Master Thesis

Symmetry and Otherness:

On Interaction with the Other in Camus and Levinas

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Outline

Introduction 4

Chapter 1: Camus and Levinas: basic comparison of philosophies 7

- 1.1: Levinas 7
- 1.2: Camus 9
- 1.3: Concluding Comparison 11

Chapter 2: On Transcendence 14

- 2.1: Why transcendence: the objection to the deification of history 14
    - 2.1.1: Levinas on the deification of history 14
    - 2.1.2: Camus on the deification of history 15
    - 2.1.3: Comparison 17
- 2.2: Transcendence 18
    - 2.2.1: Levinas on Transcendence 18
    - 2.2.2: Camus on Transcendence 21
- 2.3: Conclusion 25

Chapter 3: Derrida and Levinas on Otherness 26

- 3.1: Derrida's critique 26
    - 3.1.1: The physicality of the Other and its relation to language 26
    - 3.1.2: The Other as alter ego 28
- 3.2: Levinas: *Otherwise Than Being* 29
    - 3.2.1: Proximity: the subject is no longer just the same 29
    - 3.2.2: The Other is in a non-reciprocal relationship with the subject 30
    - 3.2.3: The face escapes representation 33
- 3.3: Conclusion 34

Chapter 4: Symmetry 35

- 4.1: Symmetry and interaction: the rebellious encounter in more detail 35
- 4.2: Rebellion as the moment of identification 36
- 4.3: Limitation and interaction 37
- 4.4: The creation of meaning through interaction 37

- 4.5: Creation, meaning, and society 39
- 4.6: Symmetry vs asymmetry – activity vs passivity 40
- 4.7: Conclusion 42

Final Conclusion 44

Bibliography 45

Introduction

Of interest to this paper are two major aims Camus and Levinas have in common: the first is to examine the ways in which Western philosophy has ingrained totalitarianism in its thought, and the second is to establish a possibility of interacting with the other that remains just. They both seek to establish whether a society which does not oppress the Other is possible and, as such, the establishing of a base possibility of action towards the Other is necessary. And yet despite these overarching similarities, they end up writing of these things in very different, sometimes irreconcilable ways. The primary concern of this paper is the establishing of this foundation upon which interaction with the Other is possible; I aim to examine the differences between Camus and Levinas on this topic and what they ultimately mean for their philosophies from the focal question of 'how can we interact with the Other?'. My claim is that the symmetry in Camus' understanding of the relationship with the Other results in an interaction which allows for the creation of meaning between the subject and Other that Levinas fails to leave room for.

Camus and Levinas are both ethical thinkers writing in the wake of WWII, at the point where a resurgence of ethics becomes urgently needed. They take a remarkably similar attitude towards WWII; they both believe that what transpired was a result of systematic and deeply engrained totalitarian line of thought in Western philosophy, where murder has been defended by ideologies and philosophy. Camus claims that crime has been made reasonable, that it is no longer done by individuals, but rather by states – it has become the law. He states: *"As soon as man [...] takes refuge in a doctrine, as soon as he makes his crime* reasonable*, it multiplies like Reason herself and assumes all the figures of a syllogism"* (Camus, 1954, 11). Similarly, Levinas states: *"The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means – politics – is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason"* (Levinas, 1969, 21). They both focus on the notion that crime has been made reasonable, that it is being justified, and from then on they put Western philosophy under scrutiny, each of them following different threads in an attempt to unravel what it is in (their) contemporary thought that has allowed for these developments. Levinas' and Camus' primary concerns remain with rendering *justice* to the Other, and they attempt to establish way of thinking that will allow for the existence and interaction with Others instead of their subjugation. They write with the same sort of drive, believing that the question of the relationship to the Other needs to take center stage, a conviction for which they derive the urgency out of having witnessed the mass scale

dehumanization and murder that has occurred in light of this question being disregarded or thought in the wrong way.

Although not an immensely popular subject, there have been some comparisons made between Levinas and Camus, particularly on the subject of political philosophy. Saller, for instance, compares the two in the context of intellectual resistance to totalitarianism (Sessler, 2008), while Sharpe brings the two thinkers together with the claim that they both tie *"subjectivity to a primordial responsibility before and for other subjects"* (Sharpie, 2011, 82), in an attempt to shed more light Camus' ethical philosophy which has remained much less addressed than Levinas'.

I too am interested in bringing these two thinkers together, although my approach pushes them more against each other. Despite their similar topics, Camus and Levinas end up reasoning in very different ways, and this leads to some major differences in the their ultimate frameworks of the relationship towards the Other. I am interested in establishing a dialogue between the two and pinpointing where they diverge, ultimately leaning towards Camus' approach. As the primary concern of both of these thinkers in regards to ethics is to not allow philosophy to exclude elements important to the justice of the Other, their philosophies lend themselves well to the notion of an ongoing discussion which allows for the reexamination and reforming of these values. In fact, both of them explicitly state something of the like – Camus states that rebellion must continue as long as there is suffering, and since there will always be suffering, consequently rebellion can never end (Camus, 1954). Levinas states that face of the Other, as the opening of difference, is the opening of ethics, and we must continually engage with the dialogue that the Other opens for us – we must be open to respond (Leivnas, 1969). While these stances are not identical in their reasoning, their message is clear: the conversation must be kept open. In that sense, the question of how to relate to the Other remains just as relevant today as when Levinas and Camus wrote their works; the context may no longer be WWII, but establishing a foundation upon which interaction with the Other is possible remains crucial. It is not a static thing that can be posited, but rather something that must be allowed to reform itself. In that sense this paper is an attempt to keep that dialogue open and address several key issues to the foundation of ethics.

The structure of the paper is as follows: I start with a basic comparison of their general worldviews: how the subject and Other relate, and what worldview is implied in this relation. I then focus on the concept of transcendence, going into what this term means to each of them and how they use it. From there I lean on Derrida to illustrate some problems

that arise from this for Levinas, continuing on why Levinas still faces a number of problems in his later work, despite attempting to answer Derrida's critique. In the final chapter I discuss Camus on the notion of a symmetrical relationship with the Other as an alternative to Levinas. I then conclude my comparison between them. I find that Camus' notion of the symmetrical relationship to the Other allows for a more mobile interaction, which, in turn, allows for the creation of meaning between the subject and Other.

Chapter 1: Camus and Levinas: basic comparison of philosophies

As brought up in the introduction, although Camus and Levinas have similar aims, they end up writing on the same subject in very different ways. In the current chapter I examine their basic positions on the relationship with the Other, and the assumptions about the relationship between subject and world that inform these views. Here I delineate some major similarities and differences between the two authors, and in the subsequent chapters I detail the consequences of these differences. I first address Levinas, then Camus, and end with a comparison between the two.

1.1: Levinas

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes the relationship between the subject and world as one of enjoyment. The world of objects is where the subject feels at home, where it can fully exercise its own freedom. Freedom is defined by this relationship between subject and world – freedom is being able to do as one pleases, to be able to understand and to act in accordance to one's own wishes. In this world of objects the subject gets to be active, to create and define itself, to turn objects into things 'for itself'. The subject does not have to accept the world as it is given, but rather, it gets to shape it and use it, and through this discover itself and enjoy its own existence. This freedom of action constitutes 'interiority', and it is within interiority that enjoyment exists. Levinas states: *"Freedom [...] is the production of the I and not one experience among Others that "happens" to the I. [...] To be I, atheist, at home with oneself, separated, happy, created – these are synonyms."* (Levinas, 1969, 148). Freedom lies at the very center of interiority and enjoyment and it is an active production of the 'I'. This interiority, as the domain of freedom, becomes the basis from which the self can interact with Others. Levinas considers it indispensable to have an interior life in order to form interpersonal relations. However, the way the subject functions by itself and the way it functions with Others is fundamentally different. What is regular in the relation to objects becomes totalitarian in the relation to other subjects. The relationship to the other is primarily defined by an interruption; the Other causes the subject to become aware that it is not as absolutely free as it felt. He states: *"The welcoming of the Other is ipso facto the consciousness of my own injustice – the shame that freedom feels for itself."* (Levinas, 1969, 86).

Levinas describes the encounter as the confrontation of the face-to-face. The self is interrupted in its free interaction with objects and confronted with the reality of the Other,

with the realization that it is not alone. The Other, says Levinas, is precisely the one who puts freedom into question, who resists this movement of comprehension and consumption. The Other resists the power of the subject and as such reveals the initial idea of absolute freedom as not only naïve, but also violent. Levinas states: *"Discourse and Desire, where the Other presents himself as interlocutor, as him over whom I cannot have power, whom I cannot kill, condition this shame, where, qua I, I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer"* (Levinas, 1969, 84). Confronted with the Other, the subject finds itself suddenly guilty of attempting to override the Other's existence.

The Other is not initially thought of as a fact, but rather desired. The Other interrupts the interaction between subject and objects, and as such is impossible to ignore. It is only after this initial confrontation that the subject tries to categorize the Other, to conceptualize it into something comprehensible. But in the first encounter with the Other, in the shame one feels at the first interruption of one's previously unlimited freedom, morality is born. As summarized by Peperzak, *"The encounter with another reveals the supreme law: my selfhood must bow before the absoluteness revealed by another's look or speech"* (Peperzak, 1991, 444). The Other demands a response, and from then on the question of justice becomes relevant, as it becomes possible for one to be just or unjust to the Other. In short, the Other refuses to become part of the world of objects and by this reveals that the subject never lived in isolation at all, that it simply failed to see the Other who was always already there. In the face of this the self feels shame and guilt, but also desire for this alterity. For Levinas, the Other is always higher than the self, as it offers a glimpse of the infinite, and it is in this that the Other is desired. Levinas states: *"It is necessary to have the idea of infinity, [...] in order to know one's own imperfection. The idea of the perfect is not an idea but desire; it is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls into question my freedom."* (Levinas, 1969, 84). Levinas states that the Other can never be fully grasped, that there will always remain something that is fundamentally incomprehensible, namely an interiority that can never be reached. As such, the Other may always reveal something new to the self. To attempt to categorize and understand the Other fully is therefore an attempt to limit this infinity, and hence an act of violence, an attempt at totalization.

