***Existence and Existents* - Emmanuel Levinas**

*Existence and Existents*, published in 1947, was one of Levinas’ first works and is very much a brief introduction to ideas which he would flesh out more fully in his later, mature books, *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise then Being or Beyond Essence* (1974).

*Existence and Existents* describes existence itself (what he calls the *there is*), as an anonymous, “undifferentiated background”, that is separate from existents (or individual beings). He discusses how the latter arise from the former through *fatigue* and *effort* (two experiences which are existentially entwined) which in turn, create (or “take on”) the *instant*, leaving us with an ‘upsurged’ being “out of joint with itself”.

Levinas then moves on to outline how our relation with the world is grounded in intentionality animated by desire. He notes a difference with Heidegger in suggesting that not all objects in the world initially appear to us as tools, but rather they appear as ends in themselves; ends which make up our existence. This is what he calls *sincerity*. He therefore also finds fault with Heidegger for calling our being in the world “everyday” and “inauthentic”.

After a discussion of the horror of existence itself (Being or the *there is*) and how this can be glimpsed through art and insomnia, he moves on to discuss the *hypostasis* (the way an existent arises from existence) and how it arises from *position* and the *present*. Levinas also discusses the ego, or “I”, and its connection to the aforementioned concepts.

Finally, Levinas ventures into ekstatic time which he asserts has its basis in other people, and the future, which he recasts as the hope for redemption as “a resurrection of the present”.

I. The Relationship with Existence and the Instant

*1. The Relationship with Existence*

Levinas distinguishes between beings (existents) and Being (existence or the *there is*) and his primary goal here is to capture the relationship the existent has with existence itself. The problem is that the so-called “relationship” we are looking for here isn’t a genuine relationship because existence (or Being) isn’t another thing or person, or “the sum total of persons and things; it is the fact that one is, that fact that *there is*.”

Moreover, we cannot develop a relationship with existence until we already exist. This last point is particularly salient because it is the reason why “the question about Being – *What is Being?* – has never been answered. There is no answer to Being… The question is itself a manifestation of the relationship with Being.” Philosophy strives, not to answer this question, but to go beyond it and the only thing beyond the “questioning of Being is not some truth – but the good.”

Nevertheless, the relationship of an existent with its existence is graspable through a consideration of its ‘birth’, which is, contrary to older notions of existence being given by divine decree or by virtue of a thing’s essence, a struggle. This struggle for existence is typically taken to be a struggle for the future but this is to see “the struggle of an already existent being for the prolongation of its existence.” In order to grasp the *birth* of that existence, this is clearly too late. Levinas therefore suggests that we must go prior to reflection because reflection is always an already constituted existence turning back over itself. He singles out *fatigue* and *indolence* as examples of such attitudes prior to reflection which concern existence itself.

To investigate these two phenomena as mental contents would be to see them as reflection sees them. Rather, we must look at them as original events arising in the face of existence itself. *Fatigue* is a weariness, not of specific things, but of existence itself. It is the “reminder of a commitment to exist”, the impossible desire to evade the burden of existence, to *refuse* it. There is nothing of a judgement in this weariness; it is prior to all judgements and experiences. It is more like simply what it is to exist. *Indolence* is not a mere lack of deliberation or an indecisiveness. Like fatigue, it is prior to such things. It is however, tied to the beginning of actions as a recoiling before that beginning, a “hesitation before existence, an indolence about existing... an impotent and joyless aversion to the burden of existence itself.” Indolence is not therefore mere distraction or indulgence in pleasurable activities. It “makes us prostrate… weighs us down… afflicts us with boredom. The man who gives himself over to pleasure, entertainment and distraction is fleeing indolence as much as work.”

*2. Fatigue and the Instant*

Fatigue can only occur in effort but it doesn’t arise in it as an accompanying phenomenon. Rather, fatigue is a constitutive part of effort because all effort contains a condemnation buried within, the sense of being “yoked to our task”, which naturally inspires weariness.

A melody is an example of a continuity. Listening to a melody is free from work and effort because it cannot be scrutinised by individual instants; to do so is to lose sight of the melody. Effort, on the other hand, is made up of stops, as in the way work is completed step by step. It is because of this – the “stoppage and a positing”, an interruption, in the middle of the anonymous flow of existence – that effort creates the instant.

