of and-being.

If you recall from chapter 2, the logic of and-being, adhering to something like the Leibnitzian theory of inclusion, tends towards a prioritisation of self-contained unity and identity with relationality built on after the fact—it is the logic of p or not p. Now, as we have discussed, Heidegger shifts us away from this logic towards a logic of with-being that attempts to think relationality in terms of a hermeneutical openness to the truth of being. It is in this openness that identity and difference arise and to some extent are always in tension—epitomised by the very distinction between, and belonging together, of Da-sein and being. What is at issue, is whether Heidegger, while recognising both unity and dispersion, still gives undue weight to

wholeness and unity—or as Christopher Fynsk puts it, whether Heidegger's philosophy contains 'a certain oneness, or a certain privileged unity which is confirmed from beginning to end'.[2]

Of course, different philosophers give expression to this concern in different ways: for Levinas it is as a totalitarianism of the same that does violence to the Other; for Derrida it is a privileging of the proper; for Wood it is a question of wholeness; and for Nancy it is a prioritisation of the singular over the plural—to name just a few of its forms that are the most relevant to this thesis. Also, the strength of this concern varies greatly. For Levinas, the criticism is harsh indeed and at times verges on polemic; while for Derrida, Wood and Nancy the criticism is often tempered by homage to the radicalism, nuances and development of Heidegger's thought. These more generous readings acknowledge that Heidegger himself struggles with the tension between unity and dispersion and that he does not shy away from the abyssal dimension evident in this tension. Further, in terms of any residue of and-being, as Woods expresses it, 'if there is a valuation it is (residually) a kind of hermeneutic reconstitution and repetition of unities of sense that continue to function, if only as rafts rather than fixed landmarks'.[3] While I heartily agree with Woods in general, I will argue that even this 'hermeneutic repetition of unities of sense' at times risks not leaving room for dispersion and difference, and has a tendency to re-introduce certain aspects of the logic of and-being.

In this chapter then, I will consider how this tendency manifests in Heidegger's conception of the solitary lot of the philosopher; the early Heidegger's analysis of

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[2]Wood, D 'Heidegger after Derrida', p115
[3]Wood, D 'Heidegger after Derrida', p110

being-in-the-world, Da-sein's authentic self-hood and being-towards-death; and the later Heidegger's analysis of the destiny of being, *Ereignis* and *Gelassenheit*. What will become apparent, is that while Heidegger's philosophy opens up a space and a demand to rethink both the ethical and political, Heidegger himself never delivers on this promise. In part this is because Heidegger considers ethics and politics to be ontic fields of investigation. That is, for Heidegger, traditional ethical and political interpretations are simply two of a number of interpretations of human being – along with psychology, anthropology, historiography, etc. – that 'pursue in different ways and to varying extents the behaviour, faculties, powers, possibilities, and destinies of Da-sein'.[4] However, it is also because the traces of and-being in Heidegger's philosophy, particularly in the form of the prioritisation of Da-sein over *mitsein*, leave Heidegger with a blind-spot in terms of such an engagement. That is, despite his assertion of the primordiality of *mitsein*, Heidegger prioritises the 'mineness' and belonging together of Da-sein and being as the ground of being-in-the-world. Thus, Da-sein's relationships with others and innerworldly beings are always in a certain sense mediated by Da-sein's relationship with the truth of being. For Heidegger, truth as *aletheia* and ontology come before ethics and politics.

It is this lacuna in Heidegger's philosophy together with the subordination and prioritisation of the singular over the plural that will provide the site for my engagement in the remaining chapters with the ethical and political dimensions of with-being through the work of Emanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy.

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[4]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H16

5.1 *Der unheimliche Philosoph*

In his early writings, as we have discussed, Heidegger seeks a way into *die Seinsfrage* through his radical re-interpretation of what it is to be human and what it is to have a world. In his later writings the ground of this being-with-the-world turned out to be Da-sein's belonging together with being which through *Gelassenheit* and language is open to the truth of being. One of the most important elements of the Heideggerian revolution was Heidegger's analysis of the temporality of Da-sein and in particular the contingent thrownness of Da-sein. The implications of this historical contingency are far reaching but most importantly demonstrate that Da-sein can never have a view from no-where on its world. Thus, Da-sein's engagement with the truth of being is always open and hermeneutical. If we apply this logic to Heidegger's own philosophy then, we can pose the question as to why Heidegger, at this point in time, re-opened the question of being. What was it about Heidegger's own being-in-the-world that warranted this kind of philosophical investigation and how did his existentiell situation affect his existential analysis?[5]

While we can never definitively give an answer to this question, because we ourselves can never gain a view from no-where perspective, one strong influence on Heidegger appears to be his dissatisfaction, or discomfort, with what man had become in the face of modern technology, the hegemony of the sciences, and the rise of the industrial city state.[6] For Heidegger, humanity had taken a 'wrong' turn

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[5]Note that an interesting question arises, which we will consider in more detail later, as to what drives Da-sein's engagement with the truth of being. For instance, is it the mystery itself, is it Da-sein's concern for its existentiell being-in-the-world, or is this the wrong way to think about the question altogether? At issue here will be Da-sein's relationship with the otherworldly.
[6]The kinds of problems depicted in Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of The West*. New York: AA Knopf, 1947

somewhere which had led to an *epoche*[7] characterised by the metaphysical attunement and the meaninglessness, boredom and lack of human dignity that accompanied it. In the face of the nihilism that attended the 'death of God', his philosophical enterprise was not simply some abstract intellectual reflection, or an instance of idle curiosity, but an attempt to recover something that was lost or forgotten—an attempt to find a home in a world that had become, for Heidegger, profoundly inhospitable. Perhaps it is this realisation that leads Heidegger to claim that the fundamental attunement of philosophy is homesickness.

> Philosophy, metaphysics, is a homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere, a demand, not blind and without direction, but one which awakens us to such questions as those we have just asked and to their unity: what is world, finitude, and individuation? Each of these questions enquires into the whole.[8]

So in his attempt to be at home everywhere, Heidegger engages in philosophy, enquires into the whole, as a response to the homelessness he feels in relation to modern society. It is in this sense that one might refer to Heidegger as Germany's *Zivilisationskritiker* of the 1920s.[9]

The nature of Heidegger's critique of modern civilisation has been characterised differently by different philosophers. Julian Young, Hugo Ott and Richard Wolin, amongst others, argue that Heidegger was an anti-modernist, while Jeffrey Herf argues that Heidegger, because of his interest in the writings of Ernst Jünger, was a

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[7]Note I will persist with the use the Greek *epoche* rather than the English epoch to signify I am using the word in a Heideggerian sense. For Heidegger, *epoche* used in relation to the history of being signifies a 'holding back' that is not captured in the English word epoch and additionally the English word has a sense of temporal historicism that Heidegger would also want to avoid.
[8]Heidegger, M *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p6
[9]See Richard Wolin's *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001; for this general positioning of Heidegger's philosophy and also this specific description on p63

reactionary modernist. The difference being, between those who would 'overcome

the world of modern technology' and return to some kind of pre-technological

society – the anti-modernists – and those who accept technology but wish to mitigate

against the cultural ravages that have accompanied the rise of technology – the

reactionary modernists.[10] While I will not engage in detail with this debate here, it is

clear even on the more moderate reactionary modernist account, that Heidegger's

post war dissatisfaction with modern society – with its understanding of human as

rational animal and its instrumental use of humans as 'standing reserve' – was a key

motivator behind his attempts at a *destruktion* of traditional metaphysics. Note,

however, in support of a more moderate reactionary modernist account, that

Heidegger did not reject these modern interpretations of man out of hand, but merely

thought there was more to human existence than this comportment allowed.

> Through this determination of the essence of the human being in the
> deterministic interpretations of the human being as animale
> rationale, as 'person', as spiritual-ensouled-bodily being, are not
> declared false and thrust aside. Rather, the sole implication is that
> the highest determinations of the essence of human being in
> humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of the human
> being.[11]

In short, Heidegger didn't feel comfortable with such a characterisation of the human

and the way of being of modernity that he saw around him. This discomfort led him

to re-examine the relations between world, finitude and individuation in an attempt to

overcome the profound boredom of the *epoche*, recover man's dignity, and bring Da-

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[10]See Young, J *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 and
Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich. New
York: Cambridge University Press, 1984 for a detailed discussion of the dispute. See Richard Wolin,
The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger. New York: Columbia University
Press, 1980 and *Heidegger's Children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001 for an interesting
discussion of the links between Heidegger's work and the German intellectual tradition of the times.
[11]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p251

sein back home to the place where it could engage authentically with the meaning of being.[12]

One might recognise in all of this what Joseph Campbell refers to as a call to adventure—the first stage in the hero's journey.[13] The philosopher, in this case Heidegger, recognises that something is *unheimlich*, or missing, in modernity and is called to quest and search for a different way of life. Further, this quest, if we recall the difficult task of *Gelassenheit*, will not be easy for at least three reasons: firstly, because as Heidegger attests in varying ways throughout his philosophy, the task itself is difficult and will involve pain, perseverance and struggle; secondly, ultimately it is a task the philosopher must undertake alone.

> It turned out that this demand to be at home everywhere, which means to exist among beings as a whole, is nothing other than a peculiar questioning about the meaning of this 'as a whole' which we call world. What happens here in this questioning and searching, in this back and forth, is the finitude of man. What occurs in such becoming finite is an ultimate solitariness of man, in which everyone stands for him or herself as someone unique in the face of the whole.[14]

And thirdly, in keeping with the hero's journey, the philosopher, in facing the whole alone must first stand apart from and perhaps oppose the masses that do not have the courage to accept the burden or ask the question. In this way, 'the true is not for everyman but only for the strong'.[15]

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[12]Note on p286 of 'Introduction to Metaphysics' in *Pathmarks* Heidegger points out that 'Meaning of Being' and 'Truth of Being' say the same thing.
[13]See Campbell, J *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988 for a full description of the mythic stages in the Hero's journey.
[14]Heidegger, M *Fundamental concepts of Metaphysics*, p8
[15]Heidegger, M *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, p133

Presumably, the early Heidegger saw himself in this light. In re-opening *die*

Seinsfrage, Heidegger headed off in a different direction to other 'philosophers' who

were caught up in the metaphysical *epoche*, taking for granted the assumptions of

and-being, and so failing to question the whole. If this is the case, not only does this

position contain a certain amount of hubris but it also maintains, to some extent, the

traditional dichotomy between the individual and society, and a 'great man' theory of

history. Richard Wolin characterises this tendency, as Heidegger's (German

romantic) commitment to the Nazi *Führerprinzip* which in turn justifies a

'revolutionary activism' and 'his panegyric to "the great creators" (*die grossen*

Schaffenden): an elite cadre of authentic leader types – poets, thinkers, and statesmen

– who stand in a privileged relation to Being'.[16]

Heidegger, of course, is not alone in this kind of view, and there are strong echoes of

Plato's philosopher kings, Kierkegaard's commitment to self and Nietzsche's

Übermensch in this position. Nevertheless, there is a prioritisation of the one, or the

individual here, over the plural or masses, which as Wolin points out may have anti-

democratic and totalitarian political overtones. And while it is worth remembering

that the later Heidegger placed more emphasis on the destiny of being, and indeed his

own thinking as being caught up or playing out this destiny, this does not seem to

change the metaphysical or political logic which is at play. It is still certain

individuals that seem to have greater access to this destiny of being because of their

receptivity to hearing this destiny through *Gelassenheit*. If anything, it strengthens

the claims of 'the great creators' by grounding their creations in something outside of

themselves that would lay claim to all.

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[16]Wolin, R *Heidegger's Children*, p67. Heidegger, of course, is not alone in this view and there are
strong echoes of Plato's philosopher Kings and Nietzsche's supermen.

We can already see that this true path of philosophical investigation, as opposed to the detours [*Umwege*] and false trails [*Holzwege*] of traditional metaphysics, prioritises unity and wholeness in many respects. Firstly, the 'demand to be at home everywhere' seems unnecessarily appropriative. It leaves little room for a genuine encounter with the unhomely or the stranger except on its own terms. That is, even if the stranger is welcomed there is an imperative to lose their strangeness and become a part of the home. What this appropriation of strangeness seems to exclude is the possibility of what Nancy terms *L'Intrus* (the intruder) who enters by force, surprise or ruse and remains foreign while still abiding. According to Nancy 'it is neither logically acceptable nor ethically admissible, to exclude all intrusion in the coming of the stranger, the foreign'.[17] Of course, one may object on Heidegger's behalf, that ultimately the homelessness that Heidegger feels in modern society, is indeed due to the will to power and closure to being that the ways of being open to Da-sein, in a society based on traditional metaphysics, presents to it. Heidegger's home in contrast, is an open home, a home where Da-sein genuinely engages with the truth of being and is 'given' over to new possibilities. Even if we accept this, what is at issue, is whether this openness to the truth of being does indeed leave space for the intruder or mystery.

Secondly, because the philosophical path takes the philosopher beyond the levelling aspects of modernity and the common, to a 'personal' encounter with being, one might wonder whether there is too much heroic individualism in Heidegger's philosophy. Indeed, one way that we could read *Being and Time* is as a description of

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[17]Nancy, J 'L'Intrus', *The New Centennial Review* 2(3), Fall 2002, p1

the philosopher's or hero's journey from a lostness in a crowded modern society to a recovery of dignity and true potential of what it is to be an individuated Da-sein. To be sure this potential is open to all Da-sein in principle; and because of Heidegger's deconstruction of the subject, any account of individuation would need to be quite radical; but the question remains as to whether Heidegger simply replaces one type of individuation with another that still follows the same logic—a logic which does not do sufficient justice to with-being.

To explore these issues in more detail, let us consider how these tendencies manifest in certain aspects of Heidegger's early and later philosophy.

5.2 The search for whole Da-sein

One of the central concerns of Heidegger's early work and in particular *Being and Time* is the deconstruction of traditional notions of subjectivity. As we discussed in the last chapter, Heidegger moves away from a humanism that would characterise the human as an entity with some fixed essence separate from its existence to Da-sein as a way of being whose essence is in its existence. Further, Da-sein's way of being is fundamentally relational, as brought out in Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world. Most of this work is carried out in Division I of *Being and Time*. However, this radical reinterpretation of the human and its existential structures also has a potential cost: that we have lost the traditional structures on which to build identity and selfhood. As David Wood puts it:

> Heidegger has ventured a radicalising articulation of man, of the
> self (as Da-sein) that does away with any basis for unity there might

previously have been, such as the permanence of a substance, or some cluster of features (grasped as present-at-hand). In opening man onto the world, Heidegger has risked loss of identity because he has dissolved the traditional limits...At every turn one might say, identity in any traditional sense is harder and harder to credit.[18]

Now of course, this is only a cost if one thinks such unity and identity must exist and be accounted for. Certainly philosophers following on from Heidegger, such as Derrida, Nancy, and Foucault to name a few, will go further in questioning the necessity of such a stable and unified identity. However, Heidegger in asking the question of the 'who' and pursuing a whole and individuated Da-sein in Division II of *Being and Time* seems to assume some kind of account of 'the same' is necessary. This of course is understandable given Heidegger's phenomenological method. That is, few would deny, from an everyday perspective, that we take for granted, or experience phenomenally, some form of unified self. Such an experience is thus at the very least due an explanation. And so one of the key themes of Division II is an exploration of selfhood and wholeness given the existential structures outlined in Division I. However, as we will see, such an account seems to reconstruct a form of individualism that lends itself too readily to traditional interpretations of the subject and contains remnants of and-being.

5.2.1 Existing as a they-self

You will recall from the last chapter that the glue that holds Da-sein's being-in-the-world together is ecstatic temporality which we considered through Heidegger's analysis of the attunement of profound boredom. However, Da-sein's temporality also serves a unifying function in relation to Da-sein becoming a whole self. To

[18]Woods, D *The Deconstruction of Time*, p172

understand how it fulfils this function we will take a closer look at the fundamental attunement of *Angst* and Da-sein's being-towards-death which form the existential conditions of wholeness as explored in Division II of *Being and Time*. What will become apparent is the mirroring of the contrast between the levelling existence of modern man to the dignified existence of the philosopher, in the existential modes of inauthenticity and authenticity.

Phenomenologically, as we have seen, Da-sein finds itself enmeshed in a web of worldly relations already caring about the entities it encounters including other Da-sein. However, world never appears by itself but always exposes Da-sein in its 'there'. This in essence is what Heidegger means by *Jemeinigkeit*. Da-sein is 'in each case' mine in the sense that I am always exposed with the world. Da-sein always finds itself 'there' situated in the world. Yet, because Da-sein is 'thrown' into this web of relations neither the situatedness nor Da-sein's understanding of 'who it is' is of its own making. In this sense Da-sein is not its own ground and existentially experiences being-in-the-world as unhomely (*unheimlich*). That is, it is anxious about the meaning of its very existence. This anxiety Heidegger calls the attunement of *Angst*, and it is in this mood that Da-sein confronts nihilism. Not surprisingly perhaps, the *Angst* about its ungroundedness sends Da-sein fleeing in search of rootedness (*bodenstendidkeit*) and a sense of 'who' it really is in its being. In the first place it seeks such roots is in the network of relationships with other beings. However, according to Heidegger:

> In this flight, Da-sein precisely does not bring itself before itself. In accordance with its own-most trait of entanglement, this turning away leads away from Da-sein.[19]

That is, Da-sein falls or flees into the cares of its everyday world and in doing so loses itself in its inherited attunement and understanding, including self-understanding.

> Initially, factical Da-sein is in the with-world, discovered in an average way. Initially, 'I' 'am' not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they. In terms of the they, and as the they, I am initially 'given' to 'myself'. Initially, Da-sein is the they, and for the most part it remains so.[20]

This they, or *das Man*, according to Heidegger, is an inauthentic way of being. It is inauthentic because it distracts and hides the true essence of Da-sein from itself. The 'who' of *das Man* is not a group of definite others or the sum of all others. It is the anonymous neutral 'they' or 'one' so often referred to in our common appeals to authority such as 'the Department said', 'commonsense', 'according to scientists', everybody knows, or 'it's what one does'. All invoke a ghostly authority for which no particular individual can be held accountable but which nevertheless fashions our interpretation of the world in substantial ways. As well as being no-one, *das Man* is also in a sense everyone. Its anonymous authority applies to all Da-sein in common and creates an everyday averageness that 'prescribes what can and can't be ventured, watches over every exception and thrusts itself to the fore'.[21] This averageness is often embedded ontically in the concepts used in our social sciences and institutions such as the average family, the reasonable person test, the common law, moderation to a bell curve, the consumer, the citizen, and the 'norm'. Again, these concepts on

[19]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H184
[20]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H129
[21]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H127

which we base decisions affecting people's lives refer to no-one in particular but apply to everyone.

It is not just our words and concepts that are ontically influenced by *das Man*. These are evidence of a much deeper way of being that permeates our everyday ontic being-in-the-world mostly unconsciously—how we dress, how we speak, what we eat, where we live, the roles we adopt (parent, employee, carpenter, lover, voter, soldier, etc.) and their related behaviours. These ways of relating are usually taken for granted and frame the very possibilities that Da-sein understands are available to it in its everydayness. In this sense *das Man* has a levelling down effect on the being of Da-sein. These ways of being of *das Man* – averageness, levelling down and distantiality – constitute what Heidegger calls publicness. The publicness of *das Man* is 'everywhere'. It is 'insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness' and 'presents every judgement and decision as its own'. In this way it takes responsibility away from Da-sein and Da-sein stands in subservience to its control and interpretation.

At one level, *das Man* seems to embody Heidegger's critique of modernity and could be interpreted as a negative mode of *mitsein,* and the kind of language Heidegger uses to describe *das Man* certainly reinforces this view.[22] However, Heidegger himself insists there is no such value judgement, and a number of Heidegger scholars also present a case for a more positive and significant role for *das Man.*[23] On this view, *das Man* is a necessary mode of Da-sein that contains an inheritance that

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[22]See Olafson, F 'Heidegger a la Wittgenstein or "Coping" with Professor Dreyfus' in *Inquiry* 37, 1994: 45-64 for a good defence of this account.
[23]This is more in line with the positions of people like Hubert Dreyfus in his book *Being-in-the-world.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991, and Taylor Carman in 'On Being Social: A reply to Olafson' in *Inquiry* 37, 1994: 203-223

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enables Da-sein to exist in a world. That is, without a background of pre-existing understandings and comportments towards the world, Da-sein would have a very sparse world indeed, or would simply be overwhelmed by the inhospitality of the world—just consider for a moment having to discover everything you take for granted about the world and the way you relate to it from scratch, to understand this point. Further, Da-sein's linguistic way of being, as a necessary condition of the discovery of world, also implies *mitsein* and inheritance.

There is no doubt that the mode of *das Man* exhibits these positive aspects and that *das Man* is a necessary existential of Da-sein. However, this positive interpretation of *das Man* cannot be the last word because this mode does not exhaust Da-sein's possible ways of being—even if existentielly Da-sein does not recognise these other possibilities while in this inauthentic mode. That is, existentially, *das Man* must also be considered in relation to authentic Da-sein. It is in this context that the positive and negative interpretations of *das Man* can be somewhat reconciled, in that while there are necessary and positive aspects to inauthentic Da-sein, Da-sein in this mode has not yet realised its full potential and become a whole Da-sein.[24] To the extent that this is a problem and *das Man* contributes to this problem, then remaining in the mode of *das Man* might be valued negatively or be considered deficient relative to authentic Da-sein which as Marjorie Grene argues could be considered an existential virtue.[25]

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[24]Note that the authentic/inauthentic distinction is not an either/or option. As Heidegger states in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p171 'Inauthenticity belongs to the essential nature of factical Da-sein, Authenticity is only a modification but not a total obliteration of inauthenticity.' See Jay Ciaffa's 'Toward an Understanding of Heidegger's Conception of the Inter-relation between Authentic and Inauthentic Existence' in *The Journal of British Society for Phenomenology* 18(1), Jan 1987; where he argues strongly for the enduring interdependence of the two.
[25]Grene, M 'Authenticity: An Existential Virtue' in *Ethics* 62(4), July 1952: 266-274

All this implies that there is something comfortable about existing in the mode of *das Man* that might implicitly prevent Da-sein from reaching its potential. This comfort arises because *das Man* enables Da-sein to avoid a confrontation with nihilism and the difficult aspects of authentic being. It constantly 'accommodates' Da-sein and puts it at ease. It provides the answers to Da-sein's everyday questions in terms of 'what I should do' and enables it to avoid any responsibility for 'what I do' because when operating in the mode of *das Man*, Da-sein is simply doing what 'one does' and cannot be held accountable. The only time Da-sein is held accountable for operating in the mode of *das Man* by others is when it does not 'do what one does'. That is, when it ventures outside the limited possibilities of average everydayness.

So why doesn't Da-sein remain in the comfortable mode of *das Man*?[26] The answer for Heidegger is that while we can flee Da-sein's groundlessness, the primordial mood of *Angst* attuned to this groundlessness constantly pursues Da-sein as a call of conscience. In other words, there is something primordial in the very essence of Da-sein that keeps niggling away at Da-sein in the inauthentic mode of *das Man* telling it there is more to being Da-sein than this mode. *Angst* reveals the mode of *das Man* as a distraction that doesn't really answer the question of 'the who' and provide Da-sein with its ground. It reminds Da-sein that it has not yet found a home, or meaning, but is merely caught up in the sights along the way. This call of conscience motivated by *Angst* passes over the they-self and re-opens the question of the 'who' of Da-sein.

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[26]Arguably some people remain in the inauthentic mode of *das Man* all their lives and never discover authenticity or the essence of Da-sein.

> Precisely in passing over the they, the call pushed it (adamant as it is about public recognition) into insignificance. But robbed of its refuge and this subterfuge by the summons, the self is brought to itself by the call.[27]

Thus, through *Angst*, Da-sein is brought back to itself and its concern with the possibilities surrounding its own existence. This concern with its own possibilities, in turn leads us back to ecstatic temporality and Da-sein's projection into the future. That is, because Da-sein projects into the future it is open to the possibility of an existential encounter with the possibility of its own death – the possibility of its impossibility – which when authentically encountered exposes the finitude and true essence of Da-sein and its ontic possibilities (which until an authentic experience of being-towards-death, are existentially encountered in terms of the everyday cares of *das Man*) as thrown and fundamentally ungrounded. This new perspective on its own finite existence frees Da-sein from its captivation in the given present and individuates a whole authentic self from the anonymous they-self of *das Man*.

5.2.2 Authentic self-discovery

What is at stake in Heidegger's analysis of being-towards-death is the true answer to the question 'who'. Being-towards-death is quite literally an experience of self-discovery that individuates or frees Da-sein for its authentic potential to take over its existence. Until this freeing, Da-sein as a they-self is not whole but rather dispersed and exhausted through its engagement with immediate existentiell possibilities.

> The self of the everyday Da-sein is the they-self which we distinguish from the authentic self, the self which has explicitly

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[27]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H273

> grasped itself. As the they-self, Da-sein is dispersed in the they and
> must first find itself.[28]

Note that this 'finding oneself' because of Da-sein's thrownness in the they, inverts

the usual ordering of the individual's relationship to the social which starts with the

individual and follows the logic of and-being. That is, for Heidegger, as for Merleau-

Ponty, the question is not how we explain intersubjectivity, or the 'and' between

given, pre-existing subjects, but rather how and under what conditions individuation

occurs. While Merleau-Ponty looks for an answer in terms of developmental

psychology and the body-subject, Heidegger examines Da-sein's relationship to

world, and the difference between the two ways of being that are open to Da-sein –

authentic and inauthentic being – the first, a modification of the second.

> Authentic being one's self is not based on an exceptional state of
> the subject, a state detached from the they, but is an existentiell
> modification of the they as an essential existential.[29]

Note also that this possibility of authentically being one's self is a hard won

modification that frees Da-sein – at least temporarily because one still remains for

the most part inauthentic – from its average everydayness and allows it to 'choose'

its own existential possibilities.

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[28]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H129
[29]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H130. Note that Heidegger seems to state exactly the opposite at H317 where he suggests 'the they-self is an existentiell modification of the authentic self'. While I will not argue it here, I believe the two statements are easily reconciled when one takes note of the distinction between 'authentic being oneself' in H130 and 'authentic self' at H317 and the fact that the first quote can be found in Division I while the second is in Division II. In the first case, because Da-sein is first thrown into the they, authentic being oneself as a mode of being is an existentiell modification. It is said from an existentiell first person perspective. That is, the nature of the self-relation changes. In the second case, it is said from an existential perspective in which the possibility of authentic selfhood is present from the very beginning as part of existential structure of Da-sein. It is in this context that the they-self is an existentiell modification of the authentic self. Or put differently, it is only on the grounds of the Da-sein's true selfhood that they-selfhood can emerge. As Richard Cohen states in 'Da-sein's Responsibility for Being' in *Philosophy Today*, Winter 1983: 317-325; 'only the authentic mode distinguishes mode at all', p319

> Free for its ownmost possibilities, that are determined by the end
> and so understood as finite, Da-sein prevents the danger that it may,
> by its own finite understanding of existence, fail to recognise that it
> is getting overtaken by the existence-possibilities of others, or that it
> may misinterpret these possibilities, thus divesting itself of its
> ownmost factical existence.[30]

However, to become free for these ownmost possibilities first requires Da-sein to go

beyond its everyday fear of death as the event of demise to encounter the existential

Angst of being-towards-death and the contingent thrownness and facticity that this

reveals.[31]

5.2.2.1 Facing finitude

As we have seen, Da-sein initially and for the most part finds itself in the mode of

das Man and has a tendency to get lost in its everyday concerns and adopt common

understandings. One of the attractions of this mode is it enables Da-sein to avoid

facing the hard questions about its own existence, including the meaning of death.

> The they does not permit the courage to have Angst about death...In
> angst about death, Da-sein is brought before itself as delivered over to
> its possibility not-to-be-bypassed. The they is careful to distort this
> Angst into the fear of a future event.[32]

Das Man, thus, conceals the existential significance of death and has a range of

strategies to evade and cover over such an encounter and make sure 'of a constant

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[30]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H264
[31]See *Being and Time*, H247 for Heidegger's distinction between perishing which occurs to all other living things and demise as the intermediate phenomenon between death and perishing.
[32]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H254

tranquillisation about death'.[33] These strategies include turning death into a generalised future event which is certain and concerns everyone but also no-one in particular. Death does not enter the present as something of immediate concern to the individual and is nothing but a vague and distant threat. Heidegger even suggests that death is an inconvenience as far as the publicness of *das Man* is concerned. An inconvenience perhaps that leads modern societies to marginalise death and hide it behind the closed doors of hospitals, nursing homes and funeral parlours—allowing only short periods of mourning before its citizens are expected to resume their participation as cogs in the everyday functioning of society.

No doubt there are other strategies for avoiding a genuine encounter with death such as belief in an afterlife, cosmetic surgery, thrill seeking, historical legacies, inheritance and communal valorisation of certain deaths – a theme explored more fully by Nancy – that are all ways of avoiding coming to terms with one's own mortality and finitude. The danger, as Heidegger sees it, in such avoidance is that Da-sein exists as a they-self caught up in the day to day possibilities and concerns of others. Such a Da-sein is blocked in its potential to become a whole Da-sein and is simply one of the herd, with no capacity to transcend average everyday understanding and question further into the truth of being. However, part of the truth of being, that ultimately cannot be avoided, is an individual Da-sein's finitude and its confrontation with the possibility of its own death.

This confrontation for Heidegger is also a confrontation with the death of god and the impossibility of finding meaning and an eternal grounding outside of Da-sein's

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[33]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H254

existence. To this extent, authentic being-towards-death is a rejection of the

immortality ideologies of the Western tradition and a characterisation of death as a

wall or passage with some kind of non-mortal or transformed, but continued,

existence on the other side.[34] The rise of the sciences and humanism means as Sartre

puts it in *Being and Nothingness* that:

> Man can no longer encounter anything but the human; there is no
> longer any other side of life, and death is a human phenomenon; it
> is the final phenomenon of life and is still life.[35]

And while Heidegger himself, despite Sartre's characterisation of his position, does

not consider death as an event or final phenomenon of life, he nevertheless does

agree that death is a phenomenon of life as being-in-the-world and that Da-sein can

encounter death as the possibility of its own non-existence – 'it must be understood

as possibility, cultivated as possibility, and endured as possibility in our relation to

it'[36] – and further, this encounter has significance for the being of Da-sein and can

modify the nature of this being.[37] This modification is a strange kind of self-

grounding in that Da-sein comes face to face with its ungrounded/contingent and

arbitrary existence that is not willed or justified by a god, not a part of some cosmic

design, and is without access to universal absolute truths; and further, that this

existence must end. And while later on in 'On the Essence of Ground' in a footnote

and again in 'Letter on Humanism' Heidegger will claim 'Through the ontological

interpretation of Da-sein as being-in-the-world no decision, whether positive or

negative, is made concerning a possible being toward God', it is clear that no such

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[34]For a fuller account of immortality ideologies and their relation to the work of Heidegger see
Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's article 'Death and Immortality in Western Philosophy' in the *Continental
Philosophy Review* 36, 2003: 235-262,
[35]Sartre, J *Being and Nothingness*, p532
[36]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H261
[37]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H247

being toward God is possible without a Da-sein that unveils the truth of being and

that Da-sein as existence, is a finite existence that must come to an end.[38] Being-

toward-death, then, is an existential realisation and acceptance of the responsibility

for Da-sein's own finite and ungrounded existence, its potential ways of being, and

the ontic possibilities before it. It is this revelation of the truth of Da-sein's thrown

facticity, and the courageous existence in this truth that ultimately grounds authentic

Da-sein.

> The nothingness before which Angst brings us reveals the nullity
> that determines Da-sein in its ground, which itself is as thrownness
> into death.[39]

Da-sein paradoxically finds the ground that has been lost with the death of God in the

very ungroundedness that God's death reveals, and which Da-sein can stoically

accept as its truth. This stoic acceptance is captured by Heidegger in the phrase

anticipatory resoluteness.

5.2.2.2 Existential self-mastery

It is in anticipatory resolution that the full significance of being-towards-death

reveals itself as an existential self-mastery. This is not a mastery over death itself as

certain critics might have it, but is a reflexive mastery over self as existence.

> Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way out fabricated for the purpose
> of overcoming death, but it is rather the understanding that follows
> the call to conscience and that frees for death the possibility of

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[38]Heidegger, M in 'The Essence of Ground', p28 note 1 and 'Letter on Humanism', p267 in
Pathmarks
[39]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, p308

> gaining power over the existence of Da-sein and of basically dispersing every fugitive self covering over.[40]

It is this element of gaining power over its existence through anticipatory resoluteness in authentic Da-sein that has led to accusations of decisionism by many critics most notably Karl Löwith. The accusation stems from the fact that resolute Da-sein in resolving to take over its existentiell possibilities for acting as its own, does so, on no other basis than its own arbitrary decision. That is, it appears that it does not matter what possibilities are pursued as long as Da-sein pursues them on the basis of its own independent decision as an authentic self rather than following the whim of *das Man* (although of course it remains possible for authentic Da-sein to decide on the same course of action that *das Man* might urge). This accusation, if sustained, has important implications for normative ethical questions, as it appears that Heidegger give us no basis on which to judge between possibilities.

However, perhaps this accusation comes too easily and without due regard to Heidegger's complete description of authentic Da-sein. In particular, we should be careful not to interpret Heidegger's resolute 'choosing to choose' as a Sartrean absolute freedom, or as the kind of choice that has a sovereign subject lurking in the background. That is, authentic Da-sein is not free to choose its projects and existentiell possibilities from a virtual blank slate based on the dictates of its for-itself. As Heidegger insists, 'even resolutions are dependent upon the they and its world' because this is the 'reality' or the 'there' in which Da-sein finds itself thrown.[41] The difference is, that authentic Da-sein exists in a 'situation' with factical possibilities which do not exist for a they-self which 'loses itself in the nearest

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[40]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H310
[41]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H299

opportunities'.[42] In this sense, what Heidegger is describing is the very existential

possibility of an authentic decision which for him is prior to any question of

normative ethics. Further, the authentic resolution should not be considered the

outcome of the whim of a transcendental subject or will separated from its world, but

of an engaged way of being, that cares about being-in-the-world, and is acting

conscientiously in full understanding of its own finitude.

> The phenomenon set forth with the term resoluteness can hardly be
> confused with an empty 'habitus' and an indefinite 'velleity'.
> Resoluteness does not first represent and acknowledge a situation to
> itself, but has already placed itself in it. Resolute, Da-sein is already
> acting.[43]

In this way, for Heidegger, resolution although always mine, is always a

fundamentally connected way of being rather than a view from nowhere decision,

and can never be arbitrary. It is this mineness, this connectedness through care and

Da-sein's fundamental contingency that are the necessary conditions for Heidegger's

call to conscience and the guilt and responsibility that accompanies each of Da-sein's

existentiell resolutions. Thus, while Heidegger does not provide us with a normative

ethics, he clearly does give us the conditions under which an ethics is possible. Only

an authentic Da-sein's resolute way of being can free the possibilities necessary for

the kinds of choices that ethics demands, although it is clear that for Heidegger, such

choices are profoundly individuated. It is also these conditions that make anticipatory

resoluteness heroic. Da-sein in being-toward-death and uncovering the possibility of

a way of being in anticipatory resoluteness becomes burdened in its existence in a

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[42]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H300
[43]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H300

way that it was not when it was lost as a they-self. Thus, Da-sein requires some level of heroic fortitude to maintain the authentic self.

But who, or what is it that displays such fortitude? What is this 'self' of which Heidegger speaks? As with terms such as 'resolution' and 'choice', the terms 'self', and the references Heidegger makes to individuated Da-sein and *Jemeinigkeit* have echoes of the individuated subject that Heidegger clearly is trying to avoid. We are led to the question of the authentic individuated self, and just what kind of self Heidegger envisages if it is not to collapse into a traditional subjectivity and another form of individualism.

The first thing to note in relation to individuality is that Da-sein's being-in-the-world of necessity also exposes a perspective on the Da-sein that finds itself there. That is, world never appears by itself but is always linked through a binary relationship to the Da-sein that worlds it. This in essence is what Heidegger means by *Jemeinigkeit*. Da-sein is 'in each case' mine in the sense that I am always exposed with the world. Da-sein always finds itself 'there' situated in the world. Thus, we should be careful not to conflate *Jemeinigkeit* with the kind of ownership or sovereign power one might attribute to a Millsian liberal subject. Even Da-sein when existing in the mode of *das Man* has *Jemeinigkeit* and is exposed as a self, albeit in the deficient or incomplete mode of a they-self—inauthentic Da-sein still exhibits 'thereness' and finds itself over against a world. In this way, there is a certain kind of reflection built into the very notion of being-in-the-world. In inauthentic Da-sein this reflection and binary relationship with world is very evident as the they-self is encountered as the cares and concerns that Da-sein has in its web of worldly relations. In a sense, inauthentic

Da-sein 'is' its world of cares and concerns. But what happens to this reflection in

the case of authentic Da-sein and being-toward-death? In authentic Da-sein there is a

kind of meta-reflection on being-in-the-world itself that exposes a more primordial or

absolute 'mineness' to Da-sein in the form of its finitude.

> Death is a possibility of being that Da-sein always has to take upon
> itself. With death, Da-sein stands before itself in its ownmost
> potentiality of being. In this possibility, Da-sein is concerned about
> its being in the world absolutely. Its death is the possibility of no
> longer being able to be there. When Da-sein is imminent to itself as
> this possibility, it is completely thrown back upon its ownmost
> potentiality of being. Thus, imminent to itself, all relations to other
> Da-sein are dissolved in it. This nonrelational ownmost possibility
> of the absolute impossibility of Da-sein.[44]

Authentic Da-sein then discovers as 'it stands before itself', not simply the particular

cares and concerns of its being-in-the-world as with inauthentic Da-sein, but a

concern for the very possibility of cares and concerns and its being-in-the-world.

This very real possibility of 'no longer being able to be there' for Heidegger is non-

relational in two ways. Firstly, it is the possibility of there being no being-in-the-

world. That is, the possible dissolution of all worldly relations and with-being—it is

the projected possibility of no cares and concerns at all. Secondly, because the

possibility of death is uniquely mine in each instance – 'no one can take the other's

dying away from him' – it exposes an absolute and unique individuality that takes

precedence over with-being.[45]

> The ownmost possibility is non-relational. Anticipation lets Da-sein
> understand that it has taken over solely from itself the potentiality-
> of-being in which it is concerned absolutely about its ownmost
> being. Death does not just 'belong' in an undifferentiated way to

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[44]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H250
[45]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H240

> one's own Da-sein, but lays claim on it as something individual.
> The nonrelational character of death understood in anticipation
> individualises Da-sein down to itself...It reveals the fact that any
> being-together-with what is taken care of and any being-with the
> others fails when one's ownmost potentiality-of-being is at stake.[46]

But what does such absolute concern about one's ownmost being amount to? Clearly,

although it might sound a little like some kind of existential Darwinism, it cannot be

a simple concern with bodily survival, or the persistence of a soul or substantive self

of some kind. Indeed, in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* where Heidegger

addresses the issue of individualism and selfhood more explicitly than in *Being and*

Time, he specifically rules out the kind of egoism to which such an interpretation

might lead.

> This statement ['it belongs to Da-sein's essence that in its being it is
> concerned with this being itself'] and all those connected with it,
> does not deal with an existentiell, ethical egoism, but it deals rather
> with the ontological-metaphysical description of the egoicity
> (Egoität) of Da-sein as such.[47]

The difference for Heidegger is while egoism is concerned with satisfying the

specific cares and concerns of an individual human being, egoicity is the interested

engagement of neutral Da-sein in the world, captured by Heidegger in the term for-

the-sake-of. That is, it is only because Da-sein is interested in its way of being and its

worldly relationships that anything like egoism or altruism become possible. In this

way, egoicity enables us to have cares and concerns that may be either self-serving or

directed towards the well-being of others. Indeed, it is only on the basis of egoicity

that a thou can exist and by choosing itself Da-sein is able to 'choose' its way of

mitsein.

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[46]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H263
[47]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p287

> Only because Da-sein can expressly choose itself on the basis of its selfhood can it be committed to others. And only because, in being towards itself as such, Da-sein can understand anything like a self can it furthermore attend at all to the thou-self. Only because Da-sein, constituted by the for-the-sake-of, exists in selfhood, only for this reason is anything like community possible.[48]

It is clear then, that even if we accept Heidegger's distinction between egoism and egoicity, Heidegger thinks that Da-sein's selfhood is a condition of encountering world and others. But frustratingly we have arrived at yet another term steeped in the metaphysical tradition, and we must be cautious not to interpret this condition as a precondition. That is, as we have indicated previously, Heidegger wants to avoid starting off with some kind of worldless subject and avoid a view from no-where. So just what kind of self is left open to Heidegger? It is nothing more than the particular 'chosen' way of being of Da-sein in its relations at any moment made possible by its essence as transcendence.

> Conceived in an existential-ontological way...the metaphysical selfhood of Da-sein, and this means transcendence as transcending one's own being, transcending being as being-with others, and transcending beings in the sense of nature and items of use.[49]

Of course, as we have discussed, there are two versions of this self-hood in *Being and Time*. The they-self of *das Man* still involves transcendence and taking up a position in relation to the world and the others in it, but this position is constantly shifting as Da-sein's self-choosing is not really its own. The they-self is thus a protean self ever changing shape and pulled in different directions by the others with it. In contrast, the heroic self of authentic Da-sein freed by being-towards-death is

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[48]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p190
[49]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p190

able to withstand the pull of *das Man* and take a stand. Not only does Da-sein take up a position in relation to the world, but it commits to this position and takes responsibility for its stand. This, in contrast to the they-self, gives Da-sein a consistency and stability to its being-in-the-world that the they-self lacks.

> The phenomenon of this authentic potentiality-of-being, however, also opens our eyes to the constancy of self in the sense of having gained a stand. The constancy of the self in the double sense of constancy and steadfastness is the authentic counter-possibility to the lack of constancy of irresolute falling prey. Existentially, the constancy of the self means nothing other than anticipatory resoluteness. Its ontological structure reveals the existentiality of the selfhood of the self.[50]

This constancy is made possible through Da-sein's authentic relationship with its own finitude and ecstatic temporality. By facing the possibility of its own non-existence Da-sein confronts its own past (thrownness) and its projection into its own future (being-towards-death) and includes them in its present resolutions about its way being as a whole, rather than limiting itself to making present and being swept along by the moving now.[51] Authentic Da-sein in this sense chooses itself in a broader temporal horizon and in the existential facticity of its finitude. This lends the authentic self to a steadfastness and wholeness that inauthentic Da-sein and the they-self lacks.

However, as pointed out by Löwith, there is no normative or ontic content to this constancy, even if one considers it an existential constancy rather than an egoistic decisionism; and of course Heidegger would agree. This is why the early Heidegger,

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[50]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H322
[51]This temporality where the three ecstasies come together is referred in *Being and Time* as the Moment *(die Augenblick)*

when considering the question of the for-the-sake-of-which or purpose of human Da-sein's existence, concludes that:

> Da-sein must itself take over the question and answer concerning
> the final purpose, why searching for an objective answer is in itself
> a or the misunderstanding of human existence in general.[52]

But what is this 'taking over of the question' except a plea for Da-sein to free itself from the 'mob' and engage in the way of being of the authentic individual who has come to terms with their own finite existence and resolves to commit and take over responsibility for their own way of being, despite its fundamental ungroundedness?

In summary, if we consider the early Heidegger of *Being and Time* we can see that Heidegger places a certain priority on wholeness and unity over dispersion and plurality, even if both dimensions are present in his work. You will recall from the last chapter that being-in-the-world is a unified phenomenon: Da-sein always encounters world as a whole through the structure of care (*Sorge*); the furniture of the world, experienced as either *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit*, is held together in a web of relations centring around Da-sein's for-the-sake-of-which; and all of this is grounded in Da-sein's ecstatic temporality which unifies past, present and future. So far in this chapter we have explored how Da-sein's temporality does not just expose world as a whole but also enables Da-sein to become an individuated and authentic self through its being-towards-death. While this is clearly not a return to a traditional subjectivity or ego based self, and while the authentic individual is still always with others and a being-in-the-world, a trace of and-being in the form of a desire for a

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[52]Heidegger, M *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p185

unified and whole self emerges that would separate this self out from, and raise it above, the average everyday existence of mass society.

This return to a prioritisation of the one has important implications for Da-sein's relationship with other human beings or *mitsein,* which in turn has potential ethical and political significance. Before I consider these implications however, we need to consider whether, and how, Heidegger's prioritisation of wholeness and unity over dispersion and plurality develops in the later Heidegger.

5.3 *Ereignis* and *es gibt*

Heidegger very quickly became aware of the kind of interpretation of *Being and Time* that we have given in the last section and was somewhat incensed by it. In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* in 1928, just the year after *Being and Time* was published, Heidegger was already denying the charge of egoism and mounting the egoicity defence which we have already outlined. Further, Heidegger all but drops the authenticity/inauthenticity distinction and the term *das Man* from his philosophy after *Being and Time,* and indeed acknowledges in several places, including in the 'Letter on Humanism' that the language of *Being and Time* fails him. The lament by Heidegger seems to be that commentators have misunderstood or have misinterpreted his work in terms of traditional notions of the subject, and that in part at least, this was due to the metaphysical nature of the language used in *Being and Time*. If then, the kinds of criticisms we have raised are not to be dismissed on this basis, we must examine Heidegger's later philosophy to see whether these traces of and-being still linger. In particular, we should see if there is a continuation of the

critical themes we have been examining namely: a prioritisation of the individual; the notion of authenticity or *Eigentlichkeit*; and an emphasis on wholeness and unity rather difference and dispersion.

5.3.1 The destiny of being

In the later Heidegger after *die Kehre*, as we discussed in the last chapter, there is a change of emphasis in Heidegger's philosophy from the kind of heroic authentic Da-sein we have just explored to Da-sein as the shepherd of being and also an increasing focus on being itself. Karl Löwith characterises this shift in 'Da-sein Resolute Unto Itself, and Being Which Itself Gives' in the following terms:

> Now existence no longer means a self-transcending in the projection of world, but instead means ek-sistence as standing-out into the truth of being. Being itself now supports ek-sistence, to the extent that Being 'holds [ek-sistence] to itself and gathers [it] to itself'[53]

While, as I argued in the last chapter, I would disagree with the starkness of the contrast that Löwith makes – for instance rather than existence having changed its meaning to ek-sistence, ek-sistence is rather the ground of existence, as Heidegger attempts to move behind Da-sein and its relationship with world and finitude to a foundational belonging together of Da-sein and being[54] – it does highlight this

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[53]Löwith, K 'Dasein Resolute Unto Itself, and Being Which Itself Gives' in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, p50
[54]Löwith himself acknowledges as much in his statement that 'the thrownness of existing Da-sein is by no means a final ground and abyss in whose weight Da-sein rests, but rather is thrown by Being itself'. But this has always been the case for Heidegger and of itself should be no point of criticism. Even at the beginning of *Being and Time* he points out that while Da-sein brings beings to light (including itself) it in no way determines how they reveal themselves. Being in this way has always had a certain priority. Indeed one must always remember that Heidegger's project has always been to understand the meaning of being, the ontological analysis of Da-sein was always only a way into this question.

change in emphasis and the tension created by the ontological gap between Da-sein and being that was also mentioned in the last chapter. That is, the tension contained in the question how can it be that 'the understanding of *being is itself a determination of Da-sein*'[55] and at the same time '*the human being is rather "thrown" by being itself* into the truth of being' (my emphasis)?[56] While the kind of exploration of Da-sein and its wholeness in Heidegger's early philosophy explores the problem from the perspective of Da-sein, the later philosophy approaches it from the direction of being. That is, in the early Heidegger it is the fundamental ontology of Da-sein that provides the structure for the unity and wholeness of Da-sein's being-in-the-world, while in the later Heidegger it is the destiny of being that seems to play this structuring role.

One needs to be careful here not to interpret destiny in a fatalistic way. As William Lovitt points out in a footnote to his translation of 'The Turning', destining (*Geshick*) has 'connotations of aptness, fitness, and self-adapting' that 'should always be kept in mind' as well as the usual meaning of fate or destiny.[57] Nevertheless, the focus seems to be how the thinking of *die Seinsfrage* has played out through the history of human thought in a series of epochs, including the present technological *epoche* with its comportment of Enframing, and the kind of abandonment of the question of being which belongs to Western metaphysics more generally. This historical series of epochs while not based around an Hegelian story of progress, nevertheless shares the similarity that the impetus and movement of this destining comes from being itself.

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[55]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H12
[56]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p252
[57]Lovitt, W Footnote in Martin Heidegger's 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p37

Further, as with the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, once one destining is played out and moves onto another destining the original destining is not lost but is somehow preserved.

> That which has the character of destining moves, in itself, at any given time, toward a special moment that sends it into another destining, in which, however, it is not simply submerged and lost.[58]

Heidegger's discussion of *epoche* and destining seem to suggest that once the truth of being reveals itself to Da-sein in some way, this truth frames Da-sein's possibilities for thinking through this revelation until a particular path of thinking leads on to another moment of truth. That is, there seems to be a certain gravity or strange attractor in being itself that pulls thinking in a certain direction which historically forms patterns as the destiny of being plays out through Da-sein. Put in the language of *Being and Time*, Da-sein's thrownness seems to have taken on an even stronger role in structuring Da-sein's possibilities in the later Heidegger—a role that is also reflected in Heidegger's analysis of language where language is the 'house of being' and 'speaks man', as we discussed in the last chapter. Thus, while in *Being and Time* beings presented themselves structured around Da-sein's care, for-the-sake-of-which and ecstatic temporality, in the later Heidegger, these structures, and the horizon of world, seem to be further structured around being as it gives itself in the event; or *Ereignis*.

In this way, collective Da-sein simply enacts the different contours revealed in the destiny of being. 'Human beings are merely the ek-sistent 'counter-throwing' of being, called by being and called upon to be its shepherds' and further the 'mineness'

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[58]Heidegger, M 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p37

and wholeness of Da-sein, seems to have been sublated under some kind of notion of historical Da-sein.[59] However, while this emphasis on being has moved us to some extent away from the language and priority given to individuated Da-sein in *Being and Time*, because Heidegger, despite claims to the contrary, still struggles to understand the belonging together of being and Da-sein from the perspective of two relata, the traces of and-being that were present in his earlier work are still present, but in different forms. This becomes apparent when we, together with Heidegger, shift our focus from this global consideration of the destiny of being to movement within a particular *epoche* and the relationship between Da-sein and the destiny of being.

5.3.2 The proper place of Da-sein

I have suggested that the emphasis in the later Heidegger on the structuring role of the destiny of being gives a stronger role to thrownness—that is, the fact that Da-sein always discovers itself 'there' comported towards an inherited world. The corollary, given the epochal significance of this comportment, is that the tendency towards fallenness (lostness in *das Man*) and the difficulty of going beyond epochal thinking would seem to be even greater. This becomes apparent when Heidegger discusses the danger that accompanies any particular *epoche*.

To understand the danger, we must first return to the belonging together of Da-sein and being in the later Heidegger, and the notion of *Ereignis*, or the event, where Da-sein is gifted being. You will recall from the last chapter that Da-sein is gifted being

[59]Löwith, K 'Dasein Resolute Unto Itself, and Being which Itself Gives' in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, p50

in the event of appropriation. However, what is peculiar in this gifting is that it is 'A giving which gives only its gift, but in the giving holds itself back and withdraws'.[60] The gift to which Heidegger refers is presence or the fact that Da-sein encounters something rather than nothing. However, because the giving itself is covered over by the gift, there is a tendency to focus on the gift and forget the giving—much like a young child at their birthday party. The danger is to forget the source of the gift, which in the case of the gift of being, means a disengagement with the truth of being and further revelation. To be sure the gift is a rich one and it is this fact, together with the intricacies of the particular truth associated with it, that can fascinate and capture Da-sein in its way of being. Further, it is only because Da-sein's collective thinking tends to be captured that the *epoche* emerges as the unit of the destiny of being.

> The history of Being means destiny of Being in whose sendings both the sending and the It which sends forth hold back with their self-manifestation. To hold back is, in Greek, *epoche*. Hence we speak of the epochs of the destiny of Being.[61]

In this context it should be noted that the history of being for Heidegger refers, first and foremost, not to a particular historical time period, but to the captivation with a particular sending of being. It is in this captivation that we can see the vestiges of *das Man*. That is, in any particular *epoche*, collective Da-sein's possibilities and ways of being are largely framed by the epochal comportment towards the world and the dimensions of the truth of being that this comportment reveals.

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[60]Heidegger, M 'Time and Being' in *On Time and Being*, p8
[61]Heidegger, M 'Time and Being' in *On Time and Being*, p9

However, as with *das Man*, the danger posed by being to itself through its sending is not the last word, because while Da-sein might get lost in a particular epochal comportment, this only covers over rather than destroys Da-sein's potential to further engage with the truth of being through *Gelassenheit*, experience *Ereignis*, and receive the gift. It is in this potential that we find the remnants of authentic Da-sein, in poetic thinking.

So while the focus and terms of the later Heidegger change, we can already see a similar logic in terms of a contrast between the danger of getting lost in thrownness and historical contingency – only engaging with the truth of being in a limited way – and the proper place of Da-sein as belonging to being. As Derrida puts it in *Spurs*:

> Each time that Heidegger refers the question of being to the
> question of the proper-ty (*proper*), of propriate, of propriation
> (*eigen, eignen, ereignen, Ereignis* especially) this dehiscence burst
> forth anew. Its irruption here though does not mark a rupture or
> turning point in the order of Heidegger's thought. For already in
> *Sein und Zeit* the opposition of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*
> was organising the existential analytic. Once there has been a
> certain valuation of the proper-ty (*proper*) and *Eigentlichkeit*, it can
> never be interrupted.[62]

What has changed in Heidegger is not the opposition of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit* but the how and where Da-sein is to find its *Eigentlichkeit*. In the early Heidegger, at the level of being-in-the-world, it is through a self-relation and wholeness made possible by being-towards-death. In the later Heidegger it is through a certain mode of thinking that will enable Da-sein to abide in the truth of being by encountering being as a whole. Both accounts of the proper: depend on Da-sein

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[62]Derrida J *Spurs*. Translated by Barbara Harlow, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, p117

modifying its way of being; require Da-sein to transcend its 'fallen' mode for this modification to occur; and result in an expansion of possibilities and access to the truth of being. The crucial difference is that, in the early Heidegger, Da-sein's proper belonging together with being is predicated on, and therefore mediated by, a certain kind of individuated selfhood, while in the later Heidegger, it is Da-sein's way of belonging together with being that is directly modified. In this sense, the later Heidegger places a greater emphasis on exteriority and openness and engages more fully with the question of the 'with'.

However, like the early Heidegger, this mode of thinking is not easily attained and he still seems to give a certain priority to the greatness of individuated Da-sein and its personal encounter with being—although based primarily on their way of thinking being as a whole, rather than their being-toward-death. Thus, in the 'Turning' we find Heidegger quoting Meister Eckhart from *Reden der Unterscheidung*, No 4: 'Those who are not of a great essence, whatever work they perform, nothing comes of it'. Indeed, Heidegger's destiny of being and the movement through epochs seems to continue to require something like the great individual and the *Führerprinzip*. That is, to break out of an epochal comportment requires certain individuals to rediscover the great essence of man through a different kind of thinking and shepherd some new truth into the world. This is partly why, for Heidegger, epochs overlap as gradually the new sending, passed on by the poet and thinker, is heard by all Da-sein.

However, this continuing theme of the individual versus society and the shift to the shepherd-poet-thinker as 'hero', together with the emphasis on being as the structuring element and openness to being as the proper abode of the 'hero',

rekindles the tension between Da-sein and being. That is, while Da-sein can prepare the path or create the space for the truth of being – and in this sense being needs Da-sein – ultimately Da-sein is 'used by being'.[63]

But does it make sense to talk about the belonging together of Da-sein and being this way? Does not this tend to create an unnecessary 'and' between Da-sein and being rather than think the belonging together or the 'with' itself? What does it mean for Da-sein to create the space, or for being to use Da-sein? What drives the motor of truth, and does not Heidegger by highlighting Da-sein's openness to revelation take us back to a naïve realism in an attempt to avoid the subjectivist tendencies of his earlier philosophy? And finally, does Heidegger's belonging together of Da-sein and being, in the name of truth as revelation, capture the fundamental essence of the 'with'? In particular does it leave a space for ethics and politics?

These questions arising from the remnants of and-being I have found in Heidegger, will be taken up in the terms of Levinas's and Nancy's engagement with Heidegger's philosophy in the next two chapters. Before I turn to Levinas, however, I would like to make some preliminary remarks on the question of a space for ethics and politics in Heidegger to set up the terms of the engagement.

5.4 Heidegger's lacuna

In chapter 2, I was critical of traditional approaches to the question of relationality and the underlying assumptions of and-being. In particular, I was concerned not only

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[63]Heidegger, M 'The Turning' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p39

with the abstract philosophical implications of these approaches but also with the ethical and political implications. In examining Heidegger's radical ontological shift I have argued, that Heidegger presents us with a deeper understanding of with-being that at the same time retains certain vestiges of and-being. The question arises as to what significance these vestiges of and-being in Heidegger have in terms of violence, particularly at the ethical and political level? Heidegger himself gives us little guidance here because ethics and politics were not explicitly dealt with in his philosophy. For him, these disciplines are ontic matters that arise after the philosophical investigation of fundamental ontology. The significance of this lacuna in Heidegger's philosophy is a matter of great debate in the literature. It has been the source of both criticism and further investigation by commentators, depending on whether one sees ethics and politics as: (1) totally absent from Heidegger; (2) implicitly present but negative; (3) implicitly present but in need of positive articulation; or (4) underdeveloped but a positive site for further development.

Part of the problem in deciding between these alternatives is knowing what exactly we are looking for. Indeed, much of the disagreement around Heideggerian ethico-politics and whether it exists, springs as much from different understandings of ethics and politics as it does from the particulars of Heidegger's philosophy. That is, if those engaging in the search for ethics and politics are looking for different things, they can come to seemingly opposite conclusions that are in fact compatible. For example in the case of ethics, if one is looking for a set of moral rules that will neatly sort out good from evil acts then one will have to look hard to find it in Heidegger. Indeed, I would suggest this kind of ethics is totally absent in Heidegger. Quite simply, Heidegger's philosophy is not operating at this ontic level. It is this kind of

ethical and political questioning that Heidegger has in mind when he talks about the disciplines of ethics and politics which are the sites of traditional normative political and ethical theories. On the other hand, if one is looking for what has been called an originary ethics or politics, in the sense of an understanding of the human way of being, or fundamental ontology, that makes ontic ethical and political questioning possible then one can quite confidently answer; yes. This places us somewhere in between alternatives 2 and 3 where there is an implicit ethics and politics in Heidegger's thinking which has both positive and negative aspects. In the remainder of this chapter, let us briefly consider where we might find such an ethics and politics, and highlight the negative aspects that I think warrant further investigation in the context of Levinas and Nancy.

5.4.1 The space for ethics and the political

At the start of this chapter, I began by considering Heidegger's motivations as a philosopher in terms of his dissatisfaction with modern society and his place as a *Zivilisationskritiker*. I then argued that this motivation and dissatisfaction manifests itself in Heidegger's philosophy as a search for the dignity of man through the heroic individualism evident in *Being and Time*, and the thinking of the poet-hero in his later philosophy. What was at stake for Heidegger was finding the proper abode or home of Da-sein. In this context, I think the moral, ethical and political intentions in Heidegger's work are beyond doubt. As Jean Luc Nancy suggests 'Only those who have read Heidegger blindly, or not at all, have been able to think of him as a

stranger to ethical pre-occupations.'[64] In this way, in examining *die Seinsfrage*,

Heidegger is concerned with problems like: what it is to be human; our relationship

to technology; the origin of art; science; thinking; identity and difference; and

freedom. And while these issues are often thought out to a large extent in the abstract

terms of the question of being, it is clear that through engagement at this deeper

ontological level, Heidegger hopes to understand and open up different possibilities

for our way of being beyond the current historical *epoche*. As he expresses in 'Letter

on Humanism':

> The desire for ethics presses ever more ardently for fulfilment as the
> obvious no less than the hidden perplexity of human beings soars to
> immeasurable heights. The greatest care must be fostered upon the
> ethical bond at a time when technological human beings, delivered
> over to mass society, can attain reliable constancy only by gathering
> and ordering their plans and activities in a way that corresponds to
> technology.[65]

But as we have seen, Heidegger's response to this problem of an age of technological

human beings, living in a mass society, and beholden to metaphysics is not to engage

at the existentiell ethical and political level but to challenge our fundamental

understanding of ourselves, our world, and our relationship with the truth of being.

However, this challenge posed by Heidegger's radical philosophical shift away from

the sovereign subject, traditional conceptions of agency, and the epistemological

world view, strikes right at the heart of traditional ethics and politics. If the and-

being assumptions that underpin such approaches to ethics and politics prove to be

deficient then this undermines these traditional approaches themselves. Thus in a

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[64]Nancy, J 'Heidegger's Originary Ethics' in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*. Edited by Francois
Raffoul and David Pettigrew, Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, p65
[65]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p268

very fundamental way, normative ethics and politics are at risk in Heidegger's philosophy.

At the very least then, Heidegger's philosophy could be said to be motivated by ethical and political concerns and has meta-ethical/political implications. However, I want to argue more strongly that Heidegger's philosophy is necessarily ethical and political and exposes how these dimensions are intimately bound up in a deeper exploration of with-being. Further, on this account, Heidegger's philosophy itself is a profound ethical and political intervention that leaves a space for a more originary ethics and politics.

5.4.2 *Ethos* and the ethico-political

Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* states:

> Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown.[66]

Despite Heidegger's insistence in *Being and Time* that he is engaged in descriptive ontology, it quickly becomes evident, based on the logic of his own philosophy, that no *a priori* description is possible, and that Heidegger himself, in not considering this

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[66]Nietzsche, F 'Beyond Good and Evil' in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Modern Library New York, 2000, p203

implication fully, may be leaving us an 'unconscious memoir' and 'personal confession' about his morality.[67]

The fact that no *a priori* or politically and ethically neutral description is possible is implicit in Heidegger's understanding of Da-sein and its relationship to being. That is, because Da-sein, as a way of being, is thrown into a world through its belonging together with being, it can never gain the kind of transcendence needed for pure description—this of course, would require something like the autonomous freedom of the sovereign subject and the thinking/acting dichotomy which Heidegger deconstructs through his analysis of being-in-the-world. Instead, in its finite and engaged freedom, Da-sein is its relating through its acting, which includes thinking and speaking. Ontological description then becomes far from neutral and is itself an interested engagement with being and the world. This is the case even for the later Heidegger since, as you will recall, *Gelassenheit* and letting be is still an active engagement with the truth of being.

So whether thinking, speaking or acting, Da-sein is always in relation. And in so far as ethics and politics are bound up in freedom, action and relationality, they are implicated in Da-sein's ontological way of being. Heidegger states as much in 'Letter on Humanism' when he discusses the relationship between ethics and ontology.

> If the name 'ethics', in keeping with the basic meaning of the word
> should now say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being,
> then that thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial
> element of the human being, as one who eksists, is in itself
> originary ethics. However, this thinking is not ethics in the first

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[67]Note that while a good case can be made that the early Heidegger is engaged in a modified Kantian exploration of the *a priori*, the fundamental structures Heidegger exposes and his understanding of truth as *aletheia* undermines this kind of project.

instance because it is ontology. For ontology always thinks solely the being in its being.[68]

Two things stand out from this quote that are worth considering. The first is Heidegger's notion of originary ethics as an ethics that 'ponders the abode of the human being' and its obvious overlap with Heideggerian ontology. The second is Heidegger's reluctance to embrace this overlap and instead insist that this abiding is reserved for ontology. Why is Heidegger unwilling to concede this space to originary ethics?

Primarily, I would suggest, because Heidegger wants to reserve this space for truth rather than value. That is, he still wants to maintain a distinction between the descriptive 'is' and the prescriptive 'ought' and prioritise ontology over ethics by grounding description and truth, outside of Da-sein, in being. It is an instance of the intrusion of the naïve realism we have previously highlighted. This is also consistent with his prioritisation of the 'mineness' of individuated Da-sein and its belonging to being over *mitsein*. That is, first Da-sein in its egoicity must find itself 'there' in the world as the grounds for the ontic considerations of how Da-sein is with others; for instance altruistically or selfishly.

To understand this prioritisation better let us explore this notion of originary ethics further to the extent that it exists in Heidegger. Or put differently, how do originary ethics (and politics) and ontology come together in Heidegger?

