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# **Kantian Imperatives and Phenomenology's Original Forces**

by  
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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## INTRODUCTION

Although research on Immanuel Kant and phenomenology has traditionally focused on epistemology, contemporary phenomenology can be seen as unveiling the Kantian “imperative” character of perception and morals. In light of the imperative character of phenomenology’s directives of things and other persons, Kant’s doctrines of perception, morals, and the sublime are reviewed and compared with the teachings of three important figures in contemporary phenomenology: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Alphonso Lingis. This work’s overarching theme is a comparison of Kant’s imperatives, which have the *form* of law, with the *forces* of things and other persons described as imperatives in contemporary phenomenology.

Kant’s categorical imperative has the form of law, but Kant’s doctrine of law is not exclusively formal; otherwise, our capacities of reason and moral action would simply lie dormant. A full understanding of Kant’s formulation of imperatives must include not only the form of law (*Gesetz*) but its force (*Triebfeder*), both of which play a role in activating the will. Although the relation of *Gesetz* and *Triebfeder* cannot be directly applied to contemporary phenomenology, the forces of things and other persons can be phenomenologically described as imperative directives that call for our appropriate response. Merleau-Ponty’s “preconfigured essences” and “levels,” and Levinas’ “epiphany” of the human face do not take things and other people as given but command perception like norms. Bringing Kant’s imperative into phenomenology more deeply, Lingis claims that the first insight is not insight into freedom but insight into law that renders the world consistent and coherent.

The first chapter provides an overview of the place of imperatives in Kant’s philosophy, and some preliminary indications of how Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Lingis critically appropriate and develop Kant’s account of imperatives. First, we review how Kant characterizes sensibility as spontaneous receptivity, which does not involve the will. Although imperatives cannot command sensibility *per se*, they do weigh on the understanding, which for Kant organizes sensibility with a mathematically regulated spatio-temporal structure. Still, Kant’s doctrine of sensibility has positive connotations for phenomenology, as Kant regards the *Ding-an-sich* as unknowable, thus legitimizing the realm of appearances central to phenomenology. Second, we summarize the role of the categorical imperative and respect (*Achtung*) in Kant’s moral philosophy. We outline both the force and form of this imperative – its compelling force (*Zwang*) and goal or end (*Zweck*). Third, we review Kant’s teaching of the sublime as recognition of the majesty of the law, with special attention to the principles of reflective judgment and how an aesthetics of the sublime connects perception and morals. Fourth, we summarize the teleological role of reason and freedom in Kant’s doctrine, which unifies Kant’s thought into

a systematic architectonic and reveals that in Kant's view all uses of reason are governed by the moral imperative.

We then give some preliminary indications of how contemporary phenomenologists criticize some aspects of Kant's imperatives and retain others. Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Lingis reject Kant's notion of autonomy as inward and detached from the exteriority of things, objects, and persons. Instead of the synthetic representation of objects required by Kant, the phenomenologists directly respond to the exterior world. Merleau-Ponty criticizes Kant's mathematization of perception but characterizes perception as an appropriate response to the imperatives of things' preconfigured essences. Although all the phenomenologists reject Kant's formulation of the moral imperative as universal law, Levinas retains the immediacy and imperative character of Kantian respect of others with the command that alterity places on subjectivity. Lingis, with the elemental imperative, retains Kant's concern with the sublime as a fundamental revelation of imperatives. For Lingis, however, the rational does not equate with the required. There are moral imperatives that are beyond Kant's rational ones. There is the intrinsic importance of a situation that requires action, a force that intrudes with the imperative urgency of what one has to do.

Finally, all the phenomenologists maintain the Kantian conception of philosophy in which fundamental imperatives govern all action and inquiry. By providing an overview of the place of imperatives in Kant's philosophy, and a review of how the contemporary phenomenology has critically appropriated and developed Kant's accounts of imperatives, it is hoped that this work will expand the scope of the inquiry beyond the usual emphasis on epistemology in the two schools and contribute to the continuing dialogue between Kant and phenomenology. With their rectification of Kant's internal, autonomous, and rational imperative, the phenomenologists retain a central role for imperatives in our response to the exterior directives of the world of things, elements, and other persons. The interiority of Kant's form of law has been replaced with the external force of imperative directives, but phenomenology retains the imperative of the human relation with the world, which organizes experience consistently and coherently as the imperative starting point for intelligibility. Furthermore, by retaining the force of the imperative, contemporary phenomenology saves the subject from becoming a mere locus in the relations of power. By taking up imperatives, the phenomenological subject becomes a force itself, as a source of resources. In these ways, the imperative, with its relation of command and subordination, is an irreversible relation of force *par excellence*.

## CHAPTER I

### KANT'S IMPERATIVES

#### *The Nature of Kant's Imperatives and Their Context in the History of Moral Philosophy*

Kant offers something new in the history of moral philosophy when he notes in the first section of the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* that "... the will stands, as it were, at a crossroads...."<sup>1</sup> This crossroads is the intersection of the will's *a priori* formal principle and its *a posteriori* material incentive. One of these must determine the will's action. But if the action is to be of unqualified moral worth, as when done from duty, it is determined by the formal principle of volition to the exclusion of the material incentive of self-interest. The formal principle also excludes any action done in the interest of happiness, as happiness is always an *a posteriori* concept, whose attainment is conditional. Thus, happiness, whether Aristotle's teleology of "an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue"<sup>2</sup> or the empiricists' the protection of life and property, is always a moral contingency. Aristotle offers a complex analysis of happiness as rooted in a philosophical anthropology of the teleology of the human soul whose rational part guides us in moderating our actions and develops continent character. But Kant objects to happiness as the condition of morality, even in Aristotle's deeper sense of happiness as a state of character rather than a mere feeling. The moral will for Aristotle would not be determined by an unconditional *a priori* principle but by attaining its object. Although the moral object for Aristotle is virtue, the teleology of virtue is nevertheless conditional and cannot supply the unconditional morality that Kant seeks.

Likewise, the empiricists make morals contingent upon the knowledge claims of human nature via experience. Specifically, the utilitarians make moral worth an *a posteriori* measurement of happiness and categorize the greatest good as the greatest benefit to all. The empiricists view morals as grounded in the various knowledge claims of human nature, in what can be seen as a pared-down version of Aristotle's virtues of happiness: for Thomas Hobbes, the protection of life and property; for David Hume, the benevolence of moral feeling and public utility of social virtue (including the utility of religion, which was before often taken as the *a priori* source of

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1. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 13, 400.

2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, ch. 13. *Introduction to Aristotle*, trans. W. D. Ross, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1947), 328.

the good); and for John Locke, the pursuit of happiness. The utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, measured morals by the degree of benefit of an action's outcome, even with Mill's qualitative stipulations, including that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."<sup>3</sup> In sum, Kant views any morality grounded in human nature, whether in Aristotle's philosophical anthropology of happiness as the virtue of human nature or in empiricism's knowledge claims derived from experience, to be conditional and contingent on the outcomes of moral actions. In no way can these objects be the source of an unconditional metaphysics of morals.

What Kant seeks is an autonomous moral principle purified of all empirical knowledge or outcomes, a principle that determines the will before it undertakes any action whatsoever. Kant finds this supreme moral principle in the categorical imperative, which determines the will *a priori* and unconditionally. Against the various views in the philosophical moral tradition on human nature, Kant claims that the moral worth of an action is not in the purpose to which it attains but in its maxim, or principle, whose worth can be known *a priori*. Kant finds the categorical and unconditional basis of his metaphysics of morals in the pure rational will before it activates itself. The rational will autonomously supplies its own imperative structure for moral action: "I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law."<sup>4</sup> Instead of empirically deriving the supreme moral principle, Kant takes the categorical imperative to be a "fact of reason"<sup>5</sup> and sees reason as supplying its own telos in the practical sphere. In response to modernity's never-ending dialectic of reason as a tool for the pursuit of happiness, which creates more and more desires, Kant turns to reason itself to determine its own limits and to supply its own moral teleology autonomously. Kant notes that it is one and the same reason that determines what can and cannot be known epistemologically and that supplies the unconditional moral law – reason is the same in the "pure" realm of concepts and "practical" realm of moral action. Because of the self-limiting boundaries of reason, Kant regards the *Ding-an-sich* as unknowable. This propedeutic of the critique of pure reason leads Kant to assert that "dogmatic" metaphysics or theology cannot supply the good in itself ontologically, because neither being in itself nor the thing in itself can be known by us. Reason, however, can affect the rational will autonomously, which allows Kant to offer his metaphysics of morals in response to the crisis of reason reduced to an instrument for the pursuit of happiness. Reason now autonomously supplies its own end in morals, instead of heteronomously pursuing various empirical ends.

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3. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 10.

4. Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 14, 402.

5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 28, 5:31.



In the preface to the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explains that he wants to purify the metaphysics of morals, to rid it of its empirical conditionality by examining the parameters that reason sets before itself autonomously, *a priori*, and unconditionally. To purify the metaphysics of morals, he examines duty and its relation to absolute necessity. Kant's project of purification in the metaphysics of morals was in response to a crisis of reason, which Jean-Jacques Rousseau saw in the reduction of reason to an instrument for the pursuit of desires. Begun by Hobbes and developed by the British empiricists and utilitarians, the instrumentalization of reason makes it a device for measuring the outcomes of moral actions as empirical objects. When reason becomes the means for the "pursuit of happiness," it creates more and more ends to be pursued, reinforcing reason as a mere means. But Kant seeks to establish reason as an end in itself, providing its own moral teleology.<sup>6</sup> In Kant's view, reason had precipitated a historical crisis of pursuing more and more "happineses," but only reason itself could supply the solution to this crisis. In morals, Kant separates the practical rules based on experience, via empiricism and philosophical anthropology, from the pure moral law. Precepts founded on experience can give us conditional rules for conduct but cannot give us an *a priori* moral law of necessity. Instead of determining moral worth or virtue on empirical or anthropological grounds, Kant insists that "all moral philosophy rests entirely on its pure part."<sup>7</sup> In this way, Kant advocates a morality of *a priori* and universal necessity, purified of all empirical or anthropological contingencies. Further, Kant avoids falling into a dogmatic metaphysics because, like the thing in itself, the good in itself cannot be known. Rather, Kant grounds his metaphysics of morals in the human will – specifically in the rational will. The human will stands at a crossroads: one path leads to the hypothetical imperative of the will's empirical objects of self-interest, the other to the categorical imperative of unconditional moral law. Technical rules of skill for attaining empirical objects are merely hypothetical imperatives because their determining power is contingent on their attainment, whereas the moral law is categorical because it commands *a priori* and therefore unconditionally. The categorical imperative admits no exceptions for our self-interest, an interest that Kant sees as another manifestation of empiricism in ethics – these exceptions to moral law are made in the interest of the "dear self." Because Kant focuses on the moral will itself and not its objects, he is the first to speak of the categorical imperative in morals: "The metaphysics of morals has to investigate the idea and principles of a possible pure will and not the actions and conditions of human will as such...."<sup>8</sup> Because the

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6. Rousseau was not convinced of reason's autonomous teleology; rather, he advocated the cultivation of political and educational forces for the rehabilitation of reason and human nature.

7. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3, 389.

8. *Ibid.*, 4, 390.

human will is free, rational, and moral, it can and is to be determined *a priori* by the form of law, which is to say that the will can be and is to be commanded categorically.

*Kant on Sensibility and the Understanding*

*Appearances.* Immanuel Kant's doctrine of perception can be seen as an attempt to redeem appearances from the philosophical tradition's discredit of them – in metaphysics' claims of appearance as illusion or allusion to essence, and in empiricism's claims of skepticism and sense deception. With Kant, a radically new notion of appearances emerges. His concern is not with the immutable essence behind the appearance but with the appearance itself within the limits of human intuition in space and time. Although he did not completely abandon the *Ding-an-sich* by claiming that it is still thinkable, Kant did regard the thing-in-itself as unknowable in the sphere of sensibility. In regard to perception, Kant emphasizes that "... we cannot treat the special conditions of sensibility as conditions of the possibility of things, but only of their appearances...."<sup>9</sup>

In this way, Kant was the first to legitimize the realm of appearances, the area central to phenomenology. Kant replaced the traditional duality of appearance and essence, which began with Plato and subordinated appearances to forms, with a concern about the conditions that make appearance possible. For Kant, the philosophical task is not to reconstruct the essence lying behind appearances. The question is how appearances, which cannot exist in themselves, exist for the perceiver. Kant underscores the importance of appearance in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Even if we could bring our intuition to the highest degree of clearness, we should not thereby come any nearer to the constitution of objects in themselves.... What the objects may be in themselves would never become known to us even through the most enlightened knowledge of that which is alone given us, namely, their appearance."<sup>10</sup>

Appearances need to be organized by the human mind so that they can become coherent and consistent phenomena; in this way, appearances become stable objects. For this reason, Kant takes the appearance of objects to be knowable only as representations of the mind. To support this dictum, he explains that there are only two possible ways in which the synthetic representations of consciousness and their objects can obtain the necessary relation to one another. Either the object alone or the subject's representation alone makes the object possible. He rejects the former as empirical and *a posteriori*, and accepts the latter because "none the less the representation is *a priori* determinate of the object...."<sup>11</sup> In this way, the

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9. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 72, A 27/B 43.

10. *Ibid.*, 83, A 43/B 60.

11. *Ibid.*, 125, A 92/B 124-5.

mind of the perceiver brings the necessary structure of order to appearances.<sup>12</sup>

### *Husserl and Heidegger on Kant's Appearances*

Although Kant's doctrine legitimizes the realm of appearances, Kantism and phenomenology have some fundamental differences. For Edmund Husserl, Kant's underlying allegiance to the *Ding-an-sich* prevents a proper entrée into the realm of appearances. According to Husserl, phenomenology starts "from below" with concrete phenomena, but Kant and the Neo-Kantians begin "from above" with abstract formulae, which are taken for granted.<sup>13</sup> What is needed is not only a critique of pure or abstract reason but a more radical critique of all reason. Philosophy must begin with the phenomena and the problems themselves.<sup>14</sup> Kant's transcendentalism in which the mind brings synthetic structure to things prevents us from heeding Husserl's well-known phenomenological battle cry "*zu den Sachen*"<sup>15</sup> – to return to the things themselves. For Husserl, Kant's Copernican revolution was not sufficiently radical. With his underlying regard for the *Ding-an-sich*, Kant deals only with form, whereas Husserl distances phenomenology from the theory of mental construction. Because Husserlian consciousness is *Bewusst-sein*, a sphere of being, phenomenology is a rigorously descriptive science, whereas Kant's transcendental critique of reason is deduced from categories of the mind.

In Husserl's view, although Kant's formalism of a necessary knowledge is unimpeachable, it says nothing of the content of knowledge, and thus does not breach Descartes' dualism of phenomena and the intellectual essence of the *Ding-an-sich*. Husserl finds the entire essential content of reality in the phenomena themselves. It is intentionality, not the mind's synthetic projections, that constitutes the objects of Husserlian consciousness and renders them intelligible. There is no need to speak of things-in-themselves, because what things are is adequately revealed in

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12. Howard Caygill notes that although space and time coordinate the objects of sense, they do so in accordance with "an internal principle of the mind" governed by "stable and innate laws" (§4 of Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation*), which is not produced spontaneously by the mind. Space and time are aspects of the passive receptivity of mind, as opposed to the active and spontaneous work of the understanding; however, they nevertheless organize the matter of sensation (*A Kant Dictionary*, London: Blackwell Press, 1995; 373).

13. Herbert Spiegelberg. *The Phenomenological Movement* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 156.

14. *Ibid.*, 107-9.

15. Edmund Husserl. *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, Quentin Lauer, trans. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 96.

consciousness.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, Nicolai Hartmann notes, knowledge consists in laying hold (*erfassen*) of an object, in contrast to a productive act of creating it, as the Neo-Kantians had interpreted knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

Like Husserl, Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* criticizes the formalism in Kant's doctrine of subjectivity. Although he credits Kant with avoiding cutting the "I" adrift from thinking, Heidegger claims that Kant has done so without starting with the "I think" itself in its full essential content as an "I think something." By beginning with the mere "I think," Kant has overlooked what is ontologically presupposed in taking the "I think something" as a basic characteristic of the self. Heidegger understands this "something" as an entity within-the-world, which presupposes our being-in-the-world. It is this concrete context of subjectivity as always already in the world that Kant has ontologically overlooked. As a consequence, Kant's "I" was forced into an isolated subjectivity, accompanying representations in an ontologically indefinite way.<sup>18</sup>

Heidegger also criticizes another aspect of Kant's formalism – Kant's neglect of the importance of temporality in the ontological status of *Dasein*, which bars the way to a true analysis of a subjectivity that is always already situated in the world. In Heidegger's view, Kant took over Descartes' position of the *cogito* quite dogmatically, even though he had gone beyond Descartes in other essential respects. Although Heidegger admits that Kant had brought time back into the subject again, he claims that Kant's analysis remained oriented to the traditional understanding of time as the objective presence of a stream of "nows." Because the decisive connection between time and the "I think" remained shrouded in darkness, Kant made the essential omission of failing to provide an ontology of *Dasein*.<sup>19</sup> Because the Kantian account of time remained within the structures that Aristotle had set forth, Kant's basic ontological orientation thus remained that of the Greeks.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these fundamental differences between Kantism and the early phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, we can find a place for Kant's imperatives in the directives of contemporary phenomenology. The later phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Lingis, offer some criticisms of the imperatives overlooked in Husserlian intentionality and Heideggerian equipmentality. Imperatives take shape as *praktognosia* in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine in which objects are objectives, tasks for our accomplishment. Levinas finds imperatives in sensation that support perception and direct sensibility through the mode of enjoyment;

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16. Quentin Lauer. Introduction to *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, 21.

17. Spiegelberg. *The Phenomenological Movement*, 323.

18. Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 367.

19. *Ibid.*, 45.

20. *Ibid.*, 49.

furthermore, these imperatives underlie Merleau-Ponty's objects of *praktognosia* and Heideggerian *Zeug*. There is also in Levinas's doctrine the more powerful imperative of alterity in the face and speech of the human other, which contests our contentment in enjoyment. Lingis, in a revision and synthesis of both Kant's and Levinas's doctrines, discerns an elemental imperative. Because it is "elementality," Lingis's elemental imperative is prior to alterity, carries its own imperative to deepen itself, and commands us to deepen our experience of life itself. In addition, it carries the call to sublime action in which, like Kantism, we restrain our self-interest in the service of expansive beauty.

### *Passive Sensibility and Active Understanding*

Kant begins the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the words: "There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience."<sup>21</sup> Kant, however, rejects empiricism's view that concepts may be derived from outer experience. Rather, concepts precede and are presupposed by experience. For experience to be intelligible, it must have structures that make it coherent and consistent. Specifically for Kant, experience is always within the context of space and time, the forms of intuition brought to sensibility by the human mind, forms that cannot be abstracted from outer sensations. Kant asserts the conformity of outer experience to internal understanding when he says: "Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuition without concepts are blind."<sup>22</sup>

As we can see from this quotation, in Kant's view, human knowledge has two components – sensibility and understanding, which are, respectively, passive and active. Objects are not possible without the coordinating concepts spontaneously generated by the perceiving mind; appearances by themselves are the indeterminate matter of empirical intuition. Thus, Kant bifurcates the faculties of intuition and understanding, respectively, into the exteriority of sensibility and the interiority of thought. Kant insists that these disparate faculties of intuition and understanding can be harmoniously coordinated, and "to neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other."<sup>23</sup> But experience, by necessity, must be structured *a priori* to make knowledge consistent and coherent by space and time, the pure forms of intuition.<sup>24</sup>

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21. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 41, B1.

22. *Ibid.*, 93, A 51/B 75.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Caygill offers some clarification of space and time as sensible forms in Kant's doctrine (*A Kant Dictionary*, 373-4). As discussed in the *Inaugural Dissertation*, they are the principles of the form of the sensible world and constitute the formal element of sensibility. Space and time are "pure intuitions" for Kant, as they are presupposed in the sensation of things and

With this relation of sensibility and the understanding, it is tempting to posit an imperative structure in Kant's doctrine of sensibility. But this claim for imperatives in sensibility cannot be made directly, as imperatives are commands that affect a will. Sensibility for Kant, however, does not engage the will of the perceiver. The raw data of our sensibility, or "receptivity," are spontaneously organized by concepts from the faculty of the understanding.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to thought's productive power of concepts, Kant emphasizes the "givenness" of perceptual content, and hence the passivity of receptivity: "Our knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations (receptivity for impressions), the second is the power of knowing an object through these representations (spontaneity [the production] of concepts). Through the first the object is *given* to us, through the second the object is

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cannot be abstracted from outer sensations. By arguing in this way, Kant is able to distinguish his account of space and time from the empiricist view that they are abstracted from the objects of sense, and from the rationalist view that they are the confused perceptions of an objective order of things. Further, space and time are "intuitions" because they "coordinate" the objects of sense but do not subsume them in the manner of concepts. Kant further develops space and time as the forms of intuition in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The role of space and time within the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to coordinate the objects of sensibility before their unification in a judgment by the concepts of the understanding. Caygill notes that much of the philosophical action of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is dedicated to showing how this may be accomplished.

In light of our next section on "Geometry and Natural Law," we would add that Kant asserts that one intuits the whole of space and time ("Space is represented as an infinite given magnitude.") *Critique of Pure Reason*, 69, A 25/B 39. "The infinitude of time signifies nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is possible only through limitations of one single time that underlies it." *Critique of Pure Reason*, 75, A 32-3/B 47-8). From the underlying infinity of space and time, Kant explains that our immediate intuition is in the form of an unlimited whole: "But when an object is so given that its parts, and every quantity of it, can be determinately represented only through limitation, the whole representation cannot be given through concepts, since they contain only partial representations; on the contrary, such concepts must themselves rest on immediate intuition." (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 75, A 32/B 48). Although the intuition of the entirety of space and time is problematic in the finite human sphere, Kant's assertion allows him to maintain the Newtonian position of space as homogeneous ("Space is essentially one." *Critique of Pure Reason*, 69, A 25/B 39).

25. We shall see in our next chapter that an imperative structure can be found in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. Merleau-Ponty takes perception to be an act of behavior as an active intensification of objects. In this case, one may correctly speak of imperatives in sensibility, because here perception is an active behavior that involves the will.

thought in relation to that [given] representation (which is a mere determination of the mind).<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, “The faculty of sensible intuition is strictly only a receptivity, a capacity of being affected in a certain manner with representations....<sup>27</sup> Because of its passivity, sensibility does not entail any imperative for Kant; however, the understanding does entail the imperatives of thought. “Pure understanding is thus in the categories the law of the synthetic unity of appearances, and thereby first and originally makes experience, as regards its form, possible.”<sup>28</sup> These laws of the understanding are characterized by an imperative force and form. Conformity to these laws are necessary for experience to become intelligible or even to make experience possible: “Although we learn many laws through experience, they are only special determinations of still higher laws, and the highest of these, under which the others all stand, issue *a priori* from the understanding itself. They are not borrowed from experience; on the contrary, they have to confer upon appearances their conformity to law, and so to make experience possible. Thus the understanding is something more than a power of formulating rules through comparison of appearances; it is itself the lawgiver of nature.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the third formulation of the categorical imperative in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, “... the will of every rational being as a will that legislates universal law,”<sup>30</sup> commands thought to be in command.<sup>31</sup> More plainly, Kant states that “This law gives to the sensible world ... the form of an intelligible world.”<sup>32</sup> Without the imperative organization of the concepts of the understanding, we could make no sense of sensibility. The world would be an amorphous, passing, unintelligible spectacle. Thus, an imperative weighs on understanding from the beginning: the imperative of reason to become practical. This practical imperative underscores the coherence brought to sensibility by the understanding.

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26. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 92, A 50/B 74.

27. *Ibid.*, 441, A 494/B 522.

28. *Ibid.*, 149, A 128.

29. *Ibid.*, 147-8, A 126.

30. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 38, 431.

31. As Lingis notes, “Thought must think itself. Once thought begins to think, it must do so consistently so that the faculty of the understanding can make sense of sensibility.” Lingis affirms Kant’s teaching that a practical imperative weighs on the understanding in perception, an imperative that supplies thought’s content. “We have learned from Kant that to recognize something in the spectacle of passing sensations, and to enable coherent action, one must form correct concepts. For there to be a cogent world, one must first submit to a practical imperative – this imperative is the first fact.” *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 16.

32. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 44, 5:43.

*Geometry and Natural Law*

In Kant's bifurcation of sensibility and understanding, appearance is divided into matter and form.<sup>33</sup> Matter is what in appearances corresponds to sensation. Form determines the manifold of appearance and allows it to be ordered in certain relations. Form is "that general characteristic of sensible things which makes its appearance in so far as the various things which affect the senses are coordinated by a certain natural law of the mind."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Kant claims that the order that forms sensation cannot itself be sensation. Because the order that forms sensation cannot itself be sensation, we can see the immediate force and *a priori* form of Kant's imperative that weighs on the understanding. Because this order of form itself is not given to sensibility, Kant infers that this order is the pure, *a priori* form of intuition of space and time. Appearances are potentially deceptive sensible impressions but possess their own order and organization. This order can be further articulated by the logic of the *a priori* concepts of the understanding or the categories. Thus "synthesized," they become phenomena: "Appearances, so far as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories, are called *phaenomena*."<sup>35</sup> Phenomena are appearances that have been organized within the framework of the pure forms of the intuition of space and time governed by objective rules supplied by the understanding.

Arthur Melnick notes that Kant brings intelligibility to space with geometric form. Geometry is involved at the fundamental level in our representation of things. The application of some geometry or other to the manifold is as *a priori* or as necessary as the intersubjectivity of singular representation.<sup>36</sup> In Kant's view, as "the schemata and conditions of everything sensitive in the human condition,"<sup>37</sup> space and time provide the geometric axes of infinity on which all possible objects of perception could be mapped. The totality of these objects, the sum of all appearances, would be "nature." Thus, for Kant, the character of natural law pervades the

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33. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. 65-6, A 20/B 34.

34. Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation and Early Writings on Space*, trans. John Handyside (Westport, CN: Hyperion Press, 1979), 44. *Über die Form und die Prinzipien der Sinnen- und Geisteswelt* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1958), 21.

35. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. 265, A 248-9.

36. Arthur Melnick, "Kant's Theory of Space." In *The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Richard Kennington. Vol. 12, *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 51 (Melnick adds that Kant would like to conclude from this that which geometry obtains is *a priori* determinable but that this is a mistake.)

37. Kant, *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation and Early Writings on Space*, §13, 53. *Über die Form und die Prinzipien der Sinnen- und Geisteswelt* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1958), 37.



faculty of the understanding. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes all empirical laws as “special determinations of the pure laws of understanding” (*besondere Bestimmungen der reinen Gesetze des Verstandes*),<sup>38</sup> which is the “lawgiver of nature” (*die Gesetzgebung für die Natur*).<sup>39</sup> Empirical laws apply “higher principles of understanding” (*höheren Grundsätzen des Verstandes*)<sup>40</sup> to “special cases of appearance” (*besondere Fälle der Erscheinung*)<sup>41</sup> and derive their necessity from grounds that are valid *a priori* and antecedent to all experience.

For Kant, the conditions of the possibility of experience are the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience. Hence, nature is the totality of all possible objects of perceptions: “categories are concepts which prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, and therefore to nature, the sum of all appearances.”<sup>42</sup> In theoretical philosophy, the “conformity of law to all the objects of experience” defines the “formal aspect of nature” that complements its material aspect as the “totality of all objects of experience.”<sup>43</sup> This conformity to law is conferred upon nature by the understanding, making possible both experience and the objects of experience.<sup>44</sup> Because sensibility is passive and the understanding spontaneously organizes perceived objects into conceptual objects, Kant characterizes the understanding as the faculty of rules. “Sensibility gives us forms (of intuition), but understanding gives us rules.... Rules, so far as they are objective, and therefore necessarily depend upon the knowledge of the object, are called laws.”<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, because human perceptions do not automatically conform to the conditions for being universal laws (as there is the possibility of incorrect perception), we can see that the law of the understanding immediately weighs on sensibility as an imperative or command instead of a causal determination. Finally, with the conformity to law of all objects of experience, the totalizing imperative of theoretical philosophy can account for the entirety of all possible objects of experience. Reason’s imperative role of formulating the content of thought in nature is what brings intelligibility to the passing spectacle around us. This accounts not only for individual objects but for the totality of experience, i.e., the world, as nature is, in Kant’s doctrine, “the object of all possible experience.”<sup>46</sup>

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38. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 148, A126-7.

39. *Ibid.*, 148, A126.

40. *Ibid.*, 195, A159/B198.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 172, B 163.

43. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 4:295-6; §16, 39-40.

44. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 147, A 126.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*, 140, A 114.

*Conformity to Law: Subject and Object*

In Kant's doctrine, before there can be any empirical intuition, the objects of perception are commanded by apodictic geometric law, which is universal and necessary. This law also bears from the beginning on the perceiving subject, inasmuch as the unity of the apperception of transcendental subjectivity accounts for the unity of objects in Kant's Copernican revolution of ideas. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant calls the unity of transcendental apperception "the highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge."<sup>47</sup> In this way, Kant's unity of transcendental apperception is analogous to the categorical imperative. In Kant's view, in order for the data of intuition to be understood, there must be some unity of apperception to which perceived objects are represented. "It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me."<sup>48</sup> For any intuition to be my intuition, it must be related to the "I think."

The "I think" itself is also an act of spontaneity, but it does not originate in or belong to sensibility. It is the product of pure or originary apperception, namely "that self-consciousness which, while generating the representation '*I think*' ... cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation."<sup>49</sup> In this way, the spontaneity of "I think" of transcendental apperception allows Kant to consider intuitions as the proper objects of knowledge, and it is also the condition of their synthesis by the understanding.

In regard to spontaneity and law, Slavoj Žižek holds that in Kant's transcendental doctrine the subject's spontaneous act of transcendental apperception obeys necessary laws, which allow it to change the confused flow of sensations into reality.<sup>50</sup> Because this spontaneity of apperception is independent of empirical intuition, it is self-legislative and thus characterized by imperative obedience to necessary laws. In the "Paralogisms of Pure Reason" in the first *Critique*, Kant emphasizes the spontaneity of pure reason as self-legislating and as spontaneous obedience to law (here Kant also indicates how human existence can be determined independently of empirical intuition through the *a priori* moral law): "Should it be granted that we may in due course discover, not in experience but in certain laws of the pure employment of reason – laws which are not merely logical rules, but which while holding *a priori* also concern our existence – ground for regarding ourselves as *legislating* completely a

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47. *Ibid.*, 154, B 135.

48. *Ibid.*, 152-3, B 131-2.

49. *Ibid.*, 153, B 132.

50. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 44.

*priori* in regard to our *existence*, and as determining this existence, there would thereby be revealed a spontaneity through which our reality would be determinable, independently of empirical intuition.”<sup>51</sup> This spontaneity of pure reason as self-legislating and lawful obedience can also be said for the spontaneous unity of apperception that occurs with Kant’s “I think” in the unity of apperception.

Spontaneity as obedience to law is one of the aspects of Kant’s turning from the things-in-themselves to human thought’s structures and strictures, which make appearances possible. Appearance is “that which, while inseparable from the representation of the object, is not to be met with in the object itself, but always in relation to the subject.”<sup>52</sup> Without recourse to the *Ding-an-sich* in appearances, Kant stresses the *a priori* necessity of conformity to law in the unity of apperception in the faculty of the understanding. He admits that his assertion at first sounds strange, but that examining this path through subjectivity will yield the *a priori* and necessary structures of the unity of thought:

That nature should direct itself according to our subjective ground of apperception, and should indeed depend upon it in respect of its conformity to law, sounds very strange and absurd. But when we consider that this nature is not a thing in itself but merely an aggregate of appearances, so many representations of the mind, we shall not be surprised that we can discover it only in the radical faculty of all our knowledge, namely, in transcendental apperception, in that unity on account of which alone it can be entitled object of all possible experience, that is, nature. Nor shall we be surprised that just for this very reason this unity can be known *a priori*, and therefore as necessary.<sup>53</sup>

As Kant notes in the second section of the *Grounding*, “Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, pure reason is practical of itself and immediately law giving. The will is thought of as independent of empirical conditions and determined by the mere form of law.<sup>55</sup> Our “nature” is to be determined imperatively in accordance with the representation of the law. The imperative of theoretical reason weighs on the understanding to turn the data of subjective sensibility into enduring objects on the space-time grid governed by the logic and

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51. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 382, B 430.

52. *Ibid.*, 89, B 70.

53. *Ibid.*, 140, A 114.

54. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 23, 4:412.

55. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 28, 5:31.

causality of the structures of the rational mind. In addition, this imperative in thought that constitutes objectivity in the phenomenal field also constitutes rational subjectivity. We shall next see how this same rational imperative is at work in Kant's moral doctrine.

## IMPERATIVES IN KANT'S METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

### *Maxims, Laws, Imperatives*

Having seen the role of imperatives in Kant's doctrine of sensibility and understanding, we can now outline how imperatives more broadly affect the will of a rational moral agent in Kant's chief philosophical concern, the metaphysics of morals. Some preliminary distinctions in Kant's moral terminology of maxims, laws, and imperatives may be useful. As Allen Wood notes in *Kant's Ethical Philosophy*, a maxim is the subjective principle of an action, i.e., a principle that the subject makes for itself to govern its action. It is "subjective" in that it is valid only for the subject who adopts it – binding on the subject only for as long as he or she chooses to accept it as a rule of action. In this sense, maxims are empirical; they are binding only when accepted. "Maxim" contrasts with "law" in that a law is a principle on which a subject *should* act. Law does not need to attain empirical actuality to have form, force, or worth. A law is immediately binding on the subject through the rational faculty, and its validity is independent of the subject's arbitrary adoption of the rule. Laws take the form of imperatives when they apply to a will that is not perfectly rational or "holy"<sup>56</sup> – that is, a will that can fail to follow them and hence must constrain itself to follow them.

Kant implies in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that our rational condition, which necessitates the virtuous self-restraint of natural impulses, eclipses holiness itself. Holiness would be a condition of perfection in which all actions are, by necessity, universal and morally good. But human action is characterized by both rational and natural impulses. This tension of reason and natural desire, however, allows for human virtue to overcome the limits of our physical nature. Because the human will can overcome the pull of self-serving impulses and subordinate them to the categorical imperative of reason, humans can achieve a type of virtue not possible in holiness. "But [human] virtue so shines as an idea that it seems, by human standards, to eclipse holiness itself, which is never tempted to break the law."<sup>57</sup> Kant underscores human virtue by citing Albrecht Haller, "Man with all his faults / Is better than the host of angels without will."<sup>58</sup>

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56. Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 348-9.

57. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158, 6:396-7.

58. *Ibid.*, 6:397.

For our actions to have unqualified moral worth, our self-serving natural desires must be subordinated to unconditional reason and universal morality. The will must be commanded categorically, without exception for the demands of the “dear self.” Kant characterizes the demands of self-interest as hypothetical, as they are merely conditional, i.e., they may or may not be fulfilled. Hypothetical imperatives are not *a priori* but *a posteriori* in two ways. First, the desires themselves are contingent: if I want *x*, I must do *y*. The antecedent “if I want *x*” in this proposition is what makes the statement conditional, and thus “*x*” is a contingent desire. Second, hypothetical imperatives are contingent on success of attaining their desired ends. Their philosophical status is merely empirical; in no way are they unconditional. Kant juxtaposes the conditionality of hypothetical imperatives with the unconditionality of the categorical imperative, which alone can supply the standards of the supreme good in a metaphysics of morals. In Kant’s view, all ethical theories based on happiness or utility are based on the contingencies of the achievement of hypothetical imperatives. These contingencies can never be the basis of Kant’s philosophical aim in ethics – a metaphysics of morals based on the *a priori* categorical imperatives of unconditional duty.

A will that can fail to follow the commands of law is a free will. But this free will is also, for Kant, rational and has the unique capacity to act autonomously in accordance with the representation of laws. This capacity of autonomy distinguishes the rational and natural domains. Nature can only follow its laws and, without reason, cannot act in accordance with the representation of laws. With its capacity for reason, the human will can follow the unconditional moral laws without making exceptions for itself. Only the human will can subordinate the hypothetical imperatives of self-interest to the categorical imperative of reason and morals. When the unconditional motive of respect for the moral law serves as the basis of our actions, as with duty, these actions attain the irreproachable status of unqualified moral worth.

#### *The Categorical Imperative and Freedom*

The theory of morality that Kant develops in the *Critique of Practical Reason* hinges on reason and practical rational activity. Speculative reason becomes activated by the exercise of practical reason, and practical reason animates and completes Kant’s project of theoretical reason. With Kant’s view of the moral law as a “fact of reason,”<sup>59</sup> pure reason is of itself

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59. Karl Ameriks explains that Kant’s “fact of reason” is a “fact” because it is not *derived* from anything prior to it and that it is “of reason” because it is understood to be given not from the contingencies of feeling but through our essential character as rational agents. *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*:

practical in establishing the moral principle and completes Kant's rational system. According to Lewis White Beck,<sup>60</sup> Kant originated the term practical reason in 1765.<sup>61</sup> Before this, one spoke separately of *Verstand* and *Wille*, but Kant unifies reason and will in practical reason. In this way, Kant prepared a new way for the definition of the will itself. Kant's predecessors could only distinguish between higher and lower faculties of desire and, according to Kant, could not single out the unique feature of moral willing. For Kant, the will is the faculty of acting according to a conception of law, specifically rational law, which is not empirically discovered. By identifying the will with practical reason, the basis of moral willing is the universality of theoretical reason rather than the satisfaction of desire driven by impulse. It is the faculty of pure practical reason that gives the unconditioned condition for voluntary action. Kant's moral principle is rational, universal, and unconditional – hence, categorical. “I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.”<sup>62</sup> I should only act in accordance with the representation of the moral law imperatively placed on me.

At the heart of this practical view is the analysis of the will's freedom, which plays a key role in Kant's moral doctrine: “Now, the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason...”<sup>63</sup> The way Kant understands freedom is what allows us to respond to the force of the moral imperative, as an effect of practical reason on sensibility. We are obligated only because we are free, free to do otherwise. An imperative would have no force on a determined being or an absolutely free being. St. Augustine explicated the relation of free will and obligation centuries before, but in contrast to Augustine's doctrine of “genuine” freedom in accordance with eternal law, Kant joins moral obligation to autonomy – the self-giving of law through reason. Although Augustine was the first to introduce the concept of free will into the Western philosophical tradition, he says little about autonomy. Free will and its temporality arise in obligation to the unchanging, divine law. Genuine freedom for Augustine is the human cleaving to this eternal law. Genuine freedom for Kant, however, is to follow human reason on its own basis, i.e., to subject one's actions to one's reason autonomously. In Kant's view, autonomy, the self-giving of law,

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*Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 70.

60. Lewis White Beck. *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 37-41.

61. Immanuel Kant, *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen im Winterhalbjahr von 1765-66* (II, 312).

62. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 14, 4:402.

63. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3, 5:4.

puts pure reason into action in the practical realm. As Gilles Deleuze notes, “only free beings can be subject to practical reason,”<sup>64</sup> and Deleuze, in fact, sees freedom as the guiding thread of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant adds: “Thus, freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other.”<sup>65</sup> In Kant’s view, autonomy, freedom, and moral deliberation uniquely characterize finite human reason. Additionally, in the broader view of philosophical history, the autonomy that characterizes the essence of Kant’s moral doctrine stands in stark contrast to the heteronomy of happiness and its disparate ends, which Kant sees in classical naturalist virtues and modern utilitarianism.

From the start, Kant sees the moral imperative itself as “a fact of reason.”<sup>66</sup> Moral theory had traditionally been founded on the good as a natural, external object of our capacity of understanding. But for Kant, any moral theory that takes the good as a natural phenomenon makes morality contingent (and *a posteriori*) and deprives morality of its *a priori* universality. By taking the moral law as a fact of reason, Kant begins with morality as a part of our capacity of reason. The moral law is simply an *a priori* fact of reason, immediate and universal; it is not a fact of nature gained through experience.

Kant’s position separates the realms of reason and sensibility, but our disparate faculties of rational cognition and natural desire are to be harmonized. Pure reason is to become practical, as happens when reason legislates over our desires and the rational will determines itself autonomously. The very form of the law of morality is the determining ground of all moral maxims. Kant lays out the primacy of the moral law in the “Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason” in the second *Critique*: “For, pure reason, *practical of itself*, is here immediately lawgiving. The will is thought as independent of empirical conditions and hence, as pure will, as determined *by the mere form of law*, and this determining ground is regarded as the supreme condition of all moral maxims.”<sup>67</sup> For Kant, this immediate lawgiving capacity of pure practical reason engenders a sense of philosophical wonder and gives morality a metaphysical dimension that was traditionally believed not possible: “The thing [the immediacy of the moral law] is strange (*befremdlich*) enough, and has nothing like it in all the rest of our practical cognition.”<sup>68</sup> Kant does not completely separate metaphysics and ethics, whereas Aristotle distinguished them as the science of being that cannot be otherwise and the science of being that can be otherwise. Nor does Kant appeal to an external, theologically driven morality, for that would be a heteronomous exercise of the moral will. Kant

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64. Gilles Deleuze, *La philosophie critique de Kant: doctrine des facultés*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 40.

65. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 26, 5:29.

66. *Ibid.*, 28, 5:31.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

specifies that “for, the *a priori* thought of a possible giving of universal law, which is thus merely problematic, is unconditionally commanded as a law without borrowing anything from experience or from some external will.”<sup>69</sup> By focusing on the will in moral theory, Kant has uncovered heteronomy not only in the objects of the will, but in the will itself in traditional, theologically based ethics. By shifting the focus from the objects of ethics to the moral will, Kant gives central importance to the dynamic of imperative law on free will – an autonomous will that can activate our capacity of reason in the moral sphere.

In Kant’s formulation of the categorical imperative, Ernst Cassirer<sup>70</sup> sees a new designation and a new solution of the basic conflict between freedom and form.<sup>71</sup> The conflict in question here is how we can be subjected to the determinations of form while at the same time be characterized as free. In the concept of autonomy, the contrast between the freedom and form dissolves itself. Within the boundaries of human reason, autonomous thought can only discover and guarantee the authentic objectivity of the laws; it cannot glean objectivity from the world of objects or from metaphysical-theological concepts. “The insight into the substance of this law thus contains at the same time a new self-consciousness in itself whose certainty can be given in no other way and through no other mediation.”<sup>72</sup> Autonomy causes and mediates the break with ethics from every terrestrial and heavenly authority. Because the autonomy of the will “is the self-same law (independent of all conditions of the objects of the

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69. *Ibid.*

70. Ernst Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961) 149-55.

71. Cassirer frames the conflict of subjective freedom and formal, objective determination in the following way: “The function of the pure will cannot be thought without relation to the object, but the decisive question lies in which direction this relation is sought. The ethical deed goes toward the world of the empirical object, but it comes to its true deciding ground, not from the world of these objects. Both demands are in the thought of autonomy as unified in a common logical midpoint” (my translation). [“Die Funktion des reinen Willens kann nicht ohne Beziehung aufs Objekt gedacht werden; aber die entscheidende Frage liegt darin, in welcher Richtung diese Beziehung gesucht wird. Das sittliche Tun geht auf die Welt der empirischen Objekte hin, aber es kommt in seinem wahrhaften Bestimmungsgründen nicht von der Welt dieser Objekte her. Beide Forderungen sind im Gedanken der Autonomie wie in einem gemeinsamen logischen Mittelpunkt vereint.” (*Ibid.*, 150-1)].

72. *Ibid.*, 149 (my translation). “Die Einsicht in den Gehalt dieses Gesetzes birgt daher zugleich den Gehalt eines neuen Selbstbewußtseins in sich, dessen Gewißheit uns auf keinem andern Wege und durch keine andere Vermittlung zuteil werden kann.”

73. *Ibid.*, 151 (my translation). “(unabhängig von aller Beschaffenheit der Gegenstände des Wollens) ein Gesetz ist”.



will),”<sup>73</sup> it designates a unity that is not given from the world of objects but a unity that is seeking and productive. In Cassirer’s view, autonomy proves to be the core of the critique of pure reason, as Kant contends that autonomy is not drawn from the content of the objects of experience but is presupposed by experience. Freedom does not follow from intelligible being but establishes and justifies itself as a datum that is first certain only of itself. With the self-determination of the free rational will, Cassirer argues that the development of the dialectical contrast between subjectivity and objectivity has reached its high point.

Although Kant often speaks of the form of law, for him, moral law is not exclusively formal. Moral law is analogous in *form* to the natural law, but it additionally carries the *force* of law. Henry Allison contends that Kant is quite clear about this moral incentive (or “force” in our terms) as the principle of execution for the supreme principle of the categorical imperative.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Kant notes in his *Lectures on Ethics* that: “Man is not so delicately made that he can be moved by objective grounds.”<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, on the necessity of compelling force in the formal capacity of the understanding, Kant states specifically that: “The understanding obviously can judge, but to give the judgment of the understanding a compelling *force*, to make it an incentive that can move the will to action – this is the philosopher’s stone!”<sup>76</sup>

To be able to affect the will and to effect its autonomous rational ends, the moral law must have both form and force. For Kant, form is the organizing principle, specifically the form of law, which makes imperative force intelligible. Although the moral law is analogous to the universality of natural law, the moral law is not empirically derived but is made possible through freedom. “This law must therefore be the idea of a nature not given empirically and yet possible through freedom, hence a supersensible nature to which we give objective reality at least in a practical respect, since we regard it as an object of our will as pure rational beings.”<sup>77</sup> We cannot intuit – in Kant’s meaning of intuition limited to the empirically sensible – concepts themselves, including the concept of freedom. We must, however, presuppose freedom as a postulate of practical reason because moral laws are only possible in relation to freedom. There would be no tension between the “is” and the “ought” unless we were free – free to do otherwise.

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74. Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 68.

75. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 46.

76. *Ibid.*, 45 (italics added for emphasis).

77. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 39, 5:44.

*Triebfeder: Zwang und Zweck* (Incentive: Force and End)

Kant often speaks of the negative side of freedom as disinterest, i.e., disinterest in one's own desires, or freedom *from* the chains of self-interest, an interest that focuses on the pursuit of individual desires instead of universal morality. He now turns to the positive aspect of lawgiving freedom, which fills the gap between speculative and practical reason left over from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. "The concept of a reason determining the will immediately ... thus is able for the first time to give objective, though only practical, reality to reason, which always became extravagant when it wanted to proceed speculatively with ideas, and changes its *transcendent* use into an *immanent* use."<sup>78</sup> In determining the will, the transcendent reason of pure speculation becomes immanent (i.e., inherent) in its practical use. The ideas of pure reason (e.g., God, the soul, freedom, and the world in its entirety) are in their speculative use transcendent concepts because they are without empirical content. By carrying over the transcendence of pure reason into the immanent realm via the rational will, Kant summons practical reason to provide the moral solution to problems whose resolution was traditionally sought in the realm of metaphysics. In this way, the immanence of practical reason gives the transcendent ideas of pure reason the form and imperative force of "natural" law.

Kant defines the pure, "authentic" (*ächte*) *Triebfeder* as the driving force of ethics via an example of the good conscience of one who has done his duty even though it has caused him great distress:

It is the effect of a respect for something quite different from life, something in comparison and in contrast with which life with all its agreeableness has no worth at all. He still lives only from duty, not because he has the least taste for living.

This is how the genuine moral incentive (*ächte Triebfeder*) of pure practical reason is constituted; it is nothing other than the pure moral law itself insofar as it lets us discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence and subjectively effects respect for their higher vocation in human beings, who are at the same time conscious of their sensible existence and of the dependence, connected with it, on their pathologically affected nature.<sup>79</sup>

But as Kant maps out the metaphysics of morals in the sphere of human freedom and reason, he realizes that it is not enough to say simply

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78. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 42, 5:48.

79. *Ibid.*, 75, 5:88.

that in morals pure reason becomes practical of its own accord. There must be some force to this form. Reason and freedom are the end (*Zweck*) of Kant's moral system, but the moral law must also have some sort of force or compulsion (*Zwang*) on the will. Otherwise, the categorical imperative would operate as a simple mechanical determination. As Jean-François Lyotard<sup>80</sup> notes, it is first necessary to renew the consideration of Kant's demand for the actualization of the faculties of the mind. Otherwise, the faculties would simply be dormant without realization in the practical realm. The practical agent needs a motive or incentive (*Triebfeder*) of the faculty's own interest, an incentive in which to invest the power of the faculties. Kant further acknowledges the necessity of *Triebfeder* because of our finite nature: "All three concepts, however – that of an *incentive* (*Triebfeder*), of an *interest* and of a *maxim* – can be applied only to finite beings. For they presuppose a limitation in the nature of a being, in that the subjective constitution of its choice does not itself accord with the objective law of practical reason; they presuppose a need to be impelled (*angetrieben zu werden*) to activity by something because an internal obstacle is opposed to it."<sup>81</sup> This internal obstacle is the competing *Triebfeder* of self-interest. The *Triebfeder* of the moral law, however, is the one that allows for genuine moral behavior. The dynamic of moral action is self-constraint, as occurs with imperatives. As with imperatives, self-constraint can only occur in a free being. In addressing the opposition of human will to the moral law, as occurs in radical evil, Kant explicitly states that the essential character of moral law is its relation to our free will:

But even if the existence of this propensity to evil in human nature can be demonstrated by experiential proofs of the real opposition, in time, of man's will to the law, such proofs do not teach us *the essential character of that propensity or the ground of this opposition*. Rather, because this character concerns *a relation of the will, which is free* (and the concept of which is therefore not empirical), *to the moral law as an incentive* (the concept of which is, likewise, purely intellectual), it must be apprehended *a priori* through the concept of evil, so far as evil is possible under the laws of freedom (of obligation and accountability).<sup>82</sup>

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80. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Interest of the Sublime." In *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*. Jean-François Courtine, et al. Trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1993), 119-23.

81. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 68, 5:79.

82. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Human Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 30-1, 6:35 (italics added).

Although Kant speaks specifically of evil in the passage above, he shows that the determining ground of all ethical behavior is the relation to the free will. As Kant notes in the *Grounding*, the ethical will stands at the crossroads of the incentives of the *a priori* moral principle and *a posteriori* self-interest. The will can be determined by only one of these competing interests. If an act is to have unqualified moral worth, the *Triebfeder* of the moral law must be the sole incentive that determines the will. By keeping in mind that the moral law is to supply incentive, or force, to its form, we can see that Kant was aware of the practical side of morals as motives, although he is repeatedly accused of an overly formalist ethics.

The moral law, however, does not simply or purely determine the actions of the will. The authentic *Triebfeder* (i.e., incentive, motive, drive, or driving spring) of interest in the moral law competes with the *Triebfeder* of self-interest. These are the unconditional interests of reason versus the self-serving inclinations of pleasure on our natural, physical side. Neither of these types of competing *Triebfeder* in human action can completely subdue the other, although one can be subordinated to the other. The moral goal of free, rational beings is to behave in accordance with universal moral law by subordinating their self-serving inclinations to the higher interest of the moral law. The formal moral law is to serve also as the *Triebfeder* or force on which the morality of every free determination of the will is based.<sup>83</sup> When the moral law is the incentive for human behavior, our actions have guaranteed moral worth, because they are not contingent on self-interest or the empirically observable accounts of others' actions: "For, a maxim of virtue consists precisely in the subjective autonomy of each human being's practical reason and so implies that the law itself, not the conduct of other human beings, must serve as our incentive (*Triebfeder*)."<sup>84</sup>

In this way, the *a priori* form of the moral law carries an immediate force. Self-interest indeed has its force but should be subsequent to what Kant calls our "moral predisposition" (*moralischen Anlage*).<sup>85</sup> Because the unconditional moral law stands higher than and prior to any rule of self-interest, the *Triebfeder* of the moral law carries greater force and even imposes itself on the will. This priority of the moral law's force over the forces of self-interest, however, is not arbitrary. Kant illustrates this priority by the moral law's "irresistible force" on our "moral predisposition" by showing that the *Triebfeder* of the moral law cannot simply be renounced, even when the *Triebfedern* of self-interest are adopted.

Man (even the most wicked) does not, under any maxim whatsoever, repudiate the moral law in the manner of a rebel (renouncing obedience to it). The law, rather, *forces*

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83. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 159, 6:398.

84. *Ibid.*, §52, 223, 6:480.

85. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Human Reason Alone*, 31, 6:35.

*itself (dringt sich) upon him irresistibly by virtue of his moral predisposition; and were no other incentive working in opposition, he would adopt the law into his supreme maxim as the sufficient determining ground of his will; that is, he would be morally good. But by virtue of an equally innocent natural predisposition he depends upon the incentives (Triebfedern) of his sensuous nature and adopts them also (in accordance with the subjective principle of self-love) into his maxim.*<sup>86</sup>

Clearly, the *Triebfedern* of the moral law and self-interest do not have equal force. Because we are physical beings, we cannot extinguish the *Triebfedern* of our sensuous nature, but we can distinguish and subordinate them to the *Triebfeder* of the moral law. This dynamic of subordination is in keeping with the imperative character of Kant's moral doctrine. The categorical imperative of morality is to have force over, command, and subordinate the hypothetical imperatives of self-interest. Again, the subordination is not arbitrary; the moral law takes precedence because of its unconditional *a priori* status in its form and consequently its greater force. If the subordination is reversed and the *Triebfeder* of self-interest eclipses that of the moral law, we then have an instance of radical evil. Kant explains the reversal of the proper subordination of the relation of these *Triebfedern* in his explication of radical evil:

Hence the distinction between a good man and one who is evil cannot lie in the difference between the incentives which they adopt into their maxim (not in the content of the maxim), but rather must depend upon *subordination* (the form of the maxim), *i.e., which of the two incentives (Triebfedern) he makes the condition of the other.* Consequently man (even the best) is evil only in that he reverses the moral order of the incentives when he adopts them into his maxim. He adopts, indeed, the moral law along with the law of self-love; yet when he becomes aware that they cannot remain on par with each other but that one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition, he makes the incentive of self-love and its inclinations the condition of obedience to the moral law; whereas, on the contrary, the latter, as the *supreme condition* of the satisfaction of the former, ought to have been adopted into the universal maxim of the will as the sole incentive.<sup>87</sup>

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86. *Ibid.* (italics added).

87. *Ibid.*, 31-2, 6:35 (italics added).

The sole motive spring or *Triebfeder* is to be the moral law. In this way, our actions are guaranteed unqualified moral worth. Without the guarantee of the moral law as the basis of our conduct, actions may merely be in conformity with duty. Kant insists that it is not enough for moral action to conform to the letter of the moral law. The action must be done from the law itself. Kant explains this distinction in a description of what he calls the “evil heart.”

Such a heart may co-exist with a will which in general is good: it arises from the frailty of human nature, the lack of sufficient strength to follow out the principles it has chosen for itself, joined with its impunity, the failure to distinguish the incentives (even of the well-intentioned actions) from each other by the gauge of morality; and so at last, if the extreme is reached, [it results] from looking only to the squaring of these actions with the law and not to *the derivation of them from the law as the sole motivating spring*. Now even though there does not always follow therefrom an unlawful act and a propensity thereto, namely, *vice*, yet the mode of thought which sets down the absence of such vice as being conformity of the *disposition* to the law of duty (as being virtue) – since in this case *no attention whatever is paid to the motivating forces in the maxim* but only to the observance of the letter of the law – itself deserves to be called a radical perversity in the human heart.<sup>88</sup>

Here Kant clearly speaks of the “motivating forces of the maxim” and makes explicit their derivation from the moral law as the sole motivating spring, or *Triebfeder*. By making the moral law, which supplies the form of Kant’s moral doctrine, its driving force, Kant forges the hinge that joins moral form and force. By providing the sole *Triebfeder* for moral behavior, the moral law supplies both the *Zwang* and *Zweck*, the compelling force and end, of Kant’s metaphysics of morals.

#### *Respect (Achtung) and Triebfedern*

In the *Grounding*, Kant further develops respect for the law (*Achtung für das Gesetz*) as the only *Triebfeder* that can give an action moral worth:

... neither fear nor inclination but *solely respect for the law, is the incentive (Triebfeder) which can give an action moral worth*. Our own will, insofar as it were to act only under the condition of its being able to legislate universal

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88. *Ibid.*, 32-3, 6:37 (italics added).

law by means of its maxims – *this will, ideally possible for all of us, is the proper object of respect*. And the dignity of humanity consists just in its capacity to legislate universal law, though with the condition of humanity's being at the same time itself subject to this very same legislation.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, respect for the law is the sole *Triebfeder* that can give an action moral worth. Respect is not an object of fear or inclination, as these objects are always empirically mediated and any imperative they carry will be merely hypothetical. Kant describes our relations with others as governed by the imperative of respect. He makes this explicit in the *Grounding* with the second formulation of the categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same as an end and never simply as a means."<sup>90</sup> Respect for the Other, and for ourselves, is respect for the moral law within us all.

Respect clearly illustrates how individual inclinations are immediately subordinated to the imperative of law. The tension of the "is" and the "ought" exists because the "ought" of respect commands immediately, before any other force or self-serving inclination can address the will. Respect imperatively governs our relations with other persons, as respect for the moral law within the Other to which I, too, am subject to as a rational being. Emphasizing the rational aspect of humanity that enjoins respect, Kant maintains that: "*Respect* is always directed only to persons, never to things. The latter can awaken in us *inclination* and even *love* if they are animals (e.g., horses, dogs, and so forth), or also *fear*, like the sea, a volcano, a beast of prey, but never *respect*."<sup>91</sup> What we feel for things is closer to admiration or amazement, as with our feeling before terrestrial and celestial beauty. But this is not respect. Kant speaks of an "inner respect" (*innerer Achtung*)<sup>92</sup> toward the Other. Respect is respect for the inner law that commands the Other, as it commands me as a rational being. Kant states that the example of the Other's inner respect holds before me a law that strikes down my self-conceit and makes this law's practicability intuitive by its example. "Respect is a tribute that we cannot refuse to pay to merit, whether we want to or not; we may indeed withhold it outwardly but we still cannot help feeling it inwardly."<sup>93</sup> Not only do we feel respect inwardly, we feel it immediately, before we might empirically construct the Other as an object worthy of respect. Respect weighs immediately on my

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89. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 44, 440 (italics added).