Levinas extends on the concept of desire; he makes a distinction by speaking of regular desire and 'metaphysical Desire', or simply a capitalized 'Desire'. Metaphysical Desire does not desire a return to something familiar, but it desires something new and different. Levinas states that this Desire is not like other desires that can be satisfied – one cannot nourish it as one would do with food. *"The metaphysical desire has another intention;*

it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness – the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it" (Levinas, 1969, 34). Metaphysical Desire is fundamentally different from the way in which objects are desired; the desire for objects is more akin to a need, one which can be satisfied with the attainment of the desired object. Metaphysical Desire, however, is fundamentally impossible; it is precisely a desire for that which cannot be had. However, that is not to say that it is inherently negative. Levinas explains: *"it is a relationship whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation, for it nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger"* (Levinas, 1969, p. 34). The Desire for the Other may never be satisfied, but the Desire is enriching in itself – it opens up the subject to the world of alterity precisely by its very impossibility. Levinas states: *"A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands* [entend] *the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the Other […]. The very dimension of height is opened up by metaphysical Desire."* (Levinas, 1969, 34-5). The Desire for otherness must be unsatisfactory by its very nature, but it is this which allows for the self to come into contact with something new, something outside itself.

In his later work *Otherwise Than Being* (1974), Levinas refines his position on the relationship between the subject, the world, and the Other. Answering Derrida's critique, Levinas no longer holds as strict of a division in which the Other is in difference and the subject in the realm of the same, instead allowing for difference to already permeate the subject, thereby opening the subject instead of presenting it as a cohesive whole. Aside from this refining, much of the initial structure remains intact – the Other is still that which allows for the subject to step outside of itself; the Other is still desired and still opens up the dimension of height. I treat this subject in more detail in the third chapter.

1.2: Camus

Camus' focus is rebellion, and it is from the moment of protest that he extrapolates a number of the points he makes. His concept of rebellion will be detailed in the subsequent chapter, while here the focus is primarily the relationship to the world and to Others that Camus establishes and that this rebellion is in relation to. For Camus the subject's relation to the world is always lacking and insufficient. The rebellion that Camus speaks of is twofold: it is a rebellion against the human condition as much as it is against human-made suffering. Both cases of rebellion function similarly: *"in both cases we find an assessment of values in the name of which the rebel refuses to accept the condition in which he finds himself"* (Camus, 1954, 29). The rebel is therefore in tension both in regards to Others, as well as to the world at large.

There is an inherent ambivalence that the subject experiences towards the world; the subject desires the world and wants to understand it and to feel at home in it. The world, however, is indifferent to human desire and does not respond to these needs; there is an inherent strangeness to it which refuses to be understood: *"at the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman"* (Camus, 1954, 20). Life can never be fully grasped, nor can it be made to last. The final death sentence awaits regardless of the amount of repulsion it may produce. This absurdist outlook is outlined in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and it is the starting point in *The Rebel*, where Camus moves on to more ethical considerations. So the rebel is faced with a desire towards the world at the same time as being faced with the impossibility of the fulfilment of this desire. The relationship to the world is therefore in perpetual tension; the subject belongs to the world and cannot even fathom its own existence outside of it; it desires the world while knowing that this is an impossible desire. Although the world is desired, it is not unconditionally accepted – there are things within the world, such as human suffering and death, which the rebel cannot grow to accept despite the knowledge that they cannot be evaded. So the rebel stays in tension, affirming and denying aspects of reality; this tension is inherent to rebellion and cannot be resolved. What the rebel rejects of the world is its suffering, its meaninglessness, and its death sentence, but this rejection is incomplete, and it is never a rejection of the world as a whole. The rejection is incomplete because it is simultaneously done *for* the world; for Camus this point is vital, he says of rebellion – *"But it rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is"* (Camus, 1954, 226). What is accepted of the world is life itself, and the potential for human-created meaning and unity it holds. The rebel can never accept death, but nor can death be escaped; rather, what the rebel manages to reject is the *implication* of death, the lack of meaning that it implies for human life. In other words, the rebel searches for reasons for living. The rebel rejects aspects of the world in favour of Others; Camus states: *"The contradiction is this: man rejects the world as it is, without accepting the necessity of escaping it"* (Camus, 1954, 226). This partial acceptance and rejection is born out of the impossible desire for the world. *"Far from always wanting to forget it, they suffer, on the contrary, from not being able to possess it completely enough [...]"* (Camus, 1954, 226).

The same applies to the relationship between people: the rebel wishes to establish limits and these limits imply only a partial acceptance of the Other. The rebel *"says yes and no at the same time"* (Camus, 1954, p. 19). It starts with the setting of a limit – the rebel refuses to accept being treated a certain way any longer. This same impulse can arise for the sake of someone else; Camus notes that revolt *"can also break out at the mere spectacle of*

oppression of which someone else is the victim" (Camus, 1954, 22). In either case what occurs in rebellion is that the rebel *"affirms that there are limits and also that he suspects – and wishes to preserve – the existence of certain things beyond those limits. He stubbornly insists that there are certain things in him which 'are worth while…' and which must be taken into consideration"* (Camus, 1954, 19). So the rebel begins to develop a certain concept of humanity through this encounter with the Other and through the realization that there is a need for the establishment of a limit. Camus considers this as a moment of identification; the rebel *"comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something inside him that does not belong to him alone, but which he has in common with other men – even with the man who insults and oppresses him"* (Camus, 1954, 22). There is an implicit solidarity with humanity inherent to rebellion. The nature of this identification will be explored further in the fourth chapter. It is important to note that the limitation of the Other does not mean the exclusion of the Other; rebellion finds its justification in the inclusion of all of humanity and consequently loses this justification the moment it ceases to do so. So the limitation of the Other refers specifically to the limitation of the unlimited freedom of the Other and the power the Other has over the subject. It is in this sense that Camus differs from Levinas – he incorporates in his thought the notion that the subject should limit the Other for its own sake. He also considers the limitation of the Other to be necessary for everyone's sake, including the Other, but this will also be explored further in the fourth chapter.

1.3: Concluding comparison

Camus and Levinas both name a tension and ambiguity, a feeling of insufficiency and limitation, as well as an impotent desire; however, I argue that they both place this very differently. For Camus the subject is in tension both with the world and the Other in a similar fashion – both are desired and both can never be fully attained. But it is also true that neither is accepted absolutely; the rebel rejects aspects of the world and rejects the reality in which human lives are disregarded, and this rejection involves for him the limitation of the Other. Nothing is an unconditional 'yes' for Camus; it is imperative that the rebel stays within tension, not giving up one side for an absolute affirmation of the Other. The Other is never unconditionally accepted, just as the world in its raw form is never fully accepted, despite the fact that the subject is attached to both and cannot do without them. The subject exists in tension, and this tension must be maintained.

For Levinas the separation between the subject and the Other seems fairly complete in *Totality and Infinity*, but is toned back significantly in *Otherwise Than Being*. The subject

begins to carry difference in itself, and as such is never absolutely free. Despite this, there is still a significant difference between the relationship between the subject and world and subject and Other. The relationship between subject and world is still primarily easy and free; the uncertainty centers in the relationship with the Other. The world of objects is defined by satisfaction of needs, not by unfulfilled desire. The Other, in contrast, is desired but never attained. There is an insurmountable height that separates the self from the Other and it is precisely that which makes the Other so desirable. But the subject cannot fully understand the Other, and it is totalitarian when it attempts to do so. Instead, the Other must be accepted and this acceptance opens up the possibility for something new to enter into the world of the subject. This relationship of Desire for the Other is fundamental for the subject; it is forever unsatisfactory, but without it the subject is trapped in the world of the same, it is incapable of ever encountering anything new or creating it for itself, the Other is imperative for this. The very impossibility of the fulfillment of Desire is necessary.

I argue that this is very different from the way Camus speaks about desire; for him both the world and the Other are desirable and not fully attainable, but there is nothing inherently valuable in this unattainability in itself. The subject desperately wishes for the world to make sense, for Others to be fully understandable and for it to be possible for people to fully belong to each other. There is nothing wrong with the desire to understand and to have in itself for Camus, either towards the world or towards other people; it is simply a fact that it is impossible to fully attain. But nor is there any value in this impossibility; that too is simply an unfortunate fact of existence. However, due to the fact that it is impossible to either satisfy or dismiss this desire, a certain tension inevitably arises. Camus only ethical statement is that one should not seek recluse from this tension. But that does not mean that this desire should not be pursued; in fact rebellion is to a large extent the pursuit for unity and understanding. Still, rebellion must recognize its limits – it would not be justified if it started to believe it can, or has the right to, fully categorize Others. So for Camus there is no fundamental distinction in the way the desire for Others and the desire for the world functions. He uses terms such as ‘understanding’, ‘belonging’, ‘unity’, ‘having’ interchangeably for both. They do not cause a problem for him as they do for Levinas. For Levinas the Other may be desired, but one should not attempt to know this Other as one would objects, where one has complete freedom of action.

The difference, once again, can be found in the placement of tension. Camus finds it imperative to stay in tension both towards the world and towards Others, while Levinas resolves this by separating the two – he places all the tension in the relationship to the Other

and eliminates it entirely from the relationship to the world. With this for Levinas the Other gains an impossible height while the world gains simplicity. When it comes down to practical action as informed by philosophy, their views are remarkably similar: they both believe the Other requires a response and this must be taken seriously: it can never be philosophically justified to deny the humanity of an Other. But their ideas of how to relate to the Other are different. The question of the height of the Other becomes important. For Levinas the Other is higher than the self, so the social relationship is constituted by a transcendence, a movement from the self into something beyond itself. Camus does not aim to explain the question of how we relate to the Other, but he also uses the term transcendence, albeit in a different way than Levinas. The Other is different in the two of them, so the interaction with the subject is consequently different as well. The question of how to interact with the Other has to do with the height of the Other, and this relates to transcendence. The following chapter examines the use of transcendence in their philosophies.

Chapter 2: On Transcendence

Camus and Levinas write their ethical philosophies in the wake of WWII, aiming to examine what it is in western philosophy that has left room for something like that to have occurred. One major thing they both address is Hegelian thought and the deification of history. The primary concern they both express is that the line of thinking that allows for nothing to stand outside of history leaves no room for values that stand beyond the passage of time and the current trends the time embraces. Their issue with this is specifically that in such a system there is nothing to defend human lives from being obliterated. They both end up making a call for some form of transcendence as a solution to this. In this chapter I first clarify their objections to the deification of history in order to contextualize the way in which they use the term 'transcendence', and then address their respective philosophies regarding transcendence more specifically. Their views on Hegelian history are quite similar; they are not identical – they focus on different aspects and defend them using different means – but the underlying issue they find with Hegelian thought is the same. I show some of their similarities and differences regarding Hegelian thought. I start by detailing Levinas' objections to Hegelian history, followed by Camus, and then do a comparison of the two. I follow this by a section focusing more specifically on transcendence, speaking first of Levinas and then of Camus.

