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The Question of Death in the "Work" of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas and Blanchot

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE QUESTION OF DEATH
IN THE "WORK" OF
NIETZSCHE, HEIDEGGER, LEVINAS, AND BLANCHOT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

INTRODUCTION: The Question of Death 1

Chapter

1. THE EVIL GENIUS, DEAD TIME, AND THE INFINITE:
Reading Descartes' Meditations on First
Philosophy 17

2. LITERATURE, NIHILISM, AND DEAD TIME 58

3. DEAD TIME: "A Fine Risk" 80

4. OTHERWISE THAN JUSTICE AND DEAD TIME 121

5. THE CLEARING AND DEAD TIME: Re-reading
Heidegger's Being and Time 150

AFTERWARD 170

WORKS CONSULTED 171

INTRODUCTION: The Question of Death

One of the most predominant readings of Heidegger's Being and Time (1927) has come to be known as the "existential" reading. The existential analytic of Dasein, undertaken in the name of fundamental ontology, is delimited by a series of crucial distinctions—ontic/ontological, existentiell/existential, inauthentic/authentic, etc. The "existential" reading of Being and Time reads these distinctions, I would suggest, as distinctions, that is, as two separate, distinguishable ways of being. This reading reads the task of the existential analytic and, therefore, fundamental ontology, as merely a step beyond the first pole of each distinction into the second pole. The analysis of death that opens the second division of Being and Time affirms, according to the "existential" reading, the possibility of the existential analytic by affirming the possibility of completing this step, that is, by bringing to light Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole. "By pointing out that Dasein has an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole, the existential analytic acquires assurance as to the constitution of Dasein's primordial

Being."¹ But this reading—a reading that reads death merely as possibility—repeats, as Levinas and Blanchot point out, the most familiar and traditional of steps.

Levinas consistently reads death in Being and Time as merely possibility. In Time and the Other (1947) Levinas writes:

Being toward death, in Heidegger's authentic existence, is a supreme lucidity and hence a supreme virility. It is Dasein's assumption of the uttermost possibility of existence, which precisely makes possible all other possibilities, and consequently makes possible the very feat of possibility—that is, it makes possible activity and freedom.²

Being toward death, in Heidegger's authentic existence, is not, therefore, a supreme vulnerability, but rather, according to Levinas, a supreme virility, "the virility of grasping the possible, the power to be able ["pouvoir de pouvoir"]" (TA 73/TO 82). Or, said otherwise in a footnote to the passage cited at the beginning of this paragraph, "[d]eath in Heidegger is not, as Jean Wahl says 'the impossibility of possibility,' but 'the possibility of impossibility.' This apparently Byzantine distinction has a fundamental importance" (TA 92 n.5/TO 70 n.43). Levinas

¹Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1957), 234, hereafter cited in the text as SZ. / Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 277, hereafter cited in the text as BT.

²Emmanuel Levinas, Le temps et l'autre (Paris: PUF, 1985), 57, hereafter cited in the text as TA. / Time and the Other, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 70, hereafter cited in the text as TO.

refers, in several of his works, to Heidegger's own description of death in Being and Time as "the possibility of impossibility" to describe his reading of death in Heidegger's Being and Time. For instance, in a discussion published in Wahl's book A Short History of Existentialism (1947) Levinas writes:

Existence produces itself in such a manner that each being is already hurling himself towards death, and this manner of hurling himself towards death is, for him, a possibility par excellence, because all other possibilities fulfill themselves and become acts, whereas death becomes non-reality, non-being. That is the sense in which Heidegger says that death is the possibility of impossibility.³

Levinas does not concede—at least in those passages where Heidegger is explicitly named—the possibility that death in Heidegger's Being and Time is to be read as both "the possibility of impossibility" and "the impossibility of possibility." The later phrase—"the impossibility of possibility"—articulates, according to Levinas, the fact that death is the "limit of the subject's virility" (TA 62/TO 74), the "impossibility of having a project" (TA 62-63/TO 74), of "grasping a possibility" (TA 64/TO 76).

What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer able to be able [nous ne'pouvons plus pouvoir']. It is exactly thus that the subject loses its very mastery as a subject (TA 62/TO 74).

The step beyond inauthenticity into authenticity that would

³Jean Wahl, A Short History of Existentialism, trans. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 53.

ensure the virility of the subject and complete fundamental ontology is interrupted. At the very moment the subject would gain complete mastery, he or she is impotent. The production or performance of this necessary yet impossible step beyond articulates the trace of death as that which merely approaches. This approach of death indicates, according to Levinas, that one is in relation with something that is absolutely other (TA 63/TO 74).

Blanchot's reading of death in Heidegger's Being and Time is not unlike Levinas'. In a passage from The Space of Literature (1955) that is obviously a reading of Heidegger, Blanchot explicitly refers to Levinas' reading of Heidegger in Time and the Other.

When a contemporary philosopher names death as man's extreme possibility, the possibility absolutely proper to him, he shows that the origin of possibility is linked in man to the fact that he can die, that for him death is yet one possibility more, that the event by which man departs from the possible and belongs to the impossible is nevertheless within his mastery, that it is the extreme moment of his possibility. (And this the philosopher expresses precisely by saying of death that it is "the possibility of impossibility.") [A footnote here reads: "Emmanuel Levinas is the first to have brought out what was at stake in this expression (Time and the Other.)"].⁴

The passage continues with Blanchot establishing the proximity of this reading of Heidegger to Hegel.

Hegel had already seen action, language, liberty, and death to be aspects of one and the same movement; he had

⁴Maurice Blanchot, L'espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 325-326, hereafter cited in the text as EL. / The Space of Literature, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 240, hereafter cited in the text as SL.

shown that only man's constant and resolute proximity to death allows him to become active nothingness capable of negating and transforming natural reality—of combating, of laboring, of knowing, and of being historical. This is a magical force: it is the absolute power of the negative which becomes the action of truth in the world. It brings negation to reality, form to the formless, definition to the indefinite. We want to draw these limits, mark these ends, come to the finish. That is the principle behind civilization's demands, the essence of the purposeful will which seeks achievement, which demands accomplishment and attains universal mastery. Existence is authentic when it is capable of enduring possibility right up to its extreme point, able to stride toward death as toward possibility par excellence. It is to this movement that the essence of man in Western history owes its having become action, value, future, labor and truth. The affirmation that in man all is possibility requires that death itself be possible: death itself, without which man would not be able to form the notion of an "all" or to exist in view of a totality, must be what makes all—what makes totality—possible (EL 326/SL 240).

For Hegel, death is productive. It is the effectuation of the appearance of the next shape of the dialectic. It is the possibility of each step of the dialectic that progresses ever so diligently to the notion of an "all," to absolute knowing. In another passage from The Space of Literature, Blanchot extends this reading of death as possibility to encompass not only Heidegger and Hegel, but also Nietzsche.

Death, in the human perspective, is not a given, it must be achieved. It is a task, one which we take up actively, one which becomes the source of our activity and mastery. Man dies, that is nothing. But man is, starting from death. He ties himself tight to his death with a tie of which he is the judge. He makes his death, he makes himself mortal and in this way give himself the power of a maker and gives to what he makes its meaning and its truth. The decision to be without being is possibility itself: the possibility of death. Three systems of thought—Hegel's, Nietzsche's, Heidegger's—which attempt to account for this decision

and which therefore seem, however much they may oppose each other, to shed the greatest light on the destiny of modern man, are all attempts at making death possible (EL 115/SL 96).

While it is not particularly unusual to characterize Hegel's work as a "system" of thought, the characterization seems wholly inappropriate when applied to the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger. I would suggest that Blanchot applies this characterization to one specific reading of the work of these three thinkers—a reading which reads death as merely possibility.

Blanchot, however, like Levinas, thinks that such a reading of death overlooks the profoundly disturbing questionableness at the heart of this phenomenon—the question of death as "the possibility of impossibility" turning into death as "the impossibility of possibility," death as possibility turning into death as impossibility, that is, turning into death as an absolute alterity that infinitely approaches (or withdraws), the "is not yet" or "dead time" (le temps mort). This question is what Blanchot, in The Space of Literature, calls "double death" (la double mort). This irreducible question of death will be explored throughout this dissertation with respect to the "work" of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot. The question of death not only opens up new and provocative readings of the "work" of these thinkers, but also raises the question of their proximity to one another, oftentimes despite their expressed intentions. It should also be noted

at the outset that the question of death will call the ideas of "work" and "production" into question—hence, the quotation marks around the term "work" both in this paragraph and in the title of the dissertation.

The first chapter of the dissertation will be concerned with Levinas' reading of "dead time" in what is otherwise one of the most familiar and traditional of texts—Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy. Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations appears in several of Levinas' works. The most significant readings occur in "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity" (1957), Totality and Infinity (1961), Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (1974), and "God and Philosophy" (1975). For Levinas, the profundity of the Meditations lies in "[t]he ambiguity of Descartes' first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another."⁵ This ambiguous or enigmatic "double origin" of the coqito and the infinite is "produced" in a reading that progresses through the Meditations. One of the most significant aspects of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is his use of the

⁵Emmanuel Levinas, Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 19, hereafter cited in the text as TeI / Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 48, hereafter cited in the text as TaI.

term "production." Production, for Levinas, is an essentially ambiguous term that designates both the effectuation and the appearance of something. What is produced by a reader who effectuates a reading of Descartes' Meditations is not, however, the unequivocal appearance of something in itself, as is usually the case in production, but rather an ambiguous or enigmatic "double origin" of the cogito and the infinite. What is produced in this effectuation is not something that appears, but rather that which withdraws from (or approaches) revelation and merely leaves a trace of itself in this irreducible ambiguity or enigma. This production, as one which does not effectuate the unequivocal appearance of something in itself, is perhaps more aptly referred to as a productionless production. This productionless production, this "productionlessness" (compare with Blanchot's désœuvrement or "worklessness") characteristic of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is marked by what Levinas calls "dead time," the interval of the "is not yet." "Dead time" marks the "relation without relation" (relation sans relation or rapport sans rapport) (TeI 52, 271/TaI 80, 295) of the cogito and the infinite. The phrase rapport sans rapport articulates the fact that one "term" of the "relation"—the infinite—absolves itself from the "relation," withdraws from (or approaches) the "relation," or said otherwise, merely leaves a trace of itself in the production of a

"double origin" in which it, momentarily appearing as an origin, is interminably vulnerable to being reappropriated by the cogito. "Dead time," which marks the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the infinite, also marks the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the evil genius/il y a.

Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations raises the question of language in Levinas' work. The radicality of everything said by Levinas risks being domesticated. Levinas is aware of this when in the Preface to Totality and Infinity he writes:

The word by way of preface [préface] which seeks to break through the screen stretched between the author and the reader by the book itself [...] belongs to the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword [l'avant-propos] or the exegesis, in unsaying the said, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights (TeI XVIII/TaI 30).

This prefatory word (or fore-word) serves as an inaugural reminder that a reading of what is said in the book must always already be accompanied by an unsaying. Thirteen years later in Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, this prefatory word (or fore-word) is not only formally thematized but, at the same time, written into the very argument and exposition of the text. This was almost certainly in response to readers such as Blanchot and Derrida who point out numerous ways Totality and Infinity can too easily be read. This response is called for because

in most cases the once only prefatory word has to do all the work of unsaying what is merely programmatically said in Totality and Infinity. One notable exception, however, is Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations. Here there is an intratextual production of what is merely announced extratextually by the prefatory word (or fore-word). In fact, the reading of Descartes' Meditations produced by Levinas in Totality and Infinity is perhaps an anticipation of what he will later formalize and write into the very production of Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, for this reading—which, as will become apparent in chapter III, plays both a decisive and a pervasive role in Totality and Infinity—is heavily drawn upon in Levinas' formal thematization of skepticism and the saying of the otherwise than being in Otherwise than Being.

One of the enduring questions asked by readers of Levinas' works is whether, and to what extent, Levinas is a reader of Hegel. Coming in the wake of Bataille's and Blanchot's readings of Hegel, Levinas' use of the term "production" certainly raises the question of Levinas' proximity to Hegel. Levinas, however, never explicitly ties his reading of production to a reading of Hegel. This task seems to have been left to his readers.

Blanchot, on the other hand, explicitly reads a notion of production or work alongside Hegel. The second chapter of the dissertation will be concerned with Blanchot's

equivocal reading of production in the work of Hegel. In "Literature and the Right to Death"—which appears in La Part du feu (1949)—Blanchot reads production alongside death understood as possibility. For Hegel, death is productive. It is the effectuation of the appearance of the next shape of the dialectic. It is the possibility of the step beyond one shape into another. Blanchot takes up the questionableness of this reading of death in Hegel.

I will limit my remarks on "Literature and the Right to Death" to a reading of two of what Blanchot calls a writer's temptations. One temptation—"revolution" or "revolutionary action"—marks the first instance of Blanchot's irreducibly ambiguous reading of the following passage from the Preface to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: "[T]he life of Spirit is [...] the life that endures [death] and maintains itself in it."⁶ Literature begins at the moment when it becomes a question, that is, at the moment when an initial reading of this line, which reads death as possibility, turns into a reading of this line which reads death as impossibility. Death, as this turning itself, leaves a trace of itself, I would suggest, in the production or performance of an interminable step/not beyond (le pas au-delà), an eternal step beyond that eternally returns. This reading of "revolution" or "revolutionary action" will

⁶G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19, hereafter cited in the text as PS.

raise the question of the proximity of this temptation and Blanchot's reading in L'entretien infini of nihilism in the work of Nietzsche. Nihilism is another temptation of a writer named by Blanchot in "Literature and the Right to Death." A reading that raises the question of the proximity of "revolution" and nihilism will, therefore, raise several questions: What is the relationship of nihilism (or scepticism), named as a writer's temptation by Blanchot in "Literature and the Right to Death," and the nihilism of Blanchot's reading of the work of Nietzsche in L'entretien infini? What is the relationship of Blanchot's reading of Hegel in "Literature and the Right to Death" and his reading of Nietzsche in L'entretien infini? Is the nihilism of Blanchot's reading of the work of Nietzsche inscribed in his reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit?

The third chapter of the dissertation will again be concerned with Levinas' Totality and Infinity. Totality and Infinity calls for being read in a multiplicity of ways. Alphonso Lingis, the principle translator of Levinas into English, suggests that Totality and Infinity is "structured, classically, as a phenomenology in different strata, related as founding and founded."⁷ Granted, the structure, and often the vocabulary, of Totality and Infinity lends itself

⁷Emmanuel Levinas, Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), hereafter cited in the text as AE. / Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), xv, hereafter cited in the text as OB.

to such a reading. But such a reading risks domesticating the interruptions of Totality and Infinity. It risks the possibility of Totality and Infinity being too easily read and appropriated by, for example, ethics or theology. Furthermore, such a reading can only be undertaken if one does not heed the extratextual prefatory word cited previously. But this once only prefatory word (or foreword) which, in most cases, has to do all of the work of unsaying what is merely said in Totality and Infinity, obviously leaves the work vulnerable to be too easily read and appropriated. It was suggested earlier, however, that Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is a notable exception to the lack of an intratextual production of what is announced extratextually by the prefatory word (or foreword). With this in mind it may perhaps be instructive to remain attentive to the way this reading plays both a decisive and a pervasive role, on innumerable levels, in the very structure of Totality and Infinity.

In Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations "dead time" or the interval of the "is not yet" names the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the infinite as well as the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the evil genius or il y a. The reading of "dead time" in Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations undertaken in chapter I of this dissertation requires, however, a deformalization or concretization. This is undertaken especially in sections

II and III of Totality and Infinity where, I would suggest, "dead time" gets renamed at each successive stratum. The following passage from Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" is, with certain qualifications, a provisional characterization of the structure of Totality and Infinity.

In Totality and Infinity the thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself.⁸

A reading of Totality and Infinity which begins with "dead time" will call into question a simple linear reading of sections II and III of Totality and Infinity and raise the question of the proximity of Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being. "Dead time" also names the "site" of a certain "relationship" of the infinite and the il y a. The interval of death, therefore, perhaps names what in Otherwise than Being is referred to as "a fine risk."

The fourth chapter of the dissertation will be concerned with the question of the proximity of Nietzsche and Levinas. In chapter III I suggest that a reading of Levinas that is not attentive to "dead time"—which is marked by or leaves a trace of itself in the performance or

⁸Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 312 n.7.

production of a "double origin"—risks domesticating the interruptions located within his work. It risks the possibility of being too easily read and appropriated. For example, a close reading of justice and responsibility in the work of Levinas—that is, the step beyond justice into responsibility—reveals that Levinas' idea of responsibility cannot be easily appropriated by ethics or politics. Responsibility exceeds the order of measure and reason. It merely leaves an enigmatic or ambiguous trace of itself in this order of just boundaries. Levinas' reading of responsibility moves at the limit of the ethical language of justice.

Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound in The Birth of Tragedy likewise moves at the limit of the ethical language of justice. Reading justice in Nietzsche alongside justice in Levinas will, I would suggest, raise—seemingly despite Levinas' intentions—the question of the proximity of Nietzsche and Levinas. This is a question that would not even be considered in a too easy reading of Levinas that sometimes seeks to appropriate his work for a post-Nietzschean ethics or politics.

The final chapter of the dissertation will be concerned with a brief re-reading of Heidegger's Being and Time with respect to the question of death articulated throughout chapters 1-4 of this dissertation. I would suggest that Being and Time decisively turns upon the

doubling of death—death as possibility turning into death as impossibility. Recall that Levinas and Blanchot consistently read death in Being and Time as merely possibility. The doubling of death calls, therefore, for re-reading these readings of Being and Time. I would suggest that this doubling—which delimits the project of fundamental ontology, that is, both limits it and makes it possible⁹—not only opens the space/time of the clearing (Lichtung), but also raises the question of the proximity of the clearing and the "dead time" of Levinas and Blanchot.

⁹See John Sallis, Delimitations—Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

CHAPTER 1

THE EVIL GENIUS, DEAD TIME, AND THE INFINITE: Reading Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy

He found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself; it seems he was permitted to find it only under this condition.

—Franz Kafka

In the second Meditation of his Meditations on First Philosophy Descartes compares that thing for which he is searching, that is, that thing about which he can be absolutely certain, to the Archimedean point.

Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakable.¹

After reconsidering the pathway of doubt undertaken in the first Meditation, Descartes writes:

So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

But I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is, that now necessarily exists (M 17).

After going back and meditating on what he originally thought himself to be, and then subtracting from that

¹René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16, hereafter cited in the text as M.

anything which is doubtful, he finally concludes: "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks" (M 18). Descartes' Archimedean point is the cogito.

Levinas traces a shift of the Archimedean point from the cogito to the infinite. The production of this shift doubles the Archimedean point—that is the cogito and the infinite are revealed as two distinct points mutually founding one another. Levinas discovers in this ambiguous and enigmatic doubling a trace of the infinite, a trace of that which is both the condition and the uncondition of the cogito. The discovery of this Archimedean point—an excessive Archimedean point that leaves a trace of itself in an ambiguous and enigmatic doubling—transforms the traditional understanding of the Archimedean point. This Archimedean point is perhaps aptly expressed by the following passage from Kafka's "He:" "He found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself; it seems he was permitted to find it only under this condition."

Levinas likewise traces a shift of the Archimedean point from the cogito to the evil genius.

In both cases the production of this shift—which is a productionless production—is marked by "dead time." "Dead time" marks the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the infinite, and the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the evil genius or il y a.

Levinas frequently characterizes his reading of Descartes' Meditations in terms of two distinct movements.

If, in a first movement, Descartes takes consciousness to be indubitable of itself by itself, in a second movement—the reflection on reflection—he recognizes conditions for this certitude (TeI 186/TaI 210).

Before undertaking a close textual reading of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations it is necessary (and helpful) to situate these two movements within the context of the distinction Levinas makes between comprehension and critique.

In the opening sections of Totality and Infinity Levinas makes a distinction between knowledge or theory understood as comprehension [intelligence] and the critical essence of knowing. In its comprehension of being (or ontology) knowledge or theory is concerned with critique.

It discovers the dogmatism and naive arbitrariness of its spontaneity, and calls into question the freedom of the exercise of ontology; it then seeks to exercise this freedom in such a way as to turn back at every moment to the origin of the arbitrary dogmatism of this free exercise. This would lead to an infinite regression if this return itself remained an ontological movement, an exercise of freedom, a theory. Its critical intention then leads it beyond theory and ontology: critique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same (TeI 13/TaI 43).

Knowledge or theory seems, therefore, to be characterized by an ambiguity or enigma—two distinct movements.

Critique or philosophy is the essence of knowing. But what is proper to knowing is not its possibility of going unto an object, a movement by which it is akin to other acts; its prerogative consists in being able to put itself in question, in penetrating beneath its own condition. It is not drawn back from the world as its

object; it can have the world as its theme, make of it an object, because its exercise consists, as it were, in taking charge of the very condition that supports it and that supports even this very act of taking charge (TeI 57/TaI 85).

These two movements are not, however, merely opposed to one another. Although oriented in inverse directions, and therefore opposed, they seem, nevertheless, to call for being thought "at the same time." The movement of comprehension, "working on straight ahead" (TeI 61/TaI 89) is, as was pointed out in the passage cited above, inverted "at every moment [à tout moment]" (TeI 13/TaI 43, emphasis added) by the movement of critique. In another passage alluding to the temporal relationship of comprehension and critique, Levinas writes: "The search for the intelligible and the manifestation of the critical essence of knowing, the movement of a being back to what precedes its condition, begin together [commence du même coup]" (TeI 56/TaI 84, emphasis added), and yet they are oriented in inverse directions. It seems that these two movements necessarily yet impossibly call for being thought "at the same time." Levinas discovers in Descartes' Meditations a work that responds to this call.

The critical essence of knowing leads—according to Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations—beyond the knowledge of the cogito (TeI 58/TaI 85). It penetrates beneath knowledge understood as comprehension, beneath knowledge which takes itself to be indubitable of itself by

itself.

If, in a first movement, Descartes takes consciousness to be indubitable of itself by itself, in a second movement—the reflection on reflection—he recognizes conditions for this certitude (TeI 186/TaI 210).

In a second movement—that is, the critical reflection on the reflection characteristic of comprehension—Descartes recognizes conditions for the certitude of comprehension. This certitude, Levinas provisionally states, is due to the clarity and distinctness of the cogito. This move is provisional because it remains "an ontological movement, an exercise of freedom, a theory" (TeI 13/TaI 43). It remains a move of comprehension. Were this inquiry to remain on the level of comprehension this move would be no more than the first step of what would inevitably be an infinite regression (TeI 13, 57/TaI 43, 85). This move, however, is subtended by the second movement, formally characterized by the critique. Levinas points out that while certitude is indeed due to the clarity and distinctness of the cogito, certitude itself is sought because of "the presence of infinity in this finite thought, which without this presence would be ignorant of its own finitude" (TeI 186/TaI 210). That is, without this presence consciousness would be unable to posit and conceive its own finitude, its own doubt (TeI 185/TaI 210). It would be unable to be certain of its own doubt, unable to actualize the first movement. Levinas is referring here the following famous passage from the third Meditation.

I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For how could I understand that I doubted or desired—that is, lacked something—and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison (M 31)?

How could I understand that I doubted back in the second Meditation, how could I have posited and conceived my doubt, my finitude, my imperfection—which, in the second Meditation, established the certitude of the cogito (that is, I understood, I was certain, I had no doubt, that I doubted)—unless there were always already in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison? Descartes here discovers in a second movement—that is, "after the fact" or in the critical reflection on the reflection characteristic of comprehension—the "condition" of the certitude characteristic of the first movement, of what was otherwise taken to be "indubitable of itself by itself," an absolute origin. Descartes discovers in the third Meditation a pre-originary origin—the infinite.

The infinite, discovered in a second movement, is discovered to be necessarily yet impossibly in the finite. It is necessarily in the finite insofar as it is the condition of the certitude of the cogito. "For," as Descartes writes, "how could I understand that I doubted or desired—that is, lacked something—and that I am not wholly

perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison (M 31, emphasis added)? However, the infinite is, at the same time, impossibly in the finite insofar as it is an in-comprehensible exteriority that is the uncondition of the certitude of the cogito. The in-comprehensible interrupts the comprehension characteristic of the first movement. The following passage from "God and Philosophy," which cites the sentence in Descartes' third Meditation immediately preceding the sentence cited above, articulates the fact that the infinite is in me insofar as it interrupts a "me" that would comprehend or include it (that is, have it in me). That is, in some way I have received an idea, I have it in me, before there is an "I" that is capable of receiving it.

The actuality of the cogito is [...] interrupted by the uncludable, not thought but undergone in the form of the idea of the Infinite, bearing in a second moment of consciousness what in a first moment claimed to bear it. After the certainty of the cogito, present to itself in the second Meditation, after the "halt" which the last lines of this Meditation mark, the third Meditation announces that "in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite—to wit, the notion of God before that of myself."² The idea of the Infinite, Infinity in me, can only be a passivity of consciousness. Is it still consciousness? There is here a passivity which cannot be likened to receptivity. Receptivity is a collecting that takes place in a

²The English translators of "God and Philosophy" use the Haldane and Ross translation of Descartes' philosophical works. The Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch translation of this sentence reads: "... my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself" (M 31).

welcome, an assuming that takes place under the force of the blow received. The breakup of the actuality of thought in the "idea of God" is a passivity more passive still than any passivity, like the passivity of a trauma through which the idea of God would have been put in us.³

This necessary yet impossible presence of the infinite in the finite is reflected in the prefix "in-" of the word "infinite." In "God and Philosophy" Levinas writes: "[I]t is [...] as though—without wanting to play on words—the in of the Infinite were to signify both the non and the within (DP 106/GP 160). This prefix signifies inclusion in the sense of immanence, insofar as the infinite's immanence is the necessary condition of comprehension, and negation in the sense of transcendence or exteriority, insofar as the infinite's in-comprehensible exteriority interrupts or is the uncondition of comprehension.⁴ "The idea of God is God

³Emmanuel Levinas, "Dieu et la philosophie," in De dieu qui vient à l'idée (Paris: Vrin, 1982), 106, hereafter cited in the text as DP. / "God and Philosophy," in Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 160-1, hereafter cited in the text as GP.