The present is thus *constituted* by the way “effort takes on the instant”. But how does the present arise? As we have seen, this act of taking on the instant involves fatigue and fatigue is a condemnation. We then have a being which is suddenly “out of joint with itself… a being that is not joining up with itself in the instant” (because it is a refusal of it), and this creates a lag. It is this lag which comprises the interval which is the present.

This distance (the present) which has suddenly opened up in existence is precisely the “upsurge [birth] of an existent.” Since the existent is founded on effort and fatigue in the instant, then for it “*to be* means to *take up being*” which means “the existence of an existent is by essence an activity.” To exist means to always be active. Even in inactivity, an existent is engaged in the fundamental activity which is its relationship with being, it’s upsurge into existence.

II. The World

*1. Intentions*

Our relationship with the world is captured perfectly in intentionality, but intention as animated by desire. With this, Levinas distinguishes his account of intentionality from Husserl (for whom intention was bereft of desire) and Heidegger (who founded his intentionality on care). For Levinas, desire is an end in itself. His example is hunger; we don’t eat to live, “we eat because we are hungry. Desire has no further intentions behind it… The desirable is a terminus, an end.”

Levinas makes an interesting observation here. Being (existence) and value are not mutually exclusive. “The reality of a thing is indeed constituted by its finality. As the end of an intention, a thing is a goal, a limit, an ultimate. Qua value, end of a desire, an object is a being”. He compares Aristotle’s unmoved mover to objects in the world. They derive existence not from acting but from attracting. The world is what is given to us. This basically means not something we just look at and contemplate, but something we engage with (intentionally via desire).

Desire separates me from the desirable (which I anticipate possessing after my desire has formed) but also presupposes some relation (“possession”) with it prior to the desire (or I could never come to desire it in the first place). This, the fact that the desirable is given both before and after the desire, “is the fact that it is given. And the fact of being given is the world.”

All of the objects in the world we see cloaked in *form*, which is basically their exterior nature. This *form* illuminates objects and allows us to see them by pointing to an interior or inwardness (the I) which identifies them as objects of use, divorced from their alterity. “By virtue of its forms the world is stable and made up of solids. Objects can be defined by their finitude”. Levinas calls this aspect the “secular nature” of the world.

Regarding other people also, *form* is the way the other makes him or herself decent or proper; “What does not enter into the forms is banished from the world.” It conceals the other and means that social life “in the world does not have that disturbing character that a being feels before another being, before alterity.” What opens the unfathomable mystery that is the Other to us, is “participation in something in common”. It is only through this “third man” that contact is made. Again, we are never genuinely “in front of one another; [we] are along with each other around something.” In this, “the ego loses nothing of its *ipseity*… [this is why civilisation] has never been able to go beyond individualism: the individual remains fully *me*.”

The bottom line here is that being in the world is characterised by what Levinas calls the “sincerity of intentions – the self-sufficiency of the world and contentment.”

Levinas also rejects Heidegger’s claim that Husserl’s *epoche* isn’t needed; “It is not by being in the world that we can say that the world is.” In order to understand human existence we must separate out “the destiny of man in the world, where there are always objects given as being and works to be done”. He remarks, against Heidegger, that not everything in the world is a tool; things often “do not exist “for…,” but are ends.” Objects do not refer to our *existence*; rather they “make up our existence. We breathe for the sake of breathing, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter… we take a walk for the walk. All that is not for the sake of living; it is living.” This is *sincerity*; “To be in the world is… to go sincerely to the desirable and take it for what it is.”

In addition, he finds fault with Heidegger calling our being in the world “everyday” and “inauthentic”. Far from this, our existence in the world actually represents the “possibility of extracting oneself from anonymous being.”

*2. Light*

The difference between the relationship between existence and existents and that between the ego and the world is that in the former “one possesses existence, but is also possessed by it.” This is because existence is not a proper term “and instead of being at a distance adheres to the I.” “The world as given to intentions [however,] leaves the I a freedom with regard to it.” The former (existence) is a burden taken up by ourselves, the latter (world) always preserves an independence from the I even while referring to the inwardness of the ego.

We can also say of intentionality that it is the origin of sense, which Levinas defines as “that by which what is exterior is already adjusted to and refers to what is interior.” It is the way objects are always given for us. Levinas now wants to connect this with *luminosity* as well. Light is, phenomenologically speaking, “a condition for phenomena, that is, for meaning”. It is what “makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us.”