2.1: Why transcendence: the objection to the deification of history

2.1.1: Levinas on the deification of history

Levinas focuses primarily on the totalizing effect of reducing the Other to history. History, for Levinas, reduces the 'saying' to the 'said' (Levinas, 2009, 37) . For him it is the encounter with the Other that is of importance – Levinas' focus is on the *act* of speaking that happens during the encounter with the Other, not on the story it's made in after. Something is inherently lost when the dynamic encounter with the Other is reduced to a static story. Levinas states: *"History as a relationship between men ignores a position of the I before the Other in which the Other remains transcendent with respect to me...When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history"* (Levinas, 1969, 52). The events that history traces are only a simplified story created out of the reality of the encounter, and as such history can never do justice to everything that a human being is. Levinas states that a world in which virtue cannot be defended and only history has value is inevitably totalitarian. He emphasizes that in such a system humans become mere tools to be used by the system, rather than being accepted with their full humanity. Levinas states that in order to be understood, the Other is treated as an object, and through this is brought down to the level of

‘the same’. As noted by Sessler, Levinas considers that the totalizing tendency of western philosophy in its approach to the Other has reached its peak in (his) modern times, as is visible in Hegelian philosophy of history, in which the Other becomes an instrument to be manipulated by reason (Sessler, 2005, 126-7).

Levinas criticizes the Hegelian dialectic for producing a system of recognition in which only masters and slaves exist; like Hegel he asserts that the ego becomes conscious of itself in relation and interaction with Others, but criticizes Hegel for making a framework in which this encounter between subjects is inevitably a confrontation which is only resolved when one decides to submit to the mastery of the Other. And even then it is never fully resolved, because recognition from another only matters if the Other is already accepted as equal. In Levinas’ theory consciousness is also tied to the Other; the ego becomes self-conscious when the Other confronts it in its shame and causes it to question whether its existence is justified (Sessler, 2005, 127-8). But this interaction is not violent; it is peaceful and opens up the possibility for the subject to exit the realm of the same. The two must learn how to live together and there is the danger of the ego transgressing the Other, but in itself the encounter does not necessitate the subjugation of one to the other, both may coexist without destroying each other. Levinas insists on the irreducibility of human lives to Hegelian thought and historicity. *“Against the universalism of Hegelian reality.. .we [are] insisting on the irreducibility of the personal to the universality of the State”* (Sessler, 2005, 129). “The politics of the face” is a safeguard against the objectification of the Other; Levinas insists that the Other must be addressed in all their difference, and their immediacy must be acknowledged, rather than turned into a concept (Sessler, 2005, 132).

2.1.2: Camus on the deification of history

One of Camus’ objections in regards to acting towards the future has to do with the justification of concrete action in the present for the sake of an ideology that is to create a better world at some undefined point in the future. Camus’ critique comes at the fact that this line of thought places its salvation at the end of history, and in doing so justifies any action so long as it contributes to the cause. In this Camus reads the danger of principles giving way to history – if there is only the guiding principle of a future that’s to come, there is nothing to determine whether actions are good or bad aside from whether they end up contributing to the cause. He sees this happening in Stalinist Marxism, as well as Hegelian thought, and states: *“When good and evil are reintegrated in time and confused with events, nothing is any longer good or bad, but only either premature or out of date. Who will decide on the opportunity, if*

not the opportunist?" (Camus, 1954, 177). In this framework the end justifies the means, and no action is condemnable simply for what it is.

Camus further criticizes Hegelian thought for taking principles and submitting them to history. In so doing, he states, they remove the stability of these principles, which are from then on to be swept by events that occur in history. *"Into the fixed ideas of its period, German thought suddenly introduced an irresistible urge to movement. Truth, reason, and justice were brusquely incarnated in the future of the world"* (Camus, 1954, 104). Ideals begin to be in constant flux, and *"by committing them to perpetual acceleration, German ideology confused their existence with their movements and fixed the conclusions of their existence at the conclusion of the historic future – if there was to be one."* (Camus, 1954, 104). If there is nothing to validate these principles but history itself, then they have no meaning until the end of history is reached, and the final judgment is made. Values cease to be static, they move alongside the events in history, and as such hold no stability. And if they are as unstable as history itself, they certainly cannot function as guides. Camus states: *"These values have ceased to be guides in order to become goals. As for the means of attaining these goals, in other words life and history, no pre-existing value can point the way."* (Camus, 1954, 104). If these values are indefinitely suspended, then everything before the end of time is permitted – it is impossible to know what will contribute to the end of history, so everything is justified in the meantime. But we are not at the end of history, and so the entirety of human life is left without guiding principles. *"The rule of action has thus become action itself – which must be performed in darkness while awaiting the final illumination."* (Camus, 1954, 104).

Hegel's followers, Camus states, have destroyed formal principles of virtue, retaining only *"the vision of a history without any kind of transcendence dedicated to perpetual strife and to the struggle of wills bent on seizing power."* (Camus, 1954, p. 105). Force becomes the manner of action; it shows itself to be efficient, and without any distinctions between right and wrong, efficacy is the only thing that can be established. And if only the end of history can make a value judgment on the use of force, then force becomes a legitimate tool that works towards establishing this end of history that will justify it. *"Impurity, the equivalent of history, is going to become the rule, and the abandoned earth will be delivered to naked force which will decide whether or not man is divine."* (Camus, 1954, p. 105). History becomes deified: "*Thus lies and violence are adopted in the same spirit in which a religion is adopted and on the same heartening impulse"* (Camus, 1954, p. 105), as it becomes the only means of justifying human actions and lives.

But in this system established with the Hegelian dialectic, Camus continues, the only principle is power, and so only masters and slaves exist. Camus states that contemporary ideologies, following Hegel, *"conceive of history as the product of and mastery of slavery"* (Camus, 1954, p. 106) and because of this cannot envision or work towards making it something different. Camus claims that it is impossible to exit this line of thinking without abandoning the Hegelian dialectic. *"If, on the first morning of the world, under the empty sky, there is only a master and a slave; even if there is only the bond of master and slave between a transcendent god and mankind, then there can be no other law in this world but the law of force."* (Camus, 1954, p. 106). There needs to be something that stands outside of this system to allow for human interaction to not be reduced to a power struggle in which the only options are to kill and enslave or to be killed or enslaved. The call Camus makes is here explicitly one of transcendence. *"Only a god, or a principle above the master and the slave, could intervene and make men's history more than a simple chronicle of victories and defeats."*(Camus, 1954, p. 106). The transcendence Camus speaks of is first and foremost a transcendence above the Hegelian dialectic – even a transcendent god is insufficient if the fundamentals of the master-slave relationship are unchanged.

2.1.3: Comparison

Levinas' and Camus' objections lie very closely together on a number of points; they both critique the assertion that nothing lies outside of history, see the deification of history as inherently dangerous, and want to establish something that stands above it – something that transcends history. The attitudes they have towards the deification of history are very clear in their respective critiques of Hegelian philosophy. Hegelian thought deifies history – both Levinas and Camus make this statement, and find this deification to be dangerous. They both assert that a world in which virtue cannot be defended and only history has value is inevitably totalitarian. They emphasize that in such a system humans become mere tools to be used by the system, rather than being accepted with their full humanity. Camus and Levinas find issue both in Hegel himself, and in the orthodox way his followers have taken up Hegelian philosophy. While they agree that Hegel's followers have simplified and misused his philosophy, turning it to much more sinister uses than Hegel intended, they believe that Hegel's philosophy already contains totalitarian grains of thought in itself, and thereby unwittingly sets the ground for the uses Hegel's followers enact.

The call for transcendence is another point in which Camus and Levinas converge; the similarities between them are apparent – both call for a transcendence above history.

However, upon closer examination, their views begin to differ. Levinas specifically refers to a transcendent god, or rather, a social relation that gains a religious dimension, while Camus (while leaving the option of a transcendent god open) pointedly decides to not speak about it, but focus specifically on a transcendence of human lives which is defensible without an appeal to a god. Camus is interested in establishing a justification for human action based exclusively on what can be experienced and spoken of. So when he speaks of transcendence, he is referring specifically to something that stands above history, but not something that gains the height of a god. Both Camus and Levinas strongly state that transcendence cannot be absolute – it must be connected to history while not being equated to it, and to go too far with transcendence is as detrimental as to deny it completely. However, later in this paper I argue that Levinas does not succeed in upholding this delicate balance, despite that being his aim. Currently I simply state their views on transcendence starting with Levinas and following with Camus, and make this argument in the subsequent section.

2.2: Transcendence

2.2.1: Levinas on Transcendence

The notion of transcendence is crucial to Levinas' framework of interaction with the Other; it is through transcendence that the self opens up to alterity and is able to experience the Other. Transcendence constitutes the social relation; it is the act of the self moving beyond itself and towards the other. For Levinas the Other can never be fully known, and it is totalitarian to attempt to reduce the other to the same. Therefore it becomes important to conceive of a way in which the self can have a relationship with the absolutely Other *"without immediately divesting it of its alterity"* (Levinas, 1969, 38). This is the role that transcendence fills for Levinas. Two things are of importance to Levinas regarding transcendence: that the Other is absolutely Other, and that the transcendence is *not* absolute, that it remains tied to the concrete alterity of individual Others. In the subsequent chapter I lean on Derrida to argue that Levinas does not succeed in upholding both elements, but in this section I merely outline Levinas' aims.

It is crucial for Levinas that the Other is absolutely Other: *"He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say "you" or "we" is not a plural of the "I.""* (Levinas, 1969, 39). He brings up the idea of radical difference – *"other absolutely and not with respect to some relative term."* (Levinas, 1969, 347). Such alterity remains inherently hidden, by virtue of its nature the self cannot know it: *"it is unrevealed because it is One, and because making oneself known implies a duality which already clashes with the unity of the*

One." (Levinas, 1969, 347). He wants to work with precisely this type of unsurmountable alterity which remains hidden from the self. Levinas wonders in which way such complete difference can concern the self and impact it, without thereby revealing itself and ceasing to be different. The question he poses is how exactly transcendence can be experienced without being reduced to the same. To answer this, Levinas brings up the one-directionality of the movement: it starts from the self and moves outwards without return. *"The heteronomous experience we seek would be an attitude that cannot be converted into a category, and whose movement unto the Other is not recuperated in identification, does not return to its point of departure."* (Levinas, 1969, 348). The self makes a movement towards the Other, but this movement never makes a full circle back into the self again; the alterity of the Other cannot be subsumed in the self to become known and familiar, it remains other. This is, Levinas states, what enables goodness and 'works'. A 'work' constitutes transcendence; he states: *"A work conceived radically is a movement of the same onto the other which never returns to the same."* (Levinas, 1969, 348). Essentially, 'work' is the term Levinas uses to describe this one-way movement towards alterity.