⁴Descartes explicitly states that the infinite is not the result of the formal structure of a negative judgment. And I must not think that, just as my conceptions of rest and darkness are arrived at by negating movement and light, so my perception of the infinite is arrived at not by means of a true idea but merely by negating the finite (M 31).

Levinas recognizes this when he writes: "[I]t is as though the negation of the finite included in In-finity did not signify any sort of negation resulting from the formal structure of negative judgment" (DP 105-106/GP 160). In a footnote Levinas adds:

The latent birth of negation occurs not in subjectivity, but in the idea of the Infinite. Or, if one prefers, it is in subjectivity qua idea of the Infinite. It is in

in me, but God already breaking up the consciousness that aims at ideas" (DP 105/GP 160, emphasis added).

The way in which the infinite—necessarily yet impossibly in the finite, that is, both the condition and the uncondition of the finite—is articulated in the finite devolves from the two distinct movements outlined above. Levinas not only clarifies this issue of the articulation of the infinite, but also establishes the proximity of his reading of Descartes Meditations to his own analyses of death, in that section of Totality and Infinity entitled "Atheism or the Will." The reading undertaken in this section, like the reading cited above, characterizes the Meditations in terms of two distinct movements. But here the two movements are given temporal designations. The first movement is called the chronological order and the second movement is called the "logical" order. These two distinct times are likewise formally articulated by the distinction between comprehension and critique.

The being infinitely surpassing its own idea in us—God in the Cartesian terminology—subtends the evidence of the cogito, according to the third Meditation. But the discovery of this metaphysical relation in the cogito constitutes chronologically only the second move of the philosopher. That there could be a chronological order

this sense that the idea of the Infinite, as Descartes affirms, is a "genuine idea" and not merely what I conceive "by negation of what is finite" (DP 106 n.5/GP 160 n.6).

The English translators of "God and Philosophy" use the Haldane and Ross translation of Descartes' philosophical works rather than the Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch translation cited above.

distinct from the "logical" order, that there could be several moments in the progression, that there is a progression—here is separation. For by virtue of time this being is not yet [n'est pas encore]—which does not make it the same as nothingness, but maintains it at a distance [à distance] from itself. It is not all at once [n'est pas d'un seul coup] (TeI 24-5/TaI 54).

It is important to keep in mind that the passages describing the cogito as "not yet" and "not all at once" are descriptions characteristic of knowledge as comprehension written from the perspective of a reader/writer who has already progressed through the two movements of the Meditations. It is from this perspective, that is, after the discovery in the third Meditation of the metaphysical relation in the cogito, that Levinas describes the cogito during the chronological order. He writes: By virtue of time, that is, by virtue of the chronological order, the cogito "is not yet," it "is not all at once." The condition of the actualization of the cogito—which is, from the perspective of the chronological order, already assumed to be an actual entity, indubitable of itself by itself—is yet to come. This does not, however, make it the same as nothingness, or, the same as potency. It is, on the contrary, maintained at a distance from itself in the interval between being and nothingness, between act and potency. It is maintained in the interval of the "is not yet" (or, the "is not all at once"). It is this interval—an interval that marks the production of a trace of separation or alterity—that, I will suggest in a moment,

Levinas proposes to call "dead time" (le temps mort).

Levinas elaborates on the description of the cogito as "not yet" or "not all at once" in the following passage:

Even its [i.e., the cogito's] cause, older than itself, is still to come [est encore à venir]. The cause of being is thought or known by its effect as though it were posterior to its effect (TeI 25/TaI 54).⁵

The cause of being (God) is thought or known by its effect (the cogito) as though the cause were posterior to its effect. Again, it is important to keep in mind that these passages are descriptions characteristic of knowledge as comprehension written from the perspective of a reader/writer who has already progressed through the two movements of the Meditations.

Referring to these passages, Levinas writes: "Thus already theoretical thought [...] articulates separation" (TeI 25/TaI 54). "Theoretical thought" here refers to knowledge understood as comprehension which articulates, after the fact, not merely the reflection, but the production of separation. For "separation," Levinas writes, "is not reflected in thought, but produced by it" (TeI 25/TaI 54, emphasis added). To fully appreciate this passage it will be necessary to clarify what Levinas means by "production."

⁵If the description of the cogito as "not yet" or "not all at once" follow from the fact that its cause is yet to come, then Levinas risks confusing his readers by beginning this passage with the word "even," which seems to imply that he is introducing new material.

Levinas introduces the term "production" in the preface to Totality and Infinity.

The term "production [production]" designates both the effectuation [l'effectuation] of being (the event "is produced [se produit]", an automobile "is produced [se produit]") and its being brought to light or its exposition (an argument "is produced [se produit]", an actor "is produced [se produit]"). The ambiguity of this verb conveys the essential ambiguity of the operation by which the being of an entity simultaneously is brought about [s'évertue] and is revealed (TeI XIV/TaI 26).

The essentially ambiguous operation of the term "production" is crucial for a proper understanding of the following passage which, as will become apparent below, is likewise crucial for a proper understanding of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations.

The I is not a contingent formation by which the same and the other, as logical determinations of being, can in addition be reflected [se refléter] within a thought. It is in order that alterity be produced [se produire] in being that a "thought" is needed and that an I is needed (TeI 9-10/TaI 39).

The alterity of the same and the other is not merely reflected within the thought of an "I." This passage, which alludes to Levinas' discussion of the cogito (I think), suggests that a cogito is needed in order that alterity be produced in being. The passage continues:

The irreversibility of the relation can be produced [se produire] only if the relation is effected [accompli] by one of the terms as the very movement of transcendence, as the traversing of this distance, and not as a recording of, or the psychological invention of this movement. "Thought" and "interiority" are the very break-up of being and the production [la production] (not the reflection [le reflet]) of transcendence. We know this relation only in the measure that we effect [effectuons] it; this is what is distinctive about it.

Alterity is possible only starting from me (TeI 10/TaI 39-40).

We know the relation, we can reflect upon it, only in the measure that we effect it (that is, bring it about). But what is known or reflected upon in this effectuation is not the appearance of something, as is usually the case in production (which ambiguously conveys both effectuation and being brought to light or appearing). For what is produced in this effectuation is not something that appears, but rather what withdraws from revelation and merely leaves a trace of itself in an ambiguity or enigma. Therefore, what is "known" or "reflected upon" is an irreducible ambiguity or enigma—a trace of what withdraws from revelation.

It is now possible to properly appreciate what Levinas means when he writes: "Separation is not reflected in thought, but produced by it" (TeI 25/TaI 54, emphasis added). Separation is produced by thought in that one effects a progression through the two movements of the Meditations, in the measure that one effects a performance of a reading of the Meditations. But what is reflected upon in this effectuation is not the appearance of something, as is usually the case in production (which ambiguously conveys both effectuation and being brought to light or appearing). For what is produced in this effectuation is an inversion of order with respect to the chronological order and the "logical" order. What is produced in this effectuation is the equiprimordiality of the cogito and God.

The ambiguity of Descartes' first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation. The separation of the I is thus affirmed to be non-contingent, non-provisional. The distance between me and God, radical and necessary, is produced [se produit] in being itself (TeI 19/TaI 48).

What is produced in this effectuation is not something that appears, but rather an irreducible ambiguity or enigma.

What is produced in this effectuation is not something that appears, but rather what withdraws from revelation and merely leaves a trace of itself in this ambiguity or enigma. Therefore, what is "reflected upon" is an irreducible ambiguity or enigma—a trace of what withdraws from revelation.

The effectuation of this "double origin" makes possible those descriptions of the cogito during the chronological order pointed out above—those descriptions which must have been written from the perspective of a reader/writer who has already effected a progression through the two movements of the Meditations. For example: the cogito "is not yet," or "is not all at once." Another example pointed out above is the following phrase: "The cause of being is thought or known by its effect as though it were posterior to its effect." The effectuation of an inversion of order, of a "double origin," makes possible the production of this logically absurd inversion of the "posteriority of the anterior" (TeI 25/TaI 54) by thought. "Thus already theoretical thought," on the basis of the

effectuation of an inversion of order, "articulates separation" (TeI 25/TaI 54). Returning to the sentence in question: "Separation is not reflected in thought, but produced by it. For in it," Levinas writes, reiterating the logically absurd inversion of the "posteriority of the anterior," "the After or the Effect conditions the Before or the Cause: the Before appears and is only welcomed" (TeI 25/TaI 54). It "appears," however, only as the irreducible ambiguity or enigma of the equiprimordiality of the chronological and "logical" orders. Therefore, what is reflected upon in this effectuation is not the appearance of something, as is usually the case in production, but the ambiguous or enigmatic trace of what withdraws from revelation.

This productionless production or "productionlessness"⁶ characteristic of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is marked by "dead time."

The interval of discretion or of death is a third notion between being and nothingness.

The interval is not to life what potency is to act. Its originality consists in being between two times. We propose to call this dimension dead time [le temps mort]. The rupture of historical and totalized duration, which dead time [le temps mort] marks, is the very rupture that creation operates in being (TeI 29/TaI 58).

"Dead time" marks the "relation without relation" (relation sans relation or rapport sans rapport) (TeI 52, 271/TaI 80,

⁶Compare with Blanchot's désœuvrement or "worklessness."

295) of the cogito and the infinite.⁷ The phrase rappport sans rapport articulates the fact that one "term" of the "relation"—the infinite—absolves itself from the "relation," withdraws from (or approaches) the "relation," or said otherwise, merely leaves a trace of itself in the production of a "double origin" in which it, momentarily appearing as an origin, is interminably vulnerable to being

⁷Levinas also refers to "dead time" in that section of Totality and Infinity entitled "The Infinity of Time."

Being is not produced [se produit] at one blow, irremissibly present. Reality is what it is, but will be once again, another time freely resumed and pardoned. Infinite being is produced [se produit] as times, that is, in several times across the dead time [le temps mort] that separates the father from the son. It is not the finitude of being that constitutes the essence of time, as Heidegger thinks, but its infinity. The death sentence [l'arret de la mort] does not approach as an end of being, but as an unknown, which as such suspends power. The constitution of the interval that liberates being from the limitation of fate calls for death. The nothingness of the interval—a dead time [un temps mort]—is the production [production] of infinity (TeI 260/TaI 284).

Levinas also refers to "dead time" in that section of chapter IV ("Substitution") of Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence entitled "Recurrence."

The expression "in one's skin" is not a metaphor for the in-itself; it refers to a recurrence in the dead time [le temps mort] or the meanwhile which separates inspiration and expiration, the diastole and systole of the heart beating dully against the walls of one's skin (AE 138/OB 109).

Other notable references to "dead time" occur in:

- 1) Maurice Blanchot's The Space of Literature. The reference to "dead time" occurs in that section of chapter I ("The Essential Solitude") entitled "The Fascination of Time's Absence."
- 2) Jacques Derrida's Of Grammatology. The reference to "dead time" occurs in that section of part I ("Writing before the Letter"), chapter 2 ("Linguistics and Grammatology") entitled "The Hinge."

reappropriated by the cogito.

The reading of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations undertaken thus far has focused on the relationship of the cogito and the infinite. This should come as no surprise since it is to this relationship that Levinas continually returns when he reads the Meditations. But "dead time" not only marks the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the infinite, but also the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the evil genius.

At the beginning of that section of Totality and Infinity entitled "Truth Presupposes Justice" Levinas points out that taking the cogito as the "first certitude"—which is characteristic of the first movement—constitutes "an arbitrary halt not justified of itself" (TeI 65/TaI 92-3).⁸ For in the cogito the thinking subject

ends up at the affirmation of an evidence that is not a final or initial affirmation, for it can be cast into doubt in its turn. The truth of the second negation, then, is affirmed at a still deeper level—but, once again, one not impervious to negation. This is not purely and simply a Sisyphean labor, since the distance traversed each time is not the same; it is a movement of descent toward an ever more profound abyss which we elsewhere have called there is [il y a], beyond affirmation and negation (TeI 65-6/TaI 93).

⁸In "God and Philosophy" Levinas likewise uses the term "halt" to describe what in Totality and Infinity he called the "first movement." But here he uses it in the context of the relationship of the cogito and the infinite.

After the certainty of the cogito, present to itself in the second Meditation, after the "halt" which the last lines of the Meditation mark, the third Meditation announces that "in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite—to wit, the notion of God before that of myself" (GP 160).

It is as if the certitude of the cogito—which is characteristic of the first movement—were "not yet," as if every attempt to actualize it were interrupted in the very attempt.

With this passage Levinas joins Descartes' description of the evil genius in the Meditations with his own account of the il y a, the "there is," that he had himself offered in Existence and Existents and in Time and the Other. The evil genius was introduced by Descartes to extend the range of issues which might be put into doubt. But the doubt arising from the evil genius is not only more extensive but also more potent than any doubt arising from a personal reflection on the fallibility of our senses. This doubt, by tearing one out of the world, thrusts one into a world that is not a world—an absolutely silent world, "an-archic, without principle, without a beginning." It thrusts one into a world where "thought would strike nothing substantial," where "on first contact the phenomena would degrade into appearance and in this sense would remain in equivocation" (TeI 63/TaI 90). It is this equivocation which constitutes the potency of the doubt arising from the evil genius.

The equivocation here is not due to the confusion of two notions, two substances, or two properties. It is not to be counted among the confusions produced within a world that has already appeared. Nor is it the confusion of being and nothingness. What appears is not degraded into a nothing. But the appearance, which is not a nothing, is not a being either—not even an interior being, for it is nowise in itself (TeI 63/TaI

91).

The equivocal appearance of the phenomena is neither pure nothingness nor a straightforward appearance in itself which, as such, would bear the signs enabling one to dismiss it and save one from being misled by it. Appearance is frightening precisely because of this equivocality, precisely because it only might deceive one. And because thought strikes nothing substantial, the I in the equivocal spiralling movement of negation and implicit affirmation does not find in the cogito itself a stopping place. It enters into a vertiginous "movement of descent [...] beyond affirmation and negation," where, like the subject interrupted by the infinite, it dwells in the equivocal interval between being and nothingness. In that section of Existence and Existents entitled "Existence Without Existents" Levinas writes:

When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. In the night, where we are riven to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer this or that; there is not "something." But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence; the voice of this silence is understood and frightens like the silence of those infinite spaces Pascal speaks of. There is [il y a], in general, without it mattering what there is, without our being able to fix a substantive to this term. There is [il y a] is an impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential. The mind does not find itself faced with an apprehended exterior. The exterior—if one insists on this term—remains

uncorrelated with an interior. It is no longer given. It is no longer a world. What we call the I is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalized, stifled by it. The disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear, the sheer fact of being in which one participates, whether one wants to or not, without having taken the initiative, anonymously. Being remains, like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one, universal, returning in the midst of the negation which put it aside, and in all the powers to which that negation may be multiplied.⁹

This reference to negation brings us back to Levinas' reading of doubt in Descartes' Meditations.

It was pointed out above that taking the cogito as the "first certitude"—which is characteristic of the first movement—constitutes "an arbitrary halt not justified of itself" (TeI 65/TaI 92-3). For in the cogito the thinking subject

ends up at the affirmation of an evidence that is not a final or initial affirmation, for it can be cast into doubt in its turn. The truth of the second negation, then, is affirmed at a still deeper level—but, once again, one not impervious to negation. This is not purely and simply a Sisyphean labor, since the distance traversed each time is not the same; it is a movement of descent toward an ever more profound abyss which we elsewhere have called there is [il y a], beyond affirmation and negation (TeI 65-6/TaI 93).

Levinas outlines here, I would suggest, two movements not wholly unlike those outlined with regard to the cogito and the infinite.

This reading of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is disruptive on several different levels.

⁹Emmanuel Levinas, De l'existence à l'existant (Paris: Vrin, 1984), 94-95. / Existence and Existents, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 58.

First, doubling the "double origin" disrupts any linear reading of the Meditations that would easily step from the evil genius to the certitude of the cogito, and then to the cogito's relationship with the infinite. That is, it disrupts any reading that would leave the evil genius behind, that would treat it as merely a step on the way to the cogito's relationship with the infinite. Second, doubling the "double origin" likewise disrupts any linear reading of Levinas' work. One can locate such a disruption in the relationship of silence and language delimited by Levinas in the context of his reading of Descartes' Meditations. Briefly, the "ever renewed equivocation [équivoque toujours renouvelée]" (TeI 63/TaI 91) characteristic of the silence of the evil genius/il y a cannot simply be opposed (as Levinas sometimes leads one to believe) to the "total frankness ever renewed [franchise totale, toujours renouvelée]" (TeI 71/TaI 98) characteristic of language. By the same token, this silence cannot easily be inscribed in a linear reading that would situate it as a step on the way to the frankness of language. The "ever renewed frankness" is always already accompanied (haunted?) by the "ever renewed equivocation." In fact, the "ever renewed equivocation" is the "inverse of language" (TeI 64/TaI 91), the inverse of the "ever renewed frankness" characteristic of language. Perhaps one should read "inverse" here as inverse sides of the same coin. This puts

any simple step into the "frankness" of language, into the "frankness" of the "ethical" relation, into question.

The reading of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations undertaken above has already begun to address, though not explicitly, the question of language in Levinas' work. Language, for Levinas, is itself the relation to infinity and the il y a, the rapport sans rapport. In a passage typical of several programmatic statements on language in Totality and Infinity Levinas writes that language is

an attitude of the same with regard to the Other, irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to an intention of thought, irreducible to a consciousness of..., since relating to what no consciousness can contain, relating to the infinity of the Other. Language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it in question (TeI 179/TaI 204).

In the Preface to Totality and Infinity, Levinas addresses the relationship between language as this rapport sans rapport and the exposition of this relation in the book.

The word by way of preface [préface] which seeks to break through the screen stretched between the author and the reader by the book itself [...] belongs to the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword [l'avant-propos] or the exegesis, in unsaying the said, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights (TeI XVIII/TaI 30).

This prefatory word (or fore-word) serves as an inaugural reminder that a reading of what is said in the book must

always already be accompanied by an unsaying. It announces that the language of Totality and Infinity is not exempt from the responsibility which language as rapport sans rapport exposes one—the unsaying of what is said. Totality and Infinity is a book that, by way of this prefatory word (or fore-word), interrupts itself.

Thirteen years later in Otherwise than Being this prefatory word (or fore-word) is not only formally thematized but, at the same time, written into the very argument and exposition of the text. This was almost certainly in response to readers such as Blanchot and Derrida who point out numerous ways Totality and Infinity can too easily be read. This response is called for because in most cases the once only prefatory word has to do all the work of unsaying what is merely programmatically said in Totality and Infinity. One notable exception, however, is Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations. Here there is an intratextual performance of what is merely announced extratextually by the prefatory word (or fore-word). Here there is the production of a work (Descartes', as well as Levinas') that is unproductive, that responds to the productionlessness of the work. In fact, the reading of Descartes' Meditations produced by Levinas in Totality and Infinity is, perhaps, not merely an anticipation of what he will later formalize and write into the very production of Otherwise than Being, but moreover, that which teaches him

the way to produce a work that responds to its own productionlessness. For this reading—which, as will become apparent in chapter III of this dissertation, plays both a decisive and a pervasive role in Totality and Infinity—is heavily drawn upon in Levinas' formal thematization of skepticism and the saying of the otherwise than being in Otherwise than Being.

Early in Otherwise than Being Levinas addresses, in language nearly identical to his announcement of the prefatory word (or fore-word), the "methodological problem" (AE 8/OB 7) of a pre-original saying "put forth in the foreword [le propos de l'avant-propos]" (AE 6/OB 5), or said otherwise, of "a forward preceding languages [avant-propos des langues]" (AE 6/OB 5).

The otherwise than being is stated in a saying that must also be unsaid in order thus to extract the otherwise than being from the said in which it already comes to signify but a being otherwise (AE 8/OB 7).

The unsaying of the said is cast by Levinas in terms of conveying and betraying.

We have been seeking the otherwise than being from the beginning, and as soon as it is conveyed before us it is betrayed in the said that dominates the saying which states it. A methodological problem arises here, whether the pre-original element of saying (the anarchical, the non-original, as we designate it) can be led to betray itself by showing itself in a theme (if an an-archeology is possible), and whether this betrayal can be reduced; whether one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks which thematization leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology.

Everything shows itself at the price of this betrayal, even the unsayable. In this betrayal the indiscretion with regard to the unsayable, which is probably the very task of philosophy, becomes possible (AE 8/OB 7).

Levinas rhetorically asks whether this betrayal, in which everything is inevitably conveyed, can be reduced—that is, whether the betrayal can be clandestinely caught in the act or listened in upon, so to speak. The betrayal can be reduced, Levinas insists, if one is attentive to the ambiguous trace of "the pre-original element of saying" (AE 8/OB 7) inscribed in the said, inscribed in particular betrayals of (read as a double genitive) the history of philosophy.

Saying, on the one hand, is the way the otherwise than being is said, the way the reduction of the betrayal is produced. But this is not "the pre-original element of saying." It is, rather, that element of saying which is merely a particular form of the said, specifically, the way something (including the pre-original element of language) is said.

Saying, on the other hand, is the pre-original, anarchical or excessive element of language that exceeds language. It is that which is "otherwise than being." But as excessive it inevitably gets reinscribed in the said. It is however, as was noted in the previous paragraph, reinscribed in a particular way. Saying, as the excessive element of language that exceeds language, leaves a trace of itself in an "ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking" (AE 9/OB 7), "in the form of ambiguity, of diachronic expression" (AE 56/OB 44).

Saying, on the one hand, is the trace of saying on the other hand.

Saying, on the one hand, that is, the reduction of a betrayal,

is produced [se produit] out of time or in two times without entering into either of them, as an endless critique, or skepticism, which in a spiralling movement makes possible the boldness of philosophy, destroying the conjunction into which its saying and its said continually enter (AE 57/OB 44).

This passage echoes the reading of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations undertaken in the previous sections of this chapter—specifically, the production of two irreducible times, the chronological and the logical order (TeI 25/TaI 54), and the spiralling movement of doubt (TeI 65-66/TaI 93)—as well as raise the question of the role of skepticism in the production of Levinas' work.

Skepticism is introduced in Otherwise than Being alongside Levinas' first formal thematization of the saying and the said. Here the necessity of unsaying the said, of reducing the betrayal inevitable characteristic of any attempt to convey the otherwise than being, is likened to skepticism.

Skepticism, at the dawn of philosophy, set forth and betrayed the diachrony of this very conveying and betraying. To conceive the otherwise than being requires, perhaps, as much audacity as skepticism shows, when it does not hesitate to affirm the impossibility of statement while venturing to realize this impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility. If, after innumerable "irrefutable" refutations which logical thought sets against it, skepticism has the gall to return (and it always returns as philosophy's illegitimate child), it is because in the contradiction

which logic sees in it the "at the same time" of the contradictories is missing, because a secret diachrony commands this ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking, and because in general signification signifies beyond synchrony, beyond essence (AE 9/OB 7).

But skepticism does not remain merely an aid to understanding the language of Otherwise than Being, and therefore something essentially external to the production of the work. On the contrary, the skeptical saying is bound ever more closely to the saying of the otherwise than being. It is as though the qualification "perhaps," so prominent in skepticism's introduction at the beginning of the work, were increasingly obscured throughout the production of Otherwise than Being until finally, towards the end of the work, Levinas writes: "Language is already skepticism" (AE 216/OB 170). That the skeptical saying becomes bound ever more closely to the saying of the otherwise than being is likewise evident in the following passage from the end of the work.

If the pre-original reason of difference, non-indifference, responsibility, a fine risk, conserves its signification, the couple skepticism and refutation of skepticism has to make its appearance alongside of the reason in representation, knowing, and deduction, served by logic and synchronizing the successive (AE 213/OB 167).

Notice that the equivocal qualification "perhaps," so prominent in skepticism's introduction at the beginning of the work, is here replaced by the unequivocal and emphatic phrase "has to."

That section at the end of Otherwise than Being

entitled "Skepticism and Reason"—which is the location of the two passages from the previous paragraph that illustrate the proximity of the skeptical saying and the saying of the otherwise than being—is the location of the most extensive treatment of skepticism in Otherwise than Being.

The periodic return of skepticism and of its refutation signify a temporality in which the instants refuse memory which recuperates and represents. Skepticism, which traverses the rationality or logic of knowledge, is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said. The contradiction is visible to reflection, which refutes it, but skepticism is insensitive to the refutation, as though the affirmation and negation did not resound in the same time. Skepticism then contests the thesis that between the saying and the said the relationship that connects in synchrony a condition with the conditioned is repeated (AE 213/OB 167-168).

The skeptical statement is inevitably refutable when there is a recognition—in a "second time" (AE 199/OB 156), that is, in reflection or "after the event" (après coup)—of the condition of the statement that states the skeptical signification. But the skeptical saying, does not merely allow itself to be walled up in the condition of its enunciation. It benefits from an ambiguity or enigma devolving from the very production of a contradiction that contests or negates it, that walls it up and domesticates it. It contests the thesis that the relationship between the two times integral to the production of a contradiction is merely a relationship of conditioned (the "first time") and condition (the "second time"), taken as though they both resounded in the same time.

