

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MODERN SUBJECT BY ARENDT AND LEVINAS:
THE OTHER AND POLITICS

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Thesis Abstract

Selbin Yılmaz, “Deconstruction of the Modern Subject by Arendt and Levinas:
The Other and Politics”

This thesis examines the notion of subjectivity in the philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas. It argues that the terms of the dichotomy between the modern and post-modern conceptualizations of the subjectivity are not satisfying for Arendt and Levinas. It aims to show that we do not have to make a choice between the self-sovereign and autonomous subject and the subjected subject. Arendt and Levinas have deconstructed the modern subject without subjugating it to any other structure, discourse or hegemonic process according to which the subject is neither at the exact center of all possible action nor is completely passive with having no capacity to act. In this respect, the study explores how Arendt and Levinas conceptualize subjectivity as ‘subject in plurality’ through integrating the other into the conceptualization. The major concern of this thesis is to question the possibility of collocating Arendt and Levinas in terms of their conceptualization of subjectivity in the context of how can they help us to reconceptualize politics. Despite the existence of some radical disjunctions in their theories, this thesis claims that they have still significant common points that make engaging them in a dialogue possible. The conclusion reached is that although they follow completely different ways when developing their philosophies, at the end, they reach to a similar conclusion which proposes that the subjectivity is dependent upon the existence of the others.

Tez Özeti

Selbin Yılmaz, “Arendt ve Levinas’ta Modern Öznenin Yapısökümü:

Öteki ve Siyaset”

Bu tez Hannah Arendt ve Emmanuel Levinas’ın felsefelerindeki öznellik kavramını incelemektedir. Arendt ve Levinas için öznenin modern ve postmodern kavramsallaştırmaları arasındaki ikiliğin yeterli olmadığını tartışmaktadır. Amacı, egemen ve özerk özne ile tabi kılınmış özne arasında bir seçim yapmak zorunda olmadığını göstermektir. Arendt ve Levinas, özneyi ne bütün olası eylemlerin merkezine koyarak ne de hiçbir eyleme yetisinin olmadığı şekilde pasifleştirerek; herhangi bir yapıya, söyleme veya hegemonik sürece de maruz bırakmadan yapısöküme uğratmıştır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, Arendt ve Levinas’ın kavramsallaştırmaya ‘öteki’ni de dâhil ederek, öznelliği nasıl ‘çoğul özne’ olarak kavramsallaştırdığını incelemektedir. Tezin asıl meselesi, siyaseti nasıl yeniden düşünmemize yardımcı olabilecekleri bağlamında, öznellik kavramsallaştırmalarına dayanarak Arendt ve Levinas’ı yan yana getirmenin olasılığını sorgulamaktır. Bazı radikal uyumsuzlukların varlığına rağmen, bu tez, önemli ortak noktaları bulunduğundan, onları bir diyaloga sokmanın mümkün olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Ulaşılan sonuç ise, felsefelerini geliştirirken tamamen farklı yolları takip etseler de, sonunda öznelliğin ötekinin varlığına bağlı olduğunu ileri süren ortak bir sonuca varmış olmalarıdır.

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Dedicated to the light and the dark,
to Gezi Resistance and Soma Miners.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The problem of the subject is a widely reconsidered issue in the history of political philosophy. Especially in the contemporary age, it is rare to encounter with a thinker or philosopher who does not take into consideration the problem of the subject or the subjectivity. To be sure, such a statistic has a relationship with the brutal events of the twentieth century which may be called as the bloodiest century of the human history. The question of the subjectivity is a touchstone for the political science, philosophy, sociology, and so on. It must be noted that the bloodiest century of the human history, the 20th century, may have led thinkers to think about the process of subjectivity, and relationships between human beings in terms of living together and sharing some commonness through respect and responsibility. Therefore, theories of the subjectivity are very significant in order to think about the relationship between human beings from a political perspective. Besides, it seems that thinking about subjectivity is one of the main elements of thinking politically.

This study deals with how Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas can help us reconceptualize politics through their conceptualization of the subject. The reason why these two thinkers are taken into consideration lies in my belief on their unique places among all these theories of the subjectivity. Their main criticisms are directed toward the tradition of Western philosophy which has always been a philosophy of totalizing. Throughout this tradition, they particularly oppose to the self-referential and autonomous subject proposed by some modern thinkers such as Descartes, Kant, and many different liberal thinkers. It must be noted that the criticisms of the modern subject already began among thinkers such as Hegel and Marx –they both think that

the autonomous subject is untenable. In the contemporary age, Arendt and Levinas are not the only ones who criticize the notion of the modern subject. There are also many thinkers who have dealt with the position of the subject such as phenomenologists, poststructuralists and postmodernists. Contrary to the modern thinking, it was particularly post-structuralism that disabled the subject and constituted it as a 'subjected subject' who is determined or fixed by structures, ideologies or some hegemonic practices. Postmodernism has gone a step further and claimed that the subject is dead.

Then, there appears two dominant thinking of the subjectivity. It seems that we have to make a choice between the self-referential, autonomous subject and the subjected subject. However, the terms of this dichotomy are not satisfying for Arendt and Levinas; therefore, they have developed a different conceptualization of the subject according to which the subject is neither in the center of all possible action nor is completely passive with having no capacity to act.

The purpose of this thesis is to work through Arendt and Levinas's problematization of the self so as to propose an alternative to the totalizing and unifying aspects of politics that arise from the modernist conceptualizations of the subject. The reason why it is important shows itself clearly in today's political atmosphere. Especially with the rise of the identity politics, the whole political activity has begun to take a shape around the relation with the 'others'. Unfortunately, this relation usually has a negative form that it leads to the problem of 'othering' which shows itself in everyday life as discourse of hatred. Therefore, there is certainly a need for a new model of the subject who will provide a 'concrete' and 'positive' relationship with the other.

Contrary to the modern thinking of the subjectivity, Arendt and Levinas underline that the human condition is determined by plurality and exteriority which arise from the existential structure of the self's inevitable relation to the other(s). This means that the world is not composed of solitary subjects, but of human beings who are all unique and different, but nevertheless related to each other in such a way that their identities depend on others. Through this claim, they both open the ways for a different (diverse) political realm that is not based upon only the self-standing subject which has totalitarian tendencies. Consequently, this thesis questions what kind of alterity or difference (which is represented by the other) there should be which shall not give way to the othering. They both have the same answer in the very beginning: The subjectivity is not a self-standing one; rather, it is constituted through being with others. Therefore, the deconstruction of the modern conceptualization of the subject is very significant for the sake of politics in terms of both political action and change of mentality of what we expect from politics.

In the second chapter of the thesis, I will examine the way Arendt opposes to the sovereign and abstract constitution of the modern subject. Historically, modernity can be summarized as the emergence of the concept of humanity as 'a singular ontological entity' who has a mastery over all realms; economics, social, cultural and political. In that sense, the subject constituted through being capable of 'reasoning' has become an authority in a world which has lost its meaning already with the death of God. Such authority seems to have a direct relationship with sovereignty. Moreover, the constructed self-sovereign subject presents or has to present itself in a unity and totality in order to have mastery over circumstances. Because, the modern subject creates the world she lives in which she implies 'control' as a means of self-determination. However, this is very criticized by many thinkers since it establishes

the ground for the totalitarianism in terms of political, cultural and social aspects of life in the contemporary age.

Secondly, Arendt is against the perception claiming that freedom can come along or can be experienced only by subjects who use their 'free wills' upon which their sovereignty is based. Especially, the notion of will, even if it can be generalized or expanded as General Will or national will, is not related with plurality; rather, it is a faculty which only wills itself. Moreover, the essential activity of this faculty of the will is to dictate and to command. The power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom but a question of strength or weakness. For her, the will to power turns into oppression since it has a relationship or intercourse with only one's self. She emphasizes that this is why today we identify power with oppression and with rule over others although it is something positive and constitutive. For Arendt, the unifying and totalizing aspects of sovereignty and its direct relationship with the will are potentially destructive for the political realm since they are exclusionary. Arendt does not reject the activity of this faculty; however, what she proposes is that the faculty of will can be political only when it coincides with the I-can which refers to 'acting' in the public realm.

What is more, the notion of self-sovereign subject is abstract for Arendt. Therefore, after examining the criticism of Arendt toward the notion of sovereignty, I will deal with how it has ended up with an abstract construction of the subject. Being at the center of the all possible action, self-sovereign subject refers to the complete rejection of the existence of the others. This rejection is, of course, not a choice or decision; rather, it is the denial of the human condition-the human condition of plurality. The main consequence of such denial is the worldlessness which is the main pathology of the modern world. It is not self-alienation for Arendt; but it is

world alienation which we have to deal with in the modern age. Consequently, Arendt deconstructs the self-sovereign and abstract position of the subject through suggesting 'subject in plurality.' She integrates the 'other' into the conceptualization against the notion of self-standing subject. Unlike the modern understanding of self which is unified, Arendt claims that the self is discontinuous and already divided. In other words, it does not have a given certain identity; rather, it attains its identity through acting in the world. This subject is not self-standing; rather, it is under transformation all the time through its relation with other, and as a result of which it gains its unique identity. Consequently, it becomes obvious that Arendt rejects the substantialist accounts of identity.

In the third chapter, I will examine what Levinas proposes in terms of the subjectivity. Before reaching the conclusion, I will try to analyze Levinas's criticism of ontology which has dominated the whole philosophy according to him. He claims that ontology –the question of Being- is a philosophy of power. Questioning what Being is has consequently led to the imprisonment to Being itself for him. Alongside with this imprisonment, philosophy has served to the reduction of the other into the same as Levinas claims. That reduction has shown itself in the most brutal way in the experience of totalitarianism. This is why he questions about the subjectivity in a relationship with others. Then, he proposes an ethical subjectivity in a metaphysical relationship. Metaphysics refers to transcendence and infinity in his lexicon. Such transcendence and infinity as opposed to the totality is the main obstacle for reducing the other since the other transcends one's comprehension which makes her irreducible. In other words, the other always goes beyond comprehension; not reducible to consciousness or understanding.

The reason why Levinas deconstructs the subject lies in his ethical concern. The relationship with the other is an ethical relationship. So, subjectivity is constituted by ethical responsibility for the other; not by rationality, sovereignty or autonomy. Levinas establishes the relation between the self and the other as face-to-face relationship. But, this face is invisible for him. What makes this relationship ethical is not to see the face of the other, but to speak to her. Face-to-face relation is always linguistic relation. The face is not something I see, but something I speak to. I am not contemplating, I am conversing. Not ontological, but ethical. It lies in the welcoming the other. Briefly, it is the question of sharing the world with others.

In the fourth chapter, I will try to engage Arendt and Levinas in a dialogue. In the very beginning, it may seem that to compare these two thinkers is difficult. Arendt is a political thinker; however, when we look at the Levinas's philosophy, we encounter with a highly philosophical language. Also, it may seem difficult to make political derivations from his theory since he essentially deals with ethics. This is one of the main criticisms directed toward Levinas. Unfortunately, he is usually accused of having a theological philosophy in which there is a Godly voice; so, it is hard to imply his philosophy to the world, human beings, and especially the political realm. However, although Levinas himself argues that the relationship between the same and the other is a religious one, I think that he has an analogy in mind between God and the other. In other words, he does not identify God and the other. On the other hand, Arendt is criticized by some thinkers with regard to her philosophy's being blind to the moral questions. In that sense, when we look at the literature, there are some works dealing with Arendt and Levinas at the same time; but, most of them compare these two thinkers in terms of the supremacy of one over the other. This supremacy is usually constituted through the same argument: Arendt lacks any

notion of ethics; and Levinas lacks any notion of politics. There are really few studies which try to read Arendt and Levinas together. In that sense, I believe that this thesis will be a contribution to that literature.

What I propose is that Arendt and Levinas, as two Jewish thinkers who have experienced the Nazi horror, develop their thinking through totality as a theoretical matter and totalitarianism as a historical fact. Therefore, they both offer a theory of subjectivity in plurality. As opposed to the claims that Arendt does not take into consideration the moral questions, and that Levinas does not offer something political, I claim that their theories have some answers our ethical and political questions. Indeed, what I claim is that a theory which has stemmed from thinking of totalitarianism can be blind to neither ethics nor politics. Despite the contrasts of their theories, they have a similar answer about the subjectivity in the last instance: subjectivity is nothing but the relationship with the other.

Now, I will continue with a brief introductory part in which I will try to examine how the modern subject is constructed by Descartes, Locke and Kant. Then, I will continue with the criticisms directed toward the modern subject. The aim of this introduction is to show how the modern subject is constructed, and how it is differed in the contemporary age.

The Need for ‘Another Ontology’: The Construction of the Modern Subject

“This modernity does not liberate man into his own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.”¹

Around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so much was happening in Western Europe, and we might say that all of these happenings paved the way to the emergence of the ‘modern identity.’ First of all, this emergence was quite related with the scientific revolution inaugurated by Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler, who pointed out that the Earth has lost centrality in the universe. As Copernicus claimed, the motion of heavenly bodies does not result only from their own motion which refers to cosmology, but also it is affected by the motions of the observers on the earth. In other words, the observed motions should be sought in the spectator. The Copernican Revolution would later turn into ‘Kantian Copernican Revolution’ in philosophical literature since while Kant seeks for the laws which govern the realm of experience. He finds that laws cannot be derived from the objects themselves, but from us. Kant points out this by saying “we can know *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them.”² On the other hand, Galileo’s invention of telescope gives the message that through technology ‘man now had new forms of power over the natural world’.³ These developments, as Hall points out, show the substitution of religion (the characteristic of medieval society) by science through which man can understand the world and might change this world through new means. Not only

¹Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: History of Sexuality, Vol.3*, (New York: Vintage, 1986), 42.

²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 111.

³Donald Eugene Hall, *Subjectivity*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 17.

science and technology, but also literature, art, philosophy have undergone changes; also the development in population and the rise of urbanization, and the birth of the modern nation state –changes going hand in hand- have altered the entire atmosphere of the world in those centuries. The root or the moment as historically pointed out of these shifts may be assigned as Renaissance which is identified with the ‘optimism about human possibilities and achievements.’⁴ Therefore, Renaissance is the primary indicator of the rise of human agency.

It can be claimed that this ‘Renaissance individualism,’ which is identified as the end of the medieval society, is the spring of the modern identity. As Taylor points out, after such a transformation, humankind needs another ontology which would be an adequate basis for its moral responses;⁵ because as Kolakowski asserts in his work, ‘if God does not exist, then everything is permitted’⁶ which would most likely be a chaos which should be avoided immediately for that time. Accordingly, this ‘another ontology’ is nothing but humankind itself.

At this juncture, the *principle of respect* which is associated with human dignity has come to agenda in order to attribute ‘power’ or ‘capacity’ to the individual who will be the authority of the world from now on. For Taylor, this principle of respect constitutes the basis of the modern Western legal tradition and it has become central to its legal systems as well as its moral thinking. While Taylor deals with the constitution of the modern identity, he always tries to bind it with the moral understanding since he believes they are always ‘inextricably intertwined themes.’

⁴Hall, *Subjectivity*, 18.

⁵Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 10.

⁶Leszek Kolakowski, *Religion* (London: Fontana, 1982), 25.

This principle of respect is closely connected to the notion of autonomy or self-rule since every human being is capable of establishing and ensuring the respect and every human being has dignity. Autonomy defines the subject as ‘capable of self-governance, able to turn inward and make reasonable decisions and engage in self-management.’⁷ The dignity appears like an inner voice which is commanding respect without a need for any outside effect. Therefore, the notion of autonomy which is the central feature of modern Western moral outlook shows itself clearly through the idea that individuals are incomparable, unknowable and cannot be objectified (which sabotages the dignity of them); they are all autonomous.

The notion of autonomy is closely interwoven with the notion of will; the will to control one’s self and one’s physical impulses. Autonomy, indeed, shows itself as an exercise of oppression and as a practice of self-limitation through one’s own will. Moreover, although it is self-oppression or a form of disciplinary power inside as Foucault asserts, it is very consistent with the idea of the modern identity since it controls within oneself, not from outside; and by the idea of autonomy, one is encouraged through self-legislation (*auto-nomos*) both in private and public-political realms. The category of autonomy ‘underpins the possibility of rights-bearing subjects, theories of individualism, and conceptions of unitary identity.’⁸ Being unitary or united is significant for one’s power of capability of doing something as the ultimate authority. Thus, the notion of sovereignty which is already linked with the autonomy provides that ultimate origin. Sovereignty has to be one or united since if there are other alternatives to claim a power, there could not be sovereignty. Therefore, the sovereign undivided subject serves as the guarantor of order as a

⁷Claire Elaine Rasmussen, *The Autonomous Animal: Self-Governance and the Modern Subject* (Minneapolis: The Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011), x.

⁸*Ibid.*, 2.

single power to govern inside and outside. As a consequence, ‘autonomy and sovereignty have been at the heart of Western political thought, seeking to define the center of political order.’⁹ The significance of order should not be ignored since the all efforts for constructing the modern subject head toward a solution for guaranteeing order through this created new authority.

Another feature of the notion of autonomy is its being abstract as criticized by many thinkers. The reason why it is labeled as abstract is because it springs from inside. In other words, the law or the norm that must be created by the autonomous individual is the self-reflection of her without any imposition from outside and from any material thing. In the absence of any external determination, autonomy is the activity of making the law inside which is abstract. This abstraction also makes the individual the authority over the action and decision. This is called also as a *liberty of indifference*. If the individual has the choice to do something or not to do it through her free will, it means that she is indifferent to them. This understanding is considered as abstract since it is not politicized. In other words, to choose something is not that much independent from outside world especially thinking through political, social and economic realms. Rasmussen underlines this point by relating the autonomy and the abstract constitution of subject very briefly:

The autonomous subject must be able to distance herself from her own empirical conditions and self-legislate. Autonomy is thus not an attribute of human beings but an activity that transforms the self into the subject of contemplation and author of the decision.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., x.

¹⁰Rasmussen, *The Autonomous Animal*, 6.

A self turning into a subject is significant for our claims of abstraction; as Rasmussen emphasizes, the self or the individual consisting of a body, blood and bones turns into a 'nominal subject' who has a hierarchical advantage in the history.

The other part of this modern identity is represented by *reason* or *rationality* which substitutes the old beliefs, faith, or soul in order to provide a basis for humankind to get a higher life only by herself. Reason is identified with 'purity, order, limit and the unchanging'¹¹ by Taylor. This idealization of reason has its roots in the Greek philosophy, especially in the thought of Plato and his moral doctrine. When Plato puts the differentiation between good and bad, he takes the reason as a measure. As Taylor cites from Plato, 'we are good when reason rules, and bad when we are dominated by our desires.'¹² He points out reason as the way of controlling oneself and becoming the mastery over his body and desires. This notion shows itself within the modern thought as well. A systematization of everything around reason is peculiar to modern thought, especially to Kant's thought.

The rationality produced by the West claims 'superiority to other alternatives.'¹³ This is a specific rationality which is constituted by the West and it is one. It shows us a 'way of thinking' or 'giving reasons' according to the rules of it. The claim of there can be only one rationality will be the hallmark of the modern Western thinking in such a way that all value spheres of the society such as politics, economics, technology, media, science, religion, art, sport, etc., will be managed under the rules of that superior rationality through the claim that rationality is

¹¹Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 20.

¹²Ibid., 115.

¹³Ulrich Steinvorth, *Rethinking the Western Understanding of the Self* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 4.

universal and gives us truth and freedom.¹⁴ In other words, there is a rational hegemony which rules the West. As Steinvorth asserts:

The West can be defined neither geographically nor historically but only by its ideas and its superior rationality. This at least is the self-understanding of the West.¹⁵

The notion of reason grows up hand in hand with the concept of the self as well as the notion of autonomy. Reason which has become the hallmark of the modern age presents itself as ‘free from established custom and locally dominant authority.’¹⁶ It itself is the new authority now, which is independent from any other effect or force. Therefore, the owner of reason, the rational agent, has the authority over the rest of the universe. This brings us to the constitutive feature of this rationality. As Taylor mentions, ‘the rational agency is the constitutive good.’¹⁷ This construction includes two-sided construction: the construction of the world and the subject herself. At that point, we may bind this notion of construction with the abstraction. If we look at the linguistic meanings of these two words, we see the relation between them clearly.¹⁸ As touched upon above very briefly, the Kantian Copernican Revolution shows it better how the reason constitutes the world which will be discussed later.

As the third feature of the constitution of the modern subject, we shall point out the sense of *inwardness* which means that all of our thoughts, ideas or feelings

¹⁴However this idea will be criticized in the twentieth century by Heidegger, Horkheimer, Adorno, Arendt and many other thinkers by claiming that it enslaves man and ruins nature. For them, rational self-mastery has turned to the self-domination or enslavement. This is what the members of Frankfurt School calls as ‘dialectic of Enlightenment.’

¹⁵Steinvorth, *Rethinking*, 3.

¹⁶Hall, *Subjectivity*, 24.

¹⁷Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 94.

¹⁸Abstract means apart from practice or reality; not applied; conceptual and theoretical; considered apart from concrete existence. When we claim that the modern subject is abstract, we mean indeed it is, in a sense, a mental construction within the modern history.

are within us, not coming from outside. This notion of inwardness has a long history going back to the Plato's thought. It is a very common idea that the West has its origins in ancient philosophy, Rome and Christianity. For instance, Plato does not put a radical differentiation between inside and outside; however, while he deals with the notion of mind which is one and in unity, he asserts that, in a sense, reason is the way of our seeing and understanding the order of the world. In other words, reason provides us getting a correct vision about the natural order which can be called as 'self-affirming aspect of reason's hegemony.'¹⁹ When coming to Augustine, we see this differentiation between inside and outside clearly. The notion of inner world in Augustine is closely related with the road to God through which he claims God is not out there or somewhere else in the material world; rather he is within us. Therefore, as Taylor cites, he warns us as 'do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.'²⁰ This also discloses the idea of self-reflexivity which is also peculiar to the modern subject. Self-reflexivity means individual can reach the truth and get knowledge only by herself; with the words of Taylor, 'the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stand.'²¹ This means that the source of knowledge or reality stands upon the first-person experience of reasoning or thinking.

Taylor prefers to present us a comprehensive and historical perspective while trying to understand the constitution of the modern identity. Following the historical order, now I will explore the thoughts of the founders of the modern identity in order

¹⁹Ibid., 121.

²⁰Ibid., 129.

²¹Ibid., 130.

to show how modern identity is constructed step by step. I will deal with Descartes, Locke and Kant respectively through the main three themes about the modern identity: principle of respect (related much more autonomy), reason or rationality and inwardness. Let's begin with Descartes who is seen as the founder of modern philosophy and modern individualism.

Descartes has adopted a method of doubt through which he proves the existence of the 'I.' This is very famous *cogito ergo sum* –I think, therefore I am– through which subjectivity has come to a very central place as the source of all possible knowledge and experience. In other words, the knowledge of what is outside can never be acquired except by the means of ideas within oneself. This doubting method also demonstrates that the *cogito* whose existence is certain has become the indubitable truth from which all other truths can be derived.²² The centrality of the self-conscious 'I' is also described in terms of apartness and individuality that it stands alone, independent from the others and from the world; so, it is immaterial thinking thing in-itself. Briefly, we may say that Descartes suggests a kind of solipsism that 'I' can know only through by my mind. Moreover, these will be the self-evident truths which are certain and irrefutable.

What Descartes puts forward is the idea of 'substance dualism' which proposes mind and body is completely separate entities from each other; they are distinct substances. Within this dualism, we see clearly the notion of self-mastery since the mind is situated as the controller of the body and desires. The body represents the material world while the mind does the immaterial. For Descartes, in order to see the reality and to realize fully our immateriality, we *disengage* ourselves from the material world and we have to objectify in order to have control over it. In a

²²Kim Atkins, *Self and Subjectivity* (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 8.

sense, the material world and our desires are instrumentalized by our reason which we defined as hegemony of reason above. This is the way Descartes shows of the inner worldly liberation, as Taylor defines.²³

Briefly, the rational control in Descartes's thought shows itself as a means of dominating the disenchanted world of matters through instrumentalizing them. Disengagement between mind and body, between immaterial and material world, can be possible only through objectifying the outside and then the internal one. Hence, the rationality gains superiority over the external realm which also shows that individual can achieve a 'self-sufficient certainty' in a world in which herself is at the center. This is called as 'disengaged self of disengaged reason' by Taylor which is a very brief description but having a strong revealing power of the situation. At the last instance, this is the fate of Cartesian subject: it will always be an outsider; it will always observe but never participate, never involve in the world²⁴ as a consequence of its disengagement.