Transcendence, here meaning movement towards absolute difference which does not return to gain understanding and become identification, is vital to the existence of goodness. Goodness without transcendence cannot exist: *"goodness is but a dream without transcendence, a pure wish […]"* (Levinas, 1969, 348). Levinas defines a work, the one-way movement from the same towards the alterity of the Other, as a *generosity*, and he stresses its one-sidedness by emphasizing that this generosity is met with *ingratitude*. The reason for this is that for a work to function, for it to really be transcendent, it cannot return to the self, and that is precisely what the reciprocal nature of gratitude would achieve. This cements Levinas into a one-sidedness, a symmetrical relationship between the self and the Other is fundamentally impossible. Despite this, Levinas does not define this movement towards alterity as a pure loss – it moves towards *something* rather than towards *nothing*, and is therefore not empty. It simply does not expect equal reciprocity. *"A work is neither a pure acquiring of merits nor a pure nihilism."* (Levinas, 1969, 349). If it were either of these things it would be directed towards itself and fail to be transcendent. *"A work is thus a relationship with the Other who is reached without showing himself touched."* (Levinas, 1969, 349). If reciprocity is denied, then this generosity the self offers is offered, in effect, for the future. *"This one-way action is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering the promised land."* (Levinas 1969, 349). Levinas stresses this; to act generously is

to act without oneself in mind in radical sense. *"The future for which the work is undertaken must be posited from the start as indifferent to my death. […] To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work is to have this triumph in a time without me, to aim at this world without me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time"* (Levinas, 1969, 349). A work is aimed at the Other with no hope of knowing how it reaches, and no expectation of reciprocity. The self is insignificant in relation to this work, it does not take itself into account. In generosity, the self is as indifferent to its own death as it is towards its own existence.

It is equally important for Levinas that transcendence is not absolute. Levinas does not want to speak of a transcendence which is absolutely separate from this world, he does not want to argue for *"the factitious transcendence of worlds behind the scenes, of the Heavenly City gravitating in the skies over the terrestrial city"* (Levinas, 2009, 4). He seems to regards such a transcendence as absurd, or at the very least as an entirely different thing than what he is speaking of. For Levinas transcendence is always in relation to the concrete Other, and as such it serves the purpose of being a link between the self and difference in the concrete world the self inhabits. *"The Being of beings and of worlds, however different among themselves they may be, weaves among incomparables a common fate; it puts them in conjunction, even if the unity of Being that assembles them is but an analogical unity."* (Levinas, 2009, 4). Transcendence is the link between alterities; it is the sole connection between the self and the Other and it is the only thing that can join them into some form of unity without totalizing them and reducing them to the same. As such, the very purpose of transcendence is to allow for an interaction with concrete Others, if it moves beyond this world to the extent that it separate from it, if it speaks of the Other as a general term rather than as a concrete individual, it loses itself. It is precisely this generalization and totalization that Levinas argues against, so it is imperative that transcendence retains its link to the concreteness of alterity.

2.2.2: Camus on Transcendence

To understand Camus' position on transcendence it is necessary to first state that his primary interest is understanding the present through rebellion, and does this by studying the only thing he can, which is examples of rebellion he has, and the values and principles they show. Camus believes that rebellion is the starting point for both the attitudes that honour lives, and those who destroy them. It is his goal to find a measure from *within* this system. He asserts that philosophy is used in his contemporary society to defend murder, and his goal is to find

out whether it *has* to be used that way, and even whether it is reasonable that it is. He is primarily concerned with the rational defense of murder, and it is this that he wants to disprove (Camus, 1954).

Camus' starting point is the absurd –finding oneself in a world that makes no sense. As Foley points out, there is a continuity of thought from *The Myth of Sisyphus* to *The Rebel*, and Camus is *"determined to show that accepting the exigencies dictated by the absurd does not lead to nihilism"* (Foley, 2014, 56). Camus is aware that the absurd worldview offers no guide when it comes to the question of murder. *"If one believes in nothing, if nothing makes sense, if we can assert no value whatsoever, everything is permissible and nothing is important. There is no pro or con; the murder is neither right nor wrong."* (Camus, 1954, 13). Moving beyond the indifference of the absurd is therefore necessary. However, Camus does not want to abandon the absurd, but rather to examine it more thoroughly and see what conclusions it leads to, and what can be constructed on top of it. The absurd is a reaction that arises when an individual is confronted with the world and experiences its strangeness. The absurdist position knows only that it is in the world; it depicts life as meaningless, but Camus finds that from the same starting point it is equally possible to derive arguments in support of life as against it. A positive argument originating from absurdism begins with a rejection of suicide: *"Suicide would mean the end of this encounter, and the absurdist position realizes that it could not endorse suicide without abolishing its own foundations."* (Camus, 1954, 14). Camus is simply stating here that from an absurdist position suicide is not *rationally* justifiable; of course it is still possible, but the absurdist position does not lead to it logically. Anything that an absurdist position may want to state stems from its position in the world, and if it abandons this it abandons itself. All that Camus initially admits to is the undeniable reality of this encounter with the world. Anything further that he wishes to construct must refer back to this experience; it has no possible justifications outside of it. Already from here, Camus sees an implicit assertion: *"But it is plain that absurdist reasoning thereby recognizes human life as the single necessary good, because it makes possible that confrontation, and because without life the absurdist wager could not go on. To say that life is absurd, one must be alive."* (Camus, 1954, 14). The first step is the affirmation of the experience and the necessity of the self to be alive to experience it. From here, the affirmation of the value of the lives of Others necessarily follows. *"The moment life is recognized as a necessary good, it becomes so for all men. One cannot find logical consistency in murder, if one denies it in suicide."* (Camus, 1954, 14). The question for Camus is specifically about the *rationalization* of murder, rather than the fact of its occurrence, and it is this that he denies from the absurdist

position. He places murder and suicide on the same side. If one wishes to deny value in life, then this denial must extend to everyone. Suicide is not sufficient to end the existence of life and the potential for creating meaning that it carries, and neither is murder. *"Equally, if one denies that there are grounds for suicide, one cannot claim them for murder. One cannot be a part-time nihilist."* (Camus, 1954, 15). It is impossible to defend absurdism while simultaneously being willing to sacrifice the lives of Others.

It is here that Camus finds the limitations of absurdism. The line of thinking that forbids murder and that which deems it a matter of indifference both stem from the absurd: *"In practice, this line of reasoning tells us at one and the same time that killing is permissible and that it is not permissible. It abandons us in contradiction, with no grounds for forbidding murder or for justifying it [...]"* (Camus, 1954, 15). All that it achieves is to leave a blank slate.

But answering the question of suicide and murder is imperative to Camus; as Carrol states, *"For Albert Camus, the question of justice ultimately rests on the basic question of whether [...] taking the life of another human being can ever be justified"* (Carrol, 2007, 85). So Camus asserts that while the absurd does not offer a response in itself, by turning in on itself it can reveal more: *"I proclaim that I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd, but I cannot doubt the validity of my own proclamation and I am compelled to believe, at least, in my own protest."* (Camus, 1954, 16). Protest, therefore, becomes central: *"The first, and only, datum that is furnished me, within absurdist experience, is rebellion"* (Camus, 1954, 16). Rebellion is a response to the condition of the absurd. It arises from encountering the chaos and injustice of the human condition; it is a call for order in the face of this absurdity. *"[...] it insists that the outrage come to an end"* (Camus, 1954, 16). Rebellion wants to transform the world, but action is necessary for transformation, and the absurd has so far not offered any guide for which action is justifiable and which is not. *"Hence it is absolutely necessary that rebellion derive its justifications from itself, since it has nothing else to derive them from. It must consent to study itself, in order to learn how to act."* (Camus, 1954, 16). Camus describes his work as an attempt at such a study of rebellion. He does not think that it is definitive, but only that it is a *possible* analysis. In Camus conception, given rebellion as his starting point, no appeal for absolute transcendence can be made, only rebellion can justify itself. The question here, then, is what exactly Camus is referring to when he talks about a value that stands above history, but that does not absolutely transcend it.

Camus speaks of this partial transcendence in terms of moderation and limits. He states that moderation is necessary for rebellion. This moderation applies both to action taken

towards Others as well as to the very understanding of the nature of humanity. Rebellion wants to establish values, but in the establishing of these values the tie to history and reality cannot be broken. *“Virtue cannot separate itself from reality without becoming a principle of evil. Nor can it identify itself completely with reality without denying itself. The moral value brought to light by rebellion, finally, is no farther above life and history than history and life are above it.”* (Camus, 1954, 260). Virtues that do not take account of concrete human lives as they exist in the present are only formal virtues – they are empty, only the content of concrete human lives can provide them with meaning. History itself is also only fueled by human lives. *“[Rebellion] assumes no reality in history until man gives his life for it or dedicates himself entirely to it.”* (Camus, 1954, 260). Camus stresses that placing values entirely above history, with no connection to it, is inherently flawed. *“Jacobin and bourgeois civilization presumes that values are above history and its formal virtues then lay the foundation of a repugnant form of mystification.”* (Camus, 1954, 260). This is equally dangerous, Camus states, as the opposite, which is bringing values in time and submitting them to the flow of history, as he accuses the revolutions of the 20th century for doing. Rebellion, then, must reject both of these options in order to remain true to its original impulse. *“Moderation, confronted with this irregularity, teaches us that at least one part of realism is necessary to every ethic: unadulterated virtue, pure and simple, is homicidal.”* (Camus, 1954, 260). To declare a principle of value that is not directly tied to concrete human lives is to allow lives to be sacrificed in its name.