The truth of skepticism [i.e., the statement of "the rupture, failure, impotence or impossibility of discourse" (AE 214/OB 168)] is put on the same level as the truths whose interruption and failure its discourse states, as though the negation of the possibility of the true were ranked in the order restored by this negation, as though every difference were incontestably reabsorbed into the same order. But to contest the possibility of truth is precisely to contest this uniqueness of order and level (AE 213-214/OB 168).

The production of the contradiction that contests the skeptical statement is compromised because it presupposes precisely what the skeptical statement calls into question—the uniqueness of order and level. The "at the same time" of the two times of the contradiction—which for traditional logic re-establishes the priority of the "second time," the condition of the enunciation, by reabsorbing the "first time" into the "second time"¹⁰—is precisely what the skeptical statement calls into question. Here there is, in a sense, an inversion of order with regard to the priority of the two times integral to the production of a contradiction. With the compromise, skepticism returns, that is, the "first time" re-establishes its priority over the "second time." This compromise is, however, only momentary, since the skeptical statement is again vulnerable to refutation.

¹⁰For Hegel, the "at the same time" of the contradictories is the appearance of a new shape on consciousness. The nothingness of negation, that is, the nothingness of the "first time," is, according to the logic of *Aufhebung*, not consumed. It is conserved in (and elevated into) the new shape of consciousness which Blanchot characterizes as a "unity of contraries" (SL 30).

This perpetual alternation between the production of a contradiction and the compromise of a contradiction (which is the return of the signification contradicted), articulates the two inextricable moments of the production of a trace of saying. It articulates the production of a trace of that which has never been present, never appeared.

This trace does not belong to the assembling of essence. Philosophy underestimates the extent of the negation in this "not appearing," which exceeds the logical scope of negation and affirmation. It is the trace of a relationship with illeity that no unity of apperception grasps (AE 214/OB 168).

Philosophy underestimates the extent of the negation in this "not appearing" because the trace is neither merely the negation of appearance, the "not appearing" of that which exceeds language (as in the production of a contradiction that negates or refutes the skeptical saying) nor merely the "appearing" of that which exceeds language (as in the compromise of the contradiction). Each of these moments is merely one of two inextricable moments necessary for the production of a trace.

Rather than its signification being merely refuted, reabsorbed, or consumed, that which exceeds language "conserves its signification" (AE 213/OB 167) in the production of a trace. It "conserves its signification"—at least momentarily—in the production of a trace, in the perpetual alternation characteristic of "the couple skepticism and refutation of skepticism" (AE 213/OB 167).

This perpetual alternation or "spiralling movement"

(AE 57/OB 44) echoes one aspect of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations in Totality and Infinity. At the beginning of that section of Totality and Infinity entitled "Truth Presupposes Justice" Levinas points out that taking the cogito as the "first certitude"—which is characteristic of the first movement—constitutes "an arbitrary halt not justified of itself" (TeI 65/TaI 92-93). For in the cogito the thinking subject

ends up at the affirmation of an evidence that is not a final or initial affirmation, for it can be cast into doubt in its turn. The truth of the second negation, then, is affirmed at a still deeper level—but, once again, one not impervious to negation. This is not purely and simply a Sisyphean labor, since the distance traversed each time is not the same; it is a movement of descent toward an ever more profound abyss which we elsewhere have called there is [il y a], beyond affirmation and negation (TeI 65-66/TaI 93).

It is as if the certitude of the cogito—which is characteristic of the first movement—were "not yet," as if every attempt to actualize it were interrupted in the very attempt.

Another aspect of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations in Totality and Infinity is echoed in another formal thematization of the saying of the otherwise than being—a thematization closely bound to Levinas' thematization of the skeptical saying. That section of Otherwise than Being entitled "From the Saying to the Said, or the Wisdom of Desire" addresses the way the saying of the otherwise than being shows itself in the said. One particular paragraph of this section calls for close

attention. It begins: "That the ontological form of the said could not alter the signification of the beyond being which shows itself in this said devolves from the very contestation of this signification." (AE 198/OB 156). That the conveying of the signification of the beyond being is not a complete betrayal of this signification, that the inevitable betrayal inherent in the conveying of the signification of the beyond can be reduced, devolves from the very production of a contradiction that is the contestation of this signification. Following upon this provisional statement Levinas rhetorically asks two provisional questions that will eventually call for a re-reading:

How would the contestation of the pretension beyond being have meaning if this pretension were not heard?
Is there a negation in which the sense of which the negation is a negation is not conserved (AE 198/OB 156)?

The significance of all three of these provisional sentences can only be determined within the context of a detailed explanation of the production of a contradiction, including of course, the contradiction that is the contestation of the signification beyond being.

The contradiction which the signification of the beyond being—which evidently is not—should compromise is inoperative without a second time, without reflection on the condition of the statement that states this signification. In this reflection, that is, only after the event [après coup], contradiction appears: it does not break out between two simultaneous statements, but between a statement and its conditions, as though they were in the same time (AE 198-199/OB 156).

The signification of the beyond being should, according to

Levinas, compromise the very contradiction that contests it. That this signification actually contests the very contradiction that contests it devolves from the production of this contradiction. The production of a contradiction, which refutes the signification of the beyond being and reabsorbs it into the said, requires two times—the statement of the beyond being and the reflection on the condition of the statement that states this signification. Contradiction appears only in this reflection, that is, only after the event, when the two times are taken as though they were in the same time. The signification of the beyond being is, therefore, evidently not beyond being when, in reflection, it is discovered that the subject is the condition of the enunciation. With this delimitation of the production of a contradiction one gets a hint of the significance of the first rhetorical question provisionally asked at the beginning of the paragraph: "How would the contestation of the pretension beyond being have meaning if this pretension were not heard?" The contradiction that is the contestation of the signification beyond being could not be produced, and therefore would not be effective as a contestation of this signification, if one moment of its production did not include the pretension of the signification beyond being. Still more, however, needs to be said on how this signification is heard without it being completely betrayed. Can there be a betrayal, as the second

rhetorical question asks, in which the sense of which the betrayal is a betrayal is not completely conserved? That is, can the betrayal be reduced?

This delimitation of the production of a contradiction also raises the question of the proximity of the signification of the beyond being (or otherwise than being) and the skeptical saying. The contradiction that is the contestation of the skeptical saying is, like the contradiction that is the contestation of the saying of the beyond being, produced in two times—"the implicit affirmation contained in saying [i.e., the condition of the statement of the skeptical saying (AE 213/OB 168)] and the negation which this affirmation states in the said" (AE 213/OB 167). The contradiction, which refutes the skeptical saying, is only "visible to reflection" which takes these two times as though they resounded in the same time.

But the saying of the beyond being, like the skeptical saying, does not allow itself to be walled up in the conditions of its enunciation. It likewise benefits from an ambiguity or enigma devolving from the very production of a contradiction that contests or negates it, that walls it up and domesticates it.

The way in which the saying of the beyond being does not allow itself to be walled up in the condition of its enunciation echoes one aspect of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations.

The statement of the beyond being, of the name of God, does not allow itself to be walled up in the conditions of its enunciation. It benefits from an ambiguity or an enigma, which is not the effect of an inattention, a relaxation of thought, but of an extreme proximity of the neighbor, where the Infinite comes to pass. The Infinite does not enter into a theme like a being to be given in it, and thus belie its beyond being. Its transcendence, an exteriority, more exterior, more other than any exteriority of being, does not come to pass save through the subject that confesses or contests it. Here there is an inversion of order: the revelation is made by him that receives it, by the inspired subject whose inspiration, alterity in the same, is the subjectivity or psyche of the subject (AE 199/OB 156).

The statement of the beyond being is inevitably refutable. The subject that merely confesses the infinite recognizes—in a "second time," that is, in reflection or "after the event" (après coup)—that it is the condition of the confession. It recognizes the statement of the beyond being as self-contradictory. Having recognized itself as the condition of the confession, it recognizes itself as the contestation of the confession. Descartes alludes to this contestation in the Meditations. Early in the second Meditation, following the first Meditation's pathway of doubt and immediately preceding the discovery of the cogito as the absolutely originary condition of certitude, Descartes writes:

Yet apart from everything I have just listed, how do I know that there is not something else which does not allow even the slightest occasion for doubt? Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me ['... puts into my mind' (French version)] the thoughts I am now having? But why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts (M 16)?

Or, said in the language of Levinas' reading of Descartes'

Meditations in Totality and Infinity, the "second time" integral to the production of a contradiction, that is, the reflection on the condition of the "first time"—that is, the pretentious statement or confession of the beyond being characteristic of what Levinas calls the "logical" order—is recognized as the chronological order.

While the confession of the infinite by the subject inevitably contests the infinite, Levinas insists that the infinite does not come to pass, does not leave a trace of itself, save through the subject that confesses it or that contests it by recognizing itself as the condition of the enunciation. Or, said in the language of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations in Totality and Infinity, the infinite does not come to pass, does not leave a trace of itself, save through the chronological order that takes the cogito as the cause of the infinite. But this inevitable refutation or contestation is obviously only half of the story necessary for the infinite to come to pass, for the production of a trace of the infinite. Were it the whole story, the recognition of the contradiction would merely alter the signification of the beyond being, would merely domesticate the infinite by walling it up in the condition on its enunciation, thereby conceding that the last word belongs to logical, rational philosophical discourse.

The other half of the story, devolving from the first half of the story, involves the infinite's resistance to

being walled up in the condition of its enunciation. Levinas is perhaps a bit too unequivocal when he writes: the statement of the beyond being, of the name of God, does not allow itself to be walled up. Given the first half of the story, Levinas would perhaps be more accurate writing: the statement of the beyond being, of the name of God, does not merely allow itself to be walled up. It does not merely allow itself to be walled up in the condition of its enunciation because it benefits from an ambiguity or enigma with respect to the condition of the enunciation. That is, the condition of the enunciation is not, as it may appear on initial reflection, merely the subject. The subject recognizes—again, in a "second time," that is, in reflection or "after the event" (après coup)—that the condition of its confession is the infinite. Or, again said in the language of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations in Totality and Infinity, there is the discovery of the "logical" order that subtends the evidence of the cogito, that takes the infinite as the cause of the cogito. The "second time" integral to the production of a contradiction, that is, the reflection on the condition of the "first time" that is the statement or confession of the beyond being, is recognized as the "logical" order rather than the chronological order. Here there is an inversion of order with respect to the condition of the enunciation, an inversion of the two times integral to the production of a

contradiction. The revelation is made by him or her that receives it. The confession or contestation of the infinite is made by him or her that is always already inspired by the infinite, by the inspired subject whose inspiration, alterity in the same, infinite within the finite, is the subjectivity or psyche of the subject.

The infinite can only come to pass, can only leave a trace of itself, in the irresolvably ambiguous or enigmatic "double condition" of its enunciation produced by a "double reading." The "double reading" of Descartes' Meditations does not allow the two times integral to the production of a contradiction to merely be thought "as though they were in the same time" (AE 199/OB 156). This "double reading" compromises the mere synchronization of the two times, it compromises the mere reabsorption of the "logical" order into the chronological order because it necessarily yet impossibly thinks the equiprimordiality of the chronological order that articulates the cogito as the condition of the enunciation, that is, as the condition of the infinite and the "logical" order that articulates the infinite as the condition of the enunciation (because it articulates the infinite as the condition of the cogito).

The logically absurd inversion of the two times integral to the production of a contradiction does not, as Levinas writes in his reading of Descartes' Meditations in Totality and Infinity, "indicate an illusion" (TeI 25/TaI

54). It "is not," as he writes in Otherwise than Being, "the effect of an inattention, a relaxation of thought, but of an extreme proximity of the neighbor, where the infinite comes to pass" (AE 199/OB 156)—that is, it is the trace of the infinite, of the otherwise than being, of the beyond being.

The significance of the three provisional sentences that opened the paragraph in question can now be determined. The paragraph began: "That the ontological form of the said could not alter the signification of the beyond being which shows itself in the said devolves from the very contestation of this signification" (AE 198/OB 156). That the conveying of the signification of the beyond being is not a complete betrayal of this signification, that the inevitable betrayal inherent in conveying of the signification can be reduced, devolves from the very production of a contradiction that is the contestation of this signification. The two times integral to the production of a contradiction are prevented by the "double reading" from merely being thought "as though they were in the same time" (AE 199/OB 156). There is, rather, a perpetual alternation between the production of the contradiction (when, according to the chronological order, the cogito is recognized as the condition of the enunciation of the signification of the beyond being) and the compromise of the contradiction, that is, the return of the signification of the beyond being (when, according to

the "logical" order, the infinite is recognized as the condition of the enunciation). The infinite is inevitably refutable, contestable, contradictory—but it returns. The second provisional sentence rhetorically asks: "How would the contestation of the pretension beyond being have meaning if this pretension were not heard" (AE 198/OB 156)? The contradiction that is the contestation of the pretension beyond being could not be produced without two times, one of which is the "logical" order, the pretension beyond being, that is inevitably refutable but that returns as one moment of the perpetual alternation between the production of the contradiction and the compromise of the contradiction (which is the return of the return of the signification contradicted). The pretension is heard (at least momentarily) because it is one moment of the perpetual alternation. The third provisional sentence rhetorically asks: "Is there a negation in which the sense of which the negation is a negation is not conserved" (AE 198/OB 156)? The answer: yes, when the two times integral to the production of a contradiction are prevented by a "double reading" from merely being thought "as though they were in the same time" (AE 199/OB 156), when there is a perpetual alternation between the production of a contradiction and the compromise of the contradiction. The negation is not conserved (at least completely) because it is merely one moment of the perpetual alternation.

The second and third provisional sentences, presented in the form of rhetorical questions, serve to articulate characteristics of the two inextricable moments of the production of a trace of the saying of the beyond being. This trace, as has already been pointed out, is produced by a necessary yet impossible "double reading," by a perpetual alternation between the production of a contradiction and the compromise of the contradiction (which is the return of the signification contradicted) neither of which can be extricated or abstracted from the other. With the trace, therefore, the signification of the beyond being, the pretension beyond being, is conserved, it is heard (at least momentarily) and, at the same time, the negation is not conserved (at least completely), because both are merely as moments of a perpetual alternation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE, NIHILISM, AND DEAD TIME

The life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it.

—Hegel

"[L]iterature begins," Blanchot writes in "Literature and the Right to Death," "at the moment when literature becomes a question."¹ What is "literature" insofar as Blanchot writes that it begins at the moment it becomes a question? Perhaps one should begin, however, not with the term "literature," but with the term "question" since it seems, from the very beginning, to render this phrase—"literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question"—questionable. That is, would not the moment when literature becomes a question, becomes questionable, presage the end of literature rather than its beginning? I would suggest that one begin with this ambiguous and questionable "question."

¹Maurice Blanchot, "La littérature et le droit à la mort," in La Part du feu (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 293, hereafter cited in the text as LDM. / "Literature and the Right to Death," in The Gaze of Orpheus, trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1981), 21, hereafter cited in the text as LRD.

This question—"the 'question' that seeks to pose itself in literature, the 'question' that is its essence" (LDM 311/LRD 41)—is posed to language by language that has become literature. This question is the "irreducible double meaning [un double sens irréductible]" (LDM 330/LRD 61) of death as possibility and death as impossibility, that is, death as an absolute alterity that infinitely approaches (or withdraws), the "is not yet" or "dead time." "Literature," Blanchot writes in the concluding sentence of the essay, "is the form this double meaning has chosen in which to show itself behind the meaning and value of words, and the question it asks is the question asked by literature" (LDM 331/LRD 62). This question is what Blanchot, in The Space of Literature, calls "double death [la double mort]."

I will limit my remarks on "Literature and the Right to Death" to a reading of two of what Blanchot calls a writer's temptations. One temptation—"revolution" or "revolutionary action"—marks the first instance of Blanchot's irreducibly ambiguous reading of the following passage from the Preface to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: "[T]he life of Spirit is [...] the life that endures [death] and maintains itself in it" (PS 19). Literature begins at the moment when it becomes a question, that is, at the moment when an initial reading of this line, which reads death as possibility, turns into a reading of this line which reads death as impossibility. Death, as this turning

itself, leaves a trace of itself, I would suggest, in the production or performance of an interminable step/not beyond (le pas au-delà), an eternal step beyond that eternally returns. This reading of "revolution" or "revolutionary action" will raise the question of the proximity of this temptation and Blanchot's reading in L'entretien infini of nihilism in the work of Nietzsche. Nihilism is another temptation of a writer named by Blanchot in "Literature and the Right to Death." A reading that raises the question of the proximity of "revolution" and nihilism will, therefore, raise several questions: What is the relationship of nihilism (or scepticism), named as a writer's temptation by Blanchot in "Literature and the Right to Death," and the nihilism of Blanchot's reading of the work of Nietzsche in L'entretien infini? What is the relationship of Blanchot's reading of Hegel in "Literature and the Right to Death" and his reading of Nietzsche in L'entretien infini? Is the nihilism of Blanchot's reading of the work of Nietzsche inscribed in his reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit?

In the first part of "Literature and the Right to Death"—that part which culminates in a reading of "revolution" or "revolutionary action" as one of a writer's temptations—Blanchot reads the experience of the writer alongside the experience of natural consciousness in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. Or more precisely, he re-writes

the experience of natural consciousness as an experience of a writer. For example, Blanchot describes work—citing an interpretation offered by Kojève in his Introduction à la lecture de Hegel (Leçons sur La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit)—as the realization of a plan through a process of transformation. It is a production that effectuates the appearance of something.² Blanchot uses the example of making a stove in order to get warm.

For example, my project might be to get warm. As long as this project is only a desire, I can turn it over every possible way and still it will not make me warm. But now I build a stove: the stove transforms the empty ideal which was my desire into something real; it affirms the presence in the world of something which was not there before, and in so doing, denies something which was there before; before, I had in front of me stones and cast iron; now I no longer have either stones or cast iron, but instead the product of the transformation of these elements—that is, their denial and destruction—by work. Because of this object, the world is now different. All the more different because this stove will allow me to make other objects, which will in turn deny the former condition of the world and prepare its future. These objects, which I have produced by changing the state of things, will in turn change me. The idea of heat is nothing, but actual heat will make my life a different kind of life, and every new thing I am able to do from now on because of this heat will also make me someone different. Thus is history formed, say Hegel and Marx—by work which realizes being in denying it, and reveals it at the end of the negation (LDM 304-305/LRD 33).

Reading this interpretation of Hegel alongside the experience of a writer Blanchot writes: "If we see work as the force of history, the force that transforms man while it transforms the world, then a writer's activity must be

²See chapter I of this dissertation for a description of production in Levinas' work.

recognized as the highest form of work" (LDM 304/LRD 33). For a writer not only "produces [a] work by transforming natural and human realities," he or she does it "to an outstanding degree" (LDM 305/LRD 34) insofar as his or her destructive act of transformation is limitless. The writer can write anything. Everything is instantly accessible to the writer. Even an enslaved writer, given only a few moments of freedom in which to write, can instantly give himself or herself a world of freedom. But, as Blanchot cautions, one is called to examine the work of the writer more closely.

Insofar as he immediately give himself the freedom he does not have, he is neglecting the actual conditions for his emancipation, he is neglecting to do the real thing that must be done so that the abstract idea of freedom can be realized. His negation is global. It not only negates his situation as a man who has been walled into prison but bypasses time that will open holes in these walls; it negates the negation of time, it negates the negation of limits. This is why this negation negates nothing, in the end, why the work in which it is realized is not a truly negative, destructive act of transformation, but rather the realization of the inability to negate anything, the refusal to take part in the world; it transforms the freedom which would have to be embodied in things in the process of time into an ideal above time, empty and inaccessible (LDM 306/LRD 35).

Blanchot uses a host of terms in this passage and throughout "Literature and the Right to Death" that can, with certain qualifications, be read as synonymous with one another: negation, transformation, realization, and production. This passage describes how all of these terms, which on a first reading can be read in a Hegelian register, find themselves,

upon closer examination or a second reading, to be at a certain distance from that Hegelian register. At decisive moments in the Phenomenology of Spirit these terms are discovered to be at a certain distance from that work,³ are interrupted, or said otherwise, are weakened. For example, in the passage just cited, Blanchot describes "the realization of the inability to negate [or realize] anything." This interruption or weakening of negation, transformation, realization, and production, is concomitantly the ruination of action.

The truth is that he ruins action, not because he deals with what is unreal but because he makes all of reality available to us. Unreality begins with the whole. The realm of the imaginary is not a strange region situated beyond the world, it is the world itself, but the world as entire, manifold, the world as a whole. That is why it is not in the world, because it is the world, grasped and realized in its entirety by the global negation of all the individual realities contained in it, by their disqualification, their absence, by the realization of that absence itself, which is how literary creation begins, for when literary creation goes back over each thing and each being, it cherishes the illusion that it is creating them, because now it is seeing and naming them from the starting point of everything, from the starting point of the absence of everything, that is, from nothing (LDM 307/LRD 36).

Literature, like every other activity in the world, presupposes the "movement of comprehension," the "movement of negation." But literature endeavors to realize or produce (that is, effectuate the appearance of) this very

³For a different reading of this "distance," which is read throughout this dissertation as the interval of the "is not yet" or "dead time," see Levinas' Totality and Infinity (for example TeI 25, 140, 184-185/TaI 54, 166, 209-210).

"movement" itself. Blanchot articulates this endeavor in various ways and in various locations throughout "Literature and the Right to Death." For example: literature is "tempted [...] to try to attain negation in itself and to make everything of nothing" (LDM 314/LRD 44). Or, literature's "only interest in a thing is in the meaning of the thing, its absence, and it would like to attain⁴ this absence absolutely in itself and for itself, to grasp in its entirety the infinite movement of comprehension" (LDM 315/LRD 44). Or, "[l]iterature is not content to accept only the fragmentary, successive results of this movement of negation: it wants to grasp the movement itself and it wants to comprehend the results in their totality" (LDM 319/LRD 48-49). Literature endeavors to step into that which is the very condition of any step. This endeavor is tragic because the power of negation, death, is the blind spot of language.

Negation cannot be created out of anything but the reality of what it is negating; language derives its value and its pride from the fact that it is the achievement of this negation; but in the beginning, what was lost? The torment of language is what it lacks because of the necessity that it be the lack of precisely this. It cannot even name it.

⁴At the risk of expanding the list to the point of meaninglessness, I would suggest that the term "attainment" can likewise (again, with certain qualifications) be read as synonymous with negation, transformation, realization, and production.

Whoever sees God dies.⁵ In speech what dies is what gives life to speech; speech is the life of that death, it is "the life that endures death and maintains itself in it." What wonderful power. But something was there and is no longer there. Something has disappeared. How can I recover it, how can I turn around and look at what exists before, if all my power consists of making it into what exists after? The language of literature is a search for this moment which precedes literature (LDM 316/LRD 45-46).

⁵See also Maurice Blanchot, L'écriture du désastre, (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 42 / The Writing of the Disaster, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 23.

I cannot welcome the Other, not even with an acceptance that would be infinite. Such is the new and difficult feature of the plot. The other, as neighbor, is the relation that I cannot sustain, and whose approach is death itself, the mortal proximity (he who sees God dies: for "dying" is one manner of seeing the invisible, of saying the ineffable. Dying is the indiscretion wherein God, become somehow and necessarily a god without truth, surrenders to passivity).

In both cases, see Exodus 33:18-23.

Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Revised Standard Version).

It is interesting to note that Levinas refers to this passage from the Bible in his early articulations of the logic of the "trace." See "Meaning and Sense" and "The Trace of the Other." It is also interesting to note that a few lines after Blanchot writes "Whoever sees God dies" (and within the same paragraph) he uses the term "trace:"

I say a flower! But in the absence where I mention it, through the oblivion to which I relegate the image it gives me, in the depths of this heavy word, itself looming up like an unknown thing, I passionately summon the darkness of this flower, I summon this perfume that passes through me though I do not breathe it, this dust that impregnates me though I do not see it, this color which is a trace and not light (LDM 316/LRD 46).

Literature realizes, in its tragic endeavor "to become the revelation of what revelation destroys" (LDM 317/LRD 47), that its "step beyond" is inevitably "not beyond." In a passage that perhaps recalls Heidegger's remarks on the term "own" (eigen), Blanchot writes that literature "learns that it cannot go beyond itself towards its own end" (LDM 318/LRD 47), towards its ownmost possibility—the "movement of negation" itself. One can step beyond "stepping" into the very possibility of "stepping" itself only by stepping, that is, the step beyond inevitably re-inscribes one in "stepping." This tragic step, this step/not beyond (le pas au-delà), is the formal articulation, according to Blanchot, of those decisive moments in the Phenomenology of Spirit when work or production is discovered to be at a certain distance from the Phenomenology of Spirit.