Locke, at that point, is also a significant figure with regard to his conceptualization of the self after Descartes. Taylor again has a good name for the Locke's understanding of the self: punctual self, which appears as the main feature of modern figure by Locke and influenced other Enlightenment thinkers. It includes the subject of disengagement and the rational control through which the self has a full power to perfect on her own. Since disengagement is always a kind of objectification through which individual also gains instrumental control over it, Locke's theory generates 'an ideal of independence and self-responsibility, a notion of reason as free

²³Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 147.

²⁴Atkins, *Self and Subjectivity*, 10.

from established custom and locally dominant authority.’²⁵ As Descartes, Locke also constructs the self as ‘a thinking intelligent being and having reason and reflection;’²⁶ the radical reflexivity which is one of the main features of the modern self shows itself in Locke’s theory very clearly. As Atkins cites from Locke, ‘whenever I have an idea I also have an awareness of myself as having that idea.’²⁷ He strongly focuses on our mental activity trying to objectifying it. For him, the capacity of mind to produce, manage and operate ideas shows man’s power.

Locke also has a hedonist theory through which he identifies good and evil with pleasure and evil. This supports the idea that how Taylor puts the relation between the construction of the modern identity and moral theory. In that sense, Locke has an understanding of a determinist use of reason in seek for good and pleasure. For him, the mind has ‘a power to suspend the execution of any of its desires; and so all, one after another; is at liberty to consider the objects of them, examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others,’²⁸ and to decide at the end which is good for oneself. This confirms the idea that reason is related with capacity which attributes it a power over both inside and outside.

What Locke also points out through the capacity of reason is the prospect of self-remaking through radical disengagement. For him, individual can create or change her habits and even herself through rational control; in other words, individual can remake herself. The connections between individual and her habits are instrumental now; they can be determined according to the best results, pleasure and

²⁵Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 167.

²⁶Atkins, *Self and Subjectivity*, 20.

²⁷Ibid., 20.

²⁸Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 170.

happiness as the result of hedonist theory of Locke. What Taylor calls as the ‘punctual self’ is this: ‘the subject who can take this kind of radical stance of disengagement to himself or herself with a view to remaking.’²⁹ This is the hallmark of the self’s pure, neutral, independent, constitutive and disciplinary stance and consciousness.

Immanuel Kant as a follower of rationalist tradition puts reason into the very center of his theory and he begins as well as Locke does with questioning what we are able to know. He criticizes the English empiricism and especially Hume’s theory which reduces all possible knowledge to the senses. Kant, at that point, incorporates empiricism and rationalism as the sources of knowledge since he believes that pure empiricism takes into consideration only the object of the perception and it is necessary to consider the human subject who can actively think. For Kant, influenced by the forms of Plato, the knowledge of objects can be possible only through forms or our categories imposed by the understanding. In that sense, ‘the human subject becomes the universal and necessary and objective condition of knowledge.’³⁰ This centrality of the human subject gains meaning through the differentiation between noumenal world and phenomenal world. He differentiates these two that the noumenal world refers to the world of things-in-themselves; and the phenomenal world refers to the world of appearance. The noumenal world lies beyond our cognitive capacities for Kant. Therefore, knowledge we get from the objects is only appearances of them; this is why we call it as knowledge since the knowledge of an object and the object in-itself is not the same things. Furthermore, we cannot know what things are really are; however, within the world of appearances, the only source

²⁹Ibid., 171.

³⁰Atkins, *Self and Subjectivity*, 47.

which provides us getting an objective and universal knowledge is reason itself. In the end, the subject constitutes itself in the realm of phenomenon as universal.

Kant's theory cannot be understood perfectly without considering his moral theory. We may summarize Kant's moral philosophy with his own words: "I ought never to act except in a way that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law."³¹ First, there is autonomy of the will here; and the ability of the individual to create her own reasons which could turn into universal. In that sense, autonomy for Kant is not only being capable of choose something; but also 'a will capable of generating its own principles and holding itself accountable to those principles in legislating and executing its own moral law.'³² That reveals the centrality of the subject in the realm of morality as well as of knowledge.

In Kant's theory, we should underline the significance of the notion of 'unity': unity of the subject, unity of nature and unity of these both which reveals in the existence of God. The thought or the human subject has to be "one" or "total;" otherwise it cannot claim that it understands the phenomenon. This is called as 'transcendental principle of the unity' which is the objective condition of all knowledge. In other words, Kantian subject constructs the world according to her objective forms and laws in a total unity which makes it universal. This is referred as 'as if' character of Kantian philosophy:

According to Kant, it was only by taking the subjective need, or purposiveness originating from this need 'as if' it was objective, humanity could create the conditions of the

³¹Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 57.

³²Rasmussen, *The Autonomous Animal*, 5.

possibility of its existence and prove itself its worth to be happy.³³

This ‘as if’ character of Kantian philosophy manifests that the modern subject is very much related with constitution; it constitutes both itself and the world. We may say that Kant is very influential on the thoughts of philosophers coming after him who believe the modern subject is a historical construction.

Briefly, the modern subject constitutes itself as self-sovereign, autonomous who stands alone and in a hypothetical position (abstract) in a sense; and this paves the way to claim the ‘universal’ which makes it the ultimate authority through reasoning. It has to construct itself and the world over again. It appears as *homo clausus* which means human on her own. However, this anxiety of unity and constructing itself makes the experience of modernity equivocal: between contingency and necessity; between immanence and transcendence; between emancipation and subjection; between autonomy and discipline. In fact, these are seen as the dynamism of modernity; for example, ‘words such as revolution, progress, emancipation, development’³⁴ are dynamic concepts of modernity for Habermas. But that dynamism has become equivocal that will be problematized by many thinkers. The major criticism will come from the structuralism; and then, it will be followed by post-structuralism and postmodernism. The dissociation of the subject will dominate the realm of discussions in philosophy and politics which will be discussed in the following part.

³³Erdoğan Yıldırım, “Return of Spirit and the Demise of Politics” in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9, No.27, (2010): 114.

³⁴Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1987), 7.

Criticisms to the Modern Subject

As discussed in the previous part, in a world which has lost ‘meaning’ already, the human subject has become an ultimate authority on which all knowledge and experience depend. This secularized subject has led to the secularization of everything of which Weber calls as ‘disenchantment of the world.’ For example, looking from a sociological viewpoint, increased rationalization has taken the form of instrumental rationality which means that the subject develops a kind of relationship with the world and others by reducing them into the categories of means and ends. Also, the development in science and technology and the restrictive apparatus of bureaucracy have become the hallmark of the modern life. Weber defines it as an ‘iron cage’ which makes transcendence and freedom impossible. From this aspect, the experience of modernity apart from its promises has become equivocal especially between emancipation and subjection that is problematized by many thinkers.

It can be said that the groundwork of the criticisms shows that there is a decisive but interactive division between the subject and the object. Before, the subject was conditioned as the authority that has the capability of attaining the knowledge of the object and theorizing about it. However, the main discussion around the subjectivity in the contemporary age accepts that there is a relationship among the objects (this object can be considered as the ‘other’) which is exterior to the subject; therefore, to get the knowledge of the object from one viewpoint which is supposedly the subject’s viewpoint is not possible at all. Indeed, it is not only a relationship of knowledge. In other words, there is no guarantee that they are strictly separated from each other; the subject is also affected by the object; in a sense, its

existence depends on it mostly. These are the discussions of the contemporary age – especially of post-modernism.

Now, I prefer to begin with Hegel and Nietzsche who have criticized the modern understanding of the subject as still being modern figures. Then, I will try to follow a historical order focusing on some philosophical figures in order to show how the ideas about the subjectivity take form.

Hegel: After a Dialectical Encounter

“Consciousness finds that it immediately is and is not another consciousness, as also that this other is for itself only when it cancels itself as existing for itself, and has self-existence only in the self-existence of the other.”³⁵

Weber is a significant figure in terms of presenting a framework about the pathologies of the modernity with related to the conceptualization of a rational subject. Before Weber, the criticisms much more related with the ontological understanding of the subject have already begun. One of the most distinctive figures is Hegel who is known as a philosopher of consciousness. He firstly underlines that consciousness is a historical being, and then, he points out three levels of consciousness. The first one is consciousness consisted of the faculties of sense-certainty, perception and understanding. Briefly, this level of consciousness refers to one's own universe. The second one is the state of self-consciousness in which one becomes aware of an existence of externality and senses that one is not alone in the universe. So, self-consciousness means self-recognition in a sense. Consciousness becomes self-consciousness when it experiences itself as the source of the understanding. In that sense, Hegel is literally against Descartes's famous *cogito ergo sum*. Rather, for him, the self is social, interpersonal and needs mutual

³⁵F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 65.

recognition. It can be comprehended neither psychologically nor epistemologically. It absolutely appears through a dialectical relation between consciousness and externality, through the intercourse of these two.

For Hegel, all men are subjected to this dialectical relationship. Dialectic is a relational methodology; and it can be defined basically as the process of confrontation which also includes the process of elimination. This dialectic flows between the universal and particular, or nature and Spirit, or nature and man, or Idea and human passions. Hegel uses the master and slave metaphor as an abstraction to explain how dialectic works. There is a confrontation of self and the other. The other cannot be other than another consciousness which is a really disturbing realization. Each demands that the other recognizes her as an independent consciousness rather than being an object. They engage in a struggle of death and life and try to kill each other for infinity; but, at the end, one consciousness dominates the other one. Whatever the end is like, self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. It is nothing but a demand for recognition. After that, reason appears as a socio-historical process and the third level of consciousness after the sublation of the first two processes. Briefly, what Hegel does is an absolute historicizing of the development of the self as distinct from Descartes and Kant who claim the subject is always subject indifferent to the history.

For example, for Kant who replaced the idea of obedience with self-governance claiming that ‘the simple unity of self-consciousness, the ‘I’, is inviolable and utterly independent and free, and the source of all universal determinations. On the other hand, Hegel has a negative conception of freedom. By differentiating ethics from morality, he shows that social ethics is not based upon the individual choices; rather it is shaped by social relations (regarding to dialectical

method). These social relations are not product of free will; they are already existent relations into which one is born.

Nietzsche: An Anti-Enlightenment Stand: Will against Reason

“All reality is already quantity of force. There is nothing but quantities of force in mutual relations of tension. Every force is related to others and it either obeys or commands. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body whether it is chemical, biological, social or political.”³⁶

Nietzsche is usually named as the first ‘postmodern’ philosopher. Although he lived in nineteenth century, he is one of the distinct figures in terms of deconstructing the subject. One of his main contributions is the differentiation between Being and Becoming he made. Within the traditional philosophy, it can be claimed that such a differentiation did not have a proper place; in other words, it did not make sense. Being, for Nietzsche, is something substantive, unchangeable, and pre-given which makes it homogeneous and unified. On the other hand, Becoming is the state of continuous change which is against fixed identity.

At the same time, Nietzsche deals with the consciousness. For him, consciousness is never self-consciousness as Hegel claims. It is rather a region of the ego affected by the external world. At that point, it may be truer to say that Nietzsche deals with body rather than consciousness as a part of becoming. Nietzsche defines ‘force’ as the source of all reality; and a body is the relation between dominant and dominated forces. As Deleuze asserts:

Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces the body is a multiple phenomenon, its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon, a unity of domination.³⁷

³⁶Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), 40.

³⁷Ibid., 40.

Body, here, appears as a multiple phenomenon consisting of active and reactive forces that is very against to the unitary and total understanding of the modern subject. It can be said that there is an ongoing struggle between these forces in order to reach out for power. These relations of forces are undetermined; in other words, there is a kind of complex relationality of forces which is not harmonious.

‘Will to power’ appears as a synthesis of these struggling forces since they both carry it. It is a complement of force; and it emerges as a function of existence in order to eliminate the internal struggles which make one powerless. Will to power means ‘returning itself’ after overcoming the inner struggles; it is the being of becoming. In that sense, we see that Nietzsche claims one is not unitary; it is already divided by the active and reactive forces inside; and from the struggle between them, will to power shows itself as the driving force for the life. In other words, for him, the creativity or the life itself does not come from reason but will.

Structuralism: No Indifference is Possible to the Other

“The concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.”³⁸

Structuralism presents a new way of thinking about objects which are related with the systems that are invisible. It claims that there are non-apparent or hidden relations and established laws among objects which cannot be known or experienced directly by the subject. In that sense, the dichotomy between the subject and the object appears utterly with the structuralist paradigm.

³⁸Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 117.

The main claims of structuralism can be summarized as following: First of all, every system has a structure in which the positions of all elements are determined by it. Structuralism is bound up with the nature of meaning; so, it deals with the language which is itself a structure. Language is a social bond, and it exists through social compromise. Individuals are born into this compromise; in other words, not the individual creates language; rather it is created by language.

Saussure deals with the methodology of linguistics and focuses on how language works. For him, language is the central institution of any society; it is not a property of anyone; it is like a bond that forms the human community. What makes decisive language is its power of signification as Saussure asserts. The term of 'signification' has a key role to express the structure of language and its effects on social realm. There is a linguistic sign composed of a signifier and a signified. A signifier has an acoustic image while a signified refers to a concept; then, the sign appears as a result of the relation of the signifier to the signified. The sign has also a relationship with the other signs in a 'signifying chain.'

Moreover, what Saussure indicates solemnly is that the relationship between the thing and the linguistic sign –word- is totally arbitrary; in other words, there is no intrinsic relationship between the word and the thing. This seems to constitute a challenge to the whole question of epistemology. Apart from *noumena* (things-in-themselves), the *phenomena* (things-as-appearances) have become the representation of the things while it was experienced by the subject before. In other words, there occurs a transformation from the realm of experiences to the realm of the representation of the things. This means that knowledge is limited with the capacity of language since its representative capacity is determinant which is external to the individual. So, language establishes its autonomy in respect to reality which means

that individuals cannot establish a direct relation with the reality. The terms such as 'sign', 'signifier' or 'signified' also show clearly that they are 'signifying' or in a sense 'pointing out' the reality; they do not correspond to reality.

Another important term in Saussure's theory is 'the idea of difference.' It means that within the relationality of the signs in the structure, there is no pre-given functionality or meaning of the things. The meaning is not only between the signifier and the signified; rather it arises from the whole structure. Furthermore, the uniqueness of a sign shows itself as not being the other one; in other words, the value of the sign which is the result of an interrelationship between the words emerges from its opposition and its difference to all other signs. The meaning of a sign is specified by its boundary; that is to say, it is empty in itself. This manifests that the meaning and the relationship itself is established through the otherness or the existence of the other signs.

Now, I will continue three major independent figures: Lacan, Althusser and Foucault. If we think they have challenged objectivity and truth, they do not use the structuralist way of thinking about structures.³⁹ It seems better to classify them in a transitional status from structuralism to post-structuralism.

³⁹Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

Lacan: A Split Subject in-between Self-Identification and Representation

*“Life goes down the river, from time to time touching a bank; staying for a while here and there. Without understanding anything- and it is the principle of analysis that nobody understands anything of what happens. The idea of the unifying unity of the human condition has always had on me the effect of a scandalous lie.”*⁴⁰

Lacan synthesizing structuralism and phenomenology tries to understand how individual subjectivity is constituted. He strictly rejects substantialist accounts of identity; and for him, the emergence of the subject is only possible in a structural relation. In other words, for a subject to emerge, it is necessary the existence of the discourse of the other. Dolan calls it as ‘decentralization of the sovereign subject of intention and will’⁴¹ by putting an emphasis on a second self. Lacan calls his own study as ‘an experience which leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*.’⁴²

Lacan as a psychoanalyst, he begins with the development of human infant in order to explain the generation of the subjectivity. The infant between the ages of 6 and 18 month sees itself in the mirror that identification with the body image occurs. It can be said that this is the moment of differentiation in which the totally confused infant sees her body is separate from her mother’s body. This also leads a misleading: the infant thinks that it reached a form of its totality (coherent and unified form) from a fragmented body-image which is called as ‘orthopedic’⁴³ by

⁴⁰Jacques Lacan, *Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever* accessed <http://www.shi.or.th/images/misc/200607201441220.pdf>, 3.

⁴¹Frederick Dolan, “Political Action and the Unconscious: Arendt and Lacan on Decentering the Subject’ in *Political Theory* 23, no. 2 (1995): 332.

⁴²Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror-phase as Formative of the Function of the I” in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Zizek, (London: Verso, 1994), 93.

⁴³Ibid, 96.

Lacan. However, what it sees in the mirror is not a real being, but only an image. At that point, there occurs the formation of the subject's identity through imaginary recognition which has actually the effect on it of alienation –alienation from a genuine capacity of fantasy.

The second phase is the intervention of the father as a third actor who separates the infant from mother. This is an external power that the infant cannot develop any resistance. At that point, in an oedipal situation, the infant realizes that mother lacks something, and then it identifies itself with this lack which is phallus which is the desire of the mother. Therefore, because of the lack of phallus, the father becomes a 'symbolic father' in the eyes of the infant and he gains a signifying function mentioned as the Name-of-the-Father which has power of naming as well as power of signifying. Dor illustrates the point as:

The father is not a real object, so what is he? The father is a metaphor. What is a metaphor? It is a signifier that takes the place of another signifier. The father is a signifier substituted for another signifier.⁴⁴

As it is seen, phallus has a social power; so, it becomes a 'symbolic order' represented by the existence of the father through which the infant gets in a relationship with externality. Dor underlines:

The metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father: not only does it permit the child's emergence as a subject by giving him access to the symbolic order, but it also institutes an irreversible psychic division in that subject.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Joel Dor, *Introduction to the Reading Lacan: The Unconscious Structured like a Language*, (New York: Other Press, 2000), 94.

⁴⁵Ibid. 118.

The division in the subject which enables the subject (*moi*) to be a subject after the entrance to the symbolic order is resulted from the very order of language. In other words, the desiring subject is taken captive by language and its original nature is lost; it leaves its natural being behind forever. For Lacan, it is only possible through the language to have a position in a social and cultural world.

The very famous statement of Lacan –unconscious is structured like a language- is very significant because of the fact that the unconscious still operates even the individual has entered to the symbolic order. The subject as *je* or *I* is located at the level of unconscious where it escapes from the domain of conscious deliberation and control.⁴⁶ This is also opposed to the notion of the Cartesian subject who is attributed of autonomy and self-transparency. Rather within the human subject, there is an ongoing struggle between the *je* and the *moi*; in other words, between the imaginary and the symbolic. There is a valuable explanation of Dor in terms of indication how unconscious functions:

If the child continues, without knowing it, to name the object of his desire by using the Name-of-the-Father as signifier, we can come to only one conclusion: the child no longer knows what he is saying in what he utters. Language therefore appears as that subjective activity in which we say something completely different from what we believe we are saying when we speak. Unconscious escapes the speaking subject because he is constitutively separated from it.⁴⁷

Briefly, the subject is divided that there is no subject other than the speaking one. As Zizek also emphasizes:

⁴⁶Bert Olivier, 'Lacan's Subject: the Imaginary, Language, the Real and Philosophy' in *South African Journal of Philosophy* 23, no.1, (2004): 11.

⁴⁷Dor, *Reading Lacan*, 130.

There is no substantial signified content that guarantees the unity of the 'I'; at this level, the subject is multiple, dispersed. The subject's unity is guaranteed only by the self-referential symbolic act: 'I' is a purely performative entity; it is the one who says 'I.'⁴⁸

At that level, the subject different from the ego occurs in a relationship with the other through the realm of language and the unconscious. So, it is always disjoined and intermittent.

Althusser: Totality of Effects – It is not Misrecognition, It is how It is!

“The most commonplace everyday police hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’ The hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was really addressed to him, and that it was really him who was hailed, and not someone else.”⁴⁹

It can be said that Althusser is one of the representatives of the structuralist turn in humanities trying to express the social phenomenon by depending upon the structures and the relations within them. That can be called as structural causality which is a process without a subject. For him, the object of observation is not individual but the structure in which the society is divided into the pieces related to each other as practices.

Althusser is a differential Marxist who tries to clear up Marxism from humanism. While Marx deals with epistemology or how knowledge is formed, he still questions the subject, but not the object. For him, the subject experiences the object and produces the knowledge. But this subject has its class position within a social totality. Knowledge, for Marx, can be defined as the appropriation of concrete

⁴⁸Slavoj Zizek, “The Cartesian Subject without the Cartesian Theatre,” in *The Subject of Lacan: a Lacanian Reader of Psychologists*, ed. by Malone, K. and Friedlander, S. (SUNY Series, 1999), 14.

⁴⁹Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Zizek, (New York: Verso, 1994), 131.

in thought. In other words, knowledge of the real is same with the real itself.

However, for Althusser, knowledge of the reality can never be attained since the subject lives in an imaginary relationship. While Marx indicates in German Ideology that subject's consciousness does not fit the social reality since it thinks it is the only constitutive which is called as 'false-consciousness,' Althusser, on the other hand, rejects the conceptualization of false-consciousness or misrepresentation. He underlines the term of 'imaginary' which shows itself as ideology. Ideology, for Althusser, 'represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.'⁵⁰ Therefore, the real and the knowledge of the real should not be attributed to the experience of the subject, rather to the social relations.

Imaginary is not something like imaginary thinking; rather it exists before the subject. It is the result of social relations and social totality. Briefly, imaginary is a structural category through which ideology governs our very real relations. This can be called as 'materiality of ideology.' Althusser also claims that imaginary is autonomous. It can be paralyzed with the Saussure's theory on autonomy of the language on one's subjectivity.

With the conceptualization of ideology, Althusser establishes a relation with the history. He criticizes that all historicism presupposes an existence of a rational subject and a rational understanding of time. He labels it as all historicism is essentialism since development of essence in time leads to the existence of history. However, ideology has no history for him; therefore, structures have no history since there is no essentialist conception of the structure. This structure is always understood in terms of its effects. Since the structure has no subject, it has also no uniform universal history.

⁵⁰Ibid., 123.

Althusser has two conjoint theses: One is that

There is no practice except by and in an ideology” which is we discussed above. The other one is that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects.⁵¹

The second one is important in terms of how the category of the subject exists within the structure. As Althusser says, ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. The relationship between ideology and the subject is very clear in the following statement: “The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology only in so far as all ideology has the function of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects.”⁵² This ‘subjectification’ of the individuals is an absolute necessity for the ideology in order to get ‘recognition’ without which to establish a power relationship is almost impossible. The state of recognition is like a state of self-consciousness as derived from Hegel. In order to say ‘I’, one needs the moment to be able to say ‘you’ through which one gains self-consciousness and becomes a subject. It should be reminded that what is interpellating individual is the imaginary. The process of the subjection to the Subject as Althusser calls, and their mutual recognition by each other ends with up insertion into the practices governed by the rituals of ideological state apparatuses and the subjects ‘recognize’ the existing state of affairs.⁵³ As Althusser concludes, “there are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they ‘work all by themselves.’”⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid., 128.

⁵²Ibid., P.129.

⁵³Ibid., P.135.

⁵⁴Ibid., 136

Foucault: Subjugated Individual rather than Free Agent of Any Action

“...what might be called a society’s “threshold of modernity” has been reached when the life of the species has been wagered on its own political strategies.”⁵⁵

Foucault is a highly critical thinker about Enlightenment and modernity, and so he is about rationality. When he makes the critique of modernity, he mainly tries to deal with a kind of ‘new’ interpretation of power. For Foucault, in the absence of power relations, a society can only be an abstraction. In other words, power or power relations are everywhere all the time since they constitute the ‘social’ and social networks; just, in the modern form of life they have changed. Therefore, Foucault’s main concern is modern forms of power with regard to modern rationality and modern subjectivity.