So the world is not merely “the sum of existing objects. The very idea of totality or of a whole is only intelligible where there is a being that can embrace it.” In other words, the world of existing objects only exists if it exists for someone and this means that it must also be illuminated in light.

*Knowing*,or *contemplation*, is a way of relating to objects while remaining detached from them. Our natural state of being is action, in which we do interact with objects as tools, but when this natural state is paralysed, we come to *know* the object. This is only possible because of *light*, hence; “Light is thus the event of a suspension, an *epoche*”. It is “that which makes desire possible… [and] the possibility of detaching oneself from being.” It lifts the ego up from its active being in the world, “this hesitation, this interval in existing, which we have seen in the analyses of fatigue and the present.”

III. Existence without a World

*1. Exoticism*

Ordinarily, objects (through *form*) refer to an inwardness (the I) which makes them parts of a world; *our* world. Art plucks them from the world by “interposing an image of the thing between us and the thing” thereby causing us to relate to the object “indirectly through the intermediary of the picture… modif[ying] it in an essential way.” Objects are modified in the sense that their exterior no longer refers to this interior – they have been “extracted from our world.”

In essence, art frees objects from the subject and presents them to us in “nakedness”, as abstractions. This nakedness is an absence of *form*, it’s a letting them stand alone, free from a binding subject. This, Levinas calls their *exoticism*. The result is that the exteriority doesn’t take us to the worldly object, but rather leaves us “wandering about in sensation, in *aesthesis*”. Art restores to objects the “character of alterity” and “returns to the impersonality of *elements*”.

This is especially true of non-realist art which throws “naked elements” at us to “bring about an absolute existence in the very fact there is something which is not in its turn an object or a name, which is unnameable and can only appear in poetry.” In this way, art directs us to existence itself, the *there is*.

*2. Existence without Existents*

Imagine all things, beings and persons disappear. What would remain? Nothingness; but a nothingness which is impersonal and anonymous, that is, “being in general”, or what we have been calling, the *there is*. In the *there is* there is no subject-object distinction for there are no subjects or objects, nor is there any inwardness or exteriority; “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.” What is left is “the sheer fact of being in which *one* participates, whether one wants to or not, without having taken the initiative, anonymously.” Does it have continuity? It is uninterrupted but not continuous because none of the points of space refer to each other, “there is no perspective, they are not situated.” It is ambiguous, a “menace of pure and simple presence, of the *there is*”. The darkness of the *there is* “reduces [objects] to undetermined, anonymous being”. Private existence is gone, replaced by an “undifferentiated background.” There is an absence of God and there is no anxiety about death because death is impossible. Consciousness therefore, is a tearing away from the *there is* because it constitutes a subjectivity which personalises the night.

The *there is* is not the nothingness Heidegger’s anxiety reveals and which somehow brings about an authentic “being toward death”. Instead of ‘anxiety’, the word Levinas uses to describe the *there is* is “horror”, but not in the face of death or even pain, rather it is a horror of being itself, that anonymous, impersonal “condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with no exits”, the horror of the night that is infinite, which is an “irremissible existence.”

The nothingness is “devoid of all being”. “[N]egation, annihilation and nothingness are events like affirmation, creation and subsistence, but impersonal events.” It is “the presence of absence… not a purely present content. There is not a “something” that remains.” Bergson’s critique of nothingness made this mistake. He acknowledged negation as a positive rejection of one being in order to think of another but when applied to the totality of being, this is nonsensical. Bergson was still thinking of nothingness as being a “something” which exists and which consciousness can grasp as an other being, after the totality of being has been rejected.

IV. The Hypostasis

*1. Insomnia*

We catch a glimpse of the “impossibility of rending the invading, inevitable, and anonymous rustling of existence” (the *there is*) when we can’t sleep. While insomnia is not “an experience of nothingness… it is as anonymous as the night itself.” It brings us before the oppressive, “bare fact of presence”; “one is held by being, held to be. One is detached from any object, any content, yet there is presence. This presence which arises behind nothingness is neither *a being*, nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *there is*, which encompasses things and consciousness.”

The consciousness of a thinking subject is the opposite, not of sleep or unconsciousness (which the conscious subject contains within itself as a possibility), but of “the insomnia of anonymous being”; it is the possibility of escape from the *there is*, the chance to “take refuge in oneself so as to withdraw from being”.