One of those decisive moments in the Phenomenology of Spirit is, according to Blanchot, the Revolution. "Revolution" or "revolutionary action" is likewise what Blanchot calls one of a writer's temptations. A writer's temptations are those decisive moments in the Phenomenology of Spirit, those "decisive moments in history" (LDM 309/LRD 38, emphasis added), which seem (at least on a first reading) to describe the very process of literary creation, the destructive act of transformation that is a step into the next stage of the dialectical progression. But these decisive moments are wrought with ambiguity. For example,

"revolution." In the writer, Blanchot writes, "negation [...] wishes to realize itself" (LDM 308/LRD 38). Blanchot continues:

It is at this point that he encounters those decisive moments in history when everything seems put in question, when law, faith, the State, the world above, the world of the past—everything sinks effortlessly, without work, into nothingness. The man knows he has not stepped out of history, but history is now the void, the void in the process of realization; it is absolute freedom which has become an event. Such periods are given the name Revolution. At this moment, freedom aspires to be realized in the immediate form of everything is possible, everything can be done. A fabulous moment—and not one who has experienced it can completely recover from it, since he has experienced history as his own history and his own freedom as universal freedom. These moments are, in fact, fabulous moments: in them, fable speaks; in them, the speech of fable becomes action. That the writer should be tempted by them is completely appropriate. Revolutionary action is in every respect analogous to action as embodied in literature: the passage from nothing to everything, the affirmation of the absolute as event and of every event as absolute (LDM 309/LRD 38).

Here again there is the ruination of action.

People cease to be individuals working at specific tasks, acting here and only now: each person is universal freedom, and universal freedom knows nothing about elsewhere or tomorrow, or work or a work accomplished. At such times there is nothing left for anyone to do, because everything has been done (LDM 309/LRD 38).

Concomitant with this ruination of action is the negation of the particular reality of the individual. The fabulous moment in history when the writer experiences his or her "own freedom as universal freedom" (LDM 309/LRD 38, emphasis added) ushers in the Reign of Terror, for the decision to allow the universality of freedom to assert itself completely in him or her negates the particular reality of

his or her life (LDM 310/LRD 39).

This is the meaning of the Reign of Terror. Every citizen has a right to death, so to speak: death is not a sentence passed on him, it is his most essential right; he is not suppressed as a guilty person—he needs death so that he can proclaim himself a citizen and it is in the disappearance of death that freedom causes him to be born. Where this is concerned, the French Revolution has a clearer meaning than any other revolution. Death in the Reign of Terror is not simply a way of punishing seditious; rather, since it becomes the unavoidable, in some sense the desired lot of everyone, it appears as the very operation of freedom in free men (LDM 309-310/LRD 39).

At this decisive moment, Blanchot introduces, for the first time in his work, the distinction between death as possibility and death as impossibility.

Death as an event no longer has any importance. During the Reign of Terror individuals die and it means nothing. In the famous words of Hegel, "It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water." Why? Isn't death the achievement of freedom—that is, the richest moment of meaning? But it is also only the empty point in that freedom, a manifestation of the fact that such a freedom is still abstract, ideal (literary), that it is only poverty and platitude. Each person dies, but everyone is alive, and that really also means everyone is dead. But "is dead" is the positive side of freedom which has become the world: here, being is revealed as absolute. "Dying," on the other hand, is pure insignificance, an event without concrete reality, one which has lost all value as a personal and interior drama, because there is no longer any interior. It is the moment when I die signifies to me as I die a banality which there is no way to take into consideration: in the liberated world and in these moments when freedom is an absolute apparition, dying is unimportant and death has no depth. The Reign of Terror and revolution—not war—have taught us this (LDM 310/LRD 39-40).

At this decisive moment in the Phenomenology of Spirit, in history, death as possibility, as the "richest moment of meaning," is discovered to be at a certain distance from the

Phenomenology of Spirit, from history. It is discovered to be interrupted, or said otherwise, to be weakened—death as impossibility. It is at this decisive moment in history that a reading of the following passage from the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit becomes irreducibly ambiguous: "[T]he life of Spirit is [...] the life that endures [death] and maintains itself in it."

Literature contemplates itself in revolution, it finds its justification in revolution, and if it has been called the Reign of Terror, this is because its ideal is indeed that moment when "life endures death and maintains itself in it" in order to gain from death the possibility of speaking and the truth of speech. This is the "question" that seeks to pose itself in literature, the "question" that is its essence (LDM 311/LRD 41).

Literature begins at the moment when it becomes a question, that is, at the moment when an initial reading of this line, which reads death as possibility, turns into a reading of this line which reads death as impossibility. Death, as this turning itself, leaves a trace of itself, I would suggest, in the production or performance of an interminable step/not beyond (le pas au-delà), an eternal step beyond that eternally returns.

Literature is the very production or performance of the ambiguous step/not beyond. What "appears" in this production or performance of a step/not beyond is an irreducible ambiguity of being and nothingness (LDM 327, 331/LRD 58, 62) Literature is the very production or performance of a trace of that which withdraws from (or,

said otherwise, which infinity approaches) revelation—the "is not yet" or "dead time."

This reading of "revolution" or "revolutionary action" raises the question of the proximity of this temptation and Blanchot's reading in L'entretien infini of nihilism in the work of Nietzsche. It is important to note that nihilism is another temptation of a writer named by Blanchot in "Literature and the Right to Death."

As we know, a writer's main temptations are called stoicism, scepticism, and the unhappy consciousness. These are all ways of thinking that a writer adopts for reasons he believes he has thought out carefully, but which only literature has thought out in him. [...] A nihilist, because he does not simply negate this and that by methodical work which slowly transforms each thing: he negates everything at once, and he is obliged to negate everything, since he only deals with everything (LDM 308/LRD 37).

Recall that "revolution" is a decisive moment in history when everything is called into question. "At this moment," Blanchot writes, "freedom aspires to be realized in the immediate form of everything is possible, everything can be done" (LDM 309/LRD 38). Nihilism is likewise a decisive event in history.

Nihilism is an event achieved in history, and yet it is like a shedding off of history, a moulting period, when history changes its direction and is indicated by a negative trait: that values no longer have value by themselves. There is also a positive trait: for the first time, the horizon is infinitely opened to knowledge—"All is permitted." When the authority of old values is collapsed, this new authorization means that it is permitted to know all, there is no longer a limit to man's activity. "We have a still undiscovered country before us, the boundaries of which no one has

seen, a beyond to all countries and corners of the ideal known hitherto, a world so over-rich in the beautiful, the strange, the questionable, the frightful..."⁶

Blanchot description of the achieving of this achievement, the realization of this extreme point or extreme form of nihilism, which corresponds to the achieving of science, is not unlike his description in "Literature and the Right to Death" of the destructive act of transformation, of the power of work which "realizes being in denying it, and reveals it at the end of the negation" (LDM 305/LRD 33).

[A]ll modern humanism, the work of science, and planetary development have as their object a dissatisfaction with what is, and hence the desire to transform being itself, to deny it in order to derive its power, and to make this power to deny the infinite movement of human mastery (EI 225/NN 126).

But this passage, which describes the realization of the extreme point or extreme form of nihilism, only tells half of the story. It will be necessary to return to this passage and situate it within its proper context.

Nietzsche writes the production of a step/not beyond into the very structure of On the Genealogy of Morals. The

⁶Maurice Blanchot, L'entretien infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 218-219, hereafter cited in the text as EI. / "The Limits of Experience: Nihilism," trans. John Leavey, in The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Dell, 1977), 122, hereafter cited in the text as NN. The quotation at the end of this passage is from Friedrich Nietzsche, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, in Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), sec. 382. / The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), sec. 382.

genealogical progression through the three essays seemingly culminates in an overcoming of ressentiment, bad conscience, and the ascetic ideal.

All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming [Selbstaufhebung]: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity⁷ of "self-overcoming [Selbstüberwindung]" in the nature of life—the lawgiver himself eventually receives the call: "patere legem, quam ipse tulisti [submit to the law you yourself proposed]."⁸

This necessary overcoming, this Aufhebung, is a "becoming conscious." It is the will to truth becoming conscious of itself.

And here again I touch on my problem, on our problem, my unknown friends (for as yet I know of no friends): what meaning would our whole being possess if it were not this, that in us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a problem (GdM 428/GoM 161)?

Deferring for a moment the question of why this "becoming conscious" is problematic, this passage provokes a question: as what does the will to truth become conscious of itself? Nietzsche answers this question in the final dramatically climactic lines of the text:

We can no longer conceal from ourselves what is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the

⁷"Necessity" is highlighted in the complete critical edition of Nietzsche's work. This emphasis is not reflected in the English translation.

⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift, in Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), vol.VI, pt.2, 428, hereafter cited in the text as GdR / On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 161, hereafter cited in the text as GoM.

human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—let us dare to grasp it—a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life: but it is and remains a will! ...And, to repeat in conclusion what I said at the beginning: man would rather will nothingness than not will (GdM 430/GoM 162-163).—

The will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a will to nothingness. But why would this "becoming conscious" be problematic? Why would it call the will to truth into question (GdM 419/GoM 153) rather than being merely the revelation of the most extreme form of nihilism, that extreme point where nihilism comes to an end in the conscious willing of nothingness, that is, the revelation of a moment in history when history is revealed in its truth? The will to truth becoming conscious of itself as a will to nothingness is problematic because the "step beyond," which reveals a concealed or unconscious evaluation as the truth of history, repeats the evaluative move characteristic of nihilism thereby reinscribing the "step beyond" nihilism into the "not beyond." The genealogist becomes inextricably implicated in the move of the ascetic priest. The genealogist, therefore, produces or performs an interminable step/not beyond, an eternal step beyond that eternally returns.

Although the eternal return remains merely implicit in the structure of On the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche

explicitly draws a connection between the eternal return and nihilism in one of the notes of what was to be The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values—a text that Nietzsche refers to as a "work in progress" (GdM 427/GoM 160) in the final pages of On the Genealogy of Morals.

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: "the eternal recurrence."

This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the "meaningless"), eternally!⁹

This passage tells one that the extreme form of nihilism is not merely that extreme point where nihilism comes to an end in the conscious willing of nothingness. The extreme form of nihilism is precisely where the possibility of coming to an end turns into the impossibility of coming to an end.

Until now we thought Nihilism was tied to nothingness. How rash that was: Nihilism is tied to being. Nihilism is the impossibility of coming to an end and finding an outcome in this end. It tells of the impotence of nothingness, the false renown of its victories; it tells us that when we think nothingness, we are still thinking being. Nothing ends; all begins again, the other is still the same, midnight is only a covered-over noon, and the highest noon is the abyss of light from which we can never escape (EI 224/NN 226).

This weakening of negation—which is also experienced at those decisive moments in the Phenomenology of Spirit, in history, when negation is discovered to be at a certain

⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, Nachgelassene Fragmente, in Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), vol.VIII, pt.1, 217 / The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 35-36.

distance from the Phenomenology of Spirit, from history—will have profound consequences. Returning to a passage cited earlier:

[I]f, indeed, we want to admit that all modern humanism, the work of science, and planetary development have as their object a dissatisfaction with what is, and hence the desire to transform being itself, to deny it in order to derive its power, and to make this power to deny the infinite movement of human mastery—then it will appear that this kind of negative weakness, and the way that nothingness is undeniably unmasked as being, lay waste at one stroke to our attempts to dominate the earth and to free ourselves from nature by giving it a meaning—i.e., be denaturalizing or perverting it (EI 225/NN 126).

The extreme form of nihilism (the turning itself of possibility into impossibility) leaves a trace of itself in the production of the necessary yet impossible step beyond nihilism. It leaves a trace of itself in the production of an interminable step/not beyond, an eternal step beyond that eternally returns.

This production is likewise traced in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Zarathustra prophesies the overman as the overcoming of the nihilistic evaluations of man. This overcoming is, as I described earlier, formally repeated in the very structure of On the Genealogy of Morals. The overman, one could say, is the will to truth having become conscious of itself—that is, the overman is the one who consciously wills nothingness.

[I]t his essential trait, the will, that would make the Overman the very form of Nihilism, rigorous and austere—for, according to Nietzsche's clear statement, "The will loves even more to will nothingness than not to will" [see Gdm 430/GoM 163]. The Overman is the one

in whom nothingness makes itself be willed and who, free for death, maintains this pure essence of will in willing nothingness. That would be Nihilism itself (EI 222/NN 124).

That would be the extreme point or extreme form of nihilism. But in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, as in On the Genealogy of Morals, this step beyond is equivocal. Immediately following his announcement of the eternal return in "On the Vision and the Riddle," Zarathustra encounters a young shepherd gagging on a heavy black snake. In "The Convalescent" Zarathustra's remarks are reminiscent of this encounter:

"The great disgust with man—this choked me and had crawled into my throat; and what the soothsayer said: 'All is the same, nothing is worth while, knowledge chokes.' A long twilight limped before me, a sadness, weary to death, drunken with death [eine todesmüde, todestrunkene Traurigkeit], speaking with a yawning mouth.¹⁰ 'Eternally recurs the man of whom you are weary, the small man.'¹¹

Zarathustra's disgust arises, Blanchot writes, from his understanding that

he will never definitively go beyond man's inadequacies, or that he will only be able to do this, paradoxically, by willing his return [retour]. But what does this return [retour] mean? It affirms that the extreme point of Nihilism is precisely where it is reversed [se renverse], that Nihilism is reversal itself [le retournement même]: it is the affirmation that, in

¹⁰Here, perhaps, is Zarathustra's "experience" of death as the impossibility of dying.

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, in Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), vol. VI, pt. 1, 270 / Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1966), 219.

passing from the no to the yes, refutes Nihilism—even though it does nothing other than affirm it, at which point Nihilism is extended to all possible affirmations.¹² From this we conclude that Nihilism would be identical with the will to overcome Nihilism absolutely (EI 225/NN 126).¹³

The extreme point of nihilism is, I would suggest, the moment when death as possibility turns into death as impossibility. It is, as that which exceeds the System, that which interrupts the step of the Hegelian Aufhebung, a moment that does not appear in itself, but that merely leaves a trace of itself. It leaves a trace of itself in the production of the going-over or transition (Übergang) becoming, at the same time, a going-under or downgoing (Untergang), that is, it leaves a trace of itself in the production of an interminable step/not beyond, an eternal step beyond that eternally returns. The extreme point of nihilism, as reversal itself (as turning itself), leaves a trace of itself in the production or performance of a reversal, a return.

The excessive nothingness of death could be characterized, I would suggest, by what Blanchot in The Space of Literature calls "the absence of time [l'absence de temps]" (SL 30-1). Like the excessive nothingness of death,

¹²Including the affirmation of the overman: nothingness.

¹³The last sentence of this passage is included in the French text as a footnote.

it not only interrupts the step of the Hegelian Aufhebung, it also leaves a trace of itself in the production of an interminable step/not beyond that is (not) itself subject to the logic of the dialectic.

The time of time's absence is not dialectical. In this time what appears is the fact that nothing appears. What appears is the being deep within being's absence, which is when there is nothing and which, as soon as there is something, is no longer. For it is as if there were not beings except through the loss of being, when being lacks. The reversal [Le renversement] which, in time's absence, points us constantly back to the presence of absence—but to this presence as absence, to absence as its own affirmation (an affirmation in which nothing is affirmed, in which nothing never ceases to affirm itself with the exhausting insistence of the indefinite)—this movement is not dialectical. Contradictions do not exclude each other in it; nor are they reconciled. Only time itself, during which negation becomes our power, permits the "unity of contraries." In time's absence what is new renews nothing; what is present is not contemporary; what is present presents nothing, but represents itself and belongs henceforth and always to return [retour] (EL 22-23/SL 30).

This time of time's absence is a "dead time" (un temps mort).

In the region we are trying to approach, here has collapsed into nowhere, but nowhere is nonetheless here, and this empty, dead time [le temps mort] is a real time in which death is present—in which death happens but doesn't stop happening, as if, by happening, it rendered sterile the time in which it could happen. The dead present is the impossibility of making any presence real—an impossibility which is present, which is there as the present's double, the shadow of the present which the present bears and hides in itself. When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone. The fact of being alone is my belonging to this dead time [ce temps mort] which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time. Someone is what is still present when there is no one. Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, as

that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation. Someone is the faceless third person, the They of which everybody and anybody is part, but who is part of it? Never anyone in particular, never you and I. Nobody is part of the They. "They" belongs to a region which cannot be brought to light, not because it hides some secret alien to any revelation or even because it is radically obscure, but because it transforms everything which has access to it, even light, into anonymous, impersonal being, the Nontrue, the Nonreal yet always there. The They is, in this respect, what appears up very close when someone dies (EL 23-24/SL 31).

"Dead time" marks a productionlessness,¹⁴ it marks what Blanchot calls désœuvrement. It marks those decisive moments in the Phenomenology of Spirit, in history, when production and work are discovered to be at a certain distance from the Phenomenology of Spirit, from history. It marks those decisive moments when death as possibility turns into death as impossibility, when the following passage from the Preface to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit becomes irreducibly ambiguous: "[T]he life of Spirit is [...] the life that endures [death] and maintains itself in it" (PS 19).¹⁵

¹⁴See chapter I of this dissertation for a description of productionlessness in Levinas' work.

¹⁵The reading undertaken in this chapter—which merely raises the question of the proximity of Blanchot's reading in "Literature and the Right to Death" of "revolution" or "revolutionary action" in the work of Hegel to Blanchot's reading in L'entretien infini of nihilism in the work of Nietzsche—need to be supplemented with a reading of Blanchot's Le pas au-delà. This work explicitly addresses the question of the relationship of Hegel and Nietzsche.

CHAPTER 3

DEAD TIME: "A Fine Risk"

How the adversity of pain is ambiguous!
—Levinas

Learn to think with pain.
—Blanchot

Totality and Infinity calls for being read in a multiplicity of ways. Alphonso Lingis, the principle translator of Levinas into English, suggests that Totality and Infinity is "structured, classically, as a phenomenology in different strata, related as founding and founded" (OB xv). Granted, the structure, and often the vocabulary, of Totality and Infinity lends itself to such a reading. But such a reading risks domesticating the interruptions of Totality and Infinity. It risks the possibility of Totality and Infinity being too easily read and appropriated by, for example, ethics or theology. Furthermore, such a reading can only be undertaken if one does not heed Totality and Infinity's extratextual prefatory word.

The word by way of preface which seeks to break through the screen stretched between the author and the reader by the book itself [...] belongs to the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by the forward or the exegesis, in unsaying the said, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights (TeI XVIII/TaI

30).

But this once only prefatory word (or fore-word) which, in most cases, has to do all of the work of unsaying what is merely said in Totality and Infinity, obviously leaves the work vulnerable to be too easily read and appropriated. It was suggested in chapter I of this dissertation, however, that Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is a notable exception to the lack of an intratextual production of what is announced extratextually by the prefatory word (or fore-word). It was also suggested that this reading is perhaps not merely an anticipation of what Levinas will later formalize and write into the very production of Otherwise than Being, but moreover, that which teaches him the way to produce a work that responds to its own productionlessness. With this in mind it may perhaps be instructive to remain attentive to the way this reading plays both a decisive and a pervasive role, on innumerable levels, in the very structure of Totality and Infinity.

In Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations "dead time" or the interval of the "is not yet" names the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the infinite as well as the rapport sans rapport of the cogito and the evil genius or il y a. The reading of "dead time" in Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations undertaken in chapter I of this dissertation requires, however, a deformalization or concretization. This is undertaken especially in sections

II and III of Totality and Infinity where, I would suggest, "dead time" gets renamed at each successive stratum. The following passage from Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" is, with certain qualifications, a provisional characterization of the structure of Totality and Infinity.

In Totality and Infinity the thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself.¹

A reading of Totality and Infinity which begins with "dead time" will call into question a simple linear reading of sections II and III of Totality and Infinity and raise the question of the proximity of Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being. "Dead time" also names the "site" of a certain "relationship" of the infinite and the il y a. The interval of death, therefore, perhaps names what in Otherwise than Being is referred to as "a fine risk."

Readings of Totality and Infinity frequently focus on the first thirty-three pages of Section III ("Exteriority and the Face"), taking the face as their point of departure. I would suggest that one begin with the body which, as will

¹Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 312 n.7.

become apparent in a moment, is not merely a "site" from which one can unproblematically "begin" anything.

Specifically, I would suggest that one begin with the equivocality of the lived body and the physical body, appearing in its most primordial form (TeI 212/TaI 235) in the postponement of death in a mortal will, in the interval of the "is not yet" or "dead time."

This equivocation is first outlined in the first two parts of section II.B.—"Representation and Constitution" and "Enjoyment and Nourishment." The equivocation outlined here will not merely be left behind but re-described throughout not only section II, but also sections III and IV.

Levinas begins the first two parts of section II by describing the movement proper to objectifying intentionality, and by establishing the proximity of the movement to what he, in other contexts, calls the first movement of Descartes' Meditations. He begins, specifically, by directing the readers attention to the privilege of representation that appeared with the first exposition of intentionality as a philosophical thesis. "The thesis that every intentionality is either a representation or founded on a representation dominates the Logische Untersuchungen and returns as an obsession in all of Husserl's subsequent work" (TeI 95/TaI 122). This pervasive domination of representation leads, Levinas

contends, to transcendental philosophy.

The Husserlian thesis of the primacy of the objectifying act—in which was seen Husserl's excessive attachment to theoretical consciousness, and which has served as a pretext to accuse Husserl of intellectualism² (as though that were an accusation!)—leads to transcendental philosophy, to the affirmation (so surprising after the realist themes the idea of intentionality seemed to approach) that the object of consciousness, while distinct from consciousness, is as it were a product of consciousness, being a "meaning" endowed by consciousness, the result of Sinngebung (TeI 95-96/TaI 123).

Levinas contends that despite the fact that the object of representation (noema), is, according to Husserlian phenomenology, to be distinguished from the act of representation (noesis), the object of representation—insofar as it is reduced to noemata that remain correlative to the act of representation—falls under

²Levinas is here alluding to himself as an interpreter of Husserl. In Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 141. / The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, trans. André Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 94, Levinas writes:

Let us indicate at once [...] that although intuition appears as a very broad notion which makes no presuppositions about the mode of existence of its object, one should not forget that, for Husserl, intuition is a theoretical act, and that inasmuch as other acts can reach being they must, according to the Logische Untersuchungen, be based on a representation. [...] If Ideen modifies, with respect to the Logische Untersuchungen, the thesis according to which representation is the basis of all acts, it does not modify it enough to forbid us to say that each position of being (thesis) includes a representative thesis. We must, therefore, observe first that, for Husserl, being is correlative to theoretical intuitive life, to the evidence of an objectifying act. This is why the Husserlian concept of intuition is tainted with intellectualism and is possibly too narrow.

the power of thought. Here Levinas establishes the proximity of this negative movement of the Husserlian epoche characteristic of representation (TeI 98/TaI 125) to the first movement of Descartes' Meditations. This reduction to noemata is, he writes,

a question of what in Cartesian terminology becomes the clear and distinct idea. In clarity an object which is first exterior is given that is, is delivered over to him who encounters it as though it had been entirely determined by him. In clarity the exterior being presents itself as the work of the thought that receives it. Intelligibility, characterized by clarity, is a total adequation of the thinker with what is thought, in the precise sense of a mastery exercised by the thinker upon what is thought in which the object's resistance as an exterior being vanishes. This mastery is total and as thought creative; it is accomplished as a giving of meaning: the object of representation is reducible to noemata. The intelligible is precisely what is entirely reducible to noemata and all of whose relations with the understanding reducible to those established by the light. In the intelligibility of representation the distinction between me and the object, between interior and exterior, is effaced. Descartes's clear and distinct idea manifests itself as true and as entirely immanent to thought: entirely present, without anything clandestine; its very novelty is without mystery. Intelligibility and representation are equivalent notions: an exteriority surrendering in clarity and without immodesty its whole being to thought, that is, totally present without in principle anything shocking thought, without thought ever feeling itself to be indiscreet. Clarity is the disappearance of what could shock. Intelligibility, the very occurrence of representation, is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same, without introducing alterity into it; it is a free exercise of the same. It is the disappearance, within the same, of the I opposed to the non-I (TeI 96-97/TaI 123-124).

There is then, according to Levinas, an essential correlation of intelligibility and representation (TeI 99/TaI 127).

But this description of representation in Husserlian phenomenology is, like the description of the first movement of Descartes' Meditations, "detached from the conditions of its latent birth" (TeI 99/TaI 126). In Descartes' Meditations the certitude of consciousness—which is due to the clarity and distinctness of the cogito—is subtended by a second movement, by a "logical" order distinct from the chronological order. The clarity and distinctness of the cogito is subtended by the discovery of the infinite. With this discovery of a condition for what was otherwise taken in a first movement as indubitable of itself by itself, there is an inversion of order—the effect becomes the condition of the cause—that produces an irreducibly enigmatic "double origin," that produces separation. This inversion of order that produces separation is likewise operative in Levinas' description of representation and the elements one enjoys.

Representation, like the first movement of Descartes' Meditations, is "a necessary moment of the event of separation" (TeI 95/TaI 122, emphasis added), but it is merely one of two necessary moments. Representation, like the first movement of Descartes' Meditations, is taken as an unconditioned condition. It "consists in the possibility of accounting for the object as though it were constituted by a thought, as though it were a noema" (TeI 101/TaI 128). This possibility reduces the represented to the unconditioned

instant of thought. But the elements one enjoys subtend this movement of representation. In the enjoyment of the elements

the process of constitution which comes into play wherever there is representation is reversed. What I live from is not in my life as the represented is within representation in the eternity of the same or the unconditioned present of cognition (TeI 101/TaI 128).

If one persists in using the language of representational thinking, that is, if one insists on describing this "phenomenon" in terms of constitution, one runs up against an enigma.

If one could still speak of constitution here we would have to say that the constituted, reduced to its meaning, here overflows its meaning, becomes within [au sein de] constitution the condition of the constituting, or, more exactly, the nourishment of the constituting. This overflowing of meaning can be fixed by the term alimentation. The surplus over meaning is not a meaning in its turn, simply thought as a condition—which would be to reduce the aliment to a correlate represented. The aliment conditions the very thought that would think it as a condition. It is not that this conditioning is only noticed after the event [après coup]: the originality of the situation lies in that the conditioning is produced in the midst of [se produit au sein du] the relation between representing and represented, constituting and constituted—a relation which we find first in every case of consciousness (TeI 101/TaI 128).