In order to be successful, revolution must renounce both nihilism as well as solely historic values. *“Revolution, in order to be creative, cannot do without either a moral or metaphysical rule to balance the insanity of history.”* (Camus, 1954, 217). Camus understands the disdain for formal morality, but believes the mistake of rebellion has been *“to extend its scorn to every moral attitude.”* (Camus, 1954, 217). In fact, Camus states, rebellion already finds a guiding principle in its very origins which is neither fully historic nor formal. Rebellion says *“that revolution must try to act, not in order to come into existence at some future date, but in terms of the obscure existence which is already made manifest in the act of insurrection.*” (Camus, 1954, 217-18). Camus here turns to art to explain this rule he speaks of. He does so, because he considers that any guiding principle of rebellion must be creative –*“[...] we have to live and let live in order to create what we are”* (Camus, 1954, 218). Rebellion, according to Camus, must fight for that in the present, but reject that in the present which suppresses freedom. But if he rejects this, he must reject it *for*

something, and for Camus that is human lives. But if humanity has no given and absolute meaning, then its value lies in its ability to create meaning for itself.

The same line of thinking is reflected in *Letters to a German Friend*. There too, Camus insists on the groundedness of his principles in reality. *"I [...] chose justice in order to remain faithful to the world."* (Camus, 1995, 28). His understanding of the world remains the same; he finds no ultimate meaning in it, but asserts that this does not mean that there is no meaning to be found in the world whatsoever. It is just that whatever meaning can be spoken of must be a meaning found between people, rather than embedded in the structure of the world. People insist on meaning, and it is only to people that 'meaning' is a term that makes sense. To insist on having meaning is to understand meaning at all, that is to say, to be capable of having it. And to be capable of having meaning amounts to *being* meaningful, because it is only in relation to someone who understands meaning that meaning makes any sense at all. Human life must justify itself, and no principle that stands above it can ever achieve this. In that sense, human lives justify themselves in perpetual self-creation and affirmation of each other (Camus, 1995, 28). This topic is treated in more detail in the fourth chapter.

Camus ties any principles inevitably to history, despite making sure that they are not equated to it. He wants to assert an identity for mankind, a 'We are' that cannot be transgressed, but he does not want to make a call to an absolute transcendence for this justification. *"'We are' in terms of history, and history must reckon with this 'We are' which must, in its turn, keep its place in history"* (Camus, 1954, 261). Nor does he want to fill the content of humanity – he simply states that 'meaning' only makes sense in relation to human lives and not outside of them.

2.3: Conclusion

Camus and Levinas both assert that thinking of the Other only through historical terms is totalitarian. Their concerns align: the value of human lives must stand above the passage of time, it must transcend history. But it is equally important that this transcendence stays tied to concrete human lives; if it is entirely separate from this reality or if it generalizes humans to the point where they become nothing more than a concept, it again becomes totalitarian. Their aims are the same, but the way in which they approach transcendence and the full extent of the role transcendence plays in their philosophies is different. For Levinas, transcendence constitutes the social relation; transcendence is the opening of the self towards difference, it is what enables the self to have a relationship with the Other without reducing

the Other to the same. For Camus this is not the case – he uses transcendence primarily to establish that the value of human lives is not transient and cannot be lost to history, but unlike Levinas he does not speak of transcendence in terms of the individual relationship between the self and the Other. In a lot of ways the transcendence Camus speaks of is simpler than Levinas', and so he does not run into the same problems that Levinas does; Levinas must tread the line of establishing the Other as immeasurably high, as offering a glimpse of the infinite while still remaining concrete and human, relatable and yet irreconcilably different. In the following chapter I examine the difficulties Levinas runs into by leaning on Derrida's critique.

Chapter 3: Derrida and Levinas on Otherness

Levinas' concept of transcendence and his insistence on framing the Other as the Most High causes the question of meaning and its formation to become problematic for him in a way in which it does not for Camus. In this section I lean on Derrida to state the problems Levinas runs into. Derrida criticizes Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* on a number of points, with the main criticism being that Levinas elevates the Other to such a degree that the Other ceases to be human. Derrida's concern is that raising the Other to the degree of claiming that it is infinitely high and infinitely different inevitably leads to turning the Other into another kind of totality. There is a radical difference between the realm of the same and of difference for Levinas, one which Derrida thinks is impossible to sustain. Levinas addresses Derrida's critique in *Otherwise Than Being*, but I argue that the answer he provides is insufficient – he does not change his framework enough to allow for the Other to really be a determinate Other. In this section I first refer to Derrida to criticize Levinas, then go through Levinas' response to show he does not manage to escape Derrida's criticism.

3.1: Derrida's Critique

3.1.1: The physicality of the Other and its relation to language

Derrida asserts that for the Other to be a concrete Other, it must be thought of as having a concrete body and therefore existing in space. He insists that there is an *"essential finitude of a face (glance –speech) which is a body and not, as Levinas continually insists, the corporeal metaphor of etherealized thought"* (Derrida, 1978, 143). It is impossible to speak of the Other, states Derrida, if the Other does not first appear as a phenomenon. The Other (in its specific alterity) must first appear as an ego (in general). *"One could neither speak, nor have any sense of the totally other, if there was not a phenomenon of the totally other, or evidence of the totally other as such"* (Derrida, 1978, 154). For Levinas the relationship with the Other is not in the realm of the spatial, but rather the field of discourse. This distinction is significant for Levinas because the spatial realm is the realm of the same, the realm of objects, and the language used there is conceptual, and to include the Other in this realm is to totalize it. Derrida takes issue with this and asserts first of all that it is impossible to take the Other out of space, and second of all that it is impossible to take speech out of space (Derrida, 1978, 154). Others have a physical presence, a concrete body, and it is through this body that we can speak of them as exterior to the self, and therefore as different. *"Bodies, transcendent and natural things, are others in general for my consciousness. They are outside, and their*

transcendence is the sign of an already irreducible alterity." (Derrida, 1978, 155). But this is already a very spatial way of framing the Other, and Derrida criticizes Levinas for not taking the reality of the external world seriously. To neutralize space, says Derrida, is to neutralize the Other as Other.

Derrida continues to say that since exteriority and interiority are spatial terms, they are a part of conceptuality – language is not opposed to them. *"For the meanings which radiate from Inside-Outside, from Light-Night, etc., do not only inhabit the proscribed words; they are embedded, in person or vicariously, at the very heart of conceptuality itself."* (Derrida, 1978, 140-141). There is no such thing as an absolute inside or absolute outside – if it were so we could not speak of it at all. Levinas ends up in contradiction; he says the Other is outside of space, and yet the exteriority of the Other is already a spatial term. *"This text of the glance is* also *the text of speech. Therefore it can be called Face. But one must not expect, henceforth, to separate language and space, to empty language of space"* (Derrida, 1978, 141). Language has a double dimension; it categorizes, it reduces, but within that it allows for speaking of the Other at all and communicating. This double dimension is unavoidable; to conceptualize is to do violence, but without this violence no discourse would be possible at all. Derrida states that Levinas is not authorized to speak of the infinitely Other if the Other does not appear in the same, and the fact that Levinas does in fact speak of the Other places him in an impossible position: *"by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego – which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him – he deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language."* (Derrida, 1978, 156). The same, says Derrida, is "*the neutral level of transcendental description"* (Derrida, 1978, 156). It is only through appearing in this zone that the Other lends itself to language and can be spoken of at all. Language, states Derrida, is exterior and can only speak of the Other as exterior, and yet discourse is the only way in which we can communicate with the Other. Violence is already inherent in discourse, it is impossible to strip it of discourse and leave it perfectly peaceful as Levinas deems it to be. Yet there is nothing outside it, and the possibility of peace exists only within it: *"Peace, like silence, is the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself."* (Derrida, 1978, 145). It is precisely discourse which calls itself to peace, not something lying outside of it. Derrida further explores the term 'absolutely Other' and shows the contradictions that inevitably arise when it is followed to its logical conclusions.

3.1.2: The Other as alter-ego

Derrida states that the infinitely Other cannot be other as a positive infinity, as god. *"The infinitely Other would not be what it is, other, if it was a positive infinity, and if it did not maintain within itself the negativity of the indefinite, of the apeiron."* (Derrida, 1978, 142). Positive infinity (god) cannot be infinitely other; if positive infinity requires alterity (as it does in Levinas) then all language must be renounced, including the words 'infinite' and 'Other'. *"Infinity cannot be understood as Other except in the form of the in-finite."* (Derrida, 1978, 142). It is only the concrete which can be different. If infinity is thought of as positive, then *"the other becomes unthinkable, impossible, unutterable."* (Derrida, 1978, 142). Derrida states: *"The other cannot be what it is, infinitely other, except in finitude and mortality (mine and its)"* (Derrida, 1978, 143). It is impossible to think of the Other's face as infinity when it is precisely the concrete and finite which characterize it and allow for its alterity, and consequently the Other must be thought of as appearing in space. From the focus on the Other's physicality Derrida arrives at a fundamental symmetry: *"If the face is body it is mortal. Infinite alterity as death cannot be reconciled with infinite alterity as positivity and presence (God)"* (Derrida, 1978, 144). It is impossible to speak about the face and infinity at the same time. If the Other has a face then it is mortal; if we are to speak of metaphysical transcendence, it cannot be at the same time transcendence towards the Other as death, and towards the Other as god. The self is mortal, but so is the Other; the Other is human, an alter-ego, and Derrida criticizes Levinas for making the Other so that it is no longer human.

Derrida criticizes Levinas for his complete division between 'the same' and 'the Other', in which the Other gains a dimension of infinity, in which otherness becomes absolute, while the same becomes a closed totality. 'Infinitely other', states Derrida, is a contradiction in terms; the Other cannot be Other if it is completely exterior to the same. To be Other can only be 'other than' – it is an inherently relational term. For something to be other to me it must be 'other than me', and if it is so it is in relation to an ego and no longer infinite. Derrida illustrates a loop in which the infinitely Other cannot be infinitely Other unless it is other than itself, but then it would not be what it is, namely infinitely Other, and so on. Following this, if the Other cannot be absolutely, infinitely other, nor can the same be completely closed off: "*the other cannot be absolutely exterior to the same without ceasing to be other; and that, consequently, the same is not a totality closed in upon itself […]"* (Derrida, 1978, 158). The same and the Other cannot be fully separated; there is no absolute totality, there is always difference within it, and difference only makes sense if it permeates the same.