For Foucault, modernity and humanism refer to the death of man since the modern man or the modern subject is a construct of domination. This domination of the individual is provided through social institutions, discourses and practices. Before coming up with this result, he studies madness, medicine and other human sciences which may be described as ‘archaeological investigations’ of his studies. Archaeology, in that sense, is an attempt to determine the conditions of possibility of knowledge, and it constitutes ‘a way of doing historical analysis of systems of thought or discourse.’⁵⁶ While searching for archives, he sees that modernity mainly focuses on the psychiatry, medicine, criminology and sexuality. These archaeological studies make him realize that modernity makes man an object; an object of modern scientific investigation. The concern for madness, medicine and other human

⁵⁵Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1. (Penguin Books, 1981), 143.

⁵⁶Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 48.

sciences is the indicator of this objectification. For these human sciences, the conception of body is one of the key components since body is “an object of knowledge and a target for the exercise of power.”⁵⁷ Body is located in a political and economic field. Moreover, Foucault mentions the phenomenon of the social body which becomes the new principle in the 19th century; and, this social body refers to the ‘materiality of power’ operating on the very bodies of individuals.⁵⁸ For instance, as Smart says:

The importance of medicine in the constitution of the human sciences arises principally from the fact that it is within the medical discourse that the individual first became an ‘object of positive knowledge’, that a conception of man as both the subject and object of knowledge first began to emerge.⁵⁹

This becoming an object of knowledge also shows us the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault says that power produces knowledge, and power and knowledge directly imply one another. Moreover, power and knowledge relations invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge. For him, social institutions are the great hints about the power and knowledge relationship, and he proposes searching for the ongoing practices within these institutions. The descriptions like ill or healthy, sane or insane, normal or abnormal, guilty or innocent produced by institutions and by ‘wise men’ have emerged through scientific investigations in order to enforce norms of reason and truth. For example, hospitals are the places in which the medical knowledge about man has been gathered; and then, through this knowledge medicine discourse has occurred. The

⁵⁷Ibid., 75.

⁵⁸Michel Foucault, “Power/Knowledge,” in *Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980),55.

⁵⁹ Smart, *Foucault*, 27.

medical knowledge is acquired through the process of illness; and at the end, the domination appears upon the individual since she lacks the knowledge. At that point, doctor is a key figure that has not only the knowledge; but also he has a moral authority which constitutes the foundation of the power to cure.⁶⁰

From another viewpoint, this also shows us that the meaning of knowledge has changed that is called as ‘the dissolution of the classical *episteme*’ by Smart.⁶¹ Firstly, it was search for knowledge for its own sake; but in the modernity, you acquire knowledge in order to rule, dominate and control the ‘social’. Secondly, modernity usually deals with the pathological events (the concerns of psychiatry, criminology, medicine and sexuality) and tries to acquire the ‘knowledge’ through pathologies. For example, in the name of ‘personal development’, which also appears as a new economic sector except its being a tool for modern power, there has occurred lots of strategies trying to search why the children do not work or why people are getting divorced and so on. This kind of investigation is peculiar to modernity; for example Plato would not do that, in other words he would probably defend that no knowledge can be derived from ‘bad’ or ‘evil’.

Through those particular modes of objectification, the forms of knowledge and the relations of power, human beings have been also constituted as subjects. In order to exercise or perform power, there is need for subject. Because, all forms of subjectivity are the products of power. Moreover, power is relational. Beyond the relationality, it is meaningless to apply power upon objects. This is the difference of power from violence or physical force. For Foucault, subject has two meanings: one is tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge; and the other is subject

⁶⁰ Smart, *Foucault*, 25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

to someone else by control and dependence.⁶² According to this definition, if power does not make individuals subjects, it cannot dominate them. It is the same for Althusser who uses the analogy of ‘Hey You!’ The answer to the question of what subject is lies under the response to the hailing of ‘Hey you!’ This hailing makes individual a subject and it also subjugates that individual. The main mechanism of this power is to persuade you or to make you accept what you are. Saying “I’m mad.” or “I’m an alcoholic.” is a kind of accepting or recognition of your situation; and such a recognition makes you subject and it becomes easy to dominate you. For example, if you say the police man “I’m drunk, I’m sorry”, this increases your penalty since you are well aware of what you did as the subject of the action. In such a relation, it is hard to resist or ignore. This is why power is also discursive and persuasive. Briefly, the modernity constructs ‘man’ both object and subject of knowledge.

Now, let’s turn into historical process in order to clarify the material reality behind the philosophy of modernity. The change in the dominant form of power mentioned in the very beginning coincides with the eighteenth century. This historical period can also be identified with the rise of the modern capitalist state. Foucault underlines this change as the transformation from the ‘sovereign power’ to the ‘bio-power’. Sovereign power, it can be called as pre-modern form of power, basically grounds on pain, torture and violence as the basic form of punishment. Such a sovereign power is nothing but *patria potestas* (Absolute Father) who has the right to decide life and death which is one of the characteristic privileges of him. Foucault formulates that as ‘power of life and death.’ In this picture, power appears as ‘a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated

⁶²See, Michel Foucault, “Subject and Power,” in *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4. (1982): 777- 795.

in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it.⁶³ However, modern power is a relational power; it is never something acquired, seized, shared, or hold.

Moreover, newly developing society which is capitalist one requires efficiency; so power needs to be efficient too. The efficiency of power shows itself in the face of law, bureaucracy and institutions in the modern world. In other words, there occurs a new economy of power relations. Within this new economy, death appears as a moment of a limit, a scandal, and a contradiction for sovereign since it means that sovereign has lost his domination over the death person. Its main aim is to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order.⁶⁴ In the name of efficiency, power should not waste individuals by killing them; rather, it should discipline them through the new mechanisms which are schools, prisons, hospitals, asylums, workshops, and so on. The discipline means systematically learning the correct behavior and it is a 'technique of power which provides for training or for coercing bodies (individual and collective);⁶⁵ and for that discipline, what is needed is the 'reason' which is the eighteenth century phenomenon. Reason works on behalf of efficiency as well as serving the process of constructing and (re)producing the subjects upon which power is exercised. For example, prison appears as the rational and efficient form of punishment or disciplining mechanism of modernity rather than violence and torture.

The new form of power which is bio-power is very essential theme within the whole schema discussed above. In order to understand the relationship between modernity, the life of the species and the political strategies, it is necessary to look

⁶³ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 136.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁵ Smart, *Foucault*, 85.

into bio-power in a detailed way. One of the main elements of bio-power is its concern about the soul of individuals, not only their bodies. By disciplining the soul together with the process of subjectification, it becomes harder to escape from bio-power. This is an important change when compared with the mechanisms of sovereign power which punishes the body only through violence and torture.

Foucault basically deals with the power relations in the modern world; and throughout his analysis, he realizes that the essence of modernity and Enlightenment is domination of human beings. This is also why fascism comes with modernity. For Foucault, it is impossible to claim that fascism lacks reason; on the contrary, it is the product of modern rationality. Beyond fascism, what is considerable about modernity is that it puts man into a 'calculable' position through instrumental rationality in the name of efficiency, effectiveness, and science. It dominates human beings through the knowledge it holds and its power over 'life.' It seems that its job is easy; because, it uses the 'techniques of the self' which leads to the self-discipline and self-domination through the forms of subjectification. There is no need too much effort to dominate.

The theories which discuss the impossibility of the modern subject, especially to *Cogito*, have a significant place within the philosophical, political and social realm. It should be emphasized that all these theories are worth to give an ear in terms of their analyzing power of modernity. However, from the beginning of this study, I tried to point out that all these make subject 'a subjugated subject' through the hegemonic processes, ideologies, discourses, and structures. On the contrary, the reason why this thesis is dealing with Arendt and Levinas is to find a possibility of developing a different subjectivity which is neither a rational, autonomous subject nor a subjugated subject. Therefore, after this narration through the exemplary

figures significant for the theories of subjectivity, I will continue with Arendt's conceptualization of subjectivity.

CHAPTER 2

ARENDR: NON-SOVEREIGN SUBJECTIVITY

The Problem of Sovereignty

In this chapter, I will examine how Arendt conceptualizes the notion of sovereignty throughout her works in terms of the sovereign subject which is the main concern of this study. In her analysis of what model of a subject should be developed, it is clearly seen that she is against the notion of sovereignty since it has a misleading approach to freedom since freedom is equated with mastery and control. Due to the fact that the sovereignty has unifying and totalizing aspects although it claims to arise from the *free will* and it develops only one way of relationship with the other people and the world through which it controls; Arendt uncompromisingly criticizes this notion.

I will first focus upon the essentials of the notion of sovereignty such as centralization, indivisibility and infallibility which tend to unify and totalize whole possible relations and actions in human realm. After examining the essentials of this notion, I will deal with the relationship between sovereignty and will, and consequently, I will try to show how this relationship turns into a danger for human realm. My main purpose is to show why Arendt has a critical attitude toward the notion of sovereignty although it is a very dominant political term in world politics.

Sovereignty as Unity and Totality

The Uncanny Self vs. the Authoritarian Self

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the modern subject is constructed as an authority as the new source of ‘meaning.’ In order to have dominating force, the sovereign subject which is a historical construction presents itself as unified whole that has totalizing effects in practical affairs. This kind of sovereignty springs from inside the self and it is thus related to the autonomy of the subject, and at the same time it is undoubtedly exclusive since the subject establishes itself as One which recognizes or, in a moderate way, needs no Other. However, for Arendt, through the notion of sovereignty, the subject treats its existence as a given, and so claims to achieve domination over its existence. But taking its source only from itself refers to the complete destruction of the whole political realm through the denial of freedom and the denial of the others.

Holding some decisive criticisms toward the tradition of Western political philosophy, Arendt asserts that freedom has been characterized as a burden since it drags the agent into the web of relationships where one has to grapple with the others, which endangers one’s sovereignty and integrity.⁶⁶ Arendt exemplifies the *liberal credo* with the expression, “The less politics the more freedom” which resulted in the identification of political freedom with security⁶⁷ to safeguard one’s internal and private realm. In that sense, it can be said that liberalism has a negative conception of freedom which is constructed as *freedom from something*. Within this conceptualization, freedom deals with only ‘to what extent one is free.’ Cooperating with the notion of security, then, freedom becomes a matter of the private realm in

⁶⁶Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 210.

⁶⁷Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 149.

which one is alone. In other words, the private realm is the only instance, according to liberalism, where freedom can be realized. For Arendt, such conceptualization of freedom is nothing but a limit to think of freedom. She is completely against this understanding:

If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth –and not, as the tradition since Plato holds, because of man’s limited strength, which makes him depend upon the help of others.⁶⁸

As Arendt insists, plurality as the human condition of action, which is the activity between people without any intermediary, is also the condition of political life. Also by rejecting the identification of freedom with private realm, she strictly emphasizes that freedom and politics are inseparable. For her, plurality as the condition of political life is not only a numerical multiplicity; rather, it also signifies the differences of human beings. One who acts in the public realm discloses her uniqueness to others through which freedom also discloses. In that sense, one can be free only through acting in the public-political realm. Arendt, at that point, makes an ontological distinction between ‘who somebody is’ and ‘what somebody is’ rejecting the unified understanding of the subject. ‘What somebody is’ in Arendtian account is identified with the predetermined characteristics of one person such as her qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings possessed by the self; and it also includes the biological and the psychological self which consists of feelings, passions and emotions dwelling in the inner realm of the self and concerning only the life itself. Through these attributes, people may seem ‘same’ or ‘typical’ since “they are what

⁶⁸Arendt, *Human Condition*, 210.

someone shares with others like her.”⁶⁹ ‘What we all are’ cannot promise the agency of action since the *what* is a characteristic of the social realm. Such characteristics are never unique since they represent the common features which we share with others. For example, being a woman or being a Kurdish belongs to the categories of the *what*. Through such identities, one cannot disclose her uniqueness in the public realm; they are merely social identities which are imposed upon us which are typical and dissolved into sameness and the uniformity. Therefore, a self that consists of a social identity is never ‘unique.’ Moreover, freedom cannot spring from such determinations since ‘action is free to the extent that it is able to transcend them.’⁷⁰

On the other hand, ‘who somebody is’ offers ‘the dispersal and dissolution of fixed and restrictive identities through politics.’⁷¹ That points to the Arendtian disagreement with poststructuralism, which problematizes the fixation of identities within structures, ideologies and hegemonic practices. The *who* is disclosed itself only through acting and speaking in the public realm, among the fellows,⁷² which also indicates a discontinuous becoming –rather than a substantive being: Whatever a self is becomes ‘a *who* by entering the public realm and acting.’⁷³ Through acting and speaking, ‘men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.’⁷⁴ As the condition of public action, human plurality has a dual character which consists of equality and

⁶⁹Zeynep Gambetti, “The Agent is the Void! From the Subjected Subject to the Subject of Action,” *Rethinking Marxism* 17, no. 3 (2005): 430.

⁷⁰Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 151.

⁷¹Gambetti, “The Agent is the Void!” 426.

⁷²Arendt, *Human Condition*, 159.

⁷³Bonnie Honig, “Arendt, Identity, and Difference,” *Political Theory* 16, no. 1 (1988): 82.

⁷⁴Arendt, *Human Condition*, 159.

distinction. People are equal since they can understand each other and plan for the future; and also they are distinct since they speak and act to make themselves understood.⁷⁵ At that point, Arendt points out the equality of human beings which does not refer to sameness of them. Equality here means all of us are human through our mental and physical faculties. It is a kind of ground to communicate to each other. However, the notion of equality is not sufficient to understand what plurality really means. Therefore, Arendt underlines the notion of distinctness as well. This distinctness reveals itself through acting with each other. In other words, one as a subject can show who she is through her actions, not through her possessed features.

As Arendt continues, the *who* having a unique personality is seen and heard by the others in an unmistakable way whereas it is hidden from the agent herself since she is dependent on the gaze of the others. Likening the Arendtian public personality to the Freudian conceptualization of ‘uncanny self’, Frederick Dolan asserts:

At once our truest and most tangible identity and a role we acquire only through a process of radical desubjectivization, it is uniquely ours but strangely unrecognizable to us, a self we can neither legitimately disavow nor fully acknowledge.⁷⁶

In a similar way, in order to show the impossibility of the sovereignty and integrity of a person, Arendt argues that action do not have an end product; rather it produces stories which are dependent upon the cooperation of the narrators, the spectators, and the actors. Therefore, one and her actions are dependent upon ‘a web of relationships

⁷⁵Ibid., 155.

⁷⁶Frederick M. Dolan, “Political Action and the Unconscious: Arendt and Lacan on Decentering the Subject,” *Political Theory* 23, no. 2 (1995): 330.

which is as real as the visible world of things.⁷⁷ Within this intangible web of relationships, action is anonymous such that:

The stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author.⁷⁸

The Indubitable Sovereignty

In contrast to Arendt's views on public action and politics, the concept of sovereignty seems incompatible with freedom since sovereignty needs to be absolute, centralized, indivisible and infallible. It is absolute since any doubt about the subject's sovereignty will lead to question its autonomy and authority which comes from inside. Taking its absoluteness from its independence from other forms of power, the main characteristics of sovereignty is its unlimitedness. For instance, Bodin likens the sovereignty of the individual to Godly sovereignty. This absoluteness paves way to the centralization of the sovereign subject who positions herself at the center of all possible relations in the world –of knowledge, of power, of other people and of the outside world. Because she is sovereign standing at the center, any reflections or reactions from outside seem open to complete rejection as if they constitute a challenge for her.

Composed of risks, dangers and hostilities (the language of modern politics), the outside world may cut into shreds the sovereign subject; therefore, she constitutes herself as indivisible since it is impossible to talk about any sovereignty if it is divided. It is like God's sovereignty which does not recognize another God. For

⁷⁷Arendt, *Human Condition*, 163.

⁷⁸Ibid., 164.

example, in the Hobbesian social contract, we witness the constitution of *Civitas* as the mortal God, which is a community united as One and presents a political totality under the sovereignty of Leviathan. What constitute sovereignty for Hobbes are its absoluteness, indivisibility, inalienability, and most importantly its free will.

Even from the conceptual level, Arendt argues that the notion of sovereignty is not political since the condition of the political is plurality. She underlines the significance of limitedness rather than boundless power, dissolution rather than indivisibility, fragmentariness rather than unity for the sake of authentic political life. Arendt who takes pluralist accounts of politics into consideration construes the subject as multiplicity⁷⁹ instead of the self-sovereign and monistic subject. This also shows her rejection of substantialist accounts of identity. Frederic Dolan argues that attempting to theorize a ‘postmodern politics’⁸⁰ turning toward plurality and democracy, Arendt rejects sovereign subjectivity. This is also the main thrust of her political philosophy that is conceiving freedom and action as *nonsovereign* according to Gambetti.⁸¹ Arendt ‘decenters’ the sovereign subject by giving priority to a ‘second self’ who is constituted in plurality, in multiplicity or through

⁷⁹Honig, “Arendt, Identity, and Difference,” 86.

⁸⁰There is a counter argument to this idea which collocates Arendt and postmodern politics. Seyla Benhabib, in her book *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, argues that there is a complexity in Arendtian account of modernity. Arendt criticizes the rise of the social realm in the modern world which conquered both public and private realms; therefore, she mainly deals with the revitalization of the public realm. In that sense, through her upholding egalitarian civil and political rights for all citizens and her call for a public realm which is antistatist, Benhabib argues that she is a political universalist. Benhabib claims that Arendt was not a philosopher of antimodernity; rather she was a modernist, but a reluctant modernist since she celebrates the universal declaration of the rights of man and citizen. See Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (California: Sage Publications, 1996). However, the main purpose of this thesis is to show that Arendt is neither a modernist nor a postmodernist. Her political philosophy transcends both.

⁸¹Gambetti, “The Agent is the Void!” 427.

intersubjectivity.⁸² The most meaningful word to define this situation is ‘relationality’ which is the acceptance of the existence of others.

Lastly, the sovereign subject has a claim to be infallible. She is sure for herself since her source is nobody but herself which also indicates her totality. The most pathological consequences of this attitude for the subject appear in our relations with the past and the future. For her, human beings undoubtedly have ties with the past and future; but the subject stands in the present where ‘time is not a continuum, a flow of uninterrupted succession; it is broken in the middle, at the point where he stands.’⁸³ The present is a gap in which one keeps her existence through constant fighting against past and future that represents a discontinuity in both the time and the subject. Therefore, the nonsovereign subject has a power to forgive against the irreversibility of action. Irreversibility being unable to undo what has been done is one of the characteristics of action along with unpredictability and anonymity. As Arendt puts forward, action being independent from its actor opens up innumerable possibilities for us, which Arendt calls the ‘boundlessness of action.’⁸⁴ She accepts that to deal with such infinite improbabilities is difficult for people and for their relations with each other. However, through the faculty of forgiving, we can get rid of the burden of the past while giving a chance to the future at the same time. Not to be dragged into the claims of infallibility and of fallibility as well, through forgiving,

⁸²Dolan, “Political Action and the Unconscious,” 332. Through comparing Arendtian and Lacanian notions of the subject, Dolan proposes the notion of second self. This secondary self means that it is substantially beyond the control, the intentions and the will of the ego.

⁸³Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 11. Arendt refers to a story by Kafka. In this story, Kafka mentions a person having two antagonists. The one presses her from behind, the other blocks the road ahead. She stands in-between them fighting. For Arendt, these two antagonists are the past and the future. Although she is determined by past and future, she still lies in infinity. Arendt calls this as a perfect metaphor for the activity of thinking. The present is the moment where we stop and think; and through this stop, we indeed disrupt the continuity of the time.

⁸⁴Arendt, *Human Condition*, 180.

we can accept our limitedness and to understand the meaning of acting together. What is significant here is that the main condition of forgiving is the plurality since who will forgive us is always the others.

Free Will upon which the Sovereignty is Based

The Will Wills Itself Only

Arendt is precisely unequivocal in the matter of the will by saying, ‘that the faculty of will and will-power in and by itself, unconnected with any other faculties, is an essentially nonpolitical and even anti-political capacity.’⁸⁵ The reason why Arendt considers the will as non-political simply lies in the relation between politics and freedom according to her account:

Without freedom, political life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.⁸⁶

She explicitly argues that freedom cannot come from the will since the will has an intercourse only with one’s self. If freedom is the meaning of politics and comes along with only action, the capacity of the will seems not to belong to politics just because the will belongs to an inward domain constantly engaging with self-inspection in contrast to the plurality of the public realm.⁸⁷ The distinction here is between political freedom and inner freedom which has ‘internalized freedom by

⁸⁵Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 164.

⁸⁶Ibid., 146.

⁸⁷Ibid., 145.

attributing it to the will.⁸⁸ However, neither the inner freedom nor the free choice between alternatives, namely the echo of liberal credo as mentioned above, is related with the political freedom which is ‘to call something into being which did not exist before.’⁸⁹

Throughout the history of political philosophy, as Arendt claims, there is an inclination to identify freedom with the inner freedom, namely philosophical freedom, in order to stand tough against the outer world. However, Arendt argues by saying:

It seems safe to say that man would know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free as a worldly tangible reality. We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves.⁹⁰

In other words, freedom as belonging to the inner realm seems like a feeling from inside. On the other hand, Arendt argues that freedom is substantially experienced in the outer world. Such that if we have not experienced freedom actually, we would not have developed the notion of inner freedom.⁹¹ Therefore, it is meaningless to expect that Arendt, who gives priority to the public realm over the private one, to support the idea of identification of will and freedom. As she underlines once more,

⁸⁸Honig, “Arendt, Identity, and Difference,” 80.

⁸⁹Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 151.

⁹⁰Ibid., 148.

⁹¹This conceptualization of freedom may remind Hegelian conceptualization of freedom. As against to the Kantian constructivism, Hegel proposes that one cannot develop the idea of freedom unless she has not experienced the domination or suppression. Although their concrete conceptualization of freedom may seem similar, they are still not comparable to each other. While Hegel signifies the dialectical method in the affairs of human beings and explains freedom with regard to domination, Arendt identifies freedom with public political action and plurality.

‘freedom as related to politics is not a phenomenon of the will’⁹² since the will has an intercourse only with itself and it ‘commands not something else but itself.’⁹³ She argues that the will cannot give rise to freedom since to will does not guarantee that the self can do what it wills in the public realm. By accepting the force of the will prior to any kind of action, she insists on the fact that freedom can spring up from the moment when the I-will and I-can is ‘so well attuned that they practically coincide.’⁹⁴ This coincidence has two meanings: First, especially the I-can shows that there has already been an action; and second, the I-can puts a limitation on the I-will which only commands itself in a fierce relationship.⁹⁵

Liberating the understanding of action from theories that seek to locate it uniquely in the command of the will, Arendt proposes the concept of *principle* derived from Montesquieu as an alternative answer to the question of what becomes expressed in action. The inspiring principle appears in the performing act without losing anything in strength and validity. Arendt says:

In distinction from its goal, the principle of an action can be repeated time and again, it is inexhaustible, and in distinction from its motive, the validity of a principle is universal, it is not bound to any particular person or to any particular group. However, the manifestation of principles comes about only through action, they are manifest in the world as long as the action lasts, but no longer.⁹⁶

⁹²Ibid., 151.

⁹³Ibid., 161.

⁹⁴Ibid., 159.

⁹⁵Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1978), 142.

⁹⁶Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 152.

Since the willing activity only wills itself and engages with self-inspection, it operates in the inner domain to determine the self. However, as Honig clarifies, ‘principles inspire us “from without” to action, unlike motives, which determine us from within.’⁹⁷

The Will as Dictator and Commander

In contradictory to the inspiring principle, the essential activity of the faculty of the will is to dictate and command. The will always commands its own execution; briefly, ‘it wills.’ For Arendt, ‘the power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom but a question of strength or weakness.’⁹⁸ At that point, it is favorable to point out the Arendtian nuances between the concepts of power and strength. Most of the time, these are used as synonyms to each other. It is a historical misunderstanding for Arendt that we are inclined to equate power with oppression and with rule over others. Power, acting in concert, is not a property to be possessed; rather it springs from the collective action. On the other hand, strength, being singular as opposed to the plurality of power, is like an individual entity and a property. The will and its strength are discussed through indivisibility by Arendt who criticizes Rousseau for equating political power with the individual will-power by supporting the idea that ‘power must be sovereign, that is, indivisible, because a divided will would be inconceivable.’⁹⁹ However, distinguishing power and strength, Arendt gives weight to power for the sake of the public realm which is identical with plurality. Power is not a matter of the will; rather:

⁹⁷Honig, “Arendt, Identity, and Difference,” 78.