That the constituted becomes within constitution the condition of the constituting, that the aliment as condition is produced in the midst of the relation between constituting and constituted, is and remains, for representational thinking, enigmatic. The originality of the situation lies in the necessary yet impossible thinking together of both representation as condition and the aliment

as condition. It lies in the irreducible enigma of a "double origin"—of an enigma which is the trace of that which exceeds meaning, of a past that has never "traversed the present of representation" (TeI 103/TaI 130), of a future that is always yet to come.

Levinas situates this description of the production of separation within the context of the event of dwelling [l'événement de demeurer]. The description of the event of dwelling in section II.D.—"The Dwelling"—will, like the description of separation first outlined in the first two parts of section II.B., be informed by Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations. Recalling the description of an inversion of order in section II.B.2., "Enjoyment and Nourishment," Levinas writes:

Representation is conditioned. Its transcendental pretension is constantly belied by the life that is already implanted in the being representation claims to constitute. But representation claims to substitute itself after the event [après coup] for this life in reality, so as to constitute this very reality. Separation has to be able to account for this constitutive conditioning accomplished [accompli] by representation—though representation be produced after the event [se produire après coup]³ (TeI 143/TaI 169).

³It seems as though Levinas' use of the term "production" here merely indicates that representation is conditioned, that it is posterior to "life." The phrase "after the fact" only refers to the alternation between the two poles of a "double origin." Therefore, when Levinas writes "representation is produced after the event" he is referring to only one pole of the "double origin"—representation understood as comprehension—which can then, again "after the event," be called into question by the other pole—"life," the elements one enjoys (which are articulated by the critical essence of representation).

Any account of the event of separation, Levinas writes, has to be able to account for or accommodate the constitutive conditioning accomplished or produced by representation. It has to be able to account for or accommodate representation's accomplishment or production of an inversion of order, its accomplishment or production of being both constitutive, that is, condition, and conditioned. Separation has to be able to account for or accommodate representation's constituting, which moves on straight ahead, and its calling itself into question when it recognizes that what it constitutes is the condition of its constituting. That is, any account of the event of separation has to be able to account for or accommodate the distinction Levinas makes between knowledge or theory understood as comprehension and the critical essence of knowing which, in its tracing back to a condition of comprehension, calls comprehension into question.

The theoretical, being after the event [après coup], being essentially memory, is to be sure not creative; but its critical essence—its retrogressive movement—is no wise a possibility of enjoyment and labor.⁴ It evinces a new energy, oriented upstream, counter-current, which the impassiveness of contemplation expresses only superficially (TeI 143-144/TaI 169).

The "relationship," or more precisely, the rapport sans

⁴It is not entirely clear what Levinas means when he writes that the critical essence of the theoretical is not to be confounded with any possibility of enjoyment and labor. Perhaps he is reading enjoyment as freedom (TeI 59/TaI 87), which is then called into question by the critical essence of knowing.

rapport, of these two inversely oriented aspects of thought is, I suggested in chapter II, formerly articulated by the two movements of Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations. These two distinct movements, the reader will recall, characterize the very meaning of separation (TeI 19/TaI 48). The event of separation is, therefore, able to account for or accommodate the ambiguity of representation as condition and conditioned in that it is produced by representation's accomplishment of this inversion of order. The event of separation both accounts for and is accounted for by representation's accomplishment of this inversion of order. There is a reciprocity here that calls into question Levinas' use of the language of causality. It raises the question: what accounts for what? This reciprocity is reflected in the next paragraph of the text where Levinas writes that the ambiguity of representation as condition and conditioned—which is articulated by the inversely oriented movements of comprehension and critique—both "results from" and produces separation.

That representation is conditioned by life, but that this conditioning could be reversed after the event [après coup]—that idealism is an eternal temptation—results from the very event of separation, which must not at any moment be interpreted as an abstract cleavage in space. The fact of the after-the-event [l'après-coup] does show that the possibility of constitutive representation does not restore to abstract eternity or to the instant the privilege of measuring all things; it shows, on the contrary, that the production [la production] of separation is bound to time, and even that the articulation of separation in time is produced [se produit] thus in itself and not only secondarily, for us (TeI 144/TaI 169).

It is important to note that the reversal or inversion of the order of the elements one enjoys and representation is operative in both directions, though Levinas explicitly outlines only one direction in this passage. That is, representation as conditioned by the elements can be reversed after the event, but it is likewise the case that representation as constitutive of the elements can be reversed after the event.⁵ The fact of the after-the-event does show, therefore, that constitutive representation is merely a possibility. It is merely one possibility among the two possibilities of a "double origin," since it perpetually alternates with the elements one enjoys understood as a condition, it perpetually alternates with itself as conditioned. As merely one pole of a perpetually alternating double origin constitutive representation does not, therefore, "restore to abstract eternity or to the instant the privilege of measuring all things" (TeI 144/TaI 169). This restoration is interrupted, perpetually. The fact of the after-the-event shows, moreover, that the production of separation is bound to time, it is bound to

⁵This is attested to not only in the first two parts of section II.B. ("Representation and Constitution" and "Enjoyment and Nourishment"), but also in the opening sentence of the next paragraph in the text:

The possibility of a representation that is constitutive but already rests on the enjoyment of a real completely constituted indicates the radical character of the uprootedness of him who is recollected in a home, where the I, while steeped in the elements, takes up its position before a Nature (TeI 144/TaI 169).

the perpetual recognition, after the fact (après coup), of the condition of what in a first movement is taken to be a condition. It is again important to note that the production or performance of this inversion of order is operative, as was stated above, in both directions, perpetually. That the production of separation is bound to time recalls Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations. Drawing upon a passage in Totality and Infinity referring specifically to Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations, but equally applicable to the rapport sans rapport of the I of representation and the elements one enjoys, one could write: The ambiguity of what conditions what, revealing the I of representation and the elements one enjoys in turn without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation. The separation of the I is thus affirmed to be non-contingent, non-provisional. The distance between me and the elements, radical and necessary, is produced in being itself (TeI 19/TaI 48). "Even the articulation of separation in time," Levinas continues, "is produced thus in itself and not only secondarily, for us" (TeI 144/TaI 169). It is not as though separation existed before it was articulated in time. Separation in itself is produced only in the event of articulation, only in the

event of producing or performing an inversion of order.⁶ What is produced "secondarily, for us," that is, what can be reflected upon (TeI 10, 25/TaI 40, 54) or known (TeI 144/TaI 170), is an ambiguous or enigmatic "double origin." What is produced "secondarily, for us" is not the appearance of something (as is usually the case in the effectuation of production), but rather the equivocal trace of what withdraws from appearance—a separated being as "not yet" and an absolute exteriority as "not yet." This production obviously calls into question the designation "in itself," for separation can be something "in itself" only in being produced as an irreducibly enigmatic or ambiguous "double origin," that is, only in not being something "in itself."

The next paragraph of the text explicitly situates this description of the event of separation within the context of the event of dwelling.

The possibility of a representation that is constitutive but already rests on the enjoyment of a real completely constituted indicates the radical character of the uprootedness of him who is recollected in a home, where the I, while steeped in the elements, takes up its position before a Nature. The elements in and from which I live are also that to which I am opposed. The feat of having limited a part of this world and having closed it off, having access to the elements I enjoy by way of the door and the window, realizes extraterritoriality and the sovereignty of thought,

⁶This articulation of separation, which is synonymous with the production of separation, is different from an articulation of separation that takes place after production, that is, after the progression through the two movements (eg. the description of the cogito as "not yet," the "posteriority of the anterior," etc., see esp. TeI 25/TaI 54).

anterior to the world to which it is posterior.
Anterior posteriorly: separation is not thus "known";
 it is thus produced [se produit] (TeI 144/TaI 169-170).

Levinas draws upon his reading of Descartes' Meditations when he writes that extraterritoriality and the sovereignty of representational thinking, the feat of being disengaged from the world of the elements, is "anterior to the world to which it is posterior" (TeI 144/TaI 170). The effectuation of an incessant inversion of order that is the production of a "double origin" is dwelling. Dwelling is both the disengagement of representation and the engagement of being steeped in the elements one enjoys, neither merely the disengagement of representation nor the engagement of being steeped in the elements one enjoys. The productionless production of separation or dwelling is marked or named by "dead time," the interval of the "is not yet." That is, the effectuation of the perpetual alternation characteristic of separation or dwelling articulates the "not yet" of disengagement and the "not yet" of engagement.

Dwelling or separation is a "way of being" articulated by the body. "A being has detached itself from the world from which it still nourishes itself! [...] There is here an ambiguity of which the body is the very articulation" (TeI 89/TaI 116). The body is the accomplishment (l'accomplissement, TeI 101, 102/TaI 128, 129) or production of the irreducibly enigmatic "double origin" of the disengagement of representation and the engagement of being

steeped in the elements one enjoys.

The body naked and indigent identifies the center of the world it perceives, but conditioned by its own representation of the world, it is thereby as it were torn up from the center from which it proceeded, as water gushing forth from rock washes away that rock. [...] The body naked and indigent is the very reverting, irreducible to a thought, of representation into life, of the subjectivity that represents into life which is sustained by these representations and lives of them; its indigence—its needs—affirm "exteriority" as non-constituted, prior to all affirmation (TeI 100/TaI 127).

The body is the effectuation of a perpetual inversion of order.

The body is a permanent contestation of the prerogative attributed to consciousness of "giving meaning" to each thing; it lives as this contestation. The world I live in is not simply the counterpart or the contemporary of thought and its constitutive freedom, but a conditioning and an antecedence. The world I constitute nourishes me and bathes me. It is aliment and "medium" ["milieu"]. The intentionality aiming at the exterior changes direction in the course of its very aim by becoming interior to the exteriority it constitutes, somehow comes from the point to which it goes, recognizing itself past in its future, lives from what it thinks (TeI 102/TaI 129).

This incessant inversion of order that is the production of an irreducibly enigmatic "double origin" of representation and the elements one enjoys formally parallels, I would suggest, Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations.⁷

⁷It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Levinas establishes the proximity of Husserlian representation and the Cartesian clear and distinct idea (TeI 96-97/TaI 123-124), Levinas recognizes the superiority of Cartesian philosophy over Husserlian phenomenology insofar as Descartes puts limits on noematization.

The body indigent and naked is [the] very changing of sense. This is the profound insight Descartes had when he refused to sense data the status of clear and distinct ideas, ascribed them to the body, and relegated them to the useful. This is his superiority over

That the body's concrete articulation of the production of separation or dwelling formally parallels Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations is further substantiated in section II.D.5., "Labor, the Body, Consciousness," where Levinas thematizes two aspects of the body. These two aspects of the body—lived body and physical body—articulate two movements not formally unlike the two movements of Descartes' Meditations.

Life is a body, not only lived body [corps propre], where its self-sufficiency emerges, but a cross-roads of physical forces, body-effect. In its deep-seated fear life attests this ever possible inversion of the body-master into body-slave, of health into sickness. To be a body is on the one hand to stand [se tenir], to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth [se tenir sur terre], to be in the other [l'autre], and thus to be encumbered by one's body (TeI 138/TaI 164).

This distinction parallels, I would suggest, the two movements integral to the production of separation or dwelling—the independence of the I of representation and the dependence upon the elements. Earlier in Totality and Infinity Levinas describes dwelling in terms of "standing."

Dwelling is the very mode of maintaining oneself [se tenir], not as the famous serpent grasping itself by biting onto its tail, but as the body that, on the earth exterior to it, holds itself up [se tient] and can. The "at home" [Le "chez soi"] is not a container but a site where I can, where, dependent on a reality that is other [autre], I am, despite this dependence or thanks to it, free (TeI 7/TaI 37).

"Standing," taken in abstraction or "detached from the

conditions of its latent birth" (TeI 99/TaI 126), articulates representational thinking. But "standing" is always already a "standing there," a standing on the earth, a being steeped in the elemental. Standing there, that is, "standing" not taken in abstraction, articulates "the radical character of the uprootedness of him who is recollected in a home" (TeI 144/TaI 169), for it articulates both the independence of the I of representation and the dependence upon the elements, neither merely one nor the other. As an articulation of the "not yet" of the I of representation and the "not yet" of the elemental, it is otherwise than merely "thinking." Hence, Levinas writes:

Standing there [S'y tenir] is precisely different from "thinking." The bit of earth that supports me is not only my object; it supports my experience of objects. Well-trampled places do not resist me but support me. The relation with my site in this "stance" ["tenue"] precedes thought and labor. The body, position, the fact of standing [se tenir]—patterns of the primary relation with myself, of my coincidence with myself—nowise resemble idealist representation (TeI 111/TaI 138).

Levinas is perhaps a bit too unequivocal when in this passage, he writes that the body, the fact of standing—both of which are characterized by the same irreducible equivocality—nowise resemble idealist representation, for "standing" (not taken in abstraction) is, as I suggested above, an articulation of both the independence of the I of representation and the dependence upon the elements, neither merely one nor the other. Therefore, rather than completely discounting idealist representation, it must be taken as one

moment (albeit, a moment vulnerable to an ever possible inversion) of the equivocation characteristic of the body, the fact of standing. Levinas himself seems to indicate this in the passage just cited when he writes: "The bit of earth that supports me is not only my object; it supports my experience of objects" (TeI 111/TaI 138, emphasis added). By conceding that the earth is not only an object of idealist representation he concedes, at least implicitly, that idealist representation plays some role in "standing." Another indication of this equivocality characteristic of "standing" is evident in the passage cited at the beginning of this paragraph: "To be a body is on the one hand to stand, to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the other" (TeI 138/TaI 164). Here Levinas seems to make a distinction between "standing," detached from its concrete conditions (which articulates the independence of the I of representation), and "standing on the earth, in the other" (which articulates the dependence upon the elements). That the two movements integral to the production of separation or dwelling—the independence of the I of representation and the dependence upon the elements—parallel the distinction between the lived body and physical body is established in the following passage:

To be at home with oneself in something other than oneself, to be oneself while living from something other than oneself, to live from..., is concretized in corporeal existence. "Incarnate thought" is not initially produced [se produit] as a thought that acts on the world, but as a separated existence which affirms

its independence in the happy dependence of need. It is not that this equivocation amounts to two successive points of view on separation; their simultaneity constitutes the body. To neither of the aspects which reveal themselves in turn does the last word belong (TeI 139/TaI 164-165).

This passage not only re-articulates "the radical character of the uprootedness of him who is recollected in a home" (TeI 144/TaI 169), it is also reminiscent of Levinas' description of the "double origin" of the cogito and the infinite in Descartes' Meditations. In the passage just cited Levinas writes the following about the two aspects of the body: "To neither of the aspects which reveal themselves in turn [se révèlent tour à tour] does the last word belong" (TeI 139/TaI 165). This is remarkably similar in form and vocabulary to the following passage: "The ambiguity of Descartes' first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn [révélant, tour à tour] without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation" (TeI 19/TaI 48). The two aspects of the body—lived body and physical body—articulate two movements not unlike the two movements of Descartes' Meditations.

This irreducible ambiguity of the body—which articulates the "not yet" of the lived body and the "not yet" of the physical body, "a sector of an elemental reality" (TeI 140/TaI 165)—is, according to Levinas, consciousness. The description of consciousness as "disincarnation" in the following passage is not unlike the

description of dwelling as "uprootedness" (TeI 144/TaI 169). "Consciousness does not fall into a body—it is not incarnated; it is disincarnation—or, more exactly, a postponing of the corporeity of the body" (TeI 140/TaI 165-166), the "not yet" of the physical body, the "not yet" of complete dependence upon the elements. To describe conscious as postponement is—as is the case in Levinas' description of the cogito in Descartes' Meditations as "not yet" or "not all at once" (TeI 25/TaI 54)—to describe it as always already in "relation" to the other. Consciousness, therefore, is produced in the effectuation of a "double origin." It is produced concretely, in the event of dwelling or separation.

To be conscious is to be in relation with what is, but as though the present of what is were not yet [n'était pas encore] entirely accomplished and only constituted the future of a recollected being. To be conscious is precisely to have time—not to exceed the present time in the project that anticipates the future, but to have a distance with regard to the present itself, to be related to the element in which one is settled as to what is not yet [n'est pas encore] there. All the freedom of inhabitation depends on the time that, for the inhabitant, still always remains (TeI 140/TaI 166).

It is perhaps misleading of Levinas to call the ambiguity of the body—that is, the event of dwelling or separation—consciousness, since this term carries so much sedimented philosophical baggage that threatens to still the ambiguity Levinas is attempting to articulate.

Leaving aside the analyses of section II of Totality and Infinity for a moment, it is interesting and important

to note that in section III of Totality and Infinity Levinas joins this description of consciousness—that is, as perpetual postponement, as "not yet"—to the relationship of language, specifically to the role language as rapport sans rapport plays in objectification.

Objectification is produced [se produit] in the very work of language, where the subject is detached from the things possessed as though it hovered over its own existence, as though it were detached from it, as though the existence it exists had not yet [ne...était pas encore] completely reached it. This distance is more radical than every distance in the world. The subject must find itself "at a distance" [<<à distance>>] from its own being, even with regard to that taking distance that is inherent in the home, by which it is still in being.⁸ For negation remains within the totality, even when it bears upon the totality of the world. In order that objective distance be hollowed out, it is necessary that while in being the subject be not yet in being [n'y soit pas encore], that in a certain sense it be not yet [ne soit pas encore] born—that it not be in nature. If the subject capable of objectivity is not yet [n'est pas encore] completely, this "not yet" [<<pas encore>>], this state of potency relative to act, does not denote a less than being, but denotes time. Consciousness of the object—thematization—rests on distance with regard to oneself, which can only be time; or, if one prefers, it rests on self-consciousness, if we recognize the "distance from self to self" in self-consciousness to be "time." However, time can designate a "not yet" [<<pas encore>>] that nevertheless would not be a "lesser being"—it can remain distant both from being and from death—only as the inexhaustible future of infinity, that is, as what is produced [se produit] in the very relationship of language (TeI 184-185/TaI 209-210).⁹

⁸It seems that Levinas is here using the term "home" in a more traditional sense, rather than in the technical sense that he develops in that section of Totality and Infinity entitled "The Dwelling," where, as I suggested above, he describes the event of dwelling or separation as a concrete articulation of the interval of the "is not yet."

⁹The phrases "at a distance" and "is not yet" refer, among other things, to Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations (see esp. TeI 25/TaI 54). In fact, Levinas'

Language—like consciousness, insofar as it "is not yet"—is, as I pointed out in chapter I of this dissertation, the rapport sans rapport of the subject and the il y a, and the rapport sans rapport of the subject and the infinite.

The irreducible ambiguity of the body—returning again to the analyses of section II of Totality and Infinity—articulates "dead time." It articulates the interval of the "is not yet" that marks consciousness, that marks the event of dwelling or separation. This interval, marking the rapport sans rapport of the I of representation and the elemental can be characterized as enjoyment.

Sensibility establishes a relation with a pure quality without support, with the element. Sensibility is enjoyment. The sensitive being, the body, concretizes this way of being, which consists in finding a condition in what, in other respects, can appear as an object of thought, as simply constituted (TeI 109/TaI 136).

But the interval of the "is not yet," marking the rapport sans rapport of the I of representation and the elemental, can at the same time be characterized as menace and insecurity.

The distance with regard to the element to which the I is given over menaces [menace] it in its dwelling only in the future (TeI 140/TaI 166).

The dwelling, overcoming the insecurity [l'insécurité] of life, is a perpetual postponement [perpétuel ajournement] of the expiration in which life risks foundering. The consciousness of death is the

reading of Descartes' Meditations plays a significant role in the paragraphs immediately following the paragraph within which this passage is located.

consciousness of the perpetual postponement [l'ajournement perpétuel] of death, in the essential ignorance of its date. Enjoyment as the body that labors maintains itself in this primary postponement [ajournement premier], that which opens the very dimension of time (TeI 139/TaI 165).

This menace or insecurity maintains itself, like enjoyment, in the primary postponement of death, that is, in "dead time," in the interval of the "is not yet." It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that the descriptions of the rapport sans rapport or "double origin" operative in section II of Totality and Infinity address the "relationship" of the I of representation and the elements, rather than the "relationship" of representation and enjoyment (as the text sometimes leads one to think), since enjoyment, I would suggest, is only one perspective on the "relationship" of representation and the elements, the other.

The perfidious elemental—which "gives itself while escaping," which "on the one hand offers itself and contents, but which already withdraws, losing itself in the nowhere"—"opens up an abyss within [dans] enjoyment" (TeI 115/TaI 141). Levinas joins this description of the elemental with his description of the il y a, the "there is," that he had himself offered in Existence and Existents and in Time and the Other.

The nothingness of the future ensures separation: the element we enjoy issues in the nothingness which separates. The element I inhabit is at the frontier of a night. What the side of the element that is turned toward me conceals is not a "something" susceptible of being revealed, but an ever-new depth of absence, an existence without existent, the impersonal par

excellence. This way of existing without revealing itself, outside of being and the world, must be called mythical. The nocturnal prolongation of the element is the reign of the mythical gods. Enjoyment is without security. But this future does not take on the character of a Geworfenheit, for insecurity menaces [l'insécurité menace] an enjoyment already happy in the element, rendered sensitive to disquietude only by this happiness.

We have described this nocturnal dimension of the future under the title there is [il y a]. The element extends into the there is [il y a]. Enjoyment, as interiorization, runs up against the very strangeness of the earth (TeI 116/TaI 142).

The irreducibly ambiguous body, the sensitive being, articulates a rapport sans rapport—marked by "dead time," the interval of the "is not yet"—of the I of representation and the elements that can be characterized as either enjoyment or menace and insecurity.

But this ambiguous characterization of the interval of the "is not yet" is multiplied by the fact that this same interval—an interval that is articulated, as I suggested above, by the event of dwelling or separation—likewise marks the rapport sans rapport of the I of representation and the Other.

But the transcendence of the face is not enacted outside of the world, as though the economy by which separation is produced [se produit] remained beneath a sort of beatific contemplation of the Other [d'Autrui] (which would thereby turn into the idolatry that brews in all contemplation). The "vision" of the face as face is a certain mode of [une certaine façon de] sojourning in a home, or—to speak in a less singular fashion—a certain form of [une certaine forme de] economic life. No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. Recollection in a home open to the Other [Autrui]—hospitality—is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides [coïncide] with the Desire for the Other

[d'Autrui] absolutely transcendent. The chosen home is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering [errance] which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other [Autrui], metaphysics (TeI 147/TaI 172).

This rapport sans rapport of the I of representation and the Other is characterized by Levinas as "ethics."

Here, as in several other places in Totality and Infinity, one can locate a certain interruption of the text—an interruption of a simple step beyond section II ("Interiority and Economy") into section III ("Exteriority and the Face"). It is an interruption that is gathered around "dead time," around the interval of the "is not yet." The irreducibly ambiguous body, the sensitive being, the separated being (these are all synonymous), articulates a rapport sans rapport with the "other" that can be characterized as enjoyment, menace/insecurity, or "ethics." Despite Levinas' attempts in Totality and Infinity to establish and maintain a distinction between the other as il y a and the Other as infinite, there is slippage. "Dead time"—which marks a rapport sans rapport with the "other"—is a "risk." The slipperiness of the distinction between the other as il y a and the Other as infinite is a risk that is run in the opening of the interval of the "is not yet."

The future of the element as insecurity [insécurité] is lived concretely as the mythical divinity of the element. Faceless gods, impersonal gods to whom one does not speak, mark the nothingness that bounds the egoism of enjoyment in the midst of [au sein de] of its

familiarity with the element. But it is thus that enjoyment accomplishes separation. The separated being must run the risk [courir le risque] of the paganism which evinces its separation and in which this separation is accomplished, until the moment that the death of these gods will lead it back to atheism and to true transcendence (TeI 115-116/TaI 142).

The disturbing consequences of this "risk" are often overlooked in a too easy reading of Totality and Infinity, that is, a reading that would subordinate the il y a to a linear reading, a reading that would merely step beyond the il y a into "ethics," that would, for example, merely step beyond section II of Totality and Infinity into section III. In Otherwise than Being Levinas writes this "risk" (and its disturbing consequences) into the very structure of the work.

In saying suffering signifies in the form of giving, even if the price of signification is that the subject run the risk [court le risque] of suffering without reason. If the subject did not run this risk [ne courait pas ce risque], pain would lose its very painfulness. Signification, as one-for-the-other in passivity, where the other is not assumed by the one, presupposes the possibility of pure non-sense invading and threatening signification. Without this folly at the confines of reason, the one would take hold of itself, and, in the heart of its passion, recommence essence. How the adversity of pain is ambiguous! The for-the-other (or sense) turns into by-the-other [Le pour-l'autre (ou le sens) va jusqu'au par-l'autre], into suffering by a thorn burning the flesh, but for nothing. It is only in this way that the for-the-other, the passivity more passive still than any passivity, the emphasis of sense, is kept from being for-oneself (AE 64-65/OB 50).

This ambiguity of the for-the-other (sense) and the by-the-other (non-sense)—which are, respectively, I would suggest, analogous to the "relationships" that in Totality and

Infinity are characterized as "ethics" and menace/insecurity—suggests that one cannot simply step beyond the il y a into "ethics." This not only calls into question a too easy reading of Totality and Infinity, it likewise raises the question of the proximity of Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being. A closer reading of Otherwise than Being will be necessary in the future. It is now necessary, however, to return to Totality and Infinity.