90. *Ibid.*, 36, 429.

91. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor, 66, 5:76.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

subject – I am imperatively subjected to its compelling force, which I cannot help but feel inwardly.

In contrast to the view that Kant's account of respect is merely formal reasoning according to rights, we can see that respect, or *Achtung*, is directed toward the unique status of personhood. The attention of *Achtung* is directed toward the Other as a concrete entity, which is beyond the bare respect for the Other's space as diagrammed patterns of natural law. Etymologically, respect is a particular mode of apprehending something. The Latin *respicere* means to "look back at" or "to look again." Attention is in this way a central aspect of respect. We respect something by paying careful attention to it and taking it seriously.<sup>94</sup> Lingis concurs that the real phenomenon of the imperative of others is what Kant calls the *person*, the Other encountered as an instance of behavior regulated by inwardly represented law. This intuition of the Other in respect is opposed to the intuition of the Other's empirical psychophysical apparatus exemplifying the laws of nature. With the real phenomenon of the imperative in the person comes respect. Respect for the Other is respect for the law that rules in another. Respect is an immediate phenomenon; it does not follow from interpretation. It is the reverse – from the first I take the presence of another to concern and to command me imperatively.<sup>95</sup>

Kant speaks of the immediacy of this phenomenon of respect in which our will is immediately "obsessed" with the law represented in the Other and submits to the law as a "compulsion" – or *Zwang*. In this way, respect for the law is not merely formal but also has force, in a way similar to "the concept of a reason determining the will immediately," which transforms reason's "transcendent use into an immanent use."

The dissimilarity of rational and empirical grounds of determination is made recognizable through the resistance of a practically legislating reason to all interfering inclinations, which is shown in a particular kind of feeling which does not precede the legislation of practical reason but which is, on the contrary, first effected by it as a compulsion (*Zwang*). That is, it is revealed through the feeling of respect of a kind that no man has for any inclinations whatever, but which he may feel for the law alone. It is shown so saliently and prominently that no one, not even the commonest mind, can fail in a moment to discover in an example that, though he can be urged by empirical grounds of volition to follow their attractions, he

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94. Robin S. Dillon, "Respect and Care: Toward Moral Integration." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (March 1992): 105-32.

95. Alphonso Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1986), 109-10.



can be expected to *obey* nothing but the pure practical law of reason.<sup>96</sup>

In this passage, Kant begins by contrasting the empirical ground of the *Triebfeder* of self-interest with the rational ground of the *Triebfeder* of the legislation of practical reason. The immanent force of practical reason immediately affects our will with a compulsion that is beyond any self-interest. This compulsion is revealed through the feeling of respect that can be had only for the law (in itself and as represented in others and in ourselves). We may follow our self-interests, but we can never truly obey them. These objects of inclination can command neither our obedience nor respect. Obedience and respect are only possible when the will is immediately determined by the practical law of reason.

Although in the passage above Kant emphasizes that obedience can only truly be to reason and not self-interest, it is important to note that Kant does speak of a compulsion, or *Zwang*, which precedes any formulation and gives us a fuller view of his moral theory, which is so often accused of being strictly formalistic. Respect does not follow from interpretation or calculation. The force of respect in the other person is immediate. By characterizing *Achtung* as immediate *Zwang*, Kant shows that from the first I take the presence of another to concern and to command me imperatively. Respect is respect for law or, more exactly, respect for the imperative of law. The imperative of respect, however, is not posited before oneself as a formulation of the law it enjoins – the force of respect precedes the formulation of the law and makes the formulation possible.

In the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant defines duty as the necessity of an action out of respect for the law (*aus Achtung für das Gesetz*) as opposed to an action from inclination. Although he had characterized respect as something like fear, something like inclination, Kant specifies in a lengthy footnote how the feeling of respect is different from the empirical phenomena of fear and inclination. Respect is a feeling generated by reason autonomously, *a priori*, and immediately. The good is simultaneously present in the person who acts according to respect; the moral worth of the act need not be determined merely from its effect:

But even though respect is a feeling, it is not one received through any outside influence but is, rather, one that is self-produced by means of a rational concept; hence it is specifically different from all feelings of the first kind, which can all be reduced to inclination or fear. What I recognize *immediately* as a law for me, I recognize with respect; this means merely the consciousness of the

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96. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (trans. Lewis White Beck, Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 95, 5:92.

subordination of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences upon my sense.<sup>97</sup>

Above, Kant emphasizes the immediacy of respect in our recognition of the law that weighs on us, as it occurs without the mediation of other incentives. Below he stresses that although immediate, respect is not the cause of the law but an *a priori* effect of the law:

The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness thereof, is called respect, which is hence regarded as the effect of the law upon the subject and not as the cause of the law. Respect is properly the representation of a worth that thwarts my self-love. Hence respect is something that is regarded as an object of neither inclination nor fear, although it has at the same time something analogous to both.<sup>98</sup>

Unlike respect, Kant characterizes as “regard” (*Ansehung*) the sensory data collected as effects of the laws of the Other’s right to their space diagrammed in natural law. In contrast to regard, the effects of respect include my response to the Other as an *affect*, which arises spontaneously and bends me in the direction of law. As an affect, respect is analogous to inclination or fear. There is a sensitivity for the imperative for law before the law can be formulated. Respect for the Other as an end, or *Zweck*, is tied up with a sensitivity, or *Zwang*, for the Other as an imperative end, which is placed singularly on me.<sup>99</sup> “Disinterest,” not self-interest, characterizes the feeling of respect. This disinterest is unique to the *Triebfeder* of respect and allows it to be the self-determining motive for the moral law, which the *Triebfeder* of self-interest can never be. Lyotard characterizes the priority and immediacy of the imperative self-determination of respect this way: “Just like listening to the order to listen: it is the ethical itself. Realized or not, this order is listened to before being heard or understood.”<sup>100</sup> Condensing the relation of the moral law, *Triebfeder*, and respect, Kant notes that “... respect for the law is not a motive of morality, but morality itself, considered subjectively as an incentive....”<sup>101</sup>

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97. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 14, 4:401.

98. *Ibid.*

99. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 182.

100. Lyotard. “The Interest of the Sublime,” 123.

101. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (trans. Lewis White Beck) 78, 5:76.

## IMPERATIVES IN THE *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT*

### *Imperatives and the Principle of Reflective Judgment*

In addition to the explication of the categorical imperative in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant gives an imperative structure to the principle of reflective judgment in the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant defines judgment as the faculty of thinking particulars contained under their universal concepts. Reflective judgment seeks the unknown universals of given particulars, whereas determinate judgment already knows the universals appropriate to its particulars. Reflective judgment requires a principle, which it cannot borrow from experience “because it is to be the basis for the unity of all empirical principles under higher though still empirical principles, and hence is to be the basis that makes it possible to *subordinate empirical principles* to one another in a systematic way.”<sup>102</sup> For any knowledge to arise from experience, the facts must first be subordinated to an imperative organizing principle, which provides the necessary and consistent condition for experience itself. Although indemonstrable, the transcendental principle of reflective judgment illustrates how the organizing principle of knowledge is not derived from experience but precedes, subordinates, and organizes all experience. This principle is not gleaned from experience, which is always experience of particulars, but transcendently supplies the imperatively organizing concept.

Reflective judgment further supplies the transcendental but indemonstrable principle that nature is adapted to our cognitive needs. In this way, the imperative carries a totalizing force, as Kant suggests that empirical knowledge is subjected to our active projection of the unity of nature. Reflective judgment supplies this principle not to nature but to itself as a law for reflection on nature. “Hence judgment also possesses an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature, but one that holds only for the subject, a principle by which judgment prescribes, not to nature (which would be autonomy) but to itself (which is heautonomy), a law for its reflection on nature.”<sup>103</sup> In this way, the principle of reflective judgment is the basis for the unity of all empirical principles. This transcendental principle is not determined from nature but is given as a law by reflective judgment to itself for its reflection on nature. “For it is a principle not of determinative but merely of reflective judgment.”<sup>104</sup> Even though this principle is not determinate, it is nonetheless imperative. By supplying a law for the reflection on nature, this *a priori* imperative structure of the

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102. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 19, 5:180 (italics added for emphasis).

103. *Ibid.*, 25, 5:185-6.

104. *Ibid.*, 25, 5:186.

principle of reflective judgment allows us cognitively to grasp empirical laws, which we cannot glean from nature itself, even *a posteriori*.

Reflective judgments whose objects precede their concepts include aesthetic judgments, which Kant calls the subjective presentations of an object. “What is merely subjective in the presentation of an object, i.e., what constitutes its reference to the subject and not to the object, is its aesthetic character.”<sup>105</sup> Kant quickly qualifies the “merely subjective” quality of aesthetic judgments by citing space as the common element in our cognition of things as appearances. Kant then contrasts space as the common element of all human cognition with the pleasure or displeasure that we subjectively feel connected with an aesthetic presentation. The feeling of pleasure is linked to a thing’s purposiveness, its harmonization as an instance of the laws of nature with the laws of our understanding (as when an object precedes the determinate judgment of concepts). Maintaining the consistency of aesthetic judgment as a species of reflective judgment, Kant explains that a thing’s purposiveness is not a characteristic of the object itself, and that its purposiveness precedes our cognition of the object. Kant then indicates how singular “subjective” aesthetic judgments of taste have an imperative character that weighs on the feeling of *all* individuals. “What is strange and different about a judgment of taste is only this: that what is to be connected with the presentation of the object is not an empirical concept but a feeling of pleasure (hence no concept at all), though, just as if it were a predicate connected with cognition of the object, *this feeling is nevertheless required of everyone.*”<sup>106</sup> Kant forsakes empirical concepts as the unifying basis of judgments of the beautiful, as they cannot be known, but he accounts for the universality of beauty with an “imperative feeling” required of everyone. But this imperative is what is required of every empirical cognition – the harmonization of sensible objects with our cognitive powers. The basis of this imperative feeling of pleasure “is found in the universal, though subjective, condition of reflective judgments, namely the purposive harmony of an object ... with the mutual relation of the cognitive powers (imagination and understanding) that are *required* for every empirical cognition.”<sup>107</sup> In this way, even though the objects of Kant’s aesthetic judgments of taste precede any concept, these objects carry an imperative feeling, “required of everyone,” of their purposiveness in the harmonization of sensible objects with our cognitive powers.

#### *Beauty as the Symbol of Morality*

In §59 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant maintains that beauty as the

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105. *Ibid.*, 28, 5:188. As Pluhar notes, Kant takes “aesthetic” from the Greek “*aisthénthai*,” meaning “to sense.”

106. *Ibid.*, 31, 5:191 (italics added).

107. *Ibid.* (italics added).

“symbol of morality,”<sup>108</sup> reconfirms the harmony of sensibility and the understanding, and coordinates the aesthetic and moral realms. With beauty as moral symbol, Kant draws a comparison of the “supersensibility” of both beauty and rational morality, and reaffirms the connection of our perceptual sensibility with the faculty of the understanding.

Now I maintain that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good; and only because we refer the beautiful to the morally good (we all do so naturally and require all others to do so, as a duty) does our liking for it include a claim to everyone else's assent, while the mind is also conscious of being ennobled, by this [reference], above a mere receptivity for pleasure derived from sense impressions, and it assesses the value of other people too on their basis of [their having] a similar maxim in their power of judgment.<sup>109</sup>

The way that beauty symbolizes the morally good is that, like the moral law, it holds for all subjects. The morally good, however, belongs to realm of intelligibility, whereas the realm of the beautiful is that of taste. In keeping with the designation of aesthetic judgment as a species of reflective judgment and its self-legislation, Kant adds that, like the moral law, judgments of taste are not founded on heteronomous empirical laws or objects.

In this ability [taste], judgment does not find itself subjected to a heteronomy of empirical laws, as it does elsewhere in empirical judging – concerning objects of such a pure liking it legislates to itself, just as reason does regarding the power of desire. And because the subject has this possibility within him, while outside [him] there also the possibility that nature will harmonize with it, judgment finds itself referred to something that is both in the subject himself and outside of him, something that is neither nature nor freedom and yet is linked with the basis of freedom, the supersensible, in which the theoretical and the practical power are in an unknown manner combined and joined in a unity.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to comparing the pure liking of the beautiful that aesthetic judgment legislates to itself with reason's autonomous force in the moral realm (“judgment does not find itself subjected to a heteronomy of

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108. *Ibid.*, 229, 5:354.

109. *Ibid.*, 228, 5:353.

110. *Ibid.*, 229, 5:353.

empirical laws ... concerning objects of such a pure liking it legislates to itself, *just as reason does regarding the power of desire*”), Kant notes that like morality, the beautiful is not characterized by the heteronomy of self-interest. Concerning the beautiful, “We like it *without any interest*. (Our liking for the morally good is connected necessarily with an interest, but with an interest that does not precede our judgment about the liking but is produced by this judgment in the first place.)”<sup>111</sup> Here, Kant reminds us that the only interest that can characterize the morally good is the *Triebfeder* of the moral law itself. Likewise, beauty is not taken as a means to our happiness but is directly felt before any calculation of self-interest or ulterior motive.

Beauty, however, because it employs aesthetic and reflective judgment but not determinate judgment, still must be called a “contingency.” Kant expresses this contingency in beauty’s status as a reflective, not determinate, judgment: “We present the subjective principle for judging the beautiful as *universal*, i.e., as valid for everyone, but as unknowable through any universal concept.”<sup>112</sup> In light of the aesthetic object’s contingency in the systematic organization of reflective judgment, Rudolf A. Makkreel argues that the contingency or “facticity” of the beautiful form could be called a “fact of *a priori* feeling,” just as Kant calls our consciousness of the moral law a “fact of reason” in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In this way, the aesthetic idea provides a rule of interpretation that indirectly presents the moral attitude.<sup>113</sup> Coordinating the moral and aesthetic realms perhaps even more forcefully than Makkreel, Kant cites examples of our common understanding as evidence of this link between the two realms:

The common understanding also habitually bears this analogy in mind, and beautiful objects of nature or art are often called by names that seem to presuppose that we are judging [these objects] morally. We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or landscapes cheerful and gay; even colors are called innocent, humble, or tender, because they arouse sensations in us that are somehow analogous to the consciousness we have in a mental state produced by moral judgments. Taste enables us, as it were, to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest without making too violent a leap; for taste presents the imagination as admitting, even in its freedom, of determination that is purposive for the understanding,

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111. *Ibid.*, 229, 5:354.

112. *Ibid.*, 229, 5:354.

113. Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 125-7.

and it teaches us to like even objects of sense freely, even apart from sensible charm.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, although moral judgment takes its law as a universal concept from the beginning, the beautiful begins with particulars and gets to a universal concept through the transcendental principle of reflective judgment. In this way, Kant draws the analogy between beauty and the moral law – the sensibility of beauty harmonizes with its universally valid concept of beauty in supersensibility, just as sensibility harmonizes with the understanding. Kant thus makes the move, none too violently, from the moral to the aesthetic realm.

### *The Sublime and Respect*

Kant begins his explication of the sublime (*das Erhabene*) by calling it “what is *absolutely large*.”<sup>115</sup> The sublime is not a quantitative judgment; it is not simply comparatively large, i.e., known through relative difference in size, but is absolutely large beyond all comparison. Because it is not known through comparisons, the sublime is not a pure or rational concept, nor is it an intuition. Like the judgments of the beautiful form, which are not preceded by a determining concept, the sublime is a concept of *Urteilstkraft* – of reflective, or aesthetic, judgment. Because the sublime is beyond comparison, its standard cannot be sought outside it but only within it. Its magnitude is equal only to itself. Thus, the sublime cannot be sought in the things of nature but can be sought solely in our ideas of reflective judgment. With the experience of the sublime, the imagination strives toward infinity but cannot attain it. Our power of estimating sublime magnitude is inadequate, yet Kant views this inadequacy itself as the arousal in us of the feeling that we have in us of a supersensible power, a feeling of the majesty of the law. What is to be called sublime is not the object but the attunement that the intellect gets “through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment.”<sup>116</sup> In this way, the feeling of the sublime is harmonized with our supersensible powers of reason, just as the experience of the beautiful harmonizes sensibility and the understanding.

Kant next compares the overwhelming experience of the sublime to the feeling of respect. “The feeling that it is beyond our ability to attain to an idea that is *a law for us* is RESPECT.”<sup>117</sup> Kant then elaborates on the relation of respect and the experience of the sublime:

Now the idea of comprehending every appearance that may be given us in the intuition of a whole is an idea

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114. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 229-30, 5:354.

115. *Ibid.*, 103, 5:248.

116. *Ibid.*, 106, 5:250.

117. *Ibid.*, 114, 5:257.

enjoined on us by a law of reason, which knows no other determinate measure that is valid for everyone and unchanging than the absolute whole. But our imagination ... proves its own limits and inadequacy, and yet at the same time proves its vocation to [obey] a law, namely, to make itself adequate to that idea. Hence the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation. But by a certain subreption (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves as] subject[s]) this respect is accorded an object of nature that, as it were, makes intuitable for us the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers over the greatest power of sensibility.<sup>118</sup>

Kant begins by showing how in the realm of perception our comprehension of each appearance is enjoined by the law of reason, which organizes particulars into intelligible wholes. In the aesthetic experience of the vastness of the sublime, the power of the imagination shows an affinity for the law, just as we show an affinity for the moral law. In both the aesthetic and moral realms, there is “respect for the idea of humanity within *our subject*.” In both realms, respect is for “our subject” in subjection to the imperative of “the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers.” The imagination proves itself to be inadequate to the absolute magnitude of the sublime in nature and to the absolute of reason; however, even with its limitations, the aesthetic imagination does attempt to obey the law of reason, which commands it to make itself adequate to the idea of the sublime and the idea of reason. Kant concludes that the feeling of the sublime is respect for our own rational vocation and respect for the majesty of the law in our unbounded power of reason.<sup>119</sup>

The inadequate feeling aroused by the sublime is similar to the feeling of displeasure that we experience when the disinterest of respect for the law constrains our self-interest. Unlike aesthetic judgment about the beautiful, which is done in restful contemplation, “in presenting the sublime in nature, the mind feels *agitated*.”<sup>120</sup> The moral experience of duty is usually one of displeasure, as our self-interested pleasures are subjugated to a higher interest in the moral law. The turmoil in the feeling of the sublime likewise elevates us to the majesty of the higher law of reason: “*das Erhabene erhebt*.” The sublime elevates us by arousing the feeling in us that we have of the supersensible power of reason. Distinguished from beauty’s pleasure of the agreement between the realms of sensibility and understanding, the

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118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*, 117, 5:260.

120. *Ibid.*, 115, 5:258. “Das Gemüt fühlt sich in der Vorstellung des Erhabenen in der Natur *bewegt*...”



sublime symbolizes the sterner side of moral autonomy with our feeling of unease before it.<sup>121</sup>

This feeling of the sublime may be the most forceful characterization of the imperative as a pre-rational feeling. With the feeling of the sublime comes the awareness of the moral law, and with reflective judgment's principle that nature is adapted to our cognitive needs comes an indication that the ground of nature is a permissible realm of human thought. As we have seen in our review of *Triebfeder* and respect, this type of feeling, bent toward law, plays a large role in Kant's doctrine. This pre-rational feeling for the imperative, although most forceful in the concept of the sublime, also characterizes the *Triebfeder* of the moral law and the feeling of respect. But Kant's imperative is not limited to pre-rational feeling. Reason, of course, plays a central role in Kant's doctrine, and it also has an imperative character. We next review the concept and imperative character of reason, which unifies Kant's entire doctrine.

### THE ROLE OF REASON AND FREEDOM IN KANT'S DOCTRINE

Unlike other Enlightenment accounts of reason that instrumentalize reason's use for the achievement of disparate ends, Kant offers a critique that entails an organic teleology of reason's self-regulation. As Kant asserts in "The Architectonic of Pure Reason" in the first *Critique*: "The whole is thus an organized unity [*articulatio*], and not an aggregate [*coacervatio*]. It may grow from within [*per intus-susceptionem*], but not by external addition [*per appositionem*]. It is thus like an animal body, the growth of

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121. Paul Guyer notes in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy – Kant: Taste and Autonomy* [Guyer, Paul (1998). Kant, Immanuel. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ed. E. Craig. London: Routledge. Retrieved March 03, 2003, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DB047SECT12>] that Kant draws a fundamental distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. Beauty pleases us through the free play of imagination and understanding. In our response to the sublime, however, we enjoy not a direct harmony between imagination and understanding, which are rather frustrated by their inability to grasp such immensities, but a grasp of them which reveals the power of reason within us (5:257). And this symbolizes the power of practical reason, and thus the foundation of our autonomy, in two ways: our power to grasp a truly universal law, such as the moral law, and our power to resist the threats of mere nature, and thus the blandishments of inclination (5:261–2). In this way, the sublime symbolizes the sterner side of moral autonomy. But the experience of beauty is also a symbol of morality, precisely because the freedom of the imagination that is its essence is the only experience in which any form of freedom, including the freedom of the will itself, can become palpable to us (5:353–4). Kant thus concludes his critique of aesthetic judgment with the remarkable suggestion that it is in our enjoyment of beauty that our vocation as autonomous agents becomes not just a "fact of reason" but a matter of experience as well.

which is not by the addition of a new member, but by the rendering of each member, without the change of proportion, stronger and more effective for its purposes.”<sup>122</sup> With reason’s self-regulation comes its autonomously imperative structure. The limits of rational inquiry are to be established by the imperative of reason itself, not by the contingencies of experience or appeals to a dogmatic metaphysics. As a human faculty, reason establishes its limits on human thought and action. Reason takes form as law, specifically the moral law,<sup>123</sup> whose imperative force weighs on free human subjects. Thus, because imperatives can command only a will that is free, freedom has a central role in Kant’s doctrine. We can only be obligated because we are free, free to do otherwise. The imperative would have no force on a causally determined being or an absolutely free divine being. Furthermore, the imperative of reason is an imperative to become practical. Because thought can reason incorrectly (in another indication of its freedom), it is subject to an imperative to think and to perceive things coherently and correctly. From the beginning, an imperative commands thought to become universal, and commands the faculty of the understanding and organizes sensible particulars. The freedom of thought makes obedience to this imperative possible.<sup>124</sup>

As Richard Velkley observes in *Freedom and the End of Reason*, the teleology of reason, and its imperative to become practical, was Kant’s response to the “crisis of reason” in the Enlightenment. Kant’s response

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122. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 653-4, A 833/ B 861.

123. As Kant notes in the first *Critique*:

On this view, philosophy is the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*), and the philosopher is not an artificer in the field of reason, but himself the lawgiver of human reason.... Essential ends are not as such the highest ends; in view of the demand of reason for complete systematic unity, only one of them can be so described. Essential ends are therefore either the ultimate end or subordinate ends which are necessarily connected with the former as means. The former is no other than the whole vocation of man, and the philosophy which deals with it is entitled moral philosophy. On account of this superiority which moral philosophy has over all other occupations of reason, the ancients in their use of the term ‘philosopher’ always meant, more especially, the *moralist*; and even at the present day we are led by a certain analogy to entitle anyone a philosopher who appears to exhibit self-control under the guidance of reason, however limited his knowledge may be.” (*Ibid.*, 657-8, A 839-40/B 867-8; italics in original)

124. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 3.

includes several ends: (1) Reason is responsible for justifying the moral view of the universe (as in "The Architectonic of Pure Reason" of the first *Critique*). (2) To emancipate and enlighten humanity, philosophic reason sanctions the ideas of the noble and the beautiful (as in the employment of transcendental reason on the question of freedom, the immortality of the soul, and God's existence in the first *Critique*'s "Canon of Pure Reason"). (3) Modern reason's crisis of incompleteness, and consequently its self-undermining use as a heteronomous tool of desire, can be remedied by reason's moral teleology, which supplies the highest good.<sup>125</sup> This organizing and organic teleological view of reason had been absent in empiricism, as when Hobbes, Locke, and Hume elaborated reason's

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125. Velkley offers these substantiations from Kant:

For there can be no *will* without an end in view, although we must abstract from this end whenever the question of straightforward legal compulsion of our deeds arises, in which case the law alone becomes its determinate. But not every end is moral (that of personal happiness, for example, is not); the end must be an unselfish one. And the necessity of an ultimate end posited by pure reason and comprehending the totality of all ends within a single principle (i.e., a world in which the highest possible good can be realised with our collaboration) is a necessity experienced by the unselfish will as it *rises beyond* mere obedience to formal laws and creates as its object the highest good. The idea of the totality of all ends is a peculiar kind of determinant for the will. For it basically implies that *if* we stand in a moral relationship to things in the world around us, we must everywhere obey the moral law; and to this is added the further duty of working with all our powers to *ensure* that the state of affairs described (i.e., a world conforming to the highest moral ends) will actually exist.

(*Kant's Political Writings*, 65; *Über den Gemeinspruch*, in *Ak VIII*, 279-80)

But although for its own sake morality needs no representation of an end which must precede the determining of the will, it is quite possible that it is necessarily related to such an end, taken not as the ground but as the [sum of] inevitable consequences of maxims adopted as conformable to that end. For in the absence of all reference to an end no determination of the will can take place in man, since such determination can be followed by no effect whatsoever.

Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 4; *Ak VI*, 4

instrumentality. In a critique of the “aim-less” and self-destructive dialectical character of reason as applied to human desire’s various pursuits of happiness, Kant’s “critical” version of moral idealism emerges. Thus, by means of a single, organic system, reason must (1) justify ordinary moral consciousness<sup>126</sup> and (2) rescue modern science from its self-consigned oblivion of reason’s undermining dialectical tendencies (as in moralities based on heteronomous objects).<sup>127</sup>

Although Kant supplies the architectonic of reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Velkley credits Rousseau with Kant’s precritical development of his organic architectonic, which provides reason’s self-criticism. Kant’s revolution in the end of reason is a systematic argument linking the elements of: (1) a moral doctrine grounding human dignity upon self-legislative freedom and (2) a teleology that ascribes a moral end to all employments of reason (as in the Architectonic). Velkley argues that Kantian accounts of moral and epistemological idealism are fully comprehensible only against this background of reason as free power determining itself and imperatively prescribing its own ends, independent of nature. Through Rousseau, Kant came to realize that modern Enlightenment accounts of the relation of philosophy and science to the human good failed to establish reason as a beneficent force in human life. Unlike Rousseau, however, Kant holds that it is possible to provide a new justification, or “theodicy,” of reason.<sup>128</sup> Because nature cannot determine the end of reason but compels man to give himself an end, this theodicy asserts the primacy of the practical end of reason. As such, moral reason is a decisive element in Kant’s new account of reason as a whole. This

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126. From the end of the first section of the *Grounding*:

Thus is ordinary human reason forced to go outside its sphere and take a step into the field of practical philosophy, not by any need for speculation ... but on practical grounds themselves. There it tries to obtain information and clear instruction regarding the source of its own principle and the correct determination of this principle in its opposition to maxims based on need and inclination, so that reason may escape from the perplexity of opposite claims and may avoid the risk of losing all genuine moral principles through the ambiguity into which it easily falls. Thus when ordinary practical reason cultivates itself, there imperceptibly arises in it a dialectic which compels it to seek help in philosophy. The same thing happens in reason’s theoretical use; in this case, just as in the other, peace will be found only in a thorough critical examination of our reason.” (17, 405)

127. Richard L. Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xiii-xiv.

128. *Ibid.*, 1-3.

defense of moral reason is not simply a later addition to Kant's concerns or to the categorical imperative. By supplying practical ends of reason, Kant has remedied reason's self-negating, dialectical tendencies as well as filling the void in the modern Enlightenment's "end-less" instrumentality of reason. In this moral or practical determination of the end of reason, practical ends must precede instrumental means (although the preparatory "propaedeutic" of theoretical inquiry to determine the limits of reason is first in "execution," it is second in "intention"<sup>129</sup>). In this way, Kant's metaphysics is above all a metaphysics of morals, supplying reason with its imperatively self-legislated goals.<sup>130</sup>

Kant credits Rousseau with the discovery of the hidden laws of human nature and claims that Rousseau's discovery is comparable to Isaac Newton's in the laws of physics. Just as Newton has brought order to the chaos of the natural world with laws of ordered simplicity, Rousseau brings order to the disorderly multiplicity of acquired human forms. Human nature and its laws have been so obscured by the multifarious misuse of reason as to make this nature unrecognizable. Although reason corrupted as an instrument of desire is the principle source of ills, it is also the only possible cure.<sup>131</sup> Reason needs to be brought to its self-determined limits to avoid overstepping its boundaries unjustly, which has been the source of individual frustrations and cultural evils.<sup>132</sup>

Implicit in this account of reason is its perfectibility, which hinges on an account of human freedom. Freedom is the principle of motivation that will be effective universally and belongs to, even defines, human essence. Freedom also provides the answer to both questions of historical change and permanence: freedom is what endures in humanity throughout historical change, and it is also the ground of human perfections.<sup>133</sup> "Everything goes past in flux; the changing tastes, the diverse forms of humanity make the whole play of things uncertain and deceptive. Where can I find the firm point of nature that man cannot overthrow and that can offer him the markers to the shore that will sustain him? ... The question is whether I shall find the fulcrum point outside this world or in this world, in order to

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129. "The practical sciences determine the worth of the theoretical. What has no such [practical] employment is indeed useless. The practical sciences are the first according to intention because ends must precede means. But in execution the theoretical sciences must be first." *Ak XIX, Reflexionen* 6612.

130. *Ibid.*, 5.

131. *Ibid.*, 61-3.

132. "The education of Rousseau is the sole means to restore the flower of civil society," for "laws are of no avail" to this end in the present age of increasing luxury, hatred between the classes, and constant warfare" (175.5-12). "The chief aim of Rousseau is for education to have the character of freedom and to produce a free human being" (167.3-4). *Ak XX, Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*.

133. *Ibid.*, 64.

set the affects in motion. In answer: I find it in the state of nature, that is, of freedom.”<sup>134</sup> Because Kant finds his fulcrum point “in this world,” freedom supplies a principle grounded in the living human world and opens a way of confirming a moral view of the world without recourse to dogmatic theology or metaphysics.

*Kant’s Moral Imperative and the Metaphysics of Morals*

The theory of morality that Kant develops in the *Critique of Practical Reason* hinges on reason and practical rational activity. Pure reason becomes activated by the exercise of practical reason, and practical reason animates and completes Kant’s project of theoretical reason. Pure reason is of itself practical in establishing the moral principle and in determining the boundaries of reason. Kant gives us a unique and complex description of the genesis of rational morality, with which he constructs a metaphysics of morals. At the heart of this practical view is Kant’s analysis of freedom: “Now, the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason....”<sup>135</sup> The way Kant understands freedom is what allows us to submit to the force of the moral imperative. We are obligated only because we are free, free to do otherwise. An imperative would have no force on a determined being or an absolutely free being. Unlike with divine beings, reason and the understanding (which is based in phenomenal sensibility) remain separate conceptual capacities for human beings – reason is characterized by universality and necessity, whereas the understanding extrapolates from particulars and contingencies.

From the start, Kant sees the moral imperative itself as a fact of reason. Pure reason is to become practical, as happens when reason legislates over our desires and the rational will determines itself autonomously. The very form of the law of morality is the imperatively determining ground of all moral maxims. For Kant, the immediate lawgiving capacity of pure practical reason engenders a sense of philosophical wonder and gives morality a metaphysical dimension that was traditionally believed not possible: “The thing [the immediacy of the moral law] is strange (*befremdlich*) enough, and has nothing like it in all the rest of our practical cognition.”<sup>136</sup> Kant attempts a unique undertaking – the coordination of metaphysics and morality in the human sphere, with imperative moral law that applies both to subjective maxims and to objective laws, which would not be possible with an ethics based in the

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134. Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1902-), 46.11-5; 56.3-5.

135. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 3, 5:4.

136. *Ibid.*, 28, 5:31.

phenomenally empirical or speculatively metaphysical realms. Because pure reason is immediately lawgiving and practical of itself, Kant concludes that the moral law is “a fact of reason”<sup>137</sup> (i.e., is not deduced in any way), and this “fact” allows metaphysics to hold sway in morality. This fact of reason is the categorical imperative that unites subjective moral maxims with universal moral law – that I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.

We can further appreciate the innovation of Kant's position when we note that philosophy traditionally began its moral theorizing with the good as a natural or ontological entity. Recourse to the traditional origin of the good is not possible in Kant's view because that would make the highest principle of the good phenomenal, contingent, and knowable only *a posteriori* – i.e., heteronomous. Kant insists that the highest good must be *a priori* so that it can be universal and unconditional – i.e., autonomous. Because Kant begins with morality *a priori*, he consciously avoids the problem of inducing a moral law from natural individual inclinations and their satisfaction. But neither does he derive the moral law by way of a theoretical deduction from an *a priori*: “The moral law, even though it provides no such *prospect*, nevertheless provides a fact absolutely inexplicable from any data of the sensible world and from the whole compass of our theoretical use of reason, a fact that points to a pure world of the understanding and, indeed, even *determines it positively* and lets us cognize something of it, namely a law.”<sup>138</sup> Thus, with moral laws effected from pure reason made practical, Kant has set in motion the reciprocal relation of freedom and the moral law. What follows from this law “pointing to a pure world of the understanding” is the furnishing of the sensible world with a “supersensible” nature. To be moral, we must be superior to our physical nature and go beyond our natural inclinations – we must subordinate our self-interest to the moral law. In an illustrative passage, Kant explains how the supersensible nature of the moral law supplements, and even completes, sensible natural laws: “This [moral] law is to furnish the sensible world, as a *sensible nature* (in what concerns rational beings), with the form of a world of the understanding, that is, of a *supersensible nature*, though without infringing upon the mechanism of the former. Now, nature in the most general sense is the existence of things under laws.”<sup>139</sup> By applying his concept of law and its universality to nature and morals, Kant coordinates the physical and metaphysical realms in an attempt to harmonize desire and thought. Even though the supersensible is freedom, nature is given to humans who have a sensible nature; thus, Kant maintains the distinction between the two realms. Yet this coordination of the two is something new, something not possible in the classical view of Aristotle, which separates ethics and metaphysics. In addition, this

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137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*, 38, 5:43 (italics in original).

139. *Ibid.* (italics in original).

coordination of the sensible and the rational is made possible only because of human freedom, acknowledged by Kant as the keystone of the whole structure of his system of pure and practical reason.

Furthermore, Paul Guyer<sup>140</sup> notes that the autonomy of the principles of reflective judgment has a central role in the *Critique of Judgment*. In the introduction to the third *Critique*, Kant argues that we must adopt reflective judgment as a transcendental but indemonstrable principle that nature is adapted to our cognitive needs. Because the understanding is *a priori* in possession of the universal laws of nature, we need not be overwhelmed by the attempt to make coherent experience out of the infinite diversity of empirical laws. But nature also has a certain order to its rules, which, as rules rather than laws, are knowable only empirically. Yet, "... the understanding must think of these rules as laws (i.e., as necessary) – even though it does not cognize, nor could ever see, their necessity – for otherwise such laws would not form an order of nature."<sup>141</sup> Therefore, "this harmony of nature with our cognitive powers is presupposed *a priori* by judgment, as an aid in its reflection on nature in terms of empirical laws."<sup>142</sup>

Kant thereby suggests that our empirical knowledge is neither passively received nor simply guaranteed, but dependent on our active projection of the unity of nature. With the purposiveness of aesthetic objects, nature becomes a permissible realm of intellection. Kant then turns to judgments of taste as both a further expression of human autonomy and further evidence that the adaptation of nature to our own cognitive needs is both contingent yet reasonably assumed. Judgments of taste are connected to autonomy in two ways: while they claim universal agreement, they must always be based on individual feeling and judgment; and while they must be made free of all constraint by theoretical or moral concepts, they are ultimately symbols of moral freedom itself. But how does aesthetic judgment both express autonomy in a moral sense and also give further evidence of the contingent adaptation of nature to our own needs? Kant answers the latter question with his idea of "intellectual interest": the very fact that beauty exists, he argues, although it cannot be derived from any scientific laws, can be taken by us as evidence that nature is receptive not only to our cognitive needs but even to our need to see a possibility for success in our moral undertakings.

After distinguishing our aesthetic and intellectual powers of judgment, Kant explains how reason, through moral feeling, has an interest in a "lawful harmony" with nature:

But reason also has an interest in the objective reality of the ideas (for which, in moral feeling, it brings about a

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140. Paul Guyer, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Kant: Taste and Autonomy*.

141. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 24, 5:184.

142. *Ibid.*, 24, 5:185.



direct interest), i.e., an interest that nature should at least show a trace or give a hint that it contains some basis or other for us to assume in its products a lawful harmony with that liking of ours which is independent of all interest (a liking we recognize *a priori* as a law for everyone, though we cannot base this law on proofs). Hence reason must take an interest in any manifestation in nature of a harmony that resembles the mentioned [kind of] harmony, and hence the mind cannot meditate about the beauty of *nature* without at the same time finding its interest aroused. But in terms of its kinship this interest is moral, and whoever takes such an interest in the beautiful in nature can do so only to the extent that he has beforehand already solidly established an interest in the morally good. Hence if someone is directly interested in the beauty of nature, we have cause to suppose that he has at least a predisposition to a good moral attitude.<sup>143</sup>

Or, as Kant puts it more simply in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (§69, "Taste Contains a Tendency toward External Advancement of Morality") concerning the feeling of sharing satisfaction with others in the feeling of aesthetic pleasure and its relation to the moral: "Satisfaction means contentment with the agreement between the pleasure of the subject and the feeling of any other person according to a general law which has to result from the general mental constitution of the feeling person, consequently from reason. This means that the choice of such satisfaction is subject, according to form, to the principle of duty. Therefore the ideal taste has a tendency toward the external advancement of morality."<sup>144</sup> In this way, the *Critique of Judgment* shows Kant's awareness of the moral law as an indication of the ground of nature as thinkable and thus a permissible realm of intellection. Through the rational interest of the moral law, Kant is able to coordinate the moral and natural realms.

#### *The Ultimate End of Human Reason*

In keeping with the unified system of moral reason, the ultimate end of human reason culminates in the explication of the idea of "the highest good," which, according to Velkley, must be the focal point of philosophic deliberation about the architectonic functions of the various forms of cognition. Critiquing the various "essential ends" of mathematics, natural philosophy, and logic, Kant argues in "The Architectonic of Pure Reason"

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143 *Ibid.*, 167, 5:300.

144. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. H. H. Rudnick (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 147; 6:244.

that: “Essential ends are not as such the highest ends; in view of the demand of reason for complete systematic unity, only one of them can be described. Essential ends are therefore either the ultimate end or subordinate ends which are necessarily connected with the former as means. The former is no other than the whole vocation of man, and the philosophy which deals with it is entitled moral philosophy.”<sup>145</sup> In this way, Kant makes the largest claim for morality in the history of philosophy heretofore. Velkley notes that the notion of the highest good, however, should not be restricted to moral philosophy, as to do so would ignore that (1) Kant’s critique of theoretical reason is an intended propedeutic to moral philosophy and that (2) this critique has a primary telos in moral concerns. Reflection on the end of reason should not be restricted to Kant’s writings that concern the foundations of practical philosophy and the metaphysics of morals. A full account of the end of reason must explain why that end compels philosophy to be a propedeutical critique of theoretical cognition, followed by the elaboration of a moral doctrine.<sup>146</sup>

As often noted in the Kantian literature, there is the initial difficulty of finding a place for a doctrine of the highest end within a morality of autonomy. Seemingly, any consideration of ends in the self-legislative will be denied to universalizing maxims that disregard the self-love of the legislator. Kant, however, recurrently discusses how the legislative moral will qua moral, and not self-interested, must have regard for the ends of a purely moral nature. The rational will is essentially purposive. Although the will cannot determine itself without regard to some end, to Kant this means something altogether different from the utilitarian sense of the will that is directed by its nature toward consequences. Because the scope of Kant’s rational project is all-encompassing and has the simplicity of natural law, Kant conceives the doctrine of the end of reason as an answer to the question of how the *whole* of human reason can be guided and understood within a single telos.<sup>147</sup>

By proposing an account of reason as spontaneous, historical, and self-legislative, Kant simultaneously supplies a telos of reason and effects a reform of modern philosophical foundations by providing this rational telos of the will. After realizing itself historically by way of destructive dialectic, reason unfolds its latent capacities for self-legislation and self-constraint. This solution fosters a new kind of moral idealism in which the spontaneity of reason is effected through the self-legislation of a moral ideal. The principle of this moral ideal is not a natural inclination or passion but a rational, ideal construct of a universal and systematic harmony of free, self-legislating beings. Maximum freedom is attained in the form of independence from “arbitrary” wills of others and “arbitrary” powers of nature. We are to strive for a moral ideal of a world that combines the

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145. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 658, A 840/B 868.

146. Velkley, 9.

147. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

maximum of self-legislated freedom of rational beings with an appropriate satisfaction of natural desires (as man is not just a rational but also natural being). This ideal, called both the “moral world” and the “highest good,” is also understood by Kant as the *arche* of a “system” of reason that unites and consummates all interests of rational beings.<sup>148</sup> Finally, although Kant’s insight into rational moral law is ideal, it is not derived theoretically but based on the free, autonomous, self-determining will as an imperative that supplies the organon of philosophy.<sup>149</sup>

### CONTEMPORARY PHENOMENOLOGY’S RESPONSE TO KANT’S IMPERATIVES

Having reviewed the fundamental motives of Kant’s imperatives, we now hope to clarify their relevance to phenomenology and current ethical and philosophical debates. By placing morals under the realm of the will, which can be commanded by imperatives, Kant’s deontological ethics of the duties of the good will departs from the major views of morality in the philosophical tradition that emphasized virtue in the objects of morality. “Dogmatic” or theological metaphysics took “the good” to be an inherent part of being or took “the good” as divinely created. Aristotle’s philosophical anthropology of human nature concentrated on perfecting the objects of human virtue and happiness. For the empiricists morals were based on the objective knowledge claims of the good grounded in human nature, namely the security of life and property, in a pared-down version of the external goods of Aristotelian virtue ethics. And utilitarianism can be seen as the culmination of moral objectivism, as its objects were to be measured for the greatest benefit of their outcomes.

Paul Ricoeur has called Kant our oldest contemporary,<sup>150</sup> and the relevance of this view becomes increasingly clear when Kant’s imperatives are viewed through the lens of contemporary phenomenology: beginning with Merleau-Ponty’s implicit imperatives in perception, continuing with the commands that Levinas’s alterity places on subjectivity, and culminating with Lingis’s imperatives for intelligibility and human action in a world not simply given, but given as imperative. Phenomenology shares Kant’s objections to the traditional philosophical views of morals and retains a foundational feature of Kant’s doctrine – the imperative. Contemporary phenomenology, however, rectifies the autonomous rational universalism of Kant’s imperatives. In the view of the phenomenologists,

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148. *Ibid.*, 14.

149. As Kant notes in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “For pure speculative reason has a structure wherein everything is an organ, the whole being for the sake of every part, and every part for the sake of all the others...” 33, B xxxvii.

150. Cited in Wolfgang Walter Fuchs, *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 9.

Kant's autonomy with its inward representation of law disconnects us from the physical world. Phenomenology, however, views our relation with the external world as governed by imperatives. Furthermore, by importing and revising Kant's imperatives, phenomenology can avoid the problems of empirical truth claims in ethics and can concentrate on the descriptions of imperative forces that guide or command our appropriate responses to our encounters with things, other persons, and ethical situations of imperative urgency. Phenomenology's doctrine of perception can also expand the imperative field beyond what Kant thought was possible. Merleau-Ponty's claims about perception include the will, whereas Kant's do not. For Merleau-Ponty, the perceiver's will is commanded by the preconfigured essences of perceptual objects. Furthermore, by taking things and other persons as imperative forces, phenomenology, like Kant, critiques the foundations of philosophical thought of its contemporaries. Phenomenology offers a doctrine that avoids reducing philosophy, morals, and epistemology to the nominalism and conventionalism of the analytic tradition or to the empirical historicity of Thomas Kuhn's paradigm shifts. A contrast that brings phenomenological force into relief can be seen between phenomenology's understanding of imperative force and Michel Foucault's teaching of historically determinate relations of power. The difference between force and power lies in the fact that power relations are reversible, whereas the relations of force are not. Lightning strikes the tree, but the tree cannot strike the lightning. Likewise, for Levinas, subjectivity is constituted in subjection to the other person, who appeals to me. I cannot construct the Other as a free act of subjectivity, which begins in self-certainty. Like Kant's phenomenon of respect, the Other's appeal to me is an immediate, irreversible force. This view of force versus power also gives us a view of freedom that is more in line with Kantian restraint than with absolute Sartrean freedom. Also, as a doctrine of the description of forces, phenomenology retains a role for subjectivity as a force of response and responsibility. Phenomenology disagrees with Foucault's assessment that, like the construct of the human, subjectivity is simply the locus of power relations, which could result in subjectivity being "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."<sup>151</sup> Rather, subjectivity is, in Lingis's words, a sustaining force in its own right that can be employed for the support of another – not a simple locus of intersecting currents but a cause, commencement, and source of resources.<sup>152</sup> In rectifying Kant's rational imperative in its explanation of the imperative forces of things, other persons, and the human subject, contemporary phenomenology implicitly acknowledges its debt to Kant and shares a view of philosophy founded on imperatives. For Levinas and Lingis, subjectivity begins in subjection.

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151. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, translation of *Les mots et les choses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 387.

152. Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations*, 111.

Although contemporary phenomenology rejects Kant's moral doctrine as too rationalist and formal, it does not mark a complete return to philosophical anthropology – certainly not in Aristotle's sense of philosophical anthropology of human nature and the virtuous development of character or excellence, or empiricism's sense of philosophical anthropology as the knowledge claims of morals grounded in human nature. The phenomenological imperatives are grounded in Merleau-Ponty's "lived body and lived world," Levinas's "epiphany of alterity," and Lingis's "elemental imperative," all of which renew Kant's imperatives with a motility and sensitive vitality that responds to imperative directives. This phenomenological return to the world, however, rejects the interiority of Kantian autonomy because of its detachment from the exterior world. Kant sought autonomy in reason and morals because he deemed physical, external motives to be always linked with self-interest that seeks to make exceptions for itself to the moral law. Also, Kant determined that, in his modern age and its instrumentalization of reason, the pursuit of a virtue ethics of natural "goods" of Aristotle's less alienated time was no longer possible. As Vermont ecologist George Perkins Marsh noted in the mid-1800s, man was no longer a part of nature, nor did he act in harmony with nature. He was now "a free moral agent working independently of nature."<sup>153</sup> With his concept of autonomy, Kant supplanted the supersensible moral world for the sensible natural world. Kant still wanted to harmonize our natural physical and autonomously rational spheres, but the time had passed for a directly harmonious relation with nature. With its return to the world via a renewed philosophical anthropology, contemporary phenomenology turns away from Kant's autonomous formal imperatives of rational law that weigh on our interiority. But in retaining the imperative character of Kant's doctrine, phenomenology seeks to describe the imperatives of the forces of things, other persons, and situations in their exteriority to us. We are not inwardly commanded by a representation of autonomous rational law but are commanded by the external imperatives of what Merleau-Ponty has called the preconfigured essences of things, what Levinas recognizes as the appeals made by the Other, and what Lingis takes to be the elemental imperative and its call for sublime action in which we restrain our self-interest in the service of expansive beauty. For contemporary phenomenology, the rational does not equate with the required in the moral sphere. To make a rational hypothesis of a responsive act is often to falsify the imperative involved. To save someone from drowning, I need not predicate my action on a rational imperative in which I save someone because I too may later be in that

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153. George Perkins Marsh, "George Perkins Marsh to Charles Scribner, September 10, 1863," Marsh Collection, University of Vermont. Cited in George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified in Human Action*, ed. David Lowenthal. Introduction (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), xxiii-xxiv.

situation. My response is immediate in a situation that appeals to me with imperative urgency. I simply do what has to be done.

With their rectification of Kant's imperative and their revision of philosophical anthropology, the phenomenologists examine the question of the "living human" instead of the autonomy of human reason. Kant turned inwardly to the autonomy of rational universality in order to reconnect with the world after modernity's historical disconnection from it. The philosophical question for Kant was "What are the limits of human reason?" Perhaps we can say that the philosophical question for the phenomenologists is "What are the limits and possibilities of human life?" We submit that the answer to this question lies in our imperative subjection to the world of things, elements, other persons, and situations that call for an ethical choice. Kant's form of law has been rectified with the external force of imperative directives, but phenomenology retains the necessity of imperatives, which organize the relation of humans to the world. In fact, Lingis asserts that Kant's concept of restrained freedom is needed to thematize, to "imperativize," the world. Otherwise, the world is merely "given" as with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Philosophically, in the elemental imperative of Lingis, thought carries its own imperative to deepen itself, as our lives command us to deepen our experience of life itself. Imperatives can direct us to what is important in our lives and what is important in life itself. In our response to imperatives, we discover ourselves in doing what we find we have to do.

Although the contemporary phenomenologists criticize some aspects of Kant's imperatives, they retain others – all reject Kant's formulation of the moral imperative as universal law, but all agree that there are appropriate responses to perceptual and moral directives. Maurice Merleau-Ponty criticizes Kant's mathematization of perception that places objects on geometric axes. With the preconfigured essences of things as directives for our appropriate responses, however, Merleau-Ponty assigns imperatives a fundamental role in phenomenology and places perception in the domain of imperatives. For Kant, imperatives would not apply to sensibility, as our sensibility does not engage a will that could be commanded. Merleau-Ponty, however, takes perception to be an act of behavior. For him, perception is an active intensification of things' preconfigured essences. Because this view of perception does involve the will, a revised Kantian imperative can be imported into the phenomenology of perception. Imperatives command the correct perception of things in a manner somewhat like norms. For Merleau-Ponty, things are charged with meaning and immanent significance. Directives for understanding immediately issue from the objects of perception, instead of from the synthesizing capabilities of the mind. Merleau-Ponty calls this inherent unity of things their style. Style stands somewhere between empiricism and Kant's requirement of the universal in intelligibility gleaned through law. Perception begins not with a pure sensuous medley but begins with sensible things. Things, for Merleau-

Ponty, are not made recognizable as objects of geometrized projection but are recognizable through their distinctive styles.

Merleau-Ponty further intensifies the imperative character of perception by taking the objects of perception to be “objectives.” Directives in things call for our appropriate responses. In what Merleau-Ponty calls “*praktognosia*,” objects are objectives, tasks ordering our competencies to accomplishment. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, this practical imperative is not placed on our understanding in conflict with sensuality but is placed on our postural schema, which integrates and mobilizes our efficacy. *Praktognosia* orders our competence, and every subsequent kind of comprehension is derived from it.<sup>154</sup> Finally, although Merleau-Ponty speaks of an immanent logic of the sensual field as a system holding itself together by order of an imperative, this system is not a set of principles or laws, but rather a system of levels posited in the sensible field.<sup>155</sup> Our response to levels has the character of an imperative as an ordinance taken up and followed through. The level, however, is not what is perceived; the level is that with which or according to which we perceive.

Emmanuel Levinas gives qualified praise to Kant’s system when he claims in *Otherwise Than Being* that: “If one had the right to retain one trait from a philosophical system and neglect all the details of its architecture ..., we would think here of Kantism.... The fact that immortality and theology could not determine the categorical imperative signifies the novelty of the Copernican revolution: a sense (*sens*) that is not measured by being or not being; but being on the contrary is determined on the basis of sense (*sens*).”<sup>156</sup> Levinas shows his appreciation for the pre-ontological force of Kant’s imperative that organizes the meaning of being, instead of ontology itself supplying the organizing force. In Levinas’s doctrine of the human face as the metaphysical trace of God’s absolute otherness, ethics precedes ontology. In this way, he retains the immediacy and imperative character of Kantian respect with the command that alterity places on subjectivity. In fact, for Levinas subjectivity is constituted in its subjection to the Other. Kant characterizes respect by interiority, but Levinas characterizes the phenomenon of alterity by exteriority. Kant’s conception is an interior subjection to the law within, whereas Levinas takes alterity to be an exterior force that weighs on the subject. In contrast to Kant’s formulation of law, Levinas characterizes the imperative of alterity as “an-archic” because alterity’s appeal and force are immediate and precede any principle or formulation. Although he agrees with Kant that subjectivity begins in the

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154. Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility*, 37.

155. Alphonso Lingis, Translator’s preface of *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), li.

156. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 129. *Autrement qu’être*, 166.

force of subjection to an imperative, Levinas disagrees with Kant's institution of the imperative exclusively as the force and formulation of law. Levinas takes our subjection to be originally constituted in alterity as the response to the face of the Other – my subjectivity is constituted in this subjection. Before there is any formulation of law, the Other's face immediately appeals to me and calls for my response and my responsibility. For Levinas, the face is not so much a phenomenon as an epiphany, as the face of the Other carries the trace of God's absolute otherness. In this way, Levinas posits his own metaphysics of morals – not a metaphysics of the moral law but a metaphysics of morals with the human face carrying the trace of God. Unlike Kantian respect, alterity is nowise reducible to me, to my relation to the universal, or to my feeling of the law within myself. The command of alterity is exterior to the subject, and precedes and constitutes subjectivity before the formulation of any law or self-referential ontology, and also precedes Kant's transcendental unity of apperception.

In contrast to Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of perception's structure of intentionality as a figure against a background and *praktognosia* (which takes objects as objectives, as tasks for our accomplishment), Levinas emphasizes the sensation prior to the perception of things. Levinas elucidates the sensuous, "elemental" medium that supports Merleau-Ponty's levels. These elements include the ground (as the support of the earth beneath our feet), the light, the warmth, the damp, and the night. Although they are not objects of perception, the elements provide the medium for the levels of perception. Perceived things revert into elements. Things end with the given, which envisions no future or possibility. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas emphatically separates our two receptivities: the receptivity of the elemental, in which the subject constitutes itself in the closed sphere of enjoyment and contentment, and the receptivity for the exterior imperative that comes from the alterity of other persons. In *Otherwise Than Being*, however, Levinas argues that this separation cannot be maintained. Our receptivity for the sensuous elemental is contested, commanded, and ordered from the start by our receptivity for the alterity of the other humans.

There are also some noteworthy similarities between Kant's view of respect and Levinas's doctrine of alterity. For Levinas, the imperative of alterity is immediate: subjectivity is commanded by the Other before any reflection. Kant's notion of respect for other persons is also characterized by immediacy. I immediately see in the Other the moral law that weighs on him or her, as it does on me, in subjection to the laws of reason. Kant calls respect for the moral law a compulsion (*Zwang*), "a peculiar kind of feeling which does not precede the legislation of practical reason but which is ... first effected by it, as a compulsion."<sup>157</sup> I do not first encounter another person empirically and then deduce the Other as a phenomenon worthy of respect. With respect, I am immediately subjected to the effects of the

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157. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 95, 5:92.



legislation of practical reason, which precede and compel me against any self-serving inclinations. Likewise, Levinas characterizes the encounter with the Other by immediacy. For Levinas, subjectivity is constituted in subjection to the Other. The Other's appeal to me is immediate and precedes any empirical deduction, induction, or inclination.

Alphonso Lingis has undertaken an explication of imperatives in the phenomenology of perception and morals in the doctrines of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, as well as that of Kant. Lingis argues that a proper understanding of perceptions as responses cannot be categorized as either universal or contingent. For Lingis, the rational does not equate with the required. Rational justifications of actions may be pointless and, in fact, falsify the imperative involved. It is the intrinsic importance that requires action, a force that intrudes with the imperative force and urgency of what one has to do. In this way, Lingis designates a commanding role for imperatives in human thought and action, even though he states that Kant's rational imperative, which is based in the theoretical uses of reason, must be revised.

Lingis acknowledges the indispensable value of Kant's imperative of reason in several ways. The role of freedom for Lingis is more in line with Kant's constraints than with Merleau-Ponty's intuition of the perceived field as the effect of freedom. As Lingis observes in his *Phenomenological Investigations*,<sup>158</sup> Kant's use of the imperative thematizes the world in a way not addressed in the existential-phenomenological work of Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger, who take being in the world as a given starting point. Like Kant, Lingis advocates a more restrictive role of freedom in opposition to Sartre's espousal of radical, absolute freedom. Juxtaposing the existential freedom found in the work of Sartre with Kant's imperative and Kant's view of freedom, Lingis observes that we are free, "and yet everywhere there is constraint in this world."<sup>159</sup> Lingis emphasizes that perceptions and encounters with others are not a product of an absolutely free will but are appropriate responses to imperatives of obligation.

Lingis explicates Merleau-Ponty's levels and their ordinances but criticizes the *praktognosia* of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception as too restrictive. Emphasizing the sensation that underlies perception and makes perception possible, Lingis offers his own "elemental imperative," which supersedes Levinas's metaphysics of alterity and retains Kant's concern with the sublime as a fundamental revelation of imperatives. Lingis proposes that the face is not an epiphany but an elemental substance with eyes that not only appeal, but shine and radiate directives. For Lingis, the elemental imperative is prior to alterity, which takes place on and issues

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158. Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations*, 109.