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[68]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p271

5.4.3 The *eigentlichkeit Ethos* of Da-sein

It is clear that originary ethics in pondering the abode of Da-sein asks a different question than traditional ethics. Whereas, Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, posed the ethical question 'what ought I to do?',[69] Heidegger's ethical question is 'how ought Da-sein abide or live with the world?'. This is, of course, because the ontic possibilities for the kinds of acts to which Kant refers, are grounded in Da-sein's comportment towards the world. Indeed, Kant's whole conception of ethics is grounded in the metaphysical comportment that conceives of the world as a collection of entities, including human rational agents, which interact according to the laws of nature and the laws of freedom.

To distinguish the two levels of ethical enquiry we might say that while Kant enquires into specific actions or rules for actions, Heidegger enquires after the home or proper *ethos* of Da-sein. However, note that because Da-sein's *ethos* determines its comportment towards the world as a whole and frames the whole web of Da-sein's ontic relationships, there are political as much as ethical implications. That is, it is Da-sein's dwelling in the openness of being and the ambiguity and conflict between Unconcealment and Concealment that is the site of politics in Heidegger. Giorgio Agamben in his book *The Open* argues strongly for this point.[70] Here he cites Heidegger's own recognition of this fact from his Parmenides lectures where he states that 'the polis is the place, gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings'.[71] Carl Schmitt's philosophy also attests to this relationship between

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[69]Kant, I *Critique of Pure Reason*, A805/B833
[70]See especially Section 15 'World and Earth' in *The Open* for Agamben's argument.
[71]Heidegger, M *Parmenides*. Translated by Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p90

ontology and politics at the ontic level through his recognition that the ontic

distinction between friend and enemy, the decision about identity, is at the heart of

politics.[72] *Ethos*, then, is not just a question of ethics but also of politics.

So where is Da-sein's *eigentlichkeit Ethos* to be found? There is no simple answer to

this, in that as we have seen, Heidegger's understanding of 'the proper' changes as

his philosophy develops. Thus, in the early Heidegger, Da-sein's *ethos* might be

found in authentic Da-sein while in the later Heidegger it is located in Da-sein's

belonging to being as a shepherd. This is, of course, reflected in the various attempts

to find an ethics or politics in Heidegger, either to build onto it or as a point of

critical engagement.

However, rather than engage in a cataloguing of such attempts, I will instead suggest

that we should look to his later philosophy for the true abode of originary ethics and

politics. I suggest this for several reasons: firstly, as I hope I have demonstrated,

Heidegger's philosophy seeks to penetrate deeper into with-being as his philosophy

progresses; secondly, in the early Heidegger, as we have discussed, Da-sein is still

too readily interpreted in terms of traditional notions of the subject—indeed many of

the positive attempts to find an ethics or politics in the early Heidegger tend to do so

in traditional ethical and political terms; and thirdly, because of these first two points,

the later Heidegger better highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of this

originary ethics and politics relative to traditional theories and to those that will later

criticise and further explore these aspects of with-being such as Emanuel Levinas

and Jean-Luc Nancy.

[72]Schmitt, Carl *The Concept of the Political*. Translated by George Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996

Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit ethos* is thus to be found in Da-sein's essence as 'ek-static dwelling in the nearness of being' through which the truth of being is revealed.[73] It is in this abode that Da-sein engages in *Gelassenheit* and the proper 'letting be' of being where beings as a whole and the mystery reveal themselves.

> Philosophical thinking is especially the stern and resolute openness
> that does not disrupt the concealing but entreats its unbroken
> essence into the open region of understanding and thus into its own
> truth.[74]

It is important to recall here that for Heidegger such thinking is not abstract or theoretical but is primordial action par excellence. As Jean Luc-Nancy nicely puts it:

> Thinking (and/or poetry) is not an exceptional form of action, it is
> not the 'intellectual conduct' to be preferred to others, but it is what,
> in all action, brings into play the sense (of Being) without which
> there would be no action.[75]

In this way, such primordial action is integral to and makes possible Da-sein's way of being in all its modes and comportments. Nevertheless as we have seen, certain comportments, perhaps in fact all comportments, which originate from such primordial action can to a greater or lesser extent obscure this origin. Through such obfuscation the essence of Da-sein as ek-sistence is forgotten and Da-sein becomes homeless. In metaphysical thinking for example, Da-sein is 'Expelled from the truth of being, the human being everywhere circles around himself as the *animal*

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[73]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p261
[74]Heidegger, M 'On the Essence of Truth' in *Pathmarks*, p152
[75]Nancy, J 'Heidegger's "Originary Ethics"' in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, p68

rationale.'[76] In such circling, Da-sein has no abode and thus has no *ethos*. This is why Heidegger rejects traditional humanism in the following way.

> Rather, the sole implication is that the highest determinations of the essence of human being in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of the human being.[77]

In other words, Heidegger believes Da-sein only realises its proper dignity when it is true to its essence. For Heidegger, Da-sein's true essence is in its ek-sistence in the openness of being, and it is only while abiding in this openness that Da-sein conducts itself with *ethos*. Therefore, such conduct or primordial action is the site of originary ethics and politics. But what does such an originary ethics and politics amount to? Nothing more than the imperative for Da-sein to make and engage with sense—to be that being that brings being itself to light. In relation to ethics, Jean-Luc Nancy expresses it as follows:

> To clarify things, one could say that the ethics that engages itself in this way engages itself on the basis of nihilism – as the general dissolution of sense – but on the exact reverse of nihilism—as the bringing to light of the making sense as action requested in the essence of Being.[78]

Note importantly that the imperative to make sense is not something chosen or imposed on a subject Da-sein, but is already contained in the fact of the ek-sistence of Da-sein and its relationship with being. Originary ethics and politics are thus to be located in the 'making sense' of ek-sistent Da-sein.

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[76]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p260
[77]Heidegger, M 'Letter on Humanism' in *Pathmarks*, p251
[78]Nancy, J 'Heidegger's "Originary Ethics"' In *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, p71

But where does the imperative to make sense lead us? It leads us to engage with the nothing of being, or the mystery, through *Gelassenheit,* and await revelation as the truth of being comes to light. There are two moments or flipsides to making sense: the first is the necessity to engage with the mystery; and the second is revelation. And while the two-sided nature of this engagement becomes more evident in the notion of correspondence with the abyss, the overall impetus is still ultimately in one direction: from mystery to light.

In this way, while we seem to have moved a long way from Aristotle and Plato, it is still truth and revelation that have pride of place in Heidegger's philosophy. To be sure this truth or sense is not one that relies on the discovery of eternal essences which fix beings in their being, separate to and distant from Da-sein. It is, however, a hermeneutic and relational engagement with being that still seeks 'unities of sense' that function as 'rafts rather than fixed landmarks'.[79] But here an important question arises that is particularly relevant to ethical and political considerations; what is the place of other people in this *ethos*? Frank Schalow in 'The Temporality of an Original Ethics' suggests an ambiguity arises in Heidegger's account of *ethos* in 'Letter on Humanism'. He suggests:

> There still remains an ambiguity in this analysis, namely, whether
> an orientation to the other arises as a part of this disposition, as
> revealing human finitude, or whether the other includes its own
> measure for delimiting my possibilities, thereby making finitude
> dependent upon my awareness of the other rather than reverse.[80]

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[79]Wood, D 'Heidegger after Derrida' in *Research and Phenomenology,* p110
[80]Schalow, F 'The Temporality of an Original Ethics' in *International Studies in Philosophy* XXV/1, 1993, p64

Or put in the terms of this thesis, can with-being be separated from *mitsein* or being-with in such a way that being-with is a subset of with-being, or does with-being depend in some way on my relationship to others? Either way Heidegger does not develop the theme of *mitsein* well enough to fully resolve this ambiguity. However, as I have alluded, I believe there is enough evidence to suspect the former is the case. That is, there is a tendency to encounter the intruder and strangeness of the other in terms of unities of sense, and even if there is disruption, the movement would be to incorporate it into a modified or new unity.

Further, while Heidegger in *Being and Time* insists on the primordiality of *mitsein*, at every turn priority seems to be given to Da-sein's solitary engagement with world as a whole and, particularly in relation to disruption and creation, to the philosopher/poet-hero's openness to making sense. As Robert Bernasconi in 'The Double Concept of Philosophy and the Place of Ethics in *Being and Time*' puts it:

> It is as if Heidegger was saying that the factical ideal of the philosopher, which at the existentiell level is indeed that of isolation and self-cultivation, would better serve to secure a genuine understanding of Mitdasein than an immediate headlong rush into a discussion of the I-Thou relation.[81]

Finally, while Heidegger emphasises the necessary role of Da-sein in bringing sense and truth to light, he still seems to want to ultimately ground truth in being, thus maintaining a naïve realism and the remnants of the internal/external and passive/active dichotomies that he seeks to overcome.

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[81]Bernasconi, R 'The Double Concept of Philosophy and the Place of Ethics in *Being and Time*' in *Research and Phenomenology* 18, 1988, p53

All of these tendencies I have argued can be traced back to the vestiges of and-being in Heidegger's exploration of the belonging together of Da-sein and being. Heidegger still approaches the relationship too much in terms of two relata with the early Heidegger emphasising the Da-sein side of the relationship and the later the being side. Further, it is these kinds of tendencies in Heidegger that leads Levinas to claim that Heidegger prioritises Da-sein's relationship with being as a whole over our personal relationships with others. On this Levinasian account, the impersonal nature of being and the *es gibt* or there is, denies or subordinates difference by its very demand to make sense and be understood.

> I insist on the fact of the impersonality of the 'there is': 'there is' as 'it rains', or 'its night'. And there is neither joy nor abundance: it is a noise returning after every negation of this noise.[82]

This, of course, raises the question of the adequacy of what I have called Heidegger's originary ethics and politics. That is, while ethics, politics and ontology, as I have argued, must be located together in the Heideggerian *ethos*, is Heidegger's account of this *ethos,* as an openness to making sense, an adequate exploration of the ethical and political dimensions of the 'with'? Or again, as Frank Schalow puts it; perhaps 'ethics is more deeply intermeshed with the task of thinking' than Heidegger himself realised.[83]

I believe this is the case, not just for ethics but also for politics, and it is to these ethical and political dimensions of with-being that I will turn in the final three chapters of this thesis. The next two chapters will concern the work of Emmanuel

[82]Levinas, E *Ethics and Infinity*, p48
[83]Schalow, F 'The Temporality of an Original Ethics' in *International Studies in Philosophy*, p64

Levinas and ethics as first philosophy. The first of these chapters will consider Levinas's critique of Heideggerian ontology and outline Levinas's own philosophical position. The second will take a more critical look at Levinas and examine in more detail the relationship between ontology and ethics. My final chapter will consider the work of Jean-Luc Nancy who I believe addresses issues arising from both Heidegger and Levinas to give us an even greater understanding of with-being.

Chapter 6 – The Ethics of with-being

> A philosophy of power, ontology is, as first philosophy which does not call into question the same, a philosophy of injustice. Even though it opposes the technological passion issued forth from the forgetting of being hidden by existents, Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relationship with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny.
>
> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*[1]

> Illeity lies outside the 'thou' and the thematization of objects. A neologism formed with the il (he) or ille, it indicates a way of concerning me without entering into conjunction with me.
>
> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*[2]

In the last three chapters, I have considered various dimensions of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and how this philosophy opens up a space for the understanding of with-being that takes us beyond the traditional metaphysics of and-being. However, I have argued that while Heidegger has opened up this space there is a question as to whether his analysis of Da-sein's belonging together with being sufficiently recognises or does justice to the ethical and political dimensions of with-being. In particular, while Heidegger recognises the performative, hermeneutic and abyssal aspects of with-being, the priority he places on unity, truth as *aletheia*, egoicity and ontology leaves a lacuna in his work in terms of the ethical and political. Heidegger, of course, would insist that the ethical and political are ontic issues that are outside of the scope of *die Seinsfrage*, however, I have argued that Heidegger's ontology of necessity also has originary ethical and political implications that are not fully recognised or explored by Heidegger. A key figure who is concerned, in particular

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[1]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, pp46-47
[2]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002, p12

with the ethical dimension of relationality, and Heidegger's failure as a philosopher to engage with ethics, is Emmanuel Levinas.

Emmanuel Levinas, like many of his contemporaries, went to Freiburg University in the 1920s to study with Husserl only to find himself enamoured with Husserl's successor Martin Heidegger.[3] Levinas applauded Heidegger's extension of the phenomenological method beyond consciousness and intentionality to the exploration of Da-sein's concrete and engaged being-in-the-world with its emphasis on relationality, affect and movement. And even though much of Levinas's philosophy would centre around a fundamental critique of Heidegger, he always acknowledged his debt to Heidegger and considered *Being and Time* one of the great philosophical works.

Nevertheless, Levinas gradually become uneasy with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. His planned book on Heidegger was put on hold, as in the 1930's he began to suspect that Heidegger's philosophy was a continuation of Western metaphysics rather than its overturning. The question that began to arise for Levinas was 'Is Ontology Fundamental?'. Over time, Levinas became more convinced that the answer to this question was 'no'—an answer clearly articulated in his 1951 article of the same name. What Levinas began to realise, even at this early stage, was that the *ethos* of 'making sense' was insufficient to give meaning to human existence and human suffering. No doubt this realisation was reinforced by Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, his denouncement of his mentor Husserl, the advent of the World War II, and the horrific attempt at genocide by the Nazis known

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[3]Indeed Levinas's early work on Husserl was important in introducing Husserl and phenomenology into French philosophy.

as the Shoah. As a Jewish philosopher searching for answers in the face of such

atrocities, it became clear to Levinas that they were not to be found in knowledge

and culture. As Catherine Chalier remarks in her book *What Ought I to do?*:

> The tragic events of the twentieth century were not the result of the
> barbarism and savagery of uncivilised people, denied education,
> driven by instinct, faithless and lawless. A highly civilised country
> produced the Shoah; the hope for a fraternal and just society gave
> way to the Gulag... That proximity between culture and horror makes
> the hope of seeing men bettered by education seem futile. It seems the
> death knell of any idea of moral or spiritual progress through
> intellectual enlightenment.[4]

Indeed, for Levinas, it is the very movement of intellectual enlightenment and the

prioritisation of epistemology and ontology in the Western tradition – including

Heidegger's fundamental ontology – that harbours violence itself, and creates

relationships between people based on power and narcissistic ego reflection.

Levinas's central concern is that as long as philosophy gives primacy to knowledge

and the revelation of what 'is', then it sets up relations with other people mediated

through the self and one's own interests (the same) and thus prevents a genuine

ethical encounter with others in their difference. Further, Levinas is insistent that

despite Heidegger's ontological advances, his work is still open to this accusation

and recreates the kinds of violence inherent in the traditional metaphysics of and-

being that we described in chapter 2. In light of this critique, the challenge that

Levinas's philosophy undertakes is to bear witness to a proximity to an other human

being that is somehow prior to, or outside of being. Indeed, for Levinas, it is this

proximity to another human being, which he terms illeity, that is at the heart of what

it means to be human—the essence of the human is to be sub-jected and to respond

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[4]Chalier, C *What ought I to do?* Translated by Jane Marie Todd, Ithaca and London: Cornell
University Press, 2002, p9

to the alterity of another human being and the ethical imperative 'thou shalt not kill',

not the Heideggerian imperative to 'let being be' and 'make sense'.

Placing Levinas's project in the context of this thesis then, we might say Levinas is

searching for a human 'with' that grounds both with-being and Heidegger's

understanding of human relations as *mitsein*—that is, he is insisting on a kind of

ethics as first philosophy. In this way, Levinas's illeity is not simply moving from an

and-being to a with-being but is attempting to escape the logic of conjunction

altogether, in so far as the conjunction signals a prior thematisation or

intelligibility—it is an unmediated 'way of concerning me without entering into

conjunction with me'.[5]

It is Levinas's attempt to escape Heideggerian ontology and the logic of the

conjunction and his witnessing of the 'with' of illeity that will be the focus of this

chapter. This will extend my analysis of relationality and will be particularly

important in overcoming the ethical lacuna in Heidegger's philosophy. I will

approach this task in three parts: first I will examine Levinas's early attempts to

leave the climate of Heidegger; then I will consider Levinas's more fully developed

notions of the ethical subject and responsibility in his later work; and I will conclude

by revealing a paradox in Levinas's work that will lead us into a more critical

evaluation of Levinas's position in the next chapter.

This next chapter, chapter 7, through this critical evaluation of Levinasian ethics will

explore further the relationship between ontology and ethics. It should be noted that

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[5]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p12

Levinas's reversal of the Heideggerian priority of ontology over ethics still radically separates ontology and ethics. It will be my fundamental claim that we need to think ethics and ontology together rather than separately, and thus my thesis will return to an exploration of with-being that does justice to both, as well as raising the question of the political. This is the question we will take up in our final chapter through an examination of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy.

However, let us begin in this chapter by outlining Levinas's attempts to leave the climate of Heidegger and his basic philosophical position.

6.1 Disrupting the wholeness of being

Levinas's fundamental criticism of Heidegger is often expressed in the rather dramatic phrase 'totalitarianism of the same'. What Levinas is concerned with is that Heidegger's philosophy, by emphasising the wholeness, 'mineness', the impersonality of being and the truth of being, which we explored in the last chapter, has a tendency to reduce the infinite to the finite driven by the imperative to make sense and a desire to be at home everywhere. On this account, Heidegger leaves little room for disruption or a genuine encounter with alterity. The direction in Heidegger's thought is always towards further revelation and a domestication of difference mediated through comprehension and being. Even the shift towards shepherding and *Gelassenheit* in the later Heidegger, for Levinas, still retains too much of the power and virility of the traditional subject that typically encounters difference on its own terms. It should be noted, however, that Levinas's engagement with Heidegger and his criticisms are more directed to Heidegger's early work, in

particular *Being and Time*. To some extent this is ironic because arguably the later Heidegger is closer to Levinas than Levinas recognises or would care to admit—as will become apparent as we look more closely at the relationship between ontology and Levinasian ethics in the next chapter.

The early Levinas, engaging with the early Heidegger (both philosophically and politically), became uneasy with Heideggerian authenticity and fundamental ontology and the space it left for an ethical encounter with other people. This unease and growing dread of being, manifests itself in Levinas's early philosophy as a phenomenological investigation of Da-sein's experience of being and his various attempts to disrupt Da-sein's egoicity, relationship with being, and encounter with world as a whole. In short, Levinas was looking for an escape from being. But how to effect such an escape? What Levinas needs, is to demonstrate that the nexus between Da-sein and being can be broken, while still retaining some meaningful notion of the human.

Levinas attempts to break this nexus in several ways in his early works *On Escape, Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*.[6] His strategy revolves around disrupting the kind of unity that Heidegger has established through: (1) a phenomenological exploration of mood and affect; (2) a reconsideration of temporality and death; and ultimately, (3) an encounter with the alterity of an other person.

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[6]Levinas E *On Escape*. Translated by Bettina Bergo, Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2003; *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001

It is on the basis of these disruptions, particularly the third, that Levinas will build his more developed view of ethics. However, before we consider this more developed position, let us consider these strategies for escaping being.

6.1.1 Affect without attunement

Levinas's first attempt to disrupt Da-sein's belonging together with being is to challenge Heidegger's largely positive and virile account of this relationship and its assumed givenness. That is, rather than being a gift for which Da-sein might be thankful, Levinas undertakes various phenomenological analyses of the relationship between Da-sein and being that exposes the dread of being. In these analyses Levinas co-opts Heidegger's reintroduction of affect into Da-sein's way of being but in such a way that it disrupts rather than attunes Da-sein to its world. That is, he deploys the notion of an affect without attunement.

To see how Levinas does this we need to recall that Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of being-in-the-world re-introduces affect as a necessary part of Da-sein's existence. However, the problem with Heidegger's approach for Levinas is that the notion of affective attunement is still bound up with understanding and comprehension. That is, it is still considered in its role of bringing being and world to light. This is particularly evident in Heidegger's analysis of the fundamental moods of anxiety and boredom, both of which are pivotal in exposing the fundamental ontological structures of Da-sein and in assisting Da-sein to heroically take on its unique way of being.

Levinas in *On Escape* and *Existence and Existents* phenomenologically examines

different affects that he suggests interrupts Heidegger's temporal ecstasis, disrupts

the very subjectivity of the subject, and thereby shatters our relationship with world

as a whole. For Levinas:

> The antithesis of position is not the freedom of a subject suspended in
> the air, but the destruction of the subject, the disintegration of
> hypostasis. It is announced in emotion. Emotion is what overwhelms.
> Physiological psychology, which started with emotional shock and
> presented the emotions in general as a disruption of equilibrium,
> seems to us here to have grasped the true nature of affectivity, despite
> its rudimentary language, more faithfully than the phenomenological
> analyses, which, after all, keep something of the character of
> comprehension and consequently of apprehension, in emotions
> (Heidegger), and speak of emotional experience and of objects
> clothed with new properties (Husserl, Scheler). Emotion puts into
> question not the existence, but the subjectivity of the subject; it
> prevents the subject from gathering itself up, reacting, being
> someone.[7]

So while for Heidegger, Da-sein always has a 'there', a position, and a web of cares,

in relation to its with-world, for Levinas the existent, or self, is singled out before it

takes up a position as a subject, or ego, in existence.[8] The relationship between the

existent and being on this account, is not a given, as in Heidegger, but an event—the

event of hypostasis. This account then, takes Heidegger's ontological difference one

step further. That is, not only does Levinas make a distinction between beings and

their being but he wants to radically separate the two and explore

phenomenologically their coming together into relation.

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[7]Levinas, E *Existence and Existents*, p68
[8]Note this claim would also undermine the major strand of modern day ethical theories that seeks to utilise the cognitive aspect of emotion such as is proposed by American philosopher Martha Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001

In *On Escape* this exploration takes the form of a phenomenological examination of

the mood malaise and its pure manifestation in nausea.

> The state of nausea that precedes vomiting, and from which vomiting
> will deliver us, encloses us on all sides. Yet it does not come from
> outside to confine us. We are revolted from the inside; our depths
> smother beneath ourselves; our innards heave.[9]

As Jacques Rolland suggests in his introduction to *On Escape*, Levinas's analysis

might be contrasted to Heidegger's analysis of *Angst* in that both are an encounter

with the nothingness at the heart of being. However, for Heidegger, as we have

discussed, although *Angst* reveals the nothingness in terms of Da-sein's finitude and

ungrounded thrownness into a world, because of its ecstatic bond with understanding

and futurity, this encounter almost immediately enables a reflective virility which

bounces Da-sein back into a world where Da-sein can authentically take over its

possibilities. In contrast, Levinas's analysis of nausea leaves Da-sein caught up in the

instant of an encounter with pure being, or the *there is* from which Da-sein wants to

escape, but from which there is no escape. In this revolting instant, the existent is

smothered by its own existence at the very moment of the event of hypostasis.

Nausea thus 'discovers only the nakedness of being in its plenitude and in its utterly

binding presence.'[10] In this moment, as we can imagine, there is no ecstatic

projection, no encounter with objects, no encounter with ego: there is no heroic

assumption of one's subjectivity but just a very visceral encounter from which the

one singled out wants to flee. But flee to where? For Heidegger, who also describes

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[9]Levinas, E *On Escape*, p66

[10]Levinas, E *On Escape*, p67. One might notice similarities here with Sartre's descriptions of encounters with the being-in-itself in his novel *Nausea*. Translated by Robert Baldick, London: Penguin Books, 2000; first published in French three years after *On Escape* in 1938. There is no doubt that Levinas had an influence on Sartre and indeed it was through reading Levinas's book *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Translated by A Orianne, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973 that Sartre first became interested in phenomenology.

the phenomenology of *Angst* in unpleasant terms, the choice is to flee back into one of two types of existence; authentic or inauthentic; but by lingering in this instant of nausea, Levinas dares to seek another way out—an otherwise than being.

Similarly, in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas continues his exploration of the phenomenology of existence and our relationship to the 'there is' and tentatively begins to mark out a space outside of Heideggerian being. Instead of nausea, he begins to talk about the horror of the 'there is', largely because when we encounter the 'there is' as nausea hypostasis overwhelms us, leaving no room for escape.

The path he takes back to the horror of the 'there is' is through a phenomenological analysis of fatigue and indolence. Fatigue marks a stretching of the relationship between an existent and its existence in which pure existence starts to become evident.

> What fatigue apprehends and abhors in the very exercise of
> existence, what it impotently declines to shoulder, indolence refuses
> in refusing to shoulder its existence. It wants to let existence, 'that
> farce everybody goes through with', as Rimbaud puts it, go on
> without it.[11]

In fatigue the existent tarries behind its existence creating a lag which constitutes the present. A present within which the existent can take up a position or a 'here in'. This is the site of traditional subjectivity. If the existent in an upsurge catches back up and takes on its existence, it takes up a position and enters the world as a subject. Levinas calls this event hypostasis. Note there are similarities here between Heidegger's analysis of boredom and Levinas's analysis of fatigue. In particular,

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[11]Levinas, E *Existence and Existents*, p17

both analyses create a distance between the 'ontic' world and Da-sein that stretches the conjunction between subject and world. But for Heidegger, as we have seen, this stretching of profound boredom never totally separates Da-sein ontologically from world but merely exposes Da-sein's own ontic/ontological structures through turning these structures onto Da-sein's own being-with-the-world. This is why boredom itself is not just an affect but also an attunement—the non-sense or meaninglessness of the world reveals itself as Da-sein's capacity for sense. In fatigue on the other hand, Levinas finds a non-sense that does not recover its sense—the existent encounters the overwhelming meaninglessness of being which takes it beyond being. Prior to the ontological moment is an absolute outside of world, which Levinas believes there is no room for in Heidegger. This outside of the world comes before hypostasis, and prevents the subject 'from gathering itself up, reacting, being someone'.[12] Nihilism in this sense is not only a no-thingness, as for Heidegger, but the promise of transcending being and finitude altogether.

What these early Levinasian analyses attempt to do is open up the possibility of an affect without attunement and with this a sub-jectivity without the thereness of a world that makes sense. They are an attempt to leave the climate of Heidegger and escape from being. Indeed, Levinas's analyses have exposed not only the particular affects he discusses but affectivity in general. That is, sub-jectivity should be thought of as the openness to be affected by that which is other than the subject. That is, to be sub-jected to exteriority before the existent takes up its existence through hypostasis.

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[12]Levinas, E *Existence and Existents*, p68

Note, however, the temporal implications of Levinas's analysis. To contemplate an affect without attunement is not only to shatter the ontological difference and the relationship between an existent and its existence, but also to challenge Heidegger's notion of temporal ecstasis and with it Heidegger's analysis of being-towards-death and the authentic individuation of Da-sein. That is, for Heidegger mood is linked to Da-sein's having-been and is the first moment of Da-sein's ecstatic temporality. Levinas's analyses of the nausea and horror of being naturally seems to lead into a re-examination of temporality and a further challenge to Heidegger's understanding of the unity of the self in *Being and Time*. Thus, we move on to Levinas's second attempt to disrupt Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

6.1.2 Death as impossibility and the authentic future

We recall that the glue that holds whole Da-sein together, according to *Being and Time*, is Da-sein's ecstatic temporality and its being-towards-death. Indeed, it is Da-sein's ecstatic temporality that also underwrites its being-in-the-world. If Levinas can dissolve this glue, we would need to revisit Heidegger's understanding of subjectivity and what it is to be a human.

Like many others (Blanchot, Derrida and Sartre to name but a few) Levinas is critical of what he sees as Heidegger's appropriation of death and its role in realising Da-sein's 'ownmost potentiality-for-being'.[13]

> Being-toward-death, in Heidegger's authentic existence, is a
> supreme lucidity and hence a supreme virility. It is Da-sein's

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[13]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H250

> assumption of the uttermost possibility of existence, which
> precisely makes possible all other possibilities and consequently
> makes possible the very feat of grasping a possibility—that is it
> makes possible activity and freedom.[14]

Instead of the meaning that Heidegger's analysis of death as the possibility of

impossibility reveals – that is, as the projected possibility of Da-sein's non-existence

that exposes its finitude and contingency – Levinas agrees with Jean Wahl that this

understanding should be inverted and that death is the impossibility of possibility.

What death signifies is the infinity or outside of being in which there would not be

any possibilities. In this sense the meaning of death is as an encounter with mystery

that disrupts the unity of Da-sein and its being-in-the-world.

> The unknown of death, which is not given straight off as
> nothingness but is correlative to an experience of the impossibility
> of nothingness, signifies not that death is a region from which no
> one has returned and consequently remains unknown as a matter of
> fact; the unknown of death signifies that the very relationship with
> death cannot take place in the light, that the subject is in a
> relationship with that which does not come from itself. We could
> say it is a relationship with mystery.[15]

If we set aside the linguistic gymnastics here, what is at stake in this subtle shift in

the meaning of death is the way that it exposes relationality. For Heidegger, the

possibility of death is the possibility of non-relationality and so exposes Da-sein's

finitude, unique 'mineness' and individuality. This self-realisation in turn modifies

the way Da-sein can assume its existence and relational way of being-in-the-world—

that is, the self-relation modifies other relations. For Levinas, the phenomenological

encounter with impossibility leaves Da-sein 'enchained, overwhelmed, and in some

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[14]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p70
[15]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, pp69-70

way passive' before death.[16] This exposure to the infinite mystery of death, rather

than turning Da-sein back to a concern with its own finitude draws Da-sein out of the

solitude of its own existence and calls into question the kind of self-grounded,

unified and individuated subject that Heidegger's being-towards-death seeks to

establish—even if this self-grounding is in the realisation of Da-sein's very

ungroundedness. Death, in this sense exposes exposure and relationality. It reveals

the impossibility of non-relationality.

> What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain
> moment we are no longer 'able to be able'. It is exactly thus that the
> subject loses its very mastery as subject.[17]

It is not simply the subject's loss of mastery that is at issue, but also the revelation of

the impossibility of such mastery and with it the very possibility of this kind of

subjectivity. Thus, the wholeness of the subject or individual is not only disrupted,

but forever interrupted because openness to relationality forecloses the possibility of

'mineness' and closed identity.

However, Levinas's disruption of Heideggerian temporality and unity does not stop

with a deconstruction of being-towards-death and authentic Da-sein. Levinas also

seeks to disrupt the wholeness of the world grounded in Da-sein's ecstatic

temporality, which according to Levinas, is an insufficient account of time.

You will recall from my analysis of profound boredom that, according to Heidegger,

Da-sein's existence is temporal; consisting of the three structural moments of ecstatic

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[16]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p71
[17]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p74

temporality: having been; the present; and projection into the future; which together

constitute the unity of temporal disclosedness in general.[18] That is, the world is

cleared for Da-sein, it has a 'there', because its projection into the future stretches the

Moment (*Augenblick*) to incorporate its having been and facticity. For Da-sein then,

past, present and future existentially always occur together as its way of being rather

than as something objectively present before it. So, while Heidegger clearly

prioritises projection and the future in his analysis of ecstatic temporality all ontic

future projections are ultimately an extension Da-sein's thrownness. Da-sein's

understanding, which Heidegger links to the structural moment of the future, is

inextricably bound with the mood or attunement that Da-sein finds itself in, the

structural moment of having-been, and the facticity of the present. This limitation on

futurity is the very structure of finitude. But isn't Da-sein then stuck within the

possibilities of its contingent 'thereness'? Isn't Heidegger's understanding of the

future simply as Levinas suggests a future present and Heidegger still caught up in a

philosophy of presence? Moreover, given that Da-sein's relation to its finitude and

temporality is in each case its own, is it not condemned to always encounter only its

own reflection—caught up in its own projections and a temporal stretching from

birth until death? This is indeed Levinas's contention.

Even when Da-sein encounters the mystery of being, it would seem it must do so in

terms of ecstatic temporality and the world or 'there' that this clears. Therefore, it

would not seem possible that Da-sein could ever truly 'let beings be' because it can

only encounter them in terms of its world and being-towards-death. As Tina Chanter

puts it:

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[18]Heidegger, M Division II, Chapter VI, section 81 *Being and Time*

> Heidegger embraces the alterity of death that the future holds with
> his notion of anticipatory resoluteness that reinstates the priority of
> presence, understood now in terms of Da-sein's ability to project
> itself into the future, and cancel the alterity of death.[19]

It is this kind of analysis that leads Levinas to accuse Heidegger of perpetuating a

philosophy of the same.