In insomnia I do not experience consciousness, rather I experience *wakefulness*, which is anonymous. “It is not that there is *my* vigilance in the night; in insomnia it is the night itself that watches.” This is what makes insomnia so like the *there is*, “I am, one might say, the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought.”

*2. Position*

*Consciousness and the Unconscious*

Consciousness, as a mode of being, arises as that *hesitation* before existence we have already discussed. Its opposite is not unconsciousness. Unconsciousness, as in sleep, is rather “a dimension of retreat” that consciousness gives itself.

*Here*

Descartes’ *cogito* gives us not the impersonal, “there is thought”, but the first person, “I am something that thinks.” The point Levinas wants to make here is that the *cogito* gives us something that is posited; that is, something with a “point of departure.” Consciousness is localised. This localisation doesn’t presuppose space though. Rather it is what Levinas calls the *here*, which simply describes the way consciousness is no longer lost in the impersonal ‘nowhereness’ of the *there is*. In the same way, this localisation doesn’t presuppose a thinking subject to grasp it as a *here*; rather “it is the subjectivization of the subject.” The *here* arises with the subject, not as an accompanying feature but as a constitutive aspect; the subject does not appear here, it *is* here.

*Sleep and Place*

What is sleep? Sleep, where we lie down somew*here* to rest, “reestablishes a relationship with a place qua base.” “To lie down is precisely to limit existence to a place, to position.” It reinforces the insight we made above that consciousness is always *here*, in its *place*, which is precisely not *some*where, *any*where, but *here*, our *place*, our *base*.

As we have seen, position is not something “added to consciousness”; rather, it is only “out of position… that consciousness comes to itself.” Position, a *base*, the *here*, is a condition of consciousness.

The opposite of position isn’t the “freedom of a subject suspended in the air, but the destruction of the subject… announced in emotion.” Emotion overwhelms us, off-balances us, it “puts into question not the existence, but the subjectivity of the subject; it prevents the subject from gathering itself up, reacting, being someone.” Emotion is fundamentally the loss of one’s base and ultimately leads to the feeling of “*finding oneself over a void*”; the void which is the *there is*.

Levinas distinguishes his notion of *here* from the *Da* of Heidegger’s *Dasein* by noting that the latter already implies a world. His *here*, on the other hand, “precedes every act of understanding, every horizon and all time.” It is the fact that consciousness is an *existent* in the first place, an existent which “proceeds from its position, from the preexisting “relationship” with a base, a place, which in sleep it embraces to the exclusion of all else.”

All of this is what makes the body not a mere thing; “its being belongs to the order of events and not to that of substantives. It is not posited; it is a position… it is the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself.” Levinas characterises the body as that in which “is effected the very transformation of an event into a being.”

*The Present and the Hypostasis*

The present is not a mere moment in time; rather, we have already seen that it is a “situation in being where there is not only being in general, but there is a being, a subject.” It is where the “transmutation” of an event into a substantive takes place. This transmutation, Levinas calls a *hypostasis*. The present achieves this transmutation through being an “evanescence”, a halting, a breaking, with duration.

*The Present and Time*

The instant is usually considered from the outset as a part of time “whose different points are only distinguished from each other by their order, and, other than that, are equivalent” but this obscures its importance and results in “abstract time” in which “there is an order of instants, but no central instant; there is not that instant par excellence which is the present.” Rather, to understand the instant, we must examine its “peculiar relationship with existence”. Each instant is “an act by which existence is acquired. Each instant is a beginning, a birth.”

Levinas cautions against disregarding the instant because it has no duration. “The evanescence of an instant constitutes its very presence”, indeed, we have already seen how its evanescence “is the condition for the fullness of a contact with being”.

*The Present and the “I”*

The evanescence of the present produces the “absolute character” of its engagement with being. This means that one instant doesn’t lead to the next; rather, each instant completely exhausts itself in its relationship with being. And this being that is taken up is not taken up lightly. Indeed the “irremissibility of existence” is, for Levinas, tragic.

Despite the fact that “the present refers only to itself”, it is not pure freedom, because this same reference “imprisons it in an identification” rendering it captive to itself in its *responsibility*. The paradox here is that only a being which refers to itself can be free but in referring to itself only, it therefore becomes *responsible*, and this responsibility marks the limit of its freedom.