159. *Ibid.*, 107.

from elemental ground. Somewhat like the force of Kant's command of reason to be in command of itself, the elemental imperative also commands itself: sight is to become luminous; hearing is to become vibrant; and thought is to deepen, to become profound. In addition, there is the elemental imperative issued from the elements of life itself in the earth, water, atmosphere, and light: that life may flourish to become support, oceanic, aerial, spiritual, and lambent. With this imperative to become elemental, we can see in Lingis a doctrine of sublime action that goes beyond needs and safeguards, and produces what is important in itself: expansive beauty to which we dedicate our lives and in whose service we subjugate our hedonist inclinations.

Lingis offers a striking synthesis between the thought of Kant and of Levinas through the imperative force of respect felt in the encounter with the Other. For Lingis, what is common to both thinkers' doctrines is an absolute exteriority. In Lingis's view of Kant, this is the exteriority of the command of thought by an imperative that is not generated by an individual subject but that already weighs on subjectivity, constituting subjectivity in subjection. For Levinas, it is the exteriority of alterity – i.e., the otherness of the Other, who remains absolutely exterior to me and is absolutely irreducible to my subjectivity. Importing the Kantian imperative of reason to become practical into Levinas's doctrine of alterity, Lingis argues that the encounter with the Other takes place in a practicable field made intelligible by the imperative for law, which makes this encounter possible by rendering things, others, and the world consistent and coherent.

Although Lingis does not assign an all-encompassing role to Kantian reason, he does give Kant's categorical imperative a fundamental status. In contrast to hypothetical imperatives, in which we are free not to act on our desired objectives, the categorical imperative immediately orders what must be done (as in the encounter with the Other, who immediately commands our respect). Also, the categorical imperative forms the imperative for a world – the self-same, concrete world, structured by a *logos endiathetos*, necessary for the consistent ordering of thought and perception. Lingis states that an imperative likewise applies to our subjectivity. If the self is taken not as simple locus of intersecting currents of energy but as a cause, a commencement, and a source of resources, it results from finding myself subject to an imperative. Lingis concurs with Kant, who thought that "I can" is given in "I must." For Lingis, the constituting of the sensuous human organism as an agent in its own right is dependent on the intuition of the imperative. In these ways, Lingis maintains, as do the other phenomenologists, the Kantian conception of philosophy in which fundamental imperatives govern all human action and philosophical inquiry.

## CHAPTER II

# IMPERATIVES IN MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

### MERLEAU-PONTY AND KANT'S IMPERATIVES

#### *The Extension of Kant's Moral Imperative into the Imperatives of Perception*

In seeking imperatives in phenomenology, we must note that in general Merleau-Ponty is quite critical of Kant's view of perception, and knowledge, as synthesized by the mind. Merleau-Ponty's critique of a Cartesian consciousness that constitutes the world and its objects holds for Kant's synthesizing power of the mind, as for Merleau-Ponty the subject finds itself always already in the world. Thus, Merleau-Ponty begins with real things and not the geometric data of Kantian space and time.

Merleau-Ponty's view, however, does not preclude the notion of imperatives in perception but broadens the scope of the imperative. Kant did not speak of imperatives in perception, as in his view perception is a spontaneous synthesis of the understanding and thus there is no will for an imperative to command. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, takes perception to be a movement or behavior on the part of the perceiver. Because of the perceiver's involvement, or "involution" in Merleau-Ponty's terms, there is indeed a will to be commanded in perception. The imperatives in perception implicit in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception are at times made explicit. The "upsurge of a true and exact world" of which Merleau-Ponty speaks forces itself on us; its objects bring their force to bear on us. This upsurge illustrates imperative force, showing a force that is intelligible without the form of Kantian law.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception affords us a good place to begin our comparison of Kant's imperatives and contemporary phenomenology. Like Kant, Merleau-Ponty objects to the traditional accounts of perception based on empiricism's isolation of inert, objective qualities or set in the Aristotelian relation of space and objects as "container" and "contained." As Joseph J. Kockelmans notes, Kant's conception of space is obviously not concerned with the relation between something containing and something contained, as such a relation would only be possible between two things. "According to Kant, therefore, space is ... only the means whereby the positing of things is made possible. In this conception, therefore, space is not ether in which things could float, nor is it an abstract quality common to all things. We must think of it rather as that on the ground of which it is universally possible to bring things into

connection with one another.”<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, however, criticizes Kant’s view of space as geometrically mathematized and claims that space is “spatializing” rather than “spatialized” as in Kant’s view. This spatializing does not refer back to Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception but to an embodied subject phenomenologically understood, whose intentionality constitutes spatial relations across space and time.

In terms of imperatives, Merleau-Ponty brings imperatives into the realm of perception in a way not possible in Kant’s doctrine. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception is even more “imperativized” than Kant’s. Because Kant took sensibility to be passive, we cannot properly speak of imperatives in Kant’s doctrine of perception. There is, however, an imperative structure to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception. Here, perception is an instance of human behavior, or a movement, which actively intensifies an object’s preconfigured essence and makes the object’s qualities stand out. Because perception is active, it includes the perceiver’s will, which can be commanded by imperatives. In this way, sensible things are not really given in perception but command it like norms. For Merleau-Ponty, imperative force issues directly from the preconfigured objects of perception themselves, whereas for Kant, objects are recognizable only through their forms as subject to geometric law, made intelligible by the concepts of the understanding. Because we can now speak directly of imperatives in the phenomenology of perception, we can carry the imperative into the realm of sensibility and make it more thorough-going than Kant allowed. In addition, a review of Merleau-Ponty’s “*praktognosia*” of objects as objectives, the distinctive “style” of things, the “levels” of perception, and the nature of freedom grounded in the world will further illustrate the thorough-going nature of imperatives as directives for perception and human action in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

### *The Preconfiguration of Things*

For Merleau-Ponty, all things and objects have preconfigured essences. They need not await the synthetic constitution through the forms of space and time intuited by the mind. Nor do things need to await their constitution in the intentionality of Husserlian object-directed consciousness. Things hold together on their own. Because the world of things is ready-made, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the decisive moment in perception as “the upsurge of a *true* and *exact* world.”<sup>2</sup> In this way, Merleau-Ponty’s direct view of things’ essences stands in contrast to Kant’s

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1. Joseph J. Kockelmans, Merleau-Ponty on Space Perception and Space. In *Phenomenology and the Natural Sciences: Essays and Translations* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 281.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 53.

synthesizing categories of the understanding. For the phenomenologist of perception, to fit the phenomenal universe into scientific categories allows them to make sense only in the universe of science.<sup>3</sup> Things, and the world, hold together before any recourse the perceiver has to any physical law: "The real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgment before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination.... The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions."<sup>4</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, things are not "a wandering troop of sensations or a system of ephemeral judgments."<sup>5</sup> Perception does not begin in disorder, confusion, or absolute neutrality but begins with coherent things and their immanent significance: "I do not perceive chaos but things."<sup>6</sup> Nor is perception a matter of a psychological function of the association of corresponding ideas: "To perceive is not to experience a host of impressions accompanied by memories capable of clinching them; it is to see, standing forth from a cluster of data, an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible."<sup>7</sup>

Because the reality of things precedes any experience or judgment of them, objects' preconfigured essences act as imperative directives for the perceiver. For Merleau-Ponty, *imperative direction* lies at the heart of perception. "The word perception indicates a *direction* rather than a primitive function."<sup>8</sup> Reiterating Husserl's directive that phenomenology is a descriptive science (as opposed to constructivist accounts in intellectualism or empiricism), Merleau-Ponty adds that "the real has to be described, not constructed or formed."<sup>9</sup> In addition to directives for perception, directives for description can be found in the phenomenology of perception itself. Returning to Husserl's phenomenological battle cry "back to the things themselves," Merleau-Ponty finds in phenomena "a basic layer of experience, a whole already pregnant with an irreducible meaning."<sup>10</sup>

As a phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty turns to an analysis of sense experience itself ("Sense experience' has become once more a question for

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3. *Ibid.*, 11.

4. *Ibid.*, x-xi.

5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 123.

6. *Ibid.*, 133.

7. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 22.

8. *Ibid.*, 12.

9. *Ibid.*, x.

10. *Ibid.*, 21-2.

11. *Ibid.*, 52.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

us”<sup>11</sup>) and uncovers what has been overlooked in empirical and intellectualist theories of perception. Empiricism reduces perception to the possession of inert qualities, whereas intellectualism is constructivist or merely nominalist. What Merleau-Ponty finds in sense experience is not inert or dead qualities but active ones. Sense experience further invests these active qualities with vital value. For instance, “a wooden wheel placed on the ground is not, *for sight*, the same thing as a wheel bearing a load.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, “vision is already inhabited by a meaning (*sens*) which gives it a function in the spectacle of the world and in our existence.”<sup>13</sup> Because for Merleau-Ponty every sensation is already pregnant with a meaning, things have stable characteristics or properties that are taken to be perceptual constants.<sup>14</sup> In our view, these constants of force have an imperative character, as they issue directives for our appropriate response. For instance, one does not look at a painting in the same way that one listens to a symphony. Also, the applause that follows a performance would be out of place in the visual arts. The perceiver responds accordingly to the different directives issuing from the objects’ or situations’ preconfigurations.<sup>15</sup>

In these ways, the perceptual constants issuing from things are imperative directives for perception that command our response. To phrase it in phenomenological language, the things themselves carry a directive force for the perceiver.<sup>16</sup> Here, sensible things are not simply given in perception but command it like norms. Thus, perception is a response to a directive in the thing’s preconfiguration. Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a listener following a sound to illustrate the constancy of phenomena. “If, during the process of reflection, I cease to hear sounds, and then suddenly become receptive to them again, they appear to me to be already there, and I pick up a thread which I had dropped but which is unbroken. The field is a setting that I possess for a certain type of experiences, and which, once established, cannot be nullified.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, to see an object is to intensify its ready-made distinctness by making it and its qualities stand out as a figure against a background. In general, to perceive is to distinguish, intensify, and clarify an object or a situation. But objects do not always present themselves so clearly. Merleau-Ponty notes that “it is indeed true that perceptual structures do not always force themselves upon the observer; there are some that are ambiguous.”<sup>18</sup> He immediately adds that

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14. *Ibid.*, 299.

15. For a historical musical example of perception as responsive behavior to directives, we would add that in the mid-1700s, audiences in Mannheim, Germany, not yet accustomed to the rising key changes of sonata form, rose from their seats as the music modulated to a higher key during the bridge sections of the exposition.

16. As with Kant, there is a correct way to see things for Merleau-Ponty.

17. *Ibid.*, 328.

18. *Ibid.*, 440. This view of ambiguity is, of course, consistent with the possibility of a free subject’s response to imperative directives.

“but these reveal even more effectively the presence within us of a spontaneous evaluation.”<sup>19</sup> This spontaneous evaluation within us, however, is not like Kant’s spontaneity that places the data of sensibility under the categories of the understanding. Kant’s sensibility is passive, whereas Merleau-Ponty’s is active. Because sense experience invests the quality with vital value, Merleau-Ponty can explain how the knife lying next to the onions on the kitchen counter takes on a different meaning when it is menacingly brandished. In the phenomenology of perception, perception actively brings out and intensifies the qualities (or *quale*) of objects: “I have brought out the quality by fixing my eyes on a portion of the visual field: then and only then have I found myself before a certain *quale* which absorbs my gaze.”<sup>20</sup> More forcefully, Merleau-Ponty asserts that “to look at the object is to plunge oneself into it.”<sup>21</sup> Again, Merleau-Ponty is in no way speaking of passivity in sensibility – the perceiver actively responds to the active qualities of the thing. In Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, both the perceiver and the perceived are characterized by movement. As Lingis notes in *The Imperative*, the nature of the sensory field is not a grid of coordinates but a sphere of pulsing activity of things’ essences. “The sensory flux does not present itself as so many space-time points successively filled and emptied and filled again, but as a sphere in which points pivot, edges extend levels, spaces open paths, colors intensify themselves by playing across a field, tones thicken and approach and thin out and recede and send their overtones into one another.”<sup>22</sup>

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the complicity between the perceiver and the object: “the things attract my look, my gaze caresses the things, it espouses their contours and their reliefs, between it and them we catch sight of a complicity.”<sup>23</sup> This complicity, too, is active, not passive. By seeing things’ qualities as dynamic (as luminescing, radiating color, or vibrating with sound), they attract us as lures or snares for our sensibility. In this way, perception is an active attunement to the directives of things. Thus, perception is behavior, and we can directly apply imperatives to the phenomenology of perception although we cannot do so with Kant’s theory of passive sensibility.<sup>24</sup> May we not say that what Merleau-Ponty’s labels complicity between the

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19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.* (italics in translation), 226.

21. *Ibid.*, 67.

22. Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 29.

23. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 76.

24. Caygill notes that Kant’s relation of the passivity of sensibility and the activity of understanding carries a fundamental difficulty of maintaining that the mind is passively receptive to the givenness of objects while actively coordinating them in definite relations (*A Kant Dictionary*, 374.).

perceiver and the object is the perceiver's compliance with an imperative in the object – that the act of perception is obedience to a commanding directive? In fact, Merleau-Ponty speaks of vision as “subordination” a central characteristic of any imperative: “Vision is a *thought subordinated to a certain field*, and this is what is called a *sense*. When I say that I have senses and they give me access to the world, I am not the victim of some muddle, I do not confuse causal thinking and reflection, I merely express this truth which forces itself upon reflection taken as a whole....”<sup>25</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, vision has a component of thought as with Kant's view, but vision is not subordinated to the laws of geometric configuration. Vision is subordinated “to a certain field,” the phenomenal field in which objects appear and give directives for appropriate vision. To understand more fully how Merleau-Ponty can speak of directives coming from the phenomenal field itself (instead of from the mind's categories of the understanding), we must review the different concepts of space in the doctrines of Merleau-Ponty and Kant.

#### *Embodied Space versus Geometric Space*

In Merleau-Ponty's view, Kant takes space to define the objectively and universally measurable relation of things, or objects, to one another in “a system of invariable relations to which every existent thing is subject in so far as it can be known.”<sup>26</sup> These relations are governed and rendered intelligible by universal law and “geometrized projection” (*géométral*).<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty's account of space, however, always entails the relation of my living body to space: “our body is not primarily *in* space: it is *of* it.”<sup>28</sup> Because we are not much “in” space but “of” space, the body belongs to and combines with space and time: “Insofar as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesized in my consciousness, and into which it draws my body. I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them.”<sup>29</sup> Because we are embodied subjects, we are not simply one object in relation to other objects. Because we are “of” space, we are immersed in space and inhabit it. Thus,

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25. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 217. “La vision est une *pensée assujettie à un certain champ* et c'est là ce qu'on appelle un sens. Quand je dis que j'ai des sens et qu'ils me font accéder au monde, je ne suis pas victime d'une confusion, je ne mêle pas la pensée causale et la réflexion, j'exprime seulement cette vérité qui s'impose à une réflexion intégrale....” *Phenomenologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 251.

26. *Ibid.*, 327.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 148 (italics added for emphasis).

29. *Ibid.*, 140.



perception occurs not in passive geometric space but actively inhabited space. For Merleau-Ponty space is spatializing, whereas for Kant it is spatialized. Things do not simply extend into empty geometrical space, but they extend that field. "To be a body is to be tied to a certain world...."<sup>30</sup> Perception takes place "in the world" with a structure imposed by a horizon on which things appear in profiles and aspects as figures against backgrounds. Here, the body is what brings perspective to space, whereas Kant takes space to be the perspectiveless position derived from the geometrized projection of all possible perspectives.

The unique spatial significance of the body in Merleau-Ponty's account stands in sharp contrast to Kant's view of the body in homogeneous space. As Merleau-Ponty notes, "The outline of my body is a frontier which ordinary spatial relations do not cross. This is because its parts are interrelated in a peculiar way: they are not spread out side by side, but enveloped in each other. For example, my hand is not a collection of points."<sup>31</sup> Nor is the hand normally an object. This would only be the case when the hand is injured; I would then hold it with my other hand. The hand, as part of the body, has a unique capacity of self-movement, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty's claim that for Kant the hand is "an 'outer brain of man.'"<sup>32</sup> Merleau-Ponty's claim, however, is overly reductionistic and unfair to Kant's account of the body (although it can be aptly applied to Descartes' account). Kant does, in fact, advocate a seminal role for the human body in perceptual orientation. The body, because of its non-transposable incongruencies of left and right hands, front and back, and head and feet, accounts for the particularized implacement of things in space. Edward Casey<sup>33</sup> notes that Kant's essay "Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Regions in Space" shows that the body's role in the implacement of things in sensible regions provides things with a directionality they would lack if considered merely as occupying positions relative to each other. Without the implementation of the body's role, material entities would be unoriented, lacking the definite direction of right and left, up and down, and front and back, which the body provides. Taken together, these paired terms of bodily direction describe the three dimensions of space, and the dimensionality of space follows the directionality of the body. Thus, Kant proposes a distinctly corporeal deduction. Only because in "the first data of our experience"<sup>34</sup> we find our

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30. *Ibid.*, 148.

31. *Ibid.*, 98.

32. *Ibid.*, 316.

33. Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 203-5.

34. Immanuel Kant, "Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Regions in Space," trans. D. E. Walford, in *Kant: Selected Pre-Critical Writings and Correspondence with Beck*, ed. G. B. Kerferd and D. E. Walford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 43; Ak II, 383.

bodies as already bifurcated into paired sides and parts can we perceive sensible objects as oriented in regions that rejoin and reflect our own bodily bifurcations. Even for Kant, things are not oriented in and by themselves in pure space; they require our intervention to become oriented. Furthermore, Casey contends that this is not a purely mental operation: the *a priori* of orientation belongs to the body, not to the mind.

Yet Merleau-Ponty offers a far more dynamic and involved account of the body's role in perception than does Kant. Despite Kant's recognition of the uniqueness of the body's incongruencies, Kant's description lacks the self-motile aspect of which Merleau-Ponty is so keenly aware. We might add that, even though Casey credits Kant with adding an account of "the living human body" to subjective idealism, the non-transposability of human hands, etc., need not be understood only through one's own lived body. These incongruencies could be observed with as much certainty in a human corpse. The dynamic view of Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of perception, which takes qualities of objects to be active and perception to be an activity, thus also applies to space. Space is a power that always refers to the living subject. Far from being singularly homogeneous or, as for Aristotle, a relation of container and contained:

Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible. This means instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected.... I catch space at its source, and now think the relationships which underlie this word, realizing then that they live only through the medium of the subject who traces out and sustains them; and pass from spatialized to spatializing space.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, we can see that Merleau-Ponty's view of perception is thoroughly dynamic as it uncovers movement in the object's qualities, the act of perception, and in "spatializing" space itself, which refers back to the constituting intentionality of phenomenological subjectivity. Now, instead of imperatives of natural law for (and within) geometric space, we find a host of imperatives that apply to embodied space. Although Merleau-Ponty rejects any formalism of consciousness by making the body the subject of perception,<sup>36</sup> we are situated in, and subject to, embodied space. The very condition of spatiality centers on the subject, and consequently the perceptual field offers the subject a motivating structure: "... we have been led to bring out, as the condition of spatiality, the establishment of the

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35. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 243-4.

36. *Ibid.*, 225.

subject in a setting, and finally his inherence in the world. In other words, we have been forced to recognize that spatial perception is a structural phenomenon and is comprehensible only within a perceptual field which contributes in its entirety to motivating the spatial perception by suggesting to the subject a possible anchorage.”<sup>37</sup>

Thus, we are always subject to the structure imposed by the phenomenal field and a horizon, which supply the motivation for perception. When Merleau-Ponty speaks of motivation here, there can be no correlation with Kant's *Triebfeder* as motivation, but we may nevertheless speak of an imperative structure. All perception is structured as the perception of a figure against a background. “Any initial perception independent of any background is inconceivable.”<sup>38</sup> I am forced to see my surroundings vaguely if I want to see the object clearly.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the phenomenal field carries an imperative structure and motivations for perception, which precede the subject's coming onto the scene. Beyond the absolute requirement of initial perception of a figure against a background, it is true that perceptual structures do not always force themselves on us; subtle appearances often must be sought out. Yet, the original structure of significance to the embodied subject in space remains and is the ground of every giving of meaning, of *Sinn-Gebung*: “There is an autochthonous significance of the world which is constituted in the dealings which our incarnate existence has with it, and which provides the ground of every deliberate *Sinngebung*.”<sup>40</sup> Space always refers to my body, and the body is the vehicle of perception. “The body is borne towards tactile experience by all its surfaces and all its organs simultaneously, and carries with it a certain typical structure of the tactile world.”<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, Merleau-Ponty speaks of an imperative structure with the body's spatialization in, and of, the phenomenal field. To illustrate further the body's significance in perception (and perception's imperative character), Merleau-Ponty compares tactile and visual experience. Visual experience pushes objectification further than does tactile experience, and we could flatter ourselves that we ourselves constitute the world, as it spreads out a spectacle before us at a distance. Tactile experience, however, does show the body to be a motile locus of perception, which is synchronized and geared with the perceptual field:

Tactile experience, on the other hand, adheres to the surface of our body; we cannot unfold it before us, and it never quite becomes an object.... It is not I who touch, it is my body; when I touch I do not think of diversity, but my

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37. *Ibid.*, 280.

38. *Ibid.*, 281.

39. *Ibid.*, 67.

40. *Ibid.* (italics in translation), 441.

41. *Ibid.*, 317.

hands rediscover a certain style which is part of their motor potentiality, and this is what we mean when we speak of a perceptual field. I am able to touch effectively only if the phenomenon finds an echo within me, if it accords with a certain nature of my consciousness, and if the organ which goes out to meet it is synchronized with it.<sup>42</sup>

This synchronization of the body with phenomena, this gearing in which phenomena find an echo within us, is clearly our response to the imperative directives we find in things. The importance of the tactile body in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of space and perception, and of gearing as a response to perceptual directives, culminates in his description of the relation of the body to the world of things as an "intertwining" (*entrelacs*). In Merleau-Ponty's final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, the concept of flesh emerges as the ultimate notion in his thought – an uncompromised notion thinkable by itself,<sup>43</sup> as well as a prototype for Being universally. Flesh is the *exemplar sensible*, because its manner of being is elemental. The body is able to move itself because it has an awareness of itself and its situation in the world; this awareness constitutes the postural schema. The synthesizing agency, then, is not the spontaneity of the mind, as Kant would have it, but the corporeal schema. Merleau-Ponty's schema, however, does not engender or posit an ideal term of unity of perceiver and thing. The focus is on the thing as a transversal unity in its style – a direction-giving unity of different sensorial tones and textures concurring, fitting together, expressing one another.<sup>44</sup> In response to perceptual directives, the sensitive flesh of the body intertwines with the sensuous flesh of things. For Merleau-Ponty, the body has an elemental status, whereas for Kant, even though the body orients things in place, the mind plays the larger role with its projection of geometric axes of infinite extension. The irreducibility of the body's directions of left and right orients the dimensions of Kantian space, but only as the initial specific actions for instantiations of universality and necessity. Merleau-Ponty's concept of space, however, centers on the spatializing dynamics of the lived body, which is always subject to the structures of the phenomenal field and its various objects that seep into this field and generate regional ontologies. Furthermore, we respond to the imperative directives of things and situations as we are geared to their motivating structures and their surrounding phenomenal fields.

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42. *Ibid.*, 316.

43. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.

44. Alphonso Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 62.

## IMPERATIVE STYLE AND LEVELS

“Praktognosia”: *The Imperative Practicality of Objects as Objectives*

In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, Lingis discovers a strong connection in the directives of objects in perception between Kant's practical imperative and Merleau-Ponty's “*praktognosia*,” which orders objects as objectives, as tasks for our accomplishment. Lingis summarizes Kant's view of the imperative as an imperative for rational autonomy. First seated in the understanding, the imperative commands thought to actualize itself, to command the sensory-motor organs that collect content for thought, and to disengage the activating will in our composite sensible nature from the lures of sensuous objects. For there to be intelligibility, our practical powers must arrange things as not simply a series of sensuous lures but as intelligible structures. The imperative laid on the composite human agency of sensibility and understanding becomes an imperative to act on the phenomenal field so as to order external nature in conformity with the rational representation of the universe, which thought constitutes in obedience to its own *a priori* imperative. Reason, by virtue of its own imperative, must become practical.<sup>45</sup>

Merleau-Ponty acknowledges Kant's imperative of ordering perception when he describes perception as primarily a “*praktognosia*” oriented toward things. However, Merleau-Ponty's *praktognosia* does not need Kant's rational representation for the understanding to obey the imperative. Merleau-Ponty bypasses representation by rooting his imperative in the structure and necessity of the embodied subject in the world. “Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, a ‘*praktognosia*,’ which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function.’”<sup>46</sup> As Lingis notes, the subjection of the subject in the phenomenology of perception takes place via the exterior ordinance of things, which directs the intentional focus of the subject's sensory powers and its exploratory positions and movements.<sup>47</sup> For Merleau-Ponty and Lingis, the practical imperative (or the world-imperative in Merleau-Ponty's terms, because the imperative is first in the world, exterior to the subject) is not placed on our interior understanding in conflict with exterior sensuality. The practical imperative of *praktognosia* is placed on our postural schema, which integrates and

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45. Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 37.

46. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 140-1.

47. Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility*, 37.

mobilizes our efficacy. *Praktognosia* orders our competence, and every subsequent kind of comprehension is derived from it.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, as phenomenologists, both Merleau-Ponty and Lingis agree with Kant that in the perception of things we cannot grasp a *Ding-an-sich*. “The key, the inner formula ... is never grasped; the real thing is before our perception as a task for exploration. But the real thing is not the sum of all that we have recorded of it; it closes upon itself, remains exterior, always beyond all that our perceptual samplings have turned up of it, not given but an external ordinance.”<sup>49</sup> Even though we have no recourse to the “thing-in-itself,” the appearance of the “thing itself” supplies directives for perception. “A perceived thing is a pole which draws the convergent surfaces and organs of our bodies like a telos, a task. The reality of things is not given in our perception, but orders it as an imperative.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, objects are not simply given to perception, but they order and command it. In this way, objects are objectives of exploration, having an imperative character. In terms of Kantian imperatives, we may not be on the unconditional level of the categorical imperative: no one is obligated to perceive; one can shut one’s eyes and stop up one’s ears. However, with objects as objectives, it seems that we are on the level of hypothetical imperatives. If one is to perceive correctly, there is a right way to accomplish this task, which is ordered by an imperative issuing from the object’s preconfiguration.

Thus, phenomenological perception is *praktognosia* and sensation is behavior. Perceived things are not static objects but objectives, tasks for our accomplishment. The character of perception is not that of the sensations of isolated empirical objects but is the perceiver’s response to directives – the perceiver’s involution in the sensuous. The directives in things are snares for our sensibilities. To perceive, one has to look, has to mobilize oneself and manipulate one’s surroundings. “Sensation itself is behavior.... To hear a sound is to turn and follow it.... Each perceived thing is a task and a means toward locating the next thing.”<sup>51</sup> Objects are objectives, tasks ordering our competencies to accomplishment. Lingis’s, and Merleau-Ponty’s, teleology of objects as objectives, however, differs from Kant’s teleology of objects. Objects for Kant are here-and-now instantiations appearing in the systematic coordinates of space and time ordered by universal geometric laws, an ordering by, for, and from the dictates of reason. Merleau-Ponty and Lingis discern directives issuing from the very things themselves, as snares for our sensibilities. To see how imperatives specifically apply to perception, we should return to perception itself and review Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of the “style” of things and the “levels” of perception.

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48. *Ibid.*

49. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 63.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 38.

*The Imperative Style of Things*

As noted above, Merleau-Ponty takes the world of things to be preconfigured. For him, things are charged with meaning, unity, and immanent significance before the perceiving subject arrives on the scene. Merleau-Ponty calls this unity of things their "style." Style accounts for the unity of a thing, distinguishes it from other things, and is also analogous to the unity of the world. We experience, in the natural attitude, a flow of experiences that imply and explain each other both simultaneously and successively.<sup>52</sup> To explicate the unity of style, Merleau-Ponty revisits the theme of preconfiguration versus formulation: "This unity is comparable with that of an individual whom I recognize because he is recognizable in an unchallengeably self-evident way, before I ever succeed in stating the formula governing his character, because he retains the same style in everything he says and does, even though he may change his place or opinions."<sup>53</sup> A thing's style makes it what it is and distinguishes it from other things. Merleau-Ponty illuminates his concept of style with the example of Paris' distinctiveness and emphasizes style's contrasts with law: "Paris for me is not an object of many facets, a collection of perceptions, nor is it the law governing these perceptions. Just as a person gives evidence of the same emotional essence in his gestures with his hands, in his way of walking and in the sound of his voice, each express perception occurring in my journey through Paris – the cafés, people's faces, the poplars along the quay, the bends in the Seine – stands out against the city's whole being, and merely confirms that there is a certain style or a certain significance which Paris possesses."<sup>54</sup> Thus, style is neither a collection of empirical sense impressions nor the experience of the law governing sensations. Style stands somewhere between empiricism and Kant's requirement of the universal in intelligibility gleaned through law. Things, for Merleau-Ponty, are not made recognizable as objects of geometric delineation – they are recognizable through their distinctive styles. It is style that distinguishes Paris's cafés from London's pubs from New York's delicatessens and pizza parlors.

Style is produced and reproduced as "a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being."<sup>55</sup> There is an interplay of directives and modulating sensations emanating from the interior of the thing, making that thing imperatively specific. For instance, "color is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being" but is "something that comes to touch lightly and make resound at the diverse regions of the colored or visible world, a certain differentiation, an

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52. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 281.

53. *Ibid.*, 328.

54. *Ibid.*, 281.

55. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

ephemeral modulation of this world.”<sup>56</sup> Against empiricism, which begins with the perception of individual and ontologically distinct *quale* (or qualities), Merleau-Ponty brings a surrounding context to his phenomenology of perception: “We must first understand that this red under my eyes is not, as is always said, a *quale*, a pellicle of being without thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say.”<sup>57</sup> Perception is not the grasping of isolated *quale*, which are then assembled in the mind. It is a response to active *quale*, which puts us in complicity with things.

The constellation of the things and their surroundings leads Merleau-Ponty to posit fields of being, or regional ontologies, for different things. Continuing the discussion of the color red, he notes that the field of red things includes such diversities as the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar. This red is also the punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes the dresses of women, the robes of professors, bishops, and the field of adornments and of uniforms. Merleau-Ponty concludes that “its red literally is not the same as it appears in one constellation or in the other....”<sup>58</sup> Against any reductionism of *quale*, Merleau-Ponty contends that it is not the isolated *quale* that gives a style but that style brings forth *quale*. The quality of color is given in its configuration in its constellation of the surrounding light, shade, and colors. “The color is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that repels or that repel it.”<sup>59</sup> In these relations of qualities to their surroundings, Merleau-Ponty sees “an immanent logic at work in the sensual field, which governs the relief of things in sizes and shapes and their staggering out in depth, which commands the distribution of tone and texture and grain in the things and holds all things together in a system.”<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Kant’s emphasis on the interiority of the faculty of the understanding in the coordination of perception, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the exteriority of objects in their preconfigurations, and the richness of their style and interrelated *quale*. Kant’s view of things as appearances projected on a universalized geometric grid does not take the phenomenological step toward the things

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56. *Ibid.*, 132.

57. *Ibid.*, 131.

58. *Ibid.*, 132.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Alphonso Lingis, Translator’s preface to *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), li.



themselves. By emphasizing the style and interrelated *quale* of things, Merleau-Ponty takes a step beyond Husserl. Objects need not await their constitution in consciousness as the objects of intentionality. Things are unified wholes before any encounter with consciousness, whether synthetic or intentional. Thus, objects are not the synthetic representations of the Kantian mind but come to us as wholes. Their holistic coherence, consistency, and constancy precede any encounter we may have with objects.

In terms of imperatives, style unifies and commands the thing's field of presence, which accordingly commands our perception. The perceiver's active focus is required to bring out a *quale* and to establish or "fix" it. Again, Merleau-Ponty speaks of our perception of the color red: "It requires a focusing, however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before – as we put it so aptly – *fixing* it. And, now that I have fixed it, if my eyes penetrate into it, into its fixed structure, or if they start to wander around it again, the *quale* resumes its atmospheric existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly, metallic, or porous configuration or texture, and the *quale* itself counts for very little compared with these participations."<sup>61</sup> Here we can see that perception requires an active participation of the perceiver. The perceiver's will responds to an imperative directive or style in the thing itself, which the perceiver actively "fixes," allowing the immanent logic of the object's sensual field to stand forth and to be grasped. Although not imperative in Kant's sense of giving law, things come into presence, and come to command a field of presence, by their style. Style issues imperatives, acting as an invisible support for the visible. This unity of things for Merleau-Ponty is not the unity of a law or a set of representations, as it is for Kant. Rather, as Lingis notes in his translator's preface to *The Visible and the Invisible*,<sup>62</sup> this invisible piling upon which the visible is set is not a set of representations or bonds constituted by *a priori* operations of a mind, nor even a set of positive configurations which would be apprehended and possessed by a mind, and converted into objects of thought. On the contrary, to see is to see *with*, according to the invisible axes and pivots, levels, and lines of force of the visible; we are guided by them, *possessed* by them.<sup>63</sup> Their authority, their fascinating indestructible power,<sup>64</sup> refers back to their style: "to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, by the style, and thereby attain at once the far-off reaches of this style..."<sup>65</sup> In this way, Merleau-Ponty clearly speaks of

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61. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 132-3 (italics in original).

62. Lingis, Translator's preface to *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, xl-lvi.

63. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 151.

64. *Ibid.*, 150.

65. *Ibid.*, 188.

imperative force in style that “commands,” “guides,” “possesses,” and has “authority” and “indestructible power.”

As with the notion of space, the body also plays a role in Merleau-Ponty’s concept of style. The moving body is the primary analogon of what a style is. The body’s movements and gestures accomplish an ordered system of changes across a determined trajectory of time, launching itself into a new trajectory of time. For instance, walking is not a “repeatedly-compensated-for-falling”; it is a rhythm that propagates itself. The hand’s gesture is not a simple succession of spasms; from its first movement, it is commanded by its final phase.<sup>66</sup> The force of the imperative works its way from the thing to the perceiver, who in response takes up its image: “The thing is borne into presence by a scheme of contrasts that commands a constellation, that modulates a trajectory of time, and that makes it leave its place to come reverberate in the receptive sensitive flesh that perceives it.”<sup>67</sup> As Lingis notes, “The self that forms in our body, that sensitive-sensible *element* that moves itself, moves toward *things*.”<sup>68</sup> The human agent, for Merleau-Ponty and Lingis, is not ordered by the rational, as for Kant, but is a sensitivity delegated by things and an ability to respond their differing directives.

*Levels: Invisible Support for the Visible*

Merleau-Ponty speaks of an immanent logic of the sensual field as a system holding itself together by order of an imperative structure, but this system is not a set of principles or laws. Rather, it is a system of “levels” posited in the sensible field by our body in its primal assuming of position before the tasks of the world.<sup>69</sup> For instance, the level of the tangible has to be found by the hand, as the dominant note of the concerto has to be found by the ear. Our eyes adjust to the level of light in the dim apartment or as we step into summer sunshine; our ears tune out background noise to hear what someone is saying to us. This response to levels has the character of an imperative as an ordinance taken up and followed through. The level, however, is not what is perceived; it is that with which or according to which we perceive. As Lingis notes: “A level is neither a purely intelligible order nor a positive form given to a pure a priori intuition; it is a sensory phenomenon. A level is neither a content grasped in perception nor a form imposed on an amorphous matter of sensation; it is that with which or according to which we perceive. It is not an object formed nor an organization elaborated among objects but an ordinance taken up and

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66. Lingis, Translator’s preface to *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, xlviii.

67. *Ibid.*, xlix.

68. Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility*, 31.

69. Lingis, Translator’s preface to *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, li.

followed through.”<sup>70</sup> Lingis develops a distinction concerning the imperatives in perception between Kant’s perceived laws in Merleau-Ponty’s perception of directives and levels. Although directives and levels have an imperative character, they do not have the imperative universal or geometric character of Kant’s objects perceived in space and time. Levels and dimensions in the environment do not extend into empty geometrical space whose infinite dimensions are intuited *a priori* or conceived by formulas. Levels are not the *hic et nunc* instantiations of things, as all objects of perception are for Kant and Hegel. The levels do not simply extend *into* the space and time of a sensorial field; they *extend* that field.<sup>71</sup> Lingis notes that for Merleau-Ponty the sensible thing is not in space but, like a direction, is at work across space and time, presiding over a system of oppositional relationships (as with the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure). Merleau-Ponty’s thought is also close to that of Leibniz. The thing is not inserted into a preexisting locus of space; it organizes a space of planes and fields about itself.<sup>72</sup>

Levels have an “elemental” status; they are that with which or according to which we perceive. For instance, light allows sight to take place, and we adjust our eyes to various levels of light in order to see. Like the essences of things, levels are preconfigured; they do not await our constitution or representation of them to become whole. Merleau-Ponty uses the example of seeing through the water in a pool to explain how levels work in his notion of inhabited, embodied space:

When through the water’s thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without this flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as* it is and where it is – which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself – the aqueous power, the sirupy and shimmering element – is *in* space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, it materializes itself there, yet it is not contained there; and if I raise my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections is playing, I cannot gainsay

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70. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 27.

71. *Ibid.*, 26 (italics added).

72. Lingis, Translator’s preface to *The Visible and the Invisible*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, xlviii.

the fact that the water visits it, too, or at least sends into it, upon it, its active and living essence.<sup>73</sup>

Here, Merleau-Ponty combines several main themes in his phenomenology of perception: how levels are elemental as that through which we perceive; how space is embodied, not geometrized, nor like Aristotle's relation of a container and the contained (even with the water in a pool); and how things' essences are active and living. In addition to these intimations of an imperative structure in perception, we can again find an imperative in our perceptual response to levels, for Merleau-Ponty describes our perceptual responses to designated levels as a "gearing" (*engrenage*). Merleau-Ponty, again, explains this through our embodied subjectivity. "The possession of a body implies the ability to change levels and to 'understand' space, just as the possession of a voice implies the ability to change key."<sup>74</sup> This responsive gearing of perception to the directives of levels is made possible, however, because of the freedom Merleau-Ponty discerns in the relation of the perceiver to the phenomenal field. We next review Merleau-Ponty's concept of freedom, with an eye turned toward Kant's view of autonomy in freedom.

### *Freedom*

It is not surprising that Merleau-Ponty concludes *Phenomenology of Perception* with a chapter on freedom. His concept of freedom relates to the embodied subjectivity that finds itself within the structures of the phenomenal field, and only free subjects can be obligated by imperatives. All the phenomenologists are critical of Kant's notion of autonomy, as it is an inward turn away from the world (i.e., from the phenomenal field in Merleau-Ponty's terms), whereas the phenomenologists argue for the exteriority of imperatives in things and other people. But how does Merleau-Ponty's view of freedom compare with Kant's? Merleau-Ponty's first reference to Kant's conception of freedom points out a problem of Kant's autonomy and idealism in the experience of freedom in concrete actions. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty refers to Max Scheler, who alleges that Kant conflates ethical intentions and real actions in "... the Kantian idea of an intention which is tantamount to the act, which Scheler countered with the argument that the cripple who would like to be able to save a drowning man and the good swimmer who actually saves him do not have the same experience of autonomy."<sup>75</sup> It would be more correct, however, for Scheler and Merleau-Ponty to speak of good will and duty rather than good

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73. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, In *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 182.

74. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 251.

75. *Ibid.*, 437.

intentions in Kant's ethics. In the *Grounding*, Kant shows that he is well aware of the limitations in the archetype of good intentions, the "Golden Rule." For Kant, as with all ethical intentions, the Golden Rule is conditional, because it is based on empirical outcomes. Its heteronomy cannot be an autonomous grounding principle, and it does not account for strict notion of duty.<sup>76</sup> Still, Scheler's contention of the limits of good intentions can be aptly applied to the good will and duty. The experience of autonomy in wanting to save the drowning person would not be the same in someone who cannot swim as in someone who can. In agreeing with Scheler's assertion, Merleau-Ponty points out that Kant's indeterminate freedom would undo all determinate ethical actions with its successive indeterminacy. Without the determinations of concrete action, freedom is everywhere and nowhere. For Scheler and Merleau-Ponty, the intention of the good will is not tantamount to its act. Merleau-Ponty insists on a commitment of freedom to action and events, which forms the basis of a lived ethics of free, but concrete, choices. These actions are not merely the good will's intentions followed by their effects. Ethical intentions must be committed to action or else they will remain indeterminate. Contrasting the indeterminacy of Kant's autonomy with the determinacy of action, Merleau-Ponty argues that:

A freedom which has no need to be exercised because it is already acquired could not commit itself ... it knows that the following instant will find it, come what may, just as free and indeterminate. The very notion of freedom demands that our decision should plunge into the future, that something should have to be *done* by it, that subsequent instant should benefit from its predecessor and, though not necessitated, should at least be required by it. If freedom is doing, it is necessary that what it does should not immediately be undone by a new freedom.... Unless there are cycles of behavior, open situations requiring a certain completion and capable of constituting a background to either a confirmatory or transformatory decision, we never experience freedom.<sup>77</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that even when Merleau-Ponty is critical of Kant's concept of freedom, he still uses terms that we can call imperative, e.g., the "demands" of freedom and its "required" structure of not being undone by a new freedom. Like Kant, Merleau-Ponty retains the distinction between causal necessity and imperatives in the realm of human freedom, as only free beings can be subject to the requirements of

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76. Immanuel Kant, *The Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3d ed., trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), fn. 23, 37, 6:430.

77. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 437-8.

imperatives. For Merleau-Ponty, although each instant is not necessitated by the previous one, each is required by the previous one.

Returning to the necessary structures of the phenomenal field, Merleau-Ponty sees freedom as a necessity in our relation to this field. There must be some distance between us and our objectives to keep us from collapsing into them. This distance is the phenomenal field itself and accounts for our simultaneous experience of freedom: "If freedom is to have *room* in which to move, if it is to be describable as freedom, there must be something to hold it away from objectives, it must have a field, which means that there must be for it special possibilities, or realities which tend to cling to being."<sup>78</sup> Here Merleau-Ponty's original text emphasizes the importance of the phenomenal field, as he uses the word "*champ*" for both "room" and "field": "Si la liberté doit avoir *du champ*, ... il faut donc qu'elle ait *un champ*..."<sup>79</sup> In contrast to Kant's freedom, which is unconditional and completely autonomous, for Merleau-Ponty, "there is no freedom without a field,"<sup>80</sup> and this field precedes any autonomous will.

Even though it is not absolutely autonomous, Merleau-Ponty's concept of freedom does run parallel to Kant's in the sense that it allows for imperatives, as imperatives can only apply to free beings. As we have tried to show in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine, imperatives and freedom apply to perception. Freedom also can explain misperception through a reversal of St. Augustine's proof of our existence, "*Si fallor sum*," if I am mistaken, I exist. For Merleau-Ponty, it is because I am free that I can be mistaken. Although for St. Augustine our existence is proved by a contingency (upon our being mistaken), for Merleau-Ponty our freedom comes along with the situation of being in the phenomenal field in which we always find ourselves. In this way, Merleau-Ponty's view is somewhat similar to Kant's notion of autonomous freedom as *a priori*, as Merleau-Ponty speaks of the necessary structure of experience, which is always situated in the phenomenal field, and is, in effect, *a priori*. Furthermore, misperception also reveals the freedom in the phenomenal field that accounts for the *praktognosia* of objects as objectives with the distance necessary for a task that is yet to be accomplished: "We *can* break up a shape by looking at it awry, but this too is because freedom uses the gaze along with its spontaneous evaluations. Without the latter, we would not have a world, that is, a collection of things which emerge from a background of formlessness by presenting themselves by presenting themselves to our body as 'to be touched,' 'to be taken,' 'to be climbed over.'"<sup>81</sup> We can perceive objects incorrectly, but without the phenomenal field, no perception at all would be possible. Misperception, too, occurs in the

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78. *Ibid.*, 438.

79. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 500 (italics in original).

80. *Ibid.*, 439.

81. *Ibid.*, 440-1 (italics in translation).

phenomenal field and carries along with it the general structure of a figure against a background. Likewise, we can ignore things but cannot ignore their setting. The “autochthonous” significance of the world is constituted in the dealings which our incarnate existence has with it.<sup>82</sup> The phenomenal field is the necessary ground of all intentional giving of meaning, or *Sinnggebung*.

Finally, freedom in Merleau-Ponty's view is what allows for our appropriate response to the directives of the objects of perception. Freedom allows for our “gearing” to the levels of perception. “Our freedom does not destroy our situation, but gears itself to it: as long as we are alive, our situation is open, which implies both that it calls up specially favored modes of resolution, and also that it is powerless to bring one into being itself.”<sup>83</sup> Clearly, freedom is always grounded in the world for Merleau-Ponty, for “without the roots which it thrusts into the world, it would not be freedom at all.”<sup>84</sup> Unlike Kant's autonomous freedom, the world for Merleau-Ponty is the constant and preexisting context for freedom. Yet, Merleau-Ponty shares some similarities with Kant's view of freedom in addition to an *a priori* setting for freedom – namely constraint. Constraint comes with freedom grounded in the world. We are not free to ignore the necessary structures of the phenomenal field and the world that make perception possible. Furthermore, correct perception requires the constraint of the perceiver to respond appropriately to an object's or situation's directive. Finally, with the extension of freedom to the perceptual sphere in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine, imperatives can be seen to apply to perception in a way not possible in Kant's view of our passive sensibility.

### *Summary*

In Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of perception, imperatives issue directly from the preconfigured essences of objects, and perception is the appropriate response to these imperative directives. In this way, perception is an activity or behavior, which involves the agent's will, and can be commanded by the object's preconfigured directives. By taking perception and sensibility as active, and involving the will, we can bring practical imperatives into the phenomenology of perception, whereas we could not in Kant's doctrine of sensibility, which deems sensibility to have no will to be commanded. For Merleau-Ponty, the notion of activity in perception extends to space itself. Merleau-Ponty does not take space to be singular, homogenous, and governed by universal, geometric law. His account of space is not a grid of coordinates but a sphere of pulsing activity of things' essences, which always entails the relation of my living body to space. As embodied subjects, we are not simply another object in relation to other

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82. *Ibid.*, 441.

83. *Ibid.*, 442.

84. *Ibid.*, 456.

objects. Nor do we grasp the objects of perception through their geometric universalizability and the transcendental unity of apperception; our grasp of them is guided by the commands of their axes and pivots, levels, and lines of force. Our perceptual competence is ordered by the *praktognosia* of objects. This notion of *praktognosia*, although not an instance of rational law, is nonetheless in line with Kant's view of practical reason, which also orders our competence in the world. The body is borne toward the world of things, and *praktognosia* is the imperative practicality that takes objects as objectives, as tasks for our accomplishment. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the practical imperative is not placed on our understanding in conflict with sensuality but is placed on our postural schema, which integrates and mobilizes our efficacy. *Praktognosia* orders our competence, and every subsequent kind of comprehension is derived from it.

To explicate the preconfigured essences of things, Merleau-Ponty develops the concept of style, which charges things with their meaning and immanent significance. The style of a thing distinguishes it from other things and makes it recognizable. Style does this by commanding the object's field of presence, which subsequently commands our perception, the active focus of which is needed to bring out a *quale* and to establish or fix it. Additionally, there are invisible supports that make objects visible, which Merleau-Ponty calls levels. Levels are what buoy up perceptual objects; they are the medium through which we perceive. They, too, stand in contradistinction to Kant's geometric space. Levels do not simply extend into the space and time of a sensorial field; they extend that field. Levels have an "elemental" status; they are that with which or according to which we perceive. For instance, the contours of surfaces are exposed by the light, whereas the depths of night are brought forth in sound.

Finally, the concept of freedom also has a fundamental role in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine. Here, freedom is not the autonomous activity of reason acting inwardly on our will, as it is for Kant. Nor do we independently fashion our freedom and constitute the meaning of objects and our surroundings, as in Sartre's doctrine. In Merleau-Ponty's view, freedom finds itself always already in a concrete situation, embedded in a phenomenal field. We always already find ourselves in a world, in which we have and make space, in which we are free to act and respond. For Merleau-Ponty, this context is simply given; there is no freedom without a field. This freedom allows for our appropriate response to the directives of the objects of perception and our "gearing" to the levels of perception.

In the next chapter, we will review what underlies Merleau-Ponty's perception and levels in Levinas' doctrine of sensation – the elemental. Here, in addition to the imperative character of our relations with the world and other people, we will see the contrast between Kant's inward autonomy and Levinas' thematization of the exteriority of imperatives, such as the appeal of alterity, the appeal made to us by the human face of the Other. With *praktognosia*, style, and levels, Merleau-Ponty has brought the imperative into the realm of perception in a way that Kant had not allowed



with his bifurcation of the realms of passive sensibility and active understanding. For Merleau-Ponty the body's affectivity underlies both spheres, in which imperative directives command the subject's will. By importing imperatives into the realm of perception, Merleau-Ponty gives a preliminary indication of how "subjectivity begins in subjection" – in subjection to an imperative. As Lingis notes, "the imperative is first in the world.... The subjection of the mind to an imperative is first the subjection of perception to the imperative in things and the imperative ordinance of the world."<sup>85</sup>

But have we not returned to Kant's categorical imperative – although with a rectification and relocation from the interiority of the autonomous rational mind to the exteriority of the world and its objects? Summarizing the role of the imperative in the phenomenology of perception, Lingis writes: "No thing can materialize ... save on the levels of the world. As the reality of any thing is conditional upon confirmation by the further exploration of the world, but the reality of the world is not conditional, so the imperative character of every particular objective is hypothetical, but the imperative character of the world of objectives ... is categorical."<sup>86</sup> In this way, the world is not simply given but is given as an imperative – as the categorically imperative setting for all our objectives. Because we first find ourselves in the world, subjectivity is constituted in subjection to this world that requires our appropriate response – the response of responsibility for the world itself.

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85. Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility*, 37.

86. Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 20.



## CHAPTER III

# IMPERATIVES IN LEVINAS'S DOCTRINES OF SENSIBILITY AND ALTERITY

### INTRODUCTION

The work of Emmanuel Levinas presents some intriguing similarities, as well as some dissimilarities, to that of Kant's. Levinas's doctrine is largely marked by imperatives, most notably the imperative carried in alterity by the face of the Other, which appeals to me and commands my response. For Levinas, the face is the fact that being affects us in the imperative, not in the indicative of objective attributes.<sup>1</sup> In Levinas's imperatives, we can find points of contact with as well as points of departure from Kantism. For instance, Levinas supports Kant's primacy of the moral sphere of the categorical imperative over any empirical or ontological totality, because likewise for Levinas the "ought" is not derivable from the "is." To put it in Levinas's terms, "ethics precedes ontology"; ethical infinity cannot be derived from or reduced to ontological totality. Kant's view of the primacy of the imperative over ontology and empiricism moves toward rectifying what Levinas takes to be the main problem of Western metaphysics: that traditional ontologies have incorrectly conceived of the framework of Being as a closed totality. In Levinas's doctrine, however, infinity (rather than the singular unconditionality of Kant's categorical imperative weighing on the finite human subject) makes genuine transcendence possible, as it outstrips any ontological or logical totality (and also surpasses Kant's "totality of all possible representations" as "nature"). Levinas supplants the totality of the inwardness of the self-reflecting *cogito* (as self-consciousness is also the basis of Kant's unity of apperception and the autonomous self-determinations of respect) with the radical exteriority and irreducibility of infinity, of "being beyond," which characterizes our relation with God, as absolutely unknowable, and includes our relation with the human other, whose face carries the trace of this infinite insurmountability between the Other and the subject.

As a phenomenologist, Levinas's starting point is not Kant's doctrine but the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger. Levinas acknowledges his debt to Husserl and Heidegger, and played some role in introducing these seminal phenomenologists to the French public with his translation of *Cartesian Meditations* and his promotion of the importance of Heidegger's

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1. Emmanuel Levinas, "Freedom and Command," In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 21.

thought. Even the early work of Levinas, however, is not uncritical of his phenomenological progenitors. In his dissertation, *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (1930), one can readily discern Levinas's move away from Husserl's idealism of phenomenology as a descriptive science of consciousness and eidetic essences, and his move toward the originality and duration of conscious life. Although Husserl did not contest the originality of conscious life, Levinas wondered how it could be thoroughly grasped by Husserl's theoretical frameworks of the intellect. Levinas would not find in Husserl's soon to be published *Cartesian Meditations* (1931) the hoped-for "philosophical intuitionism" of real life, which would have begun with an intersubjective reduction instead of the phenomenological reduction. Husserl's account of intersubjectivity in his Fifth Meditation is founded on a "monadological egology" that begins with the self-certainty of the *cogito*, which Levinas was beginning to see as a misidentification of intersubjectivity. For him, subjectivity that begins with self-reflection can only remain immured in the *cogito*. In a later development of his doctrine, Levinas examines a different kind of intentionality that aims at something it cannot seize in principle – the infinite. The infinite surpasses the idea of the infinite – the *cogitatum* is not merely the correlate of the *cogito* and cannot be contained within the framework of Husserlian *noema* and *noesis*. Levinas's "intentionality" (if we may use this term) of the infinite also characterizes the radical exteriority of the Other, whom I cannot possess. This non-possessability of the Other undermines Husserlian intentionality, which constitutes its objects in consciousness. The infinite and the Other resist the power of the reduction to the self-same found in the Husserlian consciousness always as consciousness of some object.

Levinas's development of transcendental alterity culminates in *Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence* (1973) translated as *Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence* (1981). Levinas explains that the "otherwise than being" of the book's title is a continuing contestation of Heideggerian ontology in the sense of "otherwise than Heideggerian Being, beyond Heideggerian essence."<sup>2</sup> There is, however, no longer any talk of metaphysics, but ethics is now taken as "first philosophy." Whereas *Totality and Infinity* focused on ethical alterity, *Otherwise Than Being* focuses on ethical subjectivity. If we follow the insights of Alphonso Lingis's in his translator's introduction to *Otherwise Than Being*, we can see that Levinas is attempting a phenomenological reduction and resuscitation of responsible subjectivity, which Husserl and Heidegger began but did not complete.<sup>3</sup> Husserl argued in the *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (1936) that the telos of theoretical culture is absolute self-responsibility, not the

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2. Richard Cohen, Preface to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999), xiii.

3. Alphonso Lingis, Translator's introduction to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997), xvii-xxii.

satisfaction of human wants. Phenomenology was founded to restore the moral basis to the scientific enterprise, but it is fair to say that Husserlian phenomenology is predominated by the theory of meaning leading back to the constitutive intentions of consciousness, which Husserl inaugurated in the *Logical Investigations*. Heidegger's philosophical enterprise was the recovery of the meaning of Being, which requires authenticity, i.e., responsibility and answerability for one's very own being. Heidegger's later work, however, subordinates the theme of responsibility for Being to a concern with Being's own intrinsic movement to unconcealment, for the sake of which responsibility itself exists. In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas sets forth responsibility as the determinative structure of subjectivity. Lingis notes that for Husserl, responsibility took the form of the total suspension of the natural attitude and the leap into the idea of infinity. In Heidegger, an antecedent leap beyond what is whole is required, a leap into the abysses of death. With Levinas, the notion of responsibility is equally extraordinary in its structure. Levinas's subjectivity structured as responsibility has an antecedent and autonomous structure. Before being the structure by which ontological truth is realized, it is a relation with the Good, which is over and beyond Being, as in Plato's doctrine. In Platonism, the Good does not become Being itself, just as the sun does not become the things that it sustains and nourishes. Likewise, Levinas's notion of responsibility, contracted as a relationship with the Good, does not become Being itself. The formulation of subjectivity in terms of the objective, the thematizable, or even of Being is already a dissimulation that forces Levinas to speak of a sphere which is not that of Being or non-Being, but is "otherwise than Being."

Although Levinas opposes any ontological philosophy that accounts for subjectivity as a locus engendered by an inner movement of being, Levinas does not abandon or ignore subjectivity. In reversing the order of priority of the subject over the human other in traditional ontological frameworks, the Other now engenders subjectivity as the locus where alterity makes contact. As support for alterity, subjectivity's ultimate meaning is not a subsistent entity or a moment of being. Levinas's intention to free subjectivity from any ontic or ontological account inaugurates a discourse of alterity in terms "otherwise than being." Thus, Levinas moves from ontology to ethics, and his ethics, like Kant's, is marked by imperative obligation. As Adrian Peperzak notes, "To encounter another is to discover that I am under a basic obligation: the human Other's infinity reveals itself as a command; the fact of the Other's 'epiphany' reveals that I am his or her servant."<sup>4</sup>

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4. Adrian Peperzak, "Emmanuel Levinas." In *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 414.

*Levinas and Kant: Common Imperative Ground*

Thus, Levinas breaks with the Western philosophical tradition, Husserlian intentionality, Heideggerian “fundamental ontology,” and largely with Kantism’s hidden ontology of the totality of representations as “nature” and the ontological hauntings of the *Ding-an-sich*. In reversing the traditional relation of the subject and the Other, Levinas contends that it is the encounter with alterity that constitutes subjectivity. Subjectivity does not begin with the self-certainty of the Cartesian *cogito*, which extends to the Other as an alter ego; rather, subjectivity begins with contact with and *in subjection* to the Other.

With this ordering by an imperative in subjection, we can understand Levinas’s professed affinity for Kantism. Levinas retains the imperative character of Kant’s philosophy but replaces the interiority of the respect that weighs on the Kantian subject with the exteriority of the Other, who commands my response and for whom I constitute my responsibility. Levinas emphasizes the “attention” of Kantian respect (*Achtung*) in noting that attention is not first the respect for the moral law; it is attention *to the Other*: “Attention is attention to something because it is attention to someone. The exteriority of its point of departure is essential to it: it is the very tension of the I.”<sup>5</sup> But despite this difference of the original location of the imperative, there are some fundamental similarities in Levinas’s and Kant’s views.