> Solitude is an absence of time. The time given, itself hypostatized
> and studied, the time the subject travels by carrying its identity, is a
> time incapable of loosening the tie of hypostasis.[20]

Now Levinas too suggests a strong link between death and the future in a way that

challenges Heideggerian temporality, or what Levinas calls in the above quote the

'absence of time'. For Levinas our relationship with death 'is a unique relationship

with the future'.[21] There is an 'eternal futurity' to death which means it can never be

present.[22] Death in this sense still has a link to temporality, but rather than being-

towards-death leading us to a certain conception of ecstatic temporality intimately

bound with the subject, death reveals what Levinas calls the authentic future.

> Anticipation of the future and projection of the future, sanctioned as
> essential to time by all theories from Bergson to Sartre, are but the
> present of a future and not the authentic future; the future is what is
> not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us.[23]

So like death, the authentic future surprises us and calls into question the mastery of

the subject including its mastery over time. In a sense both death and the authentic

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[19]Chanter, T *Time Death and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger*. Stanford, California: Stanford
University Press, 2001, p32
[20]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p57
[21]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p71
[22]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p71
[23]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p77

future constantly threaten to disrupt the kind of ecstatic temporality that Heidegger describes and with it the unity of authentic Da-sein and its being-in-the-world.

Each unique and singular instant, beyond the power and will of Da-sein, has the capacity to announce authentic Da-sein's vulnerability and passivity which is an exposure to alterity and ultimately, for Levinas, the source of the ethical relation and the ethical subject. For Levinas, this exposure demands an escape from being and ontology, and an exploration of the original relationship *with* alterity. The 'with' here is not the preposition '*mit*' of Heidegger's *mitsein* because for Levinas this '*mit*' signifies 'an association of side by side, around something, around a common term and, more precisely for Heidegger around truth'. [24] The 'with' is rather the face-to-face proximity to an other human existent that comes before both ontology and epistemology.

But perhaps we move too quickly here. So far, Levinas's analysis of death and futurity has shattered the unity of Heidegger's authentic Da-sein by challenging Heidegger's analysis of being-towards-death and ecstatic temporality but has not explained the move from the alterity of death, to the alterity of the face-to-face encounter with an other human being which is at the heart of Levinas's philosophy of ethics. Indeed, it is the alterity of the other person that is the most important point of disruption to Heidegger's philosophy and is the focus of the development of Levinas's own philosophy. Let us then, in concluding this section, consider the link between death and alterity as the ultimate site of ontological interruption.

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[24]Levinas, E *Time and the Other*, p41

6.1.3 Death and the Other

Ultimately for Levinas, these attempts to find an escape from being through the phenomenological analysis of affect without attunement and the disruption of Dasein's ecstatic temporality, find focus in Levinas's analysis of our relationships with the alterity of other people in the figure of the Other. An important point of convergence of these themes can be found in examining the intertwining of death and the Other. Ultimately, this will lead Levinas to concentrate on the originary relationship with alterity 'studied in terms other than those of the dialectic of the solitary subject'.[25]

Levinas, as his philosophy develops, approaches death from two directions: the first is, as we have explored above, a challenge to the Heideggerian analysis of being-toward-death and a rejection of subjectivity; while the second, more in keeping with the ultimate direction of Levinas's philosophy, is through the affective significance of the Other in terms of death and the exposure of diachronous temporality.

> The Other, inseparable from the very event of transcendence, is situated in the region from which death, possibly murder, comes. The unwanted hour of its coming approaches as the hour of fate fixed by someone. Hostile and malevolent powers, more wily, more clever than I, absolutely other and thereby hostile, retain its secret. Death, in its absurdity, maintains an interpersonal order, in which it tends to take on a signification.[26]

Death in this sense is situated in the same region as the Other, because the Other in relation to death is both the possibility of my own murder by malevolent powers

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[25]Levinas, E *Existence and Existence*, p93
[26]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p233-244

(again an interruption of the virility of the self-grounded subject), and the possible

death of the Other. In the first case, even in the solitude of 'my own' death there is

still open 'an appeal to the Other, to his friendship and his medication'.[27] And more

importantly for Levinas, in the second case there is the command 'thou shalt not kill'

as well as the possibility to ignore this command. Indeed, for Levinas it is those who

open themselves to the death of the Other who manifest humanity.

> I think that the human consists precisely in opening itself to the
> death of the other, in being pre-occupied with his death.[28]

Again, this can be contrasted to Heidegger for whom we can never be authentically

open to the death of the other because 'no one can take the others dying away from

him'.[29] Even sacrificing oneself for the other, according to Heidegger, does not take

the other's death away. But this is written from the perspective of neutral Da-sein

and a symmetrical understanding of its relationship to other Da-sein. For Levinas,

this opening to the death of the Other is a singular and personal event. It is not a

matter of understanding, but of being summoned by the need or suffering of the

Other to the exclusion of a concern with one's own being. It is the shattering of the

self-grounded subjectivity and the manifestation of an ethical subject that is

singularised by its very movement towards the Other.

> Goodness consists in taking up a position in being such that the
> Other counts more than myself. Goodness thus involves the
> possibility for the I that is exposed to the alienation of its powers by
> death to not be for death.[30]

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[27]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p234
[28]Levinas, E 'The Philosopher and Death' in *Is it Righteous to be?* Edited by Jill Robbins, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001, p124
[29]Heidegger, M *Being and Time*, H240
[30]Levinas, E *Ethics and Infinity*, p247

Note that this is no longer a relationship between equals. The Other is elevated in such a way that their death counts more than one's own. This redirects the significance of death away from a concern with Da-sein's mineness and being-towards-death, towards a being-for-the-death-of-the-Other. In this way, the possible death of the Other takes on an ethical significance that trumps and pre-figures the solitary being-towards-death of Heidegger.

Having arrived at the central focus of Levinas's concerns, in the next section I will briefly explore the significance of this proximity to the Other for the ethical subject and the notion of ethical responsibility.

6.2 The ethical subject and responsibility

While the ethical problem has always been the focus of Levinas's philosophy, it is in his more mature work of *Otherwise than Being* originally published in 1974 that his thinking of ethics as first philosophy is at its most nuanced and comprehensive. It is in this book more than any other that we get a deeper sense of Levinas's understanding of illeity, the ethical subject, and the un-assumable responsibility that sociality and the ethical relation entail. As with Heidegger, Levinasian ethics does not operate at the ontic or normative level and he does not seek to give concrete answers to the Kantian ethical question 'what ought I to do'.

> My task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning...One can without doubt construct an ethics in function of what I have just said, but this is not my own theme.[31]

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[31]Levinas, E *Ethics and Infinity*, p90

Neither, however, does he take up our Heideggerian modification of Kant's ethical question 'how ought Da-sein abide or live with the world' which would be equally programmatic for Levinas. For Levinas, ethics and the ethical subject comes before the 'I' conceived as either sovereign rational subject or as a Da-sein dwelling in being. Instead the Levinasian subject requires:

> A notion of subjectivity independent of the adventure of cognition, and in which corporeality of the subject is not separable from its subjectivity, is required if signification signifies otherwise than by the synchrony of being, if intelligibility and being are distinguishable, if essence itself signifies only on the basis of an ascription of meaning that devolves from the-one-for-the-other, the signifyingness of signification.[32]

Such an ethical subject which 'devolves from the-one-for-the-other' can never capture itself and own itself as a for-itself. There is no subject prior to, or separate from this relationship with an other person, to catch sight of through reflection. Even the Sartrean for-itself as pre-reflective cogito, which can never catch itself in reflection and has no inside, does not go far enough because it still comes before our relationship with others and is an intentionally based and directed cognition. Rather, the ethical subject is singled out and unified by its encounter with the other and is 'the distinctive in-oneself of the contraction of ipseity and its breakup'.[33] As fundamentally an in-oneself, the subject and its corporeality come together, thus overcoming the problem of separating the subject from its corporeality as Descartes clearly does and as Levinas also sees Heidegger doing. Here we should also note, of course, that corporeality for Levinas, is different than physiology, biology, or the ability to perceive and experience. Like Merleau-Ponty, Levinas considers the

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[32]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p78
[33]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p109

sensible and our embodied exposure and vulnerability to alterity to be more than a

matter of a particular kind of entity's ability to be consciously affected by sensations

it receives from the world around it.

> The most fundamental mode of affectivity, the enjoyment and
> anxiety by which subjectivity is affected with itself in being
> affected by plenary or vacuous sensuous contents, is taken to be
> preceded by the being thrown back upon oneself, reeling under the
> impact of alterity. It is the demand of alterity that throws
> subjectivity back upon its own resources.[34]

So this 'demand of alterity' disrupts the self-assured completeness or totality of the

unified ego and challenges its resources and virility. Not by opposing it with a like

power, but by exposing its ungroundedness and vulnerability. No matter how

separate, self sufficient, and insulated the ego based for-itself might consider itself in

its own reflection, the other person shatters the mirror and its false image to reveal a

subject that is subject by virtue of its being summoned against its will and before

will.

> This breakup of identity, this changing of being into signification,
> that is, into substitution, is the subject's subjectivity, or its
> subjection to everything, its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is
> its sensibility. Subjectivity, locus and null-site of this break up,
> comes to pass as a passivity more passive than all passivity.[35]

Moreover, while this break-up of identity and unity occurs at the level of being, the

passive subjectivity that is revealed has an even stronger unity. This unity or

singularity Levinas captures explicitly in the term 'the One' in *Otherwise than*

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[34]Lingis, A Translator's introduction to *Otherwise than Being*, pxxvii
[35]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p14

Being.[36] This 'one' is a pure singularity that is 'a unity of the self that is presynthetic, prelogical and (in some way) atomic, precluding the splitting up or separation of the self from itself'.[37] But note that although it is atomic, it is never alone or in isolation, it is always in a relationship with the Other—in illeity. Further without the gravity of this relation it would not exist. It is not first a subjectivity that then encounters the Other, our by now well known formulation of the 'and' relationship and the one as self-grounded subject, but has meaning through that very relationship. Using a Heideggerian term, we might say the Levinasian One is thrown. However, for Levinas the unique subject is not thrown into a world, but finds itself 'persecuted' or 'held hostage' by the Other who demands a response.

> Here uniqueness means the impossibility of slipping away and
> being replaced, in which the very recurrence of the I is effected. The
> uniqueness of the chosen or required one, who is not a chooser, is a
> passivity not being converted into a spontaneity. This uniqueness
> not assumed, not subsumed, is traumatic; it is an election in
> persecution. Chosen without assuming the choice.[38]

Thus, although the ethical subject is never alone, it is traumatised and persecuted in relation to the Other—a relationship from which it cannot escape. One might wonder, in this respect whether we have not jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, so to speak. That is, in Levinas's attempt to escape the solitude of being, has he not lead us into a even more intolerable situation that could lead to *ressentiment*. Are we not left in the position of Frankenstein's monster 'as a creature, but an orphan by

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[36]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p56 begins a section entitled 'The One' which explicitly addresses the strength of the unity of the ethical subject.
[37]Levinas, E 'Substitution' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p85
[38]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p56. One might note in the last sentence the contrast with the Heideggerian formulation of resolute Da-sein as having chosen to choose.

birth or an atheist no doubt ignorant of its creator'?[39] It is thus not surprising that

Levinas often uses the trope of pain to capture the sense of this trauma.[40]

> Pain is pure deficit, an increase of debt in a subject that does not
> have a hold on itself, does not 'join up the two ends'. The
> subjectivity of the subject is precisely this non-recapture, an
> increasing debt beyond the *Sollen*.[41]

The debt to which Levinas refers, is the debt of responsibility, which is ultimately

where he locates the ethical imperative. It is an imperative beyond the *Sollen*, or

should, of the other ethical formulations because it is not a case of intentionality.

There is no choice in accepting this responsibility. It is not a question of selecting a

'good' action, or even living in a way that does justice to Da-sein's dignity. It is

simply a matter of recognising the summons of the Other and the responsibility this

entails. It is not a question that one poses to oneself, but a question that is posed by

the other in the evocation of a unique self. A question to which there is only one

answer, which is given as it is asked, 'here I am, answering for everything and for

everyone'. [42] For Levinas, it is not my death which singularises me, but this call to

responsibility by the Other. This call is a burden of responsibility that is omnipresent,

infinite and can never be met—it exposes an asymmetric relationship involving an

un-assumable responsibility.

> Obsessed precisely with responsibilities that do not go back to
> decisions taken by a freely contemplating subject, and thus accused
> with what it never did, persecuted and thrown back upon itself,
> backed up to itself, ipseity 'takes on itself', in the absolute inability

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[39]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p105
[40]Note the parallel here between Levinas's use of pain to describe the encounter with the Other and Heidegger's use of pain to describe the pain of linguistic dif-ference as the mystery comes to language.
[41]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p55
[42]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p114

> of slipping away from proximity, from the face, from the dereliction
> of the face where infinity is also absence. More exactly: the upsurge
> of ipseity is the very fact of this gravity in being.[43]

Here the 'I' of ipseity is, for Levinas, not in the nominative but always 'from the start

in the accusative' and under this accusation it is orientated away from itself towards

the Other, 'dis-interested' in its own essence.[44] This extraverted obsession of the for-

the-other perhaps takes its extreme form in my concern for the death of the

neighbour and the imperative 'do not kill'. This pre-occupation with the death of the

neighbour, even to the extent of dying in their place reveals, not as Heidegger

analyses, the mineness of death and the impossibility of encountering the death of

someone else, but the ethical and the good par excellence.

The good in Levinas, as the 'with' of illeity, is prior to and takes precedence over

evil. While it is true that one can as an ego and consciousness dwelling in the

ontological and epistemological, turn one's back on the Other (physically kill an

other person for instance), or attempt to subsume it in terms of the same (as in an

us/them dichotomy) – the very definition of evil for Levinas – the fundamental

ethical demand cannot be effaced. The good, as the fact of our proximity, conditions

evil and always leaves its trace which might be re-awakened.[45]

Note then, traditional theories of ethics that appeal to universal principles or self

legislation inherently contain at least some evil for three reasons. The first is that

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[43]Levinas, E 'Language and Proximity' in *Collected Philosophical Papers of Emmanuel Levinas*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, Netherlands: M.Nijhoff, 1987, p123
[44]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p112. Levinas uses 'dis-interested' in many places to suggest the ethical subject has moved beyond the ontological and epistemological concerns of the ego. For example, 'The one assigned has to open to the point of separating itself from its own inwardness, adhering to esse; it must be dis-interested' *Otherwise than Being*, p49
[45]See chapter 3 in Catherine Chalier's book *What Ought I to do?* For a clear articulation of this theme and its overlaps and contrasts with the Kantian notion of evil.

they rely on an ego based subject of some kind to adopt such a morality through their freedom or autonomy. The second is that they reduce the ethical to theories, concepts and laws which are totalising and mediate the relation to other people; and finally they deny the uniqueness and difference inherent in the ethical subject and the Other in each unique encounter by measuring all the same. The passivity of the 'here I am' is lost in the self-interestedness and virility of the 'I judge'. Or as Georgio Agamben suggests, we have crossed a line and confused 'ethical categories with juridical categories'.[46] This confusion arises when we conflate the 'force of judgement' and the law, with truth and justice.

According to Levinas, however, there is a 'pre-originary susceptiveness' to the good that always contains the possibility of revelation and inspiration.[47] The exception can always interrupt the law.

Having demonstrated how the early Levinas attempted to disrupt Heideggerian ontology and outlined the basic terms in which the later Levinas sought to displace ontology with his ethics as first philosophy, I would like to conclude this chapter by highlighting an important paradox in Levinas's philosophy that will prove to be the source of its significance but will also force us to rethink the relationship between ethics and ontology.

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[46]Agamben, G *Remnants of Auschwitz*. New York: New York Zone Books, 1999, p18. Kafka's *The Trial* draws out this distinction rather chillingly, where a man, Joseph K, is arrested, accused, tried and condemned for a crime of which he is unaware and did not commit. It demonstrates how the 'force of judgement' can be radically separated from ethics and ethical categories. While the stark separation that Kafka illustrates is not always so clear, the very possibility of such a separation should make us wary of mistaking the one for the other.

[47]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p122. Note again the parallel with the later Heidegger here in terms of his notion of the danger and the saving grace which we discussed in previous chapters.

6.3 Hearing the prayer

In trying to come to terms with Levinas's philosophy and his exploration of illeity,

we must first acknowledge a difficulty or perhaps even a paradox. How is it possible

to even think that which is beyond being? Or as Derrida puts the problem in his essay

'Violence and Metaphysics':

> The nudity of the face of the other – this epiphany of a certain non-
> light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed – will
> still have to be exposed to a certain enlightenment.[48]

Levinas's philosophy is an attempt to 'present the unpresentable' as Lyotard might

say, or using Levinas's own formulation in *Otherwise than Being*, it is an attempt to

bring the saying (which is unsayable) to the said, while still maintaining the trace of

the saying and thereby avoiding the violence of language itself.

> The subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system
> and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In
> language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the
> price of betrayal.[49]

Nevertheless, Levinas insists that because language is 'ancillary and indispensable' it

can still approach otherwise than being 'as though being's other were an event of

being'.[50] His main linguistic method of exposing this trace of the saying is to appeal

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[48]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, London
and Henley: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1978, p85
[49]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p6
[50]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p6

to his interlocutor using different tropes to his predecessors.[51] I use the word appeal,

and phrase it this way, because this is how Levinas conceives of his philosophical

works, as prayers. While at first this trope itself might seem strange, it is particularly

consonant with Levinas's position.

The prayer never stands alone but immediately implies a relation between the

worshipper and the infinite Other (God) towards whom the prayer is directed. It is

also a request that the prayer be heard, a request which tacitly acknowledges the

vulnerability of the worshipper in the face of the infinite. That is, the worshipper

takes the risk of exposing themselves through an appeal to be heard by another that

may or may not be fulfilled. This appeal, or saying, is on Levinas's account

antecedent to the content of the prayer, i.e. what is said, and conditions it.

> The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of
> information which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying. It is
> not due to the contents inscribed in the said and transmitted to the
> interpretation and decoding done by the other. 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.[52]

Thus, by using the term prayer, Levinas draws attention to the fact that his

philosophising is first and foremost an appeal to the Other – us his readers (each

singularly) – on the basis of his own humanity. Its content, framed in the language of

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[51]For example the shift from visual metaphors – which tend too easily to fall into the illusion of the
Cartesian theatre where the external world simply unfolds before the voyeuristic Cyclopean gaze of
consciousness. Vision is the sense of the Field Marshall who can assess the battle and order his
enemies to be bombed with impunity – to the more intimate metaphors of touch, such as the caress,
and sound, such as saying and speech. For a discussion of visualism and the shift away from sight as
the primary sense for knowing and relating see David Levin's *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*.
Berkley: University of California Press, 1993 which has a chapter on both Heidegger and Levinas.
Levinas also uses other methods as well as changing metaphors such as avoiding use of the verb 'to
be' in *Otherwise than Being* which is not apparent in the English translation. See xliv of the
translator's introduction to *Otherwise than Being*
[52]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p48

being, for Levinas, is always secondary to this appeal. Nevertheless, this content

itself attempts to expose this praying relationship as fundamentally ethical and this is

a common source of criticism of Levinas's philosophy. The question is, can

Levinasian ethics do without ontology, and if not, to what extent can ethics be first

philosophy as Levinas insists? Can we still give credence to the notion of an

otherwise than being?

These questions require a more detailed analysis of the relationship between

Levinasian ethics and Heideggerian ontology and a critique of certain aspects of

Levinas's position. What is at stake is our fundamental understanding of what it is to

be human and the relationality that underpins this humanity. For Heidegger, with-

being is grounded in Da-sein's belonging together with being and is driven by an

imperative to make sense; for Levinas, with-being is grounded in our proximity to

the (human) Other and is driven by vulnerability, suffering and sacrifice for-the-

Other. In this way, in their respective searches for first philosophy both confront the

problem of ground and retain an element of the logic of and-being. Thus, as Louis

Wolcher suggests:

> Although he radically reverses Heidegger's philosophy by making
> ethics the site from which ontology emerges, his thinking and
> Heidegger's both move identically, according to the following
> structure of thought: a theme is always a 'to' that must be accounted
> for by a 'from' that leads to it.[53]

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[53]Wolcher, L 'Ethics, Justice and Suffering in the Thought of Levinas: The Problem of the Passage' in
Law and Critique 14, 2003, p95. Consistent with my assertion, Wolcher argues that the logic of the
from/to derives from Leibnitz's principle of sufficient reason which manifests itself in metaphysics as
the idea of ground, p112. Further he suggests that while Levinas is acutely aware of the problem of
ground in his attack on the sovereign subject, he forgets this in his attempt to ground justice in ethics
or place ethics as first philosophy.

My next chapter will engage in a deeper analysis of this ethico-ontological

movement to further develop our understanding of the with and with-being by

bringing Levinas into closer proximity with Heidegger.

Chapter 7 – Interruptions, Tears and the Knotted Skein

> One of the major objections against Levinas's thinking is that in the course of articulating his claim that ethics is beyond being and so unthematizable, he makes a theme of the unthematizable. Is there not a fundamental betrayal of the otherwise than being, whenever it is cast in the language of being? Is it not contradictory to affirm the independence of ethical intelligibility from theoretical thought within theoretical discourse?
>
> Robert Bernasconi, *Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy*[1]

> The inter-human perspective can subsist, but can also be lost, in the political order of the City where the law establishes mutual obligations between citizens. Properly speaking, the inter-human lies in the non-indifference of one to another, in a responsibility of one for another. The inter-human is prior to the reciprocity of this responsibility, which inscribes itself in impersonal laws, and becomes superimposed on the pure altruism of this responsibility inscribed in the ethical position of the self as self.
>
> Emmanuel Levinas, *Useless Suffering*[2]

In my last chapter after outlining Levinas's objections to the totalitarianism of Heideggerian ontology and Levinas's own philosophical recovery of ethics as first philosophy, I drew attention to a paradox in Levinas's work that many scholars use as a basis for criticism if not outright rejection of Levinasian ethics. The paradox lies in the fact that, as Bernasconi puts it, 'in the course of articulating his claim that ethics is beyond being and so unthematizable, he makes a theme of the unthematizable'.

What is at stake here is the very legitimacy of Levinas's attempts to present the unpresentable. If the unpresentable can be presented does not this reprioritise being over ethics and furthermore demonstrate the impossibility of a radical alterity in relation to both ethics and ontology. If the Other were really absolutely Other, a

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[1]Bernasconi, R 'Skepticism in the face of philosophy' in *Re-reading Levinas*. Bernasconi, R and Critchley, S, London: The Athlone Press, 1991, p149

[2]Levinas, E 'Useless Suffering' in *The Provocation of Levinas*. Edited by Bernasconi, R and Wood, D, London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p165

disjunction that amounted to a pure duality, then it might be claimed, as Caputo does, that the self could not encounter the Other at all:

> If something were, properly speaking, absolutely Other then it would not be a matter of concern for us and we would simply ignore it, being quite oblivious of it...But that means that the Other is related to us after all, viz., in a very powerful, unconditionally commanding way...I would say, pace Levinas, what is otherwise-than-being cannot help ending up as being-otherwise.[3]

However, rather than simply rejecting Levinas's position and reverting to Heideggerian ontology, might we not give a more nuanced reading of the relationship between Levinasian ethics and Heideggerian ontology to discover the dimensions of this contradictory space?

That will indeed be the focus of this chapter. I will argue that neither ontology nor ethics can be prioritised as first philosophy by building upon my argument from chapter 5 that Heideggerian ontology is necessarily ethical and that Levinasian ethics contributes greatly to an understanding of this ethical dimension. However, we will not go all the way with Levinas in insisting that ethics is first philosophy. Much of this chapter will be focused on demonstrating that Levinasian ethics needs ontology to even get off the ground. Ultimately, I suggest the meaning of this paradox is that ontology and ethics belong together. This will then return us from our discussion of the 'with' without conjunction back to a discussion of with-being, albeit now with a more nuanced understanding of ethical meaning of relationality—an ethico-ontology of with-being if you will. However, this is not the last word, because I also want to demonstrate that just as Heideggerian ontology did not do justice to the plural

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[3]Caputo, J *Against Ethics*. Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993

dimension of with-being, so Levinasian ethics also fails to engage sufficiently with plurality of existence. This claim provides the motivation for discussion of Jean-Luc Nancy in the final chapter.

I approach the task of this chapter in two parts. The first part will discuss the Levinasian paradox I have already mentioned, hoping to discover both the significance of Levinas's work for our understanding of with-being, as well as exposing its necessary interdependence with ontology. Largely this will emerge from an examination of Levinas's engagement with Derrida, his discussion of 'the trace' and through his analysis of the meaning of language in terms of the distinction between 'the saying' and 'the said'. These are the terms in which Levinas himself re-engages with ontology and begins exploring the seeming paradox of a heteronomous experience.

Closely linked to language and this re-engagement with ontology, is Levinas's account of the meaning of our concrete relations with third parties in terms of justice and the political. The second part of the chapter, then, will examine Levinas's shift from ethics to politics which he places on the same plane as ontology. Of concern, will be the legitimacy of Levinas's prioritisation of illeity over community and the shift from the asymmetric and non-conjunctive relationship 'with' the infinite Other to the being-with of finite humanity. Let us begin, however, with the question of the conundrum of the heteronomous experience.

7.1 Can there be such a thing as a heteronomous experience?

While many philosophers have explored Levinas's work, particularly the seemingly

contradictory space between Heideggerian ontology and Levinasian ethics, perhaps

the most careful and sustained engagement with this issue has been provided by

Jacques Derrida.[4] What is interesting about this engagement is that it takes the form

of a discourse with Levinas and the Levinasian *oeuvre* that performatively explores

this 'impossible' space between being and its Other, in a way that attempts to

seriously enact Levinasian ethics with respect to Levinas himself. It is this nuanced

engagement that leaves open the possibility of a double or deconstructive reading of

two of Derrida's major essays on Levinas: 'Violence and Metaphysics' and 'At this

very moment in this work here I am'.[5] That is, while often these works are read as

straightforward critiques of Levinas, one can also read Derrida as being sympathetic

to Levinas's problematic.[6] In this way Derrida attempts to occupy 'the space between

the writer's (*Levinas's*) intentions and the text'.[7] This kind of ambivalence by

Derrida is not really unusual for those familiar with his work as it is consistent with

the more developed deconstructive approach he employs in his later writings. Indeed,

similar to Levinas, Derrida is often accused of paradoxically using the very logo-

centric tradition that he is trying to displace. Levinas draws attention to this fact in

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[4]Jaques Derrida was a central figure in bringing Levinas's philosophy to prominence initially through his piece 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 and was also profoundly influenced by Levinas's work. For a discussion of what Derrida sees as the legacy of Levinas see *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999.
[5]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*; and 'At this very moment in this work here I am' first published in French in 1980, appears in English, translated by Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-reading Levinas*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley.
[6]See Bernasconi, 'The Trace of Levinas in Derrida' in *Derrida and Difference*. Edited by D Wood and R Bernasconi, Chicago: North-western University Press 1988; and Critchley, S 'The Chiasmus: Levinas, Derrida and the Ethical Demand for Deconstruction', *Textual Practice* 3(1), 1989: 91-106
[7]Critchley, S 'The Chiasmus: Levinas, Derrida and the Ethical Demand for Deconstruction', p93

his essay on Derrida 'Wholly Otherwise', in part, as a response to what as he sees as

Derrida's criticism of his own work:

> One might even be tempted to infer an argument from this use of
> logocentric language against that very language, in order to dispute
> the produced deconstruction: a path much followed by the refutation
> of scepticism, but where, although at first crushed and trampled
> underfoot, scepticism got back up on its feet to come back as the
> legitimate child of philosophy. A path, perhaps that Derrida himself
> has not always disdained from following in his polemic.[8]

Note that in this, Levinas is both affirming something positive in deconstruction

through the contrast with scepticism, which he sees as somewhat analogous with his

own work, and the very problem of the paradox we are discussing—gently criticising

Derrida for using such a polemic against Levinas himself in 'Violence and

Metaphysics'.[9] However, perhaps here Levinas does not fully appreciate the

sympathy for his work that is also contained in 'Violence and Metaphysics', a

sympathy that would seem to preclude interpreting the article as a simple critique of

the Levinasian paradox. Indeed, on the double reading to which we have alluded, the

paradox might be better described as a Derridian aporia—an aporia between

ontology and ethics.

So how does this dialogue and reading unfold and what does it tell us of the

relationship between ontology and ethics?

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[8] Wood, D and Bernasconi, R *Re-Reading Levinas*, p5
[9] See for instance 'Skepticism and Reason' in Chapter V of *Otherwise and Being* for Levinas's
discussion; 'Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy' by Robert Bernasconi in *Re-reading Levinas;* and
'Asymmetry and Transcendence: On Scepticism and First Philosophy' by Paul Davies in *Research
and Phenomenology* 35, 2005: 118-140, for a more detailed engagement with this issue.

7.1.1 A necessary violence

On one side of the aporia or double reading, 'Violence and Metaphysics' repeatedly draws attention to the necessity of phenomenology and ontology to both Levinas's philosophical enterprise and the ethics he is attempting to articulate.

> Just as he implicitly had to appeal to phenomenological self-
> evidences against phenomenology, Levinas must ceaselessly suppose
> and practice the thought of the precomprehension of Being in his
> discourse, even when he directs it against 'ontology'.[10]

It is Derrida's insistence on this 'implicit appeal' that has led many commentators to interpret 'Violence and Metaphysics' as a straight forward critique of *Totality and Infinity*.[11] Derrida makes two powerful points in arguing for the quoted conclusion: (1) Levinas misinterprets Heideggerian ontology; and (2) Levinasian ethics presupposes and needs something like Heideggerian ontology and a phenomenology of the Other to have any force. Let us consider these two points in more detail.

One of Levinas's strongest claims is that Heidegger subordinates the relationship with the Other (a human existent) to the impersonal relationship with being. But there can only be a subordination, or prioritisation, between two determined things— indeed Levinas often seems to refer and use the term being as if it were a thing. Later in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas explicitly suggests that 'Fundamental ontology itself, which denounces the confusion between Being and entities, speaks of Being as an identified entity'.[12] Now while Heidegger at times uses being as a noun, and as we

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[10]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p141
[11]Whether this is an accurate interpretation, due to the perspective of the commentators, or the fact that it was one of Derrida's first attempts at deconstruction I will not attempt to judge.
[12]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p43

have argued approaches the belonging together of Da-sein and being from the perspective of being as a separate pole, the overall direction of Heidegger's thought, as Derrida argues, is that being is not an entity or essence. Also, despite the ontological difference between the existent or being, and its being, being is nothing outside the existent. To quote Derrida:

> Being is but the being-of this existent and does not exist outside of it as a foreign power, or as a hostile or neutral impersonal element.[13]

In this sense, on Derrida's account, Levinas seems to misread the relationship between the being and its being. Being is neither above or beside the existent, nor is it a simple predicate. These interpretations would seem to classify the relationship as an 'and' relationship between two things on the same ontic plane. As we have seen, Levinas's early attempts in *Existence and Existents* to radically separate the one from the other would seem to be evidence of this misunderstanding. That is, Levinas could be accused of forgetting or misinterpreting the ontological difference. Interestingly, in some ways similar to Levinas, what Heidegger is really attempting, particularly in his later work, is to articulate in the language of being the non-conjunctive Da-sein/being space in which beings, but never the space or anything like a universal being, reveal themselves. In other words, Heidegger in a very important sense himself seeks the meaning of being beyond being as *esse*.[14] As Darin Crawford Gates

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[13]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p136
[14]Note that arguably Heidegger does not suffer from the same kind of paradox as Levinas because of his hermeneutical understanding of truth. That is, while being is not 'a being' it can enter the world through language as 'a being' for the purposes of philosophical discussion. However, whatever is disclosed about being in this way while emerging from our relationship with being will never fully reveal being and will always be open to hermeneutical revision through further engagement with being. Thus, the relationship with being is not one of complete alterity in the Levinasian sense even though it is beyond being as *essence*.

argues in 'Ontological Disclosure and Ethical exposure: Heidegger and Levinas on meaning, subjectivity, and non-indifference':

> Meaning as *Sinn* always has a structure which withdraws from cognition and yet makes cognition possible—withdraws from understanding and yet makes understanding possible. The understanding draws from, is nourished by, that which withdraws.[15]

In particular, in Heidegger's later writings that which gives in the event of *Ereignis* is beyond both time and being. On Heidegger's account, Da-sein could not have an encounter with exteriority unless it was open to *Ereignis* as the event of being. In this way, being does not negate difference but maintains it. Thus, it would seem that each genuine revelation of an existent is an acknowledgement of and encounter with exteriority in an almost Levinasian sense. Likewise this acknowledgement is not a straightforward cognitive understanding as Levinas implies. Heidegger has insisted right from the time he introduced the term, that Da-sein is not simply the *cogito* and the later Heidegger, as we have seen, explicitly contrasts the kind of appropriative thinking to which Levinas is alluding, with the 'letting be' of *Gelassenheit*.