The ambiguity of the other as il y a and the Other as infinite—an ambiguity gathered around "dead time" and articulated by the irreducibly ambiguous body, the sensitive being—is reiterated in that part of section III of Totality and Infinity entitled "The Ethical Relation and Time." In "The Ethical Relation and Time" the "other"—insofar as its rapport sans rapport with the subject can be characterized as menace and insecurity—is, I would suggest, expanded in section III of Totality and Infinity to encompass not only the elemental (as is the case in section II) but also the faceless other "encountered" in war and commerce. It is also important to note that in this part of Totality and Infinity the interval of the "is not yet," which marks the rapport sans rapport of the subject and the "other," is not only characterized as menace and insecurity (as well as enjoyment and "ethics"), but also as violence. "Violence bears upon only a being both graspable and escaping every hold" (TeI 198/TaI 223). It is, as I described above, the

body that concretely articulates this ambiguity. Here—as in that part of section II entitled "Labor, the Body, Consciousness"—Levinas describes the body in terms of a series of irreducible distinctions such as lived body/physical body, body-master/body-slave, and health/sickness.

The body exceeds the categories of a thing, but does not coincide with the role of "lived body" ["corps propre"] which I dispose of in my voluntary action and by which I can. The ambiguity of corporeal resistance which turns into a means and from means turns into a resistance does not account for its ontological hybris. The body in its very activity, in its for itself,¹⁰ inverts into a thing to be treated as a thing.¹¹ This is what we express concretely in saying that it abides between health and sickness. Through it one not only fails to recognize, one can mistreat the "for itself" of the person; one does not only offend him, one coerces him. "I am anything you like," says Sganarelle, under the blows. One does not adopt successively and independently the biological point of view on it and the "point of view" which from the interior maintains it as a lived body; the originality of the body consists of the coinciding of two points of view. This is the paradox and the essence of time itself proceeding unto death, where the will is affected as a thing by the things—by the point of steel or by the chemistry of the tissues (due to a murderer or to the impotency of the doctors)—but gives itself a reprieve and postpones the contact by the against-death of postponement. The will essentially violable harbors treason in its own essence. It is not only offendable in its dignity—which would confirm its inviolable character—but is susceptible of being coerced and enslaved as a will, becoming a servile soul (TeI 205/TaI 229).

In the following passage, Levinas gathers together the three

¹⁰"For itself" here refers to the lived body, the body-master, health.

¹¹"Thing" here refers to the physical body, the body-slave, sickness. It refers to the body as "a sector of an elemental reality" (TeI 140/TaI 165). It does not refer to the body as a represented thing.

characterizations of the interval of the "is not yet" (enjoyment, menace/insecurity/violence, and "ethics"), while at the same time noting the "risk" that they each can drift into the other:

The corporeity of the will must be understood on the basis of this ambiguity of voluntary power, exposing itself to the others [autres] in [dans] its centripetal movement of egoism.¹² The body is its ontological regime, and not an object. The body, where expression can dawn forth and where the egoism of the will becomes discourse and primal opposition, at the same time [en même temps] conveys the entry of the I into the calculations of the Other [autrui] (TeI 206/TaI 229-230).

"Dead time"—articulated by the irreducibly ambiguous body—is a "risk." The body, as the "site" of the rappor sans rapport with the "other," is the "site" of enjoyment, exposure to menace/insecurity/violence, and the "ethical" relation. Or, said in the language of Otherwise than Being, the body is, I would suggest, the "site" of enjoyment, the by-the-other (or non-sense), and the for-the-other (or sense).

This irreducible ambiguity of the body is founded in mortality.

It is in mortality that the interaction of the psychic and the physical appears in its primordial form. The interaction of the physical and the psychic, when approached from the psychic, posited as for itself or as causa sui, and from the physical, posited as unfolding in function of the "other," gives rise to a problem due to the abstraction to which the terms in relation are reduced. Mortality is the concrete and primary phenomenon. It forbids the positing of a for itself

¹²The "centripetal movement of egoism" refers to enjoyment (see TeI 91, 116/TaI 118, 143).

that would not be already delivered over to the Other and consequently be a thing. The for itself, essentially mortal, does not only represent things to itself, but is subject to them (TeI 212/TaI 235).

The equivocality of the lived body and the physical body, the psychic and the physical, appears in its most primordial form in the postponement of death in a mortal will, in the interval of the "is not yet" or "dead time."

Levinas also addresses the question of the proximity of menace/insecurity/violence and "ethics" in an essay entitled "Transcendence and Evil." The essay is ostensibly a reading of Philippe Nemo's Job et l'excès du Mal. Levinas divides his reading into three moments: evil as excess, evil as intention, and evil as the hatred of evil. I will concentrate primarily on the third moment where the question of evil's proximity to good is raised.

Levinas sums up the third and last moment—evil as the hatred of evil—as follows:

[E]vil strikes me in my horror of evil, and thus reveals—or is already—my association with the Good. The excess of evil by which it is a surplus in the world is also our impossibility of accepting it. The experience of evil would then be also our waiting on the good—the love of God.¹³

This "movement leading from the 'horror of evil' to the

¹³Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence et mal," in De dieu qui vient à l'idée (Paris: Vrin, 1982), 203, hereafter cited in the text as TM. / "Transcendence and Evil," trans. Alphonso Lingis, in Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 183, hereafter cited in the text as TE.

discovery of the Good [...] completes in a theophany the transcendence opened in the totality of the world by the concrete 'content' of evil" (TM 204/TE 184). In this reversal or inversion of evil and of the horror of evil into an expectation of the Good "there can [...] be no question," Levinas thinks, "of a passage from Evil to the Good through the attraction of contraries" for "that would make but one more theodicy" (TM 203/TE 183). In "Useless Suffering" Levinas describes what he means by theodicy.

Western humanity has [...] sought for the meaning of this scandal [i.e., useless suffering] by invoking the proper sense of a metaphysical order, an ethics, which is invisible in the immediate lessons of moral consciousness. This is a kingdom of transcendent ends, willed by a benevolent wisdom, by the absolute goodness of a God who is in some way defined by his super-natural goodness; or a widespread, invisible goodness in Nature and History, where it would command the paths which are, to be sure, painful, but which lead to the Good. Pain is henceforth meaningful, subordinated in one way or another to the metaphysical finality envisaged by faith or by a belief in progress. These beliefs are presupposed by theodicy! Such is the grand idea necessary to the inner peace of souls in our distressed world. It is called upon to make sufferings here below comprehensible. These will make sense by reference to an original fault or to the congenital finitude of human being. The evil which fills the earth would be explained in a 'plan of the whole'; it would be called upon to atone for a sin, or it would announce, to the ontologically limited consciousness, compensation or recompense at the end of time. These supra-sensible perspectives are invoked in order to envisage in a suffering which is essentially gratuitous and absurd, and apparently arbitrary, a signification and an order.¹⁴

¹⁴Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering" trans. Richard Cohen, in The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 160-161.

Levinas acknowledges that Nemo himself is likewise sensitive to this problem when he rhetorically asks: "Does not the philosophical contribution of all this Biblical exegesis consist in making it possible to go as it were beyond the reciprocal appeal of terms that negate one another, beyond dialectics" (TM 203/TE 183, emphasis added)? This is made possible not only because evil, as Nemo delimited it in the first two moments of the book, is not any kind of negation, but also because Nemo is sensitive to the Nietzsche's warning against the spirit of ressentiment, that is, a good that would signify only a repayment for evil or a vengeance. With this in mind Nemo describes the expectation of the Good as a thought that would think more than it thinks. The soul, torn up from the world and awakened to itself by evil, the soul beyond satisfaction and recompense, "expects an awaited that infinitely surpasses expectancy" (TM 204/TE 183-184). But despite Levinas' praise for this "very profound" formulation that makes it possible to go beyond the reciprocal appeal of contrary terms that negate one another, beyond dialectics, he rhetorically asks: "Does [the movement leading from the 'horror of evil' to the discovery of the Good in Nemo's book] not lead to but the opposite of evil, and to a goodness of simple pleasure, however great it be" (TM 204/TE 184)? That is, does it not lead, however superlative or excessive the good may be, to a goodness that merely compensates for the evil, to a

play of good and evil.

The notion of "play" designates, for Nemo, the relation of the soul with God. "Play" cannot however, according to Levinas, be deduced from the disproportion between expectation and the expected, i.e., the disproportion between God and the thought that thinks God. Moreover if play is deduced from the disproportion between God and the thought that thinks God then one risks, according to Levinas, reinscribing this "very profound" formulation within a theodicy where the expectation of the Good would be reduced to the dialectical play of good and evil (understood as contraries) "in which the wholly-otherness of God [would no longer be expected but rather] would become visible" (TM 203/TE 183). To illustrate this point Levinas cites the following passage from Job et l'excès du Mal: "The excess of beatitude alone will answer to the excess of evil" (TM 204/TE 184). Levinas suggests that Nemo uses two different senses of "excess" in this passage in order to maintain the privileged signification of evil around which his whole book is constructed.

The excess of evil does not mean an excessive evil, whereas the excess of beatitude remains a superlative notion. For if it were necessary to already see in beatitude, as such, an excess, evil would not have the privileged signification about which Nemo's whole book is constructed (TM 204/TE 184, emphasis added).

But according to Levinas, there is always already also an excess of good as well as an excess of evil.

This prompts Levinas to propose, in the form of a

rhetorical question, an alternative understanding of the movement leading from the "horror of evil" to the discovery of the Good that does not lead to the opposite of evil, to a goodness of simple pleasure.

Does not the Good that is awaited in this "awaiting which aims at infinitely more than this awaited" maintain a relationship less remote with the evil which suggests it, while differing from it with a difference more different than opposition (TM 204-205/TE 184, emphasis added)?

The relationship that the Good maintains with evil is therefore, according to Levinas, less remote and at the same time more different than a relationship of mere opposition. And while both Nemo and Levinas recognize a disproportion between expectation and the expected, Levinas has certain reservations about designating it with the notion of "play." He will choose instead to designate it with the notions of command and prescription.

Levinas hints at this alternative designation of the disproportionate relationship between expectation and the expected when he raises "the problem of the relationship between the suffering of the self and the suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other man" (TM 205/TE 184)—a problem which never appears on the foreground of Nemo's commentary on the book of Job.¹⁵ Is there not a question of this problematical relationship, Levinas asks,

¹⁵This passage parallels the inversion from the fear of death into the fear of committing murder delimited by Levinas in Totality and Infinity.

in the "Where were you when I founded the earth?" of Job 38:4?

This passage, at the beginning of the discourse attributed to God, "reminds Job of his absence at the hour of creation" (TM 205/TE 184). But how are we to understand this absence? This passage has commonly been understood as an almost satirical retort to the impudence of Job—Where were you?¹⁶ But, Levinas rhetorically asks, does this passage "only set forth a theodicy in which the economy of a harmonious and wisely arranged whole harbors evil only for a look limited to a part of this whole" (TM 205/TE 184, my emphasis)? That is, does the suffering of the self as a self exposed to evil merely take hope in and await the ultimate good (understood as the contrary of evil) that lies beyond its limited look? Rather than the traditional reading of this passage—"Where were you?"—Levinas reads "Where were you?" and asks:

Might one not understand in this "Where were you?" a denunciation of being wanting, which can have meaning only if the humanity of man is fraternally solidary with creation, that is, is responsible for what was neither one's self nor one's work, and if this solidarity and this responsibility for everything and for all, which cannot occur without pain, is the spirit itself (TM 205/TE 184)?

This reading, which sets forth a theophany rather than a

¹⁶In fact, according to Levinas' reading of Nemo's interpretation of Job, this is how Nemo would read this passage (despite the exceptional relationship he sets up between the soul and evil). Therefore, according to Levinas, in this instance, Nemo and the tradition are agreed.

theodicy, denounces a look limited to a part of a harmonious and wisely arranged whole. It even denounces a look that is, according to Levinas, delimited by Nemo—a look that, having been torn out of the world by evil, merely waits on the opposite of evil, the goodness of simple pleasure. The theophany set forth in this reading differs, therefore, from the theophany that Levinas believes Nemo sets forth—a theophany that risks being reduced to "one more theodicy" (TM 203/TE 183), to a mere "play" of contraries within a totalized economy.

The "suffering of the self" as a self exposed to evil always already involves or is equiprimordial with "the suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other man." In fact, according to Levinas, a "suffering of the self" that is not equiprimordial with the "suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other man" never truly "expects an awaited that infinitely surpasses expectancy," never truly expects a good that would not signify a repayment for evil or a vengeance, a good beyond recompense.

The pain of the transgressive responsibility brought out in Levinas' reading circumvents a reading of the good inherent in the Nietzschean idea of ressentiment. It marks the "relationship" of "the suffering of the self and the suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other man."

Levinas elaborates on this disturbing affliction called pain in a passage that constitutes, I believe, the denouement of his reading of Nemo's Job et l'excès du Mal.

That in the evil that pursues me the evil suffered by the other man afflicts me, that it touches me, as though [comme si] from the first the other was calling to me, putting into question my resting on myself and my conatus essendi, as though [comme si] before lamenting over my evil here below, I had to answer for the other—is not this a breakthrough of the Good in the "intention" of which I am in my woe so exclusively aimed at (TM 206/TE 185)?

The phrase "as though" [comme si] plays a key role in Levinas' reading of Descartes Meditations. It articulates a thinking in two times. Specifically, with respect to Levinas reading of Descartes' Meditations, it articulates the undecidability or equiprimordiality of the cogito and the infinite.

In the passage in question the "as though" [comme si] articulates Levinas' reading of Job 38:4, that is, the undecidability or equiprimordiality of the suffering of the self and the suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other man, both of which are likewise characterized by ambiguous double origins. The "as though," therefore, articulates a "relationship" of good and evil that is simultaneously "less remote" and "more different" than a relationship of opposition. It is "as though" the double origin characteristic of the relationship between the soul and evil were the double origin characteristic of the relationship between the soul and good.

Earlier in the essay Levinas delimited the exteriority or transcendence in evil using language strikingly similar to the language he uses in his reading of Descartes' Meditations to describe the ambiguous "relationship" of the cogito and the evil genius/il y a.

In its malignancy as evil, evil is an excess. While the notion of excess evokes first the quantitative idea of intensity, of a degree surpassing measure, evil is an excess in its very quiddity. This notion is very important: evil is not an excess because suffering can be terrible, and go beyond the endurable. The break with the normal and the normative, with order, with synthesis, with the world, already constitutes its qualitative essence. Suffering qua suffering is but a concrete and quasi-sensible manifestation of the non-integratable, the non-justifiable. The "quality" of evil is this very non-integratability, if we can use such a term; this concrete quality is defined by this abstract notion. Evil is not only the non-integratable; it is also the non-integratability of the non-integratable (TM 197-198/TE 180).

Evil, like the idea of the infinite, exceeds the very thought that would think it. In fact, Levinas uses the term "transcendence"—a term otherwise reserved for the infinite—in his description of evil.

In the appearing of evil, in its original phenomenality, in its quality, is announced a modality, a manner: not finding a place, the refusal of all accommodation with..., a counter-nature, a monstrosity, what is disturbing and foreign of itself. And in this sense transcendence (TM 198/TE 180)!

Evil is only insofar as it exceeds every thought that thinks it. Evil tears one out of the world as unique and exceptional—as a soul (TM 201/TE 182). The ex- in exceptional testifies to the ex-cess of evil that overflows the very thought that would think it. It testifies, that

is, to the incompleteness of soul in its completeness. For by virtue of chronological time the soul—by thinking that which exceeds thought—"is not yet."

With this in mind, one is in a position to see how the "as though" articulates in the passage in question, a "relationship" of 1) the double origin characteristic of the "relationship" of the soul and evil, and 2) the double origin characteristic of the "relationship" of the soul and good, that is simultaneously "less remote" and "more different" than a relationship of opposition. When Levinas writes...

That in the evil that pursues me the evil suffered by the other man affects me, that it touches me, as though [comme si] from the first the other was calling to me, putting into question my resting on myself and my conatus essendi, as though [comme si] before lamenting over my evil here below, I had to answer for the other—is not this a breakthrough of the Good in the "intention" of which I am in my woe so exclusively aimed at (TM 206/TE 185)?

...one reads, I would suggest, the following: That in the evil that infinitely approaches me—that in the exceptional relationship of myself and the evil that exceeds my thinking of it—the evil suffered by the other man afflicts me, that it touches me, as though from the first the "other" that calls to me, that puts my resting on myself and my conatus essendi into question were the personal other that faces me rather than the anonymous faceless other of evil, as though before lamenting over my evil here below I had to answer for the "other." The personal "other" that faces me

and the anonymous faceless "other" of evil maintain—by way of the "as though"—a relationship simultaneously "less remote" and "more different" than a relationship of opposition.

CHAPTER 4

OTHERWISE THAN JUSTICE AND DEAD TIME

Signification signifies in justice, but also, more ancient than itself and than the equality implied by it, justice passes by justice in my responsibility for the other, in my inequality with respect to him for whom I am a hostage.

—Levinas

"All that exists is just and unjust
and equally justified in both."
That is your world! A world indeed!—

—Nietzsche

By turning itself into an inability to reveal anything, literature is attempting to become the revelation of what revelation destroys. This is a tragic endeavor.

—Blanchot

Death is, on the one hand, the very possibility of grasping the possible, the power of assumption. Death is, on the other hand, an absolute alterity that approaches without ever being assumable. It "is not yet." Death, as approach, as postponement, is called "dead time." Earlier I suggested that a reading of Levinas that is not attentive to "dead time"—which is marked by or leaves a trace of itself in the performance or production of a "double origin"—risks domesticating the interruptions located within his work. It risks the possibility of being too easily read and appropriated. For example, a close reading of justice and

responsibility in the work of Levinas—that is, the step beyond justice into responsibility— reveals that Levinas' idea of responsibility cannot be easily appropriated by ethics or politics. Responsibility exceeds the order of measure and reason. It merely leaves an enigmatic or ambiguous trace of itself in this order of just boundaries. Levinas' reading of responsibility moves at the limit of the ethical language of justice.

Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound in The Birth of Tragedy likewise moves at the limit of the ethical language of justice. Reading justice in Nietzsche alongside justice in Levinas will, I would suggest, raise—seemingly despite Levinas' intentions—the question of the proximity of Nietzsche and Levinas. This is a question that would not even be considered in a too easy reading of Levinas that sometimes seeks to appropriate his work for a post-Nietzschean ethics or politics.

Earlier I suggested that the ambiguity of the other as il y a and the other as infinite is gathered around "dead time," that is, death understood as an absolute alterity that infinitely approaches. This is evident even within that section of Totality and Infinity explicitly concerned with death—"The Will and Death." In that section Levinas writes:

Death threatens me from beyond. This unknown that frightens, the silence of the infinite spaces that

terrify, comes from the other, and this alterity, precisely as absolute, strikes me in an evil design or in a judgment of justice (TeI 210/TaI 234).

"Evil design" refers, I would suggest, to the rapport sans rapport of the subject and the other as il y a, which is characterized by Levinas as menace/insecurity/violence.

"Judgment of justice" refers, I would suggest, to the rapport sans rapport of the subject and the other as infinite, which is characterized by Levinas as "ethics."

While chapter 3 of this dissertation pointed out that "dead time" can concretely be characterized as enjoyment, menace/insecurity/violence, or "ethics," the reading undertaken in that chapter concentrated primarily on the first two alternatives. Still more needs to be said, however, about the third alternative—"ethics," that is, the rapport sans rapport characterized by a "judgment of justice." What does Levinas mean by "ethics" or "judgment of justice"? And what prevents these familiar and traditional ideas from being too easily read and appropriated?

In that part of Totality and Infinity entitled "The Truth of the Will" Levinas makes a distinction between this "judgment of justice" and the "judgment of history." His remarks on this distinction can best be understood when read alongside the distinction he makes between comprehension and critique, which is instantiated in his reading of Descartes' Meditations. Briefly, the "judgment of history" is "a

verdict set forth impersonally and implacably out of universal principles" (TeI 222/TaI 244), particularly, the universal principle of justice. This judgment, set forth in the visible (TeI 220/TaI 243), is of the order of the comprehension. The "judgment of justice," set forth by the invisible, is articulated by the order of critique. It is, therefore, not so much a judgment inspired by a universal principle of justice as it is an indictment of justice, of the order of comprehension. There is a shift of the genitive from subjective genitive (read: the judgment pronounced by justice) to objective genitive (read: the judgment pronounced upon justice). This judgment, coming from the absolute alterity of the other (TeI 210/TaI 234), is often referred to by Levinas as a "judgment of God," that is, a judgment pronounced by the infinite.

The judgment of justice, coming from the absolute alterity of the other, indicts my arbitrary freedom (TeI 222/TaI 245), it calls the arbitrary dogmatism of comprehensions' free exercise into question (TeI 13/TaI 43). That is, it effects a critical movement, a discovery of a condition for what is otherwise taken to be unconditioned, a justification of comprehensions' freedom (TeI 58-59/TaI 86) which consists in recognizing in the other a right over the unconditioned egoism of comprehension (TeI 10/TaI 40), in recognizing one's own injustice. But in this inversion of the movement of comprehension characteristic of critique, in

this justification of freedom, this recognition of the other, this attempt to be just, one becomes, paradoxically, more unjust. Levinas writes:

The infinity of responsibility denotes not its actual immensity, but a responsibility increasing in the measure that it is assumed; duties become greater in the measure that they are accomplished. The better I accomplish my duty the fewer rights I have; the more I am just the more guilty I am (TeI 222/TaI 244).

The attempt to be just, that is, the recognition of the other as the condition of what is otherwise taken to be unconditioned, is inevitably reinscribed back into the order of comprehension. One is inevitably guilty of the arbitrary dogmatism of comprehension's free exercise, of its non-recognition of the other. This move is, in turn, again vulnerable to the judgment of justice, that is, to the critical movement's justification of comprehension's freedom. There is an incessant "step beyond" that is incessantly "not beyond." The more I am just the more guilty or unjust I am. There is here the performance or production of a perpetual alternation characteristic of Levinas' formal thematizations of skepticism and the saying of the otherwise than being in Otherwise than Being, both of which, as was suggested in chapter I of this dissertation, heavily draw upon Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations. This perpetual alternation between two poles of a "double origin" is a trace of that which exceeds the universal principle justice governing the "judgment of history."

The judgment of justice that indicts my arbitrary freedom does not, therefore, simply "seal my [as well as the other's] pure and simple entry into the universal order" (TeI 222/TaI 245), that is, an order impersonally and implacably governed by a universal principle of justice, as is the case in the "judgment of history." There is, rather, a shift, as I suggested earlier, in the way one reads the genitive in "judgment of justice"—a shift from subjective genitive (read: the judgment pronounced by justice) to objective genitive (read: the judgment pronounced upon justice). In the name of justice, insofar as it is understood as a universal principle, one is summoned to step beyond justice. In the justification of the arbitrary dogmatism of comprehension's free exercise, in the recognition of the other, that is, in the inversion of order characteristic of the movement of critique, there is the production or performance of a trace of that which exceed justice.

In reality, justice does not include me in the equilibrium of its universality; justice summons me to go beyond the straight line of justice, and henceforth nothing can mark the end of this march; behind the straight line of the law the land of goodness extends infinite and unexplored, necessitating all the resources of a singular presence. I am therefore necessary for justice,¹ as responsible beyond every limit fixed by an

¹The term "justice" here seems to indicate that which exceeds justice understood as a universal principle. The term undergoes slippage in this passage insofar as it summons me to go beyond justice understood as a universal principle. It is, therefore, somewhat confusing to use the term "justice" to name that which exceeds it. Levinas

objective law. The I is a privilege and an election. The sole possibility in being of going beyond the straight line of the law, that is, of finding a place lying beyond the universal, is to be I (TeI 223/TaI 245).

The interminability of the march beyond the universality of objective law, of the step beyond justice, refers to the perpetual alternation outlined in the previous paragraph. It refers to the perpetual alternation between the singularity of the "I" and the other that incessantly calls the "I" into question. The singularity of the "I" is necessary for the production or performance of a trace of that which exceeds the objective law, the universal principle of justice. The "I" which effects this production is, therefore, the sole possibility of the invisible manifesting itself in being.

The invisible must manifest itself if history is to lose its right to the last word, necessarily unjust for the subjectivity, inevitable cruel. But the manifestation of the invisible can not mean the passage of the invisible to the status of the visible; it does not lead back to evidence. It is produced [se produit] in the goodness reserved to subjectivity, which thus is subject not simply to the truth of judgment, but to the source of this truth. The truth of the invisible is ontologically produced [se produit] by the subjectivity which states it. For the invisible is not the "provisionally invisible," nor what remains invisible for a superficial and rapid glance, and which a more attentive and scrupulous investigation would render visible, nor what remains unexpressed as hidden movements of the soul, nor what, gratuitously and lazily, is affirmed to be a mystery (TeI 221/TaI 243).

should perhaps reserve the term "responsibility" to name this "relationship" with excess. This distinction between justice and responsibility, merely alluded to in Totality and Infinity, is decisively drawn, as will become apparent in a moment, in Otherwise than Being.

The truth of the invisible is produced by the subjectivity that effects the production, by the "I" that is called into question, by the "I" that, for example, proceeds through the two movements of Descartes' Meditations effecting the production of a "double origin," that is, a trace of the invisible in the visible.² The invisible manifests itself only as an irreducible ambiguity or enigma, only as the performance of a perpetual alternation that perpetually interrupts the visible. This performance or production of a perpetual alternation that perpetually interrupts the visible, interrupts any firm position from which one could make ethical or political evaluations (of, for example, justice or injustice), while, at the same time, not absolving one of the necessity (not to say, the inevitability) of making such evaluations.