The Other cannot be thought of except in relation to an ego; there is an underlying symmetry between them. There is only 'other' that is partially same and vice versa; either there is only the same, says Derrida, *"or indeed there is the same and the other, and then the other cannot be other – of the same – except by being the other's other: alter ego."* (Derrida, 1978, 160). The other as alter-ego is the other as other. This is the fundamental symmetry that cannot be escaped; it lies under even Levinas' ethical dissymmetry, states Derrida, even though Levinas would find it intolerable. *"The other as alter ego signifies the other as other, irreducible to my ego, precisely because it is an ego, because it has the form of the ego."* (Derrida, 1978, 157). It is only because the Other is an ego that it is a face that can speak and understand, and without this symmetry the Other cannot be respected. The relationship between the self and the Other is a relationship between two finite ipseities. Derrida states that even ethical dissymmetry would be impossible without this underlying symmetry. *"That I am also essentially the other's other, and that I know I am, is the evidence of a strange symmetry whose trace appears nowhere in Levinas's descriptions. Without this evidence, I could not desire (or) respect the other in ethical dissymmetry"* (Derrida, 1978, 160). I must know that I am other to the other, says Derrida, since without this, the "I" (the ego in general) would not be able to be a victim of violence. Furthermore, in the dissymmetry Levinas describes, the perpetrator of violence cannot be other itself, it must be the same (ego). (Derrida, 1978, 157).

3.2: Levinas: *Otherwise Than Being*

3.2.1: Proximity: the subject is no longer just the same

Levinas refines his view in *Otherwise Than Being* in response to Derrida's critique; one way in which this becomes clear is through the notion of proximity. In proximity Levinas no longer speaks of the Other as the most high and as absolutely Other and infinitely distant – difference permeates the self and the Other becomes also infinitely close.

In proximity the subject approaches, it is in a state of motion: *"I am not in the approach called to play the role of the perceiver that reflects or welcomes"* (Levinas, 2009, 82). The self is no longer static and sure, welcoming of difference, but it is *itself* in motion, it *also* approaches. Proximity is therefore not a *state*, but a *restlessness*; there is no site of proximity, it is never at rest and therefore never congeals into a structure. Levinas defines subjectivity through the notion of proximity: *"Proximity, as the "closer and closer," becomes the subject"* (Levinas, 2009, 82). Whereas before the subject was the same, at rest, at home with oneself, it is now restless. The self is no longer inherently knowable and present

to itself; *"One can no longer say what the ego or I is"* (Levinas, 2009, 82). The very approach that is proximity constitutes subjectivity – there is no endpoint which reveals the self as a presence, it is only the approach. The subjectivity of this approaching subject is prior to consciousness; it is torn up by difference, *"caught up in fraternity"* before it is conscious of itself.

As can be seen here, Levinas redefines the notion of the self and the Other so that difference infiltrates the self on a fundamental level. It is no longer just the Other who is different – difference makes up the self. As such the self and the Other are brought closer together; they are no longer in a straightforward opposition in which the self is on the side of the same and the Other of radical difference. Instead, they approach each other, caught up in the relationship between them. Levinas responds to Derrida's critique in multiple ways (such as for instance with his concept of substitution); here I focus on how his ideas change through the notion of proximity. From the initial setup it appears that Levinas manages to account for certain things, such as difference in the same. However, despite the changes he makes, the further he details his concept of proximity, the clearer it becomes that he is unwilling to let go of certain notions that Derrida shows are problematic. The Other still remains radically unknowable, and Levinas continues to not allow the Other to become concrete. The Other may no longer be spoken of as the most high, but it still does not become a definite Other. I follow Levinas' elaboration on the notion of proximity in order to elucidate some of the ways in which he fails to answer Derrida's critique and ends up stuck in the same issues despite the changes that he makes.

3.2.2: The Other is in a non-reciprocal relationship with the subject

Levinas continues on the point that humanity should not first be understood as consciousness, arguing that the subjectivity of the approaching subject is prior to consciousness. Proximity refers to humanity, but this is not *"as the identity of an ego endowed with knowledge"* (Levinas, 2009, 83). He goes further than just stating that proximity is prior to consciousness, specifying that proximity does not resolve into a consciousness, or the consciousness that a concrete being is nearby. Levinas dismisses the notion that proximity implies that the Other would be within one's reach in the sense that *"it would be possible for one to take hold of that being, hold on to it or converse with it, in the reciprocity of handshakes, caresses, struggle, collaboration, commerce, conversation"* (Levinas, 2009, 83). At this point, he states, proximity would already have been lost, since proximity does not stand to be thematized. The fact that Levinas does not allow for reciprocity can be seen in two ways. One

is that proximity is *more* meaningful because of it, because it does not dissolve into the need for being returned, it exists beyond any specific interaction. But the other way problematizes concrete interactions, with concrete interactions here being specific acts of interaction between people, such as the handshakes or conversations Levinas mentions. I argue that specific interactions *require* reciprocity, that without reciprocity the subject and the Other never meet, but instead perpetually miss each Other.

At this point Levinas runs into the same issues that Derrida raised; Levinas keeps to the notion that proximity can never refer to a concrete Other – the Other appears in proximity, but apparently this approach cannot be characterized by any specific interaction. The Other does not appear in any way that the self can interact with – looking at, conversing, or touching a specific person already takes the self out of proximity. This leaves Levinas with no other option but to speak of a generalized Other, if any specificity is already a breach of proximity there is simply no other choice. In that sense Levinas does not manage to gain any new ground against Derrida's critique, he still traps himself in only being capable of speaking about an absolute Other, while for Derrida as soon as the Other appears, it must be concrete. The further Levinas progresses with the concept of proximity the more in line he stands with his previous ideas – he retains a fundamental dissymmetry between the self and the Other despite the fact that the Other is no longer inherently higher than the self, and there is still a fundamental lack of reciprocity. The subject is obsessed with the neighbour, and this obsession is one-sided. The speaking subject is exposed to the neighbour through the act of speaking – it is not reduced to the 'said', but expresses itself in the 'saying'. For the subject to expose itself like that, states Levinas, it must first be wounded into opening up, and this occurs because the Other affects the subject. This effect, however, is not reciprocal, it only goes from the Other to the subject, and not the Other way around. The irreversibility is necessary for the foundation of the subject: *"not to turn into relations that reverse, irreversibility, is the universal subjectness of the subject."* (Levinas, 2009, 84). This inequality and non-reciprocity characterizes the relationship to the Other and finds its expression in responsibility. *"In the responsibility which we have for one another, I have always one response more to give, I have to answer for his very responsibility"* (Levinas, 2009, 84). This dissymmetry continues to characterize Levinas' writing.

Levinas does establish a possibility of reciprocity through the third party, but I argue that this is problematic. The face implies the third party through the trace of the infinite: *"The presence of the face, the infinity of the Other, is a destituteness, a presence of the third party"* (Levinas, 2009, 213). Since the face carries in itself the implication of all of humanity, an

interaction between the subject and the Other is always shadowed by the third, and this brings out questions of responsibility, reciprocity and justice. But there is an ambiguity there as to how this third exactly relates to the subject and the Other. As Bernasconi points out, there is an *"apparent uncertainty as to how to relate the third party to the face to face relation"* (Bernasconi, 1999, 76). Levinas alternates between arguing that the third party appears only *after* the relation to the Other in the face to face, or *simultaneously* with it. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas rejects the idea that the third party is an *addition* to the face to face relation, but in *Otherwise Than Being* he alternately argues for both sides (Bernasconi, 1999, 76). Bernasconi's concern is Levinas in relation to politics, so he states that the problem that arises if the third is derivative is that it, in turn, makes politics derivative to ethics in Levinas (Bernasconi, 1999, 76). Levinas needs the artificial addition of the third because the third is needed in order to account for responsibility and justice.

But if the notion of the third *is* simultaneous, if it already always shows in the face of the Other, then the system works the way Levinas proposes it, as Bernasconi argues, to allow for ethics and politics to correct one another (Bernasconi, 1999, 77). I argue, however, that, despite positing the mutual connection between the subject, Other, and third, it fails to adequately account for the fact that the third would have to be included in the subject as well, that the subject would have to carry a trace of the third for the Other. The reason I argue that this is problematic for Levinas is because it assumes *symmetry*. For Levinas there a non-symmetrical relationship in which the subject *faces* the Other, the Other *contains* a trace of the third, and the third *binds* the subject to the Other. Each of these relationships is dependent on the other two (for instance, the third cannot bind the subject if the Other does not contain the third) which means that they cannot form one by one, but must appear simultaneously. But, for Levinas, these relations can only appear in the aforementioned organization; the subject cannot bind the Other, for instance, because Levinas insists that they need to be in an asymmetrical relationship. Bernasconi describes the development of an eventual symmetry: *"the Other issues a command that commands me to command the one who is commanding me"* (Bernasconi, 1999, 80), but, I argue, this is only a *resulting* symmetry – it is *posterior* to the encounter with the Other. That puts Levinas in a position in which he needs to explain why these relations appear in only one of the possible orientations, but this would require an additional organizing element, a 'fourth party'. However, it is then clear that a similarly structured argument could be made, forcing one to posit a 'fifth party', and so on ad infinitum. Because of this, I consider reciprocity to still be a problem for Levinas, and in the

following chapter I detail what Camus' concept, which *does* contain symmetry, allows for that Levinas does not.

3.2.3: The face escapes representation

Levinas describes proximity as contact with the Other, but this contact neither annuls the Other's alterity, nor suppresses the subject. But in order to achieve this, Levinas frames the contact as extremely neutral, stating that *"In contact itself the touching and the touched separate, as though the touched moved off, was always already other, did not have anything common with me"* (Levinas, 2009, 86). Levinas neutralizes the notion of contact to the point where it can hardly be considered contact at all. The touch between the subject and the Other does not involve either of the two being affected.

Not only does Levinas neutralize the contact with the Other, but he goes on to say that the Other cannot be properly said to appear. Everything that appears must appear through an empty horizon, and this a priori horizon already puts the thing that appears in a sort of genus. The thing that appears may be unique, but it still belongs to a genus and is still preceded by a horizon which is the necessary condition for its appearance. But the Other is completely different, it does not have any thing that can precede it and announce its appearance. *"He does not appear. What sort of signaling could he send before me which would not strip him of his exclusive alterity?"* (Levinas, 2009, 86). The Other, then, has no essence, genus, or resemblance – it is a priori. *"Not coming to confirm any signaling made in advance, outside of everything, a priori, the neighbor concerns me with his exclusive singularity without appearing"* (Levinas, 2009, 86). The Other assigns the subject before the subject can designate it.