On this more generous interpretation of Heidegger's position, Levinasian ethics, as an ethics of exteriority, of necessity requires Heideggerian ontology even if this is not sufficient for Levinasian ethics. As Derrida puts it:

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[15]Gates, D 'Ontological Disclosure and Ethical Exposure: Heidegger and Levinas on Meaning, Subjectivity, and Non-difference' in *Philosophy Today* 45(4), Winter 2001, p320. Indeed, Gates in a very good article explores several elements of Levinas's critique of Heidegger and finds them wanting. However, consistent with what I am arguing here he still wants to suggest that Levinas's ethics of the Other captures something that Heidegger misses or does not pursue far enough in his analysis of *mitsein*. His conclusion is that 'Levinas is wrong insofar as his critique of Heidegger passes over important nuances of Heidegger's analysis, but he is right that by leaving out the dimension of asymmetry, obligation and vulnerability, Heidegger does subordinate "justice to freedom"'; p326

Not only is the thought of being not ethical violence, but it seems no ethics – in Levinas's sense – can be opened without it. Thought – or at least the pre-comprehension of Being – conditions (in its own fashion, which excludes every ontic conditionality: principles, causes, premises etc) the recognition of the essence of the existent (for example someone, existent as other, as other self etc). It conditions the respect for the other as what it is: other. Without this acknowledgement, which is not a knowledge, or let us say without this 'letting be' of an existent (Other) as something existing outside me in the essence of what it is (first in its alterity), no ethics would be possible.[16]

This leads us to the second part of Derrida's argument, that Levinasian ethics relies upon and needs ontology and phenomenology for its very possibility.

Now, Levinas might point out that the existent does not need to acknowledge the Other even in this minimal way to be affected by the Other and that the 'respect' which Derrida refers to seems to be too much an attitude that can be actively adopted by a sovereign subject. Indeed, it seems clear, that existents can be affected by something without needing to acknowledge it. For example, one's body is sustained through breathing air without air necessarily ever revealing itself to one conceptually or linguistically in the openness of being. The problem, however, is that if our relationship to the Other is like this, it is hard to see a place for ethics. That is, certainly I might be open to and respond to the Other, even to the point of giving my life for the Other, but such a response would be automatic or a kind of reflex which Levinas would place in the instinctual realm of the animal that is still fundamentally concerned with its own existence. As Levinas puts it in relation to that group of affections related to animal need:

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[16]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p138

> Animal need is liberated from vegetable dependence, but this very
> liberation is itself dependence and uncertainty. An animal's need is
> inseparable from struggle and fear; the exterior world from which it is
> liberated still remains a threat.[17]

Therefore, even if this kind of affectivity is in play, it requires more to become

Levinasian ethics. This is why Levinas describes our affection for the Other as

Desire rather than need. Whereas needs are finite, goal directed, satisfiable and

ultimately an internalisation of exteriority, metaphysical desire for the Other longs

for and reaches out to infinity—a longing that can never be satisfied but only

deepened.

> Let us again note the difference between need and Desire: in need I
> can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the
> other; in Desire there is no sinking ones teeth into being, no satiety,
> but an uncharted future before me.[18]

But note that the affect of desire first requires that breathtaking recognition of the

Other than oneself. That is, as Levinas explores more fully in *Otherwise than Being*,

I must be singled out as the One in the face of the Other and somehow feel the

weight of un-assumable responsibility. In short, I must recognise the face of God,

even if this is only a minimal recognition of an infinite alterity.

Indeed, Levinas seems to acknowledge this himself in many ways in his later

philosophy. One mark of this recognition is the shift from the Other as stranger, to

the Other as neighbour. In a note to 'Enigma and Phenomenon' Levinas

acknowledges his previous reluctance to use the term neighbour because of its

association with community and neighbouring. That is, he thought the term might not

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[17]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p116
[18]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p117

capture the absolute alterity and height of the Other. Although note, even a stranger

is minimally recognised as a stranger. Slavoj Zizek, for instance, thinks that

Levinas's fear that the term neighbour domesticates the radical alterity of the Other

also applies to Levinas's description of the Other more generally. In 'Neighbours and

Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence' Zizek argues that Levinas already

gentrifies the Other too much by giving it a human face. Instead Zizek wants to draw

attention to the monstrous aspect of otherness.

> The neighbour (*Nebenmensch*) as the Thing means that, beneath the
> neighbour as my *semblant*, my mirror image, there always lurks the
> unfathomable abyss of radical Otherness, of a monstrous Thing that
> cannot be "gentrified";[19]

or again referring specifically to the Levinasian Other:

> At a more radical level, 'the abyss/void of the Other: the human
> face "gentrifies" the terrifying Thing that is the ultimate reality of
> our neighbour'.[20]

Zizek's rather dramatic re-description of the Other is meant to contrast the inherent

violence of the dyadic relationship of illeity with a justice and ethics that Zizek

argues can only exist after Levinas's entrance of the third (a point I will explore

shortly), and thus should be given ethical priority. But in a way, the power of Zizek's

description is that it perhaps unintentionally demonstrates, as well as provides an

argument for, this position. That is, while Zizek has given us a less benevolent

meaning of the Other, it is the fact that the Other is given meaning at all, rather than

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[19]Zizek, S 'Neighbours and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence' in *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Ontology*. Edited by Slavoj Zizek, Eric Santner and Kenneth Reinhard, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p143
[20]Zizek, S 'Neighbours and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence' in *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Ontology*, p146

the specific meaning, that is important. The Other, in so far as it is radically Other can have no meaning because it has no ontological dimension. Even when it minimally enters being in the Derridean sense, as the acknowledgement of difference, it has a limited albeit very important meaning.

However, to give the Other a human face and to attribute to it the ethical imperative 'do not kill' is to have already entered into the realm of language, the third, and ontological determination.[21] What Zizek's meaning highlights is that the radical difference and height of the Other could just as easily be the Devil as God. At times Levinas comes close to admitting this point himself such as when he suggests the face of the Other is as much a temptation to kill as it is an imperative not to kill, but the overall tendency in Levinas's philosophy is to attribute a positive valence to the Other as God. Further, even the possibilities of 'not killing' or murder at least recognises the mortality and/or danger of the Other and perhaps this meaning is one ontological step too far. A more promising trope here might be to describe the encounter with the alterity of the Other as dis-ease.[22] The openness to dis-ease seems to capture the significance of illeity in more neutral ontological terms; still retains the

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[21]Indeed Levinas is often accused of an anthropocentrism. The question of Levinas's anthropocentrism is often raised in the context of our ethical relation to the animal such as in Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics' and in various interviews with Levinas such as in Bernasconi and Wood's *Provocation of Levinas*. Two good articles dealing with the issue are John Llewlyn's 'Am I obsessed by Bobby (Humanism and the Other Animal)' in Bernasconi and Critchley's *Re-reading Levinas*; and Peter Atterton's 'Ethical Cynicism' in *Animal Philosophy*. Levinas himself in his writings rarely addresses the question of the animal directly although much is made of his short essay 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights' in *Difficult Freedom: Essays in Judaism*. Translated by Sean Hand, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990. For a more radical attack on anthropocentrism still see Silvia Benso's article 'Of things face-to-face with Levinas face-to-face with Heidegger: Prolegomena to a metaphysical ethics of things' in *Philosophy Today* 40 (1), Spring 1996 where she argues that Levinas fails to engage with the 'Otherness of things', p132.

[22]The term dis-ease in relation to Levinas is very briefly mentioned in DH Brody's 'Emmanuel Levinas: The Logic of Ethical Ambiguity in Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence' in *Research in Phenomenology* 25, 1995, p193. This article is also a good reference in relation to the onto-ethical and the ambiguity surrounding the saying and the said which we shall explore shortly. Judith Butler in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London, New York: Verso 2004, speaks of anxiety in the face of the Other to capture its ambiguous meaning as both the impulse to kill as well as the 'thou shalt not kill'.

central meaning of a Levinasian originary ethics as the possibility for the ethical

response; leaves room for violence and inhumanity in this relational space (part of

Zizek's concerns); and allows for allergy and an encounter with the Other within (a

theme we will explore further in relation to Jean-Luc Nancy in the next chapter).

Regardless, to the extent that Levinas enters into meaning at all he has already

entered in some way into the realm of the third. Thus, his ethics is as much political

as it is ethical. Again, this is a point we will explore shortly.

Another more telling mark of the necessity for the Other to obtain minimal

ontological recognition in Levinas's later philosophy, is the distinction between the

saying and the said and the notion of the trace, which can paradoxically through its

absence, appear in being. But these shifts or developments in Levinas's position

could themselves be seen as a response to Derrida's engagement with his work in

'Violence and Metaphysics' and indeed a response in some sense already presaged, if

not there, in the second of the two double readings in Derrida's piece.

This other reading exposes a certain sympathy with Levinas's position and even an

acknowledgement that the paradox in Levinas's work that we have been exploring is

a necessary paradox.

> Levinas's metaphysics in a sense pre-supposes – at least we have
> attempted to show this – the transcendental phenomenology that it
> seeks to put into question. And yet the legitimacy of this putting
> into question does not seem to be any less radical. What is the
> origin of the question about transcendental archi-factuality as
> violence? Upon what basis does one ask questions about finitude as
> violence? Upon what basis does the original violence of discourse
> permit itself to be commanded to be returned against itself, to be
> always, as language, the return against itself which recognises the
> other as other?...But the naked opening of the question, its silent

opening, escapes phenomenology, as the origin and end of phenomenology's logos.[23]

In this remark we see that despite the fact that Derrida thinks Levinas's metaphysics pre-supposes phenomenology, there seems to be a legitimacy to this enterprise. Further, Derrida acknowledges that the question that Levinas has opened does indeed seem to escape phenomenology. The key to this escape seems to be the double meaning of language and discourse.

The first meaning of language is its determinate content. That is, the kind of meaning that Heidegger captures in the phrase 'language is the house of being'. Being and world come to presence through language. It is in language for Heidegger that the truth of being comes to light and indeed the question of truth arises. But, as Heidegger recognised, in its determinate content language and the beings it brings to presence also covers over being and the being of those beings—the ontic manifestation through language threatens to obscure the ontological. However, this threat is necessary if being is to come to light at all and thus language as well as being a threat is also the saving grace. Even at the level of being, the essence of language in its heart contains an ambiguity.

Another ambiguity exists in the second meaning of language which is beyond the content of language. In this second meaning: 'The verb must not only be the verb of someone—it must overflow, in its movement toward the other, what is called the speaking subject.'[24] That is, not only is the essence of language the house of being, but it is movement towards another speaking subject—language is discourse. It is

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[23]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p133
[24]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p98

language as discourse that is the key element of Levinas's distinction between the animal and man, although as we will see this itself raises a number of questions. The face, for Levinas, is not only an epiphany, the face speaks or signifies and commands a reply. It is speech and discourse that as Derrida puts it 'makes the cry of need become the expression of desire'.[25] But note for this discourse to get off the ground, the face of the Other must register at some level in its signification (i.e. must register as a phenomenon and enter the light of being in the Heideggerian sense) and it requires the phrase 'or better yet, phrases: because the singular calls forth the plural (as the plural does the singular) and because the singular and plural are already the plural'.[26] This however, is where the paradox arises because this calling forth which is the ethical significance of the Other immediately betrays itself through this originary discourse. The first 'phrase' 'do not kill' and the reply it evokes 'here I am' already enters into discourse and also finitude—it is thus originary violence. As Derrida puts it:

> Now there is no phrase which is indeterminate, that is, which does not pass through the violence of the concept. Violence appears with articulation. And the latter is opened only by (the at first preconceptual) circulation of being. The very elocution of non-violent metaphysics is its first disavowal.[27]

However, note this first disavowal is a necessary condition for ethics if we are to move beyond automated or instinctual responses. If there was no discourse then there would certainly be no violence but also no possibility of encountering the Other as

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[25]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p147
[26]Jameson, F pxii of his forward to Lyotard's *The Differend*
[27]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, pp147-148. This primitive violence is also the kind of violence Zizek is alluding to in his article 'Neighbours and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence' in *The Neighbour*. In short, if my partiality for the Other through either instinct or loving devotion overwhelms my capacity to think of the other Others impartially, then this is not originary ethics but violence according to Zizek.

other. Putting it slightly differently, if the Other did not signify in being, then any response it evoked would be neither good nor evil because it would be simply ignorant reflex. Arguably, such blind reflex is a violence of a different order—the absolute violence of a predator devouring its prey, or to take a more ethically loaded example an ignorant soldier who blindly following orders, sacrifices their life for a cause they do not understand or even recognise. This logic leads Derrida to suggest:

> Discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only do itself violence, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without ever being able to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse. Necessarily without reappropriating it, for if it did so, the horizon of peace would disappear into the night (worst violence as previolence). This secondary war, as the avowal of violence, is the least possible violence, the only way to repress the worst violence, the violence of the primitive and pre-logical silence, of an unimaginable night which would not even be the opposite of day, an absolute violence which would not even be the opposite of non-violence; nothingness or pure non-sense.[28]

However, we must remember that this necessary violence also contains the possibility for peace because the meaning of language is always the gesture towards the Other. But rather than Derrida's horizon of peace, which has echoes of Heidegger's use of the term horizon, Levinas's discourse with Derrida around these issues continues in his later philosophy through the development of the notion of the trace and culminates in *Otherwise than Being* with the difference between the saying and the said.

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[28]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p130

7.2 He passed with only a trace

In 'The Trace of the Other', written in 1963, just two years after *Totality and Infinity* and one year before Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics', Levinas himself poses the question of whether there can be a heteronomous experience of the Other.

> Can there be something as strange as an experience of absolute exteriority, as contradictory in its terms as a heteronomous experience?[29]

Having posed the question, the rest of his essay is concerned with outlining the possibility of such a heteronomous experience through the notion of the trace. It is worth noting that in this essay, and the 1964 essay 'Meaning and Sense', Levinas uses the terms experience and presence quite freely in explaining the trace. This is a practice that he assiduously eschews in his 1965 essay 'Enigma and Phenomenon' and his later writings, perhaps in response to Derrida's engagement with his work in 'Violence and Metaphysics', because these terms seem to be too closely linked with ontology and phenomenology and seem to support the suggestion that Levinas pre-supposes ontology and phenomenology in his work.

Regardless, the general features and characteristics of the trace are fairly consistent. That is, Levinas is seeking 'an attitude that cannot be converted into a category, and whose movement unto the other is not recuperated in identification, does not return to its point of origin'.[30] In describing this requirement, Levinas often uses the analogy of Abraham leaving his fatherland, which he opposes to the Greek myth of

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[29]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy.* Edited by Mark Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p348
[30]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p348

Ulysses returning to Ithaca. The crucial point being, that the desire for the Other, which we described above, is a movement or passage towards an infinite exteriority which never returns to its point of origin and recovers identity. In 'Trace of the Other' Levinas ultimately settles on the term liturgy, in its non-religious Greek sense, to capture this notion of a work without a return to the same. That is, liturgy as 'a public office or duty which the richer citizens (of Athens) discharged at their own expense' for others.[31] Levinas also insists that this duty, or work, requires an ingratitude from the Other because gratitude would be a return of the movement to its origin. This is a point that Derrida makes much of in his later essay 'At this Moment Here I am' in which he claims that in responding to Levinas's work he cannot show any gratitude to Levinas without abandoning ethical discourse by returning the work to its origin.

Of course, it is always possible that in fear of losing the comfort of its powers (or wealth), as ego, the existent may shun the passage and return to its familiar ontological and phenomenological homeland like Ulysses. If this happens the alterity of the Other is shunned in favour of a reduction of the Other to an 'alien being' that is 'promised to research' and in principle can be known and brought to light.[32] Indeed, according to Levinas,

> Western philosophy coincides with the disclosure of the other
> where the other, in manifesting itself as a being, loses its alterity.
> From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the
> other that remains other—with an insurmountable allergy.[33]

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[31] Oxford English Dictionary Online
http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50134405/50134405se1?query_type=word&queryword=liturgy&f
irst=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=2&search_id=IBwL-PXRF4t-
23319&hilite=50134405se1
[32] Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p345
[33] Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p346

But how does this alterity even register to an ego dwelling in being as either desire or

allergy? How is it that the ego in the face-to-face encounters a passage which it can

follow or avoid? How is it that the Other signifies? According to Levinas, its

significance is as an interruption to the phenomenological world.

> We can at least approach this signifyingness in another way by
> situating it with respect to the phenomenology it interrupts.[34]

However, Levinas must be careful here because this interruption itself cannot

become immanent lest he fall prey to the critique of pre-supposing phenomenology –

it is perhaps worth remembering that Levinas has a fairly specific form of Hegelian

phenomenology in mind in the sense of a conscious intentionality towards a

phenomenal object – or of simply describing a nihilistic or negative immanence that

would be the opposite pole but on the same plane as the ontological, e.g. being and

nothingness, sense and nonsense, etc. Sartre's description of the look and my

encounter with the Other would be a good case in point. He rather vividly describes

the encounter as follows:

> Suddenly an object has appeared that has stolen my world from
> me…The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds
> therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a
> decentralisation of the world which undermines the centralisation
> which I am simultaneously effecting.[35]

Here we also see in this 'theft' and 'sliding away of my world' an interruption, but

one which decentres rather than fully disrupts and which is ultimately recoverable by

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[34]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p356
[35]Sartre, J *Being and Nothingness*, p255

me through turning the Other into an object. Of course what follows in Sartre is a kind of ontological trench warfare where the Other and I compete to give meaning to the world and subsume each other's freedom. In this sense it is a competition between equals that lacks the asymmetry of Levinasian encounter with the Other—'The face is not the countenance. It cannot be contained'.[36] Thus:

> The haemorrhage to which Levinas refers is not in the zone of self-consciousness, *Selbstbewusstsein*, or any other region of consciousness, unconsciousness or being, Sein. It is an emptying out of my consciousness, a *kenosis* commanded by the ethical word of the other which inflicts a wound that never heals.[37]

The kind of wound that Levinas draws on in an attempt to avoid the Sartrean trap, consistent with his early work, is a temporal one. The Other, according to Levinas has its own temporality that disrupts the ecstatic temporality of Da-sein and therefore calls into question both its being-in-the-world and any self-grounded sense of individual identity or egoism. The trace of this disruption 'appears' as a temporal fissure between the temporality of Da-sein's existence in the world and its being-towards-death, and the absolute past of the Other which is also eternity.

> A trace qua trace does not simply lead to the past, but is the very passing toward a past more remote than any past and any future which still are set in my time – the past of the other, in which eternity takes form, an absolute past which unites all times.[38]

But why is it that the trace of the Other leads to this absolute irrecuperable past which also doubles as eternity? The term past here seems to indicate the priority of this relationship with the Other over Da-sein's relationship with world, and thus the

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[36]Llewelyn, J 'Levinas, Derrida and Others vis-à-vis' in *The Provocation of Levinas,* p143
[37]Llewelyn, J 'Levinas, Derrida and Others vis-à-vis' in *The Provocation of Levinas,* p144
[38]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context,* p358

priority of ethics over ontology. Almost literally, before the subject becomes a

subject that is thrown into a world it is subject to an obligation to the Other. Or

differently, before the subject is singled out by its being-towards-death, it is singled

out by the command to respond to the Other. The self, which is not yet a Da-sein,

consciousness or ego, is the unique one who has sole and unending responsibility for

the Other. This obligation and call is there for eternity in two senses: firstly, the

possibility of interruption remains a constant, regardless of whether the ego ignores it

or not, because this subjection to the Other is primordial; and secondly, because if

the ego follows the trace and is thus disrupted, its concern and obligation goes

beyond the finitude of its own worldly time and beyond its own death.

> To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work is
> to have this triumph in a time without me, to aim at this world without
> me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time.[39]

Indeed, Levinas's examination of fecundity, paternity and the son, and the notion of

the intergenerational seems to capture this sense of 'beyond the horizon of my

time'.[40]

But note this absolute past which doubles for eternity is not something that can ever

appear in my past as worldly ecstatic projection. Because this projection can only

bring things to finite presence and deal with identities, the alterity of the Other which

is infinite, and my responsibility which is unending, cannot 'appear' except as

temporal disruption, without a certain reduction.

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[39]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p349
[40]See Levinas, E *Time and The Other*, pp90-92 and *Totality and Infinity*, pp267-269

This is why Levinas spends some time distinguishing between a trace that is a mere sign of absence, such as a hunter following spoor, from the trace that 'signifies outside of every intention of signaling and outside of every project of which it would be the aim'—for example the thief who leaves fingerprints while trying to wipe out their fingerprints.[41] It is in the exploration of these two kinds of traces that Levinas realises that a sign is never a mere sign but always has the significance of this second kind of trace.

> But in this sense every sign is a trace. In addition to what the sign signifies, it is the past of him who delivered the sign. The signifyingness of a trace doubles up the signifyingness proper to a sign issued in view of communication. A sign stands in this trace.[42]

This notion of a sign standing in the trace and the importance of language in our encounter with the Other becomes more explicit in Levinas's writing after Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics'. In 'Enigma and Phenomenon' the link between the trace and language receives more attention as a theme, even to the point where the Greek term enigma is used in reference to both.

> This way the Other has of seeking my recognition while preserving his incognito, disdaining recourse to a wink-of-an-eye of understanding or complicity, this way of manifesting himself without manifesting himself, we call enigma – going back to the etymology of this Greek term, and contrasting it with the indiscreet and victorious appearing of a phenomenon.[43]

> Language is the possibility of an enigmatic equivocation for better and for worse which men abuse.[44]

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[41]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p356
[42]Levinas, E 'The Trace of the Other' in *Deconstruction in Context*, p357
[43]Levinas, E 'Enigma and Phenomenon' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p70
[44]Levinas, E 'Enigma and Phenomenon' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p70

What becomes apparent is that language is enigmatic because it has both ethical and phenomenological/ontological significance. That is, as Derrida pointed out in 'Violence and Metaphysics', language is significant in two ways: through its content; and through its passage as discourse with the Other.[45] The 'abuse' that Levinas refers to in the above quote is due to the tendency for men to exploit this equivocation in language in one of at least two ways. Either: one can forget the signification of language as discourse (the ethical) and focus only on the content of its signs, such as the philosopher who engages in phenomenology or ontology as Levinas conceives of them; or, one can use the ambiguity of discourse to make an invisible approach that withdraws as it is being made, such as the provocative gesture or word of a would-be lover that has 'not interrupted the decency of the conversation'.[46] Regardless, these possibilities arise because of the enigma inherent in language that Levinas tries to articulate in the difference between the saying and the said. While this difference is referred to in 'Enigma and Phenomenon' it is not fully developed until Levinas's second major work *Otherwise than Being*. Indeed, not only does Levinas articulate the difference in this work, but, as he comes to realise, his whole philosophy needs and is an engagement with the implications of the implied hospitality offered by the house of being.

As Derrida already suggests in 'Violence and Metaphysics':

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[45]As an aside here, Steven Hendley in his article 'Speech and Sensibility: Levinas and Habermas on the Constitution of the Moral Point of View' in *Continental Philosophical Review* 37(2), 2004: 153-173 examines Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and his procedural aspects of communication and tries to align this with the demand for justification and justice that is the meaning of the third in Levinas. While it is true that Habermas's account looks beyond the content of language to its process, Levinas's sense of justification is very different to the 'outstretched field of questions and answers' of Habermas which is directed towards agreement. Levinas's justification, as we will see, is always against the background of originary ethics and interruption. In this way, he is much closer to Lyotard than Habermas. Bob Plant's 'Apologies: Levinas and Dialogue' in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 14(1), 2006: 79-94; gives a good response to Hendley in this regard.
[46]Levinas, E 'Enigma and Phenomenon' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p70

And first of all because the concept (material of language), which is always given to the other, cannot encompass the other, cannot include the other. The dative or vocative dimension which opens the original direction of language, cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension of the object without violence. Language, therefore, cannot make its own possibility a totality and include within itself its own origin or its own end.[47]

7.3 The saying beyond the said

While Levinas maintains his polemic against Heideggerian ontology throughout his later philosophy including in *Otherwise than Being*, it is perhaps here in his exploration of the saying and the said that we get his most nuanced engagement with the issue of the relationship between ethics and ontology. As we have mentioned, the difference between the saying and the said emerges from the ambiguity in language itself. On the one hand, we have language as a series of signs, the said, which for Levinas is the realm of phenomenology, ontology, logos, concepts, themes, knowledge and intentional communication.[48] On the other hand, we have the signification of language as a response to the Other, where the order of language establishes an 'absolute difference'.[49] It is this saying that Levinas wants to emphasise and give priority to in *Otherwise than Being*. That is, for Levinas, it is as an approach to the Other that language is primarily significant.

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[47]Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, p95
[48]Note that for Heidegger, what Levinas describes as the said, is really at the ontic rather than the ontological level and that he too seeks something more primordial in our openness to being and poetic thinking. In a sense, the 'letting be' of his later philosophy could itself be described as a witnessing or a welcoming—although not specifically of the Other embodied in the approach of another person. As Derrida suggests in 'Violence and Metaphysics': 'For Levinas, as for Heidegger, language would be at once a coming forth and a holding back (reserve), enlightenment and obscurity; and for both, dissimulation would be a conceptual gesture. But for Levinas, the concept is on the plane of Being; for Heidegger it is on the plane of ontic determination', p149.
[49]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p195

> Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates,
> to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a forward
> preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the
> commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very
> signifyingness of signification.[50]

That is, the content of language already presupposes a relation with the Other. To

speak is both to recognise the Other and to expose oneself to the Other.

> It is a risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of
> inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas and
> vulnerability.[51]

Thus, the ontological content of the said is conditioned by the social significance of

the saying. The ethical performativity of language as uncovering in sincerity is in a

sense more fundamental than its role in bringing the truth of being to light. Put

differently, the meaning of meaning is not primarily in the semantic sense of an

utterance but in its welcoming or witnessing of the Other. Furthermore, the question

of meaning in its semantic sense could not arise for Levinas if the Other did not

single me out and demand a response. That is, the linguistic distinctions we make

between the performative, declarative, denotative, etc. at the level of the said, are

only made possible by the fundamentally performative nature and ethical

significance of language at the level of the saying, which these distinctions threaten

to occlude but cannot efface. This means that any ontological statement whatsoever

has ethical significance. The sincerity, which in the said becomes manifest in

propositions and notions of the truth, is always directed towards and has implications

for an other. This is especially the case if one doesn't recognise that one's

understanding of 'what is' is already an ethical engagement. However, even if one

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[50]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p5
[51]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p48

does, such as in Levinas, the passage or trace from the saying to the said still is an act of originary violence.

> Language permits us to utter, be it at the price of betrayal, this outside of being, this ex-ception to being, as though being's other were an event of being.[52]

Ontology and ethics thus come together in language for Levinas. However, with language we have already moved beyond the face-to-face of proximity. Once we move beyond the originary response of 'here I am' we have entered the realm of discourse and ontology. Of course, one might immediately wonder why such a move and betrayal are necessary. Why is it that we have to make the passage from the saying to the said? Could not we simply live a pure ethical existence by remaining in the mute silence of responsibility for the Other? Levinas's answer to this revolves around the entrance of the third person and the question of justice. Thus, the problem of how the heteronomous experience can retain its trace in ontology is also a problem for politics and community. Put differently, if as we have argued, the Levinasian 'with' necessarily involves with-being, then abstract ethical proximity also involves concrete community—or the 'with' also involves *mitsein*. To begin to understand how with-being is not only an ethico-ontological space but also a political one, let us consider Levinas's entrance of the third and the relationship between ethics and justice.

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[52]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p6

7.4 Two's epiphany, three's justice

Levinas recognises that the pure relationship between the One and the Other cannot exist because a third party interrupts and puts this pure relationship itself into question.

> If proximity ordered to me only the other alone, there would not have been any problem, in even the most general sense of the term. A question would not have been born, nor consciousness, nor self-consciousness. The responsibility for the other is an immediate antecedent to questions, it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters.[53]

The entrance of this third party is nothing less than the entrance of another Other who is also an Other for the original Other. The One finds itself facing two demands for infinite responsibility which it cannot meet. How can one choose between two incomensurable demands?

I am reminded of the dilemma faced by Paris in having to judge which of three incomparable Greek Goddesses: Hera; Athena; and Aphrodite; was the fairest and would receive the golden apple—the apple having been left by Eris, the Goddess of Strife at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis to sow discord because she was not invited. In at least one version of this myth, when the Goddesses first approached Paris for his judgement, he was blinded by the encounter until they cloaked themselves in cloud so he was able to look at them and cast his ill-fated judgement that led to the Trojan war.

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[53]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p157

Similarly, the meaning of the third is not ethics but justice. The third demands that

the One justifies its relation to the Other. But for the One to justify its relation to the

Other it must first consider the Other in relation to the third, fourth and so on—it

must compare two or more incomparables. Like the Goddesses, the absolute

Otherness of these Others, must be cloaked or reduced to the common measure of

immanence in the said, before a choice can be made and justified.[54] Paradoxically,

we again see that a certain violence is necessary in the passage from Levinasian

ethics to justice. But note this violence can never be as totalitarian as Levinas's

polemic often insists and Levinas realises as much.

> The plot of the saying that is absorbed in the said is not exhausted in
> this manifestation. It imprints its trace on the thematization itself
> which hesitates between, on the one hand, structuration, order of a
> configuration of entities, world and history for historiographers, and
> on the other hand, the order of non-nominalised apophansis of the
> other, in which the said remains a proposition, a proposition made to
> a neighbour, a signifyingness dealt to the other. Being, the verb of a
> proposition, is, to be sure, a theme, but it makes essence resound
> without entirely deadening the echo of the saying which bears it and
> brings it to light.[55]

The Other, exteriority, cannot be killed, it can only ever be abused and violated. This

has the ring of Heidegger's danger and saving grace, as he too saw the price of

certain modes of manifestation and representational truth as a leading away from the

event of being—a covering over. But this covering over could never be complete

even in the case of the calculative thinking of technology, because for Heidegger, it

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[54]Note it is somewhat unclear what would count as 'good' justification in Levinasian terms. While
Levinas derives some sense of equality from the entrance of the third it is unclear exactly how this
equality might become immanent in a community. This becomes particularly evident as Levinas
develops his notion of exceptional politics which we will explore shortly. That is, justice seems to be
tied to the possibility of disruption rather than instantiation. This is of course consistent with
Levinas's project of understanding the possibility of ethics (and justice) rather than developing a
normative position as previously discussed.
[55]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p47

is Da-sein's relationship with being that is foundational. Likewise with Levinas, the

said can never destroy the saying because in a sense the saying makes possible and is

logically prior to the said. Note, however, if this is the case, the ontology, logic,

consciousness and presence that are inherent in the said can also never be completely

totalitarian—because the passage or trace is always available as a permanent

possibility of rupture, there is at least a minimal openness to the Other. That is, in the

said, we can always encounter the angelic prophetic messenger even if not the

infinity of God, and it is this messenger that can lead us beyond the said and back in

the direction to God.[56]

Although, because the saying and the said always occur together this desire must be

expressed as an unsaying, that of course, must always be said. Derrida captures this

point quite well in 'At this very moment in this work here I am' when considering

the question of how Levinas's work works:

> Musn't one reverse the question, at least in appearance, and ask
> oneself if that language is not of itself unbound and hence open to
> the wholly other, to its own beyond, in such a way that it is less a
> matter of exceeding that language than of treating it otherwise with
> its own possibilities. Treating it otherwise, in other words to
> calculate the transaction, negotiate the compromise that would leave
> the non-negotiable in tact and to do this in such a way as to make

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[56]Levinas often describes the encounter with the Other as an encounter with the trace of God, but it must be remembered that Levinas is not talking about God as a being. That is, as he states in *God, Death and Time*. Translated by Bettina Bergo, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, p137; and also in 'God and Philosophy' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p131; he wants to think God outside of onto-theology on the basis of an Otherwise than being. In this context, God is the infinite transcendence of the absolutely Other prior even to the alterity of the Other and the ethical bond. In this sense God seems to be the abstract formal indicator of Alterity or the infinite that traumatically enters finitude as subjectivity to the neighbour, desire and responsibility. Consistent with Jewish thinking God's name is unpronounceable. As Jill Robbins expresses it in 'Tracing Responsibility in Levinas's Ethical Thought' in *Ethics as First Philosophy*. New York, London: Routledge, 1995, p182; 'the nonmanifestation of the revelation of God can be understood otherwise, as a differential constitution of (textual) traces, as the other-trace. Then perhaps we can begin to think God, in Levinas's work, as the name – unpronounceable if you like – for the difficult way in which we are responsible to traces.' This question of the trace from abstract Alterity to concrete alterity is one I will explore further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

the fault, which consists in inscribing the wholly other within the empire of the same, alter the same enough to absolve itself from itself.[57]

This reversal seems to suggest that rather than too quickly restricting the role and essence of language to being and logos, that we should consider that other possibilities may be a part of language including openness to the Other. This works both for and against Levinas's position. On the one hand, it resolves the paradox that Levinas seemingly engages in being to present an otherwise than being, as both dimensions are a part of language. On the other hand, it also calls into question Levinas's polemic against the violence of the said and ontology. Could it be that we could engage in language and the said in such a way that the same does not necessarily return to the same? If so, then Levinas's allergy to Heideggerian ontology would indeed seem to be an over-reaction.