Following Lingis’ explanation of the similarity of Levinas’s and Kant’s doctrines,<sup>6</sup> we can note that the subject’s relationship with the Other consists in being appealed to and contested by the Other. This movement comes from without, and without any act initiated or posited by subjectivity. The word of the Other that appeals to the subject, that calls to me, is an imperative that binds me but does not originate in a synthesis of my subjectivity’s own *a priori*s (as with Kant’s categorical imperative). Indeed, the approach of the Other is an empirical and contingent event, but as a relationship out of which responsibility arises, it is itself an *a priori* fact that precedes the *a priori* forms or conditions of the possibility of experience. For Lingis, this view is somewhat similar to Kant’s, in which subjection to law, which is the fact of the categorical imperative, precedes and makes possible the legislative activity of autonomous subjectivity and precedes even its intrinsic forms.

Levinas highly esteems Kant’s insight into the primacy and immediacy of the categorical imperative, which allows moral meaning to determine being instead of vice versa. Yet Kant retained the intelligibility of sensation via the faculty of the understanding in the representation of

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5. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 99.

6. Lingis, Translator’s introduction to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, xxiii-xxv.

objects. As representation is a mode of ontological thought of the self-same, Levinas does not allow such recourse in his own doctrine. But even though Levinas escapes from the totalizing framework of Being, he does not break with order or orientation, as this break would lead to chaos. Rather, Levinas's evasion of Being can be seen as the thematization of the imperative force that precedes the forms of law. Even in Kantian respect one must obey the preceding force, which is not made by my own initiative, in order to make sense of and to obey the formal commands of law. In the dynamics of respect, Kant subsequently converts the force affecting "rational feeling" into a justification of the law, which the subject imposes on himself in an autonomous act of human reason. As Lingis notes, Levinas does not allow this autonomous justification of formal rational law. The sense of alterity consists precisely in not being able to treat the law as a law that I have given myself. Alterity comes to me from without and comes by exceeding my autonomous capacities. Alterity consists in my not being able to take up and appropriate the order put to me, in not being able to make it into my own principle.

Even though alterity is not autonomous, the force of alterity retains a similarity to the Kantian respect that weighs on the subject but is not originally of the subject's own initiative. Even more so for Levinas's alterity than in Kantian respect, the law is obeyed before it is understood. As an indication of this imperative's priority and depth, Levinas finds obedience in sensibility, not in the Kantian spontaneity of the understanding that follows the formal laws of nature. One is open to alterity, exposed in its direction, to its sense, susceptible to being affected, exalted, and pained. Lingis contends that these terms locate the impact of alterity in sensibility. We would add that by placing the imperative in sensibility instead of the spontaneity of the unity of apperception, Levinas articulates the orientation in the imperative as force rather than form. By finding intelligibility in the orienting forces of sensation, Levinas expands the realm of intelligibility beyond Kant's boundaries of formal law. In regard to Kant's formalism, Žižek holds that the central tenet of Kant's transcendental idealism is that the subject's spontaneous act of transcendental apperception changes the confused flow of sensations into reality, which obey necessary laws.<sup>7</sup> We would add that with Levinas's central tenet of exposure to exteriority, the encounter with alterity brings an orienting force that does not need to be formalized in order to be understood. The Other's insurmountability establishes the direction of the relation between the self and Other in a directive that cannot be formalized because it is irreducible although it is understood through the intelligibility found in sensation.

In contrast to Kant, Levinas does not conceive sensibility as the receptive side of a Kantian synthetic event, in which receptivity is always already being grasped and continually taking repossession of itself. Such

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7. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 44.

sensibility would be an element of a cognitive act, an act of consciousness – or more precisely self-consciousness. The sensibility affected by alterity is not that sensibility in which identification is already at work. Alterity is precisely the unidentifiable. Its sense is the unilateral direction of an approach that is caught in being ordered. The sense of alterity is immediate, and tied to and understood in obedience. As Lingis explains, “Levinas conceives the register upon which the ethical imperative makes its impact on subjectivity is not as a cognitive sensibility, but as sensuality, susceptibility to being affected, vulnerability with regard to pleasure and pain,”<sup>8</sup> and Levinas concludes that this affective sensibility characterizes all sensibility. Sensibility is not only the apprehension of sense but also sensitivity, a susceptibility to being nourished and pained, and not only to receive a message by the datum that affects one. There is no receptive or perceptive sensibility without susceptibility, and the exposure to alterity is at the very basis of the openness by which the subject opens itself to objects and things. Thus, Levinas’s subject originates in subjection as exposure to exteriority.

Kant had already characterized the “rational feeling” by which our nature is inclined by the law as a suffering and restraint bent toward law, and Lingis sees something like Levinas’s thesis of sensibility as susceptibility implied in Kant’s moral philosophy. In Kant’s doctrine, there is no perception of objects without a corresponding spontaneity, and this spontaneity acts to order the data of sensation. In fact, this spontaneity is already under order, and the “rational feeling” first affects the mind with a sense of law prior to the perception of organized objects. There is an ordering sensibility in Kantian spontaneity even before the commands of law are followed. What is new in Levinas is that the affliction of alterity precedes being affected by material being. Alterity does not issue in an ordered appropriation of the world; alterity orders the world. Although he describes material being in the positive terms of sustenance and nourishment over and beyond information, Levinas conceives the impact of alterity as pain, as the disturbance of complacency, pleasure, and contentment. Exposure to the Other is exposure to being wounded and outraged, and being confounded in the primacy of one’s own initiatives. Even further, the responding and responsible subject finds its capacity to control and even to fulfill alterity’s demand of responsibility exceeded on all sides. Levinas draws the moral subject in distress, in terms equal to or exceeding Kant’s desolate characterization of the law-abiding rational entity humiliated and pained in being bent toward the law and continually frustrated in its natural happiness.

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8. Lingis, Translator’s introduction to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, xxiv.



*Levinas's Exteriority and Kant's Interiority*

Thus, the moral theories of Levinas and Kant are both characterized by imperatives although their imperatives have different sources. For Kant the rational moral law commands categorically with universality and necessity, and for Levinas the Other's vulnerability imposes itself upon me in an inescapable appeal that summons my response and responsibility. This contrast also accounts for the differences in the thinkers' conceptions of subjectivity. Kant's moral subject is characterized by interiority, finitude, and autonomy. Respect for the rational moral law, which for Kant typifies our relations with others, weighs on the subject internally and is autonomously self-determined. Levinas's moral subject, however, is characterized by exteriority, infinity, and the "privileged heteronomy" of the Other, in which the subject originates as a locus of contact and support for the Other.

Another important difference between Kant and Levinas is found in their views of perception. As we have seen, Kant's view of space can be characterized by the interiority of the mind. Space and time are the pure forms of intuition governed by the objective rules of the understanding. Levinas's view of space, however, is marked by exteriority and exposure. With the coupling of sensation, vulnerability, and sensibility, Levinas's doctrine of sensation is closer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view of embodied "spatializing" space than to Kant's view of space governed by formal geometric law. Space for Levinas is originally constituted in proximity to and contact with the Other.

In regard to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, Levinas develops the notion of sensation and sensibility of the "elements" that are prior to and buoy up Merleau-Ponty's objects and levels. The elements, which often go unnoticed as the basis of perception, include the light, the dark, the sea, the sky, and the ground that supports us without our troubling ourselves about it. The elements have a thorough-going constancy in Levinas's doctrine of sensation and sensibility. Sensibility is the mode of enjoyment for Levinas – in our enjoyment of things, things revert to the elemental. Our relation to the elements is not one of distance, as required by perception, but one of *immersion*. Sensation itself is immersed in the elemental medium in which things are found. As Levinas sought to rectify Husserl's intentionality of consciousness as always consciousness of something, he seeks to revise Merleau-Ponty's dictum of perceptual intentionality that "all perception is the perception of a figure against a background" by investigating sensation as the basis of perception.

Lingis notes that in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas separates the closed realm of enjoyment and contentment in sensation from the realm of

exposure to the Other.<sup>9</sup> Here, Levinas separates our two affective receptivities: the receptivity for the elemental, in which the subject closes itself in the sphere of enjoyment and contentment, and the receptivity for the exterior imperative that comes from the alterity of other persons, which contests this enclosed contentment. My enjoyment of the elements is contested by the Other's vulnerable appeal with the nakedness of his face and eyes; I must take responsibility for the Other's impoverishment with my material resources. This separation of the realms of perception and morality is vaguely similar to Kant's split between intuition and understanding, but Levinas's division is not as thoroughgoing as Kant's is. As he develops his doctrine, Levinas becomes dissatisfied with his own dualism of our two receptivities for the elements of sensation and for the human Other. In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas argues that the separation of our two affectivities cannot be maintained. Our receptivity for the sensuous elements is contested, commanded, and ordered from the start by alterity, by the human Other. The Other contests the subject even before contentment can take place.

With his rehabilitation of sensibility in sensation, Levinas shows intelligibility to be inherent in our exposure to force of the elements and in our enjoyment of things, without recourse to rational form or the interiority of representation. Because Levinas calls sensibility "the mode of enjoyment" (*la façon de la jouissance*),<sup>10</sup> it stands against rational form that fixes objects as representations; enjoyment is a process in which things return to their elemental status in our contentment with them. The soup nourishes me and sates my hunger on the elemental level as a necessity of life and its sustenance. This mode of sustenance in the elemental, this "living from" (*vivre de*) that constitutes enjoyment is prior to any representation. Likewise, against rational form, Levinas brings intelligible force to the moral realm. The appeal of alterity is a force that is "an-archic," as it precedes any *archē* or principle, including the categorical imperative. The imperative of the human face brings an immediate appeal with its own intelligibility. For Levinas, the face is not simply one phenomenon among others but is characterized as an epiphany in which the Other places an imperative on me. Unlike Kantian respect (although respect is immediately bent toward law), alterity is not contingent upon the extension and legislation of formal and autonomous rational law from within. The Other solicits my response immediately, and my responsibility takes shape in this encounter.

In this chapter, we will first summarize Levinas's doctrine of sensation, as it underlies any doctrine of perception and is also the basis of Levinas's moral philosophy. This is done for three reasons: 1) to show how

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9. Alphonso Lingis. "The Sensuality and the Sensitivity." In *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1986), 227.

10. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 135.

sensation underlies and supports Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of perception of things and its levels; 2) to describe how things revert to the elemental in our enjoyment of them, and how enjoyment carries an implicit imperative structure; and 3) to explain how the subject's contentment in the elements is contested by the imperative of alterity.

After this review of Levinas's doctrine of sensation, we will further examine Levinas's notion of alterity, and compare Levinasian alterity and Kantian respect. Although both thinkers' conceptions of morality are characterized by imperatives, Levinas challenges Kant's autonomy of rational moral law with the "an-archic" appeal of alterity. In this way, Levinas's moral subject is characterized by infinity, whereas Kant's is characterized by finitude. These differences will allow us to conclude with a larger discussion of the points of contact and departure in Kant's and Levinas's doctrines. Both thinkers begin with imperatives but diverge in their views of them. Kant remains aligned with ontology by allowing theoretical reason to penetrate the imperative via the unconditionality of rational moral law, whereas Levinas transcends ontology via the ethical infinity found in the epiphany of the face and speech of the Other.

## **SENSATION AND SENSIBILITY**

### *Levinas's Rehabilitation of Sensibility in Sensation*

In comparison with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, which is largely directed at things and objects, Levinas emphasizes sensation in the sensual medium that is prior to perception. Levinas elucidates the sensuous, "elemental" medium that supports Merleau-Ponty's levels on which things take place. Levinas's "elements" include the ground (as the support of the earth beneath our walking feet and reclining bodies during sleep), the light, the dark, the warmth, the damp, the wind, and the night. Although not perceived as are things or objects, the elements are the sustaining medium for the objects and levels of perception. Our relation to the elements is not that of distance as with perceptual objects but of immersion in an elemental medium. Furthermore, these elements are thorough-going in Levinas's doctrine of sensation and sensibility; sensation begins with the elements and sensibility ends in, or returns to, them. Levinas characterizes the mode of sensibility as enjoyment, which results in the closed elemental sphere of contentment and satiety. In enjoyment, perceived things revert into elements; things end with the given, which envisions no future or possibility. In his analysis of sensation, Levinas shows how sensibility is the mode of elemental enjoyment that underlies perception and how things revert to the elemental. This reversion also has an implicit imperative structure, as things are "subordinated to enjoyment" (*se subordonnent à la jouissance*).<sup>11</sup>

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11. *Ibid.*, 133.

Levinas discerns something deeper in perception which is so inherent that it has been overlooked – sensation in the sensuous medium that supports things. Without sensation, there would be no sensibility and thus no perception. Just as Merleau-Ponty examined perception as a behavior beyond the Kantian dichotomy of intuition and understanding that resulted in the passivity and spontaneity of sensibility, Levinas finds in his investigation of sensation what Merleau-Ponty has overlooked – sensation. Finding intelligibility at an even deeper level than Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that things have preconfigured essences and are not “a wandering troop of sensations,”<sup>12</sup> Levinas argues that “sensibility is not a fumbling objectification.”<sup>13</sup> Sensation and sensibility carry a structure of intelligibility of the *milieu* of the “elemental” medium that supports objects. Enjoyment is the mode of sensibility, enjoyment in the medium that supports things and sustains our activities. Our contentment in the elemental thus occurs through the sensuous elements that underlie Merleau-Ponty’s levels on which things take place. Levinas explains the relation of the elemental and enjoyment in distinction to Merleau-Ponty’s doctrine of perception and Kant’s representation of objects as their “representational content” dissolves into the “affective content” of enjoyment: “Enjoyment, by essence satisfied, characterizes all sensation whose representational content dissolves into their affective content. The very distinction between representational and affective content is tantamount to a recognition that enjoyment is endowed with a dynamism other than that of perception.”<sup>14</sup> What Levinas shows in the elemental is our subjective affectivity, our sensitivity in our sensibility. In this way, Levinas further discloses the depth of the subject’s affectivity, which allows the perceiver to follow the imperative directives of perception in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology without recourse to the synthetic representations of the mind. Thus, the subjective affectivity found in the elemental strengthens the notion of affectivity in sensibility and perception, providing a single source allowing the unification of Kant’s realms of sensibility and the understanding. Affectivity underlies all sensation and perception, whether of elements, objects, or the epiphanies of other faces. Thus, affectivity applies not only to sensation and perception but also to ethics. Moral subjectivity begins for Levinas in affectivity’s exposure to exteriority in general and the subject’s sensitivity and susceptibility for the Other in particular.

### *The Elemental*

Levinas’s explication of the elements takes the form of a description

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12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 123; *Le visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) “un troupeau errant de sensations,” 164.

13. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 187.

14. *Ibid.*

of the unformed sensuous elements of sensation. "Hence, we can say that the element comes to us from nowhere; the side it presents does not determine the object, remains entirely anonymous. It is wind, earth, sea, sky, air."<sup>15</sup> In the translator's introduction to Levinas's *Existence and Existents*, Lingis gives a succinct summary of the significance of Levinas's doctrine of the elements. Instead of beginning with the perception of objects, Levinas begins with the elements that support "being in the world," which is the starting point for Merleau-Ponty's field of things and Martin Heidegger's network of *Zeug* (equipment or gear): "If the world is a field of things, there is then something else in subjectivity besides being in the world; there is a relationship with the terrestrial, with the light – and with the sensuous element, which, before being taken as so much data for cognition, is savored, is assimilated, nourishes and contents life. There is the *elemental*; and an existence finds itself and rests in the elemental, and thus finds its self, prior to awakening to the world."<sup>16</sup> As Lingis notes, Levinas has separated the elemental from the world-order of things and objects by reinstating the separation of sensing from perception.<sup>17</sup> Subjectivity first finds its existence in the elemental before awakening to Merleau-Ponty's world of perceptual objects or Heidegger's *Zeug*.

Furthermore, the anonymity of the elemental precedes and supports the specificity of things. The elements are given in the mode of "*il y a*," or "there is." Their fundamental anonymity can be explained in contrast to Heidegger's view of the relation of *Zeug* and "the they" (the neuter "one," *das Man*), which is the everyday mode of human existence and the starting point of the phenomenological investigation of *Dasein*. Because of their thorough-going anonymity, Levinas argues that the elements are "nobody's" as opposed to *Zeug* that are for "anyone" or *das Man*. The elements are essentially impersonal, even more impersonal than the reference of any particular *Zeug* to other *Zeug* or to any general characterization of *Dasein* as *das Man* as the referential nexus of equipmental relations. Levinas offers "*il y a*," or "there is," as the counter to the context of things disclosed by their reference to *das Man*. Because it is elemental, the "*there is*" is essentially neutral. "*There is* is an impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential."<sup>18</sup> The neutrality of *il y a* is even more anonymous than the neutrality of *das Man*. Whereas "the they" of *das Man* is for anyone, the "it" of *il y a* is for no one in its essential anonymity. Levinas holds that things refer not to *Zeug*'s interchangeability but to my possession, my enjoyment, which is surrounded by the non-possessable elemental medium of earth, sea, light, or city. Levinas contrasts the non-possessability of the underlying elements

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15. *Ibid.*, 132.

16. Lingis, Translator's introduction, *Existence and Existents*, 10-1.

17. Alphonso Lingis. "The Elemental Imperative." *Research in Phenomenology* 18 (1988): 14.

18. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 58.

with the possessability of things and objects: “Things refer to possession, can be carried off, are furnishings (*meubles*); the medium from which they come to me lies escheat, a common fund or terrain, essentially non-possessable, “nobody’s”: earth, sea, light, city. Every relation or possession is situated with the non-possessable which envelops or contains without being able to be contained or enveloped. We shall call it the elemental.”<sup>19</sup> This neutrality and anonymity of Levinas’s elements is the medium that buoys up the world as the world of things. This medium precedes the world of things, which is the starting point for both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. In fact, Merleau-Ponty’s chief complaint against Sartre’s concept of radical freedom is that instead of fashioning the world through our absolutely free choices, we are already in a world of things that presents contexts for our choices. To begin with, there must be something, or a field of things, from which to choose. Likewise, the implements of Heidegger’s concept of *Zeug* disclose the totality of a network of tools that are ready-to-hand (*Zuhanden*) for *das Man*, which is the phenomenological and constitutive starting point of *Dasein* in the world. Levinas, however, describes our relation to the elements as “enjoyment” (*jouissance*). Prior to Merleau-Ponty’s world of things and Heidegger’s network of *Zeug*, Levinas contends that the sensuous medium of the elemental buoys up things and that with their reversion to the elemental in our enjoyment, enjoyment discloses the elemental medium in which all things come to us. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas emphasizes the elemental medium as what is essential to things, rather than absorption in *Zuhanden*’s tasks: “In enjoyment the things are not absorbed in the technical finality that organizes them into a system. They take form within a medium (*milieu*) in which we take hold of them. They are found in space, in the air, on the earth, in the street, along the road. The medium remains essential to things.... This medium is not reducible to a system of operational references and is not equivalent to the totality of such a system.... The medium has its own density.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the elemental has its own density as the medium in which perception takes place. Our relation to it is one of immersion in this elemental density, rather than a system of operational references, as with Heideggerian *Zuhanden* or Merleau-Ponty’s *praktognosia*, which both begin with the perception of objects and their instrumental objectives. Because of its anonymity, the elemental resists constitution as an object of intentional consciousness. Levinas contrasts our immersion in the elemental medium, our “bathing in the element,” with our relation to the solidity of things or objects:

To tell the truth the elemental has no side at all. One does not approach it. The relation adequate to its essence discovers it precisely as a medium; one is steeped in it; I am always within the element.... Man plunges into the

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19. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 131.

20. *Ibid.*, 130-1.

elemental from the domicile.... Through the home our relation with space as distance and extension is substituted for the simple "bathing in the element." But the adequate relation with the element is precisely bathing.... A thing offers itself to us by its side, as a solicitation coming from its substantiality, from a solidity.... The element presents us as it were the reverse of reality, without origin in a being, although presenting itself in familiarity – of enjoyment – as though we were in the bowels of being.<sup>21</sup>

This immersion in the elemental, however, does not permit a totality of things or an ontology of substance, as the immersion is not interiorized by the representations of consciousness. By prioritizing the elemental over things, Levinas accomplishes a "reversal of reality" that does not originate in the substantiality of being but begins with and is oriented by the familiarity of immersion in elemental enjoyment.

#### *The Apeiron*

In Levinas's view, the elements, with their own density, account for themselves, as opposed to Heidegger's doctrine of Being that originates in Nothing's nihilation of itself ("*das Nicht nichtet*"). For Levinas, the elements are not defined by the negation of their surrounding nothingness. The elemental is not Nothing but *apeiron*. Instead of the dialectical delineation of Being surrounded by nothingness as in Heidegger's account, "the elemental separates us from the infinite."<sup>22</sup> In this distinction between *apeiron* and infinity, Levinas characterizes the elemental *apeiron* as boundless but not infinite. To distinguish this boundlessness from infinity, Levinas speaks of "finition" that is without limit and is not known through the infinite. "Finition without reference to the infinite, finition without limitation, is the relation with the end (*fin*) as a goal."<sup>23</sup> Although finition is without limitation, it is not infinite, as it ends in or reverts to the elemental *apeiron*. Thus, in Levinas's elucidation of the elemental, we find that the boundless *apeiron* is both the source and goal of things, as they arise from the elemental and return to it in enjoyment. In this separation, Levinas contrasts the infinite and the elemental.

Although the infinite and the elemental seem similar, the concepts apply to different realms in Levinas's doctrine: the infinite is ethical whereas the boundless is elemental and implies enclosure in the *apeiron*. Infinity characterizes the absolute gap between the self (or "the same") and the Other, as with the gap between God and man. Levinas takes this infinite gap to be ethical because the face of the human Other carries the trace of

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21. *Ibid.*, 131-2.

22. *Ibid.*, 132.

23. *Ibid.*, 136.

God's absolute alterity. Another difference is found between infinity's insurmountability and the elemental's reversion to itself, its closure in contentment, in our enjoyment of things. Because of this difference, the infinity of ethics can contest our contentment in the elemental. Even though the elemental results in enclosure, containment, and contentment, it arises in the boundlessness of the *apeiron* and not from infinity. As noted above, even prior to Heidegger's *Zuhanden*, things take form within an elemental medium in which we take hold of them; things and implements are found in space, in the air, on the earth, in the street, along the road. In this way, the elemental is the source of things and is what delineates them. The elemental extends not into the infinite but into the *apeiron*. Furthermore, because Levinas likens the elemental to the *apeiron*, he avoids the extensions of infinity that paradoxically characterize the closed totalities of ontologies, including Kant's totality of representations as "nature," in which all possible objects can be plotted on a geometric grid of infinite extension.

As an example of elemental boundlessness and how it contrasts with infinity, we can cite the elemental support of the earth found in the act of sleeping. When we sleep, we give ourselves over to the elements in the sense that the weight of the earth supports our own reclining weight. Yet the weight of the earth is not supported by an infinite extension of its own weight, but by a "non-weight" of boundless *apeiron*, which is not an infinite surpassing of limits. The boundless indetermination of the elemental earth, sea, and sky precedes thought's distinction between the finite and the infinite, and lies outside thought, specifically the intentionality of consciousness, which seeks the other side of aspects and profiles in the appearances of things. Levinas explains the distinction between the elemental and the infinite in this way:

Thus, thought does not fix the element as an object. As pure quality it lies outside the distinction between the finite and the infinite. The question what is the "other side" of what offers us one side does not arise in the relation maintained with the element. The sky, the earth, the sea, the wind – suffice to themselves. The element as it were stops up the relation to which it should have had to been thought, and by relation to which scientific thought, which has received from elsewhere the idea of infinity, does in fact situate it. The element separates us from the infinite.<sup>24</sup>

Because of its distinction as self-sustaining and self-sufficient, the elemental is what separates us from the infinite. Characterized by *apeiron*, the elemental stops up the relation to the idea of infinity, as it resists all of thought's determinations of objective qualities.

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24. *Ibid.*, 132.



Additionally, the boundless indeterminacy of the elemental has a temporal quality that is lacking in the atemporality of infinity. For instance, the future is characterized by the unknown, not as an infinite extension of the known. The difference between the boundlessness of *apeiron* and ontological infinity of extension can be seen in the elemental dimension of the future, a dimension properly characterized by the nocturnal rather than the infinite. Although we cannot foresee the future, it is not characterized by infinite possibilities but by *apeiron*. The nocturnal-elemental dimension of the future is, like *apeiron*, essentially ungraspable. The future is not knowable as an infinite extension of possibilities from the known "here and now" of consciousness or ontological thought, but is to be known through the elemental boundlessness of the night that characterizes the future.

With similar ungraspability, the elements come out of *apeiron*, the come from "nowhere":

But this overflowing of sensation by the element, which appears in the indetermination with which it offers itself to my enjoyment, takes on a temporal meaning. In enjoyment quality is not a quality of something. The solidity of the earth that supports me, the blue of the sky above my head, the breath of the wind, the undulation of the sea, the sparkle of the light do not cling to a substance. They come from nowhere. This coming from nowhere, from "something" that is not, appearing without anything that appears – and consequently *coming always*, without my being able to *possess* the source – delineates the future of sensibility and enjoyment.... The future, as insecurity, is already in the pure quality which lacks the category of substance, of something. It is not that the source escapes me *in fact*: in enjoyment quality is lost in the nowhere. It is the *apeiron* distinct from the infinite, and which, by contrast with things, presents itself as a quality refractory to identification.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the elucidation of the elemental as *apeiron*, the passage above describes enjoyment as the mode of sensibility. In our enjoyment of things, in our satiety, things revert to the elemental medium. In this elemental reversion in enjoyment, things lose their qualities of objective substance in the *apeiron*. Thus, things are delineated neither by surrounding negativity nor by self-identity. Things come to us from the elements and return to the *apeiron* in our enjoyment of them. To enjoy something is not enjoy an objective quality; it is enjoyment in immersion in the elemental. For Levinas, sensibility is in the mode enjoyment, which accounts for the reversion of things' objective qualities to the elemental and explains how

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25. *Ibid.*, 141.

sensation lies at the heart of perception. We can also see how enjoyment carries its own imperative order that lies beneath the perception of things, as things are “subordinated” to enjoyment in their use.

*Enjoyment as Elemental Reversion and the Subordination of Objects*

In order to elucidate the subjective affectivity in sensation, Levinas distinguishes the elements from things and proposes “to analyze more closely the way the things we enjoy come to us. Enjoyment precisely does not reach them qua things. Things come to representation from a background from which they emerge and to which they return in the enjoyment we can have of them.”<sup>26</sup> In this way, enjoyment is our enjoyment in elemental immersion, as things return to their elemental origin in our use of them. Levinas adds that our use of things presupposes our enjoyment of them: “Tools and implements, which themselves presuppose enjoyment, offer themselves to enjoyment in their turn. They are playthings: the fine cigarette lighter, the fine car. They are adorned by the decorative arts; they are immersed in the beautiful, where every going beyond enjoyment reverts to enjoyment.”<sup>27</sup> Here we can see the aesthetic dimension to Levinas’s doctrine of the elements. Beauty itself is an element. Things become immersed in the beautiful elementally in our enjoyment of them. With his emphasis on enjoyment as sustenance in the elemental, Levinas speaks of things’ “subordination” to our enjoyment as the dynamic of their elemental reversion. In this way, we can discern an imperative of enjoyment in our use of things. Because of their underlying elemental medium, things carry the force of an imperative of enjoyment and immersion in the elemental when we use them. In his explication of enjoyment, Levinas speaks of this subordination of *Zeug* to our enjoyment, which allows us to discern here an imperative of the elemental – an imperative of enjoyment. “As material or gear the objects of everyday use are *subordinated to enjoyment* – the lighter to the cigarette one smokes, the fork to the food, the cup to the lips. Things refer to my enjoyment.”<sup>28</sup>

Levinas contends that the elements underlie all objects, including the complexities of tools and implements. In Heidegger’s analysis, a piece of equipment (*Zeug*) discloses its referential relation to other pieces of equipment, as there is no such thing as “an equipment” (“ein *Zeug*”). A piece of equipment immediately discloses a totality of equipment. The hammer is there for the nail, the nail is a fastener for the shingle, the shingle is for the roof – all of which refer ultimately to *Dasein* as the “for sake of which” (“*das Worumwillen*”) of *Zeug*. *Dasein* is the nexus of the totality of equipment. For Levinas, however, all objects – including Heidegger’s *Zeug* – ultimately refer not to *Dasein* but refer to and presuppose our enjoyment

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26. *Ibid.*, 130.

27. *Ibid.*, 140.

28. *Ibid.*, 133 (italics added for emphasis).

of them. "Every object offers itself to enjoyment, a universal category of the empirical – even if I lay hold of an object-implement, if I handle it as a *Zeug*. The handling and utilization of tools, the recourse to all the instrumental gear of life, whether to fabricate other tools or to render things accessible, concludes in enjoyment."<sup>29</sup>

When Heidegger observes that we are absorbed in our task, is it not more correct to say that we are absorbed in the elements and in the elemental enjoyment that sustains our task? It seems that enjoyment as immersion in the elemental accounts for the sustaining absorption of our tasks rather than attributing this absorption to the task's technical finality. The activity needed to accomplish the finality is sustained in enjoyment; absorption as enjoyment is what sustains our tasks. Enjoyment remains essential to the activity in that it sustains the activity in a way that the teleology of technical finality cannot accomplish on its own. Thus, enjoyment in the use of things lies even beneath the implement's absorption in the technical finalities of our tasks; absorption is primarily enjoyment, not *Zuhandensein*.

Thus, according to Levinas, *Zeug* refers to enjoyment rather than *das Man* as ontic *Dasein* (per Heidegger, as equipment can be used by anyone – the hammer's handle can be grasped by anybody, the seat of the tractor fits anyone). It is, however, certainly true from Heidegger's examples that the entire network of *Zeug* fundamentally refers back to *Dasein* – the hammer is the implement that nails the shingles to the roof that will shelter *Dasein*. But for Levinas, the *sustaining element* of these activities is not *Dasein* as their ultimate nexus of reference, but the elements themselves and our enjoyment of them. The hammering itself is the element that the roofer enjoys in the rhythm of hammering; the enjoyment of the hammering is sustained in this rhythm. In this way, enjoyment and the elemental come full circle – enjoyment of the elemental rhythm sustains the activity and the rhythm sustains the enjoyment (although this is just another way of describing the elemental reversion of things in enjoyment). Elemental enjoyment eclipses the specific technical finalities of our tasks and overshadows *Dasein* as the original referential nexus of the network of tools. In our use of things, the implement, and its technical finality, is lost in the enjoyment of the elemental rhythm, but the rhythm is not lost – enjoyment in the elemental rhythm is what sustains the hammering. This sustenance of activities in enjoyment does not preclude ends that are not inherent to the activity; indeed, the shingles are nailed down to provide shelter. But by thematizing what sustains our activities, Levinas identifies what has been overlooked in Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's doctrines: the sensibility that underlies perception in the mode of enjoyment. Our activities are sustained in enjoyment, although they often (or even usually) have technical finalities that are external to the activity.

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29. *Ibid.*, 132-3.

Although Levinas brings an aesthetic dimension to the elemental by taking beauty to be an element, we can attempt to keep the elemental from becoming over-aestheticized by distinguishing between elemental rhythm and musical aesthetics. In the example of hammering as elemental enjoyment, Levinas would not claim that hammering's elemental rhythm is musical, as with drummers drumming. But all who enjoy elemental rhythm are not necessarily musical. For instance, there is a gait, or rhythm, to walking – but walking is not dancing. Walking, however, does sustain itself in a rhythm that is not focused teleologically on which part of the body has to be balanced next (nor is walking necessarily focused on its teleological destination).

To elucidate the elemental enjoyment that is inherent to the sustenance of tasks, let us view what happens when enjoyment goes out of an activity. Only when the roofer grows tired while hammering nails into shingles does the teleological series of tasks in hammering come to the fore, whereas before these tasks were absorbed in the rhythm of elemental enjoyment. Only when the roofer grows tired do self-awareness and teleological intentionality guide his activity. When the sustaining rhythm of enjoyment is lost, even the most experienced roofer, who has long since mastered his general tasks, places a nail with now deliberate action on its appropriate point on a shingle. The shingle is then fixed by a series of halting movements, whereas before the nails were driven smoothly in a rhythm. Similarly, when I become tired from walking, I begin to drag my feet. Only then do I begin to think teleologically about the series of tasks of walking – taking one step at a time, putting one foot in front of the other. But in my dragging gait, I have lost my rhythm in walking. I no longer enjoy it; I have lost the elemental rhythm that sustained it.<sup>30</sup>

Levinas's insight into the elemental as self-sustaining enjoyment in general and as rhythm in particular distinguishes his view from Merleau-Ponty's teleology of *praktognosia*, which takes objects as objectives, and from Heidegger's teleology of the external tasks of the technical finalities of *Zeug*. It seems that Levinas would add to Heidegger's famous insight that a breakdown of equipment reveals the hidden connections of the network of *Zeug* that the teleological ends of our tasks are also eclipsed in elemental enjoyment. If the cobbler grows exhausted in his tasks, his simply knowing that the shoe must be repaired may not be enough to sustain his activity. But when the cobbler sustains his movements through the enjoyment of them, he has an excess of energy that does not terminate in the task at hand. The cobbler may add a flourish of extra taps from his enjoyment of the rhythm, taps beyond what is required to complete the job. The dimension of immersion in the elemental sustains the action and exceeds the task's teleological termination. In the weariness of our actions, however, our tools and tasks are prevented becoming elementally

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30. With this account of rhythm, walking cannot be taken as a kind of "controlled falling," which is argued for in some contemporary accounts.

immersed. This observation is consistent with Levinas's view that things are not encountered on their own (nor primarily as a totality of *Zeug*) but are discovered in the elemental sphere, the sensuous medium that buoys up all things, whether they are the objectives of *praktognosia* or the implements of *Zeug*. Thus, sensibility as the mode enjoyment holds a central place in Levinas's doctrine and, in spite of their claims, underlies the central tenets of *Zeug* for Heidegger and *praktognosia* for Merleau-Ponty. As an indication of the fundamental status of enjoyment in Levinas's doctrine of sensation, enjoyment is not taken as a superficial pleasure but phenomenologically discloses our deep relation with life and being: "Enjoyment – the ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being, with its materiality, embraces all relations with things."<sup>31</sup>

*Elemental Orientation in Sensibility versus Kantian Representation*

With his emphasis on sensibility as the mode of elemental enjoyment, Levinas gives sensibility a different dynamic than Kant's objects intuited as representations. For Levinas, things are not fixed in rational consciousness as Kantian representations. Because Levinas begins with the intelligibility in sensibility in which things emerge from the elemental, Levinas's doctrine of sensation stands in stark contrast to Kant's doctrine of the understanding's representation of intuited objects. In terms of the relation of sensibility and reason, Kant's representation of objects allows theoretical reason to penetrate more deeply into perception than in either Merleau-Ponty's *praktognosia* or Heidegger's *Zeug*. In Levinas's view, thought, which is the basis of Kant's doctrine of intuition, first makes its way outward from the elemental medium toward representations. Levinas's notion of sensibility as immersion in the elemental, however, is not reducible to a representation. Sensibility is found in the mode of enjoyment, which closes on itself in contentment. Thus, sensibility is not in the mode of fixed and mediated representations but is incessant movement and total contact: "... the movement comes incessantly upon me, as the wave that engulfs and submerges and drowns – an incessant movement of afflux without respite, a total contact without fissure nor gap from which the reflected movement of a thought could arise. It is to be within, to be 'inside of....' This situation is not reducible to a representation, not even an inarticulate representation; it belongs to sensibility (which is the *mode* of enjoyment)...."<sup>32</sup>

Although Levinas contends that sensibility is not reducible to representation, his position does not render sensibility unintelligible. Sensibility and enjoyment have their intelligibility through their self-support and in their support for things, as opposed to Kant's representations of objects, which are supported by the intelligibility of thought. Levinas

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31. *Ibid.*, 133.

32. *Ibid.*, 135.

insists that sensibility is not an inferior knowledge but renders intelligibility in immediate contact with its content. This content “contents” sensibility in the elemental so that sensibility need not seek the Cartesian clarity and distinction of a representation fixed in thought:

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

The sensibility is therefore to be described not as a moment of representation, but as an instance of enjoyment. Its intention (if we may resort to this term) does not go in the direction of representation. It does not suffice to say that sensation lacks clarity and distinctness, as though it were situated on a plane of representation. Sensibility is not an inferior knowledge bound however intimately to affective states: in its very *gnosis* sensibility is enjoyment; it is satisfied with the given, it is contented. Sensible “knowledge” does not have to surmount infinite regression, that vertigo of the understanding; it does not even experience it. It finds itself immediately at the term; it concludes, it finishes without referring to the infinite. Finiton without reference to the infinite, finition without limitation, is the relation with the end (*fin*) as a goal.<sup>33</sup>

Because it is not a representation, sensibility does not as such apprehend an object. Rather, sensibility is steeped in the sensual elements, or the medium, that sustains objects and sustains enjoyment. Instead of aiming at or constituting objects as with Husserlian intentionality, sensibility *dissolves* objects in enjoyment. The elemental medium sustains my completed enjoyment as contentment:

Sensibility does not aim at an object, however rudimentary. It concerns even the elaborated forms of consciousness, but its proper work consists in enjoyment, through which every object is dissolved into the element in which enjoyment is steeped.... Contentment, in its naïveté, lurks behind the relation with things. This earth upon which I find myself and from which I welcome sensible objects or make my way to them suffices for me. The earth which upholds me does so without my troubling myself

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33. *Ibid.*, 136.

about what knowing what upholds the earth. I am content with the aspect this corner of the world, universe of my daily behavior, this city or this neighborhood or this street in which I move, this horizon within which I live, turn to me; I do not ground them in a more vast system. It is they who ground me. I welcome them without thinking them. I enjoy this world of things as pure elements, as qualities without support, without substance.<sup>34</sup>

Levinas realizes that his view of elemental sufficiency and sustenance runs counter to reason, and he offers some explanation of the intelligible coherence of the elements, in as much as “sensibility is not thought unaware of itself.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, Levinas argues for the priority of sensibility over the totality of reason, despite the latter’s condemnation of the former: “In the eyes of reason the contentment of sensibility is ridiculous. But sensibility is not a blind reason and folly. It is prior to reason; the sensible is not to be ascribed to the totality to which it is closed.”<sup>36</sup> Again we see Levinas’s complaint against ontology’s totalities – this time in the shape of Kant’s completion of being via the representations of reason that guide the faculty of the understanding. In Kant’s view, objects of sensation (whose totality is “nature”) can be properly understood only as representations of the mind. As already noted in the first chapter’s section on “Geometry and Natural Law,” for Kant “categories are concepts which prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, and therefore to nature, the sum of all appearances.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the totality of all possible objects of perception can be mapped on the geometric axes of space and time. Thus, “nature” is the sum or totality of all appearances, and the character of “natural law” pervades the understanding. For Kant, the “conformity of law to all the objects of experience” defines the “formal aspect of nature” that complements its material aspect as the “totality of all objects of experience.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, Kant’s doctrine retains the trait of traditional ontologies that conceive of the framework of Being as a closed totality (and then infinitely extend this framework). In a word, Kantian representation remains on the level of “the same” without sensibility’s exposure to the exteriority of the elements or to “the Other.” As Levinas contends: “To remain the same is to represent to oneself. The ‘I think’ is the pulsation of rational thought.”<sup>39</sup>

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34. *Ibid.*, 137.

35. *Ibid.*, 138.

36. *Ibid.*, 138.

37. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 172, B 163.

38. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 4:295-6; §16, 39-40.

39. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 126.

Yet Levinas does not judge Kant's doctrine to be just another ontology falling in line with the Western tradition. In Kant's doctrine, Levinas sees the reversal of the Cartesian *cogito's* primacy of infinity over the finite, allowing Kantian finitude to be described positively as sensibility. For Kant (as well as Heidegger), the finite is no longer exclusively conceived as a privileged relation to infinity as in Descartes' doctrine:

The Kantian notion of infinity figures as an ideal of reason, the projection of exigencies in a beyond, the ideal completion of what is given incomplete – but without the incomplete being confronted with a privileged *experience* of infinity, without it drawing the limits of its finitude from such a confrontation. The finite here is no longer conceived by relation to the infinite; quite the contrary, the infinite presupposes the finite, which it amplifies infinitely (although this passage to the limit or this projection implicates in an unacknowledged form the idea of infinity, with all the consequences Descartes drew from it, and which are presupposed by the idea of this projection). The Kantian finitude is described positively as sensibility, as the Heideggerian finitude by the being for death. This infinity referring to the finite marks the most anti-Cartesian point in Kantian philosophy as, later, of Heideggerian philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, if we may extrapolate from Levinas's view, the unconditionality of the categorical imperative allows Kant to avoid a full-blown ontological reduction, as “*unconditionality*” is its starting point rather than the “privileged experience of infinity.” When Levinas speaks of the privileged relation to infinity that Kant avoids, this may implicate Kant's notion of the unconditionality of the moral law, which Kant does not characterize as infinite or as a Cartesian idea of infinity. Although not characterized by infinity, the unconditional maintains its priority over the conditional. As Kant had noted about the moral law, the conditional claims of an empirical ethics can never determine the unconditional law; the relation must begin with the unconditional from which the conditional properly follows. For both Kant and Levinas, the ethical has an irreducible starting point, although it begins with the unconditionality of the moral law for Kant and the irreducible infinity of alterity for Levinas. Here, Levinas's ethical infinity is distinct from Descartes' notion, as this infinity cannot be thought, cannot be reduced to the self-same of the *cogito*). That ethical infinity cannot be reduced to thought distinguishes Levinas's doctrine from all others, but in a certain sense Kant's emphasis on the unconditional foreshadowed Levinas's view: the unconditionality of the moral law is not a

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40. *Ibid.*, 196.



principle derived neither from empirical conditions nor from the idea of Cartesian infinity.

In ethics, both Levinas and Kant seek to explain the conditions of concrete experience, i.e., what makes ethical experience possible. Although Levinas speaks of infinity as the dimension of ethics (in distinction to boundlessness of the elemental), his notion of ethical infinity is not Descartes' *idea* of infinity as the infinite extension of thought. In this way, Levinas's ethical infinity is the irreducibility of the Other to the self or the same; it is an infinity that cannot be thought or represented as the same. Likewise, Levinas sees the uniqueness of the unconditionality of Kant's categorical imperative, which is not based on the Cartesian idea of infinity: "The fact that immortality and theology could not determine the categorical imperative signifies the novelty of the Copernican revolution: a sense (*sens*) that is not measured by being or not being; but being on the contrary is determined on the basis of sense (*sens*)."<sup>41</sup> In bringing the mind to things as the condition of all possible experience, Kant's Copernican revolution makes finitude a positive aspect of sensibility. With Kantian finitude described positively as sensibility, Kant has begun to move away from the idea of infinity that characterizes perception as thought and moves toward the sensibility as affectivity. Although Kant clearly does not embrace the affectivity of finitude as thoroughly as does Levinas, Kant had worked affectivity into morals in which the subject from the start is susceptible to the commands of moral law as "bent toward the law." Kant's *Triebfeder* must have some preexisting affectivity in order to supply motivation. Kant's positivity of human finitude allows one to feel the force of the moral law, allows us to be pained by the law's unconditionality, in a way not possible if the Cartesian idea of infinity were to be imported into ethics.

### *Affectivity*

Another aspect of Levinas's elucidation of the elemental in his doctrine of sensation is his emphasis on the affectivity of subjectivity, an affectivity that also allows the subject to respond to the appeal of the Other in the ethical realm. Kant also addresses affectivity as the initial susceptibility to the *Triebfeder* of the moral law itself. This feeling, however, is not the specifically pre-established capacity of "moral feeling" of the empirical and Epicurean doctrines. As Kant notes in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, "there is here no *antecedent* moral feeling in the subject that would be attuned to morality."<sup>42</sup> "Sensuous feeling," Kant adds, "which is the basis of all our inclinations, is the condition of the particular

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41. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 129.

42. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 65; 5:75.

feeling we call respect.”<sup>43</sup> As Lewis White Beck notes on Kant’s broader view of this initial moral receptivity, we must have a receptivity of moral feeling in general before we can have the specific feeling of respect for the moral law.<sup>44</sup> In this highly qualified manner, affectivity underlies Kant’s moral doctrine as receptivity and susceptibility to the force of *Triebfedern*. But Levinas takes this affectivity much further. His emphasis on affectivity allows us to see the common ground of imperatives of perception and morals, and shows how affectivity underlies subjectivity in the subject’s experience of sensation as enjoyment: “Sensibility is not a fumbling objectification. Enjoyment, by its essence, characterizes all sensation whose representational content dissolves into their effective content. The very distinction between representational and affective content is tantamount to a recognition that enjoyment is endowed with a dynamism other than that of perception.”<sup>45</sup> In our enjoyment of things, things sate us and content us with their finitude. Here Levinas departs from Kant’s limitations on sensibility and representation. For Levinas, we need not understand objects as extensible on the infinity of extensible geometric axes: “The sensibility that we are describing starting with enjoyment of the element does not belong to the order of thought but to that of sentiment, that is, the affectivity wherein the egoism of the I pulsates. One does not know, one lives sensible qualities: the green of these leaves, the red of this sunset. Objects *content* me with their finitude, without appearing to me on a ground of infinity. The finite without the infinite is possible only as contentment. The finite as contentment is sensibility.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, Levinas places sensibility not on the order of thought but on the order of sentiment, in the ordering of affectivity. In Levinas’s view, affectivity is able to respond to the force of directives without the aid of the formal principles of representation. This affectivity “wherein the egoism of

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43. *Ibid.*, 5:75; cited in Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 225.

44. *Ibid.*, 223-5.

45. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 187.

46. *Ibid.*, 135. Levinas on pp. 135-6 notes further that:

The strength of the Kantian philosophy of the sensible likewise consists in separating sensibility and understanding, in affirming, though only negatively, the independence of ‘matter’ of cognition with regard to the synthetic power of representation. In postulating things in themselves so as to avoid the absurdity of apparitions without there being anything that is appearing, Kant does indeed go beyond the phenomenology of the sensible. But at least he does recognize thereby that of itself the sensible is an apparition without their being anything that appears.

the I pulsates” has fundamental significance for imperatives. Affectivity can be seen as the basis of the will’s susceptibility to imperatives – even as the initial susceptibility to the Kantian *Triebfeder* of respect for the moral law. We have contended that subjectivity’s core of affectivity allows imperatives to be imported into the phenomenology of perception, which effectively dissolves the barrier between Kant’s realms of sensibility and understanding. Levinas is keenly aware of this affectivity, as he links it with the intelligibility of sensibility. As noted above, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas discerns two realms of our affectivity: enjoyment, which moves toward contentment; and alterity, which contests our self-enclosure in satiety and contentment. Later, in *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas will claim that alterity orders the world of things even before our contact with it. Like Kant, Levinas rejects the influence of egoism over the moral subject, but Levinas does not share Kant’s suspicions about sensibility, which would need the categories of the understanding to render sensibility intelligible. Levinas discerns affective, and moral, intelligibility in the imperative that the face places on the subject. “The face is the fact that a being affects us not in the indicative, but in the imperative, and is thus outside all categories.”<sup>47</sup> For Levinas, sensibility is not opposed to morality; sensibility is the unavoidable condition of the ethical.<sup>48</sup>

*Sensation and Contentment: The Foreground of Alterity*

When Levinas states that “not everything that is given in the world is a tool,”<sup>49</sup> we return to his argument against Heidegger’s primacy of *Zeug* but this time with an emphasis on contentment. Levinas cites something very basic – food – as our final example of sensation against the primacy of things, implements, and representations. Implements exist for some further end, but food is to be consumed and culminates in our contentment and satisfaction. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas elaborates the example of food as an element of satisfaction because it provides a sharp contrast to our relations with other persons, which are not relations of consumption in either Levinas’s doctrine of alterity or Kant’s “kingdom of ends.” To illustrate, Levinas contrasts eating and loving. With eating, there is a complete satisfaction of desire, but love is characterized by “an essential and insatiable hunger”:

Food ... is significant for us because of the place it occupies in everyday life, but especially because of the

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47. Emmanuel Levinas, “Freedom and Command,” In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 21.

48. Catherine Chaliel. *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 7.

49. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 43.

relationship between desire and its satisfaction which it represents, and which constitutes what is typical of life in the world. What characterizes this relationship is a complete correspondence between desire and its satisfaction. Desire knows perfectly well what it wants. And food makes possible the full realization of this intention. At some moment everything is consummated. Compare eating with loving, which occurs beyond economic activity and the world. For what characterizes love is an essential and insatiable hunger.<sup>50</sup>

Contesting the closed contentment of the elemental sphere, the human other appears in this context of insatiability. The Other is no way consumable; alterity eludes any reduction to or consumption by my ego. We do not come to know the Other as an extension of our self-certain *cogito*, nor is the Other an intention to be filled by the teleological acts of Husserlian consciousness. Similar to the elemental, the human other is not a thing or object. Although in Levinas's view the Other is distinct from the elements, which resist the completed status of objects because they are the medium of objects, the Other also resists completion as an object. "The *other* is precisely this objectless dimension.... There is no goal, no end in view."<sup>51</sup>

This lack of possession and incompleteness of the Other, however, does not result in a corrosive skepticism about other persons. Skepticism, in fact, retains the traditional ontological priority of the self over the Other. The knowing, or doubting, subject remains a locus of stability while the outside world is doubted. Although I hold myself to be certain, the Other is continually held in doubt. If we address skepticism in the form of Hume's empiricism, we can see how Levinas's doctrine displays alterity's originality in the genesis of its imperative. The imperative of alterity does not arise in the indicative mode of objective facts of experience, nor is this imperative derived or derivable from the facts of experience. Alterity is the originary event of Levinas's imperative, and Levinas derives the subject from this relation to alterity. Hume's claim that "the ought" cannot be derived from "the is" (as all knowledge comes from experience of "what is") misses the ethical point. Levinas, like Kant, begins with the ethical "ought" by placing an imperative at the beginning of the human order instead of deriving ethical life from the ontological facts of being as "what is" or "the is."

Unlike skepticism's origination in the subject that doubts the outside world but not itself, Levinas's alterity begins with the Other's appeals to me with his or her face, which calls for my response. In this way, the living Other imperatively summons my response and my responsibility.

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50. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 43.

51. *Ibid.*, 43-4.

Furthermore, in alterity there is no teleological completion of a reciprocal intersubjectivity. There is no return to myself as there is satisfying my desire when eating. The Other appeals to me and calls me out across a gap that cannot be bridged by the self-certainty of the *cogito*. My subjectivity begins in subjection to the other person who calls upon me and calls me out. This calling out by the Other is what distinguishes alterity from the elemental. The impersonal and anonymous realm of the “*il y a*” of the elemental is contested by the personal and concrete encounter with the human other.

### **ALTERITY, INFINITY, EXTERIORITY, AND ASYMMETRY**

#### *The Imperative of Alterity and Infinity*

Although Levinas discerns an imperative structure in elemental enjoyment in which things and implements are subordinated to enjoyment, in *Totality and Infinity* this imperative is contested by a more forceful one – the imperative of alterity that the subject encounters in the face of the Other. However, the sensation of the elements underlying the perception of things does reveal the susceptibility and affectivity found in our subjectivity, an affectivity that also allows our responsibility for the Other to be felt and understood.

For Levinas, the human face is not merely one phenomenon, or even one element, among others. For him, the face is an epiphany. As such, the face is not a relation with some empirical object whose qualities are observed. When one encounters the face of another, one does not first consider empirical attributes as one would when viewing a statue – the shape of the nose, the line of the jaw, etc. Because of the unique force of the Other's face, one does not notice the color of the Other's eyes, nor is it important in this encounter. The face has a different relationship from that which characterizes our relation to the possessability of things and our sensibility as elemental immersion. Instead of the possession or immersion that marks these relations, our relation with alterity is uniquely one of transcendence. “The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence....”<sup>52</sup> When the Other faces me, he or she takes a stand. With his or her face and speech, the Other calls me out, contesting my contentment in the elemental. This relation with the Other is never closed in a totality but is one of incommensurate power – it is a relation not of power but of irreversible force: “The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.”<sup>53</sup> Because “the face

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52. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 193.

53. *Ibid.*, 198.

resists possession, resists my powers,”<sup>54</sup> the Other is not an extension of myself as an alter ego. The Other is irreversibly and irreducibly other. As such, human alterity is characterized by infinity – not the *idea* of infinity (which would return to the self-same) but the insurmountable gap between the self and the Other, which carries traces of the gap of alterity between the divine and the human. Even though the Other is not knowable as an extension of myself, the Other calls me out and appeals to my resources. The Other imperatively organizes my response and responsibility to him or her, and this imperative singles me out. In this way, “the epiphany of the face is ethical,”<sup>55</sup> and my subjectivity begins in this subjection to the Other, who calls me out of myself.

Because the infinity of alterity precedes any formulation or deduction of principles (*archē*), Levinas describes his moral theory as “an-archic.” Even though both Levinas and Kant maintain that the ethical is not reducible to, and thus not derivable from, ontology, Levinas’s anarchy of alterity carries this notion farther from ontology than does Kant’s principle of the moral law in the categorical imperative, as alterity precedes any principle. Because of its absolute insurmountability, because of its infinity, alterity occurs outside of any ontological framework – infinity allows alterity to transcend ontology. This insurmountable irreducibility of alterity allows Levinas to reassert with Kant, now more forcefully, that ethics precedes ontology.

Levinas’s priority of ethics over ontology has more force than Kant’s because Levinas constitutes the subject in light of God’s absolute and infinite otherness, which is revealed as a trace in the epiphany of the face of the Other. In this way, Levinas radicalizes his ethics by claiming the ethics of alterity to be an infinite metaphysics allowing for the subject’s genuine transcendence that does not return to the self-same. For Levinas, God is not an infinite extension of ontology as in the Christian theology. Rather, God is, as in the Judaic tradition, absolutely unknowable – absolutely other and unnamable (e.g., written as “G-d”). Kant’s conception of subjectivity, however, remains on the level of the finite, as human finitude allows the subject to feel the force of the moral law as *Triebfeder*. In fact, this finitude accounts for the supersensibility of both the moral law and the experience of the sublime. The sublime’s immeasurability exceeds our ability to know, i.e., what we can know through representations. Thus, the feeling of the sublime is unrepresentable, as it occurs in the presence of the infinite. Still, the Kantian subject is finite, and the infinity of the sublime arouses a feeling, not a knowable representation, in us. As Catherine Chaliel notes, the boundlessness of Kant’s sublime will not suffice for Levinas.<sup>56</sup> In its uniqueness, the face of the Other is a phenomenon that carries a trace of the infinite gap between the subject and God’s absolute otherness. Because the

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54. *Ibid.*, 197.

55. *Ibid.*, 199.

56. Chaliel, *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas*, 97-103.

face is not a phenomenon or even a sublime phenomenon, only the face can teach a person the meaning of spiritual resistance that exceeds any phenomena. Levinas's ethical anarchy is essentially infinite.

Because of the originary relation with the face of the Other and my self, Levinas's ethical subject precedes the ontological subject. In terms of the history of the phenomenological movement, we can perhaps say that Heidegger's view of the primacy of ontology over knowledge claims ushered in the era of contemporary philosophy in *Dasein's* break with the modern era's model of immured subjectivity originating in the self-certainty of Descartes' *cogito*. Levinas's doctrine of alterity (and developments from Lingis on the elemental imperative and sublime action), however, might be said to introduce a post-contemporary philosophical view. The refinements of Heidegger's primordial onto-ontological structure of Being disclosed to *Dasein* are eclipsed by Levinas's originary ethical imperatives that precede any ontology, including Heidegger's framework of Being as fundamental ontology.

Heidegger, although he had not pushed the primacy of the ethical as far as Levinas, does show the limits of knowledge claims as the basis of ontology. Heidegger bolsters this claim by showing that the ontological subject precedes the epistemological subject in *Zuhandensein's* primary relation to *Dasein* and showing the priority of this referential relation over the objective attributes of entities. For Heidegger, the *Vorhandensein* of objects as entities (or of knowledge claims) is a derivation from the originary understanding found in *Zuhanden*, in which the entire network of equipment primordially refers to *Dasein's* needs and desires.

But was not the same impulse against ontology already implied, although not thematized, in Kant's doctrine of the imperative, and have we not arrived at another point of contact between Kant and Levinas? Because of the centrality of alterity and the primacy of the appeal of the Other's face, Levinas's doctrine can be seen to have a strong affinity with Kant's categorical imperative in two ways – first, Levinas conceives ethics to be in subjection to an imperative; and second, ethics cannot be known or discovered through the investigations of ontology.

First, Levinasian ethics is characterized by subjection to an imperative – we are not subjected to the interiority of the moral law within ourselves but are subjected to the alterity of humans exterior to us. For Levinas, subjectivity arises externally in subjection to the Other, whereas for Kant, subjectivity occurs internally in response to the moral law within. Although both thinkers see subjectivity as arising in subjection to imperatives, the moral subject for Levinas arises in the accusative via the Other, not in the nominative as with the giving of myself the moral law. In this way, Levinasian exteriority clashes with Kantian interiority, as Levinas takes the relation of alterity to be a privileged heteronomy versus Kant's relations of autonomy among rational beings.

On the second point of agreement between the thinkers, Levinas concurs with Kant that ethics cannot be known or discovered through

investigations of ontology. Kant's categorical imperative is a "fact of reason," not a "fact of being." Similarly, Levinas's ethics precedes ontology with the appeal and contestation of the epiphany of the human face. Levinas succinctly claims that "things have no face,"<sup>57</sup> and the same could be said about ontology's lack of imperative force in ethics, in which "the is" cannot determine "the ought." For both Levinas and Kant, ontologies cannot provide the "supersensible" transcendence necessary for ethics.