So the face escapes representation: *"it is the very collapse of phenomenality"* (Levinas, 2009, 88). It is too weak to appear, it leaves only a trace of itself; its features only capture a trace of its past, not its present. On this point Levinas does not attempt a reconciliation with Derrida – he stands on the point that the Other does not appear as a phenomenon, and in doing so leaves himself open to the original criticism Derrida relayed, namely, that it is impossible to speak of an Other who does not appear. Derrida argued that Others exist in space, and the concreteness of the body of the Other cannot be disregarded. Levinas continues to not account for this, as for him the image of the face always betrays the Other. Levinas says of the neighbour: *"It is precisely in his image that he is no longer near"* (Levinas, 2009, 89). The image captures a concrete moment, makes it visible and comprehensible, and this is violent towards the Other who carries a trace of the infinite. So

here again Levinas resists the idea of the concreteness of the Other – the Other does not appear, and hence is not allowed to have any concrete features. Any features that the Other has are a betrayal, since they do injustice to the infinity of the Other.

3.3: Conclusion

It has now become clear that, despite the changes that Levinas makes, he retains a depiction of an Other who is still not allowed to be concrete, and who still stands in a dissymmetry in relation to the subject. The subject has changed, it has become a stranger to itself, but its position regarding the Other remains the same – the subject is still guilty. The only difference is that this guilt has permeated the subjects existence on a deeper level: *"to revert to oneself is not to establish oneself at home [...] it is to be a stranger, hunted down even in one's home contested in one's own identity"* (Levinas, 2009, 92). So while the subject has changed, it still remains below an infinitely high Other. And in relation to this infinitely high Other, the subject can only ever be passive. The subject is now exposed to the Other and this exposure is passivity that is only expanded by speaking. *"The act of speaking is the passivity in passivity"* (Levinas, 2009, 92). The subject exposes itself to the Other in passivity and this passivity is *"opposed to the imperialism of consciousness"* (Levinas, 2009, 92). There still remains a lack of possible action; the subject is stopped in its tracks in the face of the Other and moved into passivity. The Other still carries a trace of infinity and does not appear as a phenomenon. So there is no clear indication of how the subject and the Other can come into contact with each Other, since the Other's physicality is still neutralized alongside any concreteness of features.

Chapter 4: Symmetry

The previous chapter discussed the difficulties Levinas runs into with his dissymmetrical conception of the Other in regards to interaction. This chapter shows that Camus structures a different possibility for interaction through his focus on symmetry between the subject and the Other, and examines the consequences of this different framework. I first detail Camus' understanding of identification through the rebellious encounter, then connect the importance of the symmetry and mutual limitation that is ingrained there to the possibility of interaction and the creation of meaning that is dependent on this interaction. The question of the creation of meaning through interaction becomes an important distinction between Camus and Levinas. I finally examine what Camus envisions as a positive transformation in society

based on these foundations he lays down, and end by examining the differences between Camus and Levinas in regards to activity and passivity in relation to the Other.

4.1: Symmetry and interaction: the rebellious encounter in more detail

The first chapter briefly discussed what can be termed ‘the rebellious encounter’. As I have stated there, Camus does not speak of an encounter in a way that can be paralleled with Levinas in a straightforward manner; Levinas speaks of an encounter which covers the first moment the subject becomes aware of the Other, while Camus is interested in rebellion, so his exploration starts from the rebellious moment. He is interested in examining what composes the moment of rebellion, and his examination presumes the rebellious moment has occurred. He wants to work out what the moment implies once it has occurred. So while his encounter does not directly parallel Levinas’, there are still a number of similarities. Camus considers the rebellious encounter to be a moment that awakens consciousness. This rebellious moment does not account for the entirety of human interaction, nor is it the first moment of the encounter with the Other, but despite this it is a moment in which the subjects affirms its own humanity as well as that of the Other.

It is this affirmation and awakening of consciousness that I detail here, to show how through it Camus escapes the pitfalls brought up by Derrida. As a lot of this has already been introduced, I here focus specifically on the rebellious encounter as an awakening of consciousness and what the consequences of the fundamental symmetry inherent in it are.

4.2: Rebellion as the moment of identification

Rebellion for Camus is the moment of identification: *“An awakening of conscience, no matter how confused it may be, develops from any act of rebellion and is represented by the sudden realization that something exists with which the rebel can identify himself –even if only for a moment”* (Camus, 1954, 20). What starts out as a refusal, grows into identification. The rebel begins to establish limits that should not be transgressed, and these grow into values that are more important to the rebel than life. *“Having previously been willing to compromise, the slave suddenly adopts an attitude of All or Nothing. Knowledge is born and conscience awakened”* (Camus, 1954, 20). This knowledge the rebel gains is still really obscure, but it is at this point that values are born as a transition from facts to rights. Camus takes the appearance of the ‘All or Nothing’ to demonstrate that rebellion, although initially appearing to be individualistic, it in fact *“undermines the very conception of the individual”* (Camus, 1954, 21). If the rebel consents to die for the sake of the rights defended by the

rebellion, then it is implicit that the rebel values these things beyond his or her own existence. *"He acts, therefore, in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men"* (Camus, 1954, 21). Camus sees this affirmation as removing the subject from isolation at the same time as awakening consciousness and giving a reason to act.

So the arising of consciousness for Camus is simultaneous to the identification with humanity. All of humanity – including the oppressors the rebel opposes – must be included in the rebel's identification, but the rebel is acting in order to inhibit and lessen their freedom. This can be done for the rebel's own sake, or just as easily for the sake of someone else. The rebel identifies with the victim, but, as Camus specifies, this is not a question of psychological identification: *"the individual is not, in himself, an embodiment of the values he wishes to defend. It needs at least all humanity to comprise them. When he rebels, a man identifies himself with other men and, from this point of view, human solidarity is metaphysical"* (Camus, 1954, 22-3). Here can be seen something similar to Levinas' notion of the third party – since all of humanity is needed to support the rebel's values, then it is clearly never just a confrontation between two parties. But, I argue, by having symmetrical relations between the self, the Other, and the third, no problems arise for Camus here, in that any relation can be inverted and rearranged freely.

4.3: Limitation and interaction

In order for rebellion to defend what it wishes to defend, it must aim to curb both its own freedom and the freedom of others. Solidarity is born and exists out of rebellion, but it destroys itself if it goes too far. *"In order to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the limits that it discovers in itself – limits where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist"* (Camus, 1954, 27). While Levinas of course practically aims to bring down oppression, in the structure of his thought it is always the Other who is faultless and the subject whose freedom must be curbed. For Camus, the basic structure is different – the subject can accuse the Other and rebel for itself, as well as for Others. The Other is not inherently justified; it is only the rebel in the moment in which he takes all of humanity into consideration within his action that is justified. And the rebel too ceases to be justified the moment this line is transgressed. The limitation of Others (as well as oneself) plays a fundamental role in the structure of Camus' thought. Rebellion denies unlimited power in order to allow for coexistence: *"Each tells the other that he is not God"* (Camus, 1954, 269). This is the only way that Camus sees as allowing salvaging everyone, including the thinkers whose philosophies his time had

deemed as nihilistic or as failed attempts at justice (naming Nietzsche, Marx, and Lenin as examples) – by forcing them under a limit and having them correct one another. Aside from inclusion, the other fundamental element of this limitation is that it offers the possibility of interaction and identification: *"we offer as an example, the only original rule of life today: to learn to live and to die, and in order to be a man, to refuse to be a god"* (Camus, 1954, 269). For Camus it is only through this mutual affirmation as humans that life can be framed in any way that allows for meaning. This brings us to the content of what rebellion aims to achieve.

What rebellion wishes to defend is *"that that part of man which cannot be confined to the realm of ideas"*, or *"the passionate side of his nature that serves no other purpose but to help him to live"* (Camus, 1954, 25). In other words, rebellion is an attempt to save the possibility for creating meaning. The rest of this chapter traces the ways in which the limitation of the Other allows for the creation of meaning.

4.4: The creation of meaning through interaction

Time and time again, Camus emphasizes that rebellion is searching for reasons to live, and that it cannot base its justification on anything other than itself. Human insurrection, states Camus, is a protest against death, or rather a protest against the *implications* of death – *"the rebel does not ask for life, but for reasons for living"* (Camus, 1954, 73). He continues, "*To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and for unity"* (Camus, 1954, 73). What is repugnant, he says, is not simply suffering in itself, but rather the fact that suffering is meaningless. The rebel objects to the human condition and demands clarity and meaning. eaning, then, is a central objective of rebellion. But meaning, for Camus, which can be defined as finding reasons for living, making sense, or giving form, stems from the potential for giving meaning that exists between people. He speaks strictly of a human-created meaning *"I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one"* (Camus, 1995, 28). Since meaning is a nonsensical term outside of human lives, it is contradictory to sacrifice human lives for its sake. *"This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life"* (Camus, 1995, 28). So meaning is not given, but it can be created by people amongst each other. Camus does not fill the content of this meaning – it would be impossible to do so – but he does delineate the parameters within which it can exist. In simple terms, he states that

others cannot be mutilated or killed in the name of ideals, but must be allowed to live freely in order to give *"a chance to the justice that man alone can conceive"* (Camus, 1995, 28).

That is the first condition; a limit must be placed on both the subject and the Other in order for them to not override each other, because the moment they do, they undermine the meaning they have been creating by uprooting its foundation, which is to say, meaning only gains its sense through Others. Meaning can be derived from individual creation, but even this is still dependent on interaction, since it is only in only in a human context that meaning has any weight. A creative element is inherent to meaning making – the first 'no' of rebellion must find a reason for itself; it cannot remain only negation, it must affirm something in order not to be empty. It is when the rebel begins to stand for something that meaning takes shape. I follow what the term 'meaning' signifies in Camus, and how he considers it to take shape.

4.5: Creation, meaning, and society

Camus sees creation as an act which gives form to life where life lacks it. This desire for form is described by Camus as the cause of both the best and worst things that can stem from human behaviour: *"The same impulse which can lead to the adoration of the heavens or the destruction of man, also leads to creative literature which derives its serious content at this source."* (Camus, 1954, 228). While well aware of the danger of this impulse, Camus also considers it to be not only impossible to dispense with, but actually the only possible guide towards a fair society. He states: *"Civilization is only possible if, by renouncing the nihilism of formal principles and nihilism without principles, the world rediscovers the road to a creative synthesis"* (Camus, 1954, 238). Camus vision of a successful revolution is a society which gives first place to *"this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of man and the world he lives in, and which we now have to define in the face of a world which insults it"* (Camus, 1954, 241-2). The reason he speaks of creation as a 'living virtue' can be seen from the two aspects of the way he defines it: 1) as the giving of form to reality which lacks it, and 2) as the free application of oneself to whatever it is one does. I will briefly go over both of these points.