The distinction between justice and that which exceeds it (responsibility), merely alluded to in Totality and Infinity, is decisively drawn in Otherwise than Being. Recall that in the name of justice, insofar as it is understood as a universal principle, one is summoned to step beyond justice, or, to be more precise, one produces or performs a trace of that which exceeds justice. That which exceeds justice, the invisible, manifests itself only as an

²See chapter 1 of this dissertation for a description of production and the role it plays in Levinas' reading of Descartes' Meditations.

irreducible ambiguity or enigma, only as the performance of a perpetual alternation that perpetually interrupts the visible, the order of justice—an order which stills this perpetual alternation, fixes this irreducible ambiguity or enigma of the I and the other under a universal principle. In that part of Otherwise than Being entitled "From the Saying to the Said, or the Wisdom of Desire" Levinas is likewise concerned—as the title suggests, albeit in the terms "said" and "saying"—with the rapport sans rapport of the order of justice and the responsibility that exceeds the order of justice but nonetheless leaves a trace of itself in its interruption of this order. For example, Levinas writes:

Signification signifies in justice, but also, more ancient than itself and than the equality implied by it, justice passes by justice in my responsibility for the other, in my inequality with respect to him for whom I am a hostage (AE 201/OB 158).

On the one hand, signification, the one-for-the-other of responsibility, signifies or leaves a trace of itself in the said, in the order of justice. On the other hand, justice passes by justice, that is, in the name of justice one is summoned to step beyond justice, or, to be more precise, one produces or performs a trace of that which exceeds justice. Responsibility signifies or leaves a trace of itself in the order of justice; the order of justice, as the site of this trace of responsibility, signifies responsibility.

This reciprocity is again echoed in the final

sentences of that part of Otherwise than Being entitled "Sense and the There Is." Here it is set within the context of philosophy's role in both conveying and (inevitably) betraying or thematizing the saying of the otherwise than being, the absolute one-for-the-other of responsibility, and its recognition of this conveying and betraying as an incessant alternation that is the trace of that which exceeds thematization, that is, its reduction of this conveying and (inevitable) betraying to difference (see "separation" in Totality and Infinity).

Philosophy serves justice by thematizing the difference and reducing the thematized to difference. It brings equity into the abnegation of the one for the other, justice into responsibility. Philosophy, in its very diachrony, is the consciousness of the breakup of consciousness. In an alternating movement, like that which leads from skepticism to the refutation that reduces it to ashes, and from its ashes to its rebirth, philosophy justifies and criticizes the laws of being and of the city, and finds again the signification that consists in detaching from the absolute one-for-the-other both the one and the other (AE 210/OB 165).

The last sentence of this passage draws a parallel between the alternating movement of skepticism and refutation of skepticism and the step/not beyond justice that I described in previous paragraphs—a step/not beyond that is the performance or production of a trace of that which exceeds justice, the absolute one-for-the-other of responsibility. In the passage "philosophy justifies and criticizes the laws of being and the city" the terms "justify" and "criticize" are synonyms that parallel the "step beyond" characteristic of skepticism (abstracted, momentarily, from the other pole

of the alternating movement, that is, the refutation of skepticism). They refer to what in Totality and Infinity is called the movement of critique—the inversion or calling into question of the movement of thematization, the discovery of a condition for what is otherwise taken to be unconditioned, the justification of the movement of comprehension (TeI 58-59/TaI 86). The passage "philosophy [...] finds again the signification that consists in detaching from the absolute one-for-the-other both the one and the other" parallels the "not beyond" characteristic of the refutation of skepticism, the recognition of the contradiction, the thematization of the difference between the one and the other which ensures their coexistence or contemporaneousness. This alternating movement can help to clarify the first sentence of the passage cited above: "Philosophy serves justice by thematizing the difference and reducing the thematized to difference." "Thematizing the difference" is the inevitable betrayal of the conveying of the other, which ensures the coexistence of the different terms. Recall that conveying and betraying (that is, the reflection, "after the event," on the statement that conveys the other) are the two times integral to the production of a contradiction. "Reducing the thematized to difference" is the recognition of this conveying and betraying (at least in the cases of skepticism and the saying of the otherwise than being) as a trace of that which exceeds thematization, that

is, as the performance or production of an incessant alternation of conveying and betraying, rather than merely the "arbitrary halt" at the betrayal or refutation of the signification. This is the case if one reads reduction as the inverse of production. I would suggest that reduction is the recognition, and therefore the re-performance or re-production after the fact, of the performance of an incessant alternation between conveying and betraying, of the production of a trace of that which exceeds reason.

In the "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," which accompanies the 1886 edition of The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche writes: "[T]he whole book knows only an artistic meaning and crypto-meaning behind all events."³ Nietzsche introduces this provocative statement by referring to both the preface to the book and the book itself.

Already in the preface addressed to Richard Wagner, art, and not morality, is presented as the truly metaphysical activity of man. In the book itself the suggestive sentence is repeated several times, that the existence of the world is justified [gerechtfertigt] only as an aesthetic phenomenon (GT 11/BT 22).

This suggestive sentence, repeated on two occasions in the

³Friedrich Nietzsche, Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus, in Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), vol.III, pt.1, 11, hereafter cited in the text as GT / The Birth of Tragedy. Or: Hellenism and Pessimism, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 22, hereafter cited in the text as BT.

book itself,⁴ immediately calls one's attention to the curious juxtaposition of "the existence of the world" and "aesthetic phenomenon." A hasty reading of this sentence may in fact completely overlook Nietzsche's choice of the word "justified."

Before hastily moving to the curious juxtaposition of "the existence of the world" and "aesthetic phenomenon"—as if each term of this juxtaposition were beyond question—one should ask the following questions: Why does Nietzsche call attention to the word "justified" by emphasizing it? What is the significance of "justification" or "justice" for Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy? How does this signification affect the way one reads the sentence in question? And why does Nietzsche use a word so blatantly loaded with "moral" overtones when, in the preceding sentence, he writes that "art, and not morality, is presented [in the preface addressed to Richard Wagner] as the truly metaphysical activity of man"?

The most significant treatment of "justice" in The

⁴This sentence appears in section 5 ("[I]t is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified [gerechtfertigt]," GT 43/BT 52) and in section 24 ("[E]xistence and the world seem justified [gerechtfertigt] only as an aesthetic phenomenon," GT 148/BT 141). It is not immediately clear what Nietzsche intended by altering the text from "existence and the world" in the book to "existence of the world" in the "Attempt at Self-Criticism" (unless, of course, it was merely an oversight).

In section 24 Nietzsche also writes: "Quite generally, only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification [Rechtfertigung] of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon" (GT 148/BT 141).

Birth of Tragedy occurs in the context of Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound.⁵ This reading moves, on innumerable levels, at the margin of justice, at the limit of justification. Like Prometheus, Nietzsche's reading does not merely transgress the limit, the Apollinian just boundary between just and unjust. It moves at the margin of justice, at the limit of justification. The limit, the just boundary, functions, but as it functions, it is interrupted.

Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound begins: "This is the world's limit that we have come to; this is the Scythian country, an untrodden desolation."⁶ This line not only locates the drama geographically at the "world's limit," it also alludes to the location of the movement of the Prometheus myth—justice's limit.

In the Greek world justice (dikē) was understood in terms of limits or boundaries. One was justified and the established order was maintained if one observed the

⁵It is interesting to note that the figure of the unbound Prometheus adorns the title page of the original 1872 edition of The Birth of Tragedy.

⁶Aeschylus, Promētheus Desmōtēs, in Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoediae, ed. Denys Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 287-329, lines 1-2 / Prometheus Bound, trans. David Grene, in The Complete Greek Tragedies, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), vol.1, 303-351, lines 1-2, hereafter cited in the text as PB followed by the line number.

measures or limits fixed by Apollo, "the god of individuation and of just boundaries" (GT 67/BT 72).

Nietzsche writes:

Apollo, as ethical deity, exacts measure of his disciples, and, to be able to maintain it, he requires self-knowledge. And so, side by side with the aesthetic necessity for beauty, there occur the demands "know thyself" and "nothing in excess"; consequently overweening pride and excess are regarded as the truly hostile demons of the non-Apollinian sphere, hence as characteristics of the pre-Apollinian age—that of the Titans; and of the extra-Apollinian world—that of the barbarians (GT 36/BT 46).⁷

These limits demanded by the Delphic god Apollo, and the concomitant understanding of justice, play a key role in Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound.

The movement in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound at the limit or margin of justice is most manifest in the way Prometheus exceeds this limit. Prometheus' titanic love for human beings defied the Delphic admonition "nothing in excess." On one occasion the Chorus says: "Your mind was yours, not his [Zeus'], and at its bidding you regarded mortal men too high [sebēi thnatous agan], Prometheus" (PB 543-4). Regard or reverence is properly said of a human

⁷The demands "nothing in excess" and "know thyself" are well represented in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound. Allusions to the demand "nothing in excess" appear in line 72 ("I am forced to do this; do not keep urging me [mēden...agan].") and in line 327 ("Now I will go and try if I can free you: do you be quiet, do not talk so much [mēd' agan labrostomei]."). An allusion to the demand "know thyself" appears in line 309 ("Yes, I see, Prometheus, and I want, indeed I do, to advise you for the best, for all your cleverness. Know yourself [gignōske sauton] and reform your ways to new ways, for new is he that rules among the Gods.").

being's worship of the gods. Prometheus' regard for human beings not only inverts the natural order, it is excessive. On another occasion Prometheus laments: "You see me a wretched God in chains, the enemy of Zeus, hated of all the Gods that enter Zeus' palace hall, because of my excessive love [tēn lian philotēta] for Man" (PB 119-23).⁸

Another motif by which the movement at the limit or margin of justice is most manifest in Prometheus Bound is transgression. Prometheus' theft of fire is a sin, an error, a transgression (hamartia). In the opening lines of the drama Prometheus reminds Hephaestus of the sin that brought them to the high craggy rocks at the world's limit.

[I]t was your flower, the brightness of fire that devises all, that he stole and gave to mortal men; this is the sin [hamartias] for which he must pay the Gods the penalty [doûnai dikēn]⁹—that he may learn to endure and like the sovereignty of Zeus and quit his man-loving disposition" (PB 7-11).

Cognate verbal forms of hamartia appear throughout the tragedy. For example, Hermes describes Prometheus in the following manner: "You, subtle-spirit, you bitterly

⁸Other examples of excess as a motif to characterize Prometheus appear in line 180 ("You are free of tongue, too free [agan d' eleutherostomeis]."), and in lines 318-9 ("This is what you pay, Prometheus, for that tongue of yours which talked so high and haughty [tēs agan hypsēgorou glōssēs].").

⁹Dikē, in this line and in line 614 ("O spirit that has appeared as a common blessing to all men, unhappy Prometheus, why are you being punished [toû dikēn pascheis tade]?"), means specifically "punishment" or "penalty," but by using this word Aeschylus also implies that Prometheus' punishment is a result of dikē and was thus caused by a transgression of dikē. See Michael Gagarin, Aeschylean Drama (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 208 n.49.

overbitter, you that sinned [examartonta] against the immortals, giving honor to the creatures of a day, you thief of fire" (PB 944-7). On one occasion, the Chorus says to Prometheus: "Shame it were for one so wise to fall in error [examartanein]" (PB 1039). On another occasion, the Chorus asks: "Do you not see how you have erred [hēmartes]" (PB 259-60)? Prometheus replies: "I have known all that you have said: I knew, I knew when I transgressed [hekōn hekōn hēmarton] nor will deny it. In helping man I brought my troubles on me" (PB 265-7).¹⁰

The smith Hephaestus, a sympathizer, connects these motifs of excess and transgression with justice (dikē).

Such is the reward you reap of your man-loving disposition. For you, a God, feared not the anger of the Gods, but gave honors to mortals beyond what was just [perā dikēs]. Wherefore you shall mount guard on this unlovely rock, upright, sleepless, not bending the knee (PB 28-32).

Prometheus gave beyond what was just, in excess of what was justified. He transgressed the limit of justice, and therefore was punished.

The "content and soul" of Aeschylus' interpretation of the Prometheus myth is, according to Nietzsche, the affiliation the titanic artist feels with the audacity of

¹⁰Another cognate verbal form of hamartia is spoken by Io: "Son of Kronos, what fault, what fault [hamartousan] did you find in me that you should yoke me to a harness of misery like this, that you should torture me so to madness driven in fear of the gadfly" (PB 576-81). See also PB 112, 563, 620.

the transgressive move of the Titan Prometheus.

In himself the Titanic artist found the defiant faith that he had the ability to create men and at least destroy Olympian gods, by means of his superior wisdom which, to be sure, he had to atone for with eternal suffering. The splendid "ability" of the great genius for which even eternal suffering is a slight price, the stern pride of the artist—that is the content and soul of Aeschylus' poem (GT 64/BT 70).

Aeschylus' transgressive creation is characterized by what Nietzsche calls "the profoundly Aeschylean demand for justice [Gerechtigkeit]" (GT 64/BT 70).

The immeasurable suffering of the bold "individual" on the one hand and the divine predicament and intimation of a twilight of the gods on the other, the way the power of these two worlds of suffering compels a reconciliation, a metaphysical union—all this recalls in the strongest possible manner the center and main axiom of the Aeschylean view of the world which envisages Moira enthroned above gods and men as eternal justice [ewige Gerechtigkeit] (GT 64/BT 70).

In the name of "the profoundly Aeschylean demand for justice" Aeschylus audaciously places not only the world of the titanic individual (the Titan Prometheus, as well as the titanic Greek artist), but also the divine Olympian world on the scales of his justice. This "demand for justice" compels a reconciliation, a metaphysical union, of these two worlds in the name of an "eternal justice."

But insofar as Aeschylus' interpretation is taken merely as a defiant creation (that has to be atoned for with suffering) characterized by a profound "demand for justice" that compels reconciliation, it does not penetrate into the abysmal depth of the myth's terror.

But Aeschylus' interpretation of the myth does not

exhaust the astounding depth of its terror. Rather the artist's delight in what becomes, the cheerfulness of artistic creation that defies all misfortune, is merely a bright image of clouds and sky [ein lichtetes Wolken- und Himmelsbild] mirrored in a black lake of sadness (GT 64/BT 70).

In a passage that specifically applies to Sophocles' interpretation of the Oedipus myth, but that is equally applicable to Aeschylus' interpretation of the Prometheus myth, Nietzsche writes:

If this explanation does justice to the poet one may yet ask whether it exhausts the contents of the myth—and then it becomes evident that the poet's whole conception is nothing but precisely that bright image [Lichtbild] which healing nature projects before us after a glance into the abyss (GT 62/BT 68).

In another passage that specifically applies to the Sophoclean hero, but that is equally applicable to the Aeschylean hero, Nietzsche writes:

But suppose we disregard the character of the hero as it comes to the surface, visibly—after all, it is in the last analysis nothing but a bright image [Lichtbild] projected on a dark wall, which means appearance through and through; suppose we penetrate into the myth that projects itself in these lucid reflections: then we suddenly experience a phenomenon that is just the opposite of a familiar optical phenomenon (GT 61/BT 67).

Nietzsche's reading of Prometheus Bound penetrates into the myth. It penetrates into Aeschylus' interpretation of the myth insofar as this interpretation is taken merely as a defiant creation (that has to be atoned for with suffering) characterized by a profound "demand for justice" that compels a reconciliation. That is, it penetrates into Aeschylus' interpretation of the myth insofar as this interpretation remains attentive only to the transgression

of the limit of justice drawn by Apollo, and not to the movement at the margin of justice. By attending to the tragedy's transformation into an inability to reveal anything, Nietzsche is attending to the tragedy's attempt to become the revelation of what revelation destroys. This is, as Blanchot points out, a tragic endeavor.

The presupposition of the Prometheus myth produces, according to Nietzsche, a painful and irresolvable contradiction, rather than a reconciliation.

The presupposition of the Prometheus myth is to be found in the extravagant value which a naive humanity attached to fire as the true palladium of every ascending culture. But that man should freely dispose of fire without receiving it as a present from heaven, either as a lightning bolt or as the warming rays of the sun, struck these reflective primitive men as sacrilege, as a robbery of divine nature (GT 65/BT 70-1).

Thus, Nietzsche continues, "the very first philosophical problem"—the acquisition of fire—"immediately produces a painful and irresolvable contradiction [einen peinlichen unlösbaren Widerspruch] between man and god" (GT 65/BT 71), between a human world and a divine world.

The best and highest possession mankind can acquire is obtained by sacrilege and must be paid for with consequences that involve the whole flood of sufferings and sorrows with which the offended divinities have to afflict the nobly aspiring race of men (GT 65/BT 71).

With this "sublime view of active sin [die erhabene Ansicht von der activen Sünde]" as the characteristically Promethean virtue, "the ethical basis for pessimistic tragedy has been

found: the justification [Rechtfertigung]¹¹ of human evil, meaning both human guilt and the human suffering it entails" (GT 65/BT 71).

The painful and irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the world reveals itself, to a reader who is not inclined to interpret away the misfortune, as

a clash of different worlds, e.g., of a divine and a human one, in which each, taken as an individual, has right [Recht] on its side, but nevertheless has to suffer for its individuation, being merely a single one beside another (GT 66/BT 71).

For example, the clash between Prometheus and Zeus is (as is the case in most Aeschylean conflicts) a matter of right or dikē on both sides. The dikē on Zeus' side results from Prometheus' theft of fire, which, as was pointed out above, even Prometheus admits was a transgression (PB 265-7).

Prometheus' theft, as the smith Hephaestus points out, went "beyond what was just [perā dikēs]" (PB 30). Prometheus must consequently pay the penalty (dikēn) for his transgression (PB 9 and 614).¹² Prometheus does not deny that some penalty is justified, but he and his sympathizers do protest the severity of the punishment. At the end of the tragedy Prometheus even accuses Zeus of acting without dikē: "In a single word, I am the enemy of all the Gods that gave me ill for good [ekdikōs]" (PB 976) and "O Holy

¹¹The word "justification" is emphasized in the complete critical edition of Nietzsche's work. The English translation does not reflect this emphasis.

¹²See note 9.

mother mine, O Sky that circling brings the light to all, you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly [ekdika]" (PB 1093).¹³ In addition, Prometheus' theft of fire is (from the side of Titan Prometheus, as well as the titanically striving human being) justifiable as an act of compassion and generosity.

Each side, therefore, taken as an individual, claims the support of dikē, each claims to have right on its side. Focusing for a moment on the titanic individual (the Titan Prometheus, as well as the titanically striving human being) it becomes apparent that

[i]n the heroic effort of the individual to attain universality, in the attempt to transcend the curse of individuation and to become the one world-being, he suffers in his own person the primordial contradiction [Urwiderspruch] that is concealed in things, which means that he commits sacrilege and suffers (GT 66/BT 71).

In transgressing the limit of individuality (the just boundary, that the ethical deity Apollo determines, between a human world and a divine world), the titanic individual does not merely transgress the limit. The titanic individual simultaneously suffers the painful and irresolvable contradiction that the acquisition of fire is both just and unjust, neither merely just nor unjust. That is, the titanic individual simultaneously interrupts the very limit between just and unjust that would determine the transgression. The titanic individual (the Titan

¹³See Gagarin, Æschylean Drama, 134.

Prometheus, as well as the titanically striving human being) moves, therefore, at the margin of justice. This movement is revealed by a "double reading" that articulates the performance or production of the painful and irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the world. This "double reading" articulates the necessity of thinking together what is impossible to think together—the limit or just boundary determined by the ethical deity Apollo and the simultaneous transgression and interruption of this limit.

Aeschylus' interpretation of the Prometheus myth—insofar as it is taken as a defiant creation (that has to be atoned for with suffering) characterized by a profound "demand for justice" that compels reconciliation—does not exhaust, as Nietzsche points out, the astounding depth of its terror. Nietzsche's reading penetrates into the myth. The equivocal "double reading" of the myth that articulates the performance or production of the painful and irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the world is the necessary and inevitable effect of a penetration into the myth, of "a glance into the inside and terrors of nature" (GT 61/BT 67). It is a trace of the myth's abysmal terror.

Nietzsche concludes his reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound by identifying the equivocal "double reading" of the myth with the Apollinian and Dionysian duality. "Whoever understands [the] innermost kernel of the

Prometheus story—namely, the necessity of sacrilege imposed upon the titanically striving individual¹⁴—must also immediately [zugleich] feel how un-Apollinian this pessimistic notion is" (GT 66/BT 72), that is, how Dionysian, or otherwise than ethical,¹⁵ this ethical basis for pessimistic tragedy is.

Nietzsche goes on to clarify this equivocal "dual nature" of Aeschylus' Prometheus—an equivocality that highlights the interruptive character of Nietzsche's earlier declaration that with the "sublime view of active sin" as the characteristically Promethean virtue, "the ethical basis for pessimistic tragedy has been found: the justification of human evil, meaning both human guilt and the human suffering it entails" (GT 65/BT 71). The ethical deity Apollo, Nietzsche reminds us, "wants to grant repose to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them and by again and again calling these to mind as the most sacred laws of the world, with his demands for self-knowledge and measure" (GT 66/BT 72). But this Apollinian

¹⁴The titanic individual striving for "[t]he best and highest possession mankind can acquire" necessarily commits sacrilege. "The necessity of sacrilege imposed upon the titanically striving individual" arises from the "painful and irresolvable contradiction between man and god" (GT 65/BT 71), the "primordial contradiction that is concealed in things" (GT 66/BT 71).

¹⁵The Dionysian is not, strictly speaking, un-Apollinian or unethical for (as will become apparent below) it is not merely opposed to the Apollinian. It is, therefore, more appropriate to write "otherwise than Apollinian" and "otherwise than ethical."

demand for just boundaries is interrupted by the Dionysian.

Lest this Apollinian tendency congeal the form to Egyptian rigidity and coldness, lest the effort to prescribe to the individual wave its path and realm might annul the motion of the whole lake, the high tide of the Dionysian destroyed from time to time all those little circles in which the one-sidedly Apollinian "will" had sought to confine the Hellenic spirit. The suddenly swelling Dionysian tide then takes the separate little wave-mountains of individuals on its back, even as Prometheus' brother, the Titan Atlas, does with the earth. This Titanic impulse to become, as it were, the Atlas for all individuals, carrying them on a broad back, higher and higher, farther and farther, is what the Promethean and the Dionysian have in common.

In this respect, the Prometheus of Aeschylus is a Dionysian mask, while in the aforementioned profound demand for justice [Gerechtigkeit]¹⁶ Aeschylus reveals to the thoughtful his¹⁷ paternal descent from Apollo, the god of individuation and of just boundaries [Gerechtigkeitgrenzen]. So the dual nature of Aeschylus' Prometheus, his nature which is at the same time [zugleich] Dionysian and Apollinian, might be expressed thus in a conceptual formula: "All that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both [Alles Vorhandene ist gerecht und ungerecht und in beidem gleich berechtigt]."

That is your world! A world indeed!-- (GT 66-7/BT 72)

This conceptual formula expresses Prometheus' movement at the margin of justice. The Aeschylean/Promethean "demand for justice"—which reveals Aeschylus' and Prometheus' paternal descent from the ethical deity Apollo—reveals an ethical basis for pessimistic tragedy that is, at the same time, otherwise than Apollinian, and therefore, otherwise than ethical. It is more appropriate to write "otherwise than Apollinian" and "otherwise than ethical" because the

¹⁶Nietzsche is referring to "the profoundly Aeschylean demand for justice" mentioned on GT 64/BT 70.

¹⁷That is, both Aeschylus' and Prometheus'.

Dionysian is not merely opposed to the Apollinian. The Dionysian—otherwise than the ethical deity Apollo—is both ethical and unethical, neither merely ethical nor unethical. Moreover, the Aeschylean/Promethean "demand for justice"—which reveals Aeschylus' and Prometheus' paternal descent from Apollo, "the god of individuation and of just boundaries"—reveals a justification of human evil that is, at the same time, otherwise than Apollinian, and therefore, otherwise than a justification, because both sides have right on their side, both sides are justified. Or, said otherwise, the theft of fire is both just and unjust, neither merely just nor unjust. The Dionysian not only transgresses the limit determined by the Apollinian, it simultaneously interrupts the very limit that would determine the transgression. Aeschylus' and Prometheus' Apollinian "demand for justice" according to a "first reading" reveals, according to a "second reading," the simultaneous transgression and interruption of justice. That is, it reveals the Dionysian not only as that which is unjust, but also as that which effects an irresolvable undecidability of "unjust" and "just." It "reveals" the Dionysian, which exceeds the Apollinian "demand for justice." One could say the Dionysian is excess (Übermass, GT 37/BT 46) itself, were not the very operation of the determination "itself" interrupted by the excess. The Dionysian can, therefore, be written only under

erasure—~~Dionysian~~. "Writing under erasure" is a gesture of writing that articulates the withdrawal from revelation of what is "revealed" according to a "second reading." What always already withdraws from revelation inevitably gets reinscribed into the order of limits or just boundaries determined by Apollo, but it leaves a trace of itself in the necessary yet impossible "double reading" of the myth expressed by Nietzsche's irresolvably contradictory conceptual formula: "All that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both."

A final note: The interruption of justice does not justify injustice. It is not as if the Dionysian is merely opposed to the Apollinian, as if it is merely the lack of boundaries. Rather, it indicates that one's system of justice (one's system of evaluations) does not make one just. The performance of the "double reading" transforms justice into the impossibility of being just (or unjust). It interrupts any firm position from which one could make evaluations (of justice or injustice), while, at the same time, not absolving one of the necessity (not to say, the inevitability) of making such evaluations, and specifically, of enacting Aeschylus' and Prometheus' Apollinian "demand for justice."