Yet there are considerable differences between Levinas's doctrine of alterity and Kant's

doctrine of respect. For Levinas, the relation with the Other is asymmetrical, and this asymmetry accounts for the irreducible infinity of the ethical relation, whereas for Kant respect has a symmetrical application to finite beings. For Levinas ethics is infinite, as alterity gives some trace of God's infinite otherness, whereas for Kant ethics takes place on the finite plane, as respect for the moral law constrains our natural self-serving inclinations. Furthermore, in contrast to Kant's conception of the sublime, which makes us uncomfortably aware of our finitude, for Levinas the infinity of the face transcends even the sublime.

The imperative, however, remains a firm point of contact between the thinkers. Levinas, like Kant, defines ethics as subjection to an imperative. Without elaboration, Adriaan Peperzak asserts that Kant's "fact of reason" of the moral law corresponds to the epiphany of the Other's face and speech.<sup>58</sup> Although Levinas's ethics is characterized by the exteriority of alterity and Kant's by the interiority of the moral law within, both the moral law and the human face impose themselves imperatively upon us. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant describes respect as "respect for the idea of humanity within our *subject*,"<sup>59</sup> emphasizing that subjectivity begins in subjection to the rational law as respect for the *idea* of humanity. For Levinas, although there is no supreme moral principle, there is an immediate susceptibility to the ethical commands that weigh "upon our subject." For him, subjectivity likewise begins in subjection – not in subjection to Kant's moral law "within our subject" but in subjection to the appeal of the Other.

Because of its ethicality, the face carries imperative force not found in an ontology of objective attributes in the indicative mood: "The face is the fact that a being affects us not in the indicative, but in the imperative...."<sup>60</sup>

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57. *Ibid.*, 140.

58. Adriaan Peperzak, "Some Remarks on Hegel, Kant and Levinas," In *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 211.

59. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 114, 5:257 (italics added).

60. Emmanuel Levinas, "Freedom and Command," In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 21;



The subordination of the self to the Other called for in the appeal of alterity is subordination to an imperative: "The formal structure of the presence of *one to another* cannot be put as a simple multiplicity; it is subordination, an appeal from one to another."<sup>61</sup> Because the alterity presented in the human face is not simply a phenomenon among others but an epiphany, it is irreducible to any ontology that begins with the self-certainty of the *cogito* or the fixed representations of objective qualities. Despite Kant's moves away from ontology in the foundation of morals in the categorical imperative, in Levinas's view the face transcends Kant's autonomy of reason and the transcendental unity of apperception, as the specter of ontological formulation and reducibility to the self-same continues to haunt these aspects of Kant's doctrine.

*The Exteriority of Alterity versus the Interiority of Autonomy*

One of the aspects of Kant's "hidden" ontology is the rational agent's self-determination and the subsequent interiority of this moral doctrine. In the dynamic of Kantian respect for the other person, one extends the interior comprehension of the moral law that weighs on oneself to the other person as another instance of the rational law also weighing on him or her. Respect is not an empirical or psychological deduction of the Other's dignity, because it is an immediate and autonomous response to the rational moral law within oneself and within another. Thus, respect is marked by the interiority of the law that weighs on my subject. Levinas, however, begins with the exteriority of the Other's alterity, which establishes my subjectivity by calling me out. Unlike previous accounts of subjectivity, which all begin with the interior self-certainty of the ego (whether Descartes' *cogito* or Kant's transcendental unity of apperception), Levinas's subject arises in exteriority through its response to the call of the Other. Whereas Kant's moral subject begins in subjection to the moral law within, Levinas's moral subject is subjected to the exteriority of the Other's appeal – through alterity, the subject is altered. Although in both doctrines subjectivity arises in subjection to imperatives, for Levinas the subject is designated in the accusative from without, not in the nominative from within. With its interiority, Kant's approach preserves the formal and rational principle that gives the subject the law of reason autonomously as a self-determining rational agent. In this way, autonomy bears the marks of a self-same ontology, in which reason gives its own law to itself. Autonomy remains in the realm of the self-same as a designation of reason itself, an interior self-naming. Instead of characterizing subjectivity by autonomy, Levinas calls alterity a "privileged heteronomy," which reflects the subject's origin in the accusative in relation to the epiphany of the Other's face and speech.

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61. *Ibid.*

*The Same or Other: Autonomy or Privileged Heteronomy?*

Because Levinas has altered the traditional path of moral subjectivity between the Other and the subject, this reversal entails a critique of Kantian autonomy, the source of the categorical imperative. Just as the starting point in morals can no longer be the subject's self-certainty in the *cogito*, morals cannot begin with the autonomous freedom of the Kantian subject. According to Levinas, we do not grasp the Other by deducing his dignity from any rational principle, or by reducing him or her to me. Levinas explains how ontologies have been based on the notion of the same, whereas he begins with the alterity of the Other, in which the Other is not my alter-ego but is irretrievably other, an other who is irreducible to me. Thus, Levinas begins not with the autonomy of the subject, but with the freedom of the Other, which outstrips the subject's powers: "The absolutely other is the 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.' I, you – these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link [*sic*] me to the Stranger (*l'Etranger*), the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself (*le chez soi*). But Stranger also means the free one. Over him I have no power. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal."<sup>62</sup> Because of the primacy of the Other, freedom for Levinas begins not with the free, autonomous subject but with the freedom of the Other, who has power over me but over whom I am powerless. This freedom is not reciprocal between the Other and me, as with Kantian respect, but carries an irreversible force. Because of its irreversibility, alterity is a force *par excellence*, as imperative force. Whereas autonomy is characterized as symmetry because all persons should respond to the universal rational law within themselves, alterity is marked by asymmetry. The Other is always above me, on high. By founding subjectivity on alterity and asymmetry, Levinas might be accused of making us our "brothers' keepers," but he reminds us of this issue's original context. Murderous Cain's question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a secondary one, derived from the originary fact of the response required by the alterity of one's brother. As Levinas reads it, Cain's question cannot be primary, as it presupposes the original responsibility for the Other. To challenge this responsibility is to acknowledge it. In this way, Levinas's notion of responsibility is more thorough-going than the requirements of Kantian respect. With the asymmetrical starting point of alterity as a privileged heteronomy, we are not only responsible for the keeping of our "brothers in reason" but are responsible for another as "any other," whether or not they have the capacity to submit to rational autonomy. Because of this thorough-going responsibility in the asymmetry of alterity, Levinas's ethical demands run more deeply than Kant's. Kant extends respect to only those others capable

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62. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

of reason, whereas Levinas does not demand rational autonomy from the Other before granting an ethical relation. For Levinas, one need have only a face to initiate the ethical relation.

*The Face and Ethical Asymmetry*

Because of the face's unique status, Levinas takes the human other as a privileged heteronomy instead of another instantiation of the formal principles of rational moral autonomy. With its imperative appeal, the face is an ethical epiphany, because it outstrips my powers. Because it can be reduced neither to knowledge nor elemental enjoyment, the face opens the ethical dimension: "The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension.... The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge."<sup>63</sup> Thus, the face of the Other invites me into a relation that is not reciprocal (which is to say, that the relation of alterity is one of irreversible force, not reversible or reciprocal power). In contrast to Kantian respect that holds equally for all persons in respect for universal moral law, Levinas's Other exercises a power (i.e., a force) that is always greater than mine because of the gap of alterity between me and the Other. We should also briefly add here that in terms of imperative force versus power (with an eye toward a more expansive argument on force versus power in the concluding chapter), Levinas implies that any "ontology of the same" remains on the plane of symmetrical or reversible power, whereas as imperative force alterity carries an asymmetrical "altering force." In this way, Levinas radicalizes his ethics of alterity as a metaphysics, whose genuine transcendence would not be possible in the form of a representation of "the Other" by "the same." Here Levinas claims that the produced egoism of "the same" cannot enter a relation with the Other without immediately divesting it of its alterity, as would occur in representation: "The metaphysical relation can not be properly speaking a representation, for the Other would therein dissolve into the same: every representation is essentially interpretable as a transcendental constitution. The other with which the metaphysician is in relationship and *which he recognizes as other* is not simply in another locality; this other recalls Plato's Ideas which, according to Aristotle's formula, are not in a site."<sup>64</sup> Levinas adds that the relation with the Other, although metaphysical but not representational, is not a formalism, as the Other is prior to any formulation: "The metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not

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63. *Ibid.*, 197-8.

64. *Ibid.*, 38.

formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same the other would not be rigorously other: by virtue of the common frontier the other, within the system, would yet be the same.”<sup>65</sup> The ethical is metaphysical because alterity precedes any formulation of it by the same. Likewise, the epiphany of the face carries the trace of God, as the absolute Other and absolutely unknowable. At the risk of overcompressing his theological arguments, for Levinas God is not an infinite extension of ontology as in the Christian theology, rather God is, as in the Judaic tradition, infinitely and absolutely unknowable and absolutely Other. I cannot reduce the Other to my consciousness, even though the Other can appeal to me with his exposed face and with his speech.

With his face and speech directed toward me, the Other solicits my response, and my responsibility begins here. The face is a power above me, or rather, it is a force above me, as this imperative relation cannot be reversed. “The approach of the face is the most basic mode of responsibility. As such, the face of the other is verticality and uprightness; it spells a relation of rectitude. The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*) but above me.”<sup>66</sup> For Levinas, the face brings its imperative force and structure of subordination without the form of rational law. The subject’s relation to the Other is not reciprocal but is a relation of irreversible force to which I am subjected. Levinas’s subject is not a “for itself” Hegelian self-consciousness; rather, it is “for another,” who singles me out: “I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an ‘I,’ precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual ‘I.’ So that I become a responsible or ethical ‘I’ to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself – to abdicate my position of centrality – in favor of the vulnerable other.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, in terms of Kantian autonomy, Levinas contends that the moral subject must abdicate his central position of freedom or autonomy in response to the Other’s vulnerability. Subjectivity is to be “altered” at its traditional core of free self-consciousness by the irreversible force of the appeal of alterity in the Other’s face and speech.

Levinas’s reversal of the traditional path of subjectivity also has significance for “force” versus “form” in imperatives. Levinas sees an ordering ethical force in the face of the Other, which calls for my response and my responsibility, whereas Kant maintains that only the form of law can bring intelligibility to ethics. The face of Levinas’s Other initiates an intelligible relation of responsibility that calls for my response, whereas

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65. *Ibid.*, 38-9.

66. Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas.” In *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 23-4.

67. *Ibid.*, 26-7.

Kant's moral subject extends respect to the Other in the understanding that the moral law that weighs internally on my own subject also weighs on all other subjects of reason. The ethical move for Kant begins in the subject's interiority and extends to the Other's interiority. For Levinas, however, ethics arises in exteriority; one becomes an ethical subject in exposure to the exterior directives of alterity. The force of the Other's face and speech solicit a response in which subjectivity arises. In the response of the subject, responsibility and subjectivity begin. Because the face and speech of the Other demand a response, subjectivity is constituted in this required response as responsibility. As a response to the imperative command of the Other, responsibility engenders the intelligible structure of subjectivity. Responsibility is the "essential, primary, and fundamental structure of subjectivity...; the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics and understood as responsibility."<sup>68</sup>

In further contrast to Kant's moral doctrine, Levinas's notion of responsibility is not the sort required by principled duty. The infinite responsibility for the Other exceeds Kant's call of rational duty. The requirements of responsibility demanded by alterity exceed the demands of reason, whereas the Kantian duty of the respect for oneself as an end prohibits this excessive responsibility for the Other. In Levinas's view, in other words, I have to face up even to that which does not interest me, because the Other comes to me as a face. As Levinas notes in *Ethics and Infinity*, "I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other, thus as a responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face."<sup>69</sup> For Levinas, I am responsible for acting for the Other, beyond my own actions, beyond my autonomy. In this way, Levinas's ethical responsibility goes beyond an autonomous responsibility for one's own actions: "The tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility, this moreover, whether accepted or refused, whether knowing or not knowing how to assume it, whether able or unable to do anything concrete for the Other."<sup>70</sup> As we see once again in Levinas's doctrine, ethical infinity outstrips the self-same by exceeding any formulated principle, including Kant's principle of rational autonomy and duty.

## **ALTERITY AND LANGUAGE**

### *The Call of Alterity in Speech*

By discussing the role of speech in the doctrine of alterity, we hope to

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68. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 95.

69. *Ibid.*, 95.

70. *Ibid.*, 97.

see how Levinas avoids the ontological reductions in language (whose terms formalize the relations of the self-same) and how speech bolsters the call of alterity of the face. For Levinas, subjectivity begins not only in subjection to the appeal from the Other's face but in the call of the Other's speech. This speech contests me, calls me out, singles me out. Furthermore, for Levinas, speech is, at its root, always already for the Other. Because language is always for the Other, it is not generated by the self-reflections of ontology (as Ludwig Wittgenstein has shown in the impossibility of a private language). By emphasizing "the saying" of speech over "the said" of language, Levinas subordinates the conceptualizing power of language to the force of speech. Specifically in Levinas's dynamic of alterity, the speech of the Other, like his or her face, places an asymmetrical force on me that commands me and demands my response.

For Levinas, speech is not a matter of the signifier and the signified, nor is it essentially the expression of meaning as in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. "Speech is an incomparable manifestation."<sup>71</sup> In the epiphanies of the face and speech, Levinas sees the fundamental significance and original orientation of the world:

The speech which already dawns in the face that looks at me looking introduces the primary frankness of revelation. In function of it the world is oriented, that is, takes on signification. In function of the word the world commences, which is not equivalent to the formula: the world issues in speech.... Speech is thus the origin of all signification – of tools and all human works – for through it the referential system from which every signification arises receives the very principle of its functioning, its key. Language is not one modality of symbolism; every symbolism refers already to language.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, for Levinas "speech is the origin of all signification," including Heideggerian *Zeug*. When Levinas says that "every symbolism refers already to language," what he discloses is not Heidegger's *das Man*, "the they" of language that "anyone" can use in which language is like *Zeug*. Rather, language as speech discloses "the Other" as the symbolic nexus of language because language is always for the Other.

In addition to a fundamental ordering of the world through speech, Levinas elucidates some of the fundamental philosophical implications of speech and language. To articulate the uniqueness of the Other, Levinas contrasts the alterity of "the Other" with "the same" of traditional subjectivity, and asserts that the relation between the self-same and other is language. Further, this irreducible relation shown in language between the

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71. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 182

72. *Ibid.*, 98.

Other and the same is metaphysical, marked by the transcendence of the "I" that arises in its relation to the Other. Language remains transcendent to the "I," as language is the point of departure of the "I." In this sense, the first-person plural "we" is a false reduction of the Other to the self-same:

We are the same and the other. We shall try to show that the *relation* between the same and the other – upon which we seem to impose such extraordinary conditions – is language. For language accomplishes a relation such that the terms are not limitrophe [*sic*] within this relation, such that the other, despite the relationship with the same, remains transcendent to the same. The relation between the same and the other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as a conversation (*discours*), where the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an "I," as a particular existent unique and autochthonous, leaves itself.<sup>73</sup>

In language, Levinas sees alterity's primacy in the irreducibility of the Other to the same, which has fundamental implications for the reflexive self-consciousness found in Kantian representation and phenomenological doctrine of the intentionality of consciousness. We can also see how language as discourse establishes subjectivity, in which "the same ... as an 'I' ... leaves itself." The subject is called out of itself, out of the self-same.

On the Other in language, Levinas continues: "Language conditions thought – not language in its physical materiality, but language as an attitude of the same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to a consciousness of ..., since relating [*sic*] to what no consciousness can attain, relating to the infinity of the Other."<sup>74</sup> On this issue of language's origination exterior to the subjective consciousness of the *cogito*, Levinas adds: "Language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it in question. The event is irreducible to consciousness, where everything comes about from within – even the strangeness of suffering."<sup>75</sup>

#### *Levinas's Call of Alterity or Heidegger's Call of Conscience?*

To illustrate Levinas's position further, it may be well worth noting the contrast between Levinas's notion of language as an appeal from "the Other" and Heidegger's view of discourse in the "call of conscience" as the appeal from the inauthentic to the authentic "self." In contrast to alterity, Heidegger's authenticity or "ownness" (*Eigentlichkeit*) remains largely

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73. *Ibid.*, 39; "limitrophe [*sic*]" could be rendered as "bordered."

74. *Ibid.*, 204.

75. *Ibid.*

within the confines of the self-originating consciousness, or the *cogito*. Ownness begins with one's authentic self and does not regard the Other. In fact, the main distraction that Heidegger sees to the authentic self of *Dasein* is the inauthentic self, the *they*-self (which takes one's self simply as another – “the one” of *das Man*). Here Heidegger's understanding of “the Other” is in the mode of inauthenticity, in which one takes oneself merely as “another” without the decisive stand made by the authentic self. Authentic *Dasein* distinguishes itself from *das Man* as another, “the one” in an indistinguishable series of “the they.” Thus, even with the refinements that Heidegger introduces, authenticity is largely in the mode of self-generated subjectivity, albeit *Dasein* singled out and grasping its ownmost possibilities. Although Heidegger's call of conscience differs from Levinas's appeal of the Other, Heidegger does assign a fundamental role to language: “If we analyze conscience more penetratingly, it is revealed as a *call (Ruf)*. Calling is a mode of *discourse*. The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to *Dasein* by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self ....”<sup>76</sup> Thus, Heidegger's call of conscience is characterized by discourse, or language, that calls to one's ownmost (*eigenste*) possibilities.

This ownness (*Eigenheit*), however, can only be brought about by the self-same. Ownness can never be brought about by alterity, which is characterized by that which is absolutely other and in no way self-same. Still, Heidegger notes how his call of conscience is a step beyond the mode of representation in Kant's court of justice. “Characterizing conscience as a call is not just giving a ‘picture’, like the Kantian representation of the conscience as a court of justice.”<sup>77</sup> But even though we are now beyond Kantian representation, we have still not come closer to the exteriority of the appeal that Levinas finds in the call of the Other. *Dasein* is to find *itself* in the call of conscience. Again, this is not a finding of the self in response to the appeal of the Other, but an appeal from one type of the self to another type of self. Heidegger calls across the gap between inauthentic *das Man* and authentic *Dasein*, not across the gap of alterity between the Other and the self. Thus, Heidegger's call is largely a discourse of the self-same as the call to *Dasein*'s authentic *self*. As Heidegger notes: “In the call of conscience, what is it that is talked about – in other words, to what is the appeal made? Manifestly *Dasein* itself.”<sup>78</sup> Having described this call in general, Heidegger then addresses the specifics of that to which one is called, which is again the self: “And to what is one called when one is thus appealed to? To one's *own Self*.”<sup>79</sup> In the passing over “the they” in the call to authenticity, the call pushes *das Man* into insignificance, “but the Self,

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76. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 314.

77. *Ibid.*, 316.

78. *Ibid.*, 317.

79. *Ibid.*, 317.



which the appeal has robbed of its lodgment and hiding-place, gets brought to itself by the call.”<sup>80</sup> Clearly, Heidegger’s concern is not with the Other but with the dangers of taking oneself as another.

In fairness to Heidegger’s position, although remaining on the terrain of the self by which the appeal to *Dasein* is characterized by the call of the inauthentic self to the authentic “Self” (capitalized by Heidegger because of its primordially over the inauthentic “self”), Heidegger does not propose the inwardness of subjectivity that marks traditional Western views of ontology. “The appeal to the Self in the they-self does not force it inwards upon itself, so that it can close itself off from the external ‘world.’”<sup>81</sup> Yet, despite the acknowledgment of the exteriority of the world and the imperative of authenticity, Heidegger’s Self remains Self-same. Heidegger culminates the call to conscience in a discussion of its content:

*What* does the call of conscience call to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell. Least of all does it try to set going a “soliloquy” in the Self to which it has appealed. “Nothing” gets called to (*zugerufen*) this Self, but it has been *summoned* (*angerufen*) to itself – that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. The tendency of the call is not such as to put up for “trial” the Self to which the appeal is made; but it calls *Dasein* forth (and “forward”) into its ownmost possibilities, as a summons to its ownmost *potentiality-for-Being*.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, because Heidegger empties out any *actual* content of the appeal of conscience, which asserts nothing, he avoids an interior soliloquy of the authentic Self. Because the appeal of conscience discloses *Dasein*’s “ownmost potentiality-for-Being,” it remains consistent with Heidegger’s reversal of Aristotle’s ontological doctrine that possibilities can only follow from preceding actualities. Furthermore, Heidegger has once again shown his distance from Kant’s court of reason and representation, as the call is not a “trial” for the Self in which the appeal is made.

Yet Heidegger does not take the appeal in his call as far as Levinas does. Heidegger’s view remains within the framework of “fundamental ontology,” in which the Self of *Dasein* remains at the center. Heidegger indeed speaks of an appeal, and thus an imperative and a summons, in the discourse of the call of conscience to responsibility in authenticity, but this call does not exhibit the thorough-going appeal of Levinas’s alterity. Authentic *Dasein* “has been summoned to *itself*.” Discourse for Heidegger begins in a dialogue of the inauthentic self of everyday language with the

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80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*, 318.

82. *Ibid.*, 318.

authentic Self. Thus, language for Heidegger is not a matter of fundamental alterity as it is for Levinas. Heidegger's "calling out" is not of the self by the Other, but of the self by another type of self, and in this way remains in the self-same of ontology and although it expands the boundaries of the *cogito* remains within its confines. Thus, Heidegger's fundamental ontology, although it shows *Dasein*'s ownmost possibilities to precede the epistemological self, remains immured in a subjectivity of "ownness" and the Self-same, and does not permit the crossing over of the Self into a primordially *ethical* relation in the Other's appeal. Discourse for Levinas, however, is primordially enacted as a conversation where the same leaves itself. The call of the alterity is not the call to an authentic self but an appeal from the Other that calls for the subject's response and responsibility. Because the discourse enacted by alterity is primordially enacted as a conversation between the same and the Other, the course of the "I" is not characterized by return but by transcendence in its responsibility for the Other.

#### *The Saying and the Said*

In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas analyzes speech and language as "the saying" and "the said," respectively. Levinas takes the "saying" of speech to be prior to "the said" of essentialized language, the *logos* that congeals terms into world behind the scenes. Saying is a "foreword" that precedes languages, because saying is "proximity" to the Other. On the relation of speech and language, Levinas explains how this proximity of the Other is the primary relation:

It is not that the essence qua persistence in essence, qua *conatus* and interest, would be reducible to a word-play. Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the signifyingness of signification.... The original or pre-original saying, what is put forth in the foreword, weaves an intrigue of responsibility. It sets forth an order more grave than being and antecedent to being.<sup>83</sup>

Instead of Heidegger's calling of language from its source in the inauthentic self of *das Man* to the authentic self, in Levinas's "saying" we find the origin of the call to responsibility in an original proximity to the Other. "Saying states and thematizes the said but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne

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83. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 6-7.

by words in the said. The signification to the other occurs in proximity.”<sup>84</sup> All saying requires the proximity of the Other because saying makes sense only the presence of the Other. In this way, Levinas distinguishes speech from the ossifications of language and prioritizes the saying over the said. With speech, it is the Other who is primary, because the saying of speech is always already for the Other, as a result of the proximity of the Other. For Levinas, it is the Other, rather than Heidegger’s ontological disclosure of truth in language, that is the nexus of speech. Because the signs of language are originally for the Other in Levinas’s view of “the saying,” the other rather than the disclosure of ontological truth for *Dasein* as the nexus of all signification in all linguistic systems. Thus, the engagement of an approach by the Other – the call of the Other – is the significance of all signification, and precedes not only language and its concepts but also precedes the concept of being or ontology. In its priority to ontology, “the saying” precedes being’s entities, essences, and identifications in the said.

Although Levinas subordinates the language of ontology in the said to the saying in the proximity of the Other, subjectivity is not left rudderless but is oriented by an imperative. By contending that “saying” sets forth *an order* more grave than and antecedent to being, we can again see how thoroughly the imperative is at work in Levinas’s doctrine. With the approach of the Other in proximity, I am not only called out by the appeal of his or her eyes or face. As a unique event or epiphany, the speech of the Other as “saying” is also a command and an ordering. In this way, subjectivity originates in this subjection to the order placed on oneself by the appeal of the Other’s speech and face. This response is commanded imperatively as responsibility for the Other in proximity: “Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship, and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or *self*.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, subjectivity originates in response to the proximity or approach of the Other. Subjectivity does not begin in the subject’s own initiative but arises in response to the subjection by the Other. In this way, Levinas reverses the traditional order of subject and Other in Western ontology.

In avoiding the reductions of ontology to the self-same, Levinas emphasizes the exteriority of his doctrine in holding that saying is *exposure* to another. He concedes that communication is a part of this saying but that exposure is the very condition of communication: “Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure.”<sup>86</sup> Communication is not reducible to truth thought in an ego and passed onto another. Because it is first exposure to the Other, communication “is not a simple ‘intention to address a message.’”<sup>87</sup>

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84. *Ibid.*, 46.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*, 48.

87. *Ibid.*

Communication is primarily neither intentionality nor an ontological identification in language; it is a saying addressed to the Other in response to the force of the Other's proximity. In this way, communication as speech is a response to the exteriority of alterity, and we can see another aspect of Levinas's historical reversal of the relation of self and Other, which now begins with exteriority instead of interiority.

### **PRIVILEGED HETERONOMY VERSUS AUTONOMY**

#### *Kant's Attempted Departure from Ontology*

Even though the sources of Levinas's and Kant's imperatives differ, we can clearly see how both doctrines are governed by imperatives – Levinas argues for the exteriority and privileged heteronomy of the Other, whereas Kant supports the interiority of the rational moral law within. Instead of the unconditional moral law within our subject, Levinas offers the exterior epiphanies of sight and sound in the face and speech of the Other. Like Kantian respect, however, the response to alterity is not a matter of deriving the dignity of the other person from any knowledge claims. Relations with others are characterized for both thinkers by primacy. Kant says of respect that it is a tribute that we cannot help but pay, and Levinas agrees that our relation to alterity is not a matter of knowledge, acceptance, or refusal of the Other. Thus, Levinas's ethical doctrine shares a fundamental point of agreement with Kant's – that morals cannot be founded on ontology. The "ought" is not simply an extension of the "is"; ethics carries a transcendental force, whether it is the *Triebfeder* of the moral law itself or the asymmetrical appeal of the face.

Of all Kant's philosophical contributions, the insight that the ethical lies beyond the ontological merits highest praise from Levinas, who thinks that this understanding may show the true significance of Kant's Copernican revolution. In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Levinas notes that Kant seeks "... to find meaning in the human without measuring it by ontology, without knowing and without asking 'how does it stand with ...?' ('qu'en est-il de'...), outside of mortality and immortality – that, perhaps, is the Copernican revolution."<sup>88</sup> In *Otherwise Than Being*, even though he notes that his own work diverges from Kant's details, Levinas acknowledges his affinity for Kant's moral doctrine, which can be determined neither by ontology nor theology. Ethical meaning is not determined by being, but being is to be determined by ethical meaning:

If one had the right to retain one trait from a philosophical system and neglect all the details of its architecture ..., we

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88. Emmanuel Levinas, "Humanism and An-Archy." In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 138.

would think here of Kantism, which finds a meaning to the human without measuring it by ontology and outside of the question "What is there here ...?" that one would like to take to be preliminary, outside the immortality and death which ontologies run up against. The fact that immortality and theology could not determine the categorical imperative signifies the novelty of the Copernican revolution: a sense (*sens*) that is not measured by being or not being; but being on the contrary is determined on the basis of sense (*sens*).<sup>89</sup>

Thus, Levinas agrees with Kant that one cannot legitimately seek ethics in ontology and its contingent "natures" or make ethical judgments via dogmatic standards. Levinas agrees with Kant that "because we must, we can," that moral obligation outstrips the facts of ontology and that our capacity for morals transcends our capacity for knowledge. We cannot begin with being *qua* being, as it would constitute an ethics that is simply given or claims to know the "good-in-itself." Kant's "good will," the basis of the categorical imperative, does not seek corroboration in ontologies:

... Kant was bold enough to formulate a more radical distinction between thought and knowing. He discovers in the practical usage of pure reason a plot which is not reducible to a reference to being. A good will, as it were utopian, deaf to the information, indifferent to the confirmations, that could come to it from being (which are important for technique and for the hypothetical imperative, but do not concern practice or the categorical imperative), precedes from a freedom above being and prior to knowing and ignorance.<sup>90</sup>

Levinas, however, discerns a return to ontology in Kant's formulation. He immediately adds that "after a moment of separation, the relationship with ontology is reestablished in the 'postulates of pure reason,' as though it were expected in the midst of all these daring moves."<sup>91</sup> Levinas also detects some remaining traces of ontology in Kant's formalism in morals. On the possibility of formalizing or totalizing the will as "practical reason" and "good will," Levinas is doubtful:

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89. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 129.

90. Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Evil." In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 176.

91. *Ibid.*

Is it so certain that the entire will is practical reason in the Kantian sense? Does the will not contain an incoercible part that cannot be obligated by the formalism of universality? And we might even wonder whether, Kant notwithstanding, that incoercible spontaneity, which bears witness both to the multiplicity of humans and the uniqueness of persons, is not already pathology and sensibility and "ill will."... The universality of the maxim of action according to which the will is assimilated to practical reason may not correspond to the totality of the good will.<sup>92</sup>

Despite these reservations, Levinas clearly esteems Kant's refusal to reduce morality to ontology. Both thinkers consider morals to be beyond being, as the "ought" cannot be derived from the "is." With the categorical imperative, Kant places morals in the realm of principles beyond sensibility. The supersensible force of the *archē* of rational moral law cannot be gleaned from any empirical knowledge. Levinas, however, has discerned a return to ontology in Kantian autonomy, as theoretical reason deploys itself in the mode of the self-same in which reason gives the law to itself. To avoid traces of ontology in his ethics, Levinas speaks of the subject's pre-original alignment with goodness, which is "an-archic" because it precedes any principle.

Without recourse to the good as simply given by nature or given by being itself, both Kant and Levinas need something to supply morals, philosophy, and life with some direction and structure. This original orientation is provided by the commands of imperatives. In this way, the world is not simply given but is given as imperative. Both thinkers offer imperatives as the source, structure, and direction for human action. Kant, of course, looks to the primacy and unconditionality of the categorical imperative in the moral law. The moral law is the source of Kantian respect for other persons, as well as respect for our own person. We feel, as a compulsion (*Zwang*), the inward law of reason to which we are subject as rational beings. This receptivity, or affectivity, is the source of respect that I feel in my person and that I recognize in other persons. Thus, Kantian respect begins with the rational subject who respects the inward law in himself and in other persons.

But even more expansively than Kant, Levinas holds that the infinity of ethics precedes the totality of ontology. With Kant's claim of the categorical imperative as the supreme moral principle, Levinas argues that Kant has let ontological formalism slip back into ethics. The autonomy of the rational moral law that the subject gives to himself puts ethics on the

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92. Emmanuel Levinas, "The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other" In *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 122.

ground of the *cogito*'s self-certainty and extends the moral law from oneself to the Other. Kant's moral move is from the interior subject to the exterior Other, but Levinas reverses the moral direction, thus undermining Kant's return to ontological self-sufficiency. The "I" does not arise as the self's unity of apperception or in "giving itself the law" in "autonomy"; rather, the "I" takes shape in response to the Other's commands instead from a self-designation. The "I" arises in the accusative from the Other, not in the nominative from the self. For Levinas, ethics precedes any principle, including the autonomous moral principle of the categorical imperative. In preceding any principle or *arche*, Levinas describes ethics as "an-archic" and deems his move away from ontology to be a "meontology."

*"Meontology" versus Deontology*

In contrast to Kant's formulation of law and duties of deontological ethics (an etymological derivation from the Greek *deon* meaning "one must"), Levinas characterizes the imperative of alterity as "an-archic" because it precedes any principle. Yet, like Kant, Levinas does not begin with ontology to discover ethical values. Kant has shown that ontology itself cannot be the source of the highest good, as it would at best be a "natural good," which could only be conditional and heteronomous. Furthermore for Kant, the good is not simply given with being but arises in our subjection to the imperative of the moral law. Levinas, too, rejects ontology as the source of the ethical, because for him, ethics precedes ontology. The face of the Other is in no way reducible to my ego or the *cogito*, which is the source of self-certainty of all ontologies. As in Kant's primacy of the moral law, Levinas offers ethics, rather than ontological metaphysics, as first philosophy. Instead of a Kantian deontological ethics of an autonomy of duty, Levinas argues for a "meontology." In his explanation of meontology (from the Greek *me-on*, or non-being), Levinas holds that the ethical meaning of existence is not derived from its natural or ontological sedimentation. "On the contrary, ... the ethical relationship with the other is just as primary and original (*ursprünglich*) as ontology – if not more so. Ethics is not derived from an ontology of nature; it is its opposite, a meontology, which affirms meaning beyond being, a primary mode of non-being (*me-on*)."<sup>93</sup> Levinas's ethical subjectivity dispenses with the idealizing subjectivity of ontology, in which self-consciousness reduces everything and every encounter to itself. In this way, Levinas seeks to rectify what he calls the "allergy to the other" in traditional philosophy. This allergic reaction to the Other includes Kant's autonomy of inward moral law and Husserl's self-described monadology of the *cogito* as the pole around which alter egos revolve in *Cartesian Meditations*.

But what of Levinas's view of the concept of freedom? Must not freedom begin with free subjectivity? For Levinas, however, freedom is not

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93. Levinas and Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," 25.

the primary value, although he does not abandon subjectivity. The subject's freedom is eclipsed in its obligation for the Other:

It is not that I wish to preserve, over and against the structuralist critique, the idea of a subject who would be a substantial or mastering center of meaning, an idealist, self-sufficient *cogito*. These traditional ontological versions of subjectivity have nothing to do with the meontological version of subjectivity that I put forward in *Otherwise Than Being*. Ethical subjectivity dispenses with the idealizing subjectivity of ontology, which reduces everything to itself. The ethical "I" is precisely insofar as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to the more primordial call of the other. For me, the freedom of the subject is not the highest or primary value.<sup>94</sup>

The primary ethical source of value for Levinas is not within my subject but in my subjection to the Other. In this way, Levinas has supplanted Kant's categorical imperative with the imperative appeal of the Other, calling for my response and constituting my responsibility. Although Levinas retains a role for freedom in subjection to alterity (as Kant does in freedom as obligation), Levinas criticizes the central aspect of autonomy in Kantian freedom. Kant's autonomy is, of course, self-generating and supported by the self-certainty of the unity of apperception. In a word, Kantian autonomy is interiority. Levinas, however, takes the imperative of alterity to be an absolute exteriority weighing on the subject in exposure and contact with the Other, who is irreducible to my subjectivity and thus is not a symmetrical "end" of reason. Morally, and grammatically, Levinas's subject discovers itself in the accusative not the nominative. Subjectivity arises in subjection to the Other.

For Kant there is no morality without the presupposition of freedom and autonomy; it is the very condition of the possibility for morality. For Levinas, however, morality takes place in a privileged heteronomy in which the Other stands above the subject. In this way, Levinas retains the imperative character of Kantian freedom as obligation. Levinas, however, deepens the force of the moral imperative through the infinity of alterity's irreducible asymmetry. This is a relation of responsibility that carries even more imperative force than the symmetry of mutual respect. Levinasian responsibility infinitely exceeds the rational requirements of Kantian respect. In transcending the parameters of power's reciprocity and ontological self-reduction, Levinas's imperative of alterity opens the vista on the dimension of ethical infinity.

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94. *Ibid.*, 27.



## CHAPTER IV

# ALPHONSO LINGIS: BETWEEN CATEGORICAL AND HYPOTHETICAL IMPERATIVES

## INTRODUCTION

Alphonso Lingis offers innovations in phenomenology itself while revising Immanuel Kant's imperative and importing this rectification into phenomenology. In this sense Lingis's work, although largely phenomenological, also encompasses Kantism, and takes both doctrines to be mutually dependent. Phenomenology needs Kant to give itself an imperative point of origin, and Kant needs phenomenology to explicate the force that underlies the imperative of formal law, which Kant's formalism cannot do on its own. With his revisions of Kant's imperative, Lingis has undertaken an explication of the imperatives largely overlooked within the phenomenology of perception and morals. With his formulations that "subjectivity begins in subjection" and that "thought is obedience," Lingis has uncovered the imperative character of the doctrines of contemporary phenomenology and gives phenomenology an originary orientation and direction that it previously lacked. Taking Kant's imperative to be the remedy for the modern scientific and postmodern or structuralist deconstruction of the human subject, Lingis indicates his move away from Husserl's constitutive intentionality toward Kant's imperative in seeking "to know the subject not so much as the generator of meaning but rather as the locus of order."<sup>1</sup> In setting out "to locate and promote the imperative that constitutes our subjectivity, that orders it to order,"<sup>2</sup> Lingis argues that subjectivity is constituted in subjection to the imperative. Here phenomenology can offer some rectifications of Kant's imperative. What Lingis brings to Kant's imperative is one of Levinas's major themes – exteriority, which Lingis develops phenomenologically as the source of imperative force that is obeyed before any interior formulation in law. In this way, force precedes form. This force, which is not a principle, is what allows for the formulation of principles.

In view of phenomenology's relation to Kant's imperatives, Lingis thematizes exteriority as the fundamental imperative force in Merleau-Ponty's directives for perception and Levinas's doctrine of irreducible alterity. In Lingis's analysis, exteriority likewise shows itself to be against Kantian interiority as the fundamentally organizing force of thought. In this way, Lingis retains and radicalizes the fundamental role of the imperative in

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1. Alphonso Lingis, *Deathbound Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 2.

phenomenology as exterior force. In terms of this exteriority in phenomenology itself, Lingis observes that Merleau-Ponty has given us a surface phenomenology of perception in which objects as objectives guide our perception of their contours and planes. Yet the object still remains exterior to us: “the real thing ... closes upon itself, remains exterior, ... not given but an external ordinance.”<sup>3</sup> For Lingis, it is Levinas who explores the depths of perception in the analysis of sensation, the elemental medium that underlies all perception. Exteriority does not and cannot become interiorized through immersion, or even as contentment, the relations proper to sensation as explicated in *Totality and Infinity*. Although Levinas was the first to advocate exteriority (and *Totality and Infinity* is indeed subtitled “*An Essay on Exteriority*”), Lingis criticizes Levinas’s metaphysics of alterity, in which the trace of God’s absolute otherness is carried in the face of the human Other. Lingis argues that Levinas’s metaphysics of morals is unwarranted, as the encounter with the Other takes place on elemental ground. Instead of a metaphysical epiphany, the face is for Lingis an element, and our response and responsibility take place on elemental ground on which our stand acts as support and ground for the Other. In this way, Lingis brings the imperative back to earth in his doctrine of the elemental imperative. Furthermore, with the elemental imperative, we find not the initial imperative of depth to maintain or support surfaces, but another imperative that depth is and promotes: the imperative to deepen. In the deepening directives of the elemental imperative, thought is commanded to deepen itself, just as seeing is to become luminescent, hearing is to become vibrant, and life is to become flourishing.

For Lingis, exteriority is imperative force *par excellence*. As with Levinas’s relation of the subject to the Other, exteriority cannot be reduced to myself or my consciousness, nor can its force be reversed as something that begins with oneself or self-consciousness. In this way, Lingis’s theme of exteriority culminates in his analysis of death’s exteriority in *Deathbound Subjectivity*. First arguing for Heidegger’s position that the imperative placed on life is first to live and take responsibility for Being, Lingis subsequently finds fault with Heidegger’s notion of the resoluteness of authenticity as the reappropriation of one’s death as one’s own instead of a death occurs anonymously to one as *das Man* or “the they.” For Lingis, death remains absolutely exterior. Because it comes on its own, it is something that we cannot appropriate. Yet our mortality has a moral dimension – mortality constitutes our morality in the sense that it mortifies us in a manner similar to the mortification of our physicality in Kantian respect.

Despite the impossibility of appropriating death or of thinking it through, Lingis sees the necessity of the Kantian imperative of thought for ordering and living life. The imperative is the first fact, without which there

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3. Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 63.

can be no hope of bringing sensibility to the passing spectacle of sensation. But instead of the imperative first arising in the locus of interior thought as it does for Kant, Lingis argues that the mind and imperative thought arise in response to the exteriority of the world of things and other persons. It is our affectivity with which we “feel” these forces, as in Kantian respect’s mortification of our *pathos* or “pathological” desires. In this way, reason and respect first arise in response to the exteriority of the world, even though thought is an internal force that has its own imperative of consistency and command.

Concurring with Kant’s view of autonomy, Lingis argues that the autonomy of reason is in no way directly gleaned from nature but is internally put on itself. Lingis’s view, however, differs from Kant’s in that Lingis begins with the external force of the imperative whereas Kant begins with its internal formulation in theoretical reason. For Lingis, before there can be any thought, there must be some force to direct it. The imperative first comes from the outside, from without. My physical subject relates to the rational imperative as an exteriority – not in the natural world, but transcendently beyond my physical self. In this way, reason is also an external ordinance placed on the body by the mind, in which reason subsequently becomes internalized in being “commanded to be in command” in Kant’s third formulation of the categorical imperative.

For Lingis, thought and respect, whether it is respect for the moral law or the more direct respect for alterity, are both passive and active. Respect, like thought, is something to which one is first subjected as force. The human subject undergoes or *suffers* the imperative force that constrains its mind and mortifies its physical desires. Respect is the restraint of the subject’s body and mind subjected to this original imperative force. It is this original force that allows for the formulation of law, which then becomes active and autonomous. When one begins to think, one is commanded to think within the structures that reason itself supplies. Although Lingis acknowledges the duality of thought’s passivity and activity, its force and its form, he concludes that Kant’s moral doctrine largely overlooks the ordinary force to which thought finds itself subjected. As in Levinas’s doctrine of immediate intelligibility in sensation, Lingis finds an immediate intelligibility in our encounters with exteriority by locating imperative urgency and importance in things, situations, and other persons themselves.

Lingis takes thought to be a complex of exteriority and autonomy: the human subject first passively undergoes subjection to exterior forces and then becomes an active agent in its response as responsibility. In this way, Lingis effects a striking synthesis between the thought of Immanuel Kant and of Emmanuel Levinas through the imperative force of respect felt in the encounter with the Other. In Lingis’s reading, what is common to both thinkers’ view of the imperative is *absolute exteriority*. Lingis finds this exteriority in Kantian thought’s imperative command, which is not generated by an individual subject but already weighs on subjectivity, constituting subjectivity in subjection. Also, Lingis finds the imperative to

be characterized by the exteriority of Levinasian alterity, i.e., the otherness of the Other who remains absolutely exterior to me and is irreducible to my own subjectivity. Lingis, however, argues that the encounter with the Other takes place in a practicable field made intelligible by the imperative for law, which makes consistent and coherent this encounter with others and with the world, and that the possibility of this encounter is rendered intelligible in the illustrations of imperative images in Kant's typology.

Although Lingis does not assign an all-encompassing role to Kantian reason, he finds reason to have an intrinsic importance and gives Kant's categorical imperative a fundamental status. In contrast to hypothetical imperatives, on which we are free *not* to take action, the categorical imperative immediately orders what must be done (as in the encounter with the other persons, who immediately commands our respect). Also, the categorical imperative forms the imperative for a world – the self-same, concrete world, structured by a *logos endiathetos*, necessary for the consistent ordering of thought and perception. But most importantly, “Immanuel Kant comes upon the imperative when he thinks, and reflects on the activity of thinking. He finds the imperative in the faculty of thought.”<sup>4</sup> Although Lingis's insight into the origin of subjectivity in subjection to imperatives shows its debt to Kant's doctrine, ultimately Lingis finds Kant's importation of theoretical reason into the categorical imperative to be problematic. Things, other persons, and situations afflict us with their intrinsic importance with an urgency of imperative force that precedes, and allows for, the formulation of law. In Lingis's view of the imperative in which force precedes form, the rational does not equate with the required. To recast the situation as an action derived from principles often falsifies it.

Because Lingis deems Kant's imperative of rational law to be too formalized, the imperative that Lingis seeks is situated somewhere between, or beyond, the categorical and the contingent, where the interiority of Kant's categorical imperative is to be rectified by the exteriority of alterity. Growing out of Merleau-Ponty's and Levinas's theories of perception and sensation, and tempered by the Kantian constraint of imperatives, Lingis's doctrine rectifies both Kantism and phenomenology but retains the strength of their insights. Lingis buttresses Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of *praktognosia* and levels of perception with an imperative of perception. Lingis, however, rectifies Merleau-Ponty's view of the world as “given” to human freedom by arguing, like Kant, that freedom is known through obligation. In this way, the world is not simply given but given as imperative. All perception, because it takes objects as objectives, is conditional and has the character of a hypothetical imperative in relation to the reality of the world, which has the character of a categorical imperative. This categorical reality of the world is the necessary setting for all our particular, i.e., hypothetical, tasks.

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4. *Ibid.*, 179.

Lingis's critiques are not limited to Kant's doctrine. His rectifications of Levinas's doctrine include the "elemental imperative," which by-passes Levinas's metaphysics of alterity and the human face that carries the traces of God's absolute otherness. By taking the face as an element instead of a metaphysical or ethical epiphany, Lingis takes the face to have its own imperative directives and forces. Forces in Levinas's language can still call upon us, but the Other can either face us with eyes that shine and radiate directives, or with eyes that can shoot daggers. Because the face can present us with either the open radiance of joy or the closed mask of anger or resentment, Lingis abandons Levinas's metaphysics of the face and alterity, but retains an imperative relation between the self and the Other as an elemental imperative.

By importing Levinas's notion of exteriority, and Merleau-Ponty's levels and styles as directives, Lingis rectifies Kant's rationalist categorical imperative while retaining its imperative character. Indeed, Lingis agrees with Kant that an imperative weighs on thought from the beginning. Whenever one thinks, one is obligated to think coherently and consistently. Thought autonomously places its own imperative on thinking. Yet Kant took the interiority of theoretical reason to be the starting point of the imperative. Lingis, however, points to the exteriority of the imperative which afflicts my understanding. Thus, for Lingis, the imperative is not given from within the formal laws of thought, but the imperative weighs on me from without. For instance, Lingis's reading of respect is closer to Levinas's view that respect as *Achtung* is first attention to the Other, not respectful attention for the law within others that I also feel within me. More precisely in terms of Lingis's critique (and defense) of Kant's imperative, Lingis distinguishes between the imperative's immediate force and its form or formulation as law. For Lingis, imperative force has *a priori* status. But because this force comes from without, its immediacy precedes any understanding or formulation. Force is what originally directs the formulations of the understanding as the form of law. Imperative force is *obeyed* before the imperative is formulated or understood.

For Kant, reason is an inherent human capacity and immediately lays its imperative on thought to think coherently and consistently, provides the moral compass for human behavior, and supplies its own telos of the highest good, as well as the focal point of philosophy. But how does Kant's role of reason compare with the view of contemporary phenomenology in the work of Lingis, who designates a fundamental role for the commanding force of imperatives in human thought and action? Despite his rectifications, Lingis retains a deep-seated connection with Kant's doctrine by acknowledging the indispensable value of Kant's imperative of reason in several ways. But in elucidating the force of the imperative instead of its form as law, Lingis emphasizes the imperative's exteriority instead of Kant's interiority of the rational will, while at the same time retaining a fundamental role for rationality and acknowledging the intrinsic importance

of reason. Furthermore, in *Phenomenological Investigations*,<sup>5</sup> Lingis observes how Kant's imperative thematizes the world in a way not addressed in the existential-phenomenological work of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Heidegger, who take being in the world as a given starting point. In Lingis's view, more akin to Kant's, the world is not simply given but is given as imperative. Simultaneously revising aspects of both the doctrines of phenomenology and Kantism, Lingis has brought the imperative into phenomenology, as the point of origin for perception and morals. Bent toward Kantian law, Lingis supports a more restrictive role of freedom, as does Kant, in opposition to Sartre's advocacy of radical, absolute freedom. In addition to rejecting any determinism, as does Kant, Lingis develops a critique of absolute freedom, favoring freedom in the context of obligation. We know that we are free because we are obligated. We are free "and yet everywhere there is constraint in this world."<sup>6</sup> The constraint of the imperative is not a determinism or an adjustment of the sensibility of an organism that responds to the pressures on it. But because of the force of the imperative, Lingis's notion of freedom is not absolutist. Lingis repeatedly stresses that perceptions and encounters with others are not a product of an absolutely free will but are appropriate responses to imperatives of obligation.

In this chapter, we attempt to trace Lingis's continual engagement with Kant throughout his phenomenological texts, which also indicate his debt to Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. Through importing Kant's imperative into phenomenology and by placing it at the origin of phenomenologically concrete situations of the world, things, other persons, and morals, Lingis revises the Kant's rationality of the imperative. By placing the "elemental imperative" at the fore of phenomenology, Lingis rectifies Merleau-Ponty's *praktognosia* of objects as objectives as well as Levinas's doctrine of the metaphysical traces of absolute otherness in the human face.

In tracing the imperative of exteriority in Lingis's multifaceted works, we can observe thought arising as the organizing response to the exteriority of natural phenomena and other persons, because things remained closed off from us as external ordinances and the Other remains irreducibly other. Lingis, however, rejects Levinas's theological metaphysics by holding that the encounter with the Other takes place on the level of the elemental. Here rather than the imperative of absolute metaphysical exteriority, Lingis finds an elemental imperative in this encounter, which demands that we become support for the Other. This support or ground for the Other is analogous to the elemental support of the earth on which the encounter takes place. Lingis also takes this relation of alterity to have dimensions of Kantian respect as the mortification of our physical desire and our bodies. Likewise, this mortification is a response to the mortality of the Other, whose mortal

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5. Alphonso Lingis. *Phenomenological Investigations* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), 109.

6. *Ibid.*, 107.

vulnerability calls for our response and responsibility. In Lingis's view of subjectivity as subjection, this responsibility constitutes morality in mortality, as the response to the Other's mortality.

Although Lingis acknowledges his debt to Kant, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas in the explicating his own thought and theirs, by bringing Kant's imperative into phenomenology, he offers some rectifications to the Kant and phenomenology. The first part of this chapter begins with Lingis's view of Kant, as Kant's imperative will be the continuous theme in our review of Lingis phenomenological doctrine. The second part focuses on Lingis's rectifications of contemporary phenomenology.

### **LINGIS AS KANTIAN PHENOMENOLOGIST: IMPERATIVE NECESSITY**

#### *Imperative Sovereignty*

Even in his first book, *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, Lingis shows an affinity for Kant's imperative and signals his more developed critique of absolute existential-phenomenological freedom in *Phenomenological Explanations*. In *Excesses*, after citing Aristotle on happiness as the natural telos of the human order, Lingis notes that Kant takes this naturalness in human action and the complementary form of nature to be not a fact of nature but an exigency of thought. Because Kant's moral doctrine has shifted the basis of morality from the realm of nature to the human domain, ethical thought is no longer determined by or reflected in natural law but is bounded by the limits of human reason. Thus, "happiness is not the motive force of ethical history. For Kant, mastery is imperative; the mastery of those who can reckon and can recognize is something commanded."<sup>7</sup> Kant's imperative replaces nature and natural happiness as the source of morals.

When Lingis cites Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative as "act *as though* the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature,"<sup>8</sup> we can see the significance of the "as though." Because the rational will is free from the determinations of the causal necessities of nature, one's moral action cannot become "natural" or a law of nature. To undertake one's actions "as though" they were a law of nature indicates a mastery of oneself (and of nature) commanded by the categorical imperative. This mastery compelled by the imperative is the self-mastery of autonomous individuals, sovereign subjects free from determinations of nature. "Sovereign ones are not motivated by wants, appetites or ambitions, but by their sovereignty, which is for them imperative. They associate out of sovereignty, not to make demands on

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7. Alphonso Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 154.

8. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 185 (italics added).

another, but to command one another. What is new in Kant is the demonstration that the reduction of social existence to the exchange of the equivalent is imperative. As well as the subjection of all nature to the laws of rational economy.”<sup>9</sup>

In citing Kant’s imperative structure as what is new in ethics, Lingis reiterates Kant’s reversal of the traditional hierarchy of nature over reason. For Aristotle, nature, with its attribute of perfectible happiness, led the way to the good, whereas reason, as a part of the human soul (part of its nature), was to moderate one’s desires. But in Kant’s view, reason precedes nature and is not to be reduced to a secondary role in the moderation of our natural desires. In fact, in order to be an understandable object of knowledge, nature must first be subjected to the rational laws of universality and necessity. Thus, nature cannot be the given starting point in a philosophy of morals. As an intelligible universal construct, nature must first be subjected to the universal laws of reason. In order for nature to be understood, one cannot begin with nature; one must begin with the imperative.

In *Deathbound Subjectivity*, Lingis emphasizes rationality as the starting point of Kant’s imperative in which nature is subject to the commands of reason. The mind does not arise from nature (or from the mind’s representations of nature) but from the faculty of reason, a faculty that is always already subject to universal law: “The mind does not rise from the intuitive representation of a law-governed nature to the idea of a moral law that ought to govern the world of men. It is just the reverse: it is because the faculty of reason is first subject to law, affected by the moral imperative, that it then sets out to synthesize its theoretical experience into a representation of law-governed nature. For Kant the sense of the law does not come out of the world.... It comes out of one’s own rational experience of oneself, one’s rational sentiment.”<sup>10</sup> In his reversal of the traditional priority of nature over reason, Kant holds that the faculty of reason places the imperative upon itself and thus organizes nature. With Kant’s reversal of the natural order in the subjection of nature to the laws of reason, the primacy of the imperative now becomes apparent. Because rational thought is primary, reason commands itself to be in command with a sovereign autonomy that is not possible as a function of natural law. One cannot take the objective laws of nature to be one’s own, but as a subject, one can and must subject oneself to the laws of reason. The moral agent is no longer to be in accordance with or dependent upon nature. Free from nature, Kant’s moral agent is an autonomous sovereignty that gives itself the rational moral law.

Thus, the human subject’s autonomy and sovereignty in no way begin with nature, its attractions, or our natural desires; autonomous sovereignty begins with our mastery over nature. As Lingis notes in *Excesses*, our “natural” will, i.e., the will lured by sensuous physicality, is transformed

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9. Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, 154.

10. Lingis, *Deathbound Subjectivity*, 43.



into a rational will that is autonomously self-ordering and self-sustaining, i.e., a sovereign maintained in ideality: “Sensuous representations command the will contingently and intermittently. Rational representations of what is universal and necessary are valid and in force always and in all circumstances.... The law commands first an inner transformation of the dependent, fitful, servile human will, that wants and responds to wants, into a self-sustaining, self-maintaining ideal will, that orders. The rationally activated will is a sovereignty, an ideality.”<sup>11</sup>

For Kant, the inherent characteristic of this self-ordering and self-maintaining sovereign ideality is its interiority. Rational thought orders and maintains itself from within, as external nature can only supply contingent rules for accomplishment but no directives of universal law. To show Kant’s interiority of rationality, Lingis describes the attributes and autonomous dictates of Kant’s rational imperative: “The imperative, Kant demonstrates, is within: the faculty that recognizes and that reckons, rational thought, finds it within itself. One *can* not think. But if one thinks, one subjects oneself to an imperative for the universal and the necessary.”<sup>12</sup> Although we are not continuously obligated to think, when we do think, we must think in accordance with the imperative of reason.

Thus, Kant’s imperative is marked by interiority and an *a priori* commanding force. Once one begins to think, one must think coherently and consistently, as per the imperative of reason in which “one subjects oneself to an imperative for the universal and the necessary.” To ignore this imperative is to engage in some activity other than thinking. But thought carries its own imperative that does not arise from any “natural” inclination or from our own free initiative. Lingis notes: “And one must think. If one thinks, it is not out of inclination or because of a project, but out of obedience to the imperative for law.”<sup>13</sup> Thought is obedience, autonomously commanding itself to be in command. In this way, rational subjectivity begins in subjection.

In noting Kant’s reversal of the priority of the rational mind over nature with the imperative as the “first fact,” Lingis gives us some explication of Kant’s “moral fact of reason.” Because Kant begins with reason as the first fact, the rational moral law cannot be induced from any experience in nature. In terms of the commanding sovereignty of the first fact of reason, one is not only subject to oneself or one’s own reason; one is subject to the reason found in other persons, just as others are “objects” of respect because they too are “subjects” subjected to rational law: “Invested with a command to be master, one is commanded to command oneself, but also to command others and to be commanded by them.... Acting sovereignly, in obedience to the law *whose force is not physical but moral*, precisely consists in not taking oneself as an exception.... It is to make

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11. Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, 154-5.

12. *Ibid.*, 154.

13. *Ibid.*

one's moves such that they not only can be understood with the principles common to all reason, but set forth principles binding on all...."<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon of sovereignty is respect; respect for the moral law that is categorically commanded by the imperative, not contingently determined through nature. In this way, the imperative of the "moral fact of reason" sets itself in motion. Instead of living in accordance with nature, "thoughtful existence does not simply obey norms; it acts always to make itself the norm."<sup>15</sup> In making itself the norm, thought institutes morality as respect for the imperative of law. By obeying the imperative when acting according to law, the moral fact of reason is obeyed before any law or rule of nature.

### *Imperative Thought*

Because Kant's imperative is *a priori*, Lingis posits the striking formulation that "thought is obedience." Lingis explains the priority of the imperative as the "first fact" that organizes all thought: "An imperative weighs on thought. The force of law, Kant wanted us to see, is a fact. It is the first fact: facts can be conceived as facts in the measure that they can be apprehended by a thought ordered by law. Thought is obedience. Concepts of what is always and everywhere found in things, propositions formulating what has to be understood as connected, are formed by a mind that is subject to law, and because it is."<sup>16</sup> Because of the force of law found in the understanding from the very origin of all thinking, thought is subject to the strictures and structures of formal universal law found not in nature but in the mind itself.