However, Levinas is perhaps warranted in suggesting that with the entrance of the third, the said must have regard to the originary ethical relationship if it seeks justice. Indeed, Levinas thinks it is the responsibility of philosophy itself to reduce the necessary betrayal of ontology and move us closer to the good.

> Everything is shown by indeed betraying its meaning, but philosophy is called upon to reduce that betrayal, by an abuse that justifies proximity itself in which the infinite comes to pass.[58]

> Responsibility for the others or communication is the adventure that bears all the discourse of science and philosophy. Thus this responsibility would be the very rationality of reason or its universality, a rationality of peace.[59]

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[57]Derrida, J 'At this very moment in this work here I am' in *Re-Reading Levinas.*
[58]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p156
[59]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p160

Put differently, it is the job of the philosopher to remember that the 'and' contains a violence that needs to be constantly unsaid in favour of the 'with' of proximity. But how does the philosopher do justice to the 'with' in the face of the third and the political order of the City? To answer this question we must critically examine what happens when the other Others enter Levinas's philosophy.

7.5 The ethics of justice

For Levinas the proximity to the Other is the primary ethical relationship. But in its pure form, I have argued that it is not enough for an ethics. In its pure form it is a relationship between a singularity and infinity in which the extreme passivity of this singularity and its response to this infinity is little more than instinct or blind worship. Indeed, because Levinas insists this encounter is beyond phenomenology and ontology one can hardly call it an encounter at all. Certainly, in its pure form, the face to face, despite the very corporeal and provocative tropes that Levinas uses such as vulnerability, the orphan, the widow, the caress, etc. is as yet an in-human encounter—it is an encounter between God and a mindless speck singled out from the dust. This speck, however, is not aware that it has been singled out, nor does it feel the pull of the response it is called to make, because it is oblivious to a God whose alterity is not yet otherworldly. As Levinas suggests, if there were only the one and the Other there would be no problem. There would be no problem because there would be no world, no humans and no 'with' or conjunction as such. Even Levinas's philosophy that bears witness to this transcendental encounter would not be possible.

This is why I have argued that Levinasian ethics needs ontology to even get off the ground. But in a sense what is at stake here is even greater. What is at stake is the relationship between God and earth. Or put differently, the relationship between an abstract encounter with the Other and the corporeal encounter with other human beings. By insisting that the encounter with the Other is 'Otherwise than Being', Levinas is left with the problem of how to overcome a duality that arises from the distinction between standing in awe of God and recognising the hunger of another person and offering them food. Alphonso Lingus is a philosopher who is very concerned about this problem which he poses as a question in 'Objectivity and Justice: A critique of Emmanuel Levinas' explanation'; 'But does not this alterity *(the alterity of God)*, which should designate the force of demand in the appeal of the one who faces, efface the face in which it is located?'.[60] Overcoming this duality is extremely important to Levinas because based on his Jewish faith and studies of the Talmud, ethics is an earthly problem for humans. That is, a large part of the spiritual life is the moral life as it is lived out by humans in the world.[61]

> The justice rendered to the Other, my neighbour, gives me an
> unsurpassable proximity to God. It is as intimate as the prayer and
> the liturgy which, without justice, are nothing... For Love itself
> demands justice, and my relation to my neighbour cannot remain
> outside the lines which this neighbour maintains with various third
> parties. The third party is also my neighbour.[62]

Indeed as Simon Critchley points out in his article 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them' the core of Levinas's critique of Martin Buber is 'that the abstraction of the ethical relation must be incarnated in the

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[60]Lingis, A 'Objectivity and Justice: A critique of Emmanuel Levinas' explanation' in *Continental Philosophical Review* 32, 1999, p401
[61]See Levinas's 'Messianic texts' in *Difficult Freedom: Essays in Judaism* for a discussion on the Spiritual Life and its relationship to secular life.
[62]Levinas, E 'A Religion for Adults' in *Difficult Freedom*, p18

life of the political realm'.[63] But how are we to understand the incarnation of God

into our neighbour? And further how is it that the love of the dyad, the ethical,

demands the justice of the third party? I find myself in agreement with Critchley here

that this passage from ethics to politics is 'perhaps the critical point or even the

Achilles' heel' of Levinas's work.[64] First let us provide a sketch of Levinas's

understanding of this critical point which is brought about by the entrance of the

third, or the recognition of other Others.

7.5.1 The other Others

On Levinas's account, the pure ethical relationship cannot occur because the

relationship with the Other is not unique.

> Everything is modified once the 'everyone' is affirmed. There the
> other is not unique. This value of holiness – and this upsurge of
> compassion – cannot exclude or ignore the relation with others in
> the simultaneity of everyone. There is the problem of choice.[65]

Note however, that while Levinas suggests 'everything is modified' this is somewhat

misleading because as he acknowledges the pure ethical encounter, which much of

his philosophy gestures towards at great length, does not occur.[66] What in fact needs

modification is Levinas's description of the ethical relation as it becomes incarnated

in corporeal human relations. And in fact, Levinas at times seems to conflate two

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[63]Critchley, S 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them' in *Political Theory* 32(2), April 2004, p2
[64]Critchley, S 'Five Problems...' in *Political Theory*, p2
[65]Levinas, E 'Interview with Francois Poirie' in *Is it Righteous to Be*, p51
[66]At one level this might be seen as an admission that Heidegger was right. That is, Da-sein is always a being-in-the-world. While Levinas's analysis might give us a different perspective on this being-in-the-world and point us beyond world, the ubiquity of the third also points to the ubiquity and unavoidability of ontology as a part of the human condition.

transitions: that from the abstract Other to the neighbour—from the value of holiness

to the upsurge of compassion; and that of the singular neighbour to the

neighbourhood—from the one to the everyone. Or if not a conflation, the fact of the

third party is significant in two ways. Firstly, it exposes the one and the Other,

proximity and the third party itself:

> Ordering, appearing, phenomenality, being are produced in
> signification, in proximity, starting with the third party. The
> apparition of the third party is the very origin of appearing, that is,
> the very origin of origin.[67]

And secondly, it confronts the newly born consciousness that has taken up a place in

the world with the problem of choice, as the 'I' weighs up between two uniques and

reduces an un-assumable responsibility into a finite action which nevertheless does

not detract from this open-ended responsibility.

> Concretely the situation is much more complex, because I never
> deal with only one person; I am always dealing with a multitude of
> persons, and consequently, these relations between persons and the
> context of the situation have to be taken into account. That is what
> limits, not my responsibility, but my action, modifying the
> modalities of my obligations.[68]

Thus, the third of necessity requires me to compare two or more incomparables and

judge between them. Furthermore, this judgement, if tempered by Levinasian ethics,

is not a private decisionism, but requires justification before the others. It is a matter

of public justice rather than private preference—a matter of disinterested being-for-

the-others rather than self-interested being-for-itself. As a matter of public justice it

is also the birth of politics. Though the advent of justice and politics brings with it an

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[67]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p160
[68]Levinas, E 'Interview with Francois Poirie' in *Is it Righteous to Be*, p55

inherent reductive violence, it is a violence ideally tempered by the trace of the

Other.

> The extraordinary commitment of the other to the third party calls
> for control, a search for justice, society and the state, comparison
> and possession, thought and science, commerce and philosophy,
> and outside of anarchy, the search for principle. Philosophy is this
> measure brought to the infinity of the being-for-the-other of
> proximity, and is like the wisdom of love.[69]

Of course, there is always the danger that the violence inherent in the search for

principle and *arche* might take priority or overwhelm the trace for a particular ego

threatening a totalitarianism of the same, but as we have already discussed this

totalitarianism can never be the last word for Levinas because of the omnipresence of

the Other which always threatens to interrupt the totality and which can never be

murdered even through the act of genocide. Thus:

> I think that the universality of the law in the state – all this violence
> done to the particular – is not license pure and simple, because as
> long as the State remains liberal its law is not yet completed and can
> always be more just than its actual justice. Hence a consciousness,
> if you will, that the justice on which the State is founded is, at this
> moment, still an imperfect justice...To soften this justice, to listen
> to this personal appeal, is each person's role. It is in that sense that
> one has to speak of a return to charity and mercy.[70]

Levinas captures this nicely in his recollection of a Rabbis saying 'before the verdict,

no face; but once the judgement is pronounced, he looks at his face'.[71] One can see in

our society where this has not applied, with the blind application of rules and laws

e.g. in the principle of 'three strikes and you're out' where what is taken away is the

judges capacity to look at the face after the verdict and before sentencing; or consider

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[69]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p161
[70]Levinas, E 'Interview with Francois Poirie' in *Is it Righteous to Be*, p68
[71]Levinas, E 'Interview with Francois Poirie' in *Is it Righteous to Be*, p69

drug laws in Indonesia and Singapore resulting automatically in life sentences and death penalties (indeed capital punishment in general could only be a sentence applied by a system that ignores the Levinasian imperative 'thou shalt not kill'). Often in attempting to make our systems fool-proof we do not allow for the exception (indeed we try to cover all contingencies). However, relying on the system is an abrogation of our responsibility in Levinasian terms; 'Once the State is created, it has its own proper reality. One must then be able to stop it when the anonymousness of the law suppresses charity.'[72] This intervention is the recognition that the universal and justice are not ends in themselves but are driven by the being-for-others that is evident in the trace. Indeed, for Levinas, the legitimacy of the State can only be grounded in our ethical relation to the Other, as Zygmunt Bauman also argues: 'The State one may say, is justifiable only as a vehicle or instrument of ethics'.[73] Furthermore, the truth of justice in this sense can never become immanent but is rather the fact of a justice to come, as any immanent manifestation of justice in terms of laws and rights is interrupted by the call of the Other.

The entrance of the third then shifts us from a consideration of the 'with' of illeity to the realm of *mitsein* and politics. The question that arises is: what is Levinas's account of the political and does it adequately account for the plurality of *mitsein*? This will be the question that guides the last few sections of this chapter and that will ultimately lead us into the work of Jean-Luc Nancy.

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[72]Levinas, E 'Interview with Salamon Malka' in *Is it Righteous to be?*, p100
[73]Bauman, Z 'The World Inhospitable to Levinas' in *Philosophy Today* 43(2), Summer 1999, p156

7.6 An exceptional politics

This first question which is put to the ethical subject by the third, the question of

justice, is also the site of Levinasian politics and community.

> Synchronisation is the act of consciousness which, through
> representation and the said, institutes 'with the help of god', the
> original locus of justice, a terrain common to me and the others
> where I am counted among them, that is, where subjectivity is a
> citizen with all the duties and rights measured and measurable
> which the equilibrated ego involves, or equilibrating itself by the
> concourse of duties and the concurrence of rights.[74]

While this site may have similar concepts to other modern notions of the political

such as citizenship, duty, rights and equality, because of the Levinasian pre-condition

'with the help from god' these concepts take on a very different meaning. These

concepts so familiar to Western liberalism need to be rethought and re-experienced

not on the metaphysical foundation of a sovereign subject grounded in its own

freedom and transcendence, but on a subjectivity which is directed towards the

transcendence in the Other in a being-for-others.[75] In short, while the political

philosophical tradition and liberalism emerging from thinkers such as Hobbes,

Rousseau, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill place freedom and equality before

fraternity and responsibility, Levinas reverses the order placing fraternity and

responsibility before freedom and equality.

> This antecedence of responsibility to freedom would signify the
> Goodness of the Good: the necessity that the Good choose me first

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[74]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p160
[75]Levinas is fond of using the contrast between Ulysses who returns to his homeland and Abraham
who left his country for the unknown and never returned to describe this different kind of subjectivity.

before I can be in a position to choose, that is, welcome its choice. That is my pre-originary susceptiveness.[76]

What is at stake here in this reversal is the fundamental relationship between citizens and between the citizen and the State and its institutions, and consequently the space of the political aimed at the Good of society. A good way to explore the shifts that this reversal entails is to contrast Levinas's account of the birth of the State to that of Thomas Hobbes. This contrast is particularly interesting because both describe the human condition, albeit in very different ways, before the State and give an account of the move from this condition to the State. Although, for both philosophers, this pre-State existence was never really instantiated in its pure form.

Hobbes saw State Sovereignty as the rational solution to the brutishness of the state of nature where humans, while totally free, were under threat from the violence of death and injury as each individually pursued their own instincts and desires. The solution was that each should give up some of their freedom and become as one, subject to the Sovereign and the laws of the State. In return, the Sovereign and the State would enforce order, security and peace through the power invested in them. Peace in this sense involves the subordination of individual differences to the unity and authority of the State. But Levinas suggests:

> It is necessary to ask oneself if peace, instead of being the result of an absorption or disappearance of alterity, would not be the fraternal mode of a proximity to the other (*autrui*), which would not simply be the failure to coincide with the other but would signify the surplus of sociality over every solitude—the surplus of sociality and of love.[77]

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[76]Levinas, E *Otherwise than Being*, p122
[77]Levinas, E 'Peace and Proximity' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p165

Indeed, Levinas suggests that it is this disappearance of alterity in the unity of the State where the others become undifferentiated citizens and others in other States become the enemy that can incite hatred.

> Indeed, it is evident that it is in the knowledge of the other (*autrui*) as a simple individual – individual of a genus class or race – that peace with the other (*autrui*) turns into hatred; it is the approach of the other as 'such and such a type'.[78]

This 'approach of the other as "such and such" a type', contains the possibility of inciting hatred because it prevents a genuine ethical encounter with others in the particular. Instead, it reduces them to a category which reflects the interests of the ego or sovereign. However, Levinas's solution to this in the form of a sociality and 'fraternal mode of a proximity of the other' is still at this stage only a binary relationship between the one and the Other. It is the ethical relation which, as we have discussed, does not exist in this pure form because there are always other Others. It is these other Others, or the third parties, that demand justice sparking the birth of consciousness, ontology and the State.

> The relation with the other and the unique that is peace comes to demand a reason that thematizes, synchronizes and synthesizes, that thinks a world and reflects on being, concepts necessary for the peace of humanity.[79]

In this move, we see a shift from the originary peace of proximity to the Other to the more global peace of humanity. Furthermore, the thematization and manifestation of world and State, despite the violence it entails, is necessary for this peace. Indeed, in the face of the third, we can easily see that to ignore them in favour of the binary

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[78]Levinas, E 'Peace and Proximity' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p166
[79]Levinas, E 'Peace and Proximity' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p168

relationship would itself be a form of violence. In sacrificing itself totally for the singular Other, the ethical subject would be oblivious to the equally valid demands of the other Others. This kind of point comes out very clearly in Lars Von Trier's films *Dancer in the Dark* and *Breaking the Waves*. In both these films, the female leads exhibit a naïve proximity to; in the first case, a son, and in the second, a husband, that eventually leads to their self-sacrifice—in both cases for the health and lives of the Other to whom they are in proximity. While one certainly gets a sense of the kind of substitution that a pure Levinasian ethics might demand, one is also frustrated at the (unnecessary?) violence this seems to inflict on the women and the other Others that they to some extent neglect in this substitution. The shift, then, from the peace of proximity to the peace of humanity, or from Levinasian ethics to Levinasian justice, seems a necessary modification to avoid a certain kind of violence inherent in originary peace. However, unlike the Hobbsian state of nature which one might want to avoid altogether, Levinas thinks we need to retain the trace of this originary peace to mitigate the violence which is also inherent in the ontological that the demand for justice necessitates. In this way, justice involves a tension or contradiction.

> But it's the fundamental contradiction of our situation (and perhaps
> of our condition), which I called Hypocrisy in my book, that both
> the hierarchy taught by Athens and the *abstract* and *slightly*
> anarchical ethical individualism taught by Jerusalem are
> simultaneously necessary in order to suppress violence. Each of
> these principles, left to itself, only furthers the contrary of what it
> wants to secure.[80]

Politics on this account, operates in the space of this contradiction or, to borrow one of Derrida's terms, aporia. This is nicely captured in the term 'prophetic politics' that

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[80]Levinas, E 'Transcendence and Height' in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p24

Howard Caygill uses in his book *Levinas and the Political*[81] and is to be

distinguished from an Athenian politics which when 'left to itself bears a tyranny

within itself'.[82] There are two important aspects to prophetic politics that distinguish

it from Athenian politics. The first is that the creation of institutions and the State

while instantiating a universal should be done in the name of a being-for-others. That

is, they should not be designed from the perspective of egoistic self-interest or from

the perspective of a homogenising 'one size fits all'. The trace back to originary

ethical proximity should not be lost in an attempt to manifest a universal and

immutable law.[83] Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there needs to be space

for interruption and the exception. That is, it there must be the possibility of

disrupting the *arche* of the State in the name of ethical responsibility which is an

anarchy. Politics, then, is the disruption of State in the name of justice, not only its

creation—a disruption that is inspired by God. This is in sharp contrast to a view of

politics and the State as the solution to the violence in the state of nature such as in

Hobbes. Levinas in 'God and Onto-theology' makes the following contrast:

> What difference is there between institutions arising from a
> limitation of violence from those arising from a limitation of
> responsibility?...at least one, in the case of the latter, one can revolt
> against institutions in the very name of that which gave birth to
> them.[84]

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[81]Caygill, H *Levinas and the Political*. London: Routledge, 2002. See chapter 4 for Caygill's
exploration of this term.
[82]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p300
[83]In this context it is worth considering the work of Desmond Manderson who attempts to understand
the significance of Levinas's work for the law in his book *Proximity, Levinas, and the Soul of the
Law*. Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006. His central argument is that legal
institutions have traditionally seen contract law as first law and that instead our approach to law
should be reconceptualised giving priority to tort law and in particular the law of negligence and the
duty of care. He suggests following Levinas that 'The duty of care emerges not because we have a
brain (which the law of contract respects), or a body (which the criminal law protects) but because we
have a soul.' p4
[84]Levinas, E *God, Death and Time*, p183

Ultimately, it is the name of the Other that must not be forgotten, and although the third party is the advent of institutions and the law which limit the original un-assumable responsibility of the ethical subject, it is the responsibility of the for-the-other that demands the justice which is the birth of politics and the State. The practical implications of this prophetic politics are readily apparent in Levinas's analysis of human rights discourse.[85] In his analysis, Levinas affirms the notion of human rights but argues for the reform of rights based on our original duty to the Other in the form of the commandment 'thou shalt not kill'. In this way, 'The right of man, absolutely and originally takes on the meaning only in the other, as the right of the other man'.[86] For Levinas then, my duty and obligation to others takes priority over any rights I might wish to claim for myself. Levinasian politics, whether in the mode of creation of the State to institute justice or in the mode of interruption of the violence of the State is always in the name of the Other and not on the basis of egoistic self-interest.

But note a rather peculiar consequence of all this for our understanding of Levinas's own philosophical enterprise. Earlier I drew attention to the fact that Levinas considered his philosophical works as prayers to the Other, us his readers—that is they are ethical in nature. While this might be the case, as linguistic offerings into the world of *mitsein* they also act as interruptions to the violence of the State and are as much a matter of politics as they are ethics. So one can ask the question as to the significance of Levinas's work as political performance and whether by reversing the order of enquiry into Levinas's philosophy, the relationship between politics and

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[85]See Levinas, E 'Prohibition against reputation and the Rights of Man' 1981, 'The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other' 1985, and 'The Rights of the Other Man' 1989.
[86]Levinas, E *Alterity and Transcendence*. Translated by Michael B Smith London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p127

ethics might need to be reconceived. Returning to Simon Critchley's point we might

shed further light on whether Levinas's move from ethics to politics is his Achilles

heel.

7.7 The faces of Janus

From our outline of Levinas's account of the political it should be apparent that his

concept of the political escapes any traditional notion of the political present or

political immanence. Instead, 'the political for Levinas is the unassimilable or the

unforgettable that returns disruptively to insist on the *question* of the political'.[87] In

this way, Levinas's whole philosophy can be interpreted as just such a disruption and

as a political project. This is indeed the interpretation that Howard Caygill proposes

in his book *Levinas and the Political*. In this book he seeks to reverse the usual

modes of analysis and explore how 'the ethical emerges as a fragile response to

political horror'.[88] That Levinas experiences such political horror in the form of 'the

bloody barbarism of National Socialism' is undisputable.[89] Also, as we have seen,

Levinas believes that Western philosophy not only did not prevent this horror but

may have been complicit in bringing it about through its focus on ontology and

logos.[90] Thus, his motivation to respond to both National Socialism and the

prevailing philosophy of the day is also clear. Further, as discussed in the last

chapter, Levinas's early works such as *On Escape, Existents and Existence* and *Time*

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[87]Caygill, H *Levinas and the Political*, p3
[88]Caygill, H *Levinas and the Political*, p2
[89]Levinas, E Prefatory note to 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' in *Critical Enquiry* 17(1), Autumn 1990: 62-71
[90]As discussed philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and particularly Heidegger (and their Greek ancestors) are Levinas's targets here.

and the Other are evidently the first tentative moves of such a response, as Levinas searched for an otherwise than being.

But one might well ask what difference it makes if the argument moves from politics to ethics, or from ethics to politics? Indeed, Levinas himself frequently shifts direction. Often in his early works, or when addressing the notion of freedom, he will start from (take for granted) being or the egoistic subject and explore interruptions— moving from the political to the ethical. At other times, such as the entrance of the third or when exploring the notion of substitution he will start from the ethical and move to the ontological or political.

Two reasons for preferring to start with the ethical are: Levinas's insistence that ethics is first philosophy and the need to first reconceptualise subjectivity, finite freedom and the entrance of the third, before reinventing the space of the political; and also that it is this direction that Levinas himself takes in his more mature works such as *Otherwise than Being*. That is, while it is the response to political horror that leads Levinas to deconstruct the political and philosophical so as to remember the ethical which has been forgotten, the overall political disruption of Levinas's project cannot be completed until the significance of the ethical is traced back to the ontological level. On the other hand, by considering the ethical as a political response we gain a different perspective on some of the philosophical moves that Levinas makes and in particular we cannot, as highlighted by Caygill, ignore Levinas's religious background.

Despite Levinas's insistence that his philosophical and religious works be considered

separately, the religious influence on Levinas's philosophy is a strong one and, as I

will argue, leads to certain tension that haunts his philosophical work and its status as

a political response. At the heart of this tension is a fear that 'the soul's principal

attitude towards the whole of reality and its own destiny' embodied in the philosophy

of Hitlerism, means that 'Christianity itself is threatened in spite of the careful

attentions or Concordats that the Christian churches took advantage of when Hitler's

regime came to power'.[91] Thus, at the same time that Levinas is seeking to escape the

elemental evil of this 'principle attitude', he is also trying to find a place for God,

Judaism and Israel.[92] This leads Levinas to propose a Janus-faced view of man,

where the face of the other is both the face of a particular corporeal neighbour and

the face of the abstract Other with a capital O, in which Levinas finds the infinite

God with a capital G.

> We must ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve an
> authentic dignity for the human subject. Does the subject arrive at
> the human condition prior to assuming responsibility for the other
> man in the act of election that raises him up to this height? This
> election comes from a god – or God – who beholds him in the face
> of the other man, his neighbour, the original 'site' of the
> Revelation.[93]

Note that liberalism for Levinas maintains a secular view of freedom as autonomy,

which is simply the antinomy of the kind of destiny involved in National socialism

and thus also falls short of the spirit of freedom and the revelation that the face of

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[91]Levinas, E 'Reflections on Hitlerism' in *Critical Enquiry*, p64
[92]Note on a generous reading this is Israel and Judaism in their universal forms rather than as historic
entities or institutions. Although it can be argued that Levinas does not adequately distinguish the two,
and he himself has been accused of racism, Zionism and silence on important political issues relating
to the State of Israel. See Caygill's *Levinas and the Political* chapter 5 for a good discussion of this
issue.
[93]Levinas, E 'Reflections on Hitlerism' in *Critical Enquiry*, p63

God exposes.[94] Regardless, this tension between the abstract face and the particular

face of man raises several questions.

The first question is why the two need to be so radically separated. That is, why does

the particular encounter with the infinite in another human being need to shift or be

mediated by an encounter with the absolute alterity of God who is often referred to in

Levinas as another 'ontological' category beyond being and nothingness. Is it not

enough to encounter and find an ethical imperative in the infinite vulnerability of the

other person in their concrete existence? As Alphonso Lingus, following Bernard

Williams, suggests:

> The other who appeals to me with his wants and needs appeals to my
> resources and my action. His appeal is not a demand for reverence for
> the infinition, absoluteness, and abstraction of his alterity. What
> makes it categorically imperative is immediacy and urgency.[95]

Note that this appeal can still evoke a for-the-other that can interrupt the egoism and

ground an ethical subjectivity, but without the need to posit an absolute alterity or

God. Further, this kind of appeal is consistent with the early language that Levinas

uses to describe the face-to-face encounter with the other such as skin, nakedness,

caress and so on.

Another reason to avoid the need for an additional 'ontological' category is to avoid

the trap of anthropocentrism. The authentic dignity of the human for Levinas is both

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[94]See Levinas, E 'Reflections on Hitlerism' in *Critical Enquiry*
[95]Lingis, A 'Theoretical Paradox and Practical Dilemma' in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 12(1), p27 quoting Bernard Williams from *Ethics at the Limit of Philosophy*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985. Note also that Derrida takes up the ethical importance in immediacy and urgency in his analysis of the decision. See for instance 'Ethics and Politics Today' in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*. Edited and translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

the God within us and our capacity to respond to the revelation of the God in another human being. The entrance of the third reveals that alterity is not just dyadic but plural. That is, God reveals himself in the faces of all humans.

> Human fraternity has then two aspects: it involves individualities whose logical status is not reducible to the status of ultimate differences in a genus, for their singularity consists in referring to itself...On the other hand, it involves the commonness of a father... Monotheism signifies this human kinship, the idea of a human race that refers back to the Other {autrui} in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself and for the Other.[96]

That is, what humans share is their very alterity which as we have mentioned seems to exclude animals and plants.

But perhaps a more serious problem still in this notion of fraternity is the insistence on monotheism. Why is it that these other Others in their faces reveal the same God? By insisting on the abstract commonness of the father in the revelation of 'the God' we would appear to have done a violence to the other Others by subsuming their otherness under a totalising concept and paternal origin. Put differently, despite Levinas's insistence on the singular uniqueness of each other so that they do not fall under a genus, the idea of monotheism risks trumping this insight.[97] Indeed as many philosophers, including Derrida, have suggested, this common paternity and

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[96]Levinas, E *Totality and Infinity*, p214
[97]In his article 'No Exit' in *Research in Phenomenology* 35, 2005: 101-115 Robert Bernasconi suggests that unlike Heidegger who he intimates moves from the concrete to the formal, Levinas is concerned with moving from the formal to the concrete, from transcendence to immanence. However, by tracing the alterity of the concrete other back to the holy and an Other with a capital O, Levinas's philosophy perhaps in the end retains too much formality and abstraction. In this way, he risks losing the 'foothold in Being' that Bernasconi states Levinas attempts to retain.

Levinas's exploration of tropes such as filiality, the son and the family threaten to turn the feminine into the Other of Levinas's Other.[98] As Derrida suggests:

> Wholly otherwise said: made secondary by responsibility for the wholly other, sexual difference (and hence He says femininity) is retained, as other, within the economic zone of the same. Included in the same, it is by the same stroke excluded: enclosed within, foreclosed within the immanence of a crypt, incorporated in the Saying which says itself to the wholly other.[99]

By encountering the face of the Other as a trace of an abstract infinite God, who perhaps worse than the neutrality of Da-sein is a He, we have excluded the particularity of sexual difference and performed the kind of totalising violence that Levinas's philosophy is seeking to highlight and avoid.[100] Importantly, this is not simply an issue for sexual difference, all corporeal particularity of the face of the Other is potentially effaced through the gesture towards a universal monotheism. To the extent that Levinas insists on such monotheism he has returned to the logic of 'the One' even if this One takes the form of the Other. Now one way of overcoming this problem might be to shift from a monotheism to an infinite polytheism but this would only be a partial solution. While it might address the problem of the universal effacing the particular, it would not address the problem of the abstract effacing the corporeal.

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[98]See Derrida's 'At this very moment in this work here I am' in *Re-reading Levinas* and his *Politics of Friendship*. Translated by George Collins, London; New York: Verso, 1997. This point is also referred to in 'No Exit' where Bernasconi notes that 'He did not offer at this time a clear answer to the objection that the idea of fecundity would lead to a philosophy of kinship, and thus remain too close to Nazism's idea of a society based on consanguinity'; p108.

[99]Derrida, J 'At this very moment in this work here I am' in *Re-reading Levinas*, p43

[100]Although note some have made the same kinds of criticisms of neutral Da-sein in relation to sexual difference.

This logic of the abstract Other (or Others if we go down the polytheism path) is clearly in tension with that element of Levinas's Judaism which, as we have mentioned, would like to invoke an earthly ethics. It is also in tension with the fact that the revelation of God is not direct but through the corporeal nakedness and need of the face of the Other.

> A Thou is inserted between the I and the absolute He. It is not histories present that is the enigmatic interval of a humiliated and transcendent God, but the face of the Other. And we will then understand the unusual meaning – or the meaning that becomes unusual and surprising again as soon as we forget the murmur of our sermons – we will understand the amazing meaning of Jeremiah 22:16: 'He judged the cause of the poor and needy;…Was not this to know me? Saith the Lord'.[101]

Two interesting points emerge from this Jeremiah quotation which are worth noting. The first is the equation of 'the cause of the poor and needy' with knowledge of 'the Lord'. It seems from the structure and context of the statement that knowing God simply is to be affected by the poor and humble. There is no necessity in doing what is right and just, to recognise God (or Gods) as a separate ontological category. The second, is that recognising 'the poor and needy' and judging their 'cause' requires the ontological. Not in the sense of a new ontological category, but in terms of existing in a world. To be sure, this existence must include a being-for-others that disrupts egoistic self interest, but to know God in this way as a minimum includes being as a necessary condition, and it is not clear that we must go beyond this way of being to find God. I would suggest that any such insistence on an absolute alterity would, quoting Levinas, go beyond philosophy into theology.

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[101]Levinas, E 'A Man-God?' in *On Thinking of the Other: Entres Nous.* Translated by Michael B Smith and Barbara Harshav, London: The Athlone Press, 1998, p58

> Hence I ask myself to what extent the new categories we have just
> described are philosophical. I am certain that this extent will be
> judged insufficient by the believing Christian. But it may not be a
> waste of time to show the points beyond which nothing can replace
> religion.[102]

It seems to me that Levinas, despite his important philosophical insights, has failed to

notice when he has passed over these points and supplemented his philosophy

unnecessarily with his religious beliefs. In doing so he has reintroduced a more

complex and ambiguous version of the 'and' conjunction in his very attempt to avoid

conjunction altogether.

The problems we have raised with Levinas above mainly stem from his insistence

that our encounter with alterity must occur outside of being. The duality he

establishes from the outset creates difficulties that Levinas attempts to overcome but

that we have argued he does not. The challenge then in resolving these difficulties, is

to develop an understanding of with-being that maintains the kind of alterity and

ethical impetus that Levinas's philosophy explores, without the condemnation of

ontology and the transcendental overtones that the Other as God contains.

Furthermore, this alterity must be explored on the basis of the plural right from the

beginning rather than having the plural mediated by the dyadic.

One of the key philosophers in recent times who offers us much in this direction is

Jean-Luc Nancy through his exploration of being singular plural. As he puts it:

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[102]Levinas, E 'A Man-God?' in *On Thinking of the Other: Entres Nous*, p54

It is necessary, then, to understand the theme of the 'image of God' and/or the 'trace of God' not according to the logic of a secondary imitation, but according to this other logic where 'God' is itself the singular appearance or the image of the trace, or the disposition of its exposition: place as divine place, the divine as strictly local.[103]

That is the challenge that we will undertake in the next chapter of this thesis.

