CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE SAYING, THE SAID
AND THE POLITICAL
'The Political'

In the previous chapters, I have tried to reflect upon the methodological underpinnings of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. In the concluding part, my focus is to engage with Levinas’s idea of ‘the political’. Here, I would like to focus on Levinas’s conception of gender, fraternity, justice, rights etc.

Face-to-face relation is the key term of Levinasian ethics. Face-to-face is particular and singular. On the other hand, ‘the political’ implies the whole of institutions, rights, justice etc. Levinas is of the opinion that face-to-face presupposes the political whole. However, the third party approach accounts for the universalization of the face-to-face. The point that Levinas seems to emphasize is that the other is the other of the other.

In the previous chapters, I have explained how Levinasian ethics evolved as a vehement opposition to the concept of totality. ‘The political’, as Levinas conceives it, is also a terrain of a stringent opposition to the totalitarian thinking. The other-oriented mode of philosophy questions the absorption of otherness into the system.¹ The same spirit governs Levinasian conception of gender, rights and justice. In the second chapter, I have reflected upon Levinasian distinction between eschatology and history. In the same fashion, he locates ethical and ontological moments in the functional dynamics of social and political institutions, state etc. In fact, this is a separation based on the diachrony of the ethical saying and synchrony of the ontological said. This is the crux of his alternate conception of ‘the political’.

Even though Levinas is not primarily concerned with politics, his ethics doesn’t exclude ‘the political’. Levinas’s works contain a serious reflection on the relationship between ethics and politics. According to Levinas, the desire experienced in the face-to-face relation makes possible the experience of human sociality. Levinas addresses the question of passage from the face-to-face to the

¹ Levinas, 1969, pp.15-16
political in section IV of *Totality and Infinity* titled 'Beyond the Face.'\textsuperscript{2} According to Caygill, the concept of political in Levinas is to be found between the movement from ontological totality to ethical infinity in *Totality and Infinity*, and from ethics to subjectivity and sensibility in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence.*\textsuperscript{3}

Levinas seeks to procure a politics of peace. He suspends a distinction between theoretical and practical reason. He believes that this distinction is based on hierarchies. Levinasian notion of 'the political' presupposes that the traditional opposition between theory and practice will disappear before metaphysical transcendence.\textsuperscript{4} Ethics is the royal road of this true transcendence.

Levinas advocates that politics ought to be inspired by ethics. Ethics has a history of its own. It transcends the state and its institutions. Proximity is a history before history. It is the politics before politics. Levinas prioritizes eschatology over history. For Levinas, state emerges from the face-to-face.\textsuperscript{5} He feels that the state, laws and institutions are very necessary. Face-to-face presupposes law, politics and institutions.\textsuperscript{6} Face-to-face is the ethical measure of a necessary politics. Levinas grounds all human existence in the face-to-face. We are already responsible before anything else. As I have already explained in the fourth chapter, Levinas is not engaged in an ethical theory. He does not intent to construct a moral theory. Metaphysics was the study of basic principles for Aristotle. So does ethics for Levinas. It is the most original, determining ways of living human life. However, Levinas explains how ethics is realized in social and political life. He argues that justice is 'derived from proximity and face-to-face. Rules and norms do not come first. They were derived from a deeper ground.\textsuperscript{7}

Political and legal institutions can function well if they are necessitated by this deeper ground.

\textsuperscript{2} Bergo, 1999, p.58
\textsuperscript{3} Caygill, 2002, p. 96
\textsuperscript{4} Levinas, 1969, p. 29
\textsuperscript{5} Morgan, 2007, p. 232
\textsuperscript{6} Levinas, 2001 b, p.108
\textsuperscript{7} Levinas, 1991, p. 159
I have reflected upon Levinas's notion of justice in the fourth chapter. For Levinas, justice is not a fundamental principle for deriving a set of principles and policies. It is responsibility that calls for justice. With the third party begins the domain of justice. Levinas locates the drive towards justice in sensibility. He goes onto assert that foundation of consciousness is justice. It is not something fixed in totality, structures and social institutions. The third party implies the rise of institutions of justice within which competing claims are to be judged. Here, Levinas is not for Rawl’s emphatic focus on justice. There is one more major difference between Rawls and Levinas. Rawls presupposes that society does not contribute to selfhood.

Charles Taylor’s ethical pluralism is similar to Levinas’s concept of ‘the political.’ However, Taylor is more focused on freedom and identity. On the contrary, Levinas feels that man is called himself man only because he is called by his neighbour. No one is willingly good. Responsibility for the freedom of the other is anterior to freedom of the self. Following Hilary Putnam, Critchley calls Levinas a moral perfectionist. Perfectionism in politics and ethics involve a cluster of things. These things are related directly or indirectly.