In *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (whose title is emblematic of Lingis's interest in Levinas's doctrine of alterity), Lingis elaborates on the originary and autonomous aspects of reason in Kant's imperative. In his explication of the force of imperatives in thought and action, Lingis agrees with Kant that a practical imperative weighs on the understanding from the beginning in perception and that this imperative practicality supplies thought's content. Lingis acknowledges that what we have learned from Kant is that in order to recognize something in the spectacle of passing sensations, and to enable coherent action, we must form correct concepts. For there to be a cogent world, one must first submit to a practical imperative – the first fact that organizes all empirical facts. Without this first fact, empirical facts would have no consistency or coherence.

To show the imperative's *a priori* status and its practicality, Lingis cites a seminal line from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*: "This law

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14. *Ibid.*, 155-7 (italics added).

15. *Ibid.*, 156.

16. *Ibid.*, 113.

gives to the sensible world ... the form of an intelligible world.”<sup>17</sup> For both Kant’s transcendental idealism and Lingis’s (and Merleau-Ponty’s) phenomenology of perception, there is a correct way to see things. For Kant, the imperative that weighs on understanding is the imperative of reason to become practical, underscoring the imperative’s role in the coherence of Kantian sensibility. Lingis illustrates the imperative’s necessity in the activity of thought in this way: “As soon as thought arises, it finds itself subject to an imperative. In order to recognize something in the passing patterns of the spectacle about one, one *has to* form correct concepts. In order to recognize constellations of patterns, one *has to* reason rightly. The imperative that weighs on thought is a fact. It is the first fact; empirical facts can be encountered as facts only by a thought that is bound to conceive them correctly.”<sup>18</sup>

In observing that an imperative weighs on thought itself, Lingis, like Kant, understands that freedom and obligation are central to reason and lie at the heart of the imperative. As Kant noted, what characterizes an imperative is obligation, as only free subjects can be obligated. Lingis explains the distinctiveness of the imperative in that it is neither a function of empirical determinism nor an absolutely free act of existential self-determination; it is characterized by obligation: “Thought can form inconsistent concepts and can reason incoherently. Thought finds itself not determined to conceive correctly and reason rightly, but obligated to do so. Thought, the activity of comprehending sensory impressions with concepts and of organizing concepts, does not arise as a drive in our nature or as a free initiative. An imperative weighs on thought; thought finds itself commanded to think. Thought is obedience.”<sup>19</sup> Because thought is obedience, it is not a causal determination but an act of obligation. As an act of obligation, the comprehension of what is sensible in perception is not a free activity arising from subjective initiative or an inner psychological drive. To make sense of the sensible, thought is *bound* to conceive patterns correctly. To submit to the imperative is to be obligated, to be bound, to be commanded.

Furthermore, for Kant, pure reason is practical of itself and immediately law giving. With the moral law as a “fact of reason,” pure reason is of itself practical in establishing the moral principle. As Lingis observes, in Kant’s doctrine the will is thought of as independent of empirical conditions and determined by the mere form of law.<sup>20</sup> Lingis sees that for Kant the imperative of reason to become practical is what commands reason to be in command. In this way, thought supplies its own

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17. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 44, 5:43.

18. Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 16.

19. *Ibid.*, 16-17.

20. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:31, 28.

content with a practicality that is imperative. Thus, in Lingis's view, thought itself is the original locus of the imperative for Kant.<sup>21</sup> By commanding itself autonomously and interiorly, thought commands our formal understanding and sensibility's practical content. Lingis, however, will criticize the autonomous interiority of Kant's formal law by finding the original binding force of the imperative to be exterior to the mind. As with Levinas, this exteriority is not reducible to the interiority of autonomy.

## FORCE AND FORM

### *Nietzsche and Deleuze on Force*

Because this chapter deals a great deal with the theme of force, it may be worthwhile to discuss briefly the role of force in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze so as to gain a better understanding of it. In Deleuze's fluid notion of "nomad thought," force holds a central position, and Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* supplies valuable commentary on force in Nietzsche's doctrine. "Nomad thought" does not establish identity but travels on difference. Here objects are not essentialized but are volatile junctures, or "vectors," that are "the point of application of a force moving through space at a given velocity and a given direction."<sup>22</sup> On force as a seminal attribute of Deleuze's "nomad thought," Brian Massumi writes: "Force is not to be confused with power. Power is the domestication of force. Force in its wild state arrives from the outside to break constraints and open new vistas. Power builds walls."<sup>23</sup> The thinker in whom Deleuze finds the most thorough and most original account of force is Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, philosophy is a dynamic in which thought itself produces movements of force, whether with the extraordinary speed of fulmination or the careful slowness of contemplation. As a result of this insight into thought and force, or this insight into thought *as* force, philosophy has a new relationship to the arts of movement: theatre, dance and music. "To think is to create: this is Nietzsche's greatest lesson."<sup>24</sup>

Deleuze goes so far to say that for Nietzsche all is relation of forces, including the "objects" of natural or philosophical science: "But the object itself is force, expression of a force.... Every force is thus essentially

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21. Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 36.

22. Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 6.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Gilles Deleuze, "Preface to the English Translation," in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xiii.

related to another force.”<sup>25</sup> As an example, Deleuze cites of Nietzsche’s doctrine of master and slave morals as, respectively, active and reactive forces. For instance, “*The slave only conceives of power as the object of a recognition, the content of a representation, the stake in a competition, and therefore makes it depend, at the end of a fight, on a simple attribution of established values.*”<sup>26</sup> In this way, Nietzsche criticizes the epistemological doctrines of both Hegel and Kant: namely, Hegel’s dialectical process of mediation and recognition, and Kant’s passivity in representation and sensibility. What philosophy has failed to address is the central role of force and its appropriation in the creation of values. This appropriation is the creative work of the artist, nobleman, or master. In fact, Nietzsche boldly claims that “it is the characteristic *right of masters* to create values.”<sup>27</sup> This is the right of those who have mastered themselves, sovereign ones who have become forces themselves in their appropriation of forces. In Nietzsche’s view, this appropriation of force is itself an active force. What this creative force brings and imposes is *form*, where there was none before. Deleuze’s description invokes the imperative: “Appropriating, possessing, subjugating, dominating – these are the characteristics of active force. To appropriate means to impose forms, to create forms by exploiting circumstances.”<sup>28</sup> Epistemologically, if one looks only to mechanical views of adaptation and utility, which Nietzsche terms “reactive” forces as opposed to the “active” force of appropriation, “one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions, although ‘adaptation’ follows only after this; the dominant role of the highest functionaries within the organism itself ... is denied.”<sup>29</sup>

Because *physis* also is a force, it can be appropriated. Thus, “nature” can be wrested from the mechanical or teleological realm of cause and effect. Deleuze finds this Nietzschean view of the plasticity of *physis* as force at work in the realm of perception: “All force is appropriation, domination, exploitation of a quantity of reality. Even perception, in its divers aspects, is the expression of forces which appropriate nature. That is to say that nature itself has a history. The history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggle for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon, changes sense depending on the force which appropriates it.

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25. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 6.

26. *Ibid.*, 10 (italics in original).

27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: A Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 209 (italics in original).

28. Deleuze, 42.

29. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 79.

History is the variation of the senses....”<sup>30</sup> In this way, Nietzsche argues that: “the ‘evolution’ of a thing, a custom, an organ is thus by no means its progressus toward a goal, ... but a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subduing.... The form is fluid, but the ‘meaning’ is even more so.”<sup>31</sup> The very transformation of *physis* itself, creating new possibilities for human nature, is Nietzsche’s concluding theme in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life”: “Thus the Greek concept of culture will be unveiled to him – in contrast to the Roman – the conception of culture as a new and improved *physis*, without inner and outer, without dissimulation and convention, of culture as the unanimity of life, thought, appearing and willing. Thus he will learn from his own experience that it was through the higher force of their *moral* nature that the Greeks achieved victory over all other cultures....”<sup>32</sup> What the Greeks had fashioned was not a culture of progress in its historical time, but a distinctive culture that stood against its time. This accomplishment occurred via the very transformation of *physis*, a transformation possible only by viewing nature as a force and subject to appropriation.

We can also briefly trace force in Nietzsche’s doctrine in a way that parallels our discussions of sensation and sensibility in Levinas, as well as our reading of the imperative as force *par excellence*. On the relation of sensibility and force in Nietzsche’s doctrine, Deleuze states: “All sensibility is only a becoming of forces. There is a cycle of force in the course of which force ‘becomes’ (for example, active force becomes reactive).... But the will to power itself has qualities, *sensibilia*, which are like the becomings of forces...; *pathos* is the most elementary fact from which a becoming arises.”<sup>33</sup> It is significant that Deleuze addresses *pathos* here, with the implication that our affectivity is what allows us to feel and to appropriate forces, in a manner similar to Levinas’s doctrine of sensibility in sensation. Nietzsche himself puts “pathos” at the fore in his argument against objectivity, whether in science or philosophy: “... no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their ‘effect’ upon the same. The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* – the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge –”.<sup>34</sup> Because the will to power is not a being or a becoming, but a *pathos*, Nietzsche places affectivity at the heart of his doctrine. Our primary

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30. Deleuze, 3.

31. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 77-8.

32. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), II §10, 123 (italics in original).

33. Deleuze, 63 (italics added for emphasis).

34. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 339.

relation to life and its forces is that of pathos, the affectivity that allows us to feel the forces that constitute all of life.

Likewise, in his doctrine of sensibility, Nietzsche does not begin with objects, but with the dynamic tension of forces and with an organizing perspective of forces at the center: “Physicists believe in a ‘true world’ in their own fashion: a firm systemization of atoms in necessary motion, the same for all beings.... But they are in error.... And in any case they left something out of the constellation without knowing it: precisely this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force – and not only man – construes all the rest of the world *from its own* viewpoint, i.e., measures, feels, forms, according to its own force – They forgot to include the perspective-setting force in ‘true being’ – in school language: the subject.”<sup>35</sup> If all centers of force construe the world from their own viewpoint, and not only humans or physicists, the question then arises of how to distinguish their value. For Nietzsche, life itself is the standard, and any art, science, or philosophy that enhances life is more valuable than one that sterilizes life. As Nietzsche argues in “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,” Descartes’ formulation of the foundation of thought gives us certainty but no foundation for life or living it. From the scientific point of view, “perhaps I still have the right to say of myself *cogito, ergo sum*, but not *vivo, ergo cogito*. Empty ‘being’ is granted me, but not full and green ‘life’; the original feeling that tells me that I exist warrants to me only that I am a thinking creature, not that I am a living one, not that I am an *animal* but at most a *cogital*.”<sup>36</sup>

In Nietzsche’s view, life itself brings its own imperative – life must be lived. On the question of which is to rule – life or science – Nietzsche offers the imperative of life itself: “Now, is life to rule over knowledge, or is knowledge to rule over life? Which of these two authorities is the higher and decisive one? No one will doubt: life is the higher, the ruling authority, for any knowledge which destroys life would also have destroyed itself.”<sup>37</sup> Because of his doctrine of perspectivism, the imperative can be seen to lie at the heart of Nietzsche’s doctrine of perspectivism, in the imperative perspective of organizing force, which physics as a natural science (as *the* natural science) has overlooked. Furthermore, it can be seen how this tension of forces implies the imperative’s aspects of obedience and command. Deleuze takes this imperative relation thoroughgoing in all aspects of life: “There is no quantity of reality, all reality is already quantity of force. There are nothing but quantities of force in mutual ‘relations of tension.’ Every force is related to others and it either obeys or commands.

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35. *Ibid.*, 339.

36. Nietzsche, *Untimely Mediations*, 119.

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 62.

What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces.”<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Deleuze somewhat surprisingly finds a Kantian heritage, and rivalry, in Nietzsche’s doctrine of force as a possible explication of Kant’s “problematic” view of synthesis. Deleuze’s view largely centers on Nietzsche’s accounts of force as a possible response to the demands of post-Kantian criticisms regarding the synthesis of objects: 1) that synthesis not merely be *conditioning* in the relation to objects but be truly productive of these relations; and 2) the condemnation of the survival of the miraculous harmonies between terms that remain external to one another. Nietzsche’s doctrine of force attempts to answer these demands by supplying the common thread for substantiating objects and binding their differing externalities by turning Kantian synthesis into a synthesis of forces. Summarizing the relation of the two thinkers, Deleuze writes: “If Nietzsche belongs to the history of Kantism it is because of the original way in which he deals with these post-Kantian demands. He turned synthesis into a synthesis of forces – for, if we fail to see synthesis in this way, we fail to recognize its sense, nature, and content....”<sup>39</sup> On the relation of Nietzsche with Kant, Deleuze concludes: ““Nietzsche seems to have sought ... a radical transformation of Kantianism, a re-invention of the critique which Kant betrayed at the same time as he conceived it, a resumption of the critical project on a new basis and with new concepts.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly, this new basis for this reinvigorated critical project is the articulation of the central importance of the concept of force.

#### *Imperative Force and Form*

To return to the relation of Lingis and Kant, up to this point in our discussion of Kant’s doctrine of the imperative, Lingis’s explication has been in complete agreement with the Prussian master’s view. Now, however, Lingis diverges from Kant’s doctrine by distinguishing between the force and the form of the imperative. Kant focuses on the imperative’s form as law, with law’s attributes of universality and necessity. But for Lingis the force of the imperative is what gives law its original orientation. Even though an imperative weighs on the understanding from the beginning, Lingis argues that its force is *obeyed* before it is understood. As Kant says about the orienting force of the phenomenon of respect, “we are bent toward the law.” For Lingis, the imperative force that afflicts our sensibility is not originally formulated as law, nor can it ever be. Despite Kant’s acknowledgment of the immediacy of moral law as *Triebfeder*, it is fair to say that Kant’s doctrine focuses far more on the form of law rather than its force on human receptivity and affectivity. Lingis, however, brings

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38. Deleuze, 39-40.

39. *Ibid.*, 52.

40. *Ibid.*



the force of the imperative to the fore; for him imperative force precedes and makes possible the form of law.

Although imperative force cannot be conceptualized, it can be described: “One has no concept of the imperative force of law; it is not put forth by an initiative of the mind. Law is obeyed before it can be conceived, formulated, understood. It is because the mind’s substance is receptive to the exigency for law that it can and does activate itself to think coherently and consistently. This receptivity, this passivity or this passion, this passive subjection which precedes and makes possible any consistent formulation of an act of thought, is an intellectual feeling, the feeling in which the intellect is born....”<sup>41</sup> In emphasizing the mind’s passive receptivity, which first *feels* the force of the imperative that precedes its form as a concept of the understanding, Lingis takes up Levinas’s doctrine of subjectivity’s affective response and origin in the imperative placed on it by alterity. Because this obedience to the imperative must precede any understanding of its form, the intellect is born out of this feeling of subjection and subjugation. Citing Kant’s definition of respect as an activity that is not simply cerebral but one of affectivity, Lingis writes: “Kant calls it the sentiment of respect. The mind thinks out of respect for law. Respect is, Kant says, something like fear, something like inclination. The law affects, pains our sensuous nature and our natural appetites. There is fear of the law in the mind.”<sup>42</sup> It is this receptivity of force that precedes and makes possible the autonomy of the mind.

With his argument for the fundamental status of force, the notion of respect becomes a central point in Lingis’s rectification of Kant’s imperative. It is here that Lingis makes the specific move from Kant’s interiority of formal law and thought to Levinas’s exteriority of our susceptibility to forces. Although Kantian respect is respect for the law, there must be some force upon the will from the start, some force that initiates and maintains one’s respect for the formal law. In his writings on *Triebfeder*, Kant implicitly acknowledges that there must be some force to the form in order to for the law to be obeyed. In Kant’s description of the moral law, the law itself supplies the *Triebfeder* of its force: the moral law itself as *Triebfeder* is the only proper incentive of moral action. Lingis, however, sees a force that underlies and precedes the interior dynamics of the moral law as *Triebfeder* by holding that moral force weighs immediately on our sensibilities not from an interior autonomy but from the exterior. The interiority of reason arises when we are afflicted and affected by the exteriority of nature (i.e., the world), things, and other persons. As with Kantian respect, our physical nature is pained and constrained by exterior forces, bending us toward law. For Lingis, however, exteriority accounts for the immediate and underlying aspects of imperative force. The mind arises in subjection to an exterior imperative. Thought *suffers* the first

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41. Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, 113-4.

42. *Ibid.*, 114.

fact of the imperative not from an interior conceptualization but in response to exteriority. In this way, imperative force precedes its form as imperative law. As in Kant's view, this first fact of imperative force is pre-empirical, as it is the condition for all empirical experience.

### *Respect and Mortification*

Lingis agrees with Kant that there is indeed a sensitivity for the imperative for law in thought's spontaneous activity of formulating coherent concepts and representations. Kant identifies this receptivity as the sentiment of respect, in which thought arises and is constituted. Kant distinguishes respect from "regard," "where circumspection circumscribes one's own space and consideration lets the other have his or her own space,"<sup>43</sup> and from "admiration," "where awe is receptive to the force of what is superior,"<sup>44</sup> as with the sublime. Lingis adds that "the real *phenomenon* of the imperative is what Kant calls the person, that is, the other intuited as an instance of behavior regulated by inwardly represented law."<sup>45</sup> For Kant, respect is first and foremost respect for law. Respect for persons is respect for the law they diagram in their positions and movements. Lingis, however, defines respect more precisely as respect for the imperative for law, which accounts for the imperative force and exteriority of the phenomenon of respect. The imperative is not *known*, Lingis argues, when the representational faculty would posit before itself a formulation of the law as its own program, but "respect produces representations of exterior objects and the system of those objects, whose consistency testifies to the mind's obedience. Thought *arises* and moves spontaneously in the direction of law."<sup>46</sup> In this way, thought is a response to exterior forces and is not fully autonomous.

On force and receptivity, Lingis notes that this rational activation of the will has the immediate effect of reducing the sensuous impulses and appetites of our composite nature to passivity and suffering. Here the thinking subject is not deadened but mortified. Lingis calls this "the underside of the feeling with which the psychic apparatus knows its receptivity for the imperative of the universal and the necessary," and immediately "I sense respect for the law in effect in the mortification the core sensory-motor blocked from its object knows."<sup>47</sup> The effect of imperative respect is thus truly an *affect*. It is our receptive affectivity that first feels the force of the imperative of respect that weighs on our sensibility and restricts our desires. In his analysis of respect as

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43. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 182.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Alphonso Lingis, *Phenomenological Investigations*, 109-110 (italics in original).

46. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 182 (italics added).

47. *Ibid.*, 184.

mortification, Lingis offers a second explanation of the primacy of the moral imperative. The mortification of my physical sensibilities arises in response to the mortality of the Other. In this way, morality is constituted in mortality, a mortality that is immediately felt like respect.

*Force and Form: Exteriority and the Formulation of Rational Law*

Lingis's phenomenological explication of Kant's categorical imperative begins first in terms of its underlying force and then its form. Thus, although he emphasizes imperative force, he does not abandon its form. Lingis begins with imperative force because it is immediate; it is met with at once whenever we think. And whenever we form concepts, we are obliged to conceive them correctly. Lingis confirms that our thought is subjected to an imperative of reason: "As soon as we set out to relate our concepts with one another, to reason, we find we are subject to the principles of right reason."<sup>48</sup> The imperative's force is immediate and *a priori*: "Every cognitive act with which empirical facts are recognized is an act that receives the full force of the imperative before it receives the impressions the environment gives. As soon as thought begins and maintains itself, it does so in subjection to the imperative."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in accordance with Kant's self-sufficiency of reason, Lingis concurs that the imperative is self-regulating: "The imperative commands thought to order."<sup>50</sup> By demanding that thought be consistent and coherent, the imperative of thought commands itself to be in command.

Although the imperative governs the representations that arise from the thinking subject, Lingis explains that the *imperative itself* is ungroundable and unrepresentable. Any principle that one might try to derive from it, or any argument one would use to support it, already presupposes a thought subjected to the imperative to formulate principles with correct concepts and to reason rightly. "The force of the imperative is the command one obeys *before* one formulates the law."<sup>51</sup> In this way, Lingis stresses the immediate and irreducible character of the imperative's force over and against Kant's emphasis on its form as law. In Lingis's view, this force is not reducible to law because it is unformulatable in law – force is what guides the formulation of law because this force is exterior to the mind and precedes form and formulation.

In *The Imperative*, Lingis describes the imperative's originary and orienting force versus its form as a law or concept in this way: "The imperative itself is not a concept, with which we represent some content. It is a command that we conceptualize correctly. It is not a principle or a law or an order. It is a command that there be principles and that our thought

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48. *Ibid.*, 179.

49. *Ibid.*, 179-180.

50. *Ibid.*, 180.

51. *Ibid.* (italics added).

represent order – or that we represent the unprincipled and chaotic correctly.”<sup>52</sup> In Lingis’s view, our response of rational representation first arises because of the external force of the natural world as unprincipled, which needs organization from rational thought to become universal and necessary. “Every cognitive act with which empirical facts are recognized is an act that receives the full force of the imperative before it receives the impressions the environment gives.”<sup>53</sup> In this way, the fact of the imperative precedes the reception of any empirical fact.

By positing imperative force as irreducibly exterior to thought and subjectivity, Lingis develops another dimension of the imperative – its absolute exteriority – a theme far closer to the doctrine of Emmanuel Levinas than to that of Immanuel Kant. In Lingis’s view, the force of exteriority is inherent but overlooked in Kant’s account of the imperative, which favors the development of the interiority of the rational will and the categorical imperative’s law-giving form. Lingis explains that for Kant concurrent with the self-regulating command that thought be self-commanding, thought must think some content. But in order to conceive content, thought *must* open itself to the exterior: “The imperative weighing on thought commands that thought think and that it think content – *open itself to the exterior*. It commands that thought relate the content it conceives in the right order and open itself to the whole field of the exterior.”<sup>54</sup> Lingis asserts that “in order to think truly, one must conceive content, which is given.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the mind can reason incorrectly or entertain fictions, but this possibility only further indicates the force of the imperative: “The mind can formulate empty concepts, can reason with content it knows to be fictitious.... But thought must be empirical.... But perception must be intentional.... The world presented before the mind as a layout of exteriority, where intentionality turns to exterior objects, is extended under the force of the absolute exteriority of the imperative.”<sup>56</sup> Lingis adds that thought is not a deterministic reaction provoked by external things but a thinker’s action moving spontaneously over externalities. Because thought is not a natural inclination of our psychic constitution, we do not think spontaneously as we imagine or daydream. “We find ourselves commanded to think, ordered to order.”<sup>57</sup> Subjectivity is subjected to the *a priori* force of the imperative that makes thought and perception possible, commanding them to be coherent and consistent. The principles of reason can be formulated only because imperative force is always already obeyed.

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52. *Ibid.*, 179.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.* (italics added for emphasis).

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, 181.

Although he does not begin with the imperative within the locus of thought as in Kant's rational morality, Lingis finds a fundamental role for thought as active rather than passivity: "Thought is not a reaction provoked by external things, but an action with which the thinker moves spontaneously over external things."<sup>58</sup> And the imperative still holds here, as thought is not a natural inclination of our psychic constitution. "We find ourselves commanded to think, ordered to order."<sup>59</sup> Although thought remains autonomous, in Lingis's view it is no longer categorically singular. Through a phenomenological analysis of thought, Lingis has uncovered formal thought's origin in the forces of exteriority, which give thought its content and direction. Like Levinas's alterity, exteriority is irreducibly outside of rational consciousness; it cannot be formulated into an identity of the self-same, nor can autonomous representational consciousness account for this exterior force.

After addressing the *a priori* force of the imperative on the thinking and perceiving subject, Lingis considers its form, i.e., the form of law. In this analysis, Lingis attempts to show the complexity of both the autonomy and exteriority of thought. In arguing that imperative form as law is derived from thought's self-reflection, Lingis does not disregard the principles of reason but contends that the formulation of law is secondary to the exterior force of the imperative. When thought reflects on itself, it represents the consistency and coherence of its concepts with the concepts of the universality and necessity of their forms. The consistency and coherence of the order of these concepts is represented by formulating the principles of reason. The order of reason follows from thought that reflects on itself. Subsequently, imperative force can be formulated in law. Our thought represents for itself what the imperative commands by formulating it in the form of laws of thought, the formulation of imperative maxims of the will that are universal and necessary. By formulating the imperative forms, thought puts itself at the origin of the formula and makes the project of activating the will its own.<sup>60</sup>

This project is consistent with making one's will and desire rational and autonomous. Yet Lingis insists that the imperative is not obeyed only in concurrence with its formulation in law. As Lingis has attempted to show, the imperative is obeyed before being formulated and that principles can only be formulated because imperative force is always already obeyed. As Lyotard has noted on imperative force, "Realized or not, this order is listened to before being heard or understood."<sup>61</sup> In order for the principles

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58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Interest of the Sublime." In *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*. Jean-François Courtine, et al. Trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1993), 123.

to be formulated with consistent concepts in a coherent order, they must be formulated in an exercise of thought already subject to the imperative.<sup>62</sup>

Although Lingis agrees with Kant that thought is obedience to an imperative, Lingis criticizes the autonomous formulation of Kantian law, including the categorical imperative:

But the laws of thought are not simply a program which thought sets up for its own operations.... They are so formulated by an exercise of thought that is already subject to the imperative.... The principles can be formulated only because they are obeyed.

The formulation, which sets before the mind the form that is imperative, does not set before it the force of the imperative, which makes the law binding. The force of the imperative remains exterior to the form with which the representational power of thought has presented the imperative before itself. Each time thought sets out to effectively think something, that is, to represent something coherently before itself in the relative exteriority of this represented presence, it acknowledges the absolute exteriority of the imperative that weighs on it.<sup>63</sup>

The obedience of thought is first obedience to force, which allows for the formulation of principles. For Lingis, representation, the essential Kantian relation of reason to its objects, is not an interiority but an acknowledgment of imperative exteriority. By definition, representations are such because they are external to what they represent. For Kant, representations were of the inaccessible *Ding-an-sich*, but Lingis finds them to be indicative of the external force of objects formulated as the internal representations of reason.

For Lingis, this ordering of our rational faculty means that imperative force remains exterior and that this exteriority supplies the binding force of thought's obedience to the imperative of law. For thought to be obedience, thought itself cannot be the source of imperative force. If thought were this source, thought would be completely self-determining and beyond the reach of any imperative. Obedience must first follow from some externality. Furthermore, the formulation of the imperative set before the mind as the *form* of the imperative does not set before the mind the imperative's unformulatable force, which makes the law binding. Each time thought sets out to think something effectively, i.e., to represent something to itself coherently, it does so in response to the imperative's exteriority that weighs

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62. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 181.

63. *Ibid.*

on it. For these reasons, Lingis concludes that in order for thought to be obedience, the imperative must be exterior to thought.<sup>64</sup>

In a final explication of the priority of imperative force over form, Lingis addresses the event character of the entry of the force of the imperative – an event already come to pass in the locus of thought that arises prior to the act of thought presenting itself. “This event is the *a priori* fact which precedes and makes possible the *a priori* forms with which understanding understands empirical facts and which it represents as its own laws.”<sup>65</sup> In this way, “the imperative is an absolute fact, a *factum*, an event with regard to which thought is passive, which thought suffers.”<sup>66</sup> Because imperative force precedes formulation in law, the universality and necessity in the principles of reason emerge from events that precede them – from the exterior force weighing on them, which can subsequently be formulated into laws of theoretical reason. In this phenomenological priority of force over form, perhaps Lingis gives another example of the primacy of Kant’s moral fact of reason by emphasizing the exteriority of force that precedes any formulation in the form of law.

Before we conclude on the original binding force of the imperative and its exteriority, we should address Hegel’s long-standing objections to the compatibility of force and human consciousness, i.e., how is it possible to *think* about force, which is altogether exterior to thought? For Hegel, there is an insurmountable gap between the mediations of consciousness and the immediacy of force. Hegel’s view of consciousness is analogous to Kant’s view of human reason: that in order for forces to be intelligible they must be encountered as the formal “representations” of the mind. Thus, both Hegel and Kant rule out any possible explication of force. To attempt to explicate force’s intelligibility in immediacy, we must look to Levinas’s doctrine of sensibility in sensation. Instead beginning with the objective formalism of Kantian representation or the mediations of Hegelian consciousness that stabilize the *hic et nunc* of perception, Levinas begins with the sensation of the medium that supports all perception. In sensation, one is in direct contact with the sustaining medium of perception (e.g., the elements of light, heat, or sound). Thus, our relation with the elements of sensation is one of immersion, not the kept distance of Kantian representation or Hegelian mediation. But even with immersion, there is still exteriority and exteriority’s original orienting force. In Merleau-Ponty’s doctrine, for instance, one adjusts to the levels that support perception. One adjusts one’s focus to accord with the level of the light; one turns to follow a sound or hears the dominant note of a concerto. These directives are exterior to oneself and one’s consciousness, and they give us an immediate direction for the directives of our vision and hearing, even of our thought. In this way, exteriority can be seen to be the original directive

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64. *Ibid.*, 180.

65. *Ibid.*, 182.

66. *Ibid.*

force for our formal attention, whether as Kantian respect (*Achtung*) or as Hegelian consciousness.

Without exteriority, there would be no external world of objects for our perception; there would be no force for the form of human consciousness. If thought were absolutely autonomous and interior, Kantian law would be merely formal. Kant here seems to have understood the necessities of original force better than Hegel, as Kant acknowledged that thoughts without content are empty. And does not Kant acknowledge force in his claim that respect is a tribute that I cannot withhold? Here Kant seems to find immediacy in the force of respect, even as respect for formal law. It is the force that originally binds, not the form. The force of original direction for the directives of formal thought can be found only in exteriority, not in the autonomous interiority of the human mind.

*Between Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives: Intrinsic Importance, Urgency, and Immediacy*

Another way that Lingis attempts to bring imperative force into relief is through his rethinking of Kant's hypothetical imperatives. Many situations that Kant had regarded as "hypothetical" Lingis finds to have an intrinsic importance, urgency, and immediacy. Lingis agrees with Kant that our actions posit objectives and the imperatives that are required for their accomplishment. For instance, if I want to build a fire in my fireplace, I must get wood and clean out the ashes. As Kant noted, a hypothetical imperative is a rule of skill for the accomplishment of particular tasks. What makes them "hypotheticals" is that we are free from the outset not to accomplish these tasks; they have no categorically binding necessity.

But Lingis questions Kant's designation of our own requirements of physical sustenance as hypothetical imperatives. "Need, hunger, and thirst obtrude with an urgency that determines action."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, there are imperatives here, but they are not hypothetical in the sense that we are free not to realize them from the outset. The requirements of sustenance are closer to categorical imperatives in the sense that we are in no way free *not* to realize them – they are the unconditional and categorical requirements of sustaining life. Sustenance is an intrinsic need of life – this requirement *must* be attended to. Furthermore, hunger and thirst have a direct relation to our action to satisfy them. Our actions here are both a means toward satisfaction and an end that terminates them. Thus, our tasks of fulfilling these needs are not mere hypothetical or utilitarian means: "The objective aimed at by need is not a means, or a symbol, of anything further."<sup>68</sup> We can, however, still make hypothetical tasks of eating and drinking. For instance, if one is to perform well in an endurance event, one must in advance take in large quantities of food and drink: one must act

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67. *The Imperative*, 171.

68. *Ibid.*, 172.



according to the hypothetical imperatives of carbo-loading and euhydration. But while illustrating the hypothetical imperative, this capacity also evidences its categorical status. Carbo-loading and euhydration are strategies for accomplishment in particular situations, strategies secondary to the original necessity and categorical imperative of sustenance.

Here Lingis embraces Levinas's doctrine of enjoyment in sensation, which terminates in the contentment of assimilated content. The actions of need, hunger, and thirst end in savoring food and drink "in the contentment that simmers over content assimilated where there had been lack and need."<sup>69</sup> The means of existence are not merely means to other ends but are also ends in themselves. In arguing for the categorical status of the requirements of sustenance, Lingis breaks with the unconditional singularity of Kant's categorical imperative. Lingis finds numerous categorical imperatives in the intrinsic importance and urgency of things and situations that call for our action and attention in a realm between the categorical and the hypothetical – a realm of intrinsic importance that perhaps lies between the unconditional the conditional, a realm for which Kant really cannot sufficiently account. But in critiquing Kant's analysis of hypothetical imperatives, Lingis shows the legitimacy of Kant's thoroughgoing and systematic categorization of imperatives. Although the imperatives of sustenance elude categorization as merely hypothetical, they nonetheless remain imperatives.

In breaking with singularity of Kant's categorical imperative, Lingis discerns other categorical imperatives of intrinsic importance in addition to the imperative of sustenance. For instance, we respond to a "sublime imperative" in protecting the beauty and majesty of what is greater than our petty desires, as when defending the intrinsic importance of the sequoia forests instead of allowing its trees to be turned into lawn furniture. To cut the ancient trees down for profit is to subvert their imperative importance. To convert these trees (or any other sublime object) into profit is to subvert, if not pervert, their inherent and sublime majesty, in a reversal similar to the hypothetical and "hypothetical" will's triumph over the categorical moral will in Kant's analysis of radical evil. Another categorical imperative of intrinsic importance that Lingis discerns is the artistic imperative in which one subordinates oneself to an artistic creation. Beethoven and Mahler did not think about what else they could have been doing when composing their symphonies. These works simply had to be accomplished; all other freedoms were relegated to unimportance.<sup>70</sup>

Lingis's categorical imperatives of intrinsic importance can be found in the question of what must be done: "What has to be done is, in Immanuel Kant's terminology, not hypothetically but categorically imperative.

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69. *Ibid.*

70. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 172. It is interesting to note that Friedrich Nietzsche also praises artistic obligation and devotion in a way that recalls Kant's view of freedom as obligation.

Immediacy to where and when I am makes what has to be done what I have to do.”<sup>71</sup> Lingis finds this intrinsic importance in innumerable in human actions: aiding a neighbor or artists’ clear sense of doing “what they have to do.” It is the same with anyone doing important work: ambulance drivers, cleaning people in hospitals, engineers designing bridges, or retirees patrolling school crossings. Continuing to find areas between, or surrounding, Kant’s hypothetical and categorical distinction, Lingis asks that “is it not that I discover *what I want to do* only when I discover what I have to do?” What I want to do is not determined by a fiat of my free will; this desire is not commanded by a hypothetical imperative that I am free from the outset not to act upon. Lingis concludes that it is “the transcendent things determine what I have to do, and relegate the rest to unimportance.”<sup>72</sup> The importance of these transcendent things is closer to the categorical than to the hypothetical. Explaining transcendent objects, Lingis cites justice and truth as examples: “The very notion of justice goes beyond what is doable.... Without a passion for justice and truth, whatever I do with my neighbor ... becomes a reciprocal egoism and whatever we agree upon becomes our ideology.”<sup>73</sup> Without transcendent goals, our actions become exercises of mere self-interest. As transcendent objects, truth and justice go beyond our self-interest.<sup>74</sup>

*Respect: Thought Become Practical*

Directed by impulses from Levinas’s doctrine of alterity, Lingis’s analysis of Kantian respect is largely thematized by exteriority. Lingis first notes that: “Thought arises and is constituted in respect.”<sup>75</sup> Respect is first respect for law, which Lingis specifies “more exactly, for the imperative for law.”<sup>76</sup> In Kant’s characterization of respect as something like fear, something like inclination, Lingis brings to Kantian respect a phenomenological description of the exteriority inherent in the imperative. In Lingis’s view, the imperative is positively known *not* when our representational faculty posits before itself as its own program a formulation of law it enjoins “but when respect produces representations of exterior objects and of the system of those objects, whose consistency testifies to the mind’s obedience.”<sup>77</sup> Instead of finding interiority in Kant’s

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71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, 129.

73. *Ibid.*, 175.

74. On a further note, the transcendent object also provides the resolution to the conflict of imperatives. If imperatives conflict, one is to side with the imperative of the transcendent object, the object that is further from one’s sensuous will.

75. *The Imperative*, 182.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*

autonomy of thought, Lingis's phenomenological approach discerns exteriority in respect. The imperative of thought that commands it to be in command, and to think real things and real persons, "requires that thought command our sensory powers to expose themselves to particular data which it can grasp with universal and necessary concepts."<sup>78</sup> In this view, our sensory powers are exposed to exteriority and take shape in this exposure.

Lingis extends this imperative exteriority into the practical field, as with Merleau-Ponty's extension of the imperative into perception via style and levels, in a manner not possible in Kant's doctrine. We hope to have shown earlier how imperatives apply to the active will of the phenomenologically perceiving subject in which perception is a movement, which permits Lingis to extend the imperative into the practical field "... and command our practical faculties to move through and manipulate the flux of data in ways it can organize coherently and consistently."<sup>79</sup> In this way, Lingis notes the practicality of the imperative and extends it into the practical and instrumental field.

Analogous to Merleau-Ponty's view of space as embodied and entailing a living subject whose affectivity underlies and unifies Kant's physical and moral realms, Lingis takes sensible data to be not only effects but affects that are collected on our sensory surfaces irradiating as pleasure or as stinging or throbbing in pain. In this way, Lingis connects the rational and physical realms, which Kant bifurcates: "our sensory faculties, and the motor faculties that move them, are not only receptive to the phenomenal data, but responsive to them."<sup>80</sup> This concurrent receptivity and responsiveness accounts for the organizing force of subjectivity, which is first passively receptive to exteriority but can become active in its response as responsibility: "Our practical powers do not only move to expose our sensory surfaces to sensory data, but are moved by them."<sup>81</sup>

Reminiscent of the will's inclusion in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, Lingis describes the "sensory will" of our whole motor vitality: "The core vital force of our sensory-motor nature moves with a sensory will, an appetite for pleasure and an aversion to pain."<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, this will is subjected to exteriority, as "it is a will ordered from without."<sup>83</sup> Lingis admits that the will of the core-vital force of our sensory-motor nature is motivated by the particular and contingent, and that our core-vitality is itself particular and contingent. Our core vital force wills to maintain itself but does not do so unconditionally. It is a particular will whose will to live is contingent. It can suppress itself; it can will suicide. Yet this particularization applies to the understanding as my

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78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, 183.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

understanding: “Understanding is particularized as *my* understanding in requiring content from my sensory surfaces, ... which expose my receptor surfaces to data and adjust to a layout of the phenomenal field that is each time particular. The imperative is placed singularly on *me*.”<sup>84</sup> Because of the will’s contingency, Lingis now returns to the autonomy of the sovereign will. With the imperative singularly placed upon me: “The *I* arises in the measure that the sensory-motor vitality is no longer diversely and contingently activated from without ... but commanded by a will activated by a representation produced inwardly by thought.”<sup>85</sup> Lingis, however, still discerns an absolute exteriority of imperative force at work here, as the command placed on me by the imperative’s absolute exteriority is a command that the *I* arise and be in command: “The *I* that understands is constituted in this obedience; the subject is constituted in subjection.”<sup>86</sup>

Lingis’s subject arises in imperative subjection, but this subject is not that of Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception, whose singularity is analogous to that of the categorical imperative. Because Lingis begins with the diversities of exteriority rather than a singular interiority, his view differs from Kant’s singularizing force of the categorical imperative. Via exteriority’s pluralistic but distinct directives of things, other persons, and the world, Lingis is able to broaden the scope of both the imperative and subjectivity.

#### *Thought’s Unconditional Force as Disengagement*

What Lingis sees in the thought commanded by the imperative’s force is the power to disengage from the particular and contingent, and posit the universal and necessary concepts of organizing structures. In this disengagement from the perpetually particular conditions of life, the will is activated by the representations that thought puts to it to act in all circumstances and always. This will “maintains itself in force unconditionally,”<sup>87</sup> as a will that wills itself. Here the rational agency constitutes itself and maintains itself as an ideal presence. To maintain itself unconditionally, the rational will must disengage itself from the sensuous lures of the physical world. To disengage, one must feel the restraining force of the imperative for the universal and necessary on one’s physical being, on one’s organism.

Concerning the force of this rational disengagement from particulars, Lingis argues that the immediate effect of this rational activation of the will is the constraint on our sensuous impulses and appetites. In the rational restraint of the physical, our sensuous appetites are not desensitized but deactivated. This is no small point, as Lingis takes the force of the

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84. *Ibid.*

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, 184.

*Triebfeder* of respect for the rational moral law to have a deeper basis in moral affectivity. Kant, as we have noted in our first chapter, maintained some role for the force of the imperative as *Triebfeder*; however, Lingis brings a deeper phenomenological account to respect as the reduction of our composite organism to passivity and suffering. Lingis describes the force of formal law as the negative feeling engendered by respect on the sensuous appetites not as a complete negation them but rather as a mortification in their constraint. This mortification is something that one feels in being blocked from an object of desire. Lingis contends that subjectivity *arises* in this restraining force that reason must obey: “This mortification, this dying that does not die which the law commands is the inward knowledge the I that arises has of its own obedience. The suffering I feel within my sensuous vitality is the weight of evidence that I have of the force of law weighing on me.”<sup>88</sup>

### **KANT’S TYPOLOGY: ILLUSTRATIONS OF IMPERATIVE FORCE**

For Kant, the imperative has been put into effect by reason itself, which commands the rational faculty to be in command. Thus, it begins largely as inward knowledge, but Lingis contends that Kant shows in his illustration of the moral “types” that one also needs external knowledge. Even for Kant, internal thought and knowledge are not enough. As he famously states in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuition without concepts are blind.”<sup>89</sup> Lingis continues his elaboration of Kant’s doctrine of the imperative in Kant’s typology, which allows him to bring the force of the imperative into relief. Force, Lingis finds, is central to Kant’s typology, as it supplies imperative images not of law but of force. Furthermore, Lingis contends that the categorical imperative’s formal characteristics of universality and necessity are actually derived from the typology’s illustrations of force rather than from law.

In Lingis’s reading of Kant’s doctrine of law, what the law commands is the knowledge that inward understanding has of its own obedience. But one also needs an external knowledge so that one can make oneself an exemplar of law in particular empirical situations. For these instantiations, one needs representations that are concrete and sensible, hence the necessity of imperative images. Kant supplies these images for our concrete existence in his typology so that the “I” engendered imperatively by autonomous reason can become an exemplar for itself (and for others). In this way, Lingis argues that Kant makes the move from the internal force and knowledge of the rational imperative to the force of external empirical exemplars.

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88. *Ibid.*

89. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 93, A 51, B 75.

To make the force of my particular empirical situation an exemplar of law, I need an advance representation – an image – that is concrete but also general so that it can be transferable to other concrete situations. Reiterating the *a priori* status of the imperative, Lingis asserts that the free imagination finds itself from the first commanded to produce a generalized image, which is needed for the practical judgment that must guide the rational will. “To make myself in my particular empirical situation an exemplar of law, I need an advance representation of the figure I must compose of my own powers.”<sup>90</sup> Lingis explains the importance of the imperative in Kant’s typology, as the imperative precedes even the free imagination: “The free imagination finds itself, from the first, commanded to produce an *imperative image*. Kant has labeled these imperative images ‘types.’”<sup>91</sup>

What Lingis designates to be “imperative images,” generated from intelligible general representations, Kant calls “types.”<sup>92</sup> Lingis sees three possible types that form coherent and consistent content: 1) sensible things, 2) the manipulation of the phenomenal field, and 3) relations with others. Put more simply, these types are respectively: 1) nature, 2) the instrumental field, and 3) civil society. These three types are analogous to Kant’s three formulations of Kant’s categorical imperative: 1) nature: “Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature”; 2) the instrumental field: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only”; and 3) civil society: “Act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a realm of ends.” These types are for Lingis “the three possible representations of systems ordered by law the understanding subject to the imperative must produce.”<sup>93</sup> Lingis finds imperative exteriority in these types, as they are the three possible representations of the exterior that the imagination become practical can produce of the subject outside its actual and particular situation, as an entity governed by the imperative for law. Because of their exteriority, they are images of imperative force. Also, all three types are required, as the conception of law is not the same in the three images.<sup>94</sup>

In *The Imperative* Lingis contends that Kant’s typology has to be criticized and replaced.<sup>95</sup> But what does he mean by this criticism? The typology, for Kant, is analogously characterized by the universal law of nature: “... comparison of the maxim of his actions with a universal law of nature is also not the determining ground of his will. Such a law is, nevertheless, a *type* for the appraisal of maxims in accordance with moral

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90. Lingis, “The Elemental Imperative,” *Research in Phenomenology* 18 (1988): 4-5.

91. *Ibid.*

92. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 184.

93. Lingis, “The Elemental Imperative,” 5.

94. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 184-185; “The Elemental Imperative,” 5.

95. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 5.

principles.”<sup>96</sup> Although the laws of nature do not apply to the realm of moral freedom, the universality of nature’s laws is legitimate as an analogous type: “... it makes that *law of nature* merely the type of a *law of freedom*.”<sup>97</sup> In this way, Kant’s typology bridges the gap between the realms of natural causality and moral freedom, so as to make an example in experience applied from the law of a pure practical reason that uses only the form of lawfulness in general while guarding against empiricism in practical reason. Lingis proposes to revise Kant’s typology with rectifications of exteriority by claiming that the imperative images of the typology illustrate our responses to the exterior forces we encounter in nature, other persons, and society. Here, the imperative image is the necessary means for the practical realization of human nature, inasmuch as this nature is not natural but composed in and by its own action. This view also gives us some indications of Lingis’s criticism of the interiority of the categorical imperative itself. As we shall see further in the section below on Lingis’s critique of Kant’s rationalism, Lingis claims that Kant actually derives the formal characteristics of universality and necessity from the illustrations of the typology, and cannot have derived them from the categorical imperative of law.

*First Type: Nature*

Citing Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative as “act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature,” Lingis concurs with Kant that whatever has a nature of its own is governed by an inherent dynamic order. Consequently, the phenomenal field as a whole is represented by the theoretical use of reason *as* nature through its depiction as governed by universal and necessary laws. What is depicted in nature as the first type is the grounding of the imperative for law in the context of the natural world, so that reason is not destined for supernatural status but acts as a guide for real human action.

Lingis observes that Kant takes the trait of thought that distinguishes humans from natural species but constitutes itself as a separate agency in conflict with the human “sensory-motor vitality.” In Lingis’s view, this conflict reveals the external context of the imperative, as Kant models his first type on the natural world. Kant does not take human heterogeneity as a sign that we are destined by an imperative external to the inner workings of nature to an extra- or super-natural status. Our heterogeneity is an indication of autonomy, “an index that a human must, of his own thoughtful initiative, make himself natural, make himself into the integrated nature that he is not naturally.”<sup>98</sup> Lingis adds that this autonomous imperative to

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96. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, (Mary Gregor, ed.) 60, 5:69.

97. *Ibid.*, 60, 5:70.

98. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 185.

become natural is not the Stoic idea that man must use his reason to find where to fit into the order of universal nature. For Kant, man is neither a part of nature, as for the Stoics, nor derived from any scientific representation of nature.

Indicating the similarity of his view on reason to Kant's, but emphasizing the force of the imperative imagery that precedes the form of law in the use of theoretical reason, Lingis summarizes Kant's view on nature as a model for practical action: "Practical reason is obligated to draw upon this representation as a model for the reconstitution or composition of the sensory-motor faculties which supply thought with content. The model imaginatively represents one's composition as a nature. This imperative image is the necessary means for its practical realization. Human nature is not natural but composed in and by its own action."<sup>99</sup> Lingis sees that for Kant, human action constitutes human nature and not vice versa. This activity is imperatively "bent toward" the laws of universality and necessity that reason places on nature that make it coherent and consistent. Reason's imperative role of formulating the content of thought from nature, i.e., the world, is what renders intelligible the passing spectacle around us. For Kant, one does not act according to nature, one acts according to thought and reason: nature is first composed by practical reason. As a free being subject to imperatives, one does not act according to the laws of nature, but one acts *as though* the maxim of one's action were a law of nature. In this way, human nature is not natural but autonomously composed in and by its own action.

*Second Type: The Instrumental Field and Relations with Others*

After discussing the typology of the natural world made intelligible through universality and necessity, Lingis next examines the instrumental field and our relations with others. Here he produces a remarkable synthesis in the themes of exteriority and imperatives in Levinas and Kant. Citing Kant's second categorical imperative, "act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only," Lingis begins his investigation of the instrumental field, which entails the dignity of the Other (and oneself for Kant) as an unexchangeable end. An instrument, Lingis explains, is a value whose properties are exchangeable for other properties and other entities, whereas an end is a good for which values are exchanged. Thus, goods do not terminate in the instrumental layout, as they can be exchanged for further goods. Kant defines "dignity" as an end that is not exchangeable. This unexchangeable end, however, does not lie outside the instrumental order but *orders* it: "it is what organizes the instrumental field unilaterally and makes the intermediaries means."<sup>100</sup>

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99. *Ibid.*, 185-186.

100. *Ibid.*, 186.



Lingis stresses that the imperative character of this typology is the organizing force laid on the imagination. Also, for Lingis, the representation of an instrumental field is characterized by exteriority, as its unexchangeable good “is transferred from the outside upon the agent himself.”<sup>101</sup> As Kant has noted, the imperative here is not found through perception, inasmuch as all perceived goods are exchangeable whereas unconditioned goods are not. “The unexchangeable end, then, is not given in perception but imagination. But this image is imperative; it fixes a direction in the economy of the instrumental field. Without it, the instrumental field would disintegrate in the multilaterality and reversibility of all its lines of exchange.”<sup>102</sup> It is this imperative of unexchangeability that organizes and anchors the practical instrumental field, in which the phenomenal flux of lures of pleasure is transformed by our sensory faculties into an instrumental field whose objects are means for us.

The concept of dignity arises with this imaginative representation of reason guiding practical agents. These agents are not the simple terminus of unexchangeability of exchangeable goods but arise as existent ends in themselves via thought. The representation of the instrumental field, not the perception of existing instrumental fields, is transferred from the outside imperatively onto the agent. Now, one must imagine one’s own sense organs and appetites as a means, and must depict the maintenance of the power of thought as an end that is not a means for anything further – a dignity. Instead of taking the practical field as a source of natural objects of the desire of our sensuous will, sensory content is to be represented as a layout of means for the use of the rational will interested only in the universal and necessary, which arrays the multiplicity of objects in a coherent order.<sup>103</sup>

*Affect and effect.* Because dignity is the source of the instrumental field’s order, the affective impact of objects is now taken as a means to conceive their objective properties: “Objectivity forms as the surface effects, which function as affects in which one’s appetite terminate, are taken as means for another good.”<sup>104</sup> Objects are in turn means for use by the rational will, which as a dignity is not a means for anything further. Thus, although thought maintains itself as an imperative, it is not absolutely self-generating. “Thought arises as the locus of impact of the force of an imperative which has come to pass without being representable in a formulation thought would put before itself. Thought arises because it is commanded to arise and to command....”<sup>105</sup> In this way, as in Kant’s third formulation of the categorical imperative that every will legislate universal

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101. *Ibid.*, 187

102. *Ibid.*, 186.

103. *Ibid.*, 187.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*

law, the rational will is an end in itself – a dignity. But in Lingis’s view, this dignity does not first arise in complete autonomy or interiority.

When the rational will becomes practical, it arises as an existent end in itself and does not become an instrument of the sensuous appetite. It does not order the outlying objects for appetitive consumption toward their most unobstructed satisfaction, nor does it simply establish itself as the terminus of the unexchangeable good for all exchangeable goods. Dignity has a character distinct from a mere depository of all means; dignity is active: “Thought arises as an existent end in itself, and the practical will it commands acts only to order the field about it in such a way that nothing violates its dignity.”<sup>106</sup> Because thought maintains itself in dignity, Lingis discerns a twofold extension of the instrumental order: a) the order the agent finds across the field is transferred upon the agent himself, allowing him to organize his disparate faculties into a means for the rational faculty; and b) the type of organization represented as a layout of objectives within reach is extended over the universe. In these ways, the phenomenal exteriority beyond the scope of any single organism is converted into a vast instrumental field. “All natures are represented as potential means for a rational organization pursued by a practical agent. Thought represents the universe in advance as a dominion awaiting its orders.”<sup>107</sup> Here, Lingis concurs with Kant that it is not nature that orders thought, but thought that orders nature via the imperative.

With this imperative image of the instrumental field, we arrive at what makes respect for the Other possible. “In the imperative image of all nature extending as a field of objective objects, always and everywhere means for one’s own unexchangeable dignity, the other arises as another locus of the same imperative.... To respect the other is to respect the law that commands in him and commands me also.”<sup>108</sup> This acknowledgment of the Other is not a causal efficacy. As Kant conceded to Hume, effects are not given in the causal concomitance of events. Nor is the representation of a principle to rationally activate the will empirically visible in one’s body. In Lingis’s reading of Kant, what makes respect possible in the instrumental field is tied in with the imperative typology of nature. Instead of perceiving others and things as causal effects: “One believes – one must believe – that it is possible that the representation of principles can alone activate the will. One believes – one is commanded to believe by the imperative laid on one’s understanding to believe – that one can command one’s psychophysical composition to execute actions that will be instances of the universal and the necessary.”<sup>109</sup> Likewise, one is commanded to believe that diagrams of action perceived in others can be understood as instantiations of the universal and the necessary. “Respect is the clairvoyance that senses from

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106. *Ibid.*, 188.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*, 188-189.

the first that the other is an exterior locus of the exteriority of the imperative which I find in my faculty of thought but cannot represent in a formulation that has its source in me.”<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the belief that an imperative commands the moves of the Other that one perceives is immediate. This belief is not like a rational hypothesis taken from a measure of reliable observation; there is an immediate sense of the imperative for law in the Other – “a force of law sensed as binding his understanding as I sense it weighing immediately on my own.... The imperative image displaces the perceived figure.”<sup>111</sup> Here, the imperative image of the Other as an object of respect immediately displaces any empirical law that could be drawn from the contingent contact with him.

Thus, as Lingis expounds upon the force of Kant’s imperative typology, he links the major theme of Levinas – alterity – to terms of imperative exteriority, in an interpretation inspired by Kant’s project of reason. In the phenomenon of respect for the Other, the exteriority of the force of the imperative is recognized, because this exteriority is inassimilable and irreducible to my formulating powers; this exterior force is what constitutes alterity. The Other is not other by occupying another place in the exteriority of nature but is another nature unto himself (as am I for Kant). The Other is not discerned as a sum-total of phenomenal differences from me but “is other as an authority to which I find myself *subjected*.”<sup>112</sup> In terms of Kant’s imperative, respect understands that the Other is another locus of the imperative, which activates itself in the field of means as a dignity and is thus genuinely *other*. Here Lingis’s view of the Other mirrors Levinas’s: “The otherness of the other is constituted by the exteriority of the imperative.”<sup>113</sup> The imperative image formed in respect functions by displacing the objective perception of the Other. In this displacement, Lingis takes the summoning and contestation of the Other to be immediate in its affectivity.

In the immediacy of the imperative’s force in Lingis’s account, we have arrived at the emergence of the self-motivating rational faculty. One feels the imperative force, *suffers* it, when one displaces one’s own contingent desires with the universal and necessary representations of the imperative image of nature, as one suffers the immediate contestation and summons in the imperative image of the Other. This feeling is not confirmed by the perceptual evidence of the causality with which one believes the imperative activates the practical will “but by the feeling of suffering in one’s intercepted and blocked impulses and sensuous appetites.”<sup>114</sup> Lingis asserts that this view hold for thought itself: “thought

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110. *Ibid.*, 189.

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*, 190 (italics added).

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*

is not something apart from or prior to this suffering,<sup>115</sup> because thought's representations of the universal and the necessary displace the sensuous representation of the particular and the contingent. In this way, Lingis continues his theme of subjectivity as subjection by claiming that "the thoughtful subject arises and maintains itself in this affliction."<sup>116</sup>

*Suffering and alterity.* Lingis then explains how this immediate, imperative suffering accounts for the Other as a rational end. "It is also the sense of suffering that makes rational the *a priori* belief that the other is other with the alterity of an imperative."<sup>117</sup> One senses that the Other is not a causal organism reacting to physical pressures in its environment; rather, one senses the Other as suffering the dictates of the imperative for law. In this way, Lingis effortlessly dissolves Ludwig Wittgenstein's doubts of knowing the Other's pain. One senses pain, explains Lingis, in the Other not by the efficacy of an inner program regulating organs and limbs: "one does not perceive the pain where it is, ... one senses it at the surface of contact."<sup>118</sup> Here Lingis overcomes Wittgenstein's aporia of another's pain via Levinas's concept of exposure to and immediate contact with the vulnerability of the Other as a "susceptible surface" of affliction.

With this surface of contact with the Other we return to Lingis's view of Kant's second typology in which contact with the Other takes place in and is commanded in the imperative imagery of the instrumental field and accounts for dignity of the Other as a rational agent: "The imperative image of the other as a set of sensory-motor powers at the service of dignity, which displaces the representation of him as a part of objective nature, is located in the practical field in the perceived figure of a surface of exposure, of vulnerability, that suffers. The figure of the other as a rational agent on his own is this surface phenomenon of a susceptibility. The sense of his suffering justifies my sentiment of an imperative in him that commands me also."<sup>119</sup> Lingis specifies that the suffering sensed in the Other is that of another rational being subject to the force of the imperative. The Other's suffering phenomenologically yields a surface impression not simply of the *de facto* vulnerability of a physical substance resisting other physical substances "but a suffering produced by its own action in obedience to law,"<sup>120</sup> i.e., of an agent subjected to the imperative force of reason. His thought, action, and dignity all maintain themselves in this suffering – a sensuous body suffering the dictates of reason. In this way, Lingis's view is closer to Kant's than Levinas's, as Lingis retains a stronger role for reason in the imperative imagery of the typology than Levinas does in the doctrine of alterity.

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115. *Ibid.*

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*, 191.