⁹⁸Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 152.

⁹⁹Ibid., 163.

For power, like action, is boundless; it has no physical limitation in human nature, in the bodily existence of man, like strength. Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with. For the same reason, power can be divided without decreasing it....strength, on the contrary, is indivisible.¹⁰⁰

Briefly, omnipotence as capacity gained through strength is the complete destruction of plurality. The argument of this thesis that Arendt deconstructs the subject by defining the subject as multiplicity rejecting the indivisibility of the sovereign subject can be interpreted in two ways: The first and the most important one for the sake of politics appears through the public action among fellows which means that the subject can have a subject position only through the gaze of the others. The second one is observed within the subject itself. For example, the thinking activity as a mental faculty is the manifestation of multiplicity within the subject since one is always two-in-one when she thinks as like in a dialogue with herself. The willing ego is also divided into two which is different from the thinking ego for Arendt insisting on the fact that:

If man has a will at all, it must always appear as though there were two wills present in the same man, fighting with each other for power over his mind. Hence, the will is both powerful and impotent, free and unfree.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Arendt, *Human Condition*, 180.

¹⁰¹Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 161.

The Desire to Control Everything as Sovereign

The Categories of Means and Ends

The sovereign subject develops a relationship with the world and politics, namely with the outside world, through means and ends categories. This is one of the main criticisms of the modern world which is also put forward by the members of Frankfurt School who emphasize that to be dominant over somewhere or something or somebody, one needs to know everything about it since you can manipulate something as long as you know it. 'To control' as an end, bringing the means alongside, is implemented through the instrumental rationality which means that the subject has an intercourse with the world and the others by reducing them into the categories of means and ends.

Arendt's theorization of *vita activa* has to be clarified here to better understand the corrupted implementation of the means and end categories. *Vita activa* includes three fundamental human activities: labor, work and action. Labor related with only the life of the people refers to the biological process of the human body that cannot be the distinctive feature of humankind since it is same process in animals as well. The main characteristic of work, on the other hand, is its correspondence to the unnatural side of human existence. It is a kind of mediation between human beings and nature through which people transform nature by using instruments and creates a 'durable and objective world'¹⁰² for themselves as a result. The main activity of work personified as *homo faber* through degrading everything into means is instrumentalizing, says Arendt and continues to point out the relation between instrumentalizing and mastery:

¹⁰²Arendt, *Human Condition*, 120.

The instrumentalization of the whole world and the earth, this limitless devaluation of everything given, this process of growing meaninglessness where every end is transformed into a means and which can be stopped only by making man himself the lord and master of all things.¹⁰³

In order to better understand the activities of the *vita activa*, it should not be disregarded that these three activities qualify three forms of politics, as Gambetti points out. She argues that the work paradigm corresponds to the instrumental logic inherent to the sovereign state.¹⁰⁴ She continues by underlining the Weberian instrumental action according to which politics is instrumental, strategic, and towards to constitute and protect power. In the modern world, Gambetti asserts, politics is considered in terms of the mentality of work which corresponds most explicitly to the sovereign state paradigm in the history. This mentality sees the humankind as a ‘raw material’ which is to be used under a certain vision.¹⁰⁵ This point is also significant for the changes in the hierarchy within the *vita activa* after the tradition of Western philosophy has made *vita activa* the handmaiden of *vita contemplativa* for the sake of eternal truths as Arendt claims.¹⁰⁶ As d’Entreves stresses in a very clear way, we also encounter a reversal of this hierarchy in the modern age where contemplation is no longer effective. What is at stake now is the elevation of *thought* and *fabrication* at the service of *making*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁴Zeynep Gambetti, “Marx ve Arendt: Emek, İş, Eylem Üzerinden Üç Siyaset Biçimi,” *Birikim*, no. 217 (2007): 1

¹⁰⁵Gambetti, “Marx ve Arendt,” 5.

¹⁰⁶Arendt, *Human Condition*, 21.

¹⁰⁷Maurizio Passerin D’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), 43.

The difference of work from labor and action is that it has ‘a definite beginning and a definite, predictable end’ whereas labor has neither a beginning and nor an end within its cyclical movement, and action has ‘a definite beginning but never has a predictable end.’¹⁰⁸ Beyond the difference, there is a danger in the elevation of the homo faber which conducts herself as lord and master of the whole earth through the use of violence inherent in all fabricating activity since to have mastery:

...is not true neither of the animal laborans, which is the subject to the necessity of its own life, nor of the man of action, who remains dependence upon his fellow men. Alone with his image of the future product, homo faber is free to produce, and again facing alone the work of his hands, he is free to destroy.¹⁰⁹

How Arendt is opposed to the means and ends categories in the realm of politics can be comprehended through these words which are almost the motto of her whole political theory: “Without freedom, political life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.”¹¹⁰ A statement as such may lead to asking some questions about justice, equality, etc. since these notions are also very related with politics. For example, can justice not be the meaning of politics? However, if Arendt had put the question like that, she would be stuck in the means and ends categories which she criticizes heavily. Just because of the possibility of a world in which justice or equality is achieved completely, Arendt is consistent with herself since if she puts these notions as the meaning of

¹⁰⁸Arendt, *Human Condition*, 126.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.,126.

¹¹⁰Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 146.

politics - these seem as ends rather than meaning- politics would consist of people who are running after these ends. What is worst is she would melt in the same pot with theorists and ideologies shouting for the end of the history. However, Arendt writes: "I shall not know the end of history since I never shall see the end of it."¹¹¹ What should not be forgotten is that human action is unpredictable.

Art of Politics Independent from Motives and Goals

Related with the means and ends categories, sovereignty appears also as a motive and goal-oriented entity which is the direct opposite of what Arendt understands by action. As she asserts:

Motives and aims, no matter how pure and grandiose, are never unique; like psychological qualities, they are typical, characteristic of different persons. Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement.¹¹²

Greatness is the only criterion to judge action for Arendt which represents the extraordinary by exalting the 'moment' itself independently from both the motives and the end.¹¹³ Therefore, this specific human activity is completely outside the category of means and ends; rather it is actuality itself.¹¹⁴ Through the understanding of means and ends categories, it can be easily derived that the end justifies the means as such 'you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs; it is the end which

¹¹¹Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. By Jerome Kohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 397.

¹¹²Arendt, *Human Condition*, 185.

¹¹³Ibid., 184.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 185.

commands the means.¹¹⁵ Arendt, on the other hand, puts an emphasis on the activity itself, at the same time as she exalts it:

The breaking of eggs in action never leads to anything more interesting than the breaking of eggs. The result is identical with the activity itself: it is a breaking, not an omelet.¹¹⁶

Aristotle's notion of *energeia* which means 'actuality' leads the way Arendt in order to conceptualize 'action' radically opposed to the means and ends categories.

Energeia exhausting its full meaning in the performance itself does not pursue an end and as a result leaves no work behind.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Arendt sees a strong affinity between authentic political action and performative arts by bounding them through the Machiavellian term 'virtuosity.' Virtuosity specifies the significance of performance which encounters with 'the opportunities the world opens up before one.'¹¹⁸ What is precious here seems that Arendt likens politics to performative arts is to point out the 'uniqueness' and 'authenticity' of the performative arts since they are momentary. Even if you go to theatre to see the same play one more time, they will be different from each other due to the performance.

The Tradition of Political Philosophy

Arendt, having dealt with the tradition both as a notion and as a reality, accuses the tradition of Western political philosophy of reducing politics to the categories of rule and order. What makes Arendt question the tradition is the demise of the politics in the modern age due to the inability and reluctance of people for acting. Being a

¹¹⁵Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 395.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 397.

¹¹⁷Arendt, *Human Condition*, HC, 185.

¹¹⁸Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 153.

German Jewish woman in the age of totalitarianism as Benhabib asserts, Arendt was able to transform the philosophical categories such as world, action, and plurality into an original political philosophy.¹¹⁹ At the end, she reaches a notion of “world alienation”, different from the Marxian self-alienation, which exactly refers to the loss of the world. Descartes, at that point, appears as the representative of the criticized tradition since ‘his most original contribution to philosophy has been an exclusive concern with the self, attempting to reduce all experiences between man and himself.’¹²⁰ Increasing progress in wealth and expropriation, the rise of the ‘social’ through eliminating the distinction between private and public realms, and the development in the bureaucratic administration –namely, rule by nobody, and the victory of animal laborans over action has led to the formation of ‘lonely mass man’ which has already absorbed into one society through which the social as a national housekeeping has risen over the public realm. What is pessimistic about this situation is that social behavior has become the norm for the all spheres of life. Behavior as opposed to the action means the complete destruction of spontaneity and so freedom; but ‘the trouble with modern theories of behaviorism is not that they are wrong but that they could become true.’¹²¹

The reason why human beings rarely engage in political activity lies in three features of action which all seem principally contradictory to the mentality of the modern age. The main features of the action are irreversibility, unpredictability and anonymity. For example, it is possible to reverse the consequences of the labor or work processes; however, if one says or does something, it cannot be reversed since

¹¹⁹Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism*, xxiv.

¹²⁰Arendt, *Human Condition*, 230.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 295.

words and deeds are dependent upon the others who see and hear them. But, the capacity of forgiving engages here in a political level as the remedy for irreversibility that in order to keep going acting in public realm, it is needed to have the capacity to forgive.

Secondly, as action is indeterminable having no causes and no motives, it is also unpredictable such that one cannot estimate how action will end –either her own action or the others’. The unpredictable character of action is not compatible with the calculative character of the modern age. However, when asking what is going on in the world, it is indeed good not to predict because it calls us; it is the call of the public. Moreover, action is a ‘response’ to what is going on in the world, opposed to the reaction, from which ‘responsibility’ springs which will be examined in the last chapter.

The anonymity of action which is the hallmark of the plurality is the third feature of action. Arendt also uses this word in order to express the situation of mass man in a negative way. Anonymity of the mass people refers to their standardization by the modern forms of power, technology, and economic processes through which they all have become the same. However, the anonymity of action signifies the fact that one is not the author of her action; she is actor and sufferer; but not the author. The agent does not control the whole process. Through action, one can disclose who she is. This means one can initiate an action; but one cannot authorize it. If it is a story written by people, this story also gains its meaning through this plurality.

These features of action may be categorized as the reasons of the decrease in public action in the modern world; however, the tradition of Western political philosophy also has an undeniable effect on that for Arendt who accused Plato of

promoting the understanding of politics in terms of rule and order categories. Plato tries to establish the tyranny of truth as opposed to the Socratic support of the opinions within the plural human realm. After the execution of Socrates, Plato deriving ‘the most anti-Socratic conclusion from the result’¹²² depreciates the polis life which is dangerous for the life of philosopher due to the existence of opinions. Therefore, he is the first, for Arendt, to use ‘ideas’ for the political purposes through generalization of the conflict between the body and the soul representing respectively the polis and the divine. The philosopher holding the ideas is still interested in politics because of the fear of execution; therefore, as illustrated in the cave allegory, he turns back to the human realm as Philosopher King rather than as a philosopher which is a danger for his life. To rule the city according to the ideas which represent the eternal truths is a kind of ‘rebellion of the philosopher against the polis.’¹²³ Establishing the victory of *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*, Plato aims to escape from the frailty and unreliability of human affairs into the rule, rule by ideas by promoting a kind of ideocracy through which ideas authoritatively become the measures and standards for moral and political behavior. Theoretically, Plato reaches this solution through differentiating knowing and doing from each other while the former one belongs to the philosopher king, the latter one does to the ordinary people. What Arendt criticizes is:

Under these circumstances, the essence of politics is to know how to begin and to rule in the gravest matters with regard to timeliness and untimeliness; action as such is entirely eliminated and has become the mere ‘execution of orders.’¹²⁴

¹²²Hannah Arendt, “Socrates,” in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. By Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 8.

¹²³Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 107.

¹²⁴Arendt, *Human Condition*, 199.

According to Arendt, the Platonic separation of knowing and doing is the root of all theories of domination¹²⁵ which provides the substitution of making for acting through degrading politics into the means and end categories. This tradition shows itself as ‘the safety of the philosopher in antiquity, the salvation of souls in the Middle Ages, the productivity and progress of society in the modern age.’¹²⁶ As a result, action has been eliminated from the conceptualization of politics because of its uncertainty.

As cited by Arendt, Hegel explicitly points out that ‘the philosophical contemplation has no other intention than to eliminate the accidental,’¹²⁷ speechless contemplation is contradictory to the contingent and spontaneous human action such that throughout the philosophical tradition the former one has tried to eliminate the latter in order to rule and order the human realm.

The Problem of Abstraction

In the previous parts, I have examined how Arendt opposes to the construction of the subject as sovereign. From now on, I will continue with one of its main consequences: the problem of abstraction. For Arendt, the sovereign subject who is at the center of all possible action does not have a relation with reality; in contrast, it presents an abstract way of thinking and living. One of its main essentials is its worldlessness in Arendt’s lexicon. Such worldlessness makes one give priority to the inner realm without any concrete relationship with the world and the others. This has

¹²⁵Ibid., 201.

¹²⁶Ibid., 205

¹²⁷Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 139.

fatal consequences for politics according to Arendt since it has ended up with the victory of *homo laborans* in the modern age which is an insuperable obstacle for the thinking activity and the public action.

Throughout this part, I aim to analyze how Arendt conceives of the subject as conditioned as opposed to the conceptualization of the subject in abstraction in which it has almost no relationship with the concrete world. As mentioned in the first chapter, such a subject is a historical construction which has begun with the Descartes's Cartesian subject. However, rather than gaining its significance through philosophical discourse, it had been effected by political, social and scientific developments according to the viewpoint of Arendt who particularly emphasizes the invention of the telescope by Galileo. For her, such developments have noteworthy impacts on the modern age. Briefly, in this part, I will examine the Arendt's challenge to the abstract construction of the subject by focusing on the notions of alienation, worldliness and natality.

World and Earth Alienation in the Modern Age

The Conquest of the Space

Arendt offers a new concept called as 'world alienation' as the hallmark of the modern age rather than self-alienation as Marx thought.¹²⁸ The origins of this world alienation go back to the Descartes's *cogito*. For her, Cartesian doubt is one of the crucial elements of the modern age. However, it seems important for Arendt to emphasize that this philosophical attitude is an immediate consequence of Galileo's

¹²⁸Arendt, *Human Condition*, 231.

invention of the telescope which is one of the great three events determining the character of the modern age along with the discovery of America and the Reformation.¹²⁹ Through the telescope, standing opposed to the Copernican developments, Galileo had challenged the adequacy of the human senses in understanding the secrets of the universe. Unlike Copernican claim which puts forward the reason, Galileo's invention had shown that sensual and rational truths which were the main mediators to understand the earthly phenomena were insufficient and unreliable. As Arendt momentarily emphasizes, it was neither reason nor senses, but an instrument, which has changed the physical world view. The significance of this invention lies in its character or form-giving capacity:

It was not reason but a man-made instrument, the telescope, which actually changed the physical world view; it was not contemplation, observation, and speculation which led to the new knowledge, but the active stepping in of *homo faber*, of making and fabricating.¹³⁰

The pathological consequence of this invention is the elevation of *homo faber* within the hierarchy of *vita activa* in the modern age. Making and fabricating has replaced thinking activity, or in other words, thinking has become the servant of making. Making itself has become the pursuit itself rather than knowledge or the end-product; and as a result, the concept of process has gained significance. Due to the process mentality, one 'began to consider himself part and parcel of the two superhuman, all encompassing processes of nature and history'¹³¹ both of which seems as infinite progresses. Moreover, the process has 'a monopoly of universality and

¹²⁹Ibid. 225.

¹³⁰Ibid., 249.

¹³¹Ibid., 280.

significance.’¹³² Therefore, the introduction of the concept of the process has fateful consequences one of which is a second reversal within the hierarchy of *vita activa*. Within the perspective of the process, one engages with nature whose main concern is life which has become the main standard of the modern age. This briefly refers to ‘the victory of *animal laborans*’ which will be detailed in the next part.

Besides the invention of the telescope, the discovery of America, the consecutive exploration of the whole earth, and the conquest of the space together have created a viewpoint of the unification of the universe from which a new science comes about. Arendt interprets this as the discovery of the Archimedean point through which the earthly phenomena can be observed by a view of totality, by a godly eye.¹³³ Earth alienation means that nature is reduced to the conditions of one’s own mind ‘instead of observing natural phenomena as they were given to her.’¹³⁴ The modern science is ‘a search for true reality behind mere appearances’ because of which ‘man has lost the very objectivity of the natural world.’¹³⁵

Consequently, mathematics has become the main instrument of the modern science which means that the phenomena are reduced to the mathematical order – which is the measure of human mind. Through mathematical operation, ‘the

¹³²Hannah Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” in *Between Past and Future*(New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 64.

¹³³One of the main assumptions of the Archimedean model is its claim of impartiality through the analogy of the position of God. This impartiality also entails the withdrawal from the world. This Archimedean norm is also utilized by the tradition of Western political philosophy in order to reproduce the Platonian differentiation between knowledge and action. Consequently, besides its being an abstract worldview, through the separation of knowledge and action, the Archimedean model is absolutely a characteristic of sovereignty as well. In order to examine the Arendtian alternative of storytelling to the Archimedean impartiality, see Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

¹³⁴Arendt, *Human Condition*, 241.

¹³⁵Hannah Arendt, “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 277.

objective truth and practical know-how are derived from cosmic and universal laws – a point of reference outside the earth- rather than the terrestrial and natural ones.¹³⁶ Arendt calls this as the ‘withdrawal from terrestrial proximity’ which gives way to the discovery of the globe as a whole.¹³⁷ What Arendt sees dangerous is that through such a universal and holistic standpoint one may acquire complete mastery over the nature as well as the capacity to destroy her.

The members of Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Adorno, seem to have very similar points with Arendt. When they analyze the Enlightenment, they claim that enlightenment has a self-destructive character. With the elevation of reason, knowledge has become the only standard in order to dispel myths and fantasies. Such a knowledge which is identical with power tries to ‘establish man as the master of nature.’¹³⁸ They underline the limitless feature of such knowledge.

To Arendt, the modern scientific theory ‘changes in accordance with the results it produces and depends for its validity not on what it reveals but on whether it works.’¹³⁹ Therefore, modern science does not have the ability to produce meaning no longer since its principles are causality, formula, calculability and utility in order to rule nature through knowledge. Through these principles, ‘number became enlightenment’s canon’¹⁴⁰ which leads the society to be ruled by ‘equivalence’ as a character of bourgeois society. Equivalence reduces everything into ‘abstract

¹³⁶Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 240.

¹³⁸Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 1.

¹³⁹Hannah Arendt, “Tradition and the Modern Age,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 39.

¹⁴⁰Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 4.

quantities' through numbers by making different things comparable. Numbers which are the medium of mathematical formalism have become the standards of the modern society through abstraction which is the instrument of enlightenment.¹⁴¹ The significance of these points lies in the emphasis upon the illusion of reason which fights against mythology and superstition. Through this illusion, one encounters with new forms of domination in the modern world. Moreover, while they argue that reason has turned against itself referring the self-destructive feature of enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno also emphasize the totalitarian character of enlightenment since it has a reference only to itself. This seems similar with the Arendtian emphasis upon the fact that 'man encounters only with himself' as mentioned above. This point also links directly with Arendt's critique of laboring society which will be discussed later.

In modern science, distance has lost its importance since speed has conquered the distance and space. Every distant part has been brought together due to the holistic viewpoint. Rather than terrestrial viewpoint, the invention of the airplane has forced one to put a decisive distance between one and the earth 'by abstracting from the terrestrial conditions, by appealing to a power of imagination and abstraction, and by alienating her from earthly surroundings.'¹⁴² The consequence is that:

Man lost the very objectivity of the natural world, so that man in his hunt for objective reality suddenly discovered that he always confronts himself alone.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Ibid., 9.

¹⁴²Arendt, "The Conquest of Space," 271.

¹⁴³Ibid., 277.

As Arendt, citing from Kafka, underlines:

He (man) found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself; it seems that he was permitted to find it only under this condition.¹⁴⁴

While Arendt sees this attitude as a ‘rebellion against human existence,’¹⁴⁵ Dana Villa names it as ‘resentment.’ As Villa asserts, the world has begun to appear to be a prison since it is identical with the finitude and limitedness. For Arendt, unlike natural and cyclical movements, the birth and the death are not natural phenomena; they are related with an artificial, a man-made world. One enters this world by birth and departs from it by death; but she knows that the world will last after her; a condition which indicates the finiteness, limitedness and conditioned existence of the human beings. Technological mastery in the modern age tries to remove the boundaries of this prison through destroying the world which is a fatal consequence. It is an existential resentment¹⁴⁶ and a dangerous hubris¹⁴⁷ through which one desires to transcend to givenness of the human condition at the end of which one has to pay price for earth alienation; or it is ‘a desire to escape from the limited human world into the limitless sphere of the non-human.’¹⁴⁸ What is more, this limitless perspective is also the very characteristic of totalitarianism whose motto is ‘everything is possible.’¹⁴⁹ Although the concept of world alienation seems much

¹⁴⁴Arendt, *Human Condition*, 225.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁶Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), 172.

¹⁴⁷Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 98.

¹⁴⁸Simon Swift, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21.

¹⁴⁹Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 382.

more important in terms of politics for Arendt, it is insufficient to understand modern man's world alienation without understanding the first one. For her, events change the world rather than the ideas; therefore, 'the author of the decisive event of the modern age is Galileo rather than Descartes.'¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, she emphasizes the congruity of the subjectivism of modern philosophy with these scientific developments.

Cogito and Introspection

After this scientific paradigm shift with the invention of Galileo, as Arendt observes, 'science and philosophy parted company more radically than ever before.'¹⁵¹ As mentioned above, Descartes's *cogito* is an immediate consequence of the invention of the telescope, and so Descartes became the father of modern philosophy in the eyes of Arendt. The Cartesian doubt appears as a response to a new reality.¹⁵² As well as Galileo, Descartes underlines the distrust of the senses proposing the modern doubting. His famous contribution to the philosophy is the conceptualization of the Cartesian subject who concerns only itself through reducing all experiences between one and oneself. His distrust of the senses results in an introspection and turning away from the world for which it has no worry and care about. After the invention of the telescope, Descartes also accepts that reality does not disclose itself to the human senses which are not reliable any more. Therefore, 'seeing with the eyes of the mind, listening with the ears of the heart, and guided by the inner light of reason,'¹⁵³ human

¹⁵⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 248.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁵³ Arendt, "The Concept of History," 55.

beings turning toward the universe have withdrawn from the world ‘into the sensing of the sensation itself.’¹⁵⁴ Steve Buckler names this new method of thinking as “implosion.”¹⁵⁵

The main characteristic of this introspection method is the certainty of the I-am. One doubting everything cannot doubt of thinking oneself; therefore, since one gains her certainty within thinking, it means one carries the certainty of her existence within herself.¹⁵⁶ In other words, the modern doubting is self-evident. The idea that ‘man can at least know what he makes himself’¹⁵⁷ has become the main attitude of the modern age. This method of introspection and the significance of an instrument – which is telescope- and which is also the signifier of the mentality of the *homo faber*, of making and fabricating, along with the other developments, give us a picture of the modern age. These developments led to the condition of ‘world alienation’ which means the loss of common sense and the shared world among human beings. For Arendt, while world alienation is the feature of the modern society, on the other side, earth alienation has become the hallmark of the modern science.¹⁵⁸

As mentioned above, when the notion of process merges into the instrumental character of the activity of making and fabricating, the *homo faber* has lost its superiority within the hierarchy of *vita activa* by giving its place to the *animal laborans*. Labor having the last place within the *vita activa* concerns only the biological needs of life and it is determined by necessity. The reason why it is in the

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 54.

¹⁵⁵Steve Buckler, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2011), 21.