In the essays in which he discusses Kant and Hobbes, Levinas reflects upon natural rights and rights for the other. Levinas is against the tradition that relates rights exclusively to the domain of self. The tradition views self as the building block of social and political life. He proposes an alternative conception of the idea of right. For him, the origin of the idea of rights is intrinsic to a natural social situation. In his essay ‘The Rights of Man and the Rights of Others’ (1985), Levinas says that human rights are based on a priori, original sense of right. Hobbes’s conception of natural state is based on natural right. For Levinas, ‘the rights of the other preceded the rights of the self. Rights may differ as a function of the actual situation.’ But he places the rights of other man above all.

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8 ibid, p. 45  
9 ibid, p. 11  
10 ibid, p.160  
11 Werhane, op.cit, p. 61  
12 Levinas, 2007, p.134  
13 ibid, p. 135
In this respect, fraternity is the central problem in Levinas's political thought. For Levinas, society is based on love and concern. Its origin is not based on power and conflict. Fraternity is more fundamental than freedom. Levinas feels that monotheism is ethical to the core. There is a commonality of genus that the ethical kinship disrupts.

Ethically, 'brotherhood is asymmetrical.'\(^{14}\) It is not reciprocal. In *Totality and Infinity*, fraternity is connected to filiality. However, the promise of the face commits me to human fraternity. In his essay 'Language and Proximity,' Levinas says that fraternity starts from absolute singularity. But it is universalized.\(^ {15}\) Levinas describes fraternity in terms of plural community of singularities. *Saying*, for Levinas, is the non-indifferent proximity of justice.

Levinas's later writings address the universalization of ethical singularity. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas explains the intrinsic connection between ethics and justice in terms of the third party approach. In *Totality and Infinity*, he addresses the passage from ethics to politics. Self is, first and foremost, social. Face-to-face is singular. However, the approach of the third party and a prophetic politics of the *saying* and the *said* elaborate the generalization of ethical singularity. Prophetic consciousness resumes the meaning of the *saying* and permits a certain universalization of ethical meaning.

Critchley observes that ethics in Levinas is ethics for the sake of politics.\(^ {16}\) Elisabeth L. Thomas also says that the recognition of other as a third is subsequent to my encounter with the face.\(^ {17}\) The relationship with a third awakens me to phenomenality. The relation of justice and thematization to the ethical moment cannot be seen as an after thought. It is the consequence of primordial responsibility. There is a complete shift from dialectic of eros and fecundity to vulnerability and the infinite in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.

\(^{14}\) Llewelyn, 1995, p.126
\(^ {15}\) Levinas, 1987, p.122
\(^ {16}\) Critchley, 1992, p. 22
\(^ {17}\) Thomas, op.cit, p. 104
Levinas addresses the question of law uniquely. There is not much discussion about the function of law in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. In his Talmudic readings, he invokes the function of law. Law mediates between human life and ethical transcendence.\(^{18}\)

Similarly, Levinas's writings are preoccupied with the issue of war and peace. According to Levinas, war threatens morality. It suppresses morality. If politics degenerates to serve the strategic operations of war, politics is opposed to morality. Political ideology can express human impulse to help others. Stalinism/Hitler's National Socialism exemplifies a period in which ethical ideal was crushed by cruelty. Levinas feels that war embraces a totality. No one can escape from the order it establishes.\(^{19}\) Levinas establishes a connection between war, totality and philosophy. First of all, war is the dominant experience that informs western philosophy. Secondly, philosophy, like war, stands for objective order.\(^{20}\)

Levinas seeks the eschatology of messianic peace. He is not satisfied with measures of peace established through and after war. War can only breed war. Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*: "The peace of empires issued from war rests on war. It does not restore to the alienated beings their lost identity."\(^{21}\) He asserts that only eschatological vision can break with totality of empires and wars.\(^{22}\) It discloses a primordial relation that totality discards. This is a key consideration of his idea of 'the political.'

The subject of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* is not the autonomous sovereign subject of modern political philosophy. His subject is subject of hospitality first, and later, more emphatically subject of obsession. Levinas views ontology as philosophy of power. It is a philosophy of state in the sense that 'state is a neutral term that dissolves differences in the name

\(^{18}\) Bergo, 1999, p.196.
\(^{19}\) Levinas, 1969, p. 21
\(^{20}\) Caygill, 2002, pp.104-105
\(^{21}\) Levinas, 1969, p. 22
\(^{22}\) ibid, p. 23
of a political whole.\(^{23}\) For Levinas, what is required is a philosophy of fraternity. Levinas refuses to digest the definition of peace as absence of violence. He is against the Hegelian conception of violence also. Hegel sees violence as the limitation of attaining totality.\(^{24}\) According to Levinas, violence does not consist in limitation of one by another. He separates violence from the antagonistic relations that makes a totality.\(^{25}\)

Hegel, according to Levinas, translates freedom into political institutions. Hegel conceives objective freedom. Levinas agrees upon Hegel's critique on subjective freedom. However, Hegel is submitting subjective freedom to the universality of law. In such a situation, freedom is the gift of totality. Levinas, on the contrary, explains the priority of work of justice over work of the state. He addresses the traditional subordination of the concept of justice to concept of truth.\(^{26}\) He asserts that justice does not follow from truth.\(^{27}\) He separates justice and freedom also in order to question the fundamental assumption of modern political theory - the priority of freedom over justice. In contrast to the Hegelian concrete universality that implies a speculative unity of infinite and finite, the infinity of the other is at the heart of his alternate conception. The infinity of the other and proximity dominate Levinas's reflections on politics.