119. *Ibid.*

120. *Ibid.*

In keeping with the ordinances of the instrumental field, the suffering of the Other is not perceived through a cognitive representation but is an imperative image produced for my practical judgment in dealing with the Other. It is sensed as imperative suffering, as subjugation to the law of reason. "To feel this suffering is at the same time to respect the imperative for law, the universal, and the necessary, that binds me also."<sup>121</sup> But more in line with Levinas's "privileged heteronomy" of alterity than with Kant's autonomy of reason, Lingis stresses that my own reason originates in the suffering of the Other. "To begin to think is to begin to reorganize synthetically the sensuous substances, affecting my sensibility as lures of pleasure, into objects, objective objects understood in function of the necessary and universal order represented by thought and entities exposed to the other, entities to which the other is painfully exposed. The suffering of the other is the origin of my own reason."<sup>122</sup> By referring to Kant's typology illustrating the force of the imperative for consistent and coherent thought in the emergence of the faculty for reason, Lingis has given an account that thematizes the imperative character of our encounter with the world of object-objectives (as in Merleau-Ponty's *praktognosia*) and the encounter of the Other, and has specified that respect and dignity originally arise out of the exertion of exterior imperative forces.

In this way, Lingis simultaneously rectifies the imperative in both Kant and Levinas. Lingis has shifted the locus of the imperative from Kant's interiority of thought to Levinas's exteriority of suffering, in which the feeling of respect weighs on my subjectivity as affliction and restriction. But it seems that Lingis's position requires that Levinasian alterity first needs Kant's imperative image found in the instrumental field of the second type, in order for the Other to be taken as a consistent and coherent force. Without the organizing form of the imperative as a "first fact" to which the Other is also subjected as a rational agent, the human Other would also be just another passing spectacle without coherence. The phenomenon of alterity would have no distinction from other phenomena without the organizing force and form of respect. But Lingis emphasizes the Levinasian affectivity of respect in his own claim that the phenomenal or cognitive image of the Other is displaced by the imperative image of the Other as a surface of susceptibility. This imperative image is produced immediately out of my sense of the imperative in the Other that also weighs on me. Because of these forces, Lingis argues that the suffering of the Other is phenomenologically the origin of my own reason. Only with alterity is there reason.

### *Third Type: Civil Society*

Lingis concludes his analysis of Kant's typology with an examination

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121. *Ibid.*, 192.

122. *Ibid.*

of civil society: “act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of the realm of ends.” This third type completes the model by adding the individual’s association with others as a society. Individuals form a civil society when they establish a legislative instance of themselves, and this society disengages from the contingencies of nature via sovereignty.<sup>123</sup> As with the other types, the third type relies on an imperative image, because this ideal model cannot be empirically observed in any existing society. “We must instead imagine another civil society such that the order in it is that of what is intrinsically universal and necessary.”<sup>124</sup> Lingis praises Kant’s keen assessment of the politics of his day, and ours, as a forum of self-inclination. “Kant understood that bourgeois representative democracy is a theater where lobbies representing the most powerful passions for wealth, for power, and for prestige work out provisional alliances, pacts, compromises, and armistices which function to allow these passions to flourish.”<sup>125</sup> These passions are, in a word, “happiness” on a societal level. According to the typology, however, civil society is to legislate universal and necessary laws that would subordinate self-interest to general reason.

Civil society as the third type also exemplifies the further development of respect and dignity. Respect for the law is both received as legislation and actively legislative in the republic of ends; everyone is bound by, and yet is an exemplar of, the same law. Thus, individuals are not only associated as parallel agents subject to law but are associated in lateral bonds, subjecting each to the other. Here Lingis connects the alterity of the practicable world with this third type. In civil society, the Other appears not as an instrumental functionary but as an intensified surface of vulnerability exposed to an imperative within him that commands me also. “In the image of an integral republic, each one would be for the others *other*. It is an image that fixes society as a distinctive form of order.”<sup>126</sup> Kant understood that this civil society was not bound by polite rational association, and Lingis accounts for this republic’s coherence as a consequence of imperative force, which also distinguishes the third type from the first two as an active model of command: “With this ‘type’ the sense of the force of the imperative disengages decisively from the notions of physical force and instrumental force and acquires the sense of command. Thought requires the sociological-juridical image of society which gives it a model of what it means to be commanded to be in command. This legislative image of its practical judgment is imperative.”<sup>127</sup> Here we see a set of imperative forces: the disengagement via imperative force, which in its disengagement from the notions of physical force and instrumental force reveals a superior

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123. *Ibid.*

124. *Ibid.*, 193.

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*, 194.

127. *Ibid.*

commanding force that commands itself to be in command, which in turn is detached from the particularities and contingencies of the physical world and instrumental field of exchange. With the commanding force to be in command, the image of civil society makes possible the image of each citizen and oneself as a society unto himself, a sovereign subject who finds that he is not only ordered by the imperative but must also issue its order.

Finally, in terms of the force found in the three imperative illustrations in Kant's typology, it should be noted that Lingis argues that the characteristics of universality and necessity that Kant deems central to the categorical imperative are not, and cannot be, derived from the categorical imperative itself. The formal characteristics of universality and necessity, in fact, cannot be known *a priori* but are known from the illustrations in the typology, as imperative images of illustrations of force. Force, not form, constitutes the imperative. We shall see more on this derivation in the section below, "Lingis's Critique of Kant's Moral Logicism."

## LINGIS'S CRITIQUE OF KANT

### *The Coherence of the Ethical Imagination*

As Lingis has noted, all three types are necessary for the integration of practical reason, but the third type accounts for how his typology is specifically ethical. Citizenship in the republic of ends is not independently elaborated alongside the other types. Here, the imperative's images of practical reason are integrated and become specifically ethical. Lingis notes that if we were limited to the first type, as agents internally motivated by a set of universally and necessary laws, it would exclude the second type, the instrumental field of means and ends. We would be left with a Stoic or technological ethics, using thought to effect a cold intervention into one's own representational faculty. To be limited to the second type, which induces us to take our sensory and motor powers as means for our practical rational faculty, would be to submit to a rationalist reductionism that ignores the objective realm of nature. Our actions would be reduced to solipsism, "an intervention of one's sensory nature such that one's spontaneous impulses not violate the dignity of one's rational faculty."<sup>128</sup>

In civil society, one is to imagine oneself as a microrepublic whose order is legislated by one's own faculty of reason and in which one's practical agencies function as relations of command and obedience. The third type does not simply supplement the others but inscribes the first upon the second, as the objective representation of nature becomes a practical objective of one's own sensory-motor nature. Like other persons: "I am commanded to view with him the sensible objects as regulated by the determinations of nature, as objective objects, but I see that they are not thereby divested of their sensuous impact.... Such action is to be effected

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128. *Ibid.*, 195.

by extending within oneself the relations of command and obedience that constitute our coexistence as rational agents in society.”<sup>129</sup> The instrumental field of the second type extending across the furthest limits of the environment is inscribed on the vision of oneself and the world induced by the first type, nature, and one’s own nature as a system of universal and necessary laws, unified in the republic of ends in the third type, all inscribed by the force of the imperative subsequently formulated in law. “The image of the other and of oneself as an instrumental system is inscribed upon the image of the other and of oneself as a nature; ... the image of the other and oneself as an unexchangeable good is inscribed ... as a totality integrated by laws; the image of command of the other and of oneself upon the image and force in the imperative at work in the other and oneself.”<sup>130</sup> The imperative organizes oneself and the Other as a totality, which is not gleaned from nature or the instrumental field but through the image of command and force at work in oneself and the Other. As Lingis concludes about the coherence of the ethical imagination illustrated in the typology: “The image of oneself as [a] responsible citizen of the universe is inscribed upon the image of oneself as a nature surrounded by nature and the image of oneself as an end in a universal field of means.”<sup>131</sup>

#### *The Primacy of the Moral Imperative*

Like Kant, Lingis advocates the primacy of the moral imperative. In Lingis’s view, the entire theoretical employment of reason turns out to be morally incumbent upon us:

The imperative for law is a pure and transcendental fact, prior to every explanation and purpose.... Thought does not obey the imperative for law in order to maintain a hold on the world; it maintains a hold on the world because it is bound to obey law.... Thought understands empirical facts of nature in the universal and necessary laws that govern them because it understands the fact of the imperative that requires that our own nature be totally rational. The whole theoretical employment of reason ... turns out to be an activity morally incumbent upon us. It is the moral imperative that makes sense to thought and makes sense of the world, or makes thought make sense of the world.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, the rational project is not motivated in the field itself; rather, thought is activated by the weight of the imperative. The imperative

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129. *Ibid.*, 196.

130. *Ibid.*

131. *Ibid.*

132. *Ibid.*, 197-8.



commands unconditionally, not as an end to be achieved but as an unexchangeable end existing from the start. The rational faculty itself, however, can have no representation of this unexchangeable good. Lingis's view once again is reminiscent of Levinasian affectivity combined with Kantian respect. The existing end that is oneself is only something that affects sensibility, as a feeling of respect for oneself. It is through the forces of exteriority and affectivity, instead of the autonomy of reason, that Lingis takes Kant to arrive at the moral fact of reason.

In another way of advocating the primacy of the moral imperative, Lingis (in agreement with Kant) does not take absolute freedom as the starting point. We are to begin with obligation; because we are obligated, we know that we are free. Lingis begins not with our free self-determination but with subjection that is itself commanded. Like the typology, in the image of autonomy, my will is not simply subjected to law but legislates law. "Autonomy is an image that we must produce. Autonomy is the imperative image of our imperative obedience. A man finds he can act freely because he must."<sup>133</sup> Here Lingis is not attempting to explain the incidence of the imperative on us, which is given as the first fact—but posits the imperative in order to obey it. Autonomy is not the starting point but the illustration of the imperative image of our imperative obedience.

In this view of autonomy, we are not then "condemned to freedom" as Sartre has so famously put it. Because of autonomy, we are condemned to imperative obligation. Likewise, Lingis sees imperative autonomy to challenge another existential doctrine of freedom, Heideggerian authenticity, which is a free determination of resoluteness in one's own being toward death. Instead of beginning with the subject's free initiative, "the idea of freedom is postulated to make the image of autonomy intelligible ... which is produced in order to make practical judgment effective."<sup>134</sup> The idea of freedom does not have *a priori* status, but its derivation is needed to produce acts of obedience. "The idea of freedom is not a production of theoretical reason.... With the idea of freedom is understood the fact of the imperative."<sup>135</sup> The production of an image of an autonomous sovereign is needed so that one can function as the rigorous judge of one's performances. "Freedom is an idea one elaborates on the image one needs in order to act as a necessary figure of the universal."<sup>136</sup>

In fact, one can only become a universal figure through the imperative. As Kant observed, humanity can be neither empirically nor divinely omniscient. As Lingis puts it: "To act in the suffering one knows from the harsh edges of hard reality is to recognize that while one is the author of the formulation of their universal and necessary order, one is not the cause of the layout in which real things are found. We have to believe that action is

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133. *Ibid.*, 200.

134. *Ibid.*, 202.

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*, 201.

possible; we know that action is not prestidigitation.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, we have arrived at the level of imperative belief in the imperative image of universality. To believe that acts conceived in obedience to the *a priori* imperative can be efficacious in nature, “we shall have to imagine that, in their essential being, rational initiatives and the natural events we have to understand as causal processes are destined for one another.” We must imagine their theoretical representations as destined for our service. In a totalizing connection to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Lingis adds: “The image will be drawn by analogy from the teleological order we find objectified in aesthetic contemplation and generalized by the imagination to extend across the natural order and the moral order.”<sup>138</sup> This natural and moral order issues from an imagination bent on obedience.

It is through belief that the “as though” of the categorical imperative (“act *as though* your action could become a universal law”) is shown in the necessity of the imperative image. Lingis continues: “While he acts *as though* he obeys only the laws he formulates for himself, he is not the force that lays on himself and on all things that take their places in nature the obligation to conform to universal and necessary law; he is but the one in whom that force gets formulated in the form of law.”<sup>139</sup>

Lingis once again discerns force at work in the imperative image here. Although largely in line with Kant’s doctrine, Lingis emphasizes feeling and affectivity in relation to the imperative’s force, which allows for its form of respect for universal law. For Lingis, feelings are not simply inert passive states awaiting empirical impressions; they are responses in the direction of inclination (i.e., as receptivity for Kant). Thought becomes practical by *displacing* sensuous representations with the representation of law. In the sensibility, anticipatory feelings of pleasure are converted into a susceptibility to pain from “the hard edges of reality perceived objectively.”<sup>140</sup> That is to say, “the force of the sentiment of respect for the imperative – something like inclination, something like fear – is felt negatively,”<sup>141</sup> in the suffering that reduces to impotence our sensuous inclinations. Instead of sensuous happiness, Kant seeks a purely rational contentment that is quite distinct from physical contentment. As Kant says, “moral self-satisfaction is not happiness or even the smallest part of happiness.”<sup>142</sup> In distinction from Levinas’s doctrine of contentment in sensation in *Totality and Infinity*, Lingis observes that for Kant “this contentment is not the feeling of a content; it is not a reward.”<sup>143</sup> Although not ending in sensuous contentment, Lingis concludes that the rational

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137. *Ibid.*, 203.

138. *Ibid.*

139. *Ibid.*, 204.

140. *Ibid.*, 205

141. *Ibid.*

142. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 91, 5:88.

143. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 205.

contentment of Kant's teleology of moral reason is "blissful." "A state of a will which finds itself in act always, independent of what the contingencies of the world promise or threaten, is the bliss of godlike existence."<sup>144</sup>

*Lingis's Critique of Kant's Moral Logicism*

Even with his revisions via exteriority, Lingis has shown his adherence to the extensive and thoroughgoing role of reason as illustrated in Kant's typology. Without an environment taken to have laws of universality and necessity, we would be condemned to a world of inconsistency and incoherence. Lingis argues that it is the mind that first knows what law is and knows that law is imperative for understanding and reason. Thus, the force of the imperative for law is not directly revealed in nature, the practicable field, or society, but is illustrated in them. Thought does not simply feel the force and fact of the imperative in an original awareness in the sentiment of respect for the Other. What thought knows is the properties of the imperative; the imperative is an imperative for law, for the universal and necessary. In Lingis's critical view, Kant draws the properties of the law it identifies as imperative from logic, as universality and necessity are the *logical* definition of a principle.<sup>145</sup>

Lingis uncovers the source of the logic invoked by Kant as the logic that governs the theoretical use of reason. This logic is a formalization of the procedures used by reason when it forms a synthetic representation of the empirical field as the bounds of nature. Although originally elaborated out of the procedures used in the substantive physics and metaphysics of Aristotle, Kant finds this logic valid for the advanced Newtonian physics of his day and rejects other concepts of order. Lingis notes, for instance, that Kant would not consider the ancient concepts of order in nature represented as Dike and Moira, the forms of organization formalized by Claude Levi-Strauss as common to native civilizations of the Americas, or statistical concepts of law in recent micro- and macro-physics to have achieved the intelligibility that reason requires.<sup>146</sup>

From these observations on universal order, Lingis concludes that the formal properties of Kant's rational imperative, universality and necessity, are not known *a priori* but are derived from Kant's "types" – most of all from the first type, nature. Lingis contends that Kant cannot find the form that is imperative in the feeling of respect, upon which the unformulatable force of the imperative weighs. Kant does, however, find this formulation of the imperative in an inspection of the cognitive forms of the speculative use of reason, which represent the data of perception as nature.<sup>147</sup> As with the categorical imperative, Kant seeks to formulate the imperative force of

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144. *Ibid.*

145. *Ibid.*, 207.

146. *Ibid.*

147. *Ibid.*, 208.

theoretical reason as a law of nature characterized by universality and necessity. Lingis observes, however, that nature, which for Kant is an illustration of the *force* of the imperative originally known in the sentiment of respect, is the original locus of *form* that is imperative. Instead of acknowledging the exteriority, irreducibility, and *a priori* status of the imperative's force, Kant has begun with a formulatable model as the form of law, which in "always already" obeying this force cannot account for it.

Citing further difficulties with Kant's logical account of reason, Lingis points out that the concept of universality as the ruling value of a theory is problematic. In addition to the set theory model for a universe of objects, scientific thought uses a myriad of conceptual models, including cluster and radial concepts, image schemas, postural and kinesthetic diagrams, etc. Theories making connections between disciplines often do not have the same mathematical form, and mathematics itself has fragmented into region-specific mathematical disciplines. Kant, of course, assumed the notion of order in theoretical representation of nature, the instrumental field, and civil society to be the same in principle. But Lingis points out that Kant's illustration of jurisprudence in civil society employs a distinctive kind of reason that does not elaborate rules of universality and necessity in social intercourse and then logically deduce juridical judgments from them. Jurisprudence "argues from cases and precedents, with a normative reason that is not simply empirical generalization."<sup>148</sup>

Commenting on Kant's view on human action, Lingis finds misleading the concept that uses every representation of a law-regulated totality. For Lingis, what is required is *not* a representation of our nature, of our faculties as an instrumental system, or of ourselves as a micro-society. A representation is required, but it is one of "the powers and forms of response in our sensuality, our sensitivity, our perception, our thought, and our motility."<sup>149</sup> In short, Lingis sees the need for a phenomenological illustration and investigation of the forces and intelligible sensations that underlie Kant's typological models. Furthermore, new projections for what we are required to become are supplied by our evolving natural and constructed environments, and not only by our practicable but by our unpracticable fields – dreams, dissonances, and the night. For Lingis, this imperative is one of phenomenological elaboration versus one of rational reduction.

With this imperative of productive observation, Lingis takes Kant's notion of respect farther than simply respect for the formal law. Although taking our nature to be pluralistic, Lingis still requires imperative directives for acting with it, for understanding what we are required to become. Because his regionalist view of knowledge argues that the different purposes of the practical and theoretical sciences, as well as their varying degrees of specialization, precludes a singular universal view, Lingis directs

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148. *Ibid.*, 209.

149. *Ibid.*, 211.

us to understand what we are required to become and requires that we “must respect the natures we are.”<sup>150</sup> For instance, a researcher or theorist must make his or her theories empirically productive and “must make his or her thought obey an imperative of productive observation rather than consolidation.”<sup>151</sup> In this multifaceted manner, Lingis argues for a thoughtfulness that is an all-inclusive but not formally reductive, a thoughtfulness that respects the elemental force that phenomenologically underlies the typology: “Thoughtfulness not only respects the economic, the sociopolitical, and semiotic orders that regulate the circulation of goods, persons, and messages in association with others, but also the *elemental ordinance* that makes us a telluric, uranian, solar, and nocturnal community. Our associations are also communities with those who are dying and who are dead.”<sup>152</sup> In his observation of elemental ordinances, Lingis criticizes the technological representation of the material environment as an ever-extending instrumentality that today reinforces the Kantian image of rational man as an end in himself with all things at his service. This Kantian image, for Lingis, is too ideological and technocratic. Alongside the technological representations of our practicable environments, we also have representations of the utility of natural things within their own ecosystems and our own symbiotic vitality within shared ecosystems. We also have the aesthetic dimensions of poetics, theater, cinema, music theory, and architectural theory that all represent the functioning of artworks and the artworks that we can make of ourselves. “All these too must shape our images of our powers and skills, our talents and tastes.”<sup>153</sup> Thus, Lingis finds an imperative directive in these “non-rational” dimensions as well. Finally, Lingis argues for representations of the unpracticable spaces of color and sound, their harmonics and dissonances, for background noise, the realm of dreams, and the night from which our representations and vision arise. In citing these unpracticable spaces, Lingis contends that Kant gives up too much to universality and formalism, and thereby loses aspects that show themselves to be necessary.

As we shall see in the second half of this chapter, Lingis elaborates a phenomenology of perception that describes imperative ordinances emanating from the elements and the things themselves, which precede conceptual identification. As he notes in *The Imperative*: “Before thought identifies something perceived with a concept, that thing holds together for the sensorial samplings with which our organisms explore it. Before reason formulates relationships with which it connects the terms it has identified, the visible, tangible, audible field extends on levels in contours and reliefs, groupings, and dispersions.... Theoretical practices are but one group among the large number of initiatives our practical powers take in the

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150. *Ibid.*

151. *Ibid.*

152. *Ibid.*, 212 (italics added).

153. *Ibid.*, 213.

perceptual field.”<sup>154</sup> Although reason plays a fundamental role in imperative obligation, the rational does not equate with the required in Lingis’s expansive view of the imperative.

*The Ordinances of Nature and of Others*

Empirical hypotheticals are verified in distinctive perceptual spaces. These fields have distinctive order or more exactly *ordinance*. These are not simply orders that we observe, but “they are directives we know in responding to them.”<sup>155</sup> Practical fields require that we take initiative. Likewise, the exteriority of others interrupts our own imperatives, and their approach contests what we are doing and thinking, “as their surfaces of exposedness are appeals put to and demands put on us.”<sup>156</sup>

Although he advocates ordinances emanating directly from the phenomenological field, Lingis also recognizes the intrinsic importance of rational knowledge, as it is the intrinsic importance of the rational faculty that commands in the theoretical use of reason. In this way, Lingis takes reason to have a central role, as evidenced by his explication of Kant’s typology that guides human activity in the spheres of nature, practicality, and politics. But in Lingis’s view, Kant is wrong to recognize only the intrinsic importance of the rational faculty in what we must do. For Lingis, because theoretical practices are but one kind of our practical powers, the rational does not equate with the required. To understand how formal theory emerges from the world or nature, Lingis calls for a phenomenological account of the imperative in scientific thought: “To understand not only the form scientific theory gives to nature, to the practicable reality, and to civil society, but also the imperative character of that form, we have to bring forth the ordinance in these first-order presentations.”<sup>157</sup> To account for the form of theory, Lingis looks to theoretical form’s *a priori* ordinance as force. Theory itself responds to the ways nature is ordered. In addition to the ordinances of nature, there are also the ordinances of the practicable field and of civil society: “What are taken to be purely rational ideas and imperatives ... are dictated not only by the ordinance of the perceived environment, but also by the ordinance unfolding a zone of practicable reality, and by the ordinance governing the social field.”<sup>158</sup>

Here we may see how phenomenology can assist Kant’s insights into the imperative character of life. In this way, phenomenology needs Kant to show how imperatives underlie our relations with nature, the field of means, and of other persons as ends, and civil society. Although Lingis has

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154. *Ibid.*, 213-214.

155. *Ibid.*, 215.

156. *Ibid.*

157. *Ibid.*, 215.

158. *Ibid.*, 216.

rectified Kant's typology via exteriority and force, he has brought the imperative character of ordinance to bear from the start in phenomenology itself, while retaining Merleau-Ponty's view of things as ontologically preconfigured. Lingis formulates this synthesis of Kantian imperatives and the phenomenology of perception in this way: "Because the perceptual world is not an amorphous sensuous flux, it is open to a phenomenology of perception that would describe the array of things as apprehended by natural perception and the ordinances in the perceived field which perception does not perceive but obeys."<sup>159</sup> Thus, like thought, perception is obedience. The character of perception is not so much the perceiving of objective data but an obedience to the perceptual directives found in things. Phenomenology's role here, after understanding Kant's insights into the *a priori* organizing character of the imperative, is to describe how objects and entities are directives for our response, and how we come to know them in responding to them: "Phenomenology will have to describe the way these entities, inasmuch as they are found in the environment we perceive and inhabit and inasmuch as they are available for our use and enjoyment, direct our perception, action, and sensibility."<sup>160</sup> In this way, objects are imperative directives and objectives for our response.

*Lingis's Critique of Kant's Rational Agency and Its Exclusivity*

Although Lingis acknowledges the intrinsic importance of the rational faculty in ordering other persons and the world as a practicable field of things about us, in his view Kant is wrong to recognize only the intrinsic importance of the rational faculty in what we have to do: "In caring for a brain-damaged child, we acknowledge the intrinsic importance of a child who will not accede to the use of reason. In snuffing out the smoldering cigarette, we acknowledge the intrinsic importance of the sequoia forests."<sup>161</sup> Here Lingis offers a critique of rational autonomy in morals – not all that is required is intrinsically rational or rationally imperative. With the examples of persons, things, and events that do not accede to reason, Lingis shows how intrinsic importance is asserted imperatively, although it is not rationally imperative.

Kant takes the individual to be a rational agency that is to act upon the categorical imperative unconditionally in all contingent practical instances. The necessity of moral action is identified with the formal characteristics of universal law. Practical thought determines what I should do about a situation by determining what anyone as a rational agent would do about it. What I have to do is imposed independently of my contingent desires and is thus categorically imperative. In order to act as though one's action were to

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159. *Ibid.*, 216.

160. *Ibid.*, 217.

161. *Ibid.*, 219.

become a universal law, all sensuous desire must be suspended in order to conceive a rational action for which reason and law can be supplied.

The agency that Lingis proposes is not Kant's universal rational agency of "what anyone would do" but an agency of specificity – the mother, lifeguard, composer, artist, or activist – that arises in response to various situations and their forces, not because of rational motivation. The lifeguard who saves the drowning person does not first formulate beliefs and make them the cause of his action. The mother who cares for the brain-damaged infant may not be able to supply reasons for doing so. It is not reason that motivates these models of human agency; their motivation is found in their response to the intrinsic importance of the situations themselves: "When we admire the character of the lifeguard and the mother, character is not the possession of a set of rationally justified beliefs in the lifeguard or mother, but healthy impulses and sound instincts."<sup>162</sup> These impulses and instincts are, in a word, forces. In responding to the intrinsic force of situations, Lingis's agent gathers its forces and becomes a force. This responsible agent can become a source of resources, a cause, and a commencement. Rather than Kant's universal rational agent, Lingis's moral agent is specified in types, roles, models, or even individuals: "When I deliberate, it is not to ask what just anyone would do in this situation. It is to ask what Malcolm X would do, what subcomandante Marcos would do, what Arnold Schoenberg would say."<sup>163</sup> Seeking a phenomenological agency between categorical reason and self-serving hypotheticals, Lingis contends that in our responsible actions we do not seek to actualize an agency that legislates for everyone through a universally exemplary act. Our responsible actions are the appropriate responses to a situation's intrinsic importance or imperative urgency.

In Lingis's more specifically responsive agency, distinct from Kant's universal rational agency of "what anyone would do," some points of divergence arise and some possible objections should be addressed. First, because Lingis's conception of agency is role-specific, it is not a completely contingent or empirically particular agency. The lifeguard or the mother is not a singularly unique agent, but an agent whose role arises in an imperatively commanded situation. In this way, Lingis's moral agent of responsibility arises in response to an imperative that is found somewhere between Kant's categorical and hypothetical imperatives. Second, it may seem that Lingis's role-specific agent is entangled in the teleology of a mere *technē* attempting to achieve an empirical outcome, as with hypothetical imperatives. But Lingis's emphasis on the urgency found in the imperative character of these situations belies their hypothetically imperative status in two ways: (1) the urgency to which I respond is *not* an imperative that I am free from outset not to recognize, and (2) the success of the response is not as important as the response itself. For instance, there

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162. *Ibid.*, 220.

163. *Ibid.*, 222.



is an imperative that comes with death; death comes on its own, is completely exterior to us, and outstrips any possibility of overcoming it, conceptualizing it, or thinking it through. I cannot save my old friend from death, yet I can be there for him. I can accompany him up to the end to keep him from dying alone. Third, it could be argued that Lingis's role-specificity has returned us to Heidegger's agency of *das Man*, the "they-self." *Das Man* is not the "anyone" of Kant's rational agency, but *das Man* is nonetheless "anyone" as the nexus of instrumental relation. It seems quite fair to say that Heidegger's *das Man* is subject to hypothetical, or instrumental, imperatives, whereas Lingis's role-specific agency remains distinct from Heidegger's and Kant's "anyone."

Lingis finds Kant's portrait of unconditional rational agency to be problematic in another way. By making moral situations unconditional, Kant, Lingis argues, eliminates the motivating force for a decision and subsequent action. Yet, "the action to be undertaken will be a sensuous particular, which will have to be *desired*."<sup>164</sup> Kant's edict of the suspension of all sensuous desire in subordination to the categorical imperative so that a rational action can be conceived is "an action for which one could supply the reason, the law."<sup>165</sup> But in doing so, is not the motivating force eliminated for a decision and subsequent action? Kant's notion of force in the moral law as *Triebfeder* does not suffice for our responsible actions, which always take place in specific and particular situations. Again, instead of Kant's rational agency, Lingis argues for a specified agency when we deliberate about what should be done. Here Lingis's specific agent responds not to universal law but to the intrinsic importance in the situation that imposes itself on us as "what I have to do."

With an emphasis on the particulars of action, Lingis suggests that "what has to be done requires attention to the concrete particulars of this situation, and the thinking that recognizes *what I have to do* is ad hoc."<sup>166</sup> By *ad hoc*, Lingis means that the rational looks toward specifics instead of the universal: "Envisaging the situation in general terms may well suggest that the kind of action and the kind of implements that resolved a similar situation may work here. It may determine a certain kind of action to be necessary: if this child has cholera, immediate rehydration is required. But ad hoc thinking is required to determine if this child has cholera and how the means of rehydration are to be acquired and administered."<sup>167</sup> This *ad hoc* thinking calls to mind Aristotle's notion of *kairos* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. *Kairos* is the decisiveness of flexible reason, which must take into account the particular circumstances for moral action, analogous to the arts of medicine and navigation. Aristotle explains: "... matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than

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164. *Ibid.*, 219 (italics added).

165. *Ibid.*

166. *Ibid.*, 220.

167. *Ibid.*

matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or set of precepts, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion (πρός τού καιρόν), as happens also in the art of medicine or navigation.”<sup>168</sup>

Lingis, in emphasizing particular situations, finds imperative urgency in the situations themselves. For Lingis, although the rational does not equate with the required, imperative urgency still directs and governs our appropriate response to situations. Here rational justifications of actions may be pointless and, in fact, falsify the imperative involved. It is the intrinsic importance of a situation that requires action, with a force that intrudes with the imperative urgency of what one has to do. In fact, “to insert a reasoning between that imperative force and my action is only to dally and hold up the urgency of what I have to do.”<sup>169</sup> If someone is drowning, and I am the only one who can swim, I must come to the rescue. I snuff out a smoldering cigarette in the sequoia forest because I must save the ancient trees. Arguing against Kant’s principle of rational moral law, Lingis contends that these examples are contingencies and not principles; nonetheless, the imperative involved is not merely hypothetical nor is it categorical or rational. Because these contingencies emerge without reason, our actions concerning them do not require rational justification. “The sequoia forest, this stranger in danger of drowning, are contingent realities and not principles. The sequoias come into existence by random genetic mutation. Behind the birth of this stranger I could not find his existence programmed in the laws of nature, but only extremely improbable accidents. As I do not find reasons for the genetic mutation of the improbable accidents which make these individuals exist, I do not find reasons for my act to save just these.”<sup>170</sup> In this way, Lingis emphasizes the imperative force of situations, not their rational or principled form, that requires my response. In this way, Lingis has decoupled imperative force and form, granting imperative force an intelligibility in sensation, without resorting to rational form or principles. It is not rational principles on which I act but “the intrinsic importance of what had required action to conserve it, rescue it, or repair it that intruded with the imperative force, the urgency, of what I had to do.”<sup>171</sup> In Lingis’s view of the moral agent, subjectivity still begins in subjection to an imperative – not in subjection to the form of imperative law but to the originary imperative force that orients form *a priori*.

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168. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book II*, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, trans. W. D. Ross, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1947) 333, 1104a4-9.

169. *Ibid.*, 220.

170. *Ibid.*, 221.

171. *Ibid.*

## LINGIS'S CRITIQUE OF PHENOMENOLOGY VIA THE IMPERATIVE

What we hope to have shown in the first part of this chapter is Lingis's phenomenological analysis of the force of the imperative that Kant had overlooked in his formulations of imperative law. In this next part, we address Lingis's critical analysis of phenomenological force in the doctrines of two phenomenologists, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas. As evidenced by his translations of and introductions to some of Merleau-Ponty's and Levinas's seminal texts, Lingis's work is firmly grounded in phenomenology. Lingis's own writings, however, have shown an affinity for the imperative character in Kant's doctrine. With some revisions to Kant's imperatives, Lingis has undertaken an explication of imperatives in the phenomenology of perception and morals. With his view toward Kant, Lingis has uncovered imperatives at work in the doctrines of the contemporary phenomenological masters. Lingis, like Kant, claims that we must begin with an imperative so that we can begin with intelligibility. But unlike Kant, Lingis finds imperative intelligibility in sensation and its elements, and begins with an "elemental imperative" that precedes Levinas's imperative alterity and culminates in "sublime action."

### *Lingis on Merleau-Ponty's Imperatives of Perception*

Lingis discerns an imperative structure in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of *praktognosia* of perceptual objects as objectives, as accomplishments for our tasks. Thus, objects are akin to hypothetical imperatives. However, the fields in which they present themselves, and the reality of the world, are categorically imperative. In this way, Lingis forges the hinge for phenomenology and Kantism. First, "the Husserlian arguments against psychologism remain valid; the thought that must be empirical and must be rational reveals not a psychological determinism but subjection to an imperative."<sup>172</sup> In regard to Kant, his *a priori* forms were found to be imperative in rational cognition and are located in the mind. Merleau-Ponty, Lingis finds, reverses the Kantian order of representative thought's primacy over things as representations. "The perceived world ... is not an organization one represents but an ordinance that commands.... The world is imperative, is as an imperative."<sup>173</sup>

In Merleau-Ponty's reversal of the Kantian order of thought and things, things are tasks for our accomplishment, directives for the mind's attention. Lingis notes that in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty identifies the forms that are imperative not by formal analysis of the logical forms of valid thought (as Kant does) but by a phenomenological analysis

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172. Alphonso Lingis, "Intentionality and the Imperative." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 3, issue no. 135 (September 1994): 290.

173. *Ibid.*, 291.

of the world, in which the given is not a mere sensory medley lacking consistency or coherence. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is geared toward things, finalized toward perceiving consistent and coherent Gestalts. This ordering force of perception is not found in the mind or universal rational law but in the consistently, and categorically imperative, unfolding world. "The world, the consistent and coherent order, is not given in perception; it is the array of directions and directives that requires and commands the advance from one objective to the next. The ordering force of any particular objective derives from the imperative character of the world in which it emerges; no thing can materialize, no objective take form save on the levels of the world."<sup>174</sup> Even though objects as objectives resemble hypothetical imperatives, the platform on which they stage their events is categorically imperative. "As the reality of any thing is conditional upon confirmation by the further exploration of the world but the reality of the world is not conditional, the imperative character of every particular object is hypothetical but the imperative character of the world of objectives, the practicable levels of reality, is categorical. Things are for perception tasks, hypothetical imperatives, because the world is categorically imperative."<sup>175</sup> Because one cannot perceive the coherence of the entire layout, one catches onto it practically, by adjusting to and following levels. Summarizing the imperative character of the reality of the world, which cannot be perceived as a whole, Lingis concludes: "The world is there as a set of directions and directives."<sup>176</sup> Likewise, in general, Lingis takes the movements of perception in Merleau-Ponty's doctrine as neither reactions and empirical adjustments nor intentional and teleological acts, but responses to imperative directives.<sup>177</sup>

#### *Freedom and the Imperative Themmatization of the World*

The final chapter of *Phenomenological Explanations*, "Intuition of Freedom, Intuition of Law,"<sup>178</sup> gives us some preliminary indications of Lingis's relation to phenomenology and Kant. While elucidating imperatives in Merleau-Ponty's *praktognosia*, Lingis critiques phenomenological intentionality by explicating, via Levinas, the elemental medium that supports the perception of objects and objectives. Because the sensuous element is substance rather than schema, consciousness is not primarily a perceptive intentionality but is from the first an affective consciousness that is sustained and supported in the elemental medium.

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174. *Ibid.*

175. *Ibid.*

176. *Ibid.*

177. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 4.

178. Alphonso Lingis, "Intuition of Freedom, Intuition of Law," in *Phenomenological Explanations* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 103-12.

Finally, although the world order is given as imperative in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, Lingis concludes that it is Kant who thematizes this world order as imperative, whereas Merleau-Ponty takes the world as simply given. With the world intuited in freedom and thematized in Kantian restraint, Lingis discerns subjectivity to be not a simple locus of intersecting currents of energy but a cause, commencement, and source of resources. The self is a sustaining force with a singular core of substance to which appeals can be made and enabling the capacity to submit to imperatives.

In "Intuition of Freedom, Intuition of Law," Lingis sketches the contrasting views of freedom in phenomenology and Kantism. He concludes that the insight into freedom is not simply given, as phenomenology claims, but is given as an imperative, which is more in agreement with Kantian philosophy. Because phenomenology set out to make philosophy a positive discourse justified by the evidence of insights,<sup>179</sup> it is also a phenomenology of action. Lingis adds that something like an intuition of freedom is distinctive to this phenomenology of action. Here, freedom would be a given, as the intuition of freedom cannot occur in a representational consciousness but in affectivity, as with Sartre's analysis of anxiety at the cliff's edge<sup>180</sup> or Heidegger's explication of anxiety in the face of nothingness.<sup>181</sup> Heideggerian anxiety contains the immediate, non-discursive insight of one's own nature as disconnected from universal nature. In Sartre's analysis, one's own present state is a causal inefficacy with regard to its continuation – one will have to conjure up an act to ensure one's being there in the next moment.

Lingis then contrasts this phenomenological view of freedom with the Kantian view of the form and force of law, with its imperative as the first fact:

Kantian philosophy does not recognize this kind of negative intuition. For it intuitions are positive, positing; what is intuited is content, and forms. But there is also a primary and irreducible givenness of law. Law, however, not simply as form, instantiated in the recurrences empirical observation formulates. Law as force, as command – an imperative for laws. The imperative is a

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179. As with Husserl's "principle of all principles" in *Ideas I*, "that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition." *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 44.

180. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 66-9.

181. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 228-35.

fact, is the first fact, for facts can be recognized as facts by a mind that thinks, that is, formulates representations of the universal and necessary. This fact is a force intuited by an intellectual sensibility, enjoining the vital complex upon which it presses to make itself productive of acts that exemplify the universal and the necessary. The insight prior to all insights into facts is not an insight into freedom, but an insight into law.<sup>182</sup>

With Kant, freedom is not the “given” starting point of consciousness; rather, it is the imperative force and form of law that organizes consciousness as obligation. The disconnection from the causal efficacy of nature, which is freedom, is not freely posited as in Sartrean phenomenology but is commanded by an imperative:

The supposition of freedom – that the executive will and the physiological means it commands can be disconnected from the causal efficacy of the particulars of nature that press upon them – is not, however, just freely posited without intuitive evidence; it is commanded. For thought has to think that it can command its will so as to construct a representation of all nature according to universal and necessary laws. It has to think that it can will to think. It has to believe that it can command its will so as to subject itself to law, to be obedient.<sup>183</sup>

Lingis then critiques two of phenomenology’s central philosophical claims, which he argues that Kantian philosophy addresses more fully: 1) having isolated a primary and irreducible intuition in the empty locus of freedom; and 2) insight into the operations of the psychophysical agent’s freedom hinging on the phenomenology of perception of *objects as objectives*. Lingis will conclude that the first claim of an empty locus of freedom is false, as subjectivity is discovered in subjection to an imperative.<sup>184</sup> On the second point, Lingis agrees that there is a perspectival structure intrinsic to any cognitive or practicable field, which is due to the structural necessity of the perceptually inobservable observing body. Here the intuition of freedom consists in recognizing the evident perceptual inexplorability of one’s sentient body. It is the unobserved body that is apodictic source of freedom for the phenomenology of perception. Furthermore, the efficacy of Sartrean freedom consists in the power to posit

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182. Lingis, “Intuition of Freedom, Intuition of Law,” in *Phenomenological Explanations*, 103.

183. *Ibid.*, 104.

184. This view may be a source of fruitful contention with Hegel’s doctrine of negativity, which is also much discussed and developed by Slavoj Žižek.

goals. However, as Lingis notes, “Sartre’s phenomenology passes over in silence, however, the problem, to Kantism closed to all insight, of the efficacy of this goal-positing consciousness to activate the executive forces of the material body.”<sup>185</sup>

In Lingis’s analysis, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology set out to supply this efficacy by describing the irreducible perception of the body as a diagram of posture and materialization of schematic movements. The axes of the force of posture are not determined by gravity; rather, the phenomenal body itself generalizes its positions into postures, stylizes its steps into gaits, and schematizes its movements as soon as the limb begins to stir. Also in Lingis’s view, in accord with our earlier view of perception as an activity that involves the will, Merleau-Ponty deliberately brought together perception and action to the point where their analyses are inseparable. Perception is already action because the perceiver, in going beyond the sensuous appearances to intersensorial and constant things, is not a purely intellectual synthesis positing identity but a motor centering of the multiple surfaces of the sentient body on a term. It is the focusing of the two eyes that replaces monocular images with one visual term. In this way, perception is not intellectual identification added to sensation; it is prehension. In addition to showing that the positioning of the sensible thing as a whole in the perceptual field is effected by the centering of a whole corporeal schema upon it, Merleau-Ponty showed that perception is an activity, a taking hold (*prise*) with eyes that focus or hands that grasp, that actively informs itself of the inner form, vibrancy, or resistance of things. Lingis adds that if perception is motility, conversely action is perception. To see something is to see how to reach it, to reach for something is to perceive it, to capture its form across distance from the start. Freedom permeates this movement of perception, and the perceived field is the effect of this freedom: “The freedom one intuits in perceiving one’s own body, of the body of another, according to its postural axes, its gait, its schemes of prehension and avoidance, is everywhere in the perceiving organism. The perceived field – of which we cannot ask if it is real, for the real is ... what we perceive – is the effect of this freedom.”<sup>186</sup>

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185. *Ibid.*, 106.

186. *Ibid.*, 107; citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), xvi: “I aim at and perceive a world.... For if I am able to talk about ‘dreams’ and ‘reality,’ to bother my head about the distinction between the imaginary and the real, and cast doubt upon the ‘real,’ it is because this distinction is already made by me before any analysis; it is because I have an experience of the real as of the imaginary, and the problem then becomes one not of asking how critical thought can provide for itself secondary equivalents of this distinction, but of making explicit our primordial knowledge of the ‘real,’ of describing our perception of the world as that upon which our idea of truth is forever based.

After elucidating Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception as a bodily activity against a Kantian synthesis of intellectual identification added to sensation, Lingis turns toward Kantism to account for the imperative intelligibility of reality in the "free" phenomenal field itself. Lingis, instead of supporting the more radical existential freedom of Sartre, notes that "yet there is constraint everywhere in this world."<sup>187</sup> The apparent sizes, shapes, and colors of things refer to the real ones in order to compose a coherent thing that is constant in its settings. "One has to perceive things, has to perceive the world."<sup>188</sup> But, Lingis insists, this imperative to be in the world is better thematized by Kant than by Merleau-Ponty. For Merleau-Ponty, sometimes this imperative is set forth as an essential necessity, as when a figure against a background is not a trait of perception but *is* perception. Lingis takes this to be Merleau-Ponty's version of Husserl's dictum of intentionality, that every consciousness is conscious of something. Here the goal of phenomenology is to show that its reflective procedures make prereflective experience the mirror image of the cognitive operations of reflection, but Lingis wonders whether this has been missed in what Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have put forth as intuitionism.

Before concluding that the reality of the world is put forth as a Kantian categorical imperative, Lingis makes a detour into Levinas's doctrine of sensation in order to critique the phenomenology of intentionality, whether of Husserl's requirement of objects as consciousness or Merleau-Ponty's necessity of perception as figures against a background. Before sensibility is the perception of forms, it is sensual, sensitive to matter and substance. Things are found in the sensuous medium, but our sentient relationship with the sensuous elements is precisely not an intentionality. Agreeing with Levinas, Lingis writes: "The sensuous element is not schema but substance; it supports us, sustains us, is sustenance, its content contents us."<sup>189</sup> There is consciousness in our immersion in the elements, but because it precedes the intentionality of things or objects, this consciousness is affective not perceptive. Lingis then discusses Levinas's doctrine of sensation in a critique of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's concept of freedom as the source of perception in the subject's "pro-ject" of transcendence:

The subjective movement in sensuality is not a transcending of the here and now to the beyond – toward the sequence of the profiles or toward the ideal – but describes a movement of involution. There is not the freedom Sartre and Merleau-Ponty claimed to intuit in perception – ec-static thrust out of one's state of being,

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We must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive."

187. *Ibid.*

188. *Ibid.*

189. *Ibid.*, 108.



and beyond the actually given and presented object-objective; there is being-in one's own substance, insistence rather than existence, the involution of enjoyment in the medium in which one finds oneself.<sup>190</sup>

But, in addition to our enjoyment in the elements, action is demanded of us. And here is where Kant's imperative comes to the fore; the imperative is not merely hypothetical in its action but is categorical in the requirement for an ordered world in order to act. That it is not object-objectives that make one act, but the imperative to act, and not merely react to pleasurable or painful images, is shown by Kant to be what makes us objectify sensuous givens into things:

Action, the ordered assembling and adjusting of means in a practicable field, requires things, which require a world – and not only the immediate correlates of appetite, phantasms conjured up by hunger. Thus, as existentialism said, one has to be-in-the-world. One has to perceive things,prehend goals, form a world about oneself structured by a *logos endiathetos* by which everything is compossible. Why? What is this imperative that makes our existence a being-in-the-world? For Sartre and Merleau-Ponty this imperative is a fact whose imperative force they did not thematize. Kant did, understanding the imperative which makes our experience an experience of nature to be an imperative for the universal and the necessary, found immediately incumbent on the mind in its commerce with its own givens. It is then not thing-goals that make one act; the imperative that one act, and not merely react to pleasurable or painful images, is shown to be also what makes us objectify sensuous givens into things.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, as in Kantism, it is the imperative that is given, not the world that is simply given, as in existential phenomenology. In explaining the necessity of the primacy of Kant's imperative for phenomenology, Lingis adds the distinction of force and form, which phenomenology can give Kantism: "The imperative is given, given to the sensibility, albeit a 'sensibility of understanding,' a purely intellectual and nowise sensuous sensibility. The *phenomenon* of the imperative is not, however, the principles in which it is formulated and thus given form, represented in the mind. The formulation, the representation, is a product of the mind, whereas

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190. *Ibid.*; citing Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 135-40.

191. *Ibid.*, 109.

for the mind to recognize the imperative is for it to recognize its own dependence – the dependence of its spontaneous productivity on a force that binds it.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, it is not Merleau-Ponty’s object-objectives of *praktognosia* or Heidegger’s instrumental tasks of *Zeug* that are first given; the imperative is first given to the mind that is, from the first, dependent on the spontaneous productivity of a force that binds it. Lingis specifies that this force, this phenomenon, of the imperative is not the mind’s formal principle; rather, it is a binding immediacy and thus a force. The mind’s productivity is dependent on submitting from the first to the force of the “first fact” of the imperative. In this way, Lingis again brings force to the fore, prior to formulation, even in Kant’s terms of the imperative.

Kant, too, had noted the receptivity for force necessary for being able to formulate the formal commands of law in his doctrine of moral feeling. As Lewis White Beck<sup>193</sup> notes, Kant had not banished moral feeling from a positive position in ethics although he disallowed feeling to be the source of the rational principle (as in Epicureanism or Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*). For Kant, moral feeling has an implicit susceptibility to the force (which phenomenology makes explicit) of the moral imperative, which the mind subsequently formulates into law. Kant tells us that respect for the law is the incentive for morality, but Beck argues that despite what Kant says, the law itself is not the incentive. Beck observes that “a law is just not the sort of thing that can be an incentive.”<sup>194</sup> In order for the moral law to be formulated in must first be felt as a force, as seen in the phenomenon of respect. According to Beck, moral feeling, stripped to its essentials, is the same as respect. In this way, Beck distinguishes the feeling of respect from Hume’s inherent or specialized capacity of moral feeling. Furthermore, Kant acknowledged the receptive capacity of feeling to precede the formulations of law in the phenomenon of respect or duty. Even though for Kant there is no antecedent feeling tending to morality, Kant allows for the capacity of receptivity, which indicates that the general capacity of “feeling” precedes having a specific feeling, *viz.* respect. Attempting to clear up the confusion over the seemingly ambiguous role of feeling in Kant’s moral doctrine, Beck writes “A man must have feeling before he can have a feeling.” Beck admits that this is perhaps a not very lucid way of saying a simple thing, but it does show that there is no evidence of a fundamental confusion in Kant’s attitude toward moral feeling, as when Kant states: “Sensuous feeling, which is the basis of all our inclinations, is the condition of the particular feeling we call respect.”<sup>195</sup> In terms of force and form, in Beck’s view, imperative force

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192. *Ibid.*

193. Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 223-5.

194. *Ibid.*, 221.

195. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 78, 5:75.

precedes its form. Thus, the *feeling* of respect precedes the formulation of moral law; feeling is indicative of force.

Similarly, in Lingis's view, the phenomenon of the imperative is given to the intellectual sensibility, not given in its formal principles which follow from this force. Lingis adds that in the *Groundwork*, Kant took the real phenomenon of the imperative to be the "person." Lingis takes the phenomenon of respect to be a distinctive intuition of the force in the form: "The real *phenomenon* of the imperative is what Kant calls the person, that is, the other intuited as an instance of behavior regulated by inwardly represented law.... Respect for the other is respect for the law that rules in another, a distinctive intuition of the force in the forms of his behavior that commands me also."<sup>196</sup>

In this way, Lingis concurs with Kant that the other person as the object of respect is not deduced from diagrams of natural law but that respect is prior to any interpretation. Here form brings an immediate force, which is not an empirical induction of a principle from sensory data that would lead to a form of law:

One should not imagine that respect follows interpretation – that I interpret his positions and moves which I empirically perceive as instantiating a form of law whose force I have known in myself, within my own faculty of reason. It is the reverse – I take the positions and moves of another, which are visibly interpretable as instantiating the ineluctable forms of natural laws, as instead instantiating subjection to principle his representational faculty finds incumbent on itself, because from the first I take the presence of another to concern me, to imperatively command me with whatever positions he takes and moves he makes.<sup>197</sup>

Thus, Lingis maintains that the force of the imperative precedes its form, even in the Kantian phenomenon of respect. Imperative force, which is not derived from principles or empirical deductions, makes possible the feeling of respect as respect for the form of law. Continuing with his insight into imperative force, Lingis turns to Levinas's doctrine of alterity to critique what he deems to be Kant's importation of theoretical reason into imperative force. For Levinas, Kant distorts the notion of respect by making it an attribute theoretical reason, in that Kant's imperative of respect is an imperative for the universal and the necessary. However: "The force of this imperative has to be disengaged from this form with which theoretical reason interprets it – the force incumbent on *me*: an appeal that singles me

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196. Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations*, 109-10.

197. *Ibid.*, 110.

out, a command that orders me.”<sup>198</sup> It is this force that singles me out, as “first person singular” (although originating in the accusative of the Other’s appeal to me), and does not do so via a paradigm of shared respect for the rational law within us all. Just as respect is not commanded by an empirical paradigm, it is not ordered by the paradigm of the principles of theoretical reason: “The other does not command me by presenting me with a paradigm but by singling me out and appealing to me. The imperative is not an imperative for the universal and the necessary; it is an imperative that I respond, arise and stand in the first person singular, to answer for his contingent and particular necessities, for his wants and failings.”<sup>199</sup> Once again, we can see an imperative for action, as our response to the appeal of the Other. Thus, subjectivity does not arise in the midst of sensuous enjoyment. “It takes form when one perceives things as objectives, it arises in a world.”<sup>200</sup> Lingis argues that being in the world presupposes an imperative that is evidence of our subjectivity as a sensitive substance of sustaining force. “The subject as agent, subjected to an imperative, is a singular core of substance, of sustaining force, that can be employed for the support of another, that can be appealed to.”<sup>201</sup> This sensitive substance is not a principle but what allows be receptive, to feel, the force of the imperative.

Lingis then draws conclusions from this presupposed imperative that turn toward Kantism in their critique of both phenomenology’s conception of subjectivity as an empty locus of freedom and of the structuralist view of subjectivity, as in Michel Foucault’s closing lines in *The Order of Things* on the historical construct of “man,” which “would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”<sup>202</sup> Closer to Kantism, Lingis argues for the binding force of an imperative that gives form to the human subject in its imperative subjection. In this way, the constitution of a human agent in its own right is dependent on an imperative. As with Kant’s conception of freedom, freedom is not simply given but is given in imperative obligation, which shows that we are free but obligated subjects. The requirement of the world in which subjectivity finds itself is categorically imperative. Thus, subjectivity is not an artificial, scientific, anthropological, or supplemental construct; subjectivity discovers itself in subjection to an imperative:

If I take myself not as a simple locus of intersecting  
currents of energy coming from the most remote corners

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198. *Ibid.*; citing Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 102-13.

199. *Ibid.*, 111.

200. *Ibid.*

201. *Ibid.*

202. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 387.

of the universe and from time immemorial, but as a cause, a commencement, a source of resources, that is not the result of an intuition of myself as that supplement that makes a profile into a thing, a possible synthesis into a practical goal. It results from finding myself subject to an imperative. As Kant thought, the “I can” is given in an “I must.” The constituting of the sensuous organism as an agent in its own right is dependent on the intuition of an imperative. The freedom of that agent is not given in a primitive intuition independent of the world or of the imperative that requires a world.<sup>203</sup>

Because I take myself as “a cause, a commencement, a source of resources,” Lingis has found the apodictic not in the aporia of intentional consciousness of Husserl’s phenomenological *epochē* or in Merleau-Ponty’s unobserved observing body but in the imperative, which issues its own binding force on subjectivity to make things consistent and coherent and accounts for the practicable sphere of the reality of the world.

*Lingis’s Critique of Levinas’s Metaphysics of Alterity*

Although Lingis’s works show strong affinities with Levinas’s doctrine of alterity, Lingis offers a major revision of it by bringing an “elemental imperative” to Levinas’s notion of the elements. For Levinas, the face is not simply one phenomenon among others because, as an epiphany, it carries the metaphysical traces of God’s absolute otherness. Lingis, however, takes the face to be an element without metaphysical traces. For him, the face is an elemental substance with eyes that not only appeal, but shine and radiate directives. In these directives of the face, Lingis discerns an elemental imperative rather than an imperative of metaphysical alterity. The elemental imperative, Lingis argues, is prior to the encounter with alterity; alterity takes place on and appeals to elemental ground.

Somewhat like Kant’s command of reason to be in command of itself, the elemental imperative commands itself in the subject’s resources: sight is to become luminous, hearing is to become vibrant, thought must deepen and become profound. In addition, there is the elemental imperative issued from life itself in the earth, water, atmosphere, and light: that life may flourish to become support, oceanic, aerial, spiritual, and radiant. In this regard, Lingis’s elemental imperative has much in common with the dynamics of subjectivity in Kant’s doctrine of the sublime, because Kant’s moral subject is finite whereas Levinas’s is infinite. It is the subject’s finitude for Kant, and affectivity as finitude for Lingis, that makes possible the feelings of respect and of the sublime. Levinas’s subject, however, is

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203. Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations*, 111-2.

characterized by the infinity of its ethical relation with God's absolute alterity. More in line with Kant's view, Lingis's imperative to become elemental elucidates a doctrine of sublime action (instead of an ethics of infinity) that goes beyond needs and safeguards, and produces what is important in itself: expansive beauty to which we dedicate our lives and in whose service we subjugate our hedonist inclinations.

## ELEMENTAL AND SUBLIME IMPERATIVES

### *The Elemental Imperative*

Lingis likewise criticizes the metaphysical aspect of Levinas's doctrine of alterity, with its absolute contestation of our sensuous contentment in the elemental realm. Levinas's imperative is characterized by a transcendence that unconditionally orders before being formulated. As in Judaic theology, God is the unformulable one, to whom is assigned the pseudo-formula, the pseudonym "God." In Lingis's view, this solution is problematic for the relationship between the sensibility for the elemental and the sensibility for alterity. For Lingis, Levinas's solution of an absolute, unconditional, transcendental, and unformulatable ethics of alterity that precedes the elemental leaves the relationship of sensibility between these realms "not only phenomenologically unexplicated but unexplicatable."<sup>204</sup> In response to Levinas's alterity as a contestation of our contentment in the elemental, Lingis criticizes as unviably metaphysical the concepts of pleasure, enjoyment, and contentment with which Levinas has understood the sensibility that is prior to the perception of things.

As an example of non-metaphysical, phenomenological alterity, Lingis cites Heidegger's incorporation of the ordination to other persons in the very constitution of implements. An implement is not first for me and then by external relation destined for others; equipment (*Zeug*) is "always already" for anyone. Similar to Heidegger's view of the Other's disclosure in the phenomenal world instead of a metaphysically preceding relation to alterity, Lingis argues not for a metaphysical imperative but an elemental imperative: "...if one is backed up into the presence in the elemental in the involution of enjoyment by the demand imperatively addressed to one, then the imperative is constitutive of the very presence of the elemental; the elemental is not there as given but as an imperative."<sup>205</sup> In this way, Lingis places the imperative for alterity not in any pre-established metaphysical realm but in the elemental sphere itself. By placing the imperative in the elemental realm, he is able to fashion a doctrine that not only gives the elements an imperative character but that also phenomenologically accounts for the Other in the elemental. For Lingis, the encounter with the Other is not ordered by a preceding metaphysical relation; rather, the elemental

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204. Lingis, "The Elemental Imperative," 17.

205. *Ibid.*

imperative is prior, and alterity takes place on and appeals to elemental ground.