This “return of the present to itself” is where the I arises “already riveted to itself, already doubled up with a *self*.” The tragic in the present lies in the way its initial freedom is, through responsibility, turned into a destiny.

In this movement of the present back on itself (through the instant) it turns into a being, an *I*. This awkward self-referential quality of the present constitutes the “ambiguity of the “I”… [which] remains unclassifiable as an object.” The “I” is this “mutation from an event into an “entity,”… The “present” and the “I” are the movement of self-reference which constitutes identity.” Indeed, Levinas asserts that the present, the I, and the instant are all “moments of one and the same event.”

*The Present and Position*

In this section, Levinas questions Heidegger’s ecstatic (meaning *outside*) understanding of temporality as a “being outside of oneself”, and given temporality is the ground of care (the being of Dasein), this means that existence itself is a movement from the inside to the outside; “through ecstasy man takes up his existence.” Rather, as we have seen, Levinas starts exploring existence through *position*.

*The Meaning of Hypostasis*

We have already seen that *hypostasis* is the “apparition of a substantive” from the ground of the impersonal, anonymous *there is*. This substantive “exercises a mastery over the fatality of Being, which has become its attribute. Someone exists who assumes Being, which henceforth is *his* being.” In finding the hypostasis, we have also found consciousness “because consciousness is localized and posited”. Indeed “through the act… of taking a position, it comes to being out of itself, and already takes refuge in itself from Being in itself.” “Consciousness, position, the present, the “I,” are not initially – although they are finally – existents. They are events by which the unnameable verb *to be* turns into substantives.”

*Freedom and Hypostasis*

The “I” is free but not completely so. It is also “forever bound to the existence which it has taken up… the fact that I am forever stuck with myself.” The freedom of the “I” lies in knowledge and intention and is negative in nature; “It is the refusal of the definitive”. In other words, while I am stuck with my own existence, I am never stuck with a particular way of existing. Through intention and desire I am always able to choose a different path.

Being stuck with myself is the one definitive element in my existence and Levinas calls this my *solitude*. The given objects in the world are imbued with meaning as though they came from me. In this sense, I am as though “closed up in an existence that is definitively *one*.”

*3. On the Way to Time*

The essence of this section is that time, or duration, resolves the tragic nature of the hypostasis.

*Cognition and the Ego as a Substance*

There is something that remains unchanged throughout human life, throughout the “changing multiplicity of becoming”; this is the ego or the “I”. But how is this identity able to remain unaffected by all of the events which affect it throughout its becoming and which modify the substance of the ego such that the ego of tomorrow is never the same as the ego of today?

What saves the “I” is the concept of *knowing*. We have already seen that *knowing*, as the ground of desire and intention, “is a relation with what remains exterior, it is a relationship with what remains outside of all relationships”, that is, it is an action which preserves the agent outside the events he or she is involved in; it “makes it possible to fix the identity of the “I,” to keep it enclosed in its secrecy.”

Knowledge keeps the “I” free from all that happens to it, because whatever else it may be, do, or be involved in, the conscious subject always *knows* it. This freedom (from involvement in the events around it) guarantees it its fixed identity; “It is thanks to the freedom of knowledge that the “I” can remain as a substance beneath the accidents of its history.”

*The Ego as an Identification and as a Bond with Oneself*

In this section, Levinas merely reiterates that the “I” is tied to itself without the possibility of reprieve. The separation and freedom that we saw “knowing” provide the “I” is not a complete liberation; it is always not just “for oneself; it is also to be with oneself.”

*Time and the Concept of a Freedom*

Being tied to oneself is a burden but for it to be a burden, the “conception of a freedom [from itself, from the burden of existence]” (as in sleep, i.e. unconsciousness) must also be present. Note that this is only the *conception* of a freedom, not genuine freedom. It is not freedom itself because “the illusory divorce of the *ego* from its *self*… will end in a resumption of existence”.

However, this conception of freedom (available in unconsciousness) carries with it the *hope* of genuine freedom – it “knocks on the closed doors of another dimension… a mode of existence where nothing is irrevocable, the contrary of the definitive subjectivity of the “I.” And this is the order of time.”