The prophetic politics of Levinas is premised on the infinity of the other. However, prophetic politics accommodates the need of establishing institutions. It also entails raising a question against these institutions in the name of primordial responsibility.\(^{28}\) This is in his mind when Levinas conceives the emergence of justice in the movement between the ethical and ontological.

Similarly, proximity, in Levinas, disrupts any possible mediation between subjective and objective freedom. Levinas conceives proximity as 'an anarchic

\(^{23}\) Caygill, 2002, p.113  
\(^{24}\) ibid, p.118  
\(^{25}\) ibid  
\(^{26}\) Levinas, 1969, p.72  
\(^{27}\) ibid  
\(^{28}\) Caygill, 2002, p.130
relationship with a singularity without the mediation. Levinas writes in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*:

Justice, society, the state and its institutions, exchanges and work are comprehensible out of proximity. This means that nothing is outside of the control of the responsibility of the one for the other. It is very important to recover all these forms beginning with proximity, in which being, totality, the state, politics, techniques, work are at every moment on the point of having their concrete gravitation in themselves, and weighing on their own account.

Levinas’s conception of the political maintains a separation between the other and the third. Levinas insists on the priority of the relation to the other over the third. Prophetic politics entails a perpetual interruption of the self by the other and of the other by the third. Levinas locates the root of original rights in proximity and substitution. He seeks to distinguish between human rights from natural rights.

Unlike Heidegger, Levinas believes that use of technology is necessary. He sees technology as an agency capable of destroying the pagan gods. Technology is a force of secularization. Technology teaches us that gods are nothing more than things in the world.

**Israel, Zionism and Justice**

For Levinas, human experience is constituted by exposure to the other. Justice is part of face-to-face and sociality. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas says that justice is a right to speak. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas places duties over the rights. Levinas writes:

Everything that I say about justice comes from Greek thought, and Greek politics as well. But what I say, quite simply, is that it is, ultimately, based on the relationship to the other, on the ethics without which I would not have sought justice. Justice is the way

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29 Levinas, 1991, p.100
30 ibid, p.159
31 Caygill, 2002, p.142
32 ibid, p.153
33 Levinas, p.166
34 Levinas, 1969, p. 298
35 Werhane, op.cit, p. 65
in which I respond to the fact that I am not alone in the world with the other.\textsuperscript{36}

Levinas clearly states that the state of Israel should be religious, and it should be committed to the erudite work of justice. Genuinely religious Jews seek to have a state in order to have justice. Levinas acknowledges the role of political and state institutions. He conceives state as a venue for the practice of justice.\textsuperscript{37} The third, in his philosophy, refers to an ethical relationship in which more than two people are involved.\textsuperscript{38} The third, for Levinas, is the realm of law and politics. It is the third man with which justice begins.

The development of Levinas’s thought takes place within the context of debates about political Zionism. Levinas was unaware of the Zionist movement in his early years in Lithuania. But in France, where he had his higher education, the Zionist movement had a serious say. Levinas, to a major extent, shares the view that political Zionism was fundamentally apolitical.\textsuperscript{39} Unlike political Zionists, Levinas’s focus is not primarily on the survival of Jewish people. Unlike cultural Zionists, he does not represent the revival of Jewish culture. His interest in Zionism is based on his belief in ‘Zion’ for all of humanity. After the establishment of Israel, Levinas undermines political Zionism in the name of ethics. Levinas is a Jewish philosopher who stood for the existence of Jewish Diaspora and its relevance.\textsuperscript{40}

There is a criticism against Levinas that his views on the state of Israel are incoherent since his writings sporadically link philosophy, religion and politics. However, his political realism is based on the premise that ‘politics qua politics cannot be ethical.’\textsuperscript{41} In \textit{Difficult Freedom}, Levinas writes that the state of Israel will be religious because of the intelligence of the great books. It will be religious through the very action that it establishes it as a state. He hopes that the state of Israel would fundamentally carry out Judaism’s sociality and ethics.