To explicate his elemental imperative, Lingis returns to Merleau-Ponty's analysis of levels through which things are given as directives. Against Levinas's notion of the closure of contentment in sensation, Lingis writes:

One does not see the light, as a particular objectified before one; one does not enjoy the light by a closing spiral of involution; one sees with the light. The light which clears space, which establishes a level, orders the eye. Earth is a nonobject, cannot be observed; when one circulates on its surface, one does not synthetically advance toward the total series of its profiles. Its nonweight supports all weights.... These world-rays are for Merleau-Ponty not phenomenally given to the movement of closure of contentment but as levels are directives that a priori lay an order on the eye and the hand that moves that gropes for objectives.<sup>206</sup>

Further citing Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of levels as elemental but in contrast to Levinas's contentment in the elemental, Lingis adds:

We think that the world in Merleau-Ponty's sense – the light that forms a level along which color-contrasts phosphoresce, the key about which the melody rises and falls, the murmur of nature from which a cry rises, the rumble of the city beneath which the moan of despair descends – these levels themselves form in a medium without dimensions or horizons – the luminosity more vast than any panorama that the light outlines in it; the vibrancy that prolongs itself outside the city and beyond the murmur of nature, the darkness more abysmal than the night from which the day dawns and into which it confides itself.<sup>207</sup>

Whereas Levinas's imperative of ethics metaphysically precedes elemental contentment, Lingis, carrying through Merleau-Ponty's insight into levels, has found an imperative that is contemporaneous with the elemental and that does not terminate in the self-closure of contentment. Here Lingis pushes this notion of the imperative given in the elemental farther than the directives of Merleau-Ponty's levels. Somewhat reminiscent

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206. *Ibid.*, 17-8.

207. *Ibid.*, 19.

of the active autonomy of Kant's command of reason to be in command of itself, the elemental imperative commands itself as sight is to become luminous and hearing is to become vibrant.

Next, via the elemental imperative, Lingis offers two quick and related criticisms of Merleau-Ponty's definition of imperatives in perception so that he can distinguish the elemental imperative. Lingis argues against Merleau-Ponty's claims that: (1) there is a telos of sensibility and *praktognosia* in the perception of objects and (2) every withdrawal from the world is a withdrawal of the sentient body into itself. Here Lingis first argues against Merleau-Ponty's telos of perception of objects as objectives, and against the finality of things and the world as the finality of sensory imperatives. As Lingis says about this phenomenological purpose in perception: "The visible, the world, remains the telos of sensibility assigned by the imperatives that order the space between things."<sup>208</sup> Lingis's elemental imperative, however, is closer to Levinas's notion of the *apeiron*, which culminates not in a teleology but in a sustaining medium of levels without dimensions or horizons. It is important to note here that Lingis and Levinas are not speaking of the elemental or an *apeiron* as behind the scenes. The world is not distinct in detachment from the elements but is set in these sensuous depths. As Lingis argues: "We submit that the world itself is set in depths, in uncharted abysses, where the vortices in which the body that lets loose its hold on the levels of the world, the dreaming, the visionary, the hallucinating, the lascivious body, gets drawn and drags with it, not things, but those appearances without anything appearing, those phantoms, caricatures, and doubles that even in the high noon of the world float and scintillate over the contours of things and the planes of the world."<sup>209</sup> Lingis emphasizes the letting go of the levels of the world in order to show the non-teleological character of the elements in contrast with Merleau-Ponty's teleology of perceptual objects as objectives.

This immersion in sensation leads us to Lingis's second criticism of Merleau-Ponty's doctrine, that every withdrawal from the world is a withdrawal of the body into itself. Instead of a withdrawal into the body, Lingis sees an involution in the elemental in any withdrawal from the world. "We think that to withdraw from the illuminated surfaces and contours is phenomenologically to give oneself over to the night, to be drawn not to the body but by an elemental imperative.... We think that the sensibility that withdraws from the world is drawn not into itself, but subjected to the elemental."<sup>210</sup> Thus, any retreat from the world and things is not a retreat into the autonomy of one's own body or into one's own pure and *a priori* sensibility. Rather, one gives oneself over to the elemental, which precedes and supports the world and things. When we withdraw from the world, we are "subjected to the elemental," subjected to the elemental

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208. *Ibid.*, 18.

209. *Ibid.*

210. *Ibid.*, 18-9.



imperative. In this way, Lingis's view probes more deeply into the elemental than Levinas's analysis of the sensation which supports perception. Levinas's foundational imperative (in *Otherwise Than Being's* more developed account than in *Totality and Infinity*) is the appeal of alterity; it is the Other who, from the start, contests our contentment of sensation and who appeals for my resources and my response. Lingis, however, remains in the elemental sphere and sees an imperative here, on which any encounter with the face of the Other takes place. The elemental imperative precedes the world and precedes any perception, even of the human face.

This substance of the face, this exposed vulnerability, seems to us to belong to the elemental. The face that faces does not only demand things. The eyes that speak do, it seems to us, shine; in them the light dwells and radiates its directives. The body that stands before one, at the distance of alterity, that demands that one take a position, answer for an attitude, that orders one, draws the repose of its position from the earth, makes itself the figure in which the ground demands that one ground. In undertaking to answer responsibly, in undertaking to secure the ground for what one says and does, it is first to the imperative for ground that the stand for another addresses singularly to one that responds.<sup>211</sup>

Thus, in order to respond to alterity, one must first secure the elemental ground on which one stands, and it is the elemental ground that allows one's responsibility to be called out singularly.

Lingis next develops the elemental imperative beyond the command of involution in the sensuous substance that supports the world and things. Here, the elemental imperative commands its own extension and self-sustenance. Instead of maintaining the surfaces of perception, the elemental imperative promotes depth. In commanding the deepening of perception, this imperative promotes profundity:

Is not our stand which enjoys the support of earth also subjected to its order; to support and to ground? Does not the vertigo that gives itself over to the abyss that descends and descends without end obey, not the imperative of the depth to maintain surfaces, but another imperative that depth promotes and is: to deepen? Does not the hearing that hears, not the particular songs, cries, and noises of the world, but the vibrancy beyond the corridors of the world obey the imperative of addressed to hearing to become

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211. *Ibid.*, 20.

vibrant? Is there not in the earth, water, atmosphere, and light that life has produced on this planet the imperative that life live to become support, to become oceanic, to become aerial, spiritual, to become lambent?<sup>212</sup>

Thus, the elemental imperative that supports life commands its living subjects – the elements that support life and the world issue their own imperatives that living subjects also become support. This elemental imperative is also an imperative of the sublime that directs human action to become thoughtful and sensitive to the heights and depths of the *apeiron*.

### *The Sublime*

In light of his elemental imperative and its own extension into the sublime, Lingis's teaching has implications that are closer to Kant's finite subject than to Levinas's infinite subject. The finitude of Kant's moral subject accounts for our sensitivity to the commands of rational law, as well as our awe in the presence of the majesty of the sublime. Lingis expresses the majesty of the sublime as its irreducibility to human use (as with the intrinsic importance of the sequoia forests). Like Kant's view of the incomparable magnitude of the sublime, Lingis's view is characterized by sublime excess and immeasurability: "Things and events reveal themselves as sublime when they demonstrate that before them man is not the measure of all things.... But the sublimity of things and events is recognized in the way they exceed concepts that measure their appropriateness to our projects. Their size, force, splendor, wild freedom, nobility make them insubordinate to the uses we may devise for them."<sup>213</sup> For both Lingis and Kant, our finitude is manifest in our finite sensibility. For Kant, respect, although it is not exactly fear or inclination, is analogous to them because they apply to the finitude of sensibility. With respect, our sensibilities of the finite, natural sphere are bent toward the universal moral law. For Levinas, however, the moral subject is characterized by the infinity of its absolute relation with God, an absolute alterity that precedes any encounter with the human Other. In this way, ethics precedes ontology for Levinas, and the ethical relation is characterized by the infinity of the absolute gap with God, which is carried as a trace in the face of the Other. Lingis's human subject, however, is characterized by finitude with its *mortal* indications in sensation. In this way, Lingis establishes the connection between the ethical and the finite by correlating the moral with the mortal. Mortality and mortification allow us to feel the force of the sublime or the force of the moral imperative. As in Kant's doctrine, it is our finitude that allows for sensuous receptivity and our subjection to imperatives: "... our feeling of

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212. *Ibid.*, 19.

213. Alphonso Lingis, "The Sublime Action," 3 (paper presented at the Ian Moore Memorial Lecture, Towson University, Towson, MD, April 2000).

having been born and our mortality enter into our sensibility as a subjection to the world. Our feeling for things is made of our stupor over finding ourselves born, and our anxiety over finding ourselves dying.... Sensibility, as the capacity to capture the sense or orientation of being, is also susceptibility to being afflicted by their force, sensitivity for them, capacity to be pained by them.”<sup>214</sup> In addition to this susceptibility to sensation, with the elemental imperative Lingis places the relation of the elemental substance of the face on elemental ground, a setting that is not characterized by the infinite but by the boundlessness of the *apeiron* and the finitude of the sensitive subject.<sup>215</sup> This boundlessness is analogous to Kant’s notion of the sublime, whose magnitude is beyond all comparison. But instead of mapping our relation to the sublime in the rational principles of reflective or aesthetic judgment, Lingis heeds the call an elemental imperative that commands us to extend our resources. In this way, the sublime carries an imperative that calls for sublime action.

In sublime action, I find what I must do in my submission to the imperative. For instance, the artist is an artist because being an artist is what she simply had to do. As Frank McCourt has said about his memoir *Angela’s Ashes*, he would have “died howling” had he not written it, knowing that without doing so, it would never be told, heard, or read. Here Lingis finds Kantian obligation in artistic freedom when he asks “is it not that I discover what I want to do only when I discover what I have to do?”: “It never occurred to Beethoven to want to be free to compose or not compose the music he continued to compose long after he could no longer hear it. It is his craft to which the craftsman finds his resources and skills destined that he prizes supremely, not the freedom that allows him to practice it. Someone who falls in love prizes this love supremely. To find oneself in love is to find oneself not free but captivated.”<sup>216</sup> Again, we see Kant’s notion of freedom as obligation at work rather than a view of freedom as liberty. What Kant calls our “pathological” self-interest is to be subjugated to the moral imperative; what Lingis calls our “petty personal interests” are dwarfed and to be ordered by the sublime imperative. Even further for Lingis, one discovers what one is by submitting to the sublime imperative.

Lingis, however, is not the first to have observed this mastery of oneself to be in obedience to an imperative. Nietzsche saw freedom’s constraint in artistic devotion, instead of a “progressive” expansion, in the imperative of any artistic, or moral, endeavor.

Every morality is, as opposed to *laissez aller*, a bit of  
tyranny against “nature”; also against “reason”.... What is

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214. Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations*, 70.

215. For a discussion of the distinction between the boundless and the infinite, see the subsection “The Apeiron” in Chapter 3 above.

216. Lingis, “The Sublime Action,” 20.

essential and inestimable in every morality is that it constitutes a long compulsion.... Every artist knows how far from any feeling of letting himself go his “most natural” state is – the free ordering, placing, disposing, giving form in the moment of “inspiration” – and how strictly and subtly he obeys thousandfold laws precisely then.... What is essential “in heaven and earth” seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be *obedience* over a long period of time and in a *single* direction ... for whose sake it is worth while to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality ... The long unfreedom of the spirit....<sup>217</sup>

This “unfreedom of the spirit,” this Nietzschean mastery of the self, this sovereignty, occurs in obedience to an imperative. What is slavish in oneself, one’s pettiness, ego, and thirst for revenge, is subjugated to one’s artistic and moral impulses of the enduring, the noble, i.e., the sublime. To master oneself is to submit to an imperative of the sublime, which is beyond oneself, beyond Kant’s inclinations of simple desire. Thus, interestingly enough, Kant and Nietzsche can be seen to share a vision of freedom as constraint and devotion.

Lingis, too, expresses sublime action in terms of constraint – the sublime carries an imperative of what we must give ourselves over to, so that our lives can become moral and meaningful. Lingis shares Nietzsche’s sensibility of artistic obligation and Kant’s notion that we are not given over to self-seeking pleasure as we pursue sublime actions. Lingis’s contribution to this type of imperative is the dimension of the elemental in the sublime, which commands our sublime action. With his imperative to become elemental, Lingis’s doctrine of sublime action goes beyond our needs and safeguards, and produces what is important in itself: expansive beauty to which we dedicate our lives and in whose service we subjugate our hedonist inclinations.

Here life is not merely a matter of self-preservation or survival. In fact, we often devote ourselves to what is important in our lives, what is beyond mere survival. This devotion of our energy and resources to what is important exemplifies Lingis’s sublime action: “In much of what we have to do, we safeguard, repair, raise, and produce what we need just in order to live.... But in how much of what we do, we safeguard, repair, raise, and produce what we need for what is important in our lives! We are not just surviving; we are devoted to a lover or a child, we are working to support an invalid mother, ... we are studying medicine or music.... We labor, we exhaust our energies, we sacrifice ourselves to safeguard, repair, raise, and

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217. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 100-1.

produce what is important in itself.”<sup>218</sup> Lingis connects what is important in itself to the elemental imperative that he finds first in sensation and that continues in our sublime devotion to the *apeiron* – the *apeiron* of the elemental limitless sky, the *apeiron* of art’s eternal beauty, and the *apeiron* of time itself as the future: “The fathomless expanse of unpolluted skies, the wild beauty of exotic plants, the harmonious haven a farm is for domesticated and undomesticated animals and plants, the secret dreams of a child and his adventures in years ahead which we will never know, the absolute existence of a perfectly executed sonata by Bartok – for them we harness our energies, subjugate our egoist and hedonist inclinations, make all the resources of our hearts and minds their servants.”<sup>219</sup> Once we begin to contemplate the sublime aspects of our world, we have already given ourselves over to sublime action, for in Lingis’s view, thought is an activity. Specifically, sublime thought is sublime action and devotion to the sublime, to what is important. “When we contemplate the Maya pyramids in the midst of the Yucatan rain forests, the great stupa of Borobudur, the monasteries of Lhasa, the Serengetti flourishing with giraffes and antelopes, the 40-foot-long sperm whales leaping from the Antarctic waters, and the clear skies, the mighty forests, the cascading rivers, we already dedicate our efforts and lives to them.”<sup>220</sup> For Lingis, contemplation is dedication just as thought is obedience, but Lingis shifts the context of Kant’s obedience to theoretical reason to our contemplative dedication to the sublime and the elemental.

Lingis also extends the elemental imperative to our encounter with other persons. Instead of Levinas’s metaphysics of alterity, Lingis speaks of the gap between the subject and the Other as a sublime distance. Although this is a distance that we cannot overcome, it does *not* carry the trace of God’s absolute otherness. As with Lingis’s doctrine of force, however, this sublime distance between the self and the Other has a magnitude that is not reducible to my self or my consciousness: “Facing us, the other stands always apart, judging our response, contesting it or accepting it. She situates herself always further beyond the view we have of her, the picture or representation we make of her. By observing her, forming a representation of her for ourselves, we envision how we can subordinate her to our projects. But by facing us, judging our response to her, she situates herself beyond our intentions, desires, and goals. She faces us in this sublime distance.”<sup>221</sup> Thus, Lingis retains Levinas’s view of the Other as not reducible to me, but Lingis’s sublime distance shows something beyond the suffering and vulnerability that Levinas sees in the Other’s appeal for my response. Here, Lingis is able to bring a positive account to our susceptibility – we are not only subject to the Other’s suffering but also to

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218, Lingis, “The Sublime Action,” 20-1.

219. *Ibid.*, 21.

220. *Ibid.*

221. *Ibid.*, 23.

his or her joy, which has immediate urgency in its unrestricted upsurge of importance. Across the sublime distance the Other's sublime and unrestricted joy appeals to me.

Is it only his or her suffering that appeals urgently to us, has importance, and afflicts us immediately? Is there not always joy in the one who faces us, even joy in his suffering – the joy of finding us? Joy is an upsurge that affirms itself unrestrictedly, and affirms the importance and truth of the face of the landscape illuminated by joy. The one who faces us in joy does not only radiate his joy which we find immediately on ourselves; it requires a response. The thumbs-up that the Brazilian street kid – his mouth too voraciously gobbling our leftover spaghetti to smile or say *obrigado* – gives us a gift that we must cherish in the return of our smile, a gift that we have no right to refuse.<sup>222</sup>

With this “gift that we have no right to refuse,” we can also find a solution via the imperative to Jacques Derrida's critique of Levinas's demand of the subject's “welcome” to the Other. Levinas has described this welcome as a gift.<sup>223</sup> Derrida argues that it is wrong to call the welcome a gift. For if the welcome is a gift, then it is given. Because it is given, it can be retracted.<sup>224</sup> This possibility of retraction would deprive alterity of its constituting force, as subjectivity's response would no longer be required but merely empirical, and thus tenuous, contingent, and conditional generosity. If, however, as Lingis contends with his understanding of the Other's joy to be a gift that we have no right to refuse, Levinas's “welcome” is not simply a gift that is given and can be taken away. With “the gift that we have no right to refuse,” Lingis has shown us how Levinas's primary insight into the imperative can be sustained and how Derrida's objection can be countered. Across Lingis's sublime distance and joy, we can see Levinas's “welcome” to be not so much given as a gift but given as an imperative. The imperative, as an illustration of force *par excellence*, cannot be retracted or reversed. Levinas should not have called the subject's welcoming response to alterity a gift, but a response that is given to an imperative.

Returning to Lingis's theme of joy, the suffering of the Other is not the only immediately apparent aspect of the Other whom we encounter; the

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222. *Ibid.*

223. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 141-2.

224. Jacques Derrida, “At This Very Moment in This Work,” in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, trans. Ruben Berezdivin, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 407-11.

Other's joy is also immediate. This is a specific criticism of Levinas's bifurcation of contentment in the elements and the contestation of the vulnerability and suffering of alterity. In Lingis's view, joy is not restricted to the individual's satisfaction or contentment in the elemental. The Other's joy, like his suffering, requires my response. Because joy is an unrestricted affirmation of itself, it is an elemental and sublime phenomenon. Here, joy is not the mere satisfaction of a desire or an inclination, as it is in Kant's doctrine. Joy is sublime action because it goes beyond the hypothetical imperative of the satisfaction of empirical desire. With the Brazilian street kid, Lingis shows how joy affirms the elemental and is sublime, showing a path beyond Levinas's metaphysical alterity and Kant's relegation of enjoyment to mere self-serving pleasure: "But the joy of the street kid is not only a contentment in the satisfaction of his hunger; it is a joy of being in the streets, in the sun, in the urban jungle so full of excitements, and it is in his laughter pealing over the excitements of the urban jungle and the glory of the sun reigning over the beaches of Rio that give rise to his hunger and his relishing the goodness of restaurant spaghetti."<sup>225</sup> With joy, Lingis has found another sphere that is between, or beyond, Kant's categorical and hypothetical status of the imperative.

With sublime action, Lingis has shown how it is possible to submit to imperative restriction in the unrestricted realm of the sublime and the elemental. But what of death? Does not death present the absolutely categorical restriction of life to the extent which no action is allowed? Yet, even here, Lingis sees possibilities for sublime action. In seemingly ordinary lives, extraordinary action is often required. For Lingis, sublime action is not just a response to the sublime beauty of nature, but is required in life itself as we face our deaths – something that we all must do. Death, as a part of life, demands the heroic response of sublime action: "Yet the death in hideously painful disease that may well await us will require no less heroism than that of the guerilla in battle before the firing squad; the accompaniment of our dying lover or child may require of us the unimaginable strengths and resolve of those who go on rescue operations in glaciers or medical missions in refugee camps. And when the time for these deeds comes, though all the others be silent and without reproach about us, we will know that the heroic had been obligatory in us."<sup>226</sup> The imperative of death demands from us a deep and heroic response, one that is met ordinarily every day in nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, and homes across the world. As Lingis suggests, what is deemed ordinary in life often requires an extraordinary response. Ordinary life often demands and even commands sublime action.

In terms of Kant's hypothetical and categorical imperatives, the sublime action is clearly beyond the hypothetical rules of skills to

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225. Lingis, "The Sublime Action," 23.

226. *Ibid.*, 26.

accomplish a task. But is the sublime action categorically imperative? Perhaps not in Kant's view, but we contend that Lingis's imperative for sublime action lies somewhere between (or beyond, as with Nietzsche's *jenseits* in *Beyond Good and Evil*) the hypothetical and the categorical. For Lingis, what is important in itself commands our sensibilities and our resources on the elemental plane. The elemental, however, is not categorical in Kant's sense of absolute universal rationality. Overlooked until Levinas's explication of the sensation that precedes perception, the elemental does not command categorical universality but commands sublime action beyond our mere self-interest and inclinations. What is important carries an imperative that has a sublime dimension and is often beyond ontologies of "what is" and is not reducible to my needs. Here, Kant's tension between the "is" and the "ought" remains in the imperative to pursue what is important. Things, other persons, situations can intrude with an urgency that may require more than a merely pragmatic or empirical response of what has usually been done before. We respond to the sublime dimension of this elemental imperative by devoting ourselves to what is important, what is beyond pragmatism's mere requirements of sustaining physical life. Lingis's insights into the imperative of subjectivity as subjection, and into the elemental imperative and sublime action leave us with a fascinating possibility. Might subjectivity itself become sublime by deepening in its response to the imperative of the sublime and the elemental? As Lingis concludes in his *Phenomenological Explanations*, if we are to take ourselves not as simple loci of intersecting currents of energy but as causes, commencements, and sources of resources, this substantiated subjectivity results from finding ourselves subject to an imperative. As Kant put it so succinctly, because "I must," "I can."



## CONCLUSION

### SUBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTION

#### A SYMBIOSIS OF KANT AND PHENOMENOLOGY

On the relation of Kant and phenomenology, it seems that phenomenology needs Kant's imperative doctrine but that Kant also needs phenomenology. Perhaps the relation of the two schools of thought can be best described as a symbiosis, a synthesis that also holds promise for the investigation and articulation of new regions for the imperative, including a phenomenology of the moral subject. As Alphonso Lingis has shown, phenomenology needs Kant's imperative because phenomenology lacks an *a priori* starting point in its attempts of founding its own doctrine in subjectivity's free initiatives (as with Sartrean existentialism) or in taking the world as given (as with Husserl's apodictic foundation of knowledge). Lingis echoes Kant's organizing force and form of the imperative in asserting that "the imperative is the first fact that organizes all other facts" and when he clearly declares that "subjectivity begins in subjection." Epistemologically and morally, the phenomenological self arises and is constituted in subjection to an imperative.

Likewise, it is tenuous to begin with the world as simply given. If the world is given, it is a gift. To return to Derrida's view of the gift in Levinas's gift, the "welcome" of the Other as a gift in Levinas has the difficulty that it can be taken away. Because the gift is given, it can be retracted. But if the world is not simply given but *given as imperative*, its founding status is no longer tenuous as a gift that can be retracted. As Kant had shown in his discussions of the inversion and perversion of moral *Triebfeder* in radical evil, the imperative cannot be taken away or reversed without subverting or destroying its constituting force and form. In this way, the imperative is a force *par excellence*. Because it is irreversible, it is not a reversible power or a retractable gift.

Kant, however, needs phenomenology because it can explicate the underlying force of the imperative's form, which Kant's formalism prevented him from elaborating. As Kant well knew, though could not make it explicit, the binding force of the imperative is obeyed before it is formulated. It is this force, not form, that bends my will toward law as in the phenomenon of respect. Yet Kant dealt mostly with the form of force as universal law, although he acknowledged *Triebfeder's* force in the moral law itself. Consequently, Kant characterized the categorical imperative and the rational will by autonomous interiority, whereas Lingis, taking impulses from Levinas's doctrine, explicates imperative force as exteriority and finds exteriority to be the imperative's binding force. For Lingis, exterior force even applies to Kant's imperative, as Lingis argues that Kant derives the universality of the categorical imperative not from formal logic but from the

illustrations in the typology. In Lingis's view, the exterior force of the world calls us out as subjects in the summons of its things, other persons, and situations with their intrinsic importance and urgency.

By discerning the intrinsic importance of situations, phenomenology discovers new domains for the imperative. For instance, Kant does not allow for imperatives in perception, as for him there is no will to be commanded here. For Kant, sensibility supplies content for the understanding, which, in turn, spontaneously renders sense data intelligible. Thus, sensibility remains in the determinist realm of cause and effect for Kant and cannot enter the realm of freedom and the free will in morals.

But in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, the things we encounter in perception are preestablished wholes with preconfigured essences that direct our perception. Because things and objects are preconfigured for Merleau-Ponty, they need not await their synthetic constitution in the Kantian mind. In the phenomenology of perception, perception is a movement and an active intensification of an object's qualities, which bring out the object and "fix it." With perception as an act of human involution, phenomenology has shown how the faculty of the will applies to perception and not only to moral sensibility. As Lingis puts it, "objects are objectives," tasks for our accomplishment. To hear a sound is to turn and follow it.

In terms of imperatives of perception and their "givenness," Lingis argues that things are not so much given to perception but command it like norms. Even at the level of sensation that Levinas has explicated as underlying all perception, we find an imperative framework in which the elements of sensation guide us in sustenance or immersion in a sustaining medium, the medium of sensation in which all perception takes place. Furthermore, this doctrine of elemental sensation culminates in the phenomenological imperatives that Lingis articulates in the doctrine of the elemental imperative and the sublime action. Thus, the phenomenologists reject the universal rationality of Kant's imperative but retain the imperative's irreversible force in their own distinctive ways: through Merleau-Ponty's preconfigured essences as directives that command perception like norms, Levinas's imperative alterity, and Lingis's elemental imperative and sublime action.

This importation of Kant's imperative into the phenomenology of perception and sensation necessarily entails a critique of the rationalism inherent in Kant's categorical imperative – a critique not possible (nor desired) in Kant's doctrine as it is founded on the autonomy of the rational moral will. Through its critique of Kant's formal rationalism (while retaining the necessity of the imperative), phenomenology shows how to overcome the bifurcation of the rational-moral sphere and the realm of sensibility and perception. In Lingis's phenomenological view, there are imperative obligations in addition to the obligations of rationality. The situations that we encounter intrude with imperative importance, urgency, and immediacy. Here the rational does not equate with the required.

Furthermore, with a phenomenological focus on the origin of Kantian respect as affectivity in which the subject suffers in subjection to and is mortified by the moral law, Lingis shows how the form of the imperative of rational respect is founded on force. In this way, phenomenology can be seen to extend the reach of Kant's imperative while rectifying its formal and thorough-going universality. Furthermore, Lingis's awareness of the elemental status of sensation's content and contentment has found imperatives to lie somewhere between (if not beyond) the hypothetical and the categorical. Again, this exploratory insight could not be generated by Kant's doctrine alone but only with the aid of phenomenology.

### DEFENDING SUBJECTIVITY VIA THE IMPERATIVE

The importation of Kant's imperative into phenomenology may also provide a most effective defense against modernity's and postmodernism's skepticism about the status of the human subject. Hume claimed the self to be merely a bundle of sensations, while postmodernists often claim that the "I" of the self is no more than a language construct. In *Deathbound Subjectivity's* preface, Lingis brings Kant's imperative to the fore in the origin of subjectivity: "In the midst of this major deconstruction of subjectivity in our time we have set out to locate and promote the imperative that constitutes our subjectivity, that orders it to order."<sup>1</sup> With this imperative command to be in command, Lingis formulates his battle cry that "subjectivity begins in subjection." Here Lingis joins forces with Kant's imperative origin of thought and the human subject against modernity's and postmodernity's critiques.

Furthermore, the Kantian-phenomenological imperative gives a fuller account of subjectivity. Although subjectivity originates in subjection as it undergoes and suffers the imperative, subjectivity is not only passive but active. Only because it is commanded to be in command can subjectivity become sovereign and active. Only because subjectivity originates in subjection to imperative force can subjectivity become a sovereign force itself. Here subjectivity can become a force in fortitude rather than a mere locus of impressions, empirical events, or language. The Kantian-phenomenological model of subjectivity as sovereignty retains Kant's seminal distinction between the "is" and the "ought," whereas Hume had collapsed the ethical ought into the positivity of what is. Hume's conflation of ethics and ontology, however, necessitates the deflation of the transcendental. Clearly, Hume's moral doctrine lacks the dimension of transcendental force, although he advocates an immediacy of moral feeling. Hume's empirical ethics of moral feeling as sympathy, although it goes beyond one's self-interest, is directly proportional to one's proximity to the event or to our fellows. With distance and time, empirical moral sensation

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1. Alphonso Lingis, *Deathbound Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2.

fades: “There is no necessity, that a generous action, barely mentioned in an old history or remote gazette, should communicate any strong feelings of applause or approbation.... Bring this virtue nearer; ... our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard.”<sup>2</sup>

The transcendental dimension of morals advocated by Kant and contemporary phenomenology, however, offers a solution to the limits and contingencies of empirical proximity. Kant proposes the supersensibility of the moral law, and phenomenology offers the exteriority of affective force that acts on the subject. Furthermore, contemporary phenomenology has elucidated the imperative’s aspect of immediacy, which is usually thought to be exclusive to empiricism. Thus, the Kantian-phenomenological retains the best of metaphysical and empirical morals – transcendence of perspective and immediacy of feeling and force, established by the imperative of respect, which as Kant well knew is not merely that of the mere regard of Hume’s warm sentiments.

To turn to postmodernism, Derrida’s view of Levinas’s alterity allows us to address the postmodern critique of subjectivity as a language concept or construct. By comparing these views, we can see the primacy of subjectivity as something founded more deeply than convention or as a language construct. Derrida explicates the founding of the self as a language construct in *Writing and Difference*. Commenting on what he takes to be the fragile status of Kantian subjectivity in a lecture entitled “The Animal I Am,”<sup>3</sup> Derrida asked rhetorically “What happens when the chimp says ‘I?’ Has the animal not established its subjectivity?”

Yet the question remains whether simply by saying “I,” the chimp would be subject to imperatives. In the context of subjectivity as a response to imperatives, the substance of human subjectivity would still be unattainable to the chimp, even with its supposed self-designation of subjectivity. The response and responsibility called upon from the depth of a human substance does not simply occur in the self-designated “I.” To say “I” may give subjectivity a unity of apperception, but it does not obligate the subject to the imperatives encountered in the human sphere of the world and the world of thought. The elements and their imperatives of depth and deepening would not be able to appeal to the chimp; these tasks for accomplishment would still be moot for the chimp that says “I.” In this way, human substance still outdistances animal substance. Merely saying “I” does not constitute the depths of human agency and capacity. These depths can form only through subjection to imperatives, imperatives that apply to and show the unique depth of the core of human substance.

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2. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 50.

3. Jacques Derrida, “The Animal I Am.” Lecture presented at The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Spring 1998.

In a related way, Derrida's postmodern critique is founded on models of reversible power rather than irreversible imperative force. In the postmodern view, the power of self-designation in the "I" is outdistanced by the Other's subjectivity. In terms of Levinas's doctrine of alterity, however, the Other is not merely a disruption of the subject's power or an entity that eludes my powers. The Other summons me by placing an imperative appeal upon me that calls for my support and resources. Levinas's "I" originates in answering to and for the Other, in the accusative not the nominative. To return briefly to the discussion on Levinas and Derrida in the previous chapter, Levinas has deemed the subject's response to the Other to be a "welcome" and that this welcome is a "gift." Derrida picks up a loose thread in Levinas's terminology when he notes that if the welcome of the subject is a gift to the Other, then as a gift it can be retracted. Furthermore, per Derrida, if the gift is "forced," then it is really no gift at all. Clearly, both of Derrida's points here are based on the assumption of subjectivity as power and power's concomitant reversibility. Derrida is, however, correct to say that if the welcome is a gift, its status as a "given" is tenuous in the gift's intrinsic retractability. But if we characterize, more correctly, Levinas's welcome of the Other not to be a freely given "gift" but a response to the imperative of alterity, we can rescue and establish the uniqueness of subjectivity. In this sense, Levinas should have said that the welcome of the Other is *not* a gift but a *response* that constitutes my responsibility as a subject in imperative subjection. Because the welcome is not a gift but a response to imperative force, this response cannot be retracted. Although it can be withheld empirically, it cannot be withheld ethically. Even if my response "is" withheld, it "ought" not to be. The welcoming relation to the Other is thus not a gift but is given as a response to an imperative, which cannot be retracted. As Brian Massumi notes in the preface to Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*: "Force is not to be confused with power. Force arrives from outside to break constraints and open new vistas. Power builds walls."<sup>4</sup> To say it once again, the imperative exemplifies the irreversibility of force *par excellence*.

Finally, in terms of the force of the imperative, Derrida argues that if the response of Levinas's gift of welcome is coerced or "forced," then it is no gift at all. This objection allows us to introduce a distinction between imperative force and coercion, which would be more akin to power and its reversibility. In the Kantian-phenomenological reading of the imperative, we do not have a "forced response" but rather a "response to forces." It is the nature of imperatives to have relations of unequal force of some principle standing above another in subordination, whether it is Levinas's Other who is always above me, Kant's universal moral law that is higher

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4. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xiii.

than my personal desires, or Lingis's sublime imperative whose importance dwarfs our petty self-interests. Against Derrida's modern model of free subjectivity, Levinas, Kant, and Lingis argue that the imperative does not originate from the subject's free initiative. Derrida's model of force in *Writing and Difference*<sup>5</sup> is that of Hegel's doctrine of force and the understanding in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,<sup>6</sup> which takes force to be unintelligible and thus necessitates the mediation of consciousness in order to become intelligible and understood. The Kantian-phenomenological view of imperative force, however, does not require an original mediation of the understanding, as this imperative force is held to be immediately intelligible, as in Levinas's doctrine of sensation. One obeys imperative force before formulating it in Kant's doctrine of respect, and in Levinas's reading of the intelligibility of force in sensation, even before the specifics of perception. Thus, Hegel as representative of modernism and Derrida as representative of postmodernism both have critiques of subjectivity that are founded on power, whereas the Kantian-phenomenological model of subjectivity is founded on imperative force with its inherent intelligibility and irreversibility. As Kant understood, I can because I must. Thus, I discover my subject not in the modern or postmodern model of free subjectivity. The imperative is not a power derived from any positive empirical ontology but is an original force: the transcendental force of the "ought" that is prior to and determinative of the "is."

### **DISTINCTIVE TRANSCENDENTALISMS: RESPECT VERSUS ALTERITY**

#### *The Foundation of the Moral Subject: Kantian Finitude or Levinasian Infinity?*

The moral doctrines of both Kant and Levinas emphasize the necessity of a transcendental distance between the ethical and the ontological, between the "is" and the "ought." The two thinkers, however, map out the transcendental terrain in different ways although their doctrines share an imperative origin. Kantian respect is characterized by interiority, finitude, symmetry, and the self-determinations of autonomy, whereas Levinasian alterity is marked by attributes that are precisely the opposite: exteriority, infinity, asymmetry, and the "privileged heteronomy" of the Other.

Kant maintains that "*respect* is always directed only to persons, never to things"<sup>7</sup> and in this way distinguishes respect from empirical "regard."

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5. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 3-30.

6. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 79-103.

7. Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66, 5:76.

Respect is directed exclusively to persons because of the capacity of reason unique to humans. One respects the *inner* law that commands other persons, as it commands me as a rational being. Kant even speaks of an “inner respect” (*innerer Achtung*)<sup>8</sup> toward other persons and maintains that respect is marked by an inexorable interiority when he observes that “respect is a tribute that we cannot refuse to pay to merit, whether we want to or not; we may indeed withhold it outwardly but we still cannot help feeling it inwardly.”<sup>9</sup>

This inability to withhold respect illustrates the finitude of the Kantian moral subject, whose finite physical nature causes it to feel the pain of the restriction of pleasure. Usually we seek to make moral exceptions for the “dear self” in seeking pleasure, but respect for the moral law in subjection to the categorical imperative of duty is the antidote to this “pathological” self-seeking. Here, Kant draws a fairly bleak picture of the finite, law-abiding, rational entity humiliated and pained in being bent toward the law and continually frustrated in its natural happiness.

As a secular moralist, Kant notes that this pain and restriction would not apply to divine or infinite beings. Thus, it is worth noting that the *unconditionality* of Kant’s categorical imperative is *not* marked by infinity (as is Levinas’s moral subject) but by singularity, a singularity opposed to the infinity of all possible heteronomous outcomes of happiness and utility. For Kant, all rational subjects are “subject to” respect for the law. Thus, for Kant, relations with other persons are symmetrical, even reciprocal. We respect one another equally because we respect the universal moral law of reason. Additionally, the law of moral reason is autonomous – reason itself gives us the moral law as “a fact of reason.”<sup>10</sup> In a word, autonomy is the *self-determination* of the rational will.

Levinas focuses on Kantian “respect” (*Achtung*) as “attention.” For Kant, the attention of respect is attention to the moral law. Levinas’s description of the “attention” of Kantian respect, however, notes that attention is not first respect for the moral law within oneself but is originally attention *to the Other*: “Attention is attention to something because it is attention to someone. The exteriority of its point of departure is essential to it: it is the very tension of the I.”<sup>11</sup> Because of this primordial attention to someone, Levinas’s alterity is marked by exteriority, infinity, asymmetry, and “privileged heteronomy.” Because alterity begins in exteriority as exposure to the Other, Levinas’s subject arises not in subjection to the interior moral law, but in subjection to the Other. In contrast to Kantian respect and the physical subject’s finitude, alterity is characterized by infinity, an infinity irreducible to any idea of the self-same

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8. *Ibid.*, 66, 5:76.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 28, 5:31.

11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 99.

(including the *idea* of infinity). The claim that the face lays upon me is an infinite one, one that I can never fully satisfy because of the Other's irreducible alterity, which carries the metaphysical and ethical trace of God's absolute alterity. Thus, infinity is the proper dimension of ethics for Levinas, as it makes genuine transcendence possible. With the infinity of alterity comes the asymmetrical relation of the self and Other, as evidenced by what Levinas calls the Other's privileged heteronomy.

Because of the primacy of the Other, freedom for Levinas begins not with the free, autonomous subject but with the freedom of the Other, who has power over me but over whom I am powerless. This freedom is not reciprocal between the Other and myself, as with Kantian respect and autonomy, but carries an irreversible force. Although respect for the moral law carries an irreversible imperative force, Kant's "kingdom of ends" is nonetheless characterized by symmetry because all persons ought to respond to the universal rational law within themselves. But Levinas radicalizes the irreversibility of imperative force in marking alterity by *asymmetry*. The Other is always above me, on high. In this way, autonomy and respect are seemingly eclipsed by the infinity of the Other's "privileged heteronomy."

Because Levinas finds the original fact of moral responsibility in the encounter with the Other, his notion of responsibility can be said to be more thorough-going than the rational requirements of Kantian respect. In this sense, for Levinas, we are our brothers' keepers. With the asymmetrical starting point of alterity as a privileged heteronomy, we are not only responsible for the keeping of our "brothers in reason" but are responsible for "any Others," whether or not they have the capacity of rational autonomy (e.g., a child with brain damage or an adult incapacitated by Alzheimer's disease). Because of this thorough-going responsibility in the asymmetry of alterity, Levinas's ethical commands run more deeply than Kant's. Whereas Kant extends respect to only those others capable of reason, Levinas does not require rational autonomy from the Other before entering into an ethical relation – one need have only a face to initiate this relation. Also, Kantian respect takes shape in the requirements of reason, whereas in alterity the ethical precedes any principle and can be said to be "beyond reason." For Levinas, the ethical infinity of alterity exceeds the requirements of reason and respect.

Thus, admittedly, Levinas's doctrine of ethical infinity is more transcendental than Kant's moral finitude, but we contend that Levinasian infinity is not necessarily more ethical than Kantian finitude. In fact, the finitude of Kant's moral subject is phenomenologically explicable in a way that Levinas's infinite moral subject is not, because finitude accounts for the affective receptivity of Kant's moral subject, whereas Levinas's dimension of infinity leaves the phenomenological moral subject unexplained.

Gerhard Krüger argues in defense of Kant's finite moral subjectivity in *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Kritik* and sees human finitude to



account for Kant's moral law as a "fact." Finitude, Krüger states, is the "essential element" of Kant's critique: "...the finitude of man, which is the essential element of the critique, is defined by Kant not as a function of temporality but as a function of the *moral law as a 'fact.'*" The decisive mortification of man for Kant is not, as for Heidegger, the absolute end, that is to say death, but is the moral obedience to the unconditional command, which in this view is already characterized in this regard by Cohen as the 'final law.'"<sup>12</sup>

Alphonso Lingis, like Levinas, has laid the claim against Kant's moral doctrine that the rational does not equate with the required. But in his explication of Kantian respect as a phenomenon that weighs on my finite subjectivity, Lingis takes human finitude to be a strength in Kant's ethics over and against Levinas's ethical infinity, which Lingis deems to be phenomenologically "unexplicable"<sup>13</sup> in the relation between the elemental and the metaphysical. Further explicating phenomenologically Krüger's insight into Kant's moral law, Lingis argues that it is the subject's finitude that makes it possible to feel the weight of respect as a restraint and mortification of one's physical desire and being. In this way, for Lingis and Kant, morality is constituted in mortality, as our finitude is what makes us able to *feel the force* of a moral imperative. This feeling is not Hume's inherent capacity of "moral feeling" but an elucidation of human affectivity.

Lingis locates these moral and mortal aspects in the sensuality of Levinas's doctrine of elemental sensation, although Lingis advocates the primacy of moral finitude in subjectivity. In the happy accident of a typographical error in a chapter subheading on mortality and sensuality in *Phenomenological Explanations*' "The Moral [*sic*] Taste of Sensuality" (when "Mortal" is meant from the section's context), we can draw out the connection between the mortal and the moral in our finitude that allows subjectivity to be pained. As Lingis observes in a simultaneous critique of Heidegger's *Zeug* and of Hume's impressions: "What wounds us may be the instrument, but what pains is the sensuous element. In pain what

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12. Gerhard Krüger, *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Kritik*, my translation (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1967), 25. "... die Endlichkeit des Menschen, auf die es der Kritik allerdings ankommt, ist von Kant nicht in Hinblick auf die "Zeitlichkeit" bestimmt worden, sondern im Hinblick auf das *Sittengesetz als ein "Faktum"*. Die entscheidene Verendlichkeit des Menschen vollzieht sich für Kant nicht im Hinblick auf das, was für Heidegger das Ende schlechthin ist, den Tod, sondern in moralischen Gehorsam gegen das unbedingte Gebot, das in dieser Hinsicht schon von Cohen treffend als das "Endgesetz" charakterisiert worden ist." [Krüger's reference to Cohen is from H. Cohen, *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (1910), 270.]

13. Lingis, presumably, makes careful use of this term to show Levinas' difficulty in being able to unfold the relation between the elemental and the metaphysical, whereas the term "inexplicable" might merely claim difficulties with the intelligibility of each.

oppresses is the light, the heat, the din, the density, the depth as such. In pain, the sensuous is an oppression before it is a sense impression, impression of a sense.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, our sense of mortality is not only an effect of our anxiety about being cast out of the world in death, as in Heidegger’s view; this sense is also an effect of being cast into the world. “But the sense of mortality is not only the sense of being cast adrift in the emptiness, when the world withdraws. It is, in pain, the sense of being cast into the world, into the utter materiality of the sensuous element.”<sup>15</sup> This pain, made possible by our finitude, makes possible both our being cast out from and into the world.

We also can feel pain in our encounter with Others, even empathetically feel their pain, giving a moral cast to the mortal. Lingis argues that what we sense in others is their mortality, which demands our response of care and empathy. Their mortality mortifies me, constituting my morality, analogous to Kant’s phenomenon of respect for the rational law. Although contemporary phenomenology’s critique of Kant’s rationalism must be taken into account, finitude and mortality are what allow for this mortification and morality.

But there is also a positive side to the elemental that we can find in Lingis’s elemental imperative and sublime action. In his critique of Levinas’s doctrine of the epiphany of the face, Lingis takes the face to be *an element* that solicits our response and responsibility. Because the elemental imperative calls for a deepening of the elements that underlie sensation, this imperative also commands a response of deepening responsibility for other persons. Perhaps we can best describe our encounter with the human face as a sublime event in Lingis’s doctrine. In the sublime encounter between the subject and the Other, the face retains its irreducible status by resisting conceptualization or representation, but loses its metaphysical-theological infinity of God’s absolute alterity.

Thus, two points are addressed in Lingis’s sublime imperative: (1) Levinas’s doctrine of sensation as a critique of Kantian representation still holds, and (2) Lingis advocates the finitude of Kant’s moral subject over Levinas’s moral infinity. First, Kant’s view of representation is telling for our purposes of explicating the sublime imperative, as it can be shown that although the sublime is “unrepresentable” it is not infinite. Finitude and the moral subject’s subsequent affectivity are the necessary conditions of the sublime imperative. Kant, of course, took representation to be necessary for any encounter, whether simply with the objects of sensibility or the moral law. He details this view in the second *Critique*:

*Life* is the faculty of a being to act in accordance with laws  
of the faculty of desire. The *faculty of desire* is a being’s

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14. Alphonso Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 71.

15. *Ibid.*

*faculty to be by means of representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations. Pleasure is the representation of the agreement of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life, i.e., with the faculty of the causality of a representation with respect to the reality of the object....*<sup>16</sup>

Thus, representation and causality are essentially linked in Kant's doctrine of the objects of representation. Pleasure occurs in correctly representing the objects of reality, and for Kant the objects of reality are only possible as the representations of reality. This view likewise holds for the *Ding-an-sich*, to which we have no direct access.

Levinas's doctrine, however, distinguishes between pleasure and enjoyment. Whereas Kant takes pleasure to concern the representations of the objects of reality, Levinas deems enjoyment to arise out of the background from which objective representations emerge. This very important difference between Kant's doctrine of the objects of pleasure and desire as representations, and Levinas's doctrine of enjoyment beginning in and returning to sensation as contentment in content discloses a seminal difference in their views of the origin and original intelligibility of sensibility and the sublime. Because enjoyment is for Levinas contentment with content, a contentment that simmers over assimilated content, enjoyment is an immersion in the elemental medium and a return to the sustaining medium from which all things first emerge. In Levinas's doctrine, enjoyment and sensibility are intelligible in their self-support and their support for things, as opposed to Kant's representations of objects supported by the intelligibility of thought.

But as Kant himself observes in the *Critique of Judgment*, the magnitude of the sublime outstrips our powers of representation, and here we find a point of contact with Levinas's doctrine of infinity as the proper dimension of morals. For Kant, the sublime is unrepresentable and outstrips our powers of cognition as well as sensibility. When Kant argues that: "we call *sublime* what is absolutely *large*.... *what is large beyond all comparison*."<sup>17</sup> and "the infinite ... is absolutely large (not merely large by comparison),"<sup>18</sup> he identifies the sublime with the infinite. The idea of the sublime is an idea of a reality that infinitely transcends our finite imaginative and sensible powers, thus causing us pain. Our cognitive powers cannot measure up to the sublime's immeasurability.

The role of the sublime in Kant's doctrine is a matter of some dispute. Henry E. Allison claims Kant's analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of*

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16. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8; 5:9 (footnote).

17. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 103, 5:248.

18. *Ibid.*, 111, 5:254.

*Judgment* to be an afterthought, as it does not really fit with the third *Critique's* larger analysis of the harmonization of beauty and taste, and of moral and aesthetic judgment.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it can be argued that the sublime is no afterthought in Kant's doctrine.<sup>20</sup> Kant had been writing on the sublime since 1764, when he published "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime." There, as in the *Critique of Judgment*, he gives great weight to the sublime as a manifestation of moral feeling. Furthermore, in terms of the role of the sublime in Kant's doctrine of freedom, it more directly than the beautiful provides an aesthetic representation of freedom, as the sublime noumenally transcends the realm of sense. In general, Allison overlooks the systematic role of freedom in Kant's accounts of the powers of reason and the primacy of practical reason.

Indeed, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant expressly supplies the links between the sublime and the rational law via "special sensible feeling": "It is something very sublime in human nature to be determined to actions directly by a pure rational law, and even the illusion that takes the subjective side of this intellectual determinability of the will as something aesthetic and the effect of a special sensible feeling (for an intellectual feeling would be a contradiction) is sublime."<sup>21</sup> And in his famous conclusion to the second *Critique* on the two things that fill the human mind with ever increasing admiration and reverence, "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me,"<sup>22</sup> Kant gives the moral law the dimension of infinity, further showing the seminal importance of the sublime in his moral doctrine. Although the starry heavens' countless multitude of worlds annihilates my importance as an "animal creature" (*thierischen Geschöpf*s, i.e., as a merely physical or natural being), the moral law within me "...on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as an *intelligence* by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and the whole sensible world, ... a determination not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaching into the infinite."<sup>23</sup>

To return to the comparison with Levinas, we can once again characterize the difference between Kant's and Levinas's doctrines by their respective interior or exterior orientations. For Levinas, the imperative of alterity is not Kant's categorical imperative of interior law and representation but an exterior command: "... we must impose commands on ourselves in order to be free. But it must be an exterior command, not simply a rational law, not a categorical imperative, which is defenseless

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19. Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 302-7.

20. I thank Richard L. Velkley for these observations on the role of the sublime in Kant's doctrine.

21. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 98, 5:117.

22. *Ibid.*, 133, 5:161.

23. *Ibid.*, 134, 5:162.

against tyranny; it must be an exterior law, a written law, armed with force against tyranny. Such are commands as the political conditions of freedom.”<sup>24</sup> Taking the sublime as unrepresentable, and thus not interior, gives affectivity an original kind of knowledge, which Levinas insists is not an inferior knowledge but is intelligible in its immediate contact with its content. We need not have representations or ideas for sensation, ethics, or the sublime to know them.

A central tenet of Levinas’s doctrine in *Totality and Infinity* is, of course, that one’s finite contentment is contested by alterity’s infinity. But here we must shift from Levinas’s emphasis on infinity in morals to the finite subject and its affectivity to address our second point above on the sublime and finitude. In his analysis of sublime action, Lingis advocates the finitude of Kant’s moral subject over Levinas’s moral infinity. In fact, Lingis claims Levinas’s metaphysics with its traces of God’s absolute alterity in the human face to be “unexplicated and unexplicatable”<sup>25</sup> in relation to Levinas’s own doctrine of the elements. Lingis’s doctrine (like Kant’s), however, advocates finitude as the proper dimension of the ethical. Although Kant’s notion of the sublime is immeasurable and thus not contained or constrained by our powers of representation, the sublime has implications for finite subjectivity as affectivity. Kant and Lingis are better aware than Levinas that the affectivity which allows us to feel the infinite dimension of the moral or the sublime can occur only because of the human subject’s finitude (as Krüger had noted for the primacy of Kant’s moral fact of reason). What Levinas deems to be the proper dimension of morals, infinity, in fact presupposes the affective finitude of the moral subject.

Even if Kant’s and Lingis’s positions on the foundation of morality in finitude were to lose the infinite dimension of Levinasian ethics, they do not lose the transcendental or supersensible dimension that imperatively affects moral subjectivity. Without recourse to infinity, Kant’s moral doctrine, like Levinas’s, retains a status that is beyond the claims of empirical knowledge. Kant’s ethics, indeed, retains a transcendental force that does not reduce the assessment of the moral value of human action to the purely empirical-secular plane. Jürgen Habermas notes the danger of this type of secularization in ethics and how Kant’s metaphysics of morals has avoided it:

... Kant refused to let the categorical “ought” be absorbed in the whirlpool of enlightened self-interest. He enlarged

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24. Emmanuel Levinas, “Freedom and Command,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 17.

It is of some interest to note that Levinas seems to have returned to Kant’s reciprocity of respect in this analysis of the politics of freedom.

25. Alphonso Lingis, “The Elemental Imperative,” *Research in Phenomenology* 18 (1988): 17.

subjective freedom [*Willkür*] to autonomy (or free will), thus giving the first great example – after metaphysics – of a secularizing, but at the same time salvaging, deconstruction of religious truths. With Kant, the authority of divine commands is unmistakably echoed in the unconditional validity of moral duties.... Secular languages which only eliminate the substance once intended leave irritations. When sin was converted to culpability, and the breaking of divine commands to an offense against human laws, something was lost.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, Kantian ethics maintains a “theological” dimension of transcendence without recourse to infinity. Although characterized by finitude, Kant’s ethics successfully resists the reduction of the transcendental to the temporal.

#### *Finitude and Sublime Subjectivity*

Lingis sides with Kant on the issue of moral finitude but offers some rectifications of the Kantian subject inspired by Levinas’s doctrine of exteriority. Lingis’s most notable revision is to Kant’s “*echte Triebfeder*” of the moral law as the “pure motive” of the moral subject. Instead of this pure motive, Lingis argues that affectivity lies at the heart of Kantian *Triebfeder*, as reason arises in response to the force that underlies and precedes the interior dynamics of the moral law as *Triebfeder*. The interiority of reason first arises when we are afflicted and affected by the exteriority of things, other persons, and situations. Yet the transcendental dimension remains in Lingis’s finite moral subject whose *Triebfeder* originates in affectivity. As Lingis asserts, if there is a conflict between imperatives, one is to choose the transcendental one whose object lies farther from Kant’s “pathological” will.

In this way, we encounter imperatives of devotion to the transcendent and the sublime in Lingis’s doctrine. Similar to Kant’s view, freedom can only be known through imperative obligation. Here, freedom begins in subjugation to what one must do. As noted earlier, this view parallels Nietzsche’s on artistic devotion. Artistic freedom is not found in the absolutely free initiatives of the artist but in the subjugation of the artist’s freedom to the work of art. Perhaps for this reason, the artist, not the philosopher, is the highest type of human for Nietzsche. The great exemplars of human history were often artists (da Vinci, Michelangelo,

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26. Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 110 [Chapter 3 was originally published as “Glauben und Wissen” in *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001); original text on line at <http://www.glasnost.de/docs01/011014habermas.html>].

Shakespeare, Beethoven, Goethe, Wagner), and great cultures championed art (Greece, Rome, and the Italian Renaissance).

Like Kant, Nietzsche argues for sovereignty. In order to be sovereign, one must master oneself by subjugating one's "pathological" impulses in devotion to a higher goal, whether the creation of a new work of art or a new species of man. Nietzsche's perspective on freedom, like Kant's, is not one essentially characterized by liberty but by obligation; it is not a matter of what one is "free from" but what one is "free for." Nietzsche, in fact, takes the overconcern with personal liberty to be a reaction of slavish plebeianism. For the model of action, Nietzsche turns toward the artist, who subjugates his freedom and sovereignly devotes himself to his artistic work. The great artists of human history acted on an imperative by doing what they had to do, the same dynamic of devotion that we have found in Lingis's doctrine of sublime action.

Because Lingis's human subject has a core of affected substance, it can feel the constraining force of Nietzschean artistic devotion, Kantian respect, or Levinasian alterity. The subject is, however, a substance that is not only passively *affected* but is actively *affective*. In our responses to imperative directives, we can become a source of resources, a cause, and a commencement. That is to say, we can become forces ourselves. Although subjectivity arises as a response to exteriority, it can become established in a manner reminiscent of Aristotle's doctrine of continent character.

For Kant, one is to desire the pure motive of the *echte Triebfeder* of the moral law, which guarantees the transcendental dimension in ethics and prevents it from collapsing into an exercise in pathological self-interest. Lingis, too, urges us to desire the transcendental in our sublime actions. He advocates looking beyond mere empirical actualities or contingencies, so that we may discover who we are in devotion to "what we have to do." Furthermore, Lingis finds urgency in the transcendental itself; the urgency of having to save the drowning person immediately transcends my self-interests. Through the transcendental, I can become a source of support and a resource for other persons and for the world.

With the rectification of Kant's *echte Triebfeder*, Lingis's doctrine of the sublime imperative shows how the transcendent can be desired and not reduced to the desire of self-interest but remain transcendental. Furthermore, Lingis shows how the moral subject can become a force in itself, how one can become a force in fortitude. For Lingis, in order to become elemental, one takes up the forces of the world and becomes a force in one's own right. In this way, a human being can become a sublime force in devotion to what is important in life. Justice, for instance, is one of these transcendental forces. Individuals, groups, and governments often refuse to accede to justice, and although there are numerous empirical examples of injustice, there is often no empirical example. Even so, justice transcendently and imperatively appeals to us for any injustice to be corrected. Here, one is both acted on by transcendental forces and acts on

and for these forces. In taking up the cause that is imperative, one becomes a cause, a force in fortitude.

Bernard Williams has praised Kant as “the philosopher who has given the purest, deepest, and most thorough representation in morality.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Kant’s probing of the depths of morality has shown the imperative to be at the heart of moral thought and action. Kant’s insight into the imperative also offers something profound for phenomenology, which can adopt the imperative for its own founding orientation in the world. In this way, the world is not simply “given” but is “given as imperative” in Merleau-Ponty’s directives in the preconfigured essences of objects, Levinas’s forces of alterity and exteriority, and Lingis’s elemental and sublime imperatives. What phenomenology offers Kantism is the explication of the forces that underlie formal law, the forces that make formal law binding and make the formulation of law possible. Phenomenology’s contribution to Kantism is the probing insight into form’s force is one that Kant’s formalism could not supply on its own. Together, however, the doctrines of Kant and contemporary phenomenology allow us to discern what is important in morals but are not limited to the moral sphere. Via the imperative, we can determine what is important in life itself, what intrudes with imperative urgency, and what calls for our response and constitutes our responsible subjectivity.

One of Kant’s most important insights was his understanding of the profound importance of the imperative for moral philosophy. Through the imperative, Kant has given phenomenology the fundamental grounding it had lacked by beginning with “the given.” The profundity of Kant’s insight into the imperative, however, can be deepened by phenomenology. Kant restricts the imperative to the plane of formal universal law, but phenomenology can give Kant’s formal understanding of the imperative the depth of elemental force. In these terms, just as thought carries its own imperative to think more deeply, it also carries the elemental imperative that depth is and promotes – to deepen. This imperative deepening is found not only in thought and morals, but in life itself, so that life may flourish and become deep. By promoting and deepening life, we can become forces ourselves, not only as support for life but as its deepening cause and commencement.

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27. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 174.



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