

Emmanuel Levinas:

Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being

Emmanuel Levinas:

Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being

Elisabeth Louise Thomas

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of General Philosophy, The University of Sydney

January, 1999

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: <i>Dasein</i> and Human Being	16
i) The Renewal of the Question	17
ii) Thrownness, Evasion and Enchainment	24
iii) Originary Insufficiency	29
iv) Pleasure: From Triumph to Shame	35
v) Nausea and Anxiety	38
Chapter 2: Being, <i>Il y a</i> and Hypostasis	44
i) Ontological Separation versus Ontological Difference	46
ii) The Impersonal and its Other	53
iii) <i>Il y a</i> and the Impossible Instance	57
iv) <i>Il y a</i> and the Duality of Hypostasis	61
v) Beyond Hope: Death, Time, <i>Autru</i>	65
Chapter 3: Enjoyment: Subject and World	72
i) Hunger and Thirst: The Salvation and Sincerity of Life	73
ii) Enjoyment and Intentionality in <i>Totality and Infinity</i>	76
iii) Enjoyment, World, Exteriority	80
iv) The Subject of Enjoyment and <i>Il y a</i>	87
v) Enjoyment: Light and Distance	91
Chapter 4: The Ambiguous Economy of Dwelling	95
i) Dwelling: The Gift of Time	96
ii) Recollection and Welcome: Sexual Difference	103
iii) Possession and/or Representation	110
iv) Realms of Light: New Visions	114

v) Representation, Sensibility and the Face	118
Chapter 5: <i>Ethos: Beyond Eros and Agape</i>	124
i) Feminine Alterity: From <i>Eros</i> to <i>Ethos</i>	124
ii) <i>Eros</i> and Plato's Social Totality	132
iii) From <i>Eros</i> to the Face	139
Chapter 6: Ethics is Justice	149
i) The Other and Social Justice	150
ii) Freedom and the Face	155
iii) The Third and Justice	163
iv) Ethics and Ontology, or Two Kinds of Justice	170
Chapter 7: Ethics, Ontology and Justice	178
i) Truth and Being's Justice	179
ii) Ethics and Being's Justice	188
iii) Language and Affectivity	194
iv) The Said and the Saying of the Said	200
Chapter 8: Subjectivity and Tertiality: <i>Il y a</i> and Illeity	208
i) Ethical Amphibology	209
ii) Human and Existential Matters	217
iii) Tertiality: Illeity and the Third Party	219
iv) Why Alterity is Ethical	229
Conclusion	238
Bibliography	242

ABBREVIATIONS of WORKS by LEVINAS
(refer to bibliography for details)

AE	
BW	<i>Basic Philosophical Writings</i>
CP	<i>Collected Philosophical Papers</i>
DE	
DEHH	
DF	<i>Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism.</i>
DMT	<i>Dieu, la Mort et le Temps.</i>
DVI	
EV	
EE	<i>Existence and Existents</i>
EI	<i>Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo.</i>
EN	
HAH	<i>Humanisme de l'autre homme.</i>
OB	<i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence.</i>
TA	<i>Le Temps et l'autre</i>
TaI	<i>Totality and Infinity An Essay in Exteriority</i>
TeI	
TIH	
TN	<i>In the Time of the Nations.</i>
TO	<i>Time and the Other.</i>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my colleagues and the staff at The University of Sydney, especially my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Moira Gatens whose support was essential for the completion of this thesis. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Dr. Linnell Secomb for her continual encouragement and support. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Bernhard Waldenfels, Thomas Bedorf and Dr. Gabrielle Baptist for making me welcome in Bochum and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) for their financial support. Finally, thanks especially to Peter and to Richard, Trish, Ingrid and Cate.

Abstract: Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being

PhD. Candidate: Elisabeth Thomas

Levinas finds the early twentieth century to be marked by a rejection of the concept of humanity, at the moment of its awakening to its own brutality. While accepting the anti-humanist position, insofar as it questions the primacy of free will, and an unquestionable security in its attachment to a pre-given, universal Reason, Levinas' work questions the value of rethinking the human in terms of being. This thesis traces Levinas' attempt to rehabilitate humanity from its devotion to ontology as first philosophy. It argues that Levinas offers a reinterpretation of the relation of being and the human, tracing the movement in Levinas' work from a critical attempt to rethink the human and being, to the notion of the human beyond being.

The thesis begins with a critical engagement with Heideggerian ontology suggesting that Levinas' renewal of the question of being in his prewar essays reflects a concern for the meaning of subjective existence and its relation to the social and political totality. These concerns lie behind his reinterpretation of the relation of existence and the existent in his essays of the 1940's in which Levinas undertakes a critique of a Platonic social totality and introduces a notion of the alterity of *eros* which does not have its value determined in terms of a teleology of social production.

From this basis, Levinas is shown to address the question of justice by articulating the essentially ambiguous relation between the subject and another in terms of the ambivalence of the face, and contrasting this with the alterity of love. The development of these ideas is traced across Levinas' major works. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that the response to the singular other is conceived of as the event of the production of a universal which affirms the tertiality of the social totality, that is, attests to the whole of humanity. In *Otherwise than Being*, the relation of ethics and justice is discussed in different terms, those of the relation of the ethical Saying and the realm of the Said or being's justice. Levinas juxtaposes the ontological tertiality of the third, with the notion of an ethical tertiality, which he calls illeity. Illeity is found to not be reducible to the ontological tertiality of the

third party, but to name the exceeding of subjectivity in terms of an absolute susceptibility to the Other, and is an excessive concept of a singular universal: the human beyond being.