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[103]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p17

Chapter 8 – Thinking the Plurality of the 'with'

> The culture that's coming to an end is one that thought the coherence of the world, its congruence, or its conformity with an order, a plan, a principle, or an end (immanent, transcendent, both immanent *and* transcendent). The culture in the offing has the job of co-existence, a co-existence that's bound neither to conformity nor accomplishing itself. It consists in co-presence alone. And co-presence doesn't just refer to itself; it refers to everyone and to no-one, the circulation of a sense that nothing either retains or saturates, a circulation found in the movement between places and beings, between all places and all beings, the infinite circulation of a sense that will end up having its entire sense in this *with*.
>
> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Changing of the World*[1]

What does it mean to co-exist? How are we to make sense of the *with* of this co-existence? Will a different engagement with these kinds of questions open up a new culture that can move beyond the 'and' ontology we have described in this thesis and its 'totalitarian' demand for unity, congruence, conformity, and order that has to a great extent dominated Western philosophy and the Western way of life? So far, with the help of Heidegger and Levinas, we have moved some distance down the path of challenging the metaphysical assumptions that reduce the understanding of 'co' of co-existence to an 'and' and have begun to explore a number of different senses of the 'with' that take us beyond this understanding. In doing so, we have called into question the natural attitude and the traditional understandings of concepts such as world, presence, and even the human itself. Of crucial importance has been a paradigm shift, that is clearly evident in Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world and *mitsein*, from an approach that tends to fix entities in a world and then as a supplement considers the relations between such entities, to an approach that places movement and relationality at the centre of both world and human existence. In the case of Heidegger, I have argued that despite the radical shifts that he makes, his

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[1]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*. Edited by Simon Sparks, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003, p306

philosophy, particularly his early philosophy, is still centred too much on an individuated Da-sein and the unity of world as a whole, and does not explore sufficiently the plurality of existence and the ethical and political dimensions of *mitsein*.

Levinas, although initially drawn to Heidegger's philosophy, seeks to leave the climate of Heidegger because he recognises there is an ethical lacuna in Heidegger's thinking. While his characterisation of Heidegger's philosophy is at times uncharitable, and the totalitarian critique of Heidegger's enterprise somewhat overstated, Levinas's philosophy of alterity adds considerable insight to the sense of the 'with'. In particular, he places a greater emphasis on our proximity to other human beings and the priority of this illeity in terms of ethics and openness, over our Heideggerian relation to ontology and truth. What I have argued is that priority cannot be given to either Heideggerian ontology or Levinasian ethics, but that both are necessary dimensions of with-being.

In this chapter, I would like to expand on this analysis of with-being in terms of ontology and ethics through a consideration of community and politics. This consideration will take as its starting point the recognition that Levinas himself makes, that the pure face-to-face ethical relationship does not exist because there is always a third term. That is, just as we needed to challenge the Oneness or unity of Heidegger, so too do we need to challenge the binary ethics of Levinas in light of the fact of the other Others. Like Heidegger's treatment of *mitsein*, Levinas's account of plurality through his introduction of the third, tends to be something of an after thought and is very underdeveloped. More serious still, Levinas's account of the

third raises serious questions about his ethics and its relationship to justice and politics. In light of these difficulties, I will argue that, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, the 'with' must be rethought from the beginning on the basis of its singular plurality. This rethinking will both retain the positive aspects of the Heideggerian and Levinasian insights while introducing a third radical shift in our understanding of the 'with' that will take us beyond any conjunctive account of the 'with' to a 'with to come'.

I begin by introducing Nancy's being singular plural and suggest how this resolves tensions we have uncovered in Heidegger and Levinas. Having established being singular plural as the ontological sense of the 'with', I then examine the implications of this for the notions of community, politics and ethics. I shall conclude this thesis with some further speculation on with-being as the 'with to come'.

8.1 Being singular plural

Let us reconsider our progress in engaging in the question of the 'with' so far, to see what is at stake in the final ontological shift we will consider—being singular plural. You will recall that this thesis has been concerned with challenging the traditional metaphysical assumptions of the natural attitude that reduces the 'with' to an 'and', or put differently builds on relationality and existence as an afterthought to the totality of entities and essences that make up the world. This 'and', of course, has always been a problem for philosophy that has manifested itself in many forms but most conspicuously in the form of duality and a whole range of dichotomies: subject/object, internal/external, mind/body and so on. The keynote of these

manifestations being what we have called the epistemological gap and its attendant

scepticism. The problem might be put this way: if we start from a series of self

contained and sufficient Ones how can they encounter one another without

compromising their absolute Oneness?[2] The answer we have suggested is not to look

for the solution in terms of an 'and' which relies on an underlying shared essence or

substance (which simply recreates Oneness at a different level), or a mediating set of

filters or laws of contact (which like Zeno's Achilles approaches but never catches

the Tortoise), but to challenge the atomistic starting position. That is, there never is a

pure One, rather the One is always open to others. We should thus, as Nancy

suggests, rethink fundamental ontology giving priority to exteriority and the 'with' in

a way that avoids a reduction to the 'and'. The outcome of this rethinking, however,

is anticipated to be more than of academic interest. Insofar as the natural attitude

limits our possibilities for with-being and ignores the ethical and political

significance of relationality, its deconstruction is itself a political act that challenges

those limits, and demands a reconsideration of sovereign subjectivity, freedom,

responsibility, language, truth, liberalism, democracy, community and so on.

Heidegger gives us the first moves in such a deconstruction. Through his

reconceptualisation of the human as Da-sein, Heidegger highlights the temporal and

ontological way of being of Da-sein that exposes being-in-the-world and its

contingency. In doing so, he re-establishes the link between essence and existence in

a way that challenges a humanism that represents 'man as subjectivity and definite

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[2]In his short piece 'Of the One, of Hierarchy' in *Cultural Critique* 57, 2004: 108-110, Jean-Luc Nancy
draws attention to how this uncompromising logic of the one is playing out on the international stage
in the clash between the United States of America and Islamic extremists; 'The one and the other God
are two opposed figures of the same One, when this Oneness is understood as absolute Presence,
consistent in and of itself, like the invisible point (for a point by definition is invisible) of the summit
of a pyramid, whose essence this summit resumes and absorbs.', p109

substance, qualifiable, whose destination and whose excellence are clearly determined and present'.[3] No longer grounded in freedom (as autonomy) and rationality, or able to transcend the world to gain an Archimedean perspective, Da-sein as there-being is always engaged in a web of worldly relations. Even originary thinking in this context, is not *theoria* or *techne* but action par excellence, where action is an engagement with truth as *aletheia*. In re-opening the ontological question as he does, we can already see that the answer to the question 'what is' will not be some objectively verifiable eternal truth or Platonic idea which human beings have some neutral access to, but will emerge from a web of contingent relations open to hermeneutic revision through further engagement with the world. Of course this implies that any answer to the question 'what is' will also have ethical and political implications because the answer both emerges from and frames the very relations to which it is a response. This is a point that Heidegger himself does not explore and is an important lacuna in his understanding of with-being.

Levinas, as we have seen, is keen to take up this lacuna in Heidegger's work. However, for Levinas, this gap is not something that can be filled in as a completion of Heidegger's work, but exposes a fatal flaw in his philosophy of being which motivates us to leave the climate of Heidegger and ontology. Put simply, our relationship with other people cannot be reduced to or mediated by truth, even if that truth is Heidegger's reclamation of truth as the Greek *aletheia*. Instead truth and the ontological way of being of Da-sein is a response to the ethical call of the Other in the form of justice, even if this justice itself contains a violence that threatens to drown out the call. Of central concern in Levinas's philosophy, is this proximity to

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[3]Nancy, J 'Interview: the Future of Philosophy' in *Jean-Luc Nancy and The Future of Philosophy*. BC Hutchens, Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2005, p162

the Other and the grounding of an unique ethical self on the basis of being singled

out to respond to the alterity of the Other. In short he places responsibility before

freedom (in its traditional sense). But as we have argued, while Levinas's approach

recognises the ethical dimension of the 'with' in the context of human plurality, his

emphasis on a radical alterity and an otherwise than being manifest in an onto-

theology leads to several difficulties. Not the least of these is the insistence on a

monotheism that finds the trace of a transcendent God in being via the Janus face of

the neighbour, as we discussed in the last chapter. The crux of the problem is a

modified version of the 'and' in the form of a radical dualism and a reprioritisation of

the abstract and infinite Other over the finite One and the violence this entails. This

is a violence that carries over into the ambiguous relationship between Levinasian

ethics and politics with the entrance of the third. In this sense, Levinas too, despite

his contribution to the thinking of alterity and difference, fails to give us an adequate

account of with-being in terms of the worldly plurality of community, politics and

mitsein.

What is at stake in thinking with-being in terms of being singular plural is thus to

preserve the positive aspects of Heidegger and Levinas's work while at the same

time overcoming the problems as we have presented them. What this entails is

continuing the exploration of the temporal and ontological way of being of Da-sein

that exposes being-in-the-world, while at the same time admitting the ethical

dimension of the 'with' explored by Levinas, and finally exploring the place of the

political that also enters this space of ethico-ontology. In other words, originary

thinking as action involves all three aspects of the 'with': the ontological; the ethical;

and the political; such that no priority can be given to any one of the three. The

question 'what is' implicitly poses the question of with-being; the answer is never simply an objective fact but a relational spacing of ontological, ethical and political significance.

8.1.1 The sense of with-being

The key to exploring this dimension where the ontological, ethical and political come together is a deeper ontological examination of plurality and singularity in a way which thinks both simultaneously rather than prioritising the One, as I have argued both Heidegger and Levinas ultimately do. A philosopher who has made a great contribution in this space is Jean-Luc Nancy.

Nancy's work is marked by a range of influences such as George Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Hegel, Kant and Nietzsche, but none have been more influential than Martin Heidegger. His engagement with this wide range of philosophers is ever present either explicitly or implicitly in his work making it versatile and wide ranging. An important aspect of his work is his concern for the political and he has written many essays in this area. It is in this context that he worked closely with Lacoue-Labarthe on a number of books and projects and in 1980 organised the famous *Les fins de l'homme* conference on Derrida and politics. In this same year Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe set up *The Centre of Philosophical Research of the Political*. The aim of this institution was to rethink the political and particularly to deconstruct the notions of the political that underpin modern democracy. This in turn led Nancy to publish his book *The Inoperative Community* in 1982.

This book, which radically challenges traditional notions of community and redefines the space of the political, greatly enhanced both Nancy's reputation and his notoriety. In many ways, it is this work that first outlines the philosophical themes that Nancy continues to explore in his later work. In particular, he attacks the notion that a unified community can somehow be created as a project. Indeed he contends it is such projects of 'community' that have led to political terror and social violence throughout history. Already in this work, the source of this violence and terror is located in the desire for the unity and totality of a closed immanence which encompasses all difference and plurality. But it was not until 1996 that Nancy published his deeper exploration of the ontological implications of this concern in the original French version of *Being Singular Plural*.

This theme of 'Being Singular Plural' underpins virtually all of Nancy's work. Here Nancy reveals his core project of rethinking ontology as first philosophy but starting with the 'with' and thus doing justice to the plural aspect of existence that he thinks has been ignored by other philosophers including Heidegger. The fundamental ontological claim in this work is that being, singularity, and plurality, can never be thought separately. Any attempt to think one without the others will constantly be intruded upon by the excess that cannot be contained in a single term.

> Being singular plural: in a single stroke, without punctuation, without a mark of equivalence, implication, or sequence. A single, continuous-discontinuous mark tracing out the entirety of the ontological domain…Because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, each designates the co-essence of the others.[4]

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[4]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p37

It is the 'unfolding of this proposition' that Nancy takes as the task of philosophy. It 'is the only thing philosophy has to do'.[5] I think it is important to recognise that this is a fundamental ontological claim about all of being and not only a reprioritisation of *mitsein*—although this fundamental ontological claim also applies to the relationship between Da-sein and *mitsein*. So as not to confuse the two and reduce Nancy's being singular plural to merely of social/political significance, I remind you that I will use the term with-being to refer to the more basic ontological claim and *mitsein* when referring to the with-being of Da-sein in relation to other Da-sein. Indeed, Nancy himself at times uses the term with-being:

> 'With' is the sharing of time-space; it is the at-the-same-time-in-the-
> same-place as itself, in itself, shattered. It is the instant scaling back
> of the principle of identity: Being is at the same time in the same
> place only on the condition of the spacing of an indefinite plurality of
> singularities. Being is *with Being [my italics]*; it does not ever recover
> itself, but it is near to itself, beside itself, in touch with itself, its very
> self, in the paradox of that proximity where distancing and
> strangeness are revealed.[6]

To make this distinction clearer and demonstrate its significance I would like to focus for the rest of this section on Nancy's notion of 'the sense of the world' and Da-sein's place in this sense. This will also give us a good starting point to unpack the claim that being is always singular plural.

At the beginning of his short piece entitled 'The "Sense" of the "World"' in the book of the same name Nancy claims that:

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[5]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p29
[6]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p35

> The word 'world' has no unity of sense other than this one: a world
> (the world, my world, the business world, the Moslem world and so
> on) is always a differential articulation of singularities that make
> sense in articulating themselves, along the edges of their articulation
> (where articulation should be taken at once in the mechanical sense of
> a joint and its play, in the sense of the spoken offering, and in the
> sense of the distribution into distinct articles). A world joins, plays,
> speaks, and shares: this is its sense, which is not different from the
> sense of 'making sense'. [7]

This quote contains several important features of Nancy's ontology that demonstrate

its continuity with and distinction from the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and

Emmanuel Levinas.

The first thing to note is a shift away from any straightforward unity of world such as

in the early Heidegger, or the unity of *Ereignis,* in the later Heidegger, that we have

argued left his philosophy mired to some extent in the One. As Heidegger puts it in

Contributions to Philosophy:

> Oneness makes up beingness. And oneness here means: unifying,
> originary gathering unto sameness of what presences together-
> along-with and of what is constant.[8]

If you recall, world for Heidegger was encountered as a whole in the context of Da-

sein's for-the-sake-of-which that in turn was made possible through the unity of Da-

sein's temporally ecstatic way of being. The spatiality of world in our being-in-the-

world for Heidegger then, is not an external dimension, nor a subjectivist relation of

ideas or mental states, but a web of ontological spatial relations ordered around or

given significance by Da-sein's projected worldly possibilities. Even the later

Heidegger's shift towards Da-sein's more general and historical relationship with

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[7]Nancy, J *The Sense of the World.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p78
[8]Heidegger, M *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning),* p138

being and the description of poetic thinking, letting be and *Ereignis* still contain the traces of a wholeness and homeliness and a tension between Da-sein and being that is evident in the notions of the mystery and the gift. Rather than the kind of ordered whole that the Heideggerian understanding implies, world for Nancy is rather a fractured spacing of singularities.[9] Further this fracturing would take place whether or not Da-sein was a part of the world. The existence of a fractured world is not dependent on Da-sein but rather Da-sein is a fragment of this existence.

> It does not make sense only for, through or in Da-sein...For it is a question of understanding the world not as man's object or field of action, but as the spatio totality of the sense of existence, a totality that is itself existent, even if not in the mode of Da-sein.[10]

As such, Da-sein too (in its singular and plural) is at play in its articulation and contact with other singularities. In this way, difference (or perhaps something akin the Derrida's differance) is the only thing that unifies world. Note that by making Da-sein first and foremost a part of existence and the sense of the world, Nancy avoids any epistemological or ontological gap and the idealist/realist dichotomy that has plagued the tradition, and I have argued, is even evident in Heidegger as the tension of the belonging together of Da-sein and being.

Secondly, this fracturing has a strong sense of materiality about it as singularities flow and shift with the 'texture' of their contact creating new spacings. But it is important to realise that this is not a return to a metaphysics of matter or entities in any straightforward sense. World does not consist of the sum total of pre-existing

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[9]For a good discussion of Heidegger's conception of space and world and Nancy's shift see the chapter on Space in Ian James' *The Fragmentary Demand*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006
[10]Nancy, J *The Sense of the World*, pp55-56

entities but rather the very relational sense that creates the distance between singularities is their basis of coming to presence. Further, this relational sense, following Heidegger's notion of Da-sein as a way of being, is the agonic movement of existence that constantly creates shifting boundaries between the singular and the plural. In his book *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, BC Hutchens distinguishes between the closed immanence of the traditional philosophies of substance where bodies are static and fixed containers for essences, which Nancy like Heidegger before him rejects, and open immanence which he uses to describe the kind of materiality of matter beyond substance and immanence of Nancy's philosophy. Nancy suggests:

> The ontology of being-with can only be materialist, in the sense that 'matter' does not designate a substance or a subject (or an antisubject). But literally designates what is divided of itself...The ontology of being-with is an ontology of bodies, of every body whether they be inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight and so on...Not only does a body go from one 'self' to an 'other', it is *as itself* from the very first; it goes from itself to itself; whether made of stone, wood, plastic, or flesh[11]

However, this account can also be contrasted to Heidegger's. The ontology of with-being for Nancy extends to all bodies not just other Da-sein. In this way, his thinking of with-being moves our relationships with other things in the world beyond the *zu-handendheit, vor-handedheit* and even 'letting-be' of Heidegger. With-being thus situates the corporeality of Da-sein even more fundamentally in the 'there' of the world than Heidegger's account. In this way, Nancy could be seen to overcome the problems and criticisms that Heidegger faced in regard to his neutral disembodied

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[11]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, pp83-84

account of Da-sein levelled by a range of thinkers including Caputo, Sartre, Chanter and, of course, Levinas.[12]

But Nancy is not only concerned with avoiding a closed immanence, he is also concerned with avoiding an unnecessary and logically inconsistent transcendence such as we saw in Levinas and to some extent even Heidegger. Indeed, Nancy suggests in various places that we are in a crisis of sense because, as Nietzsche's arguments for the death of God and post-modern thinking have demonstrated, the sense of the world can never be grounded in something 'outside and higher' than it, whether that be God, Man as the transcendent subject, Science or the Other.[13] This first moment of nihilism for Nancy, rather than posing an intractable problem suggests we are looking for the wrong thing and in the wrong place for sense. Rather:

> Sense belongs to the structure of the world, hollows out therein
> what it would be necessary to name better than by calling it the
> 'transcendence' of 'immanence'—its transimmanence, or more
> simply and strongly, its existence and exposition. The out-of-place
> term of sense can thus be determined neither as a property brought
> from elsewhere into relation with the world, nor as a supplementary
> (and problematic or hypothetical) predicate, nor as an evanescent
> character 'floating somewhere' but as the constitutive of
> 'signifyingness' or 'significance' of the world itself. That is, as the
> constitutive sense of the fact that there is world.[14]

The sense of the world in its material transimmanence thus seeks to avoid the problems of traditional metaphysics as well as the vestiges of this metaphysics that

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[12]See John Caputo's 'The Absence of Monica: Heidegger, Derrida and Augustine's Confessions' in *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*. Edited by Nancy Holland and Patricia Huntington, University Park PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001; or *Demythologising Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*; Tina Chanter's *Time Death and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger;* and Emmanuel Levinas's *Existence and Existents.*
[13]Nancy, J 'Interview: the Future of Philosophy' in *Jean-Luc Nancy and The Future of Philosophy*, p161
[14]Nancy, J *The Sense of the World*, p55

can still be found in Heidegger and Levinas. However, at least two important

questions arise namely: how is Da-sein's relationship to be rethought in terms of the

sense of the world; and how do the social and ethical factor into this new ontology?

To investigate these questions we will take a closer look at this transimmanence and

its expression through singularity and plurality.

8.1.2 Transimmanence, singularity and elliptical sense

From what has already been said it should be clear that Nancy wishes to continue,

even more radically, Heidegger's deconstruction of the sovereign subject and

traditional notions of identity derived from the logic of and-being that I outlined in

chapter 2. To this end, the fundamental ontological fact of being singular plural

contains no mention of a subject, or for that matter, Da-sein. The critical term that

Nancy explores in their place in the first instance is singularity.

Singularity for Nancy needs to be thought across time and space. We have already

seen how the creation and play of the world explodes into the difference and spacing

of bodies not as separate material entities but as a share of the material world in with-

being. However, this sharing, which is the sense of the world, is an open passage

rather than a static presence. In this way, a snap shot of such sharing would reveal

the singular through a temporal singularisation, as one amongst others. But this

temporal 'punctuation' itself needs to be thought in its plurality. It is one instant in an

infinite plurality of instances. Indeed, this temporal plurality is what is often

forgotten in our rush to fix identities and isolate essences. Furthermore, even the

spacing of the singular plural at any moment is only one of an infinite number of

singular plural configurations. This is why Nancy describes the singular as follows:

> In Latin, the term *singuli* already says the plural, because it
> designates the 'one' as belonging to the 'one by one'. The singular
> is primarily each one and, therefore, also with and among all the
> others. The singular is plural. It also undoubtedly offers the property
> of indivisibility, but it is not indivisible the way substance is
> indivisible. It is, instead, indivisible in each instant within the event
> of its singularisation. It is indivisible like any instant is indivisible,
> which is to say that it is infinitely divisible, or punctually
> indivisible.[15]

One cannot overstate the sense of dynamics that Nancy is trying to communicate

with the notion of singular plurality and the description of sense as passage. Each

turning of the world involves the spatio-temporal birth of new singularities which in

their plurality are points of the shared origin of the world. Most importantly for the

deconstruction of the subject:

> At this exact point, then, one becomes most aware of the essence of
> singularity: it is not individuality; it is, each time, the punctuality of
> a 'with' that establishes a certain origin of meaning and connects it
> to an infinity of other possible origins.[16]

It is because of this notion of singularity that Nancy can claim that 'in a certain way,

there never has been, and never will be, a philosophy 'of the subject' in the sense of

the final closure in itself of a for-itself'.[17] Or, to put it in Levinasian terms, the for-

itself, or ego, can never return to the same. Even the same person is made up of

singular differences. There can be no such thing as a unified singular subject. 'It is

never the case that I have met Pierre or Marie per se, but have met him or her in such

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[15]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p32
[16]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p85
[17]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p29

and such a form, in such and such a state, in such and such a mood and so on.'[18] This is a rather radical challenge to traditional notions of human identity which attempt to identify some characteristic or essence in the subject that persists and is continuous through time; or any closed notion of identity for that matter.[19] Such a unified identity simply does not exist on Nancy's account. Note also that it is not only persistence through time that is at issue here but also the unity of a human singularity at any point in time. That is, even at a particular point in time the human singularity is also plurality. Nancy becomes acutely aware of this plurality in himself around the time of his heart transplant and subsequent battle with cancer. As he colourfully puts it in L'Intrus:

> The Intrus exposes me, excessively. It extrudes, it exports, it expropriates: I am the illness and the medical intervention, I am the cancerous cell and the grafted organ, I am the immuno-depressive agents and their palliatives, I am the bits of wire that hold together my sternum, and I am this injection site permanently stitched in below my clavicle, just as I was already these screws in my hip and this plate in my groin. I am becoming like a science fiction android, or the living-dead, as my youngest son one day said to me.[20]

What this experience of the intruder exposes for Nancy is the ontological significance of the fractured 'I' of human identity and the plural dimension of human singularity.[21] The singular then cannot be equated with either the sovereign subject,

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[18]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p8

[19]Brian Garrett in his book *Personal Identity and Self-consciousness*. London, New York: Routledge, 1998; gives a good account of traditional approaches to identity and its close link with and-ontology. As he puts it 'After all something is a F (has the nature of a F) only if it has the identity or survival conditions appropriate to F's. Thus there is a sense in which the nature of something determines, and so is prior to, its identity.', p12. Typically, these survival conditions have been searched for in the body, individual psychology, or the soul in the face of numerous thought experiments and with limited success.

[20]Nancy, J 'L'Intrus' in *The New Centennial Review*, p13

[21]Note importantly that while Nancy was in the midst of rather special circumstances this ontological insight has more general relevance. Indeed, there may be many other more common experiences that reveal the plurality and fragile singularity of human existence such as when I feel torn between two courses of action, when I am a 'different person' around certain individuals or in certain situations, or

or even some other notion of the individual because the singular is always exposed by the plural. It can never be a closed unity—all essences are also co-essences. The important implication of this, which we explore more fully later, is that there never can be a complete totalitarianism of the Same, and the ego never can be concerned totally with its own being. Rather than being caught up in the circular logic of self grounding, the self as singularity is engaged in an elliptical sense which is always the dance of the praxis of with-being.

But perhaps we move too quickly from our discussion of singularity which refers to the spacing of all bodies whether 'animate, inanimate', etc. to subjectivity and the plurality of the human. First, we need to consider the relationship between the sense of the world, which as we have mentioned does not need Da-sein, and the meaning of being, language and truth which emerge from the singular plural with-being of Da-sein.

8.1.2.1 Meaning and sense

When we consider the distinction between meaning and sense in Nancy we would do well to recall Levinas's distinction between the saying and the said. For Levinas, the saying and the said reveal two moments of language. The saying being the movement and impetus of language towards an Other and the said being the determinant content of communication. The former is never present and is always in excess of its reduction to the latter. For Nancy, the relationship between sense and

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perphaps when engaging in some kind of self-defeating behaviour. It is also worth noting that there is a strand of philosophy of the mind spearheaded by Daniel Dennett in his book *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1991 that argues against the notion of a unified 'I' and the Cartesian theatre.

meaning is something similar except that sense could exist without meaning in a way

that the saying could not exist without the said. Also sense is more like the

assumption or precondition for meaning and language which at the same time are a

part of sense. Put differently, sense is not meaning but meaning is sense. This of

course, has great significance for *die Seinsfrage*, or meaning of being, and Da-sein's

relationship to it. It is never the case that first there is being and then it is given

meaning through Da-sein's historical openness to receive its truth, rather Da-

sein/*mitsein*, thought of as the we or singular/plural, are the circulation of meaning.

> But we are meaning in the sense that we are the element in which
> significations can be produced and circulate. The least signification
> just as much as the most elevated (the meaning of 'nail' as well as
> the meaning of 'God') has no meaning in itself and, as a result, is
> what it is and does what it does only insofar as it is communicated,
> even where this communication takes place only between 'me' and
> 'myself'. Meaning is its own communication or its own
> circulation.[22]

The sense of the being singular plural of Da-sein is as the circulation of meaning.

Meaning emerges from the passage of the sense of with-being.

> In other words, in revealing itself as what is at stake in the meaning
> of Being, Dasein has already revealed itself as being-with and
> reveals its self as such before any other explication. The meaning of
> Being is not in play in Da-sein in order to be 'communicated' to
> others; its putting into play *is identically being-with.* Or again:
> *Being is put into play as the 'with' that is absolutely indisputable.*[23]

Meaning, then, is not something that Da-sein brings to the world or experience

(idealism), nor does it find it in the objects of the world (empiricism), rather it is the

signification of the 'with' at play in the world which in turn is an origin of further

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[22]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p2
[23]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p27

articulation of singular/plural boundaries. Because of this structure, meaning contains a tension between its signification of the 'with' or sense, and its semantic content. Meaning operates as a hermeneutics with two moments: interpretation and truth.

8.1.2.2 Sense and truth

Meaning as interpretation presupposes the material sense of the world of which it is a part. The movement of interpretation in a way traces the passage of sense even as it is engaged in the very praxis of making sense—one might think of certain experiments in quantum physics where the observer also affects the result. Thus, meaning never quite captures the sense it is interpreting, it always lags behind. Truth could be considered as the artefact or sediment of this lag. It loses some of the movement of sense and interpretation, in presenting something as 'such and such'. However, as Nancy states, this does not mean we abandon truth or end up in some kind of relative notion of truth.

> That one speaks of sense does not mean that one abandons or
> disdains the category of truth. But one does shift registers. Truth is
> being-such, or more exactly it is the quality of the presentation of
> being such as such. Sense, for its part, is the movement of being-
> toward, or being as coming into presence or again as transitivity, as
> passage to presence—and therewith as passage of presence.[24]

Note that truth on Nancy's account is firmly grounded in sense— *'finitude is the truth of which the infinite is sense'.*[25] Thus, truth is not arbitrary or relativistic, but emerges from with-being. While it is the case that this still means truth is, and should be, open to revision, and we can never gain a view from nowhere of a universal and

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[24]Nancy, J *The Sense of the World*, p12
[25]Nancy, J *The Sense of the World*, p29

eternal truth, Nancy's understanding of truth, consistent with but in a more radical

way than Heidegger's, is a return to a form of realism that some would argue has

been lacking from other French philosophers of the 20th century (such as Derrida,

Blanchot, Lyotard and Foucault). Further, as a part of meaning, truth circulates and

comes to presence through language which speaks the sense of the world.

> Language says what there is of the world, nature, history and
> humanity, and it also speaks for them as well as in view of them, in
> order to lead the one who speaks, the one through whom language
> comes to be and happens ('man'), to all of being, which does not
> speak but which is nevertheless—stone, fish, fiber, dough, crack,
> block and breath.[26]

The speaker has this strange position where they are both of the world and speak for

it. But the speaker is never alone. Each speaker (or better still each time one speaks)

is a singular instance of a plurality of origins (of a world).

Having considered singularity, and the place of the Da-sein in the world in contrast

to Heidegger, I will now turn to Nancy's notion of plurality in contrast to Levinas's

notion of alterity.

8.1.3 Transimmanence and alterity

Although Nancy is strongly influenced by Heidegger, he is well aware of the various

philosophies of the Other which criticise Heidegger's emphasis on oneness and his

failure to adequately account for alterity. Indeed, in a footnote in *Being Singular*

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[26]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p3

Plural in relation to Nancy's own claim that with-being is being's ownmost problem, Nancy suggests:

> Levinas testifies to this problematic in an exemplary way. But what
> he understands as 'otherwise than being' is a matter of
> understanding 'the ownmost of Being', exactly because it is a
> matter of thinking being-with rather than the opposition between the
> other and Being[27]

With this remark in mind it is not surprising that Nancy wants to think alterity in terms of being singular plural and that in doing so he wants to retain many of the insights of Levinas minus, of course, the appeal to a transcendent Other as we have already discussed.[28] But how does he go about this?

You will recall that Levinas's concern with the Western philosophical tradition is its tendency towards a totalitarianism of the same. That is, in an attempt to be at home everywhere, to use a Heideggerian motif, there is a tendency to wage war on the alien by reducing it to something that can be known, identified, given meaning and made finite. In doing so alterity is violently taken possession of by a subject and absorbed into the same. Levinas, of course, thinks Heidegger's philosophy is also a part of the tradition and commits the same violence with his understanding of being and the world.

Levinas's response is not to re-conceive the world but to reject world and being at a fundamental level. This, according to our previous argument, forces him beyond

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[27]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, Footnote 37, p32
[28]Simon Critchley in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*. London: Verso, 1999 argues that Nancy fails to capture the face-to-face relation described by Levinas because he leaves no room for surprise and genuine alterity, however as will become apparent, I disagree with Critchley and will argue that Nancy does do justice to alterity.

world into the transcendental space of God and an onto-theology with its attendant problems. Nancy too, thinks the possibility of totalitarianism and violence in relation to the other is a real one. He would also agree that the tradition, including Heidegger, has been complicit in this violence. Nancy's solution, however, is not to reject world and being but to re-conceive them so that he leaves room for the plural as well as the singular, agony as well as unity, and the infinite as well as the finite. The key philosophical move that Nancy uses to achieve this is to radically disperse the origin of the world into a plurality of singularities. That is, even more radically than Levinas, Nancy brings God as concrete alterity into the world. Not as the infinite demand of the face, or the trace of an abstract Other, but as the fractured origin, at each turning of the world spent in singular plural spacing.

> The other origin is incomparable or inassimilable, not because it is
> simply 'other' but because it is an origin and touch of meaning. Or
> rather the alterity of the other is its originary contiguity with the
> proper origin. You are absolutely strange because the world begins
> *its turn with you.*[29]

It is because of this infinite heterogeneous repetition of turnings as meaning circulates, that incommensurable alterity is exposed i.e. the spacing of any meaning or world is finite at any moment, but the circulation of sense is infinite. The Origin is distributed throughout time and space across singularities. 'Access is refused by the origin's concealing itself in its multiplicity.'[30] In this way, no singular can ever gain complete access to the origin. However, the singular constantly encounters the origin in its own existence and by the touch of other existences. It is simply that it cannot appropriate the origin because the sense of the origin is contained in the infinite

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[29]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p6
[30]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p10

plurality of origins that are the world. Further, this plurality of origins is not simply a multiplication of the same. Each singular of this plurality is unique in its diversity and contingency and this is why it exceeds any particular meaning given to it. The origin is always an excess. However, unlike Levinas there is a commonness to these origins that lies in their uniqueness.