With this reading of justice one can begin to read the following suggestive sentence: "The existence of the world

is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon." Nietzsche calls attention to justice as if to suggest that one can read the existence of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon only if one reads it alongside the transformation of justice effected in the text. It is as if the transformation of justice outlined above effects (or is effected by) a transformation of art. A detailed outline of this transformation would exceed the scope of this essay, but one can catch a glimpse of it in Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound where, as was pointed out above, Nietzsche identifies the equivocal "double reading" of the myth with the Apollinian and Dionysian duality—the two art deities of the Greeks around whom the innumerable transformations of art effected in The Birth of Tragedy are gathered.¹⁸

Nietzsche's reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound attempts to rethink—and, in a sense, to liberate—the concept of justice. Here, perhaps for the first time (to refer to a phrase in Nietzsche's "Attempt at a Self-Criticism"), a pessimism "beyond good and evil," beyond just and unjust, is suggested. At the risk of moving far too quickly, I would suggest that, perhaps, Levinas' idea of justice is not unlike the just boundaries characteristic of

¹⁸For a more detailed account of these transformations see John Sallis, Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

the Apollinian order and that Levinas' idea of responsibility is not unlike the excessive Dionysian, which interrupts the just boundaries of the Apollinian order and merely leaves an enigmatic or ambiguous trace of itself in that order. Perhaps.

CHAPTER 5

THE CLEARING AND DEAD TIME: Re-reading Heidegger's Being and Time

In "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," first published in 1966, Heidegger writes of his attempt, undertaken again and again since 1930, to give the questioning in Being and Time a more originary [anfänglicher] form. This means: to submit the beginning [Ansatz] of the question in Being and Time to an immanent critique.¹

He indicates that through this undertaking "the name of the task of Being and Time gets changed" (SD 61/TB 55). But into what is it changed? Heidegger answers this question with a question: "Does the name for the task of thinking then read instead of Being and Time: clearing and presence [Lichtung und Anwesenheit]" (SD 80/TB 73)? The change here is not, however, the result of an external critique undertaken in the name of transcending Being and Time, but rather the result, as Heidegger has already indicated, of an immanent critique—a critique that is already in play in Being and Time itself.

This immanent critique decisively turns, I would

¹Martin Heidegger, Zur Sache des Denkens (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1969), 61, hereafter cited in the text as SD. / On Time and Being, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 55, hereafter cited in the text as TB.

suggest, upon the doubling of death—death as possibility turning into death as impossibility. Recall the introduction of this dissertation which pointed out that Levinas and Blanchot consistently read death in Being and Time as merely possibility. The doubling of death calls, therefore, for re-reading these readings of Being and Time. I would suggest that this doubling—which delimits the project of fundamental ontology, that is, both limits it and makes it possible²—not only opens the space/time of the clearing (Lichtung), but also raises the question of the proximity of the clearing and the "dead time" (le temps mort) of Levinas and Blanchot.

The existential analytic of Dasein, undertaken in the name of fundamental ontology, is delimited by a series of crucial distinctions—ontic/ontological, existentiell/existential, inauthentic/authentic, etc. That reading of Being and Time that has come to be known as the "existential" reading reads these distinctions as distinctions, that is, as two separate, distinguishable ways of being. This reading—which, I would suggest, inevitably characterizes the "first reading" of a doubled re-reading of Being and Time—reads the task of the existential analytic and, therefore, fundamental ontology, as merely a step

²See John Sallis, Delimitations—Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

beyond the first pole of each distinction into the second pole. The analysis of death that opens the second division of Being and Time affirms, according to the "existential" reading, the possibility of the existential analytic by affirming the possibility of completing this step, that is, by bringing to light Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole. "By pointing out that Dasein has an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole, the existential analytic acquires assurance as to the constitution of Dasein's primordial Being" (SZ 234/BT 277). But this reading—a reading that reads death merely as possibility—repeats, as Levinas and Blanchot point out, the most familiar and traditional of steps.

The question of Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole is already anticipated in the opening section of the first division. Heidegger's "exposition of the task of a preparatory analysis of Dasein" begins by sketching two characteristics of Dasein—"the priority of 'existentia' over essentia, and the fact that Dasein is in each case mine [die Jemeinigkeit]" (SZ 43/BT 68). Heidegger qualifies his choice of the term "existence" (Existenz) to designate Dasein's comportment to its Being by pointing out that the term "does not and cannot have the ontological significance of the traditional term 'existentia'" (SZ 42/BT 67). It designates, rather, what Heidegger calls Dasein's potentiality-for-Being (Seinkönnen). Heidegger writes:

That entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself towards its Being as its ownmost [eigensten] possibility. In each case Dasein is its possibility, and it 'has' this possibility, but not just as a property [eigenschaftlich], as something present-at-hand would (SZ 42/BT 68).

Weaving in the other characteristic of Dasein, mineness, Heidegger introduces the issue of authenticity (Eigentlichkeit). The passage continues:

And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be authentic [eigentliches]—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. As modes of Being, authenticity and inauthenticity (these expressions have been chosen terminologically in a strict sense) are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness [Jemeinigkeit] (SZ 42-43/BT 68).

The question of Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole, anticipated in the opening of the first division and "completed" in the opening chapters of the second division, delimits the movement of the existential analytic.

In the analysis of "Being-in" the word clearing (Lichtung) decisively comes into play with respect to the question of Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole. As essentially ex-isting, as "being-there," that is, as the site (the "there," the "Da") where its own Being (Sein) is disclosed, Dasein is itself the clearing (Lichtung).

When we talk in an ontically figurative way of the lumen naturale in man, we have in mind nothing other than the existential-ontological structure of this entity, that it is in such a way as to be its "there".

To say that it is 'illuminated' ["erleuchtet"] means that as Being-in-the-world it is cleared [gelichtet] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it is itself the clearing [Lichtung]. Only for an entity which is existentially cleared [gelichteten] in this way does that which is present-at-hand become accessible in the light or hidden in the dark. By its very nature, Dasein brings its "there" along with it. If it lacks its "there", it is not factually the entity which is essentially Dasein; indeed, it is not this entity at all. Dasein is its disclosedness [Erschlossenheit] (SZ 133/BT 171).

As potentiality-for-Being, Dasein's way of Being lies existentially, Heidegger writes, in one constituent of the clearing—understanding (Verstehen) (SZ 143/BT 183).

The crux of Heidegger's analysis of understanding is his precise characterization of this existentiale as projection (Entwurf). Drawing upon his earlier analysis of the worldhood of the world, Heidegger writes: "With equal primordially the understanding projects [entwirft] Dasein's Being both upon its 'for-the-sake-of-which' [Worumwillen] and upon significance [Bedeutsamkeit], as the worldhood of its current world" (SZ 145/BT 185). Proximally and for the most part Dasein is projected upon significance, upon the "relational totality" (SZ 87/BT 120) that structures a world. Recall that the world is structured by the Being of the ready-to-hand (involvement), that is, by the manifold context of assignments and references of an "in-order-to" visible to circumspection (Umsicht). From the world, Dasein is, in turn, given back to itself, disclosed to itself. Dasein can understand itself in terms of the possibilities of an "in-order-to" that structure a world. But this

particular projection and subsequent disclosure does not let possibilities be as possibilities. Being out for something concernfully, which characterizes Dasein's comportment to the world, is not a comportment toward the possible as possible. In the analysis of death Heidegger writes:

"Being towards" a possibility—that is to say, towards something possible—may signify "Being out for" something possible, as in concerning ourselves with its actualization. Such possibilities are constantly encountered in the field of what is ready-to-hand and present-at-hand—what is attainable, controllable, practicable, and the like. In concernfully Being out for something possible, there is a tendency to annihilate the possibility of the possible by making it available to us. But the concerned actualization of equipment which is ready-to-hand (as in producing it, getting it ready, readjusting it, and so on) is always merely relative, since even that which has been actualized is still characterized in terms of some involvements—indeed this is precisely what characterizes its Being. Even though actualized, it remains, as actual, something possible for doing something; it is characterized by an "in-order-to". What our analysis is to make plain is simply how Being out for something concernfully, comports itself towards the possible: it does so not by the theoretico-thematical consideration of the possible as possible, and by having regard for its possibility as such, but rather by looking circumspectively away [umsichtig...wegsieht] from the possible and looking at that for which it is possible [das Wofür-möglich] (SZ 261/BT 305).

Even though the concerned actualization of the ready-to-hand is merely relative, insofar as it remains situated within the referential totality of an "in-order-to," the sense of the possible operative in the circumspection that guides concern remains confined within the horizon of actualization. Being out for something concernfully, comports itself toward the possible—that is, toward the

ready-to-hand which is as being possible, which is only insofar as it is situated within the referential totality of an "in-order-to"³—by looking circumspectively away from the possible as such and by looking at that for which it is possible, that is, at that for which it is the possible actualization. This looking-away from the possible to its possible actualization is what Heidegger calls expecting (Erwarten).

Expecting is not just an occasional looking-away [ein Wegsehen] from the possible to its possible actualization, but is essentially a waiting for that actualization [ein Warten auf diese]. Even in expecting, one leaps away from the possible and gets a foothold in the actual. It is for its actuality that what is expected is expected. By the very nature of expecting, the possible is drawn into the actual, arising out of the actual and returning to it (SZ 262/BT 306).

Heidegger contrasts expecting, which essentially confines possibility within the horizon of actuality, to anticipation (Vorlaufen), which frees possibility, lets possibility be as possibility.

The issue of anticipation is anticipated in the analysis of understanding. Recall that the understanding not only projects Dasein upon significance, but also, and with equal primordially, upon its "for-the-sake-of-which." The "for-the-sake-of-which," as the analysis of the

³For example, the pencil is most properly the pencil not as an object present-at-hand but when it is situated within the referential totality of an "in-order-to," that is, when it is used "in-order-to" write, which is done "in-order-to" to finish the dissertation, which is done "in-order-to"...

worldhood of the world indicates, refers to that being, Dasein, characterized essentially by its potentiality-for-Being (Seinkönnen). It refers to that being which "grounds" the "in-order-to" of significance (SZ 83-88/BT 114-22). Therefore, not only is Dasein projected upon significance, that is, upon the possibilities of an "in-order-to" that structure a world, it is also projected upon possibilities understood with respect to its potentiality-for-Being, that is, its ownmost possibilities, possibilities as possibilities. From both of these possibilities Dasein is given back to itself, disclosed to itself.

Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting. As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself, and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities (SZ 145/BT 185).

Heidegger is perhaps a bit too unequivocal in the next passage of the text which describes projection solely in terms of projection upon possibilities as possibilities. I would suggest that Dasein's projection upon significance is a projection that does not let possibilities be as possibilities.

Furthermore, the character of understanding as projection is such that the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects—that is to say, possibilities. Grasping it in such a manner would take away from what it projected its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents which we have in mind; whereas projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it be as such. As projecting, understanding is the kind of Being of Dasein in which it is its possibilities as possibilities (SZ 145/BT 185).

Heidegger goes on to characterize the two-sided self-disclosure that is correlative to its two-sided self-projection—that is, its projection upon the possibilities of an "in-order-to" that structure a world and its projection upon its ownmost possibilities—in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity.

Understanding can devote itself primarily to the disclosedness of the world; that is, Dasein can, proximally and for the most part, understand itself in terms of its world. Or else understanding throws itself primarily into the "for-the-sake-of-which"; that is, Dasein exists as itself. Understanding is either authentic, arising out of one's own Self as such, or inauthentic (SZ 146/BT 186).

These two forms of projective understanding are analogous to what one might call authentic and inauthentic possibility.

The negative determination of possibility characteristic of Heidegger's analysis of understanding is positively supplemented in a relatively short passage from that section of Being and Time entitled "Pre-sketch [Vorzeichnung] of the existential-ontological structure of death." The analysis of death in Being and Time arises in response to the question of whether or not the existential analytic of Dasein undertaken in Division I is complete, whether or not it has grasped Dasein as a whole. But this demand for the completion of the existential analytic seems "manifestly inconsistent" (SZ 236/BT 279) with the analysis of care which forms the structural whole of Dasein. The "primary item" in the structure of care is the "ahead-of-

itself" (Sichvorweg), which obviously harkens back to the potentiality-for-Being central to the analysis of understanding (SZ 191-2/BT 236).

The 'ahead-of-itself' [>>Sichvorweg<<], as an item in the structure of care, tells us unambiguously that in Dasein there is always something still outstanding [aussteht], which, as a potentiality-for-Being [Seinkönnen] for Dasein itself, has not yet become 'actual'. It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is constantly something still to be settled [eine ständige Unabgeschlossenheit] (SZ 236/BT 279).

The inconsistency, therefore, is this: as soon as Dasein is wholly itself, Dasein is not.

[A]s soon as Dasein 'exists' in such a way that absolutely nothing more is still outstanding in it, then it has already for this very reason become "no-longer-Being-there" [Nicht-mehr-da-sein]. Its Being is annihilated when what is still outstanding in its Being has been liquidated (SZ 236/BT 280).

This inconsistency would preclude the possibility of grasping Dasein as a whole save for Heidegger's reservations: the argument giving rise to the inconsistency is not only merely formal, it also inadvertently posits Dasein as something merely present-at-hand. "Have we, in our argument," Heidegger asks, "taken 'Being-not-yet' and the 'ahead' in a sense that is genuinely existential" (SZ 237/BT 280)? In fact, rather than simply precluding the analysis, this inconsistency—the necessary yet impossible coincidence of being and nonbeing—forms, as will become apparent throughout the course of the analysis, the essential element of the death analysis that calls for thinking.

Heidegger then establishes, within the context of an analysis of the possibility of experiencing the death of others, that death is not merely an event (Begebenheit). In the wake of the seeming inconsistency of Dasein itself getting access to the phenomenon of death, this analysis arises as an alternative means of getting access to the phenomenon. But Heidegger concludes that despite "the fact that one Dasein can be represented [Vertretbarkeit] by another" (SZ 239/BT 283), the possibility of representing breaks down completely in the phenomenon of death. "No one can take the Other's dying away from him" (SZ 240/BT 284). I am, with respect to the phenomenon of death, unrepresentable. This impossibility of substitution is due to the mineness (Jemeinigkeit) of death.

By its very essence, death is in every case mine [meine], in so far as it 'is' at all. And indeed death signifies a peculiar possibility-of-Being in which the very Being of one's own Dasein is an issue. In dying, it is shown that mineness [Jemeinigkeit] and existence are ontologically constitutive for death. Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially (SZ 240/BT 284).

With this passage Heidegger again returns to the prescription—as he did when he expressed reservations about the "manifest inconsistency" between the demand for the completion of the existential analytic and the analysis of the structure of care—that death is a phenomenon to be understood existentially.

In order to get a genuinely existential conception of the phenomenon of death it is necessary, therefore, to

determine the way that death belongs to existence.

According to the analysis of the structure of care, Dasein's existence consists in its being always already "ahead of itself." Dasein always already projects ahead to what it not yet is. But, Heidegger asks, is this "not-yet" which belongs to Dasein as long as it is, to be interpreted, as it was previously, as still outstanding (Ausstand) (SZ 242/BT 286)? That which is still outstanding is, for example, the remainder yet to be received in order to pay off or settle a debt. When the debt is paid off, that which is still outstanding gets liquidated. To be still outstanding means, therefore, that what belongs together is not yet all together. Heidegger concludes that "[e]ntities for which anything is still outstanding have the kind of Being of something ready-to-hand" (SZ 242/BT 286-7). But the lack-of-togetherness that belongs to any such entities cannot define the "not-yet" which belongs to Dasein with respect to its possible death. Here Heidegger again reiterates the "manifest inconsistency" referred to earlier.

That Dasein should be together only when its "not-yet" has been filled up is so far from the case that it is precisely then that Dasein is no longer. Any Dasein always exists in just such a manner that its "not-yet" belongs to it (SZ 243/BT 287).

Heidegger then addresses two examples of entities to which one could presumably say the "not-yet" belongs, in order to determine, at least in a negative way, Dasein's peculiar "not-yet." The not yet full moon is "not-yet" in the sense

of "not-yet" perceptible. But this "not-yet" pertains only to the way one perceptually grasps that which is already actual. Dasein's "not-yet" is not, however, something provisionally and occasionally inaccessible to perception. It is not yet actual. "Dasein must, itself, become—that is to say, be—what it is not yet" (SZ 243/BT 287). The "not-yet" of the ripe fruit is, unlike the "not-yet" of the full moon, a "not-yet" of becoming. The fruit becomes ripe, and that becoming ripe belongs to the being of the fruit. "Correspondingly," Heidegger notes, "as long as Dasein is, it too is already its "not-yet"" (SZ 244/BT 288). But when the fruit becomes ripe, it fulfills itself, it actualizes its possibilities. Dasein does not, however, fulfill its possibilities with its death. On the contrary, its death is the moment when its possibilities are taken away.

Heidegger then distinguishes the senses of ending characteristic of present-at-hand and ready-to-hand things and the sense of ending characteristic of Dasein.

[J]ust as Dasein is already its "not-yet", and is its "not-yet" constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The "ending" which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a Being-towards-the-end [Sein zum Ende] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die" (SZ 245/BT 289).

The "not-yet" of death, considered existentially, has, therefore, the character of something towards which Dasein comports itself. Immediately preceding the passage that

lies at the center of Heidegger's analysis of death, Heidegger modifies this existential characterization of the "not-yet." Death, he writes, is something impending (Bevorstand) (SZ 250/BT 293-4).

The passage that lies at the center of Heidegger's analysis of death can, for heuristic purposes, be divided into five parts. It begins:

Death is a possibility-of-Being [Seinsmöglichkeit] which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being [in seinem eigensten Seinkönnen] (SZ 250/BT 294).

Death is a possibility that Dasein has always to take over—that is, a possibility upon which, using terminology introduced in the analysis of understanding, Dasein must project itself. In fact, it is the only possibility upon which Dasein has no choice but to project itself.

Projecting itself upon this possibility Dasein stands before itself in its potentiality-for-Being—that is, it is given back to itself, disclosed to itself, from that possibility. This possibility, as the only possibility upon Dasein must project itself, is Dasein's ownmost possibility.

The passage continues:

This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there [die Möglichkeit des Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens]. If Dasein stands before itself [seiner selbst sich bevorsteht] as this possibility, it has been fully assigned [verwiesen] to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being [eigenstes Seinkönnen]. When it stands before itself in this way,

all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone (SZ 250/BT 294).

What is at issue for Dasein in its projection upon this possibility, and its being disclosed to itself from this possibility, is, as the analysis of anxiety shows, nothing within-the-world but rather being-in-the-world as such. What is at issue is Dasein's no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. What is more, not only does this projection and self-disclosure banish Dasein from present-at-hand and ready-to-hand entities within-the-world, it exiles Dasein fully, that is, it undoes the Dasein-with of others. To project upon this possibility and to be disclosed from it—that is, to stand before itself—is, at the same time, to be in utter exile. This possibility is non-relational.

The passage continues:

This ownmost non-relational [un-bezüglich] possibility is at the same time the uttermost one [die äusserste]. As potentiality-for-Being, Dasein cannot outstrip [überholen] the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein (SZ 250/BT 294).

This part of the passage follows almost directly from the previous parts—since death is Dasein's ownmost, non-relational possibility, it is the extreme possibility. Death is that possibility that delimits—that is, both limits and makes possible—possibilities. This possibility is unsurpassable, not to be outstripped.

The passage continues by gathering together the three determinations of death that have emerged:

Thus death reveals itself as that possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped. As such, death is something distinctively impending (SZ 250-1/BT 294).

The possibility of death is distinctive in that it is otherwise than any impending possibility within-the-world.

The passage concludes by emphasizing that the possibility of death is not only a mode of disclosedness, but, in a certain sense, a privileged mode.

Its existential possibility is based on the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed [erschlossen] to itself, and disclosed, indeed, as ahead-of-itself [Sich-vorweg]. This item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion in Being-towards-death (SZ 251/BT 294).

The ahead-of-itself, one should note, is that moment in the structure of care that corresponds to the analysis of understanding. Death, as the most originary concretion of this structure, delimits—that is, both limits and makes possible—this structure. This delimitation, moreover, is the doubling of death upon which turns the re-reading of Being and Time.

The first movement of this doubling is marked by Dasein's return to itself. Projection upon and disclosure from this possibility serve to draw Dasein back from dispersion to a certain unity with itself, to a certain wholeness. This possibility—which marks the condition of the possibility of possibility—discloses Dasein in its ownmost.

The second movement of this doubling effects an

interruption of the first movement. For that possibility which discloses Dasein in its ownmost is, at the same time, the possibility that banishes Dasein to utter exile, that separates it not only from others and the world, but also from itself. This possibility marks, therefore, not only the condition of the possibility of possibility, but at the same time, the condition of the impossibility of possibility. Death as possibility turning into death as impossibility. One is here called to think together that which is impossible to think together—Dasein is (being) and is not (nonbeing), it is itself in being other, it is ownmost and othermost, it is homecoming in exile.⁴

In both "The Trace of the Other" and "Meaning and Sense" Levinas implicitly casts Heidegger's philosophy as one ultimately characterized by homecoming. For example, in a passage from "Meaning and Sense"—a passage whose context obviously indicates that he is referring, among other philosophers, to Heidegger—Levinas writes: "Philosophy's itinerary remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island—complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the other."⁵ Levinas,

⁴See John Sallis, "Mortality and Imagination: Heidegger and the Proper Name of Man," in Echos: After Heidegger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁵Emmanuel Levinas, "La signification et le sens," in Humanisme de l'autre homme (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972), 40. / "Meaning and Sense," in Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 91.

however, wishes to oppose the story of Abraham to the myth of Ulysses. In "The Trace of the Other" he writes: "To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure."⁶ Levinas' choice of the word "oppose" is perhaps a bit too polemical since the "relation" of homecoming to exile can never be one merely of opposition. In more careful formulations Levinas himself speaks of a homecoming in exile that is not unlike the reading of Heidegger's analysis of death offered in the previous paragraphs. For example, in the chapter entitled "Substitution" from Otherwise Than Being Levinas writes:

If the return to self proper to cognition, the original truth of being, consciousness, can be realized, it is because a recurrence of ipseity has already been produced [produite]. This is an inversion in the process of essence, a withdrawing from the game that being plays in consciousness. It is a withdrawal in-oneself which is an exile in oneself, without a foundation in anything else, a non-condition. This withdrawal excludes all spontaneity, and is thus always already effected, already past (AE 135/OB 106-107, emphasis added).

These provisional remarks serve only to raise the question of the proximity of Heidegger and Levinas. The doubling of death—which gives rise to the call to necessarily yet

⁶Emmanuel Levinas, "La trace de l'autre," in En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger (Paris: Vrin, 1982), 191. / "The Trace of the Other," trans. Alphonso Lingis, in Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 348.

impossibly think together homecoming and exile—likewise raises the question of the proximity of Heidegger and Blanchot with respect to Blanchot's "double death." It is now necessary, however, to return for a moment to the reading of Heidegger's death analysis.

The doubling of death is both the condition of the possibility and the impossibility of fundamental ontology. This doubling of death, on the one hand, effects the possibility of fundamental ontology, it establishes the distinctions (so crucial to the existential analytic) as distinctions—ontic/ontological, existentiell/existential, inauthentic/authentic, etc. But, on the other hand, it is ruinous of not only the possibility of fundamental ontology (insofar as it is understood as merely a step from one term of the distinction to another), but also, of the very language of possibility itself. The distinctions of the existential analytic—which, according to the "existential" reading, set the stage for the most familiar and traditional of steps—can, therefore, no longer be understood as merely distinctions. One could perhaps say, as Levinas does in a completely different context, that there is a rapport sans rapport—a relation without relation—between the terms of each distinction. That is, the latter "term" of each distinction infinitely approaches (or withdraws).

This doubling of death opens the space/time of the

clearing (Lichtung). But Levinas and Blanchot do not read this doubling (at least in those places where Heidegger is explicitly named). I would suggest, however, that this doubling of death not only opens the space/time of the clearing, but also raises the question of the proximity of this clearing and the "dead time" of Levinas and Blanchot.⁷

⁷Having suggested this, it is immediately necessary to add a note of reservation. This re-reading of Heidegger's Being and Time merely serves as a way to problematize a too easy reading of the work of Levinas or Blanchot that would proclaim that they have unambiguously stepped beyond the work of Heidegger. It must be emphasized, however, that it merely raises the question of the proximity of the work of Heidegger and the work of Levinas and Blanchot. It does not seek to synthesize them. Given time, it would be necessary to supplement this reading with a reading that would remain attentive to differences between the works of Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot. For example, it would be necessary to take into account (among a host of other works) Levinas' Otherwise than Being and his essay "Mourir pour . . ." in Heidegger. Questions ouvertes (Paris: Osiris, 1988), as well as Blanchot's The Space of Literature.

AFTERWARD

This afterward serves to unsay what was said in the dissertation, it serves as a corrective to what may have been ill understood in the dissertation.

This dissertation is composed of five relatively self-contained chapters gathered together only by the logic of approach—the "is not yet" or "dead time." The logic of approach serves as a way to problematize a too easy reading of the works of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot—a reading, for example, that proclaims that one of these thinkers has unambiguously stepped beyond one of the others. It must be emphasized, however, that it merely raises the question of the proximity of the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot. It does not seek to synthesize them. Given time, it would be necessary to supplement this reading with a reading that would remain attentive to differences between the works of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot.

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