*The Time of Redemption and the Time of Justice*

Desire leads to fulfilment, effort leads to the fruit of those efforts, and this makes up the “time of the world.” It is the way our effort is compensated and our “situation, or the engagement in existence, which is effort, is repressed, compensated for, and put to an end”. Levinas calls this “economic activity.”

In yet another criticism of Heidegger, Levinas notes that things around us serve as *tools* when we are living this “economic” existence; they aren’t ontological, they are “economic”. They serve to allow us to get our compensation (the fruit of our efforts) and to get it faster and easier, but none of this has lifted us out of “economic” activity. Tools are subordinate to desire.

Now this compensation isn’t enough for our *hope* for freedom. Hope requires, not just compensation or the end of suffering, it demands *salvation*. We don’t want our past effort to be compensated or merely brought to an end, we want it to be *sanctified*. The problem is that our past pain cannot be redeemed; “retribution in the future does not wipe away the pains of the present. There is no justice that could make reparations for it. One should have to return to that instant, or be able to resurrect it.” To hope for salvation then means to “hope for the reparation of the irreparable; it is to hope for the present.” For Levinas then, “the essence of time consist[s] in responding to that exigency for salvation” and “the future… [is] a resurrection of the present”.

*Time and the “I”*

In economic time, the “I” remains exterior to time; an unchangeable substance that circulates across a string of equivalent instants to link them up and give them coherence. But there is a deeper time which is “not a succession of instants filing by before an I”. Levinas believes that the next instant is “an annulment of the unimpeachable commitment to existence made in the instant; it is the resurrection of the “I.” We believe… that its death in the empty interval will have been the condition for a new birth.” Indeed, this notion of time is the “resurrection of the irreplaceable instant” that constitutes *hope* and *salvation*, and unravels the irremissible, definitiveness the “I” found itself burdened by in existence.

However, the I cannot be the foundation of its own salvation; it “is not independent of its present… [and] cannot traverse time alone”. It could never give itself a new instant, an instant in which it “recommences as other… it cannot endow itself with this alterity.”

*Time and the Other*

The problem with the above is that time, as conceived here, could never come from a “solitary subject”. The “otherness” or “alterity” of each new instant cannot “be found in the subject, who is definitively *himself*.” This leads Levinas to the conclusion that this alterity we have identified in time can only come from the alterity that is other people; “Is not sociality something more than the source of our representation of time: is it not time itself?” “The dialectic of time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the other”.

Bergson treated time as something purely exterior to the subject (“a time-object”) and Heidegger took it to be something entirely contained within the subject. Neither of these are correct.

*With Another and Facing Another*

Levinas understands sociality in two different ways. The first is the *with*. This is the “collectivity which says “we” [and] that feels the other to be alongside of oneself, and not facing one.” As a collectivity, it is built up around a third term which supplies what is common in the communion. This is what Heidegger’s *Miteinandersein* corresponds to.

The second is a relationship not mediated by a third man but what Levinas calls the “I-you collectivity”. This is the “fearful face-to-face situation of a relationship without intermediary, without mediations.” What is important in this relationship is that the other is what he or she is “by virtue of his very alterity.”

Such relationships are initially asymmetrical; the other is weak while I am strong, or vice versa and while the other will always remain an alterity for me, this doesn’t mean perpetual conflict must ensue; “In the reciprocity of relationships characteristic of civilization, the asymmetry of the intersubjective relationship is forgotten… [resulting in] a levelling of the idea of fraternity”.

V. Conclusion

The “concrete present” (also “the time of the world” or “economic time”) is full of the past and leaps towards the future. Modern philosophy has connected human existence with this “dynamism of time” to separate it from mere things, but in doing this we have lost the substantiality, the static nature, of the subject.

Levinas breaks with this tendency by turning from the idea of instants of time appearing out of an infinite series to a *present* instant which transmutes a verb into a substantive, the *hypostasis* (or the “beginning of *a* *being*.”) Indeed, the “present is the very fact that there is an existent.” The evanescence of the instant allows it to be a “pure present” and frees it from its past although it doesn’t alleviate from it the burden of existing in a relation with itself. For this, time and the other are necessary.

Levinas has not opposed the *cogito* here but has sought to answer a different question. His question, “what is it to exist?” – the ontological problem – is a question that drives deeper than the *cogito* and is therefore antecedent to the “scission of being into an “inside” and a “outside.”” He is not concerning himself with questions *about* being but about the “meaning of the very fact that in Being there are beings.”