> There is a common measure, which is not some one unique standard applied to everyone and everything. It is the commensurability of incommensurable singularities, the equality of all the origins of the world, which, as origins, are strictly unexchangeable. In this sense, they are perfectly unequal, but they are unexchangeable only in so far as they are equally with one another.[31]

Nancy reconceptualises otherness as equal but unexchangeable. There is neither equality nor an economy of the same here because of this incommensurability but at the same time this alterity does not give rise to the kind of height or asymmetric relationship of Levinas's Other.

Note also that the strangeness introduced by the diversity and contingency of the plural in the case of human singularities can be opposed to the anonymity of *das Man* in Heidegger. The everyday for Heidegger lapses into the undifferentiated—the levelling of possibilities. But for Nancy this ignores a fundamental fact of our everyday existence—the differentiation and plurality that is all around us. There never is a unified *das Man*.

> People are silhouettes that are both imprecise and singularised, faint outlines of voices, patterns of comportment, sketches of affects, not the anonymous chatter of the public domain.[32]

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[31]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p75
[32]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p7

Further, as we have noted, even a singularised person also exists in the singular plural in a way that a person can encounter alterity or strangeness within themselves and is not a unified or self-contained origin in any absolute sense. Again returning to Nancy's article on his transplant called 'L'Intrus' we read Nancy's firsthand phenomenological description of this alterity within his own body.

> The intruder enters by force, through surprise or ruse, in any case
> without the right and without first having been admitted. There
> must be something of the *intrus* in the stranger; otherwise, the
> stranger would lose its strangeness: if he already has the right to
> enter and remain, if he is awaited and received without any part of
> him being unexpected or unwelcome, he is no longer the *intrus*, nor
> is he any longer the stranger. It is thus neither logically acceptable,
> nor ethically admissible, to exclude all intrusion in the coming of
> the stranger, the foreign.[33]

Nancy uses this logic of the intruder to explore the experience of his own heart and body betraying him. His heart, which he might have once subsumed under the unity of his body, is suddenly a stranger to him and intrudes on his health. It is this intrusion which marks the alterity of his heart and which is necessary to maintain the singular plural. Without this agony between singularities, the plural and alterity could easily be forgotten—as they so often are in terms of subjectivity and identity.[34]

Note further, that importantly for Nancy, alterity and singularities as points of origin are not limited to *mitsein* or the human.

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[33]Nancy, J 'L'Intrus' in *The New Centennial Review*, p1
[34]Note Susan Hanson the translator of 'L'Intrus' into English in her article 'The One in the Other' in *The New Centennial Review* 2(3), Fall 2002, suggests that Nancy's style mirrors the phenomenology of the intruder 'The exposure of the finitude of Being, one could say speaking of the surprising effects of "L'Intrus", is performed on the body of the text itself: its fragmentation, which entails frequent cuts from voice to voice, time to time, scene to scene, exposes unusually wide and variable margins or gaps between its parts.' p206. Note also that in Nancy's case the experience of the intruder is a very aptly captured in the term dis-ease that we explored briefly in the last chapter.

> Whether an other is another person, animal, plant, or star, it is above
> all the glaring presence of a place and moment of absolute origin,
> irrefutable, offered as such and vanishing in its passing.[35]

One might immediately conclude that by broadening alterity in this way Nancy has

avoided the anthropocentric tendencies we found in Levinas; and this is indeed an

advantage of Nancy's analysis. What remains to be seen is whether Nancy can still

retain, or improve upon, the ethical significance of Levinasian alterity. In this

context, the human still has a unique place in relation to this alterity through the

exposition of these points of origin and as the circulation of meaning.[36] Interestingly,

Nancy describes Da-sein's encounter with other points of origin as intriguing and a

matter for curiosity.

> We find this alterity primarily and essentially intriguing. It intrigues
> us because it exposes the always-other origin, always
> inappropriable and always there, each and every time present as
> inimitable. This is why we are primarily and essentially *curious*
> about the world and about ourselves (where 'the world' is the
> generic name of the object of this ontological curiosity).[37]

It is worth noting two things about Nancy's account of curiosity. The first, relating to

the question just posed re a space for ethics in Nancy, is whether this curiosity has

displaced the kind of Levinasian responsibility that is the ground of Levinasian

ethics. Has Nancy returned to either an epistemological or ontological relationship

between the human and the world as the primary encounter with alterity? Nancy

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[35]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p20
[36]Although note that our understanding of the human itself should be open to the circulation of meaning on Nancy's account because there can be no permanent and shared essence of humanity except perhaps in the very thin sense of sharing meaning. Thus the site of the human itself is open to ontological, ethical and political contestation. If Heidegger developed a strange humanism then Nancy's philosophy goes one step further towards the human as the circulation of meaning.
[37]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p19

suggests that alternatives to curiosity lead to a destructive hatred which includes the

introduction of the capital 'O' Other.

> If we do not have access to the other in the mode just described but
> seek to appropriate the origin – which is something we always do –
> then this same curiosity transforms itself into a destructive rage. We
> no longer look for the singularity of the origin in the other; we look
> for the unique and exclusive origin, in order to either adopt it or
> reject it. The other becomes the Other according to the mode of
> desire or hatred. Making the Other divine (together with our
> voluntary servitude) or making it evil (together with its exclusion or
> extermination) is that part of curiosity no longer interested in dis-
> position and co-appearance, but rather has become the desire for the
> Position itself.[38]

For Nancy, then, our attempts to fixate and capture the other as origin turn it into an

Other that is given meaning as either a Devil or a God depending on whether our

movement toward the Other is either hatred or desire respectively.[39] Or put

differently, we covet the position itself and enter into a power relationship to try and

usurp the position through brute strength or something like Levinasian substitution—

through either tyranny or martyrdom. For Nancy, both responses forget the implicit

equality of the common measure of the singular plural and create an inequality where

either the One has priority over the Other or vice versa. Thus, in sharp contrast to

Levinas who sees our asymmetrical and unequal relationship with the Other at the

heart of ethics, for Nancy, ethics could only start from the equal. However, one

wonders just how far Nancy can get with the notion of a curiosity 'interested in

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[38]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p20
[39]Note in this way Nancy attempts to get behind the dispute between Levinas and Zizek that we
discussed in the last chapter. That is, he wants an encounter with the other before the other is given
meaning and becomes an Other. However, I wonder in this sense whether curiosity is an appropriate
affect through which to achieve this move because of its usual link to consciousness and cognition.
Also it seems to create a little too much distance and separation from the other probably for the same
reason. Although Nancy's phenomenological description of curiosity as touch, sexual curiosity and
care may go some way to alleviating these fears. As suggested I think dis-ease might be a better
alternative.

disposition and co-appearance'. This starts to sound very much like the 'letting be' or shepherding of the later Heidegger.

The second thing to note, lest we think we have a return to Heidegger, is the sharp distinction between Nancy's positive use of curiosity versus Heidegger's rather negative one. For Heidegger, curiosity is a fleeting and shallow interest that is captured by the various beings of Da-sein's world. It is an inauthentic way of thinking that falls well short of anything like a 'letting be'. For Nancy curiosity is our deep interest in the other as origin. The other allows us to touch the origin even as it renews itself in response to and escape from the touch. Nancy likens the touch of curiosity to sexual curiosity and to having an affair with the other as origin. Perhaps this is why Nancy ultimately admits that the mad desire for the Other is contained in the very dissemination of the origin which 'upsets the origin in "me" to exactly the same extent that it makes "me" curious about it'.[40] Curiosity in this sense exposes the ambiguity of with-being that Levinas's face of the Other also exposes. That is, curiosity is the opening of with-being that contains the possibility of both murder and sacrifice.

> Singularities relate to each other first of all through this curiosity.
> They intrigue each other. A 'transcendental' curiosity institutes the
> relation. It falls short of a confrontation between subjects as well as
> a communal idyll, falls short of both benevolence and malevolence.
> It can open up fear and desire, love and hate, pity or terror. It can be
> indiscreet and discreet. It can be rejecting or caring: *curiosis* has the
> same root as cura, care or concern; 'to care or be concerned about
> the other' contains all the ambivalence of the relation.[41]

In this way, the ontology of being singular plural is at the same time ethical.

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[40]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p21
[41]Nancy, J *The Sense of the World*, pp73-74

To consider the nature of this ethics further, we will turn to the issue of responsibility in Nancy and in particular his short essay entitled 'Responding to Existence' in his book *Finite Thinking*.[42]

8.1.4 Responding to existence

Nancy begins this essay with the question 'for what are we responsible?'[43] He notes that philosophers such as Blanchot, Levinas and Derrida amongst others have as a common theme 'being or existence ultimately defined as responsibility' and moreover they think that 'philosophy or thinking is itself both responsibility and "absolute" responsibility'.[44] One of the corollaries of this is that thinking itself changes in its significance. Following Heidegger, thinking is no longer a theoretical thinking or cognition that goes on in the mind of a subject which is separate from the world, but a direct engagement with the world. Thus, in thinking or philosophising about responsibility, these philosophers are already engaged in responsibility. As Nancy puts it 'this thinking is already the performative of the responsibility that it wants to think'.[45] Nancy largely agrees with this direction, but of course, as we have seen, thinks the task of philosophy is to think the being singular plural of existence which is nothing other than to engage in the sense of the world. In this way, sense and responsibility come together. We have a responsibility to engage in what Nancy calls finite thinking to make sense, and in making sense we are engaged in responsibility.

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[42]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, pp289-299
[43]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, p289
[44]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, pp292-293
[45]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, p293

> Sense, then, has the same structure as responsibility; it is
> engagement, oath. *Spondere* is to engage by a ritualized oath. To
> one's *sponsio*, the other's *responsio* responds. The response is first
> of all a reengagement—an engagement in return for what engaged
> us or what engaged itself for us: the world, existence, others. It is a
> guaranteed exchange without any guarantee of making sense. It is a
> mutual pledge to truthfulness without which neither speech nor
> expression [regard] would be possible. So when one answers for,
> one also responds to—to a call, to an invitation, to a question or to a
> defiance of sense. And when one responds to, one answers for- for
> the sense that is promised or guaranteed.[46]

We can see then in this explanation of the responsibility of sense in terms of co-

respondence with others some similarity to Levinas, but in a way that also achieves a

certain *rapprochement* with Heidegger's emphasis on truth. To make this similarity

clearer, we must remember that sense for Nancy is the spatio-temporal movement of

the being singular plural. Two terms that Nancy shares with Levinas to describe this

movement are proximity and touch. Nancy uses proximity in a similar way to

Levinas to signify the paradox of the boundaries between singularities which both

touch and yet separate to create a distance.

> All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touch is
> separation; moreover it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch
> each other. Contact is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond
> connection and disconnection.[47]

Furthermore, it is the play of touch and its circulation in meaning which holds the

promise of sense, which as already discussed, can never be present but is always to

come. However, because sense is always to come, responsibility to make sense also

includes responsibility for the irresponsibility of sense. The way to take up such a

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[46]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, p296
[47]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p5

responsibility is thus to 'resist being seized by a captation of sense'.[48] This, in turn, like Levinas makes our responsibility infinite and un-assumable. It is the infinite responsibility of a commitment to open-ended co-respondence.·

> Sense is what makes one return to the other and that therefore makes it so that there is one with the other. This is why it is always of the order of response: not the response to the question, which closes research or relieves the demand, but the response to the address. One always addresses the truth in me—and I always return the address to the truth of the other...I would say that today it *(philosophy)* has to think only of the response: not a response solution or a response verdict, but a co-respondence.[49]

The ethical imperative for Nancy is to co-respond in a way that does justice to the with-being of existence or the sense of the world—a 'with' that can never be fulfilled because it is always to come. In using this term co-respondence, Nancy is able to combine three philosophical themes in one by bringing together the Heideggerian imperative to bring the truth of being to light (through the sense of correspondence as truth), and the Levinasian imperative of responsibility (through the sense of correspondence as response) into a sense of correspondence as an open-ended dialogue that always promises 'the with to come'.

Now given that this 'with to come' and responsibility as co-respondence are facts of existence as being singular plural, like Levinas the good has priority over evil. Nevertheless, one of the possibilities that can emerge from the co-respondence of existence and Da-sein's attempt to speak the with for the whole of existence, is an ossification of the 'with' that undermines co-respondence. It is the various forms of this ossification that constitute evil for Nancy.

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[48]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, p298
[49]Nancy, J *A Finite Thinking*, p298

> In addition, evil is only ever [found] in an operation that fulfils the
> with. One can fulfil the with either by filling it up or by emptying it
> out; it can be given a foundation of plenitude and continuity or an
> abyss of intransitivity. In the first case, the singular becomes a
> particular within a totality, where it is no longer either singular or
> plural; in the second case, the singular exists only on its own and,
> therefore, as a totality—and there too it is neither singular nor
> plural. In either case, murder is on the horizon, that is, death as the
> operative negativity of the One, death as the work of the One-All or
> the One-Me.[50]

The evil that Nancy describes here is none other than the reduction of the 'with' to

the 'and' and the violence of the relationality that the logic of and-being implies. As

with Levinas, this evil amounts to a totalitarianism of the one and the death of

alterity, but unlike Levinas the possibility of the good and the disruption of this

violence takes place straight away in the world through re-opening co-respondence

with the plurality of others rather than through the one God. For this reason, Nancy's

ontology is straight away ethical, and also straight away political. Co-respondence

with alterity makes sense of the world through the spacing of singularities in the

plural. The third person of Levinas is always a part of with-being, equal in its alterity

with the Other, and the other others, as a singular point of origin. In this sense, not

only are ontology and ethics involved in responsibility but also politics.

Indeed, one of the places that the structure of evil that we have just described is most

evident is in the traditional approaches to community and the political. So much so,

that Nancy argues this rethinking of the 'with' demands a retreat of the political as it

is commonly conceived so as to reveal an understanding of the political as an

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[50]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p92

unworking of community. It is to Nancy's analysis of this political dimension of

plurality and the co-respondence of with-being in community that we will now turn.

8.2 The inoperative community

The possibilities for evil that Nancy describes in *Being Singular Plural* are already

evident in his political thinking in his earlier work *The Inoperative Community* and is

also echoed in his later work *Retreating the Political*. In both works he is concerned

with exposing the metaphysical assumptions underpinning the traditional thinking of

community and the political, and radically displacing them or forcing them into

retreat. To the extent that he does this he could be said to be narrowing his focus

from the being singular plural of with-being to the being singular plural of human

existence or *mitsein*. Or put differently, he attempts to think the plurality of human

existence in terms of the logic of being singular plural. This application, as it were,

of the logic of being singular plural, is a common strategy for Nancy throughout his

varied *oeuvre* even when dealing with such diverse issues as art, literature and film.

Regardless, Nancy's concern in the case of both the traditional and modern thinking

of community and politics, is that it has ossified the 'with' and the spacing of

singularities in community with very negative and tangible historical consequences:

war; genocide; subsumption in economic production; and so on. For this reason

Nancy suggests:

> The gravest most painful testimony of the modern world, the one
> that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must
> answer (by virtue of some unknown decree or necessity, for we bear
> witness also to the exhaustion of thinking through History), is the

testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community.[51]

So what is community and how is it dissolved, dislocated and conflagrated?

Nancy begins by suggesting that 'communism' was an emblem for a yearning for community. This yearning represents a certain level of dissatisfaction with the mode of *mitsein* contained in a modern day technopolitical, capitalist society. We might recall Heidegger's negative modes of *mitsein* such as, being for-, against-, passing-one-another-by, not-mattering-to-one-another, in this regard. As people see their lives increasingly subordinated and alienated to the dominion of social and economic roles, and the divisions and infrastructure supporting a modern society, there is a feeling that something is missing, or lost. The communist doctrine, as an emblem, held the promise to satisfy this desire. But communism in its manifestation and eventual decline has left the yearning for community without an emblem. Furthermore this was inevitable, because community on Nancy's understanding cannot be taken on as a project or work. No emblem of it can ever be made immanent (i.e. brought to presence). Community, for Nancy, is not something that can be manufactured or realised in essence by man—community is inoperative in that it is an open-ended or infinite sharing of meaning and communication rather than a malfunctioning. Thus, the title of Nancy's essay.

However, the understanding of an operative community as a work to be produced, and the conflation of community with immanent social structures is the very basis of our traditional and common understandings of society. That is, whether it be social

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[51]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p1

contract theory, communitarianism, or a radical liberalism, all attempt to ground and

instantiate a particular vision of community. And yet, as will soon become apparent,

in doing so each misunderstands the 'with to come' of being singular plural and does

a fundamental violence to *mitsein*.

8.2.1 Community building – houses of straw and sticks

In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy engages in a detailed critique of the traditional

kinds of understanding and approaches to community that I outlined in my

discussion of the violence of and-being in chapter 2.[52] As we highlighted in that

chapter, social contract theorists such as Hobbes, Rousseau and Rawls adopt an

atomistic notion of society and community which are considered the sum of the

individuals who make them up. More recently, the kind of mathematically based

game theory used in economics and social modelling also starts from this

presupposition of a collection of singular rational agents. But such a view of society,

based on a radical individualism or subjectivism leaves no place for what Nancy calls

a *clinamen* (an inclination) towards an other. Nancy suggests:

> Neither personalism nor Sartre ever managed to do anything more
> than coat the most classical individual subject with a moral or

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[52]Note *The Inoperative Community* as well as being an engagement with George Bataille borrows the term 'inoperative' from Maurice Blanchot. Interestingly Blanchot responded to Nancy's work in *The Unavowable Community*. Translated by Pierre Joris, New York: Station Hill Press, 1988. While much of the response seems to be one of furious agreement, Robert Bernasconi in 'On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West: The debate between Nancy and Blanchot' in *Research in Phenomenology* 23, 1993, provides good argument that Blanchot in fact favours Levinas against both Nancy and Bataille based on Nancy's different approach to the death of the Other. He then argues similar to Critchley that Nancy does not leave space for a truly Levinasian encounter with the Other. As I have already argued, while there are of course differences, I think Nancy's account allows adequately for alterity. As a matter of completeness I also draw attention to Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*. Translated by Michael Hardt, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota press, 1993 as a further instalment in the debate over community, although I will not engage with this work here.

sociological paste: they never inclined it, outside itself, over the
edge that opens up its being-in-common.[53]

Thus, this conception of community leaves no place for the ontological priority of

mitsein instead the 'with' of this kind of community is appended to the individual as

a series of 'ands'. In terms of Nancy's manifestations of evil, this view is based on

the One-me.

Perhaps in response to this view, another alternative traditional view is that society or

community is taken to be greater than the sum of its parts. If the first view, perhaps

embodied in our social and economic structures, reveals a radical individualism, this

second view veers towards a radical unification which has somehow been lost in our

modern day society. As Nancy puts it, this mythic community has:

> its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy. Distinct from
> society (which is a simple association of forces and needs) and
> opposed to emprise (which dissolves community by submitting its
> people to its arms and to its glory), community is not only intimate
> communication between its members, but also its organic
> communion with its own essence...it is made up principally
> wherein each member identifies himself only through the
> supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body
> of the community. In the motto of the Republic, fraternity
> designates community: the model of the family and of love.[54]

But this is still to remain mired in the absolute where individual sovereignty has been

replaced by communal sovereignty. Again we have lost primordial *mitsein* in favour

of a relationship between communities, or a community and the others outside it, –

these remain defined in terms of the 'and' – and the being-with inside of such a

community effaces plurality and is reduced to a functional relation in service of the

[53]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p4
[54]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p9

community. Hobbes again, in philosophy, gives us a good example of this, where the state ruled by a sovereign might be considered as a unified artificial person acting on the authority of its members. Communitarian and much sociological thinking also looks for what unifies a particular group of individuals whether that be a goal, values, or way of life. As we have discussed, often this unity at the group level threatens to override the individuality and diversity of its members in its own insistence of identity. Indeed, much of the modern day political rhetoric often appeals to this higher level unity and identity, particularly in times of war or external threats to national security (for example the appeal to humanitarian solidarity in the invasion of Iraq), but also when trying to deal with internal differences and division (for example the un-Australian attitudes of undeserving welfare recipients).[55] Indeed, as we have seen, it is this kind of totalising subsumption of the others under the representation of the One that both Levinas and Nancy challenge in their philosophy. In terms of Nancy's manifestations of evil, this view is based on the One-All that operates as a One-Me at the communal level. The modern day Nation state, as we discussed in chapter 2 is an exemplar of this logic.

These conceptions of community, or any others following the same logic which collapses the singular and plural together in some way (even under the guise of a positive fusion such as in Bataille's community of lovers), Nancy would regard as mythic because they are ideals or understandings of community that uphold the false hope that some vision of community can be made immanent and fail to take account

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[55]For a good discussion of the plurality of community that is often violently suppressed in the name of commonality using Australian examples see Linnell Secomb's 'Fractured Community' in *Hypatia* 15(2), 2000: 139-143

of the unworking of community at the heart of community.[56] Nancy is suspicious of

myths of this genre for three reasons: they have accompanied our Western world

from its beginnings; they have religious overtones of communion; and there is no

historical precedence for such communities. Nancy's conclusion in relation to our

yearning for such a mythic community is that:

> Nothing, therefore has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost.
> We alone are lost, we upon whom the 'social bond' (relations,
> communication), our own invention, now descends heavily like the
> net of an economic, technical, political and cultural snare.
> Entangled in its meshes, we have wrung for ourselves the
> phantasms of the lost community.[57]

All forms of this mythic community, whether it is lost or some future utopia, are

according to Nancy, examples of a totalitarianism of absolute immanence and they

not only are not community, but 'instantly suppress community, or communication

as such.'[58] Further the cost of this totalitarianism according to Nancy is the death of

its members and ultimately the death of community. As Nancy writes:

> Political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute
> immanence have as their truth the truth of death. Immanence,
> communal fusion contains no other logic than that of the suicide of
> the community that is governed by it.[59]

The logic underpinning this point is the fact that when community comes to mean a

particular vision that must be made immanent, then the value of the individuals in

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[56]For a detailed analysis of the role that myth plays in politics and addressing the traditional problems of ground and legitimacy that we highlighted in chapter 2 see Jean-Luc Nancy's 'Myth Interrupted' in *The Inoperative Community*. 'Mythic thought – operating in a certain way through the dialectical sublation of the two meanings of myth – is in effect nothing other than the thought of a founding fiction, or a foundation by fiction', p53
[57]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p12
[58]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p12
[59]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p12

relation to such a community is subordinated to the value of the realisation of that community. The meaning of the death of individuals both inside and outside the community are measured in terms of their contribution to this realisation— individuals and their deaths are considered means to the communities ends. In this context: some deaths are considered necessary; some desirable; some unfortunate; some to be grieved and so on.[60]

This weighing up and measuring death in terms of community does two things. Firstly, death for the community can become the infinite fulfilment of an individual's life, at the same time that it reinforces the importance of the work of the community.[61] Secondly, because different deaths count, or are discounted, differently, the equality of human beings 'as singular points of finite existence' is effaced. Death in this way changes into murder and ultimately leads to the suicide of community.

That death can change to murder occurs fairly readily as those existing outside of the community become expendable and open to extermination, as the Jews became in Nazi Germany, for instance. But why does this truth of death also follow the logic of the suicide of the community? Precisely because the singularity of the death of each individual member is expendable and subordinated to the work of making community immanent which, of course, is never possible—the fallacy of utopia. It is the quest for this impossible perfect immanence that leads to suicide either in a desperate attempt to preserve the state of perfection, such as in the tragedy of the

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[60]See Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, for a good discussion of the lives that count and how they count in relation to current political events such as September 11 and the invasion of Iraq.
[61]Take for example the soldier who dies for their country or the terrorist who dies for their faith.

death of the lovers, or in an attempt to refine and purify a community that leaves it as a null set. Take for example the search for a set of ideal Australian values against which to measure citizens that perhaps no Australian can fully meet.

But of course for Nancy, like Blanchot, this kind of sublation of death to the work of community is absurd. It ignores the singularity of death (similar to Heidegger) and the utter senselessness of death. For Nancy, death is an unmasterable excess that reveals finitude. Nevertheless, it is shared death and finitude, and it is in this sense that we share in community—not as a project or event, but as the exposure of each other in our finitude.

> The motif of revelation, through death, of being together or being-with, and of the crystallisation of community around the death of its members, *that is to say around the "loss" (the impossibility) of their immanence* and not around their fusional assumption in some collective hypostasis, leads to a space of thinking incommensurable with the problematics of sociality or intersubjectivity (including the Husserlian problematic of the alter ego) within which philosophy, despite its resistance has remained captive.[62]

Nancy proposes an inoperable community that exposes its members in their mortal truth and in so doing reveals the impossibility and violence of community as a project or fusion. Indeed, it exposes the fallacy of absolute immanence at all its levels.

> Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of egos – subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal – but of I's that are not egos. It is not a communion that fuses the egos into an ego or a higher we. It is a community of others.[63]

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[62]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p14
[63]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p15

Nancy terms this exposition of the fallacy of the absolute, ecstasy. It is ecstatic

because we find ourselves abandoned to our finite existence through our exposure to

the finite existence of others. It is this finite existence that we have in common—that

we share together as community. Note the subtle shift in this thinking from common-

being i.e. a sharing of the same characteristic of being or essence; to being-in-

common where being is the circulation of meaning amongst a diverse plurality. Note

also that Nancy has developed a position that, like Levinas, disrupts the ego in favour

of a movement towards the others and alterity. He thus retains an ethical imperative

that would seem to capture the important concrete aspects of Levinas's 'thou shalt

not kill'. The question that remains is the kind of political space that this

understanding of *mitsein* opens up.

8.2.2 The retreat of the political

Nancy's deconstruction of community in *The Inoperative Community* might be said

to signal what Nancy calls the retreat of the political. That is, it signals the retreat of

any understanding of the political or community as an order, system, structure,

project, design, or form that must be made immanent. However, as Nancy suggests,

this does not mean that there is no longer a political.

> The retreat of the political does not signify the disappearance of the
> political. It only signifies the disappearance of the philosophical
> presupposition of the whole politico-philosophical order, which is
> always an ontological presupposition...The retreat of the political is
> the uncovering, the ontological laying bare of being-with.[64]

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[64]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p37

Rather, the laying bare of the politico-philosophical order has revealed a more originary political space in Nancy's ethico-ontology of *mitsein*. This more originary political space is concerned with play in the sense of the world and shared finite existence. As such, it reveals itself as the antithesis of, or counterweight to, traditional politics. The political experience of community, instead of embodying a fixed identity or a common being, turns out to be the constant resistance or interruption of these attempts to ground, and therefore ossify, *mitsein* in a closed immanence. The ecstatic sharing of community that takes place through language and communication where language is not a means of communication but communication itself, it 'is the unworking of work that is social, economic, technical and institutional'.[65] The political then, for Nancy, is a struggle or series of singular ruptures at the heart of *mitsein*:

> Political would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking
> of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community
> consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing...We must not
> stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common
> expose itself.[66]

Here the use of writing should again remind us of the term co-respondence in its dialogical sense as an open ended communication that promises 'the with to come'. That is, it should be considered very broadly as the performative circulation of meaning which is *mitsein* and which is the play of being singular plural. Political justice then, involves the infinite responsibility for the existence of other origins and openness to the finite thinking of the sense to come. As such, it is the site of not only politics but also originary ethics and fundamental ontology.

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[65]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, p31
[66]Nancy, J *The Inoperative Community*, pp40-41

Conclusion – The Shifting Boundaries of with-being: the with to come

If we are accept the understanding of with-being that I have developed throughout this thesis then there can be no conclusion. At best what can be offered is the promise of future co-respondence and further touches of meaning as responses to the sense of the world in which this thesis participates.

This sense of the world is with-being, as the fracturing of world into the shifting articulation of singularities, created and destroyed through difference, movement and agon-y. It is the abandonment of the law of identity, the substance of the monad, the certainty of reason, and the search for eternal ground of and-being; and the embrace of openness, interruption and incompleteness that means the 'with' of with-being is always to come. But where does this leave us, Da-sein/*mitsein*, who emerge from the sense of the world as the circulation of meaning which seems to undo this sense of the 'with' even as we participate in it?

It seems as if our very being as meaning risks fulfilling the 'with' and fixing it into a conjunction through truth, that even if open to hermeneutic engagement, always lags behind the sense which gives it birth and has already abandoned it. All of the philosophers we have looked at draw attention to this risk and the inevitable violence it contains. For the early Heidegger it is to lose one-self in the they-self and thrownness; for the later Heidegger it is to attempt to be the master of being rather than its shepherd; for Levinas it is a totalitarianism of the same that ignores the ethical call of the Other; and for Nancy it is the tyranny of the One and the forgetting of co-essence.

Yet all, as well as warnings, offer periapts against these risks in the shape of various forms of openness to interruption. For Heidegger it is the saving grace of a hermeneutical engagement with the truth of being through *Gelassenheit*; for Levinas it is the face-to-face with its imperative 'though shalt not kill'; and Nancy offers us unworking and co-respondence, which I have argued, through dialogue, offers the promise of openness to both truth and responsibility.

But is openness to co-respondence enough to avert the risks? How much dis-ease can Da-sein/*mitsein* live with? A common criticism of Nancy's politics and perhaps neo-left politics in general, is that it does not contain a positive moment. That is, there is no program for political/social/ethical change. Indeed, it would seem that the development of such a program would contradict the imperative to disrupt such programs. Further, to develop such a program would seem to require a return to essentialism, or something like it, in order to ground such a program. Carsten Strathausen in his article 'A Critique of Neo-left Ontology' makes this point very forcefully:

> As long as neo-left theorists embrace a non-essentialist ontology, questions about how best to achieve economic equality and social justice remain unanswerable—for if they could be answered, the ontology in question would no longer be 'groundless' or unstable, but provide a dependable basis for how to change the world.[1]

Of course, this criticism only carries weight if we assume that such a program is necessary. That is, people who make this criticism of Nancy, and others like Foucault, Levinas and Derrida, usually start with the unquestioned assumption of

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[1]Strathausen, C 'A Critique of Neo-left Ontology' in *Post-modern Culture*, p26

what is needed and then critique their subject for not providing it.[2] Nevertheless,

Nancy himself acknowledges that this is an issue that is still outstanding:

> The retreat of the political and the religious, or the theologico-
> political, means the retreat of every space, form, or screen into which
> or onto which a figure of community could be projected. At the right
> time, then, the question has to be posed as to whether being-together
> can do without a figure and, as a result, without an identification, if
> the whole of its 'substance' consists only in its spacing.[3]

But for Nancy, the right time to consider whether a figure of community is necessary

will only be after we have properly thought out our being-in-common. In a sense, he

feels that, as yet, we have not done enough to retreat the political. It is not until after

we have cleared the theologico-political of 'every space, form or screen' that we can

tell whether such a figure is necessary. That is, it is not until we are without such a

figure that we can tell whether we truly need it, or whether it is a convenient desire.

Nancy's fear is that critics, particularly those interested in maintaining the status quo,

are often too quick to insist on the indispensability of identification, essence, destiny,

absolute truth, etc. either for self interested reasons, or as a fearful reaction to the

retreat of the political and anxiety over a loss of ground.[4]

Of course, even if it were necessary, we might wonder what form this necessity

takes. Moreover, we might be concerned that this necessity is both too seductive and

too violent. That is, it is possible that if Da-sein/*mitsein* is to continue circulating as a

share of the sense of the world and as meaning, we must engage in speaking the truth

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[2]See for example Charles Taylor's well known critique of Foucault 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth' in *Foucault: A critical reader*. Edited by David Couzens Hoy, Oxford: B Blackwell, 1986
[3]Nancy, J *Being Singular Plural*, p47
[4]Indeed, and-being and violence of all types are also responses to the dis-ease of difference and finitude even if they are responses that deny the truth of co-respondence.

of with-being of which we are a part. But perhaps our participation in with-being through the fixity of truth, makes us feel too much like Gods who can capture the origin of the world—and truth may be a nectar that is just too intoxicating. And in this intoxicated state, we may continue to wield these truths, which are a part of the performative reality of with-being, against the other fragmented origins of the world in an attempt to capture them; even as their boundaries constantly shift and in their agony threaten to humble us and expose our ungrounded finitude.

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