\textsuperscript{36} Levinas, 1988, p.174
\textsuperscript{37} Morgan, 2007, p. 401
\textsuperscript{38} Batnitzky, 2006, p.153.
\textsuperscript{39} ibid, p.152
\textsuperscript{40} ibid, p.155
\textsuperscript{41} ibid
Levinas's political thought distinguishes between 'Israel' and 'state of Israel'. He is not separating Israel and state of Israel. In Levinas's writings, the idea of Hegelian universal history prevails over a pluralist notion of history. Pluralist notion of history is advocated by Rosenzweig. Caygill contrasts Hegelian universal history and Rosenzweig-inspired pluralism of holy and universal history. He writes:

This is evident in Levinas's closing remarks on the state of Israel. According to the pluralist notion of history, the dimensions of the state of Israel would always be in tension between universal and holy history, with the state, its civil society and the Diaspora suspended between the political and religious dimensions. In contrast, according to Hegelian universal history, all historical events are located within the progressive actualization of the idea of freedom in the state. An account of the state of Israel would in these terms locate the foundation of the state as the historical outcome of a sacrifice for the sake of freedom.  

Levinas succeeds in aligning universal and holy history through the inversion of universal history. For him, the state of Israel is founded on sacrifice. The state for Levinas, writes Caygill, "does not actualize freedom, but provokes sacrifice." Levinas speaks of messianic institutions. For him, they are not real existing institutions. They are not forms of the ideal state. Messianic institutions imply correction to existing institutional structures. The state of Israel is set within a particular political history. It is rather a political event. The state of Israel is a necessity to realize the civil freedom that could not be guaranteed to Jews in Diaspora.

Levinas characterizes the state of Israel as a hybrid of holy and universal history. Israel cannot be understood solely in terms of universal history. The political categories of universal history cannot comprehend the internal dynamics to the core. The holy history projects the messianic mission of Israel. According to the categories of holy history, the wars and politics of Israel are secondary. The holy history prioritizes ethical and religious dimensions. However, Levinas believes in a political logic that combines the dimensions of universal and holy

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42 Caygill, 2002, p.180
43 ibid
44 ibid, p.181
history. He places the messianic mission of Israel and the actions of the state of Israel.45

At the same time, Levinas maintains a tension between holy and universal history. The state, for him, is a suspended claim of universal and holy history. Levinas conceives a plethora of political dimensions to accommodate both universal and holy history. But it can be shown that he prioritizes the political categories of universal history in judging the actions of the state of Israel.46

The way Levinas approaches the Zionist questions can be considered as a concrete example of his prioritization. According to Levinas, Zionism has recurred throughout the universal history of the state of Israel. Even though Levinas states that space is not one dimensional and aligns both universal and holy history, he doesn’t hesitate to show his conceptual affinity to the standpoint of universal history, which is foregrounded in Zionist premises. The tradition of Jewish people carries an ethical message. But the state anticipates many unwanted proclivities and tensions. The State can become a complete corruption of the ethical ideal. There is a tendency to lapse into a nationalist agenda fully immersed in power politics. For Levinas, dominance and conflict are endemic to political life. It is very difficult to mitigate conflict and dominance.

Levinas is of the opinion that politics is unavoidable to felicitate acts of kindness and care. Political institutions are necessary to control and protect.47 What is required is the attitude of the people to resist the temptations of politics in pursuit of justice. According to Levinas, the reign of messiah comes closer if the people try to resist temptations of politics. For Levinas, politics should have a messianic vision. Morgan comments on Levinas’s messianic politics:

I do not think that Levinas’s concept of messianism and politics is unique to Judaism and the state of Israel. Messianism involves all those commitments that are concerned with our responsibilities to others; it is about realizing ethics in our lives. Politics is about the institutions of organized social life that enable us to live together with one another. Politics should have a messianic vision; it should

45 ibid
46 ibid
47 Morgan, 2007, p. 403
be guided by ethical conscience and by the hope that its institutions and its citizens will have just lives.\textsuperscript{48}

Levinas is not viewing Israel as a unique state. But he attributes certain specificities to state of Israel. Obviously, the rise of Israel as a state marks a historic specificity. Israel is the name of people’s return into history in the particular sense. But in a general sense, it marks the return of the politics and messianic opportunities for all.

Levinas views Zionism as a movement that acknowledges Jewish suffering. The movement addresses the suffering and seeks to reduce it. Zionism is based on a politics that seeks to reach out to the afflicted and the abandoned. Zionism is not about what Israel’s neighbours do and think. It is only about Israel’s welfare and its responsibility to a neighbour. Levinas is worried about Israel’s ongoing fight with Palestine. He wants the state of Israel to uphold human rights. For Levinas, it would be a brutal irony of history if state of Israel take up oppressive measures against the Palestines.\textsuperscript{49} Levinas is equally sympathetic to the people of Palestine. He refuses to reduce Jewish-Arab conflict into a political issue. It has a deep rooted psychological and moral dimension also. Arabs lived in the land for centuries. No one can ignore their claim over the land. Zionism, instead of narrowing itself to a political movement, should embrace reconciliatory steps to sort out the problems. Levinas nevertheless maintains a fundamental distinction between ‘the other’ and ‘the third’. Caygill points out that other can stand in the way of the third. Levinas locates this distinction in the ongoing confrontation between the people of Palestine and Israel.

For Levinas, Zionism is essentially an ethical movement. It is a movement that is born out of suffering. It cannot impose suffering on another. Levinas hopes that particular political aspect of Zionism will give way for its universal aspect to win.\textsuperscript{50} It is in this context that Levinas addresses the conflict between ethics and politics. For him, this conflict is not a philosophical issue. He believes that state itself is ethically grounded. On the massacres and attacks, Levinas tries to show

\textsuperscript{48} ibid, p.405
\textsuperscript{49} Caygill, 2002, p.174
\textsuperscript{50} Morgan, 2007, p. 408
that how ethics and politics are doubly related. They are "the transgression of ethics in the name of ethics."\textsuperscript{51} According to Levinas, function of state is not unconditional. It has ethical limits. Levinas is thinking about an ideal situation where ethics and politics mutually complement.

Levinas strongly opposes social Darwinism, one of the most dominant tendencies of political thought. Levinas sees that social Darwinism shatters the idea of ethical state. It questions the idea of a welfare state. Relating the structure of existence to humanity, Levinas identifies in the survival instincts the origin of all violence.\textsuperscript{52} According to Levinas, Nietzsche is a pioneer of National Socialism. He associates Heidegger with Social Darwinism. Heidegger's notion of Dasein is conceived almost in a Darwinian fashion. Dasein implies the following things. The aim of being is being itself. The living being struggles for itself.\textsuperscript{53}

Heidegger, in \textit{The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics}, objects to Darwinism generally. There are three important dimensions for the objection. First of all, Heidegger thinks that Darwin introduces some misleading questions into biology. Secondly, his interpretation of self-preservation is confined to an economic point of view. Thirdly, and most importantly, Darwin fails to explore the relational structure between the animal and its environment in terms of openness.\textsuperscript{54} For Darwin, animal is independent and then it adapts.

Levinas explores the important aspects of prophecy as a solution to the most of these fundamental problems. In the fifth chapter of \textit{Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence}, Levinas explains this. For him, prophecy implies the possibility of non-political politics. Prophecy is the interruption of politics.\textsuperscript{55} His essay 'God and Philosophy' also deals with meaning of Zionism and prophecy. Above all, Levinas maintains that fraternity is made possible not by equality but by a fundamental inequality. The prioritization of prophetic politics and suffering is emphatically evident in most of his writings after 1967.

\textsuperscript{51} ibid, p.23
\textsuperscript{52} Levinas, 2007, p.10
\textsuperscript{53} Bernasconi, Robert, 'Levinas and the Struggle for Existence', in \textit{Addressing Levinas}, op.cit, p.173
\textsuperscript{54} ibid, p.175
\textsuperscript{55} Batnitzky, 2006, p.157
Utopia

The notion of utopia has been one of the recurrent themes in Levinas’s political writings. There is a passage from the ethical to the political in Levinas. This passage implies a multiplicity in being without totalization.

Levinas’s notion of utopia goes around his conception of the encounter with the other. Levinas situates the quest for justice in the face of the other. Utopia generally refers to the political. In Levinas, ethical and political are linked at large. The face of the other remains the locus of this linkage. Levinas refuses to see politics as a supplement to ethics. For him, politics is already ethical. Levinasian utopia lies in understanding the meaning of human in its very disinterestedness. He invokes reciprocity of duties and rights.

Levinas explains the passage from ethics to politics. The utopian space of the encounter lies in the obligation for the other. This obligation is preserved in the state by maintaining the debts between citizens. The ethical exercise of freedom responds to the political rights of the other. In this way, space of politics is marked by asymmetric space. The incomparability of other in the ethical passes over to the peace sought for the other in politics. Levinas explains the passage from ethics to politics in the function of law. Utopia is accomplished politically as legal justice. Peace is utopia made political. Levinas goes onto explain as to how the asymmetrical spatiality of ethics manifests itself in politics. The passage from singularity to law necessarily involves risks. The first risk is the confusion of the law that protects singularity within anonymous legality. Justice answers to singularity with defense and protection. Justice forbids usurpation of other’s place in political space.

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57 Levinas, 2007, p.200
58 ibid, p.198
59 Drabinski, op.cit, p.186
60 ibid, p.191
61 ibid, p.192
Levinas stresses the universality and kind of irreducible impersonality of law. The law of peace must work with indifference despite its universality. For Levinas, universality of law accompanies peace in its protective function. Law protects the singularity of other in the sense that it shields it from anonymity. In shielding the other from anonymity, law carves out the space for singularity. Law of peace is not opposed to singularity. In its universality, law protects the singularity of the unique other without absorbing it into the general will.

In a nation, the law of peace stands fixed. Law is universal, and its space carved out by act of comparison, insects sameness to political life. A nation carries in itself debts between citizens. It doesn’t itself carry the debts between, for instance, classes, races or regions. For Levinas, privilege of rank also obstructs justice. Levinas is worried about the permanent exclusion of a minority in democracy. When rank and privilege alter politics, they become starting point for rethinking law on the model of generosity. Levinasian conception of state makes ethical life possible by not interfering with the debts between unicities.

**Paul Ricoeur’s Critique**

In 1957, Paul Ricoeur published a small volume ‘Autrement’ devoted entirely to his critical engagement with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. In another major work, *Oneself As Another* Ricoeur deals with the ethical character of self-hood and its intimate relation to the alterity of other person. Levinas and Ricoeur had a lot of similarities. They were trained in phenomenological school of philosophical tradition. Later on, Ricoeur’s dissatisfaction with phenomenology led him primarily to linguistics. Secondly, both of them were attracted to the notion of incarnate existence as explained by Gabriel Marcel. They both agree that ‘norms are not the ground zero of morality.’ But, according to Ricoeur, moral sociality is the second component of moral life. Moral sociality aims at self esteem which is the important aspect of moral life. Ricoeur equates moral sociality with normativity. For Levinas, moral sociality doesn’t at first manifest

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62 ibid, p.191  
63 ibid, p.193  
64 Cohen, 2004, p. 287
itself as normativity. Normativity, in Levinas, ‘is a conditioned development.’\(^{65}\) Normativity later on appears at the level of justice. Initial morality that emerges with sociality is more stringent than normativity. Levinas sees laws as part of developed morality. They are not its initial moment.

Disagreeing with Levinas, Ricoeur gives precedence to moral character over moral sociality. Ricoeur puts his emphasis on the notion of mutuality. He feels that mutuality is absent in Levinasian intersubjectivity. For Ricoeur, mutuality is not the affirmation of the other person. Mutuality comes from two persons aiming the same good life.\(^{66}\) He heavily depends upon Aristotle’s conception of mutuality in *Nicomachean ethics*.

Later on, Ricoeur shifts from Aristotle’s notion of mutuality to his own more inclusive concept of solicitude. Solicitude is the basic meaning of the moral self in its ethical intention towards another. Ricoeur feels that not mutuality, but extremity is the basis of Levinasian ethics. Levinas obviously puts weight on the height and initiation of the other. According to Ricoeur, receiving is on an equal footing with the summons to responsibility. Solicitude is more fundamental than mere obedience to the command of a higher other.\(^{67}\) Ricoeur asserts that the autonomy of the self is bound tightly with solicitude for one’s neighbour and with justice for each individual.\(^{68}\)

Ricoeur believes that by giving priority to moral sociality, Levinas indirectly gives priority to moral norms. Hence, Levinas reduces alterity to moral law. He reduces moral selfhood to obedience to duty.\(^{69}\) This is the reason why Ricoeur calls Levinasian other the master of justice. In Levinas, self and other are both out of relation and in relation. He believes that diachrony is the very force of ethics. Similarly, humanity arises in moral responsibility. Levinas conceives self as more passive than receptivity. It is more passive than any passivity.

\(^{65}\) ibid  
\(^{66}\) ibid, p. 288  
\(^{67}\) ibid, p.292  
\(^{69}\) Cohen, 2004, op.cit, p. 293
Cohen says that Ricoeur belongs to Parmenidian-Hegelian heritage of philosophy. On account of this tradition, Ricoeur views that Levinas is guilty of treating a non-relation as relation. For Ricoeur, Levinasian self is too separate. The other is taken to be too other. They cannot be put into a relation.\(^70\) In Ricoeur’s mutuality, self is not separated from its other.\(^71\) Levinas’s commentators think that Ricoeur does not touch Levinas’s analysis of self’s capacity of reception in *Totality and Infinity*. Separated self, in Levinas, is more capable of moral encounter because of its created being. Ricoeur seems to ignore Levinas’s account of selfhood starting with created being.\(^72\) He invokes lack of receptivity in Levinas. Ricoeur feels that ‘Levinas doesn’t solve the problem of establishing selfhood capable of receiving transcendent alterity without diminishing the radical transcendence of that alterity.’\(^73\) Obviously, Levinas’s account of erotic relation, fecundity and paternity addresses this problem. Levinas holds the view that sexuality is the very plurality of our existence.

**Levinas and Feminism**

There are multiple strands of feminism. Different heated debates and issues emerge in the terrain of feminism. Acceptance or rejection of post-feminism is one among the heated topics. According to Tina Chanter, feminism involves a number of more or less distinct approaches to women’s sexuality. Assuming the unity of feminism as a discourse amounts to the rejection of feminism.

Levinas, from the very beginning, is critical of any theory that presupposes the sameness of the other. Levinas thus finds problem with Durkheim in this respect. He feels that even Durkheim treats the relation of ‘I’ and other in terms of the collective whole. Levinas’s philosophy pre-empts any consideration of the relation between subjectivity and sociality. Levinas’s account of the otherness of the other starts with the asymmetry of the face-to-face. The feminine is presupposed by the face-to-face.

\(^{70}\) ibid, p. 298
\(^{71}\) Ricoeur, 1995, p.18
\(^{72}\) Cohen, 2004, p. 298
\(^{73}\) ibid, p. 300
The other par excellence is the feminine. Levinas sees otherness as the core of the feminine. In *Second Sex*, Beauvoir argued that femininity is inessential as opposed to the essential. Woman is deprived of the status of full subject. Levinas is not aloof from philosophical practices that tend to legitimize this. According to Beauvoir, *Time and Other* is the best example of this tendency. Commenting on Beauvoir’s criticism, Tina Chanter writes:

Levinas’ portrayal of femininity seems to fall prey to very traditional assumptions about the role of woman. The domain in which the face of the feminine makes its appearance for Levinas is the realm to which woman has been consistently relegated; the relatively serene abode of the domicile, the dwelling as presupposed by the feminine touch.

Levinas presents interiority in terms of enjoyment. For him, ‘life of enjoyment is a vibrant state of exaltation in which dwells the self.’ Body makes possible labour and representation. Body is the condition of labour and representation. In recognition of human sociality, a distance is created between ‘I’ and the enjoyment. Thing’s relation to body separates a thing from the chaos of elements. Possessions are created out of elements.

For Levinas, the ‘I’ exists as a separated being. At the same time, ‘I’ is answerable to the other. The ‘I’ is caught up in enjoyment, and yet it is in relation to the other. Commenting on the relation with the feminine other, Levinas says that “I must have been in relation with something I do not live from. This event is the relation with the other who welcomes me in the home, the discreet presence of the feminine.” This equivocation constitutes the epiphany of the feminine. The equivocal, for Levinas, is the domain of the feminine. In other words, Levinas assumes equivocation as the way of the feminine.

According to Tina Chanter, the feminine being, in Levinas, is one who encourages the ‘I’ to break the life of enjoyment. Levinas is of the opinion that

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75 Chanter, ‘Feminism and the Other’, in *The Provocation of Levinas*, op.cit, p.37
76 Levinas, 1969, p.118
77 ibid, p.171
feminine is presupposed by the face-to-face. The presence of woman is an absence at the same time. The speech that feminine face initiates is not a verbal speech. It is a silent speech. The presence of feminine is a discreet presence. It is a presence in withdrawal. Levinas sees self-effacement as the essence of the feminine.

Tina Chanter appreciates certain efforts in Levinas that are directed against the male hegemony and totality. She writes:

"If there is anything that Levinas is at pains to stress, it is the asymmetry of relation between I and the other. The effort to repudiate the notion of individuality that is based upon individuality is at the heart of Totality and Infinity. For Levinas, the reciprocal assumes the priority of the whole, whereas the singularity of the feminine, despite its return to self, is that in fecundity the 'I' is not purely and simply dissolved in to the collective."  

Levinas, in Totality and Infinity, employs a distinction between sex and gender. Feminine body is equivocal. Feminine being is both qua feminine and qua human being. Levinas says that femininity and masculinity are the attributes of every human being. Gender is not fully determined by physical features. Gender is unavoidably social also. There is a tendency to relate femininity to woman's body. This shouldn't imply that there can be no femininity without a female body. When he says that gender is not fully determined by sex, he doesn't undermine the impact that biology bears on gender.

In Levinas, the relationship of love of voluptuosity is a matter of dual solitude. It excludes the social relation. It excludes the third person. Levinas advocates a heterosexual formulation of love relations. He wants to maintain the possibility of a beyond. It is not exterior to love relation. It is within the relationship. Responding to Levinas's proposal, Alison Ainley writes:

Because of this Levinas must face the charge that the continuity of the identity via fecundity expresses not only the continuity of the law of the father, but also a presupposition of a heterosexual relation, albeit symbolically rather than biologically expressed.

78 ibid, p.155
79 Chanter, 'Feminism and the Other', in The Provocation of Levinas, op.cit, p.45
80 ibid
81 ibid, p.47
82 ibid
Levinas wants to keep accounts of maternity and paternity which is linked to a biological projection but not governed and determined by it, but the qualifying point that Derrida raises is still valid.  

Levinas is sceptical about the possibility of a language outside male language. However, Levinas's merit lies in radically reworking the concept of otherness. For him, woman's difference doesn't imply her inferiority. Tina Chanter feels that Levinas's notion of otherness provided feminism with a voice. It is nothing but the voice of the radically other. His efforts are not completely alien from that of feminists. Even Beauvoir doesn't intent to reverse the patriarchal relations. She is not saying woman is of superior sex. Instead, Beauvoir asserts that woman is not a deviant. She is not defined in relation to man. She does not limit man, but acts independently.

In Questions to Emmanuel Levinas, Luce Irigaray attacks Levinas's approach to erotic relationship. In her point of view, Levinas is following the language and logic of patriarchy. He denies woman her active subjectivity. In his early works, feminine other is the primary other. Irigaray attacks his justifications also. But in Levinas's later works, feminine other is replaced by a neutral other. Eros and femininity are the central concepts in Time and the Other. It is true that Levinas refuses to see femininity as property of woman. For him, it is a situation in which men and woman participate. Feminine is a habituation. In Levinas, 'the feminine is associated with the easy habitation on the part of male.'

Irigaray feels that Levinas denies woman a home of her own. She lacks a face. She lacks a transcendence of her own. The female is forced to do her supporting role. She is forced to sustain the feminine habitation of the male. She lacks self-determination and face. Female doesn't stand for an other to be represented in her human freedom. Irigaray struggles to show that Levinas's philosophy fails radically short of ethics. Of course, Levinas portrays erotism as exposure to the other of femininity. He says that erotic love can be explained in

83 Aainly, Alison, 'Amorous Discourses: The Phenomenology of Eros and Love Stories', in The Provocation of Levinas, op.cit, p.78
84 Chanter, 'Feminism and the Other', in The Provocation of Levinas, op.cit, p.52
85 Perpich, op.cit, p.29
86 Hutchens, 2004, p.147
terms of metaphysical desire and voluptuosity. Hutchens explains the possibility of different interpretations on Levinas:

On occasion, Levinas's description of the female and the feminine are fraught with disparagement, though this is perhaps his way of conveying how the feminine is misunderstood if the erotic is reduced to mere voluptuosity. For Levinas, the feminine may be a consoling means of realizing the masculine potential by providing a loving family. Although the feminine is respected as an other, the significance of her alterity is defined by the role in the erotic economy of the male.87

This is the reason as to why feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray denounce Levinas's notion of erotism as strictly sexist. On the other hand, feminists like Catherine Chalier, Alison Ainley and Tina Chanter recognize and uphold the honesty of Levinasian masculine perspective.

Levinas upholds the view that there is something more to erotic relationship than voluptuosity. Female is a being like any other being. She provides romantic and sexual fulfillment the male needs. She is, at the same time, the feminine, which is elusive, mysterious and incapable of being grasped by male's desire for pleasure.

Levinas distinguishes between two kinds of erotic relationship. The first kind of erotic relation involves two equal partners satisfying their sexual drives. The voluptuosity excludes the third party and the social relation. The reciprocity between the lovers excludes all ethically meaningful language. There is no language in the intimate relation of voluptuosity.88 Voluptuosity seeks and aims the voluptuosity of the other partner. It never seeks the other person as the feminine.

Levinas refuses to see the love of voluptuosity as ethical. He reduces it to an exercise that satisfies the sensual needs. It is fully based on self-interestedness. In contrast to the first, the second kind of relationship respects the feminine in the female. For Levinas, this is the poorest kind of face-to-face relationship. But,

87 ibid, p.146
88 ibid, p.148
according to Levinas, this kind of erotic relation is also not ethical. However, Levinas distances himself from the traditional view of the feminine. Tradition views woman as an object of lust. Levinas refuses to find even a real reciprocal relationship in love relations. For him, the feminine cannot be correlated with the masculine. This doesn't imply that there is a contradiction between masculine and feminine. However, it means that feminine cannot be conquered by the efforts of the masculine. It cannot complement each other. The male profanes the body of the female. This profanation leads to further desires to experience the feminine. In fact, to profane female is a masculine tendency to grasp the feminine. But female body cannot provide what male seeks. In voluptuosity, a male is not only facing a face alone, but also a body that is as expressive as face. The male tries to grasp the feminine by caressing the female. Caress is aimed beyond the physical body of the female.

Levinas upholds the equivocal nature of woman as female/feminine. Levinas encounters a femininity that evades masculine grasp. The elusiveness of the female is not a power that it has over the masculine. Male profanes female precisely because he cannot grasp her femininity. It is femininity, not the female that constitutes the real alterity. Levinas maintains an equivocal relationship between the female who is needed and the feminine that retains its alterity. Femininity as alterity cannot be represented. According to Levinas, erotic love aims beyond the satisfaction of the need. The male tries to grasp the feminine by caressing the female body.

Above all, the erotic relationship is a genuine face-to-face relationship because of the equivocal in the female. Levinas feels that females in a patriarchal society are forced to dissimulate because of the equivocal nature of the female as male experience it. The male ultimately fails to attain satisfaction of his desire. Female escapes subordination only by virtue of being feminine.

89 ibid, p.150
90 ibid, p.152
91 ibid, p.154