1. Creation is bound up with the rebellious impulse: *"In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it and the construction of a substitute universe"* (Camus, 1954, 221). Rebellion does not simply negate – it negates in the name of something, and it creates and embodies what it stands for. Rebellion protests against a meaningless world by creating sense and meaning. *"Rebellion, from this point of view, is a fabricator of universes. This also*

defines art" (Camus, 1954, 221). It takes from what reality offers and gives it a form which it originally lacked, thereby turning it into something comprehensible. This is not to say that the artist can impose unity on reality – that remains a complete impossibility – but simply that the artist can take something out of reality and make sense of it.

2. It is important to point out that Camus is not speaking here only of 'high' art, or even that he necessitates anything that would take the form of a work of art. What is of importance is not necessarily the work that is produced or the way it can be interacted with, but rather the subject's ability to engage with something and apply itself to it. In that sense labor is also explicitly included here, provided that it is free. *"Industrial society will only open the way to a new civilization by restoring to the worker the dignity of a creator; in other words, by making him apply his interest and his intelligence as much to the work itself as to what it produces."* (Camus, 1954, 238).

Thus, the creation of meaning is dependent on interaction for Camus, and it is necessary for the construction of a more positively arranged society. It does not fall on society to create this meaning for anyone: *"The absolute is not attained, not, above all, created, through history"* (Camus, 1954, 266). What Camus concretely means by a good society, is simply one in which allows for the creation of meaning: *"society and politics only have the responsibility of arranging everyone's affairs so that each will have the leisure and the freedom to pursue this common search."* (266). The effect of this is that history, rather than being an object of worships becomes *"only an opportunity which must be rendered fruitful by a vigilant rebellion."* (Camus, 1954, 266). Rebellion – specifically creative rebellion – is again presented as a living virtue. It is in a constant act of creation; it creates itself and justifies itself in this creation. It is in this sense that rebellion cannot fight for the future, but must embody what it stands for in the present; since it is its own justification, it must show in itself that it is worthwhile through its actions. *"Its merit lies in making no calculations, distributing everything that it possesses to life and to living men. [...]Real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present"* (Camus, 1954, 268). Rebellion itself is the giving of form. *"Rebellion proves, in this way, that it is the very moment of life and that it cannot be denied without renouncing life. Its purest outburst, on each occasion, gives birth to existence"* (Camus, 1954, 268).

Camus states that "*perhaps there is a living transcendence"* by which he is referring to this act of giving form or making sense. *"Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually*

promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history" (Camus, 1953, 224). For him transcendence and creation are linked; if anything can be spoken of as being transcendent, it must be what people make of reality, what they capture from it and turn into something which has value and meaning. At this point can be seen the radically different conclusions that Camus's concept of transcendence and interaction and Levinas' lead to.

4.6: Symmetry vs asymmetry – activity vs passivity

Camus speaks of both individual creation and interaction – for him meaning must be created between people. As was shown in the previous chapter, Levinas does not manage to leave this space open. This can again be brought down to the clash between symmetry and dissymmetry in the relation to the Other in their works. The activity of art, creating and engaging both, for Camus is the creation of unity. Perhaps a reason that Camus sees this option where Levinas does not, is because Camus attributes importance to activity as well as passivity – the relation to the Other is equal, and as such one's own needs gain importance. As remarked by Hofmeyr, the relationship with the Other in Levinas is a relationship of critique, *"because the other does not confirm my world but interrupts it."* (Hofmeyr, 2007, Criticism: Art's Salvation?). For Levinas this interruption is of importance – the subject is put in radical passivity in the encounter with the Other. Hofmer summarizes: *"the spoken word directed towards the other person produces transcendence by shattering his/her world of self-sufficiency dominated by egocentric pursuits"* (Hofmeyr, 2007, Criticism: Art's Salvation?). Something like what Camus suggests would not be permitted in a Levinasian world-view. As explained by Hofmeyr, Levinas does not regard at least artistic creation as positive in its own right: *"For Levinas, the artist - situating herself at the heart of her own spectacle - is firmly entrenched in this egoist and therefore inadequate existence"* (Hofmeyr, 2007, Criticism: Art's Salvation?). Art is seen as having an aspiration towards life, but one that can never go beyond being an aspiration, because an artwork can only ever capture an instant. A work of art, then, contains a 'derisory life' for Levinas. Hofmeyr states: *"For Levinas, the eternally frozen instant accomplished in art is "the meanwhile", never finished, still enduring - something inhuman and monstrous."* (Hofmeyr, 2007, Putting my Freedom into Action: the Impact of Art?). He presents art as disengaged and irresponsible because of its distance from human lives. This stands in opposition to initiative and responsibility, and as such *"it cannot ever constitute the supreme value of civilization."* (Hofmeyr, 2007, Criticism: Art's Salvation?). It is possible to salvage art for Levinas through critique – critique can ideally

"link the fixed world of art to the intelligible world - to reintroduce life and time into art." (Hofmeyr, 2007, Criticism: Art's Salvation?). Critique has the power to re-engage art in this way for Levinas because *"it signifies a primordial relation with the other person"* (Hofmeyr, 2007, Criticism: Art's Salvation?). But this does not change the fundamental structure – art is still insufficient on its own, and it is still the case that the Other needs to impose passivity on the subject. So for Levinas the Other stops the subject and that's where transcendence lives. But the downfalls of that have already been shown – it is one-sided and impotent, it does not allow the self to do the same for the Other; it leaves the Other out by refusing to engage it as an equal. Levinas does not leave room for meaning to actually take shape, because individual giving of form – such as can be found in art – is seen as inherently incomplete and insufficient. Direct engagement with the Other is then the only option, but Levinas blocks this off too by allowing only a radical passivity towards the Other in which the subject is not allowed to make sense of the Other.

For Camus any transcendence that may be spoken of exists in the meaning that's shared between the self and the Other; the subject and the Other both *engage* each other, rather than that the Other *paralyzes* the subject. There is movement and interaction between the two, which allow for the creation of meaning. And meaning that is found is not automatically negative. Art is not reductive of reality – it *adds* to reality, it supplements it with something it lacks. It imposes form, and this imposition does reach towards the Other, but it can stop itself before it becomes totalitarian because it is not absolute – art cannot overcome reality and force it to function under its rules. Meaning is made possible through interaction, but not in an interaction the way Levinas describes it. Instead, it is interaction that allows for self-expression, in which the subject and the Other share meaning and create it between them. The subject is allowed to want to frame the Other, this is not inherently violent. It is possible to capture something for Camus; things can be given form, even if this form is incomplete. The danger lies in assuming this form can be complete, but it is not inherently wrong in itself: *"There is an evil, undoubtedly, which men accumulate in their passionate desire for unity. But yet another evil lies at the roots of this confused movement. Confronted with this evil, confronted with death, man from the very depths of his soul cries out for justice"* (Camus, 1954, 267). The creation of from, should it manage to escape the danger of becoming totalitarian, provides something concrete to hold on to. Creativity allows for rebellion to *be* something, to actually offer a positive alternative.

4.7: Conclusion

The question of the possibility of the creation of meaning pushes the framework of the interaction between subject and Other in a way that is difficult for Levinas. Although he adds the notion of the third, in the structure of just the subject and the Other he does not allow for reciprocity. This becomes a problem for him when faced with the question of how meaning can arise and exist between the subject and the Other. Camus offers a possibility here through engagement. He proposes an identification or arising of consciousness which simultaneously affirms the subject and the Other in a relationship of symmetry. From here he stresses the importance of boundaries – the subject and the Other both must limit each other in order to interact. The Other for Camus is ambiguous; it can be a source of good or bad, just like the subject, but through their mutual limitation they can engage each other and through this engagement create a certain sense and meaning in the world. This interaction is the necessary foundation for the creation of meaning – 'meaning' is a term that makes sense only between people, and no act of creation can develop something that holds a truth beyond what people attribute to it. But from this foundation Camus allows for the giving of form through work that is individual expression and engagement rather than a direct interaction with the Other. This is a sort of making-sense that the subject can do for itself and choose to engage with, allowing the subject to attribute form to its own life, something which Camus attributes great importance to. For him creating meaning is a necessity for living life, and he designs a framework in which this is possible, finally defining a positive society as one in which this pursuit is made possible. Instead of a passivity in the face of the Other, Camus proposes a mutual limitation, one which allows for the necessary movement for the creation and engagement with meaning.

Final Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the establishing of a foundation for the interaction with the Other and the ways in which Camus and Levinas differ on this point. In the first chapter I established some key differences in the relationship between subject and world in these two thinkers, and the ways in which these differences inform the relationship between subject and Other. I named a difference in the placement of the tension that exists between world, subject, and Other, for which the question of the height of the Other became relevant, and consequently the use of the term 'transcendence'. The following chapter examined the use of transcendence in these two authors, starting by showing the similarity in the necessity they both find in using this term in in defense of the value of human lives and the assertion that it should stand above history. This was followed by pointing out the differences in their use of the term, despite their similar aims, focusing on how for Camus the use of transcendence does not imply an infinitely high Other as it does in Levinas. The third chapter examined Levinas on this point in more detail, leaning on Derrida to criticize his concept of the Other, and taking into account Levinas' later works and how he changes the use of these concepts there. I assert that although Levinas changes his concept of the Other so that the Other is no longer the most high, the fact that he maintains an asymmetrical relationship to the Other causes problems for him in terms of interaction. The final chapter focuses on Camus to illustrate what I find lacking in Levinas, namely, a symmetrical relationship with the Other in which the subject and Other are allowed to limit each other, and through this limitation create meaning between them.

In a sense, this paper has polarized the differences between Camus and Levinas in order to pinpoint where they diverge and what some of the implications of these differences are. Despite the differences in the specifics of the relationship with the Other, however, much of their thinking is in line with each other. They both see ethics as first philosophy, and they both understand subjectivity as inseparable from the relationship with the Other. From then on, they understand answering the responsibility towards the Other as the only possibility of engaging with life and living it in a meaningful way. Since they deal with issues that are so closely linked, it is valuable to compare them to each other in order to gleam ways in which they can correct and supplement each other. This paper has attempted following one possible thread between them, but there are multiple possibilities that can be explored if the conversation between the two is kept open.

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