¹⁵⁶Arendt, *Human Condition*, 255.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 257.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 240.

last place within the *vita activa* is related with its incapability of producing meaning. Since it bounds to necessity, it cannot produce meaning. Meaning can rise out only after the action has come to an end. However, with the identification of meaning with the end-product:

Meaning itself had departed from the world of men and men were left with nothing but an unending chain of purposes in whose progress the meaningfulness of all past achievements was constantly canceled out by future goals and intentions.¹⁵⁹

With the victory of *animal laborans*, life as the main concern of the laboring activity has become the highest good in the modern age which then leads to the rise of the social which absorbs the private and public realms simultaneously. While political organization is achieved through mutual consent which makes it artificial, the natural organization which is the direct opposition of the political one is centered at home and family.¹⁶⁰ For Arendt, the social means the rise of the household into the nationhood level which is named as an oxymoron ‘going under the name of the public household.’¹⁶¹ It is a realm which is governed by necessity and the needs of biological life which have a ‘limited political meaning’¹⁶² since they functionalize the politics by transforming housekeeping into a collective concern¹⁶³ and by reducing politics to administration.

¹⁵⁹ Arendt, “The Concept of History,” 78.

¹⁶⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 25.

¹⁶¹ D’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 45.

¹⁶² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 24.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

According to Arendt, the main characteristics of society are its identification with conformism, uniformity and anonymity under the measurement of one opinion and one interest. In other words, it has a monolithic, antipluralistic character.¹⁶⁴ Besides, society eliminating the possibility of any spontaneous action imposes its members a certain kind of behavior. Its aim is to normalize its members through equalizing them as Horkheimer and Adorno offers. However, this is an abstract equality that at the end has resulted in the emergence of mass society which is one of the main elements of the totalitarianism. Arendt claims that the social equalizes all members of a given community and controls them with equal strength. The victory of equality in the modern age is the result of the conquest of the public realm by the social, and equality has been set apart from the difference which has become the private matters.¹⁶⁵ The uniform behavior, which was imposed on the human beings in the concentration camps, is identical with the statistical determination and scientifically correct prediction.¹⁶⁶ The substitution of behavior for action is supported by the behavioral sciences especially in the 1950s aiming to ‘reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal.’¹⁶⁷ Consequently, the rise of the social has become the hallmark of the world alienation whose first sacrifice was the love of the world.

World alienation firstly means that one has lost her place and her contact with the others in the world which paves way to the turning into the inner realm, to the private sphere through introspection. Moreover, this indicates the elimination of the

¹⁶⁴Villa, *The Fate of the Political*, 24.

¹⁶⁵Arendt, *Human Condition*, 38.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

public realm in which one acts and speaks with others by sharing a common world. However, with the Cartesian reason, Arendt states that ‘what men now have in common is not the world but the structures of their minds’¹⁶⁸ which are playing only with themselves. Briefly, world alienation is identified with the loss of freedom, the loss of intersubjectivity and consequently the loss of meaning which can be raised only through commonness and sharing.

In order to show how introspection or inwardness has become pathological in the modern age, I now aim to examine Arendt’s book written on Rahel Varnhagen who is a Jewess lived between the years of 1771 and 1833. Seyla Benhabib in her book *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* aims to decenter *The Human Condition* which is Arendt’s most considerable book. Therefore, she begins with an analysis of the book about Rahel Varnhagen in order to understand Arendt through her most significant aim: understanding! The book about Rahel Varnhagen seems explanatory for the aim of this thesis since it gives lots of analysis about unworldly inwardness and introspection which are directly opposed with common world. This is an inner biography which reveals the worldless sensibility of Rahel. One of her letters to a friend, Rahel says: “What am I doing? “Nothing. I am letting life rain upon me.” As Benhabib asserts, it is this “worldless” sensibility that Arendt treats as the most objectionable about Rahel.¹⁶⁹ Such a romantic inwardness which is the only source of the truth leads to the loss of the sense of reality in Rahel’s life since it deals with the one’s soul rather than the world. She is an exemplary figure of modern individualism through her endless conflicts and subjectivism of her emotional life.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 257.

¹⁶⁹Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism*, 11.

Joshua Yoder claims that Rahel is a figure who is the unique combination of enlightened rationalism and romantic introspection which are combined in German thought more anywhere else in Europe.¹⁷⁰ However, Arendt is very critical about the theories of individualism including the rational individualism of the Enlightenment and the introspective self in romanticism which are both abstract. Rahel who is engaged with self-thinking only believed that she carries the truth inside; but at the same time she was yearning for this truth to be understood by the others. This makes her suffer all the time because she had lost the distinction between the private and the public, between the subjective and the objective. In other words, introspection results in the dissolving all existing situations into moods and giving an aura of objectivity to everything subjective.¹⁷¹

Self-thinking, which is the meaning of life for Rahel, means the withdrawal from the world and the entrance to the realm of the pure ideas. What is pathological with such an engagement is that ‘by the very act of isolation from the world, thinking becomes limitless’¹⁷² which is opposed to the limited feature of the human beings. Rahel experiences inner freedom by escaping external coercion and feel free in a limitless way through the unlimited freedom of thought. However, freedom is worldly and limited as well as nonsovereign.¹⁷³ It is limited since it is worldly, occurs in the web of human relationships in which one cannot be sovereign anymore. As Yoder argues, due to the over-emphasis upon individual subjectivity, the

¹⁷⁰Joshua Yoder, *The Case of Human Plurality: Hannah Arendt’s Critique of Individualism in Enlightenment and Romantic Thinking* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), 26.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 28.

¹⁷²Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (London: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), 90.

¹⁷³Villa, *The Fate of the Political*, 82.

rationalist and romantic thinkers bring forth the alienation and superfluity through isolating the individual from all humanity.¹⁷⁴ The hidden importance of the analysis of the figure of Rahel lies in the direct relationship between her isolation from the worldly reality and the emergence of the totalitarianism. As Arendt argues, the main characteristics of the totalitarianism are the phenomena of the mass society and superfluous humanity. When she names her book as *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she does not follow the method of causality in order to reach the origins; rather she tries to understand how the tradition of philosophy can be effectual in the rise of totalitarianism.

The Worldliness

World in-between us

Since Arendt is dissatisfied with the rise of the social in the modern age where the differentiation between the public and the private realms has become blurred, she mostly emphasizes the importance of the public realm. For her, public realm is identical with ‘the common.’ The term public or this commonness signifies two phenomena: The first one refers to a public realm in which one may make oneself appear to the others through being seen and heard. This meaning of the public simply refers to the public political realm in which human beings appear to each other through speech and action. Such an appearance through speech and action constitutes ‘reality’ for Arendt rather than the experience of the eternal –the work of contemplation or *theōria*. This reality is constituted through the products of speech and action as well as it constitutes the fabric of human relationships and affairs. This

¹⁷⁴Yoder, *The Case of Human Plurality*, 51.

worldly reality ‘saves us from our lonely imaginings.’¹⁷⁵ As Arendt overstates, this reality depends upon the existence of others –the plurality- ‘who can see and hear and therefore testify their existence.’¹⁷⁶ Arendt calls this as ‘subjective in-between.’ There is a web of relationships among human beings which relates and binds them. This is a subjective public realm which lies in-between human beings. In this public realm, human beings are appearances, they disclose themselves to the others; they are able to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched. Briefly, they are not mere subjects; rather they are as objective as stone and bridge.¹⁷⁷ In Arendtian sense, although speech and action leave no work or products behind unlike the activity of work, this realm is as real as such an objective world of things. This is why Arendt uses the word ‘web’ metaphorically as if there is a tangible web among human beings.

From the perspective of the politics, this realm is also a public-political realm in which human beings act and speak with each other and share the opinions rather than truth. Opinions which are informed by the facts and events are not self-evident as truth is. Since it carries an element of coercion which makes it hold tyrannical tendencies, truth which presents itself as self-evident is non-political and anti-political for Arendt. What is worth to consider about politics in Arendtian sense is that the subjective in-between, the web of human relationships is not bound to truth; rather it is constituted through opinions through which people are sharing. The concreteness or tangibility of this realm lies in its opposition to rational and philosophical truths which are beyond agreement or dispute since they present

¹⁷⁵Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 154.

¹⁷⁶Arendt, *Human Condition*, 82.

¹⁷⁷Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 19.

themselves as universal. For example, the statement ‘all men are created equal’ is not a self-evident truth for Arendt which was incited enormously by many philosophers. However, for Arendt, this statement cannot be a matter of truth, because if we accept it by the coercion of truth, we cannot develop any further political thinking and this argument will stay ‘abstract’ if we do not actualize it:

The human sense of reality demands that men actualize the sheer passive givenness of their being, not in order to change it but in order to make articulate and call into full existence what otherwise they would have to suffer passively anyhow.¹⁷⁸

Therefore, to actualize what equality means, it is not sufficient to accept or believe this argument is true. This argument must be a matter of agreement and consent among people which makes it also politically relevant. As Arendt states, ‘we hold this opinion because freedom is possible only among equals.’¹⁷⁹ Moreover, this principle of political equality –the equality of unequals can be secured only by democratic political worldly institutions.¹⁸⁰ This also signifies the meaningfulness of the public realm; the meaning which can be experienced in the plurality reveals only through mutual consent, as the statement above shows, rather than mutual dependence which is the characteristic of the social realm or the theory of natural rights. In other words, she exalts the political equality or ‘equality of citizenship rather than the greater equality of condition and the abstract goal of social justice.’¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸Arendt, *Human Condition*, 187.

¹⁷⁹Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 247.

¹⁸⁰D’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 16.

¹⁸¹Villa, *The Fate of the Political*, 40.

Secondly, public directly refers to the 'world' itself which is common to everyone. What Arendt especially emphasizes is the difference between the world on one side and the earth or the nature on the other. What distinguishes the world from those is its artificial condition which means that the world is the works of one's hands. In other words, it is a man-made world and the world of things which condition human beings. According to Arendt's definition:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.¹⁸²

This world is an objective world due to its object/thing-character. This objectivity of the world functions to condition human beings in such a way that they are dependent on things in terms of the relation and separation with a sense of belonging and of being at home in the world. Arendt calls this as 'objective in-between' that is directly related with the other in-between –the subjective one- as mentioned above. The world of things lies between human beings 'out of which arise their specific, objective and worldly interests.'¹⁸³ *Inter-est* here means which lies between people and which is common to them in a world of objective things. This is a tangible realm of the world of things which people visibly have in common and these tangible objects condition people within a common world.

The name of *The Human Condition* shows how Arendt is against the notion of human nature which is one of the main themes of the traditional political philosophy. As Canovan argues, this term is a kind of challenge to 'the hubristic

¹⁸²Arendt, *Human Condition*, 48.

¹⁸³Ibid., 162.

fantasies of totalitarianism and modernity’ in order to emphasize that ‘we are all subject to conditions which we cannot escape.’¹⁸⁴ Arendt’s answer to the problem of the human nature seems striking in terms of signifying the materiality or concrete reality of the human beings as opposed to the abstract construction of them: “If we have a nature or essence, then surely only a god could know and define it.”¹⁸⁵ However, the conditions of human existence such as life, natality, mortality, worldliness, plurality and earth- cannot give one such answers about what one is or who one is which means that ‘they never condition us absolutely.’¹⁸⁶ This explanation seems significant to understand what Arendt means: She is trying to open a space for human beings in the modern age by uncovering their capacity to act which is not bound to the absolute or superhuman qualities.

The significance of the realms of subjective in-between and objective in-between is described by Dana Villa in a very illustrative way especially for the purpose of this study:

The concept of the world goes a long way toward achieving to decenter the subject by thematizing the meaning-disclosing horizon in terms of which all subject/object relations are founded.¹⁸⁷

Being-in-the-world vs. Worldlessness

It is widely accepted that Arendt is not a mere disciple of Heidegger; but she draws upon his some conceptualization by deconstructing most of them. One of them is

¹⁸⁴Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 104.

¹⁸⁵Arendt, *Human Condition*, 12.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸⁷Villa, *The Fate of the Political*, 213.

‘being-in-the-world.’ This term is related with freedom which is one of Arendt’s main concerns. Throughout the tradition of Western political philosophy, freedom has been mostly identified with the inner freedom which defends that freedom springs from *bios theoretikos* (the contemplative life). However, Arendt aims to think of freedom as a worldly phenomenon. From a Heideggerian terminology, freedom is a mode of being-in-the-world.¹⁸⁸ *Dasein* –the being of man- has a worldly character; therefore, being-in-the-world also means being-with-others. Moreover, ‘Da’ signifies *Dasein*’s being-there linking it with an external world and *Dasein* opens or discloses itself in this world. However, although Arendt is motivated by the concept of being-in-the-world, she strictly underlines that Heideggerian worldliness is a mere fact of alienation due to the fact that the fear of death –the source of anxiety of *Dasein*- makes *Dasein* feel like not-being-at-home in the world.¹⁸⁹

Arendt, on the other hand, usually uses the notions of the ‘darkness of the private realm’ and ‘shining in the public realm.’ If one comes out from her privacy and enters into the public realm, she makes herself ‘appear’ to the others through speech and action. This is clear how Arendt re-conceptualizes *Dasein*’s openness in terms of politics through which she chooses very un-Heideggerian direction.¹⁹⁰ Although being-in-the-world is a mode of *Dasein*, Heidegger calls this as ‘fallenness’ which means that *Dasein* has lost its authenticity because of the routine of the everydayness. Since *Dasein* which concerns primarily its being itself is threatened by death, it is ‘in a constant relationship with this threatened existence.’¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 119.

¹⁸⁹Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 179.

¹⁹⁰Villa, *The Fate of the Political*, 123.

¹⁹¹Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 179.

Therefore, he changes his direction to the death through which *Dasein* fulfills its authenticity since the death is the only thing belongs to only itself through which one has the certainty of being herself. Heidegger identifies the existence and essence of human beings. This is an attempt to make man master of Being for Arendt who argues that ‘this ideal of the Self is no longer Self which follows as a consequence of Heidegger’s making of man what God was in earlier ontology.’¹⁹² For Arendt, such ‘passion to become subjective’ is the mark of man as ‘man in his abandonment.’¹⁹³

This is a mere turning to the self to which Arendt is very much against. This inward turn is unavailable in terms of politics for her, and or it means the turn to the darkness where no one can reach. The authenticity lies in the public political action through which one discloses her uniqueness. In the private realm, it is impossible to talk about differences since each is bound to necessity and each is same in a sense. The individual life is ‘of value not because it is unique, but because it is exemplary.’¹⁹⁴ However, one can reveal her difference and uniqueness in the public realm in front of the eyes of the others. This is why public action is called as authentic action. Rather than Heidegger’s pejorative use of ‘they’ which refers to the others in public, Arendt exalts the plurality –the presence of the others- as the source of authenticity.

Nevertheless, human beings have lost an authentic public realm in the modern age. This is called as worldlessness which makes one feel homeless. The most pathological consequence of the destruction of the modern world is the emergence of mass society and so mass behavior due to the technological automatism. One of the

¹⁹²Ibid., 180.

¹⁹³Ibid., 174.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 26.

main characteristics of mass society is its worldlessness, its deprivation of public realm and at the same time its loss of the private realm. Although the decline of the public is fateful for the formation of mass man, this loss has begun with the ‘much more tangible loss of a privately owned share in the world’¹⁹⁵ since the property is the most elementary condition for man’s worldliness. Arendt relates this with the large scale expropriation and the increase in social wealth which are the main reasons for the transformation of everything into ‘the object of production and consumption and of acquisition and exchange.’¹⁹⁶ After the loss of public and private realms, worldlessness has become the main feature of the mass society due to the worldless mentality of modern ideological mass movements. Worldlessness means that ‘the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them.’¹⁹⁷ With the loss of the intermediary of a common world of things, human beings have become imprisoned in their private realms without seeing and hearing each other.

Natality

Arendt claims that all Western history remains in between the mortality of human beings and the immortality of nature. Throughout this duality, mortality becomes the hallmark of human existence where everything embedded in a cosmos was immortal.¹⁹⁸ As she defines:

¹⁹⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 233.

¹⁹⁶ D’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 38.

¹⁹⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 48.

¹⁹⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 19.

This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line with a recognizable life-story from birth to death in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.¹⁹⁹

Although mortality is the hallmark of human existence, Arendt stresses that human beings still have the capacity to transcend this mortality through word and deed. It is certain that speech and action do not last forever as well as their speaker and doer. However, through remembrance and story-telling by a poet or historian, these words and deeds have shining glory through which they gain an everlasting fame. Although the greatness of action is self-evident, we still need story-tellers who to tell the stories of ‘the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words.’²⁰⁰ For Arendt, impartiality, as an important standard for historical sciences, has degenerated with the modern age in which objectivity has become a mere technical and scientific issue or man-made process. However, rather than a technical objectivity, the science of history cannot be separated from poetry and story-telling. For example, Homer as a poet and story-teller praises the glory of Hector not less than Achilles in order to immortalize human deeds.

Arendt strictly emphasizes that the difference between immortality and eternity. The experience of eternity which is described as the experience of the philosopher king within the cave allegory of Plato is a kind of death for Arendt since such a philosopher is not followed by any fellow cannot be related with any activity; so it lives in a perfect singularity. On the other hand, immortality is achieved by mortal human beings through speech and action within the human condition of plurality. Moreover, it seems that Arendt has uniqueness in mind in her emphasis

¹⁹⁹Arendt, “The Concept of History,” 42.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 46.

upon the natality along with mortality. Although the tradition of philosophy has dealt with the notions of death, the transcendence of death, the fear of death, or immortality of soul, Arendt changes the direction into the natality –the capacity of beginning something which ‘can make itself felt in the world.’²⁰¹ For Arendt, the world is not erected for one generation; rather it transcends the life-spans of mortal human beings.²⁰² Therefore, while this world is permanent and stable, human plurality is dynamic. In other words, there are always new-comers who have the capacity to begin something new. Arendt challenges the traditional philosophical notion of ‘the fundamental feature of man’s existence is not mortality, but natality which makes action possible.’²⁰³

Natality is a central category of political for Arendt. The political character of natality shows itself in the insertion of oneself to the human world through word and deed:

To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, to begin, to lead, and eventually to rule), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action.²⁰⁴

From this perspective, human beings are seen as the ‘beginners’ who are the carriers of the principle of beginning within themselves. Action which brings forth the new is the indicator of the human capacity to transcend the statistical laws, probabilities and certainties. Through action, human beings as beginners can achieve the unexpected

²⁰¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 10.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰³ Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 130.

²⁰⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 157.

which is infinitely improbable.²⁰⁵ The new, the unexpected is a kind of miracle which comes from neither God, nor superhuman powers; it comes from human beings by virtue of being born and by virtue of giving birth.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 158.

CHAPTER 3

LEVINAS: ETHICAL SUBJECTIVITY

The Problem of Ontology

Levinas who is one of the most controversial philosophers of the twentieth century is mostly known as the philosopher of the other. His philosophy is mainly concerned with ethics as a first philosophy whose priority also signifies its constitutive speciality. It can be suggested that Levinas as the philosopher of the other also theorizes the notion of subjectivity –which is an ethical subjectivity- with regard to the relation between the Same and the Other through decentering the subject of transcendental philosophy as we call it the modern subject. Although transcendence is a key term for Levinas’s philosophy since he defines the Other through transcendence and alterity, the subject of transcendental philosophy or transcendental idealism has become the main opposite of his notion of ethical subjectivity constituted through infinite responsibility for-the-Other contra to the notion of self-responsibility of the modern subject. In that sense, his philosophy is an overall refutation of the history of philosophy. In this part, I will deal with how Levinas opposes to the idea of ontology which is the theory of being -being as to exist in the world. For him, the whole history of Western philosophy is an egology whose concern is to generalize and centralize the notion of identical, self-sufficient and self-referential being which refuses any notion of exteriority which is called as totality.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ It is possible to see that throughout his philosophy Levinas fights against the notion of ontology since it leads to totality through elimination any kind of ethical relationship with the Other and the world. Therefore, I will build this Levinasian part by only focusing how he conceptualizes ontology and the understanding of the self/subject within it. Unlike the Arendtian part which has dealt with two

Ontological Imperialism

Ontology as Egology and Domination

For Levinas, contemporary ontology has a great novelty through identifying the being to the whole of human behavior; under the statement of ‘the whole man is ontology.’²⁰⁷ Contemporary ontology is the revival of ontology in a more fundamental way. For fundamental ontology, reason is a naïve reason since it has liberated itself from temporal contingencies. However, this means for ontology is to forget itself; therefore, coinciding with the facticity of temporal existence, fundamental ontology claims that to be and to understand being is to exist in this world. That is a great break with the theoretical structure of Western thought for Levinas since ‘to think is no longer to contemplate, but to be engaged, merged with what we think, launched.’²⁰⁸ Levinas calls this as the dramatic event of being since it turns out to be an imprisonment over the beings. Even though it seems something possible to engage with the world as opposed to the abstract positioning of being, it is not for Levinas. Due to the fact that being proposed by fundamental ontology cannot be reduced some other determinations or conditions, its engagement with the world becomes domination. In other words, although the existent has mastery over the existence since existence is ‘naturally’ bound to the body or the existence is surrounded by existents; the existent still has to deal with the weight of the existence over itself. Levinas mainly directs his objections about the priority of being to the idealist subject.

main problems of which Arendt directs to the modern subject, it seems to me that Levinas directs his objections only to ontology.

²⁰⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 2.

²⁰⁸ Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” 3.

Transcendental idealism which is developed by Kant is a subject-centered theory. While he makes a distinction between thing-in-itself and thing-as-appearance, it seems that through underlining the limited capacity of reason to get the essence and the truth of the outside world he gives a good lesson to the whole mentality of philosophy which is mainly shaped by the search for the true knowledge. However, despite defending the notion that thing-in-itself cannot be known by the subject, he constructs a theory founded upon the subject itself. Time and space are the two subjective forms of the human mind which also implies that they are not things-in-themselves. They are the sources of the experience of the things as they appear, experienced by the subject. As Levinas claims, ancient philosophy does not deal with the subject-object correlation by accepting naturally that thought has an object. However, while constructing subjectivity; modern philosophy has raised originality of the subject-object relation through reducing knowledge to existence.²⁰⁹

The subject of transcendental idealism can be identified with the rational sovereign subject who is constituted by its own categories through which it comprehends the universe and gets the truth. The reason of this subject posits itself as the universal reason valid for everyone and this validity makes it self-responsible since it is autonomous and absolutely sovereign.²¹⁰ What is problematic for Levinas as so for Arendt is the tradition of Western philosophy itself since it has been a philosophy of the ego, or the Same or the subject out of which a rational, legislative and instrumental subjectivity is produced. The great tradition of philosophy presents the self as universal and defines it as the base of understanding and knowing. In other

²⁰⁹Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," *Diacritics* 26, no. 1 (1996): 14.

²¹⁰I think we have made clear that point in the first and the second parts of this study while examining the constitution of the modern subject and Arendt's opposition to it. Therefore, there is no need to go further within that part.

words, ‘universal thought is always the thought in the first person.’²¹¹ However, the relationality between universality, understanding and knowing is a bit dangerous since it rules out the particularity. As Levinas points out:

...to understand the particular being is already to place oneself beyond the particular. To understand is to relate to the particular, which alone exists, through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal.²¹²

Moreover, knowledge and understanding always relates themselves to the presence of being, that is to say, to ontology. While knowledge always requires the synthesis of the ideas and the unity of their apperception, to understand being in the openness of being involves violence and negation through the power of understanding and naming which turns out to be domination. Through knowledge and understanding, the I is prone to thematize or objectify or neutralize the outside world in order to grasp or comprehend it -called as subject-object correlation which distinguishes subject as the container and the object as the contained. It is a relationship of knowing through which the alterity of the known being vanishes due to its being thematized. What is pathological with this correlation is its objectifying and categorizing attitude toward the world and the Other which is the hallmark of totality. Therefore, this relation based upon understanding is problematic for Levinas in terms of the relation with the other who is beyond comprehension and irreducible to knowledge:

Everything from him –the other- that comes to me in terms of being in general certainly offers itself to my understanding and my possession. I understand him in terms of his history,

²¹¹Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (USA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 126.

²¹²Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” 5.

his environment, his habits. What escapes understanding in him is himself, the being.²¹³

How does the Other escape from the Same? Through its exteriority! Exteriority is a key term through which Levinas obliterates the notion of the knowing subject. The Ego, the I is always identical to itself –identity as synthesis and unity with its all capacities. This identity is supplemented by interiority. Within this interiority, the Ego is always free through reference to itself. However, the Other,²¹⁴ who is not interior to the I, interrupts the freedom of the I since it is a rupture in the unity of the I. As opposed to the characteristics of the identity as synthesis and unity; the Other is always a break, a separation or a division. In its identity, the I is completely free, but the exteriority of the other is the end of this freedom. This exteriority can be negated only through murder. The other who I want to negate is the only one that the I wants to kill. Levinas underlines that this want to kill the other is the moment of the defeat of the power since the other escapes even from being killed by the I. The encounter with the other, the face-to-face relation is the situation of being unable to kill since the face signifies otherwise than being transcending my comprehension and my power.

Although it is impossible even to kill the Other or to kill is the only way to eliminate, Levinas claims that Western philosophy is an ontology –theoretically-

²¹³Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” 9.

²¹⁴There is a difference between the Other with a capital O and the other in Levinasian lexicon. *Autrui* in French means the Other which refers to the personal other, the other person. *Autre* refers to otherness in general and to alterity. It seems that although such differentiation is significant, Levinas himself has not been very attentive in the usage of these terms, neither have I.

which kills the Other through reducing it to the Same.²¹⁵ This is because the I is constituted as free and self-sufficient which implicitly means that the I, within its reliable identity, has no need to reference something outside itself. The individuality of the I is constituted not ‘by what distinguishes it from others, but by its reference to itself.’²¹⁶ Self-reference signifies self-sufficiency which turns out to be a struggle toward the other, the stranger²¹⁷ who disrupts the I’s own reality. The aim of this struggle is based on domination; the same wants to dominate the other. Therefore, ontology is philosophy of power since it absorbs the Other.

Thus, Western philosophy as ontology justifies a total system as the carrier of harmony and order which is also underlined by Arendt. This system serves to the limitless freedom of the I for the sake of which the other is absorbed within the same. The egocentric totalistic thinking organizes everything around itself through which it gains control over the nature and the others. This power is the measure of freedom. The freedom of the I can be limited only by the natural and social forces, and also death. Death produces the notion of a finite freedom which is engaged with power. As the demigod in modernity, the Western man is idealized as ‘the satisfied man, to whom all that is possible is permissible.’²¹⁸ As well as self-sufficiency, the finitude of the I should also be considered attentively in order to think over how the I in its

²¹⁵Unlike Arendt, he has a critical attitude toward Socrates whose teaching for him is the manifestation of the primacy of the same since it concerns ‘what is in me’ receiving nothing from the other.

²¹⁶Emmanuel Levinas, “The I and the Totality” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 16.

²¹⁷Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape* (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 50.

²¹⁸Emmanuel Levinas, “From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 140. This statement brings to mind Arendtian statement about totalitarianism: Everything is possible. Arendt develops her idea upon the nihilism of mass society. Totalitarianism has institutionalized nihilism through corrupting the relationship between human beings and the world. Masses had thought that everything is possible and nothing is true, everything flows, there will not remain anything left.

self-sufficiency and finitude justifies itself to fulfill the meaning of life that will reach an end. In other words, in its exalted egoism and ipseity, the I who dominates itself and its life, also dominates the Other.

The domination of the other or the denial of any exteriority, in brief totality, is called as ontological imperialism –kind of tyranny- by Levinas. In such a total system, truth becomes anonymous and universality becomes impersonal which is another inhumanity.²¹⁹ Anonymity and impersonality is the result of ontology which does not care for the Other. This is because ontology is the fundamental dogma of all thought²²⁰ for Levinas. This dogma stems from the skepticism toward the outside world which leads the philosophy turn toward Being rather than the concrete beings; therefore, the whole history of Western philosophy is skepticism which looks for power to overcome this insecurity.²²¹ This implies the notion of self-sufficiency established as a humiliation toward outside world which is also the sign of the bourgeois spirit and its conservative philosophy. As Levinas points out:

The bourgeois is concerned with business matters and science as a defense against things and all that is unforeseeable in them. His instinct for possession is an instinct for integration, and his imperialism is a search for security...He prefers the certainty of tomorrow to today's enjoyments.²²²

²¹⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

²²⁰Levinas, *On Escape*, 71.

²²¹Besides theoretical pathologies, Levinas also finds skepticism as absurd since it refutes itself. Therefore, phenomenology is significant for him due to the fact that phenomenology is basically intentionality of consciousness which means that consciousness is always consciousness of something. In other words, through intending all thought is its object. It is impossible to separate them. Therefore, phenomenology is the way to overcome all skepticism. When Levinas first met with Husserl in Freiburg, he felt that phenomenology is beyond just a new theory; 'it is new ideal of life, a new page of history, almost a new religion.' See Emmanuel Levinas's "Freiburg, Husserl and Phenomenology," *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, edited by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Illinois: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1998), 37.

²²²Levinas, *On Escape*, 50.

This search for security does not only belong to the bourgeois philosophy; rather it is the main element of Western philosophy under the name of peace. In order to overcome the violence of the other and to persevere in being (*conatus essendi*), Western thought establishes peace through knowledge and truth, that is to say, through reason and also through artistic act. Peace of the individual through reason's overcoming the alterity of the outside world is indeed to be-for-oneself within the security of well-being and freedom for Levinas.²²³ That kind of a peace creates and also searches for silence; rather he looks for a peace in which 'the eyes of the other are sought.'²²⁴ The word 'certainty' is also key to Levinas's thought. Ontology concerning with being itself establishes it as a finite being in its dialectical relation between being and nothingness. This finitude is certain, being is always toward death. This certainty constitutes the meaning of life as I mentioned above how the meaning of life is dependent upon the I since it is in the center of the world. Self-sufficiency and finitude indicates the characteristic of the centralized being which signifies the Heidegger's *Dasein* with which Levinas constantly struggles.

Heidegger's *Dasein* on the Basis of Being, Death and Time

It seems that Levinas has a kind of Oedipus complex toward Heidegger whose philosophy is very influential on him and, on the other side, whose political engagement has created a great resentment in him. The Nazi party membership of Heidegger seems a bit traumatic for Levinas; therefore, as it can be said that his

²²³Emmanuel Levinas, "Uniqueness" in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 190. Moreover, Arendt has also a very similar point to that. She argues that Western political philosophy has reduced to politics in to the dichotomy of to rule and to be ruled through making action handmaiden to contemplation. It was mainly the resistance of philosopher who is Plato –after death of Socrates- to the politics in order to escape the unpredictability of action for its security.

²²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, "Dying for..." in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 208.

theory is developed mostly through the totalitarianism, Heidegger has also a big role in terms of theoretically and factually. At the first glance, Levinas agrees with Heidegger that epistemology is not first philosophy. The traditional epistemological approach presupposes that there is a relation and so difference between the subject and the object and the idealist epistemology admits that the subject has the knowledge of the object within itself which is originated from Cartesian *cogito*. Heidegger rejects these epistemological approaches since they understand Being as an entity. Rather, he suggests the notion of Being-in-the-world as the constitutive character of *Dasein*. In that sense, Being-in-the-world signifying the ground of knowledge as Being-alongside-the-world refers to the duality of *Dasein* which is both inside and outside. That is called as circular structure of *Dasein*²²⁵ which is totality for Levinas. Heideggerian *Dasein* finds its authentic existence in its annihilation, being with others refers to its inauthentic existence. Its being-with-others stems from its thrownness to the world; it is something it cannot have the control over; it has to share this world with others. However, in Heidegger's thought others appear to *Dasein*'s everydayness as 'They' not as the Other in its alterity. The authenticity of *Dasein* is altered by nothing.²²⁶ Another problematic in Heidegger according to Levinas is his hermeneutical approach to the other. Heidegger claims that being can be understood in linguistic. Since the same and the other is in the same tradition, they can communicate to each other and this communication is truth revealing. First of all, the tradition is determinative in this approach, the other is dependent on this tradition; therefore, it is not possible to talk about the alterity of the

²²⁵Zeynep Direk, "The Problem of Other in Continental Philosophy" (BA diss., Boğaziçi University, 1990), 86.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, 207.

other.²²⁷ Secondly, for Levinas, the relationship with the other is not a truth revealing; rather ‘a primordial access to the Other beyond all ontology’ is to encounter in justice or injustice.²²⁸ Briefly, Heidegger reduces the Other into the Same since he does not care for the alterity of the other.

However, According to Levinas, by breaking the chains of epistemology and going beyond subject-object level, Heidegger tries to attempt to grasp subject ontologically. Therefore, it is not a problem of essence which deals with be-ing; rather it is question of being, namely its existence which encloses essence through the modes of existing. Briefly, for Heidegger, ontology is first philosophy which means that existence has priority to be questioned since it comes about through existing. Existence basically is the understanding of being as the mode of existence itself. Therefore, Heidegger is unquestioningly obedient to the truth of Being.²²⁹ Being which is completely independent and separate from the existents (beings) should be the only concern for Heidegger who justifies the mastery of Being over the beings. As Levinas claims, Heidegger continues the respectable tradition of Western philosophy which reduces the particular to the universal.

Furthermore, in the dialectics of being and nothingness, Heidegger maintains the finitude of the being as the source of all meaning. Death represents the irreversible; it is the certitude of death. This certitude means that secondhand knowledge of death does not work for human beings who can acquire the death itself only through dying; therefore, *Dasein* marches toward death through murmuring ‘I

²²⁷Direk, *The Problem of Other*,” 126.

²²⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 89.

²²⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

shall have to die my own death.’²³⁰ For Levinas, the phrase ‘to die my own death’ is a sign of *Dasein*’s *Jemeinigkeit* (Mineness) which implies the deduced I from a closed relationship of being with being itself. Mineness also implies authenticity of *Dasein*. *Dasein*’s Mineness consists of being-to-do, being-to-fulfill and having-to-be. These notions essentially underline the humanity understood as *Dasein* who concerns being only; for Levinas that is a fundamental ontology. Therefore, Levinas exposes ‘the analytic of *Dasein*’²³¹ which requires Mineness ‘as the possibility of the mine and of all having’²³² which is identified as to be-in-the-world is to be one’s possibilities whereas to be one’s possibilities is to understand them. Understanding existence is an intimate relation between existence and its possibilities.²³³ It is not a cognitive relation anymore; it is independent from the distinction between the knowing subject and the object known. It is a priori knowledge of existence itself. It is an inner knowledge coming from its very existence. The analytic of *Dasein* principally refers to the structural whole of *Dasein* which is totality for Levinas. What is remarkable in *Dasein* to Levinas is its totality in its death; the finitude becomes the very characteristic of *Dasein*’s existence and also the very principle of the subject’s subjectivity. With Levinasian words, ‘totality would be fulfilled at the very moment in which the person ceases to be a person.’²³⁴ That means authentic existence is found in annihilation. Death is the moment of fulfilling the *Dasein*’s lack to be a whole. This wholeness stems from the death’s revealing itself without any

²³⁰Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time* (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 8.

²³¹*Ibid.*, 30.

²³²*Ibid.*, 30.

²³³Levinas, “Heidegger and Ontology,” 23.

²³⁴Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 31.

possible substitution. It is untransferable and inalienable possibility of *Dasein*. What Levinas draws attention here is the relationship of ontology and power once again:

Heidegger speaks here of a power: I am capable of an imminent power. Now, death is a possibility of which *Dasein* must itself take charge, and which is untransferable. I here have a power that is my own, proper to me.²³⁵

This power appears as the possibility of the impossibility; a possibility to seize! It is the most proper, an untransferable, an isolating and an extreme possibility since it is 'me' or 'ipseity' which cuts all the ties with the outside world through surpassing all others. This is the point against which Levinas mostly protests.

Briefly, death is understood as a result of a logical operation which is negativity: no-longer-being as opposed to being. Levinas seems having contempt for Western thought due to its struggle for nothingness. The main argument of Western thought which goes back to Aristotle is that it is impossible to think nothingness. However, Heidegger claims to have an access to nothingness through anxiety which is the experience of nothingness. While Heidegger asserts that nothingness is thinkable in death, Levinas defends the unthinkable side of nothingness, and through targeting Heidegger he emphasizes that 'to have experienced anxiety does not allow one to think it (nothingness).'²³⁶ However Levinas asks the question the other way around: Is death separable from the relation with the other? He firstly argues that death is not only a personal experience since one's own death is unknown to it; it is more than the experience of death if we try to relate it to a meaning. Its meaning comes from the death of another person. The experience of death is not personal, one first sees

²³⁵Ibid., 44.

²³⁶Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 70.

the other dying; and the death of the other creates a break or a rupture within the Same; it splits the total I. It is a trauma for the self.

Secondly, Heideggerian relationship between death and time is also rejected by Levinas. Time is constituted through Being-toward-death for Heidegger. In other words, the origin of time is based on being-toward-death. This means the reduction of time and *Dasein* for Levinas; on the contrary, he proposes to think death on the basis of time rather than time on the basis of death as Heidegger does. Levinas claims that death as the constitutive of the time is the degenerated version of Kantian philosophy by Heidegger who finds the most radical version of the finitude of being in Kant who posed the question ‘What may I know?’ Levinas accepts that this question leads to finitude since it underlines the limited character of reason at the end. However, there are other questions posed by Kant: ‘What must I do?’ and ‘What may I hope?’ These questions and their answers are going ‘somewhere else’ for Levinas, since they are incomprehensible and not reducible to the theoretical reason. Practical philosophy and the notion of hope signify something other than being which means it goes beyond finitude and time. Levinas, at that point, establishes the notion of time as a relationship and time as diachrony rather than synchrony which is the sign of presence. This diachrony comes from the relationship with the other; time is produced in this relationship with the other.

Existence without Existents: The Impersonality of the *There is*

Ontology takes for granted an ontological difference between being (Being-in-general) what makes up the existence of an existent and beings/existents. As Levinas claims, the event of Being is to make transcendent ‘a being’ in order to apply it to the

One which is indivisible. However, One excludes all multiplicity and exteriority through renouncing the transcendence of itself.²³⁷

Being does qualify neither a subject nor an object, it is not a quality at all for Levinas; therefore, it has an impersonal character. Besides this impersonality, Being has a relationship only with itself, with the pure fact that there is Being. Levinas calls the pure fact of Being as *there is* from which it is impossible to escape. What Levinas calls as *there is* is the existing without existents. Due to the fact that it is not attached to any object, *there is* is impersonal, anonymous and inextinguishable consummation of being; it is being in general.²³⁸ The pressure of *there is* externalizes itself as the fear of nothingness:

The fear of nothingness is but the measure of our involvement in Being. Existence of itself harbors something tragic which is not only there because of its finitude. Something that death cannot resolve.²³⁹

The Oneness and *there is* are the marks of time as ‘instant.’ Existence is bound to the instant which means that the instant being excludes all others and remains in the same. It is caught up within itself. As Levinas says, the instant is the very ‘accomplishment of existence.’²⁴⁰ Levinas defines the time of the I as present related with presence; and the present and the I constitutes identity through self-reference.

²³⁷This renunciation of transcendence mainly refers to the death of God. God is merely beyond-being for Levinas and it is also the source of the idea of infinity in us. Levinas criticizes the modern world for its paganism. First element of this paganism is One’s being a demigod. See Levinas’s “From One to the Other,” 135. He especially identifies National Socialism with paganism in which man-gods. He points out the death of God in Auschwitz. Paganism is the impossibility to get out of Being, to be enclosed to it, to forget ‘otherwise than being.’ It is a kind of religion that people forget the voice of God. Levinas, “The Living Relevance in Maimonides,” *Paix et Droit*, no. 4, (1935), 6-7, quoted in Jacques Rolland, ‘Annotations’ to *On Escape* by Emmanuel Levinas (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003.), 90.

²³⁸Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 57.

²³⁹*Ibid.*, 20.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 76.

Levinas calls identity as ‘the indissoluble unity between the existent and its existing’²⁴¹ which also refers to the solitude of the subject. The subject in its solitude is chained to itself, to its existing; it is identical to itself, it refers only to itself. This solitude is the first price to be paid as the result of the freedom through which an existent arises in existing. Just because this self-reference glamorizes the I with freedom. As long as it says ‘I’, it indeed refers to its freedom. It has an unlimited freedom within itself. On the other side, this reference imprisons it in an identification for Levinas. But still, there is a gap between Ego and the self, which means that complete identification is not possible. It is an impossible identity since ‘no one can stay in himself.’²⁴² The return of identity to itself is not possible any more due to the privation of the other.

Levinas emphasizes upon the notion of light in order to show the relation between the presence, the I and knowledge. He says light, knowing and consciousness has their place in hypostasis.²⁴³ They put a distance between the I and outside world through accomplishing ‘its destiny to be the sole and unique point of reference for everything.’²⁴⁴ But, how? The notion of light is significant for philosophy according to which light is supposed to be the condition for all beings. Since it fills the universe, it is a condition for phenomenon which gives itself to our consciousness through the horizon. In other words, light is a condition of meaning which is also the source of knowledge as knowing qua light. Briefly, light is

²⁴¹Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1987), 54.

²⁴²Emmanuel Levinas, “Without Identity” in *Humanism of the Other* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 67.

²⁴³ Levinas uses this term ‘hypostasis’ in order to refer to the existence without existents, in this sense to the ‘there is.’ The term also refers to the present which is the time of the I. Hypostasis is where the existent makes a contract with existence but riveted to itself, to its identity.

²⁴⁴Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 65.

comprehension.²⁴⁵ Then, the subjectivity is constituted as the objectivity of light within the solipsism. This brief introduction was to better understand the anonymity of the *there is*. According to Levinas, the night which is the absence of day and light, is the very experience of the *there is*. Where light is the source of vision, it is also forgetting of the *there is* for Levinas. However, there is nothing to deal with in the darkness of the night. Within this absence, there is an invasion of presence, an unavoidable presence. Without any discourse, any perspective, and anything to respond, there is only Being ‘like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one, to universal.’²⁴⁶ It is the irremissibility of the pure existing. This heavy atmosphere is called as the horror of the *there is* by Levinas. This horror arises from the depersonalization of the subject; it insists in its inhuman neutrality.²⁴⁷ This situation leads the subject to have nausea, a feeling for existence, which refers to the fact that the *there is* has no exits. It is impossible even to die; it is universal existence remains even in its annihilation.²⁴⁸ It is the oppression of presence which shows itself as vigilance. The *there is* cannot sleep, cannot dream. It is an impossibility of possibilities. The present is bonded to the being; it is imprisoned in identification: it always returns to itself! The presence and the I through self-reference constitute

²⁴⁵Light presupposes that the subject has vision. However, vision is related with an object to be comprehended. Briefly, vision is the event of comprehension and grasping. Briefly, it signifies the reduction of the Other to the Same through its synchrony as being. As John Wild express in his introduction essay to *Totality and Infinity*: “Totalitarian thinking accepts vision rather than language as its model. It aims to gain an all-inclusive, panoramic view of all things, including the other, in a neutral, impersonal light like the Hegelian *Geist* or the Heideggerian Being.” This is why Levinas appreciates the phenomenological method. For him, phenomenology is the destruction of representation through which the object opens itself to the human mind. Rather, phenomenology rejects the direct vision of the object through putting forward the partial visions since it takes the objects as its point of departure rather than the gaze of the subject. For Levinas, This is the very achievement of Husserlian phenomenology which supports the multiplicity of perspectives and one-sided views. See Emmanuel Levinas’s *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Illinois: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1995).

²⁴⁶Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 58.

²⁴⁷ Jacques Rolland, “Getting Out of Being by a New Path,” introduction to *On Escape*, by Emmanuel Levinas (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 27.

²⁴⁸Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 61.

identity as Cartesian cogito which ‘rests on the absolute effectuation of being by the present.’²⁴⁹

The very function of the presence is self-reference denying any notion of time and the identification of the subject with being which is addicted to itself. However, Levinas suggests the impossibility of identity; and in order to show this impossibility, he focuses on the notion of time in his lectures delivered in 1946-47 in Paris which was published in 1979 as *Time and the Other*. He begins with emphasizing that the time is the very relationship of the subject with the other rather than the achievement of an isolated and lone subject.²⁵⁰ Levinas develops his thesis through the notion of death. As I mentioned above, Heidegger defines death as the possibility of impossibility. On the contrary, Levinas reverses this idea and claims that death is the impossibility of possibility. The impossibility of death means it is unknown; it is ungraspable, incomprehensible and unpredictable. Therefore, death is not a mastery as Heidegger asserts; rather it is a mystery. Through making attribution to the discussion on light, Levinas emphasizes that death does not take place in the light. If we remember the identification between light and presence, this means that death is never present as Levinas cites from Epicurus: “If you are, it is not; if it is, you are not.”²⁵¹ Therefore, death implies the end of one’s heroism or one’s mastery over its existence. Death is the death of the other which is a trauma for the I. Moreover, as like the Other is ungraspable, it is beyond my comprehension like future itself. Consequently, the Other is the future for Levinas which implies:

²⁴⁹Ibid., 81.

²⁵⁰Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 39.

²⁵¹Ibid., 71.

The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future. It seems to me impossible to speak of time in a subject alone, or to speak a purely personal duration.²⁵²

For Levinas, to have a time means to have a past and a future, not to exist in the present. We do not even have present for him since ‘it slips between our fingers.’²⁵³

Present means the domination of the existence by the existent in the instant. In the present, one being enchained to itself cannot get rid of itself and undo itself. It is stuck with itself. At the end, Levinas comes up with the notion of dual solitude:

The solitude is more than the isolation of a being or the unity of an object. It is, as it were, a dual solitude: this other than me accompanies the ego like a shadow. It is the duality of boredom...This duality awakens the nostalgia for escape, but no unknown skies, no new land can satisfy it, for we bring ourselves along in our travels.²⁵⁴

Where to escape? Levinas finds the answer in the transcendence and the absolute exteriority of the other as a result of Desire. Now, I will turn to what Levinas means by escape -escape as the most radical condemnation to the philosophy of being.²⁵⁵

The Escape

In 1934, Levinas wrote an article entitled as *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* after Hitler came to power. For him, the barbarism of National Socialism stems from ontology –the theory of being concerned with being. The subject of this ontology is the famous subject of transcendental idealism who ‘wishes to be free and

²⁵²Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 77.

²⁵³Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 97.

²⁵⁴Ibid., 87.

²⁵⁵Levinas, *On Escape*, 51.

thinks itself free' through the performance of gathering and dominating.²⁵⁶ The Western philosophy has established the sovereign freedom of reason as superior to reality which also refers to the supremacy of the soul over the body. Body has always been understood as an obstacle due to its subjection to earthly condition; therefore, it has always been to be overcome. The simplistic philosophy of Hitler discovers the importance of body, which also leads him to follow racist ideology, by claiming that the soul is chained to the body. For Levinas, this attitude for the body is a new conception of man,²⁵⁷ the biological character of the body emphasizes a natural, an original and an inevitable bondage to it. With this commitment to the body, a kind of re-invention of the notion of race, human beings have become racial others to each other under the universality of the race which has no exit. The consequence is fatal: "Chained to his body, man sees himself refusing the power to escape from itself."²⁵⁸ Levinas argument elaborates that the discovery of body has taken the enchainment to the existence one step further.

After one year, in 1935, Levinas focuses on the concept of escape which emphasizes a need to escape by a new path from the chains of existence.²⁵⁹ In addition to its being a condemnation, escape is also a need in the game of the being which is brutal and serious. Life is a pleasant game for Levinas, however, it is no more a game under the seriousness of the being. Therefore, within this game which leaves human beings no further games, the only movement to be done is to escape.

²⁵⁶Emmanuel Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," in *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1990): 63.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 69.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 70.

²⁵⁹ On escape mainly focuses on the being's enchainment of existence. Although it defines escape as a new path, the text does not fully mention what kind of a path is that as Jacques Rolland asserts. See Jacques Rolland, *Getting Out of Being by a New Path*, 6. However, it is clear that Levinas suggests an escape as 'otherwise than being' which will be illuminated in the next part through focusing on the other works of Levinas.

This need to escape arises from the duality of the existence which is mentioned in the previous part. The absolute existence which is identity since it is self-referential appears as enchainment to itself and so suffering. It is this suffering which ‘invites us to escape.’²⁶⁰ The escape does not mean going to somewhere else, rather it is pure getting out –getting out of the being.²⁶¹ This escape or getting out takes us to the heart of philosophy in order to renew the problem of being for Levinas.²⁶² In that sense, Jacques Rolland calls this text as ‘philosophically alive’ since it already belongs to a space of questioning.²⁶³

Levinas seeks for material reasons for our need to escape; so, he argues about the inadequacy of satisfaction to need. A satisfaction of a need is related with pleasure for him. However, pleasure is only concentrated in the instant, it is momentary which means that it is going to be broken up. After this break, the being will be disappointed and losing its pleasure, it will find itself again only existing. According to Levinas, this situation is shameful for the being, it is ashamed of the totality of its existence since in the last instance it always finds only itself. It discovers that its spontaneous freedom within itself is ‘murderous in its very exercise.’²⁶⁴ This shame turns into nausea as a modality of being which means that ‘we are riveted to ourselves, enclosed in a tight circle that smothers.’²⁶⁵ Nausea stems from the incapacity to break with existence and presence. At that point, it should not

²⁶⁰Levinas, *On Escape*, 55.

²⁶¹Levinas uses the term ‘ex-cendence’ in order to explain ‘getting out.’ As Jacques Rolland clarifies it: “The word is modeled upon “trans-scendence,” adjoining “ex-“ or “out” to the Latin *scandere*, “to climb.” See the translator’s notes in *On Escape*, 115.

²⁶²Levinas, *On Escape*, 56.

²⁶³Rolland, *Getting Out of Being*, 4.

²⁶⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 84.

²⁶⁵Levinas, *On Escape*, 66.

be forgotten that pleasure essentially contains the promise of escape since the inadequacy of satisfaction to need which is the all importance of human condition ‘brings us closer to the situation that is the fundamental event of our being: the need for escape.’²⁶⁶ Therefore, as opposed to the egological philosophy which dealt with only the security of the I and which labels the other as an obstacle to the Ego, Levinas argues that the other is not a threat to the Ego, rather it is very desired in the shame of the I.

Briefly, ontology as the whole tradition of Western philosophy is an egology through which the subject is constituted as self-sufficient and sovereign. However, this means reducing and even killing the Other for Levinas. Consequently, he builds his philosophy upon ethics in order to think of Other and get rid of the heavy burden of existence.

Ethics vs. Ontology

In order to go beyond the ontological viewpoint that has totalitarian tendencies, Levinas points out the significance of an ethical relationship. Levinas attempt is not only toward to the theoretical conceptualization of the self; it also deals with the historical function of such a subject. His main aim is to show how such a subject who is constituted as ‘the master of himself’ has turned out to be ‘master of the other’ as well.²⁶⁷ This mastery over the other has appeared in the most barbarian way in Nazi experience which gave way to the murder of 6 millions of Jews. This barbarism

²⁶⁶Ibid., 60.

²⁶⁷Duygu Türk, *Öteki, Düşman, Olay: Levinas, Schmitt ve Badiou’da Etik ve Siyaset* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2013), 38.

essentially refers to the decline of the spirit and the crisis of modernity.²⁶⁸ This lived experience inspired Levinas to ask the question ‘what ought to be’ rather than ‘what is’ as ontology does. ‘What is’ always refers to a system of relations.²⁶⁹ This is why Levinas is the philosopher of ethics. As Richard Cohen points out fairly to ask ‘what is...?’ indicates the inability to escape from being and essence.²⁷⁰ If we ask essential questions, we get essential answers; ethics cannot answer such questions. Ethics is completely opposed to the essences. It ‘never *was* or *is* anything.’²⁷¹ It is prior to all essences, it is to ruin all essences and identities. It is to disturb. It escapes from all thematization, all principles.

I have finished the previous part with an unanswered issue: A need to escape, but where? Levinas answers: To the Other, to the ethical relationship with Other, to the metaphysical transcendence of it. This escape is necessary in two ways: The first one comes from the other: When we encounter with the Other, it is a challenge to our unity, it puts in question the freedom since it escapes our comprehension, and it is absolutely exterior. The second one comes from the same itself: The suffering because of being imprisoned to our beings and feeling shame every time when we find ourselves again. Especially when freedom of the Same discovers itself as

²⁶⁸ Michael M. Morgan profoundly examines how Levinas is affected by the novel of Grossman called as *The Black Book* which is about Nazi death camps. The author compares the passages from the novel with Levinas’s ideas in a very illuminating way; and he shows how Levinas is inspired the real experience of Nazism when he is developing his philosophy. See Michael M. Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Levinas* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 16-36.

²⁶⁹ Levinas says: “...most of the time the who is a what. We ask ‘Who is Mr. X?’ and we answer: ‘He is the President of the State Council,’ or ‘He is Mr. So-and-so.’” See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 177. This is to define someone. However, the other is always indefinable, ungraspable and non-thematizable. Rather, “Who is” signifies a face which needs no reference outside itself. It is the signifier itself. But, according to structuralist approach, it is known that the signifier is always another signified in a relations of signs. Levinas presents face as a signifier who gives a sign but is not signified. It is before every sign.

²⁷⁰ Richard Cohen, “Better Than Being,” introduction to *Ethics and Infinity* by Emmanuel Levinas (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1985), 7.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

imprisoned within Being, it seeks a relation with a wholly other; 'it cannot repress the Desire for the absolutely Other.'²⁷² We 'desire' the absolutely other. So, in this chapter, I aim to follow Levinas's answer to the question of where to escape focusing on the notions metaphysics, metaphysical desire, and metaphysical transcendence. Then, after explaining how metaphysics precedes ontology, I will deal with what Levinas proposes after deconstructing the whole ontological scheme and its way to subject. He proposes an ethical subjectivity which is constituted through an ethical relation between the same and the other on the basis of responsibility.

Metaphysics vs. Ontology

Metaphysics as Transcendence

As opposed to ontology, Levinas presents metaphysics. A metaphysics which refers to transcendence and exteriority! For him, ontology has renounced metaphysics through reducing the other to the same and refusing to encounter with alterity, with the radical heterogeneity of the other. For metaphysics, the other than me is absolutely exterior to the same; it cannot be comprehended or grasped by the same. It is invisible, it is transcendent, and it is above me. Unlike the ontological concern of finitude, metaphysics founded upon transcendence does not reach an end since it is transcendent. This also means that transcendence is not negativity. Levinas gives the example of the relation between labor and the world. Through the philosophies of Hegel and Marx, labor is understood as the transformation of nature; in a sense, it is the negation of nature. For Levinas, the negator and the negation, the same and the

²⁷²Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 12.

other or the thesis or the antithesis are positioned in the same picture; in other words, they are 'posited together, they form a system, that is, totality.'²⁷³ Why Levinas rejects the opposition of these terms is due to their ending up with a synthesis which is the mark of the finitude. However, a transcendental relation does not reach an end.

Therefore, Levinas proposes the notion of infinity as against the totality. To re-emphasize again, they are not anti-thetical to each other, they are not negation of each other; if they were, and it would be a totality again at the end. Totality means unifying and monistic system which is reductive. This is what Levinas opposes the most. Therefore, rather than dialectical relationship, it can be said that there is a tension between totality and infinity. The infinity has a philosophical priority over the idea of totality. While the latter one presents itself as the relationship of the self with itself, the idea of infinity is produced in the relation between the same and the other. The infinity is a situation which breaks up the totality and it is 'the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the other.'²⁷⁴ As negativity is incapable of transcendence, the idea of infinity is also not related with negativity; rather the idea of infinity is related with the idea of the perfect which cannot be reducible to the negation of the imperfect. To understand what Levinas means with infinity, it is necessary to draw upon what he derives from the Western philosophy, especially from Plato and Descartes. Plato elevates Good to the highest place among the ideas; it is the idea of ideas. Plato recognizes Good as beyond being, as otherwise than

²⁷³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 41.

²⁷⁴Ibid.,24.

being irreducible to neither epistemology nor ontology. Good is ex-cendence, which means it is getting out or a departure from Being.²⁷⁵

Good is one of the key notions of Levinas's ethics. In the previous part, I underlined that the other is the only one that I want to kill; but it even escapes my murder; in other words, the face is what one cannot kill. When we encounter with the other, we hear that 'Thou shalt not kill.' While insisting on the unkillable feature of the Other, Levinas asserts that this incapability does not arise from an ontological necessity and it is clear that even we hear the command 'thou shalt not kill,' we can still kill the other. But it is *better* not to kill; this better 'escapes thematization, representation, formalization, idealization, identification, and all the cautions of essential thinking.'²⁷⁶ Levinas has a critical attitude towards Socrates since his philosophy is a complete search for 'what is in me' which rejects to learn anything from the Other in order to be free and to be permanent within the same.²⁷⁷ Through focusing on the ethics, Richard Cohen makes an illuminating comparison between Socrates and Levinas. Socrates always asks the question what's what. Consequently, he comes up the idea that: "To know the good is to do the good."²⁷⁸ Respectively, one must first know the good, and then to do it. On the contrary, believing in the Platonic Good beyond being, beyond thematization Levinas defends that 'to know

²⁷⁵Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 15. On the other hand, Arendt does not appreciate Platonic Good as Levinas. Arendt believes that Plato was guided by Greek ideal –the beautiful and the good. Among these two he made up himself for the good rather than the beautiful. This is something in purpose for Arendt. Plato is an important thinker who is the founder of the tradition of political philosophy through which he reduces politics to the contemplation. Therefore, why he preferred the good as the idea of the ideas is that: "The difference between the good and the beautiful, not only to us but even more so to the Greeks, is that the good can be applied and has an element of use in itself. Only in the realm of the ideas for political purposes and, in the Laws, erect his ideocracy, in which eternal ideas were translated into human laws." See, Arendt's "Socrates" in *Promise of Politics*, p. 11.

²⁷⁶Cohen, *Better Than Being*, 11.

²⁷⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

²⁷⁸Cohen, *Better Than Being*, 5.

the good is already not to have done it.’²⁷⁹ Before knowing the good, one does the good. As Richard Cohen points out, this *before* signifies ethics; ethics before ontology and epistemology, ethics as first philosophy.

With respect to Descartes, Levinas is opposed to the Cartesian subject since it is constituted in a purely subjective process which denies the relation with the other with regard to the constitution of subjectivity. The ‘I think’ reduces all exteriority to the immanence of a subjectivity which is fundamental to the modern philosophy. However, there is one point that Descartes deserves appreciation according to Levinas. This point is the idea of infinity which ‘shatters immanence’²⁸⁰ and which refers to ‘a relation with a total alterity irreducible to interiority.’²⁸¹ The founder of famous Cartesian cogito, Descartes, accepts the indubitable existence of the self. On the other hand, he deals with the notion of the infinite. As a finite and doubtful being that cannot be sure about the existence of outside, one has the idea of infinite within itself. A finite thought has an infinite. From this thought, he reaches the God who is the only capable to put me the idea of infinite. This idea of infinite means going beyond and being capable of thinking something beyond being, beyond comprehension, beyond content. It is a thought more than it thinks.²⁸² If we gather Good beyond Being and the idea of infinity, we see that their relationship has become clear in the argument of impossibility of killing the other. This impossibility has a relation with infinity; and the idea of infinity in us conditions it in a very

²⁷⁹Ibid., 11.

²⁸⁰Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” 21.

²⁸¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 211.

²⁸²The statement of ‘a thought more than it thinks’ is very important in terms of why Levinas establishes ethical relationship through infinity. Ethics is the relationship between the same and the other in which other appears as absolutely exterior which is infinite. So, the importance of the idea of infinity lies in the fact that it is a thought which remains always exterior to the thought itself.

positive way.²⁸³ Whereas it seems as a capability to transcend, it also signifies the passivity of the self. This infinity reveals as affection for Levinas, as the love or the fear of God; it is a passivity in the face of God. It is a dis-interested affectivity. This passivity and dis-interestedness toward God is the source of Levinasian ethics in which affectivity becomes the source of sociality, fear for others rather fear for one's own death.²⁸⁴

While Levinas is decentering the locus of the subject and trying to look for 'beyond being' and the metaphysical other, he proposes the idea of infinity which consummates subjectivity as hospitality, as welcoming the Other; the infinite is the absolutely other which is transcendence itself. Infinity, therefore, is both a relation and separation. It separates the same and the other in order to prevent the assimilation of the other into the same; this separation at the same guarantees a relation which is not a correlation or identification. Levinas mostly uses dichotomies such as politics and ethics, the self and the other or the totality and the infinity. With regard to these dichotomies, he is always looking for 'an absolute transcendence' or 'absolute exteriority.' In the name of search for absoluteness, he rejects the dialectical method since thesis and anti-thesis are pure negation of each other and at the end they form a totality as we mentioned. Levinas argues this point explicitly by saying:

The identification of the same is not the void of a tautology nor a dialectical opposition to the other, but the concreteness of egoism. This is important for the possibility of metaphysics. If the same would establish its identity by

²⁸³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199.

²⁸⁴Emmanuel Levinas, "The Idea of Infinite in Us" in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 220.

simple opposition to the other, it would already be a part of totality encompassing the same and the other.²⁸⁵

‘The concreteness of egoism’ is what makes absolute transcendence possible. It refers to its non-integrateable character. Therefore, a separation²⁸⁶ between the same and the other is necessary in order to prevent them to sink into a ‘correlation’ which is one of the constituents of totality. As Levinas asserts, ‘correlation does not suffice as a category for transcendence.’²⁸⁷ Levinas calls this separation as atheism which means one lives with oneself as an egoism without God and without society. This atheistic self posits itself as the same which is an accomplishment of God who has created a being capable of atheism having its own view.²⁸⁸ The atheist separation which is psychism is a requirement for the idea of infinity in order to escape being and go beyond being since ‘only an atheist being can relate himself to the other’²⁸⁹ since they are separated to each other.

²⁸⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38.

²⁸⁶ See Leora Batnitzky’s “Encountering the Modern Subject in Levinas,” in *Yale French Studies*, no. 104 (2004): 6-21. The author claims that Levinas defends the modern subject as separable and independent subject through his notion of separation. In that sense, the postmodern reading of Levinas is false through reading Levinas as the opponent of the modern subject. However, I think, there is a point we should think over more. Levinas mentions about the separable self which is Ego in its solitude. What I argue is that there is a difference between the self and the subjectivity. Yes, Levinas defends the separable self in order to open a possibility for transcendence and exteriority, in order to prevent the separable selves to fall into a correlation or a synthesis. Beyond transcendence and exteriority, separation is necessary for the radical alterity which already presupposes separation. As Derrida asserts, there can be no hospitality for the other without radical alterity. But, subjectivity has to contact with alterity. However, Levinasian subjectivity is an absolutely ethical subjectivity which is possible only through the other unlike the modern subject who needs no exteriority.

²⁸⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 53.

²⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 58-59.

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 77.

Metaphysical Desire

In previous part, I have examined the notion of escape as getting out of being. As I mentioned, this escape was not examined enough by Levinas in terms of explaining where to escape and where this need to escape come from. Before answering the question where to escape in Levinasian terms, I intend to focus on the notion of need a bit more. Need is directly related with a void or a lack that is to fulfill which signifies its dependence on the exterior. This is the quality of privation of need. This dependent character means it does not possess its being completely which is an obstacle to its absolute separation. It should not be forgotten that separation should be absolutely independent. On the other hand, need is defined as a provisional rupture in totality of the same. In the part 'The Escape,' I have mentioned about the inadequacy of satisfaction to need and its momentary character related with pleasure. According to this viewpoint, need is profoundly tied to being since:

...need will allow us to discover, not a limitation of that being that desires to surpass its limits in order to enrich and fulfill itself, but rather the purity of the fact of being, which already looks like an escape.²⁹⁰

Although need contains a promise of escape, it cannot provide an absolute transcendence and exteriority. So, there is a need for something more, something that do not fail at the end. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas implies the metaphysical desire. He presents this major work as a defense of subjectivity as against to the purely egoist construction of it; and as against to the end of subjectivity which is marked by the twentieth century -as he believes- with the rise of social sciences

²⁹⁰Levinas, On Escape, 57.

which have reduced subjectivity to the mathematical intelligibility or ideology.²⁹¹ He defends subjectivity as constituted in the idea of infinity. This infinity, in Levinasian words, ‘the infinite in the finite, the more in the less... is produced as Desire.’²⁹² This metaphysical desire is ‘to die for the invisible,’²⁹³ it desires for the absolutely other which never satisfies itself; it is beyond satisfaction, it is disinterested. It is different from need. Desire is insatiable since it is not a desire for food or clothes. It is a desire for exteriority and alterity which breaks up the ego’s totality which enables being to escape from itself. An atheist self in its separation only lives for happiness and enjoyment; therefore, Desire different from happiness looks for the other in a very non-egoist way through escaping being. The alterity of the Other is inadequate to the idea; but it has a meaning for Desire, it understands the alterity. It understands it as the Most-High. Desire opens the dimension of height in its nobility. The Other comes as human Other with a face and shows itself in the dimension of height. The I finds itself in an elevation, ‘the consciousness finds in itself more than it can contain.’²⁹⁴ This dimension of height also signifies that the ethical relationship between the same and the other is established through a metaphysical asymmetry; it is an asymmetrical relationship that the other always commands from above, like the commandment of God to which to obligate. This asymmetry requires an unconditional obedience and infinite responsibility.

²⁹¹Levinas, “Without Identity,” 61.

²⁹²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50.

²⁹³*Ibid.*, 35.

²⁹⁴Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” 18.

Ethical Subjectivity

Life and Enjoyment

“Life is nourishment.” This statement of Levinas refers not only to a definition of life, but it also carries a definition of subjectivity in itself in terms of the subject’s relationship with the life and the things. Life is not a bare existence; rather it is nourishment. The relationship between life and living cannot be built upon needs and the fulfillment of these needs. There is something more than it. Need is not only a simple lack of something that enslaves us; rather one is happy its needs. As Levinas claims we enjoy what we live from. Levinas by rejecting the utilitarian view of the things claims that we *live from* or *live on* them. They are not the mere objects of representations, they are not only the objects of intentional consciousness; rather, they are the objects of enjoyment giving themselves to taste constituting the joy of life:

What I do and what I am is at the same time that from which I live. We relate ourselves to it with a relation that is neither theoretical nor practical. Behind theory and practice: the egoism of life. The final relation is enjoyment, happiness.²⁹⁵

Once again, Levinas is opposed to the Heideggerian approach to the things as tools. Tools are objects of care for Heidegger. They are defined by use themselves. *Dasein* through revealing its mode of existence handles these tools which are not mere things. Rather, their handlability is the affirmation of their being. Handling is an intentionality which means ‘the tool is always in view of something.’²⁹⁶ ‘In view of something’ implies the functionality of a tool, it has a function in a relation to the

²⁹⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 113.

²⁹⁶Levinas, “Heidegger and Ontology,” 20.

other tools. For Levinas, it is also an instrumental view of the world and life. Briefly, Heideggerian world is composed of the totality of things through which every tool handled by *Dasein* fulfills its function in a relationship with being. Levinas asserts what escapes Heidegger is the nourishment. For example, Levinas rejects both statements: We live to eat or we eat to live. Rather, we eat because we are hungry. Unlike Heideggerian intentionality toward things, Levinas builds up the relationality through Desire which does not concern for being. Desire has no other intentions other than itself. It exactly knows what it desires, it is sincerity. Life is sincerity for Levinas who claims that Heidegger is not aware of sincerity since he deals with things as tools. Furthermore, by calling it as inauthentic, he cannot recognize the sincerity in eating. But eating is the full realization of its sincere intention for Levinas who remarks that: “The man who is eating is the most just of men.”²⁹⁷ The point, for him, is that:

The uttermost finality of eating is contained in food. When one smells a flower, it is the smell that limits the finality of the act. To stroll is to enjoy the fresh air, not for health, but for the air. These are the nourishment characteristic of our existence in the world.²⁹⁸

The enjoyment which can be defined as the relationship with an object is also one of the means of separation. Levinas criticizes Heidegger for not taking enjoyment into consideration. Because to enjoy without utility is the way of being human for Levinas and life is a joy of play; it is not to care about existence anymore; it is ‘carefreeness with regard to existence;’²⁹⁹ it is without security as opposed to the

²⁹⁷Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 45.

²⁹⁸Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 63.

²⁹⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 134.

security-based mentality of ontology. But, the seriousness of being does not allow living as such. One of the most famous statements of Levinas points out the seriousness of being: “*Dasein* is never hungry” since it has a relationship with food as an implement only in a world of exploitation.³⁰⁰ However, through enjoyment, the Ego, the being which is riveted to itself in its hypostasis, separates from itself. It forgets of self. The reason why such a relationship with the world is significant for Levinas lies in its being a passage to ethics. For Levinas, a sincere relation to the object is a kind of hesitation with regard to existence; and he relies on that from such a hesitation a subject will arise.³⁰¹ As Levinas asserts:

The morality of earthly nourishments is the first morality, the first abnegation. It is not the last, but one must pass through it.³⁰²

The relation with the life is relevant for the constitution of the ethical subjectivity since it is the first movement of the self toward the Other. Briefly, one must pass through it in order to encounter with the absolutely Other.

Phenomenology of the Other

Although Levinas is very critical about phenomenological methods of Husserl and Heidegger whose philosophies could not get out respectively from epistemology and ontology, he is still cited within the phenomenological tradition. He himself defines his attempt as ‘a phenomenology of sociality based on the face of the other.’³⁰³ Husserlian phenomenology is constituted through the *cogito* even if Husserl is not a

³⁰⁰Ibid., 134.

³⁰¹Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 46.

³⁰²Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 64.

³⁰³Levinas, “From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time,” 148.

mere follower of Descartes. For example, by putting in the parenthesis which means without living in it, the consciousness can still speak of the object according to Husserl who calls this 'positional consciousness' as phenomenological reduction.³⁰⁴ However, this method signifies the identity of pure consciousness with itself in the guise of the I think that is the immanence of subjectivity. The I think is still the first person. Being different from the traditional epistemology, phenomenology is also a theory of knowledge which seeks for the meaning of existence by asking 'what is to be' rather than asking whether a thing exists or not. Husserl finds this meaning in the intentionality of consciousness which is always a consciousness of something. However, for Levinas, Husserl's phenomenology cannot avoid sinking into solipsism. Husserl trying to avoid the problem of solipsism focuses on the existence of other consciousness. To prove their existence, he argues that if I have a sense of existence, I can transfer this sense to another consciousness if it is like me. Consequently, I accept the existence of other consciousness which can be a proof of an objective world exists. But such a resemblance seems that it is already a reduction of the other to the same. It is not enough to reach the other and its alterity, as Zeynep Direk asks in a very Levinasian way, 'can the alterity be reached by analogy?'³⁰⁵ Although Levinas appreciates Husserlian phenomenological reduction since it is the sign of going back to the concrete man, he keeps his criticisms through the argument that the concrete life is not solipsism. If it is, through one individual consciousness, we would reach only an abstraction, not the concrete life. Therefore, he argues that

³⁰⁴Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 12.

³⁰⁵Direk, *The Problem of Other*, 72.

phenomenological reduction may be the only first step, but we should discover others.³⁰⁶

Husserlian phenomenology is also bound to the presence since the phenomenon shows what is in itself to the consciousness. Consciousness itself is also an ex-position within the unity of its identity and presence. As Levinas underlines, such a presence becomes representation. Through the activity of consciousness which perceives, presence fulfills itself through representation to itself or identification with itself. Being identified with itself again also means synchronization with itself through representation. Representation in its pure spontaneity is prior to all activity in a pure present; it involves no passivity.³⁰⁷ Briefly, consciousness is ‘the life of presence,’³⁰⁸ it is ‘an exposure to the grasp, to taking comprehension, appropriation.’³⁰⁹ Moreover, it should be considered that this representation is one of the functions of intentionality. Briefly, intentionality which is actually the activity of thematizing gaze of consciousness and getting knowledge through this gaze is absolutely the reduction of the Other to the Same; it is the synchrony of being in its individualistic gathering. Levinas main criticism begins at that point. He argues that why Husserlian phenomenology is a solipsism lies in the fact that he develops his method only on the representation affirming the life of the ego. However, Levinas asks whether intentionality is also based on a representation; then, he answers that no, there are also non-representational intentionalities or even

³⁰⁶Levinas, *Theory of Intuition*, 150.

³⁰⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 125.

³⁰⁸Emmanuel Levinas, “Hermeneutics and Beyond,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 67.

³⁰⁹Emmanuel Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 127.

there is nonintentional consciousness. In that sense, he continues his position of decentering the subject.

Proximity is one of those which cannot be reduced to intentionality for Levinas. As against to the synthesis which gathering every data in consciousness, Levinas proposes proximity which also signifies a distance between the same and the other. The epiphany of the face, the face of the other always comes in a proximity, it never clashes with the same. Proximity means closeness; it comes 'closer and closer'; it is even closer than presence. Through the proximity of the other, one always hears its voice which is a commanding voice which I have to obey. Proximity is not sensed by seeing; rather it is sensed through hearing. I hear the voice of the Other, its face escapes my vision since it is not thematizable. Therefore, proximity is the very opposite of knowing.

Proximity also refers to the diachronic conception of time in Levinas's philosophy. One of his criticisms toward Husserl and Heidegger is their understanding of time as synchronic which is the time of Being within the situation of 'amphibology of being and entities'³¹⁰ through concerning only the essence of Being. He rejects the synchronic time which always refers to the Ego and its identity. Synchronic time is ontological which brings everything together in the present. As I pointed out above, the present moment of being, its identity is a burden on the existent; it is the mark of totality. Levinas seeks for the diachronic time which breaks up the essence, which is ethics itself as well, in order to reach 'otherwise than being' or 'beyond being.' Diachronic time also signifies the proximity of the other.

³¹⁰Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 4th ed. (Pennsylvania: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2002), 38. This situation refers to the ontological difference between being and beings. In such a situation, Being is an identified entity. It is presence within the synchronism.

Diachrony is disjunction or interruption of identity ‘where the same does not join the same’³¹¹ which is the mark of non-synthesis. Through this interruption, the same cannot turn back to itself; rather its identity comes to it from outside *despite itself*. This outside is nothing but to be elected by the Other. From now on, it is for another. It is chosen, elected which refers to its passivity. This chosenness also points out the subject’s uniqueness. Uniqueness means no one else can substitute its place. If I am asked by the other, I am the only one who must answer; no one can answer on behalf of me. This is an obligation; but also this is my uniqueness in my singularity.

This diachronic conception of time is also the fundamental element of why one is unconditionally responsible for the other which also signifies the priority of the other. I have mentioned that Levinas firstly against to the construction of time on the basis of death like a long distance in between birth and death. Rather, he proposes to think death on the basis of time. The first death is always the death of the other. In the part on infinity, I also explained the relationship between the other and the future; but the other has a relationship with the past as well. The responsibility for the other stems from an immemorial past which is never present, which is impossible to reduce to the present and representation. One encounters with the other within its past. This immemorial past comes to me as an order to which one has to respond:

Here I am in this responsibility, thrown back toward something that was never my fault or of my own doing, something that was never within my power or my freedom, something that never was my presence and never came to me through memory. There is an ethical significance in that responsibility in that an-archic responsibility.³¹²

³¹¹Ibid., 52.

³¹²Emmanuel Levinas, “Diachrony and Representation,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), 170.

This responsibility is without a beginning since one finds itself non-intentionally in the immemorial past of the other or in the history of humanity. That is the diachrony of the past which cannot be gathered into representation. This an-archic responsibility is what Levinas proposes as an-archic subjectivity, without a beginning, without a reciprocity, without intentionality.

Proximity is also prior to any consciousness. It is an-archic responsibility, it is without beginning. Proximity is also disturbance of the remembered past if we remember the immemorial past of the others. The I sees the trace of the past in the face, this trace refers to 'the anarchy of what has never been present.'³¹³ Proximity as opposed to knowing which the activity of consciousness disturbs the presence of an identity through leaving a trace. Through rupturing the presence, proximity is an anarchical relationship without any principle and any ideality.³¹⁴ In Levinas's lexicon, anarchy does not mean disorder; it is rather an order, another order which troubles the hegemonic one.

Language is another one irreducible to intentionality. It is not only the system of signs; it is dialogue. Levinas prefers language which is already relational to the thematizing gaze or the vision of the ego. Instead of a simple reflection of an experience, he proposes the lived experience of signifying which is *Saying* which presupposes a relation different than intentional one. This significance can be experienced only in the absolute otherness of the other. He carefully emphasizes that it is also possible to reduce language to intentionality if we ascribe it a teleological meaning in order to achieve necessary communication. But the attachment of

³¹³Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 97.

³¹⁴*Ibid.*, 100.

language to the being and the world in such a teleological manner is called as *Said*. The *Said* absorbs itself to being taking a position toward a thing through thematizing it and ascribing it to a meaning. This thing is fixed in a present and represents it to itself. This thematization is also the sign of synchronization through representation. On the other hand, *Saying* is absolutely dependent on the other who always escapes my gaze my thematizing power. So, even if there is an intention when one is start communicating with the other, this intention fails due to the irreducibility of the other to the thematization. Moreover, the emphasis upon *Saying* shows how Levinas gives weight to the language instead of ‘the panoramic exposition of being itself’³¹⁵ which is the activity of holistic thinking of philosophy. Vision is always to understand; but language as *Saying*, which refers to dialogue indeed, is relational and is always open to new possibilities through diverse responds which has no end in a sense.

Welcoming the Other

Criticizing epistemology and ontology, Levinas completely rejects logical relations with the world and the other by arguing that they are not mere negations of the self. The relation established through resemblance is not so much different from reducing the other to the same. In such a relation based upon contemplating about the other who is like me and trying to understand it under the mental categories, it is impossible to reach the alterity of the other. Even if one intends to understand the other, it fails since the other is always beyond one’s comprehension. This is a highly difficult problem to solve for modernist thinking which is already established as egology. But, why Levinas is a very significant philosopher to me is his reformulated question of the other in a very generous way by not reducing it to the categories. He

³¹⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 29.

asks whether I can coexist with the other not corrupting its otherness or whether I can deal with its alterity or not. Then, he comes up the idea that to deal with the alterity of the other is possible only through welcoming of it and sharing the world with it. It is possible by giving oneself to the other in a relationship which is shaped by generosity. This generosity, this giving oneself is possible only through the idea of infinity which refers to a thought more than it thinks. It is always more and more. It is insatiable. This is why Levinas establishes subjectivity as welcoming the other, as hospitality through which the idea of infinity is consummated. What the idea of infinity teaches us that human beings can contain more than their capacities. So, we have the capacity to welcome the other through crossing the barriers of immanence. We can give a place to the absolutely other by not taking its exteriority as a challenge. This is what ontology does as a philosophy of power. That is the security and certainty-based mentality of ontology. However, Levinas challenges the priority of ontology by arguing that philosophy is not a mere contemplation or reflection on the existence. Since reflection:

...gives us only the narrative of a personal adventure, a private soul, incessantly returning to itself, even when it seems to flee itself. The human gives itself only to a relationship that is not being able.³¹⁶

The self reveals itself in a relationship in which it is not being able to that is to say it is in a face to face relation. While the I encounter with the other, it encounters face. The face is not an idea or a concept; it is a concrete face in the particularity of the encounter. This face comes in its nudity; it is naked which implies it is by itself without referring anything other than itself. Moreover, if we remember how Levinas

³¹⁶Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?" 11.

is against the panoramic vision of the I under the light since it is the activity of grasping subject, he asserts that face is not seen as a refusal to be contained. This is why Levinas gives priority language over vision since language means the ethical inviolability of the other.

Besides, the nudity also signifies the destituteness of the Other. In Levinasian terms, it comes with hunger to which it is impossible not to respond. To recognize this hunger is to give, a giving to the lord, to the master. Even if it is hungry, it is still master since it comes in a dimension of height through its transcendence and exteriority. So, it is the Master and the Lord; but it is also ‘the stranger, the widow, and the orphan’ to whom one is obligated. That means the Other is situated in a dimension of height and of abasement of which Levinas calls as ‘glorious abasement.’³¹⁷ Ethical relationship is a face to face relation which is immediate. This face is the way the other expresses itself. Its expression through face exceeds the idea of the other in the I. The face speaks, it is discourse itself. This expression of the other and its receive by the I is to have the idea of infinity. To have the idea of infinity is the main source Levinasian responsibility which is an anarchic responsibility. Why this responsibility is without a beginning –it is anarchic- stems from the idea of infinity which is immanent to us. Levinas once says: “...to possess the idea of infinity is to have already welcomed the Other.”³¹⁸ Besides its being a responsibility, it also indicates a teaching. Teaching is a significant concept in terms of ethics and in terms of how Levinas criticizes Socratic notion of midwifery:

The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed

³¹⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 251.

³¹⁸Ibid., 93.

this conversation is a teaching. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain.³¹⁹

Language is the relationship between the same and the other and its essence is friendship and hospitality.³²⁰ But, this language reveals itself in the dimension of height, it is designated as teaching by Levinas. Socratic maieutics is not a ‘pedagogy;’ rather it introduces ideas to the mind by violating it.³²¹ But teaching does not signify a violence even if it comes from above. The Other’s mastery and alterity reveals itself in teaching without conquering and violating. It is not hegemony; on the contrary, it breaks up the circular structure of totality. Derrida calls this as ‘magisterial teaching.’³²² Teaching means one’s being open to be taught indeed. In that sense, Levinas designates the reason as receptivity as opposed to the conception of reason as active which understands and grasps. Such a reason is an impersonal legality whose objectivity can be established only through resemblance, through the assumption that all human beings have reason. Such an analogy seems nothing but the reduction of the other to the same since it absorbs alterity and accounts plurality as a numerical plurality. Such reason cannot find another reason to speak for Levinas. Rational thought is not a thought achieved through the categories and activity of reason; it is, on the contrary, to be taught, to receive what the Other says and commands. It refers at the same time the passivity of the I, ‘a passivity more passive than all passivity.’³²³ Reason is in the position to receive of which is

³¹⁹Ibid., 51.

³²⁰Ibid., 305.

³²¹Ibid., 171.

³²²Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 17.

³²³Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 14.

resembled to an open door by Derrida.³²⁴ So, welcoming the other is passivity and rationality as well. This is why Levinas establishes the relation as proximity, as approach.

Therefore, the encounter of the face cannot be examined in a power relation; it is not scandal for me since it challenges me and put in question my freedom; rather it is a first teaching for Levinas. It should not be forgotten that the scandal is the death of the other; not to encounter with it. As I explained, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that the traditional philosophy interpreted death as ‘a passage to nothingness’ or ‘a passage to another existence.’³²⁵ As Derrida emphasizes, to identify death with nothingness is the murder itself.³²⁶ Death is not the death of the I since it is unknown to it. The death of the other is the first death, and it is a scandal for the I who see the other’s death which leaves it non-responsive and at the same time responsible. I am responsible for the death of the other, I cannot leave it in its dying alone. It is an emotional movement to an unknown. As Derrida underlines, this unknown is not negativity; rather it is the element of friendship and hospitality.³²⁷

The notion of hospitality is established through one’s being at home. For Levinas, home has a privilege since it is the source of separation of one in which it lives its interiority. To remember, interiority and separation are the main conditions for exteriority and transcendence. So, to separate oneself is necessarily to dwell

³²⁴ Derrida, *Adieu*, 27.

³²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 232.

³²⁶ Derrida, *Adieu*, 6.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

somewhere. One is always at home with oneself.³²⁸ Home also signifies the possession of the one. One possesses home and the other worldly objects at the same time. But this possession is something more than buying, selling or exchanging the property; it has a metaphysical reference. One can possess a thing that the thing cannot resist for that; however, the other possessors can contest among themselves about the possession of the things. That means they are issued by discourse. Therefore, to be free oneself from its possession is significant for Levinas. In other words, Levinas asks in what degree one is ready to give its possession to the other. In his words, 'I must know how to give what I possess.'³²⁹ For that this is necessary to encounter with the epiphany of the face which puts in question the I's freedom and the world possessed as well.

So, hospitality reveals itself in the approach of the other. The other is always a Stranger who disturbs one when it is at home. The disturbance of the other which puts into question the spontaneity of the I is called as ethics by Levinas. Since the Stranger means a free one over which being has no power, a relation between those can be only language beginning with the words "Welcome!" What is notable in language is not to name or thematize the other, but the interpellation, vocative. When the I speaks to the other, the other is not under category, but the other is a living human individual to whom the I speak. Dialogue maintains the distance between the same and the other, it is the source of transcendence which prevents to fall into totality. In this dialogue, no one loses its egoism which is necessary for their

³²⁸*Totality and Infinity* has a chapter named as Beyond the Face. This chapter consists in articles of Levinas which focus on the issues such as paternity, fecundity and sexuality. Through these subjects, Levinas claims that the self is already divided in itself, through 'his' son, through 'his' sexually other which is the feminine; and he claims that this biological split in one or the multiplicity of Being through such biological features is the ultimate structure of Being. I think that these issues are not relevant for the purpose of this study since they are very essentialist and sexist. I am dealing with the decentering the subject in terms of ethics and politics.

³²⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171.

separation; but this egoism cannot be protected by power, rather the Ego recognizes that the other has a right over it, not a power. Therefore, a relationship without power is possible only through hospitality.

As against to a relationship seeking for power, hospitality means approaching the Other through discourse. This discourse begins with saying *yes* to the other. But this *yes* is always a response to the Other; while criticizing the Descartes's cogito, Levinas says that 'it is not I, but it is the other that can say yes.'³³⁰ Derrida making a genius reference to the motto of structuralism, "In the beginning was the word" says that:

If it is only the other who can say yes, the first yes, the welcome is always the welcome of the other... There is no first yes, the yes is already a response... It is necessary to begin by responding. There would thus be, in the beginning, no first word. The call is called only from responding.³³¹

This argument makes us remember the anarchic responsibility once more if beginning is always responding.

The welcoming of the other stems from the shame and feeling injustice which is felt by the Ego due to the its limitless freedom. Levinas uses the notion of the other in the same which is different from face to face encounter and from the same and the other as interlocutors. This term refers to the discomfort of the same disturbed by the other. Putting in question the freedom of the I is called as conscience by Levinas; therefore, welcoming the other is also conscience. It is due to the conscience that it is impossible to kill the other. For Levinas, this is the end of powers. As he argues, ethics is a relationship in which human beings are not being able to, to welcome is

³³⁰Ibid., 93.

³³¹ Derrida, *Adieu*, 24.

the mark of this. The Ego has no powers over the other; so it can only welcome the other. Briefly, the self is a host and a hostage at the same time. This duality finds its meaning in responsibility since both stems from it.

Being a host and a hostage at the same time gives us what Levinas proposes with regard to subjectivity. Levinasian subjectivity is a subjection since responsibility arises like bondage. The self is bounded to the Other, it has to obey its commandment. This bond is not a bond which enslaves the self; rather, through responsibility for the other, subjectivity is constituted. This responsibility does not mean to be responsible for the self and the other only. It also means to be responsible for the deeds and misdeeds of the other and to take the burden. This argument is developed through the notion of substitution by Levinas. Substitution means to put oneself to the place of the other through the idea of infinity put into it. It is an interruption of the identity. Substitution is also the condition of being hostage to the other which signifies the passivity of the self; the subject is a persecuted and an accused subject.³³² I am hostage to the other up to sacrificing myself for the sufferings of it. I am responsible for every kind of act of violence, even for the actor of that violence.³³³ Why Being is defined as everything possible is permitted lies in

³³² 'Accused subject' is a subject who is called and commanded by the Other. On the other hand, this accusation has also a lingual meaning for Levinas. The subject is not in the position of nominative from that is the I. It is rather a 'me' which is in an accusative form. It is 'me' to whom the Other approaches. In other way, if one says 'I'; it means 'here I am' who is answering for everyone and everything.

³³³ According to Simon Critchley this argument is questionable when one thinks about the murder of Levinas's family by the Nazis during the Second World War. In that sense, he argues that Levinas leaves us in a sheer ethical overload. See Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 56-63. Also, Michael Morgan discusses whether Levinasian ethics is an 'extreme self-sacrifice.' See Michael Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 241. These are some of possible readings of Levinas's ethics as an ideal asceticism. However, Silvia Benso claims that Levinasian ethics is lack of an ascetic ideal. Especially in the Nietzschean sense, asceticism refers to the dialectics of negation to which Levinas absolutely opposes. Benso argues that Levinasian ethics signifies the death of the ascetic priest through defending an ethics without resentment. It is an excessive ethics. See Silvia Benso, "Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?" in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 27, no.2, (1996), pp.137-56.

the fact that Being is without responsibility. But, the position of Being is like an imprisonment, it is enchained to itself. On the contrary, freedom for Levinas lies in the substitution which provides getting out of being, it frees it from enchainment to itself. Substitution is not a bare subordination; rather it is breaking up the essence. Breaking with being's essence is the main theme of ethics and ethical relationship is indeed opposed to the identification of freedom and power. Briefly, to break up the essence is the real freedom for Levinas; and besides freedom, through that, he proposes us an anarchic subjectivity; a traumatic, a persecuted subject, a vulnerable subject, and an obsessive subject³³⁴ who cannot posit itself all alone. It is already divided by the Other, it is a fission itself. It already loses its place, the other dislocates it.

To conclude, through criticizing the whole Western philosophy for being an ontology, Levinas puts forward ethics as a responsibility for the Other. To reduce the Other to the same have fatal consequences especially in the twentieth century –a century that full of violence and a century that we are taught up as the development of humanity. However, the historical facts show that there is not a positive correlation between the scientific and technological developments and goodness or progress. Levinas, in that sense, develops his philosophy through analyzing the effects of theoretical arguments about the modern subject and then proposes a different subjectivity through which he argues that the Other should not be reduced to something else. In the age of nihilism, or in a world in which meaning has lost, meaning can arise only through intersubjectivity.

³³⁴ Obsession refers to the passivity of the subject in Levinas. The subject is obsessed with responsibilities which are not resulted from the subject's own decisions. The subject is accused of the deeds of the others, and responsible for them. See Levinas, "Substitution," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 79-97.

CHAPTER 4

ARENDRT AND LEVINAS IN DIALOGUE

Why Arendt and Levinas?

Up to this point, I examined how Arendt and Levinas have ‘deconstructed’ or ‘dislocated’ the isolated place of the subject through putting forward the other. These distinct narrations about Arendt and Levinas may seem irrelevant to each other since while Arendt deals with the political subjectivity and political action in the public political realm, the main concern of Levinas is an absolutely ethical relationship between the same and the other. I think that the main theme is abiding: They both deconstruct the subject; but in two different ways. However, this difference does not constitute an obstacle to interconnect them. Therefore, I aim to engage them in an intellectual dialogue for the sake of politics in terms of the relationship with the others.

A Way From Totalitarianism to Politics and Ethics

First of all, I would like to elaborate why I have chosen to think of Arendt and Levinas together. I believe it is quite explicit that their main motivation to focus upon the problem of the subject, the subjectivity and the other stems from the modernity, modern politics and modern society. Levinas identifies modern age with barbarism while Arendt sees it in its widespread nihilism. Barbarism and nihilism in the modern age makes them ask the question of the other: The ethical other and the political other. While the two Jewish philosophers who have experienced the Holocaust were trying to understand the National Socialism, they derived the conclusion that the Nazism has a relationship with the centralized construction of the subject. But I must

underline that the relationship between totalitarianism and the subject is not a direct relationship in the theories of Arendt and Levinas; but it can be said that totalitarianism is a factual reality makes them to think about subjectivity. Moreover, they both find the answer when thinking of why totalitarianism has emerged in the tradition of philosophy.

When I discussed how Levinas criticizes ontology and totalitarianism, I examined how he analyzes the thought of Heidegger and the philosophy of Hitlerism. On the other hand, Arendt detects one of the main features of totalitarian regimes as the mass support behind it. As she claims, mass society has a kind of fanaticism toward the movement and their leader. By the successful organization of masses, what totalitarian movement achieved is the destruction of the very capacity to act. Arendt relates the rise of totalitarianism and mass society with the breakdown of class society. Unlike class society, masses do not have a common interest which is the mark of worldless characteristic of mass society.

Moreover, Arendt points out a direct relationship between the self-centered modern subject and the mass man. However, she notes that the mass man is much more than that self-centered subject. Although the latter one is also experienced in individual isolation, the main hallmark of the mass man is its selflessness. Selflessness means ‘the feeling of being expendable.’³³⁵ Selflessness is experienced in a social atomization and an extreme individualization by missing any link with others. This disengagement with others is an obstacle to act together and to judge what others are doing. However, according to Arendt, totalitarian movements have built a different kind of interdependence which is the source of total domination. Arendt calls this as ‘total loyalty.’ The mass man is loyal to the movement and the

³³⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 315.

leader in an unrestricted and unconditioned way. Arendt defends that such domination is possible only through such isolation. The main handicap of this isolation is that it makes human beings conformist. Since they have no relationship with other people and they lose their capacity to act and judge, they live according to the imposed norms and behaviors without questioning them. Furthermore, she analyzes that totalitarianism does not rule through external means; rather it dominates human beings from within.³³⁶ Such an inner structure results in the disappearance of distance between them. As I discussed before, the loss of distance means the loss of particularity under the holistic viewpoint.

Arendt also deals with the totalitarian organization in which leader principle has a significant role. She argues that there is an identification of the leader and the movement which results in the total power of the leader within the movement such that the leader –Führer- is the supreme law. Beside the source of law, the leader claims ‘personal responsibility for every kind of action, deed, or misdeed, committed by any member or functionary in his official capacity.’³³⁷ This claim of total responsibility signifies the fact that everything is totalized. Consequently, under this total identification and total responsibility, no one can be responsible for anything. Arendt claims that this is why very few Germans have helped to their Jewish neighbors: Firstly, they have lost the world in-between them; and secondly, they feel no responsibility for each other. Also, this is why Adolf Eichmann believed that he had not been guilty. Briefly, they were all lack of capacity to act, to judge and to feel

³³⁶ Arendt asserts that there are technical and structural differences between authoritarian, tyrannical and totalitarian forms of government. The first two are structured in the model of pyramid. While the authoritarian government takes the source of authority outside itself, the authority appears from above in the tyrannies. In both, authority and power comes from top to the bottom. However, totalitarian form of government rules from within; therefore, Arendt resembles it to an onion. The domination from within creates a fiction of a normal world. Arendt calls this as ‘a deceptive façade of normality.’ See Arendt, “What is Authority?” pp. 98- 99.

³³⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 374.

responsibility. Especially, they were ‘thoughtless.’ They believe that everything is possible and nothing is true.³³⁸

I think that Arendt has a very existential relationship with totalitarianism in terms of both experientially and theoretically. She says that:

If we want to be at home on this earth, even at the price of being at home in this century, we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with the essence of totalitarianism.³³⁹

This statement shows how the fact of totalitarianism is significant for Arendt. It can be said that she is in a constant dialogue with it when she criticizes the tradition of political philosophy, the modern age, and when she is searching for what to do. She claims that to understand this newest form of domination, we should develop a new way of thinking since it had already destroyed all our political concepts and definitions, and all our categories of thought and standards for judgment.³⁴⁰

Therefore, there is a need for the recovery of the world through newness for Arendt.

Levinas has also experienced the Nazi terror as a Jewish in a more brutal way than Arendt has. His family was murdered by the Nazis and he was imprisoned as a French military member between the years of 1940 and 1944. Levinas describes his life as ‘dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror.’³⁴¹ So, it

³³⁸ For the discussions of the totalitarian organization which human beings are like animalized in terms of losing their capacities, see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964).

³³⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” in *Essays in Understanding: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. By Jerome Kohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 323.

³⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, “Mankind and Terror,” in *Essays in Understanding: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. By Jerome Kohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 302.

³⁴¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Signature,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990), 291.

is obvious that Levinas as like Arendt develops his theory after the unforgettable experience of the National Socialism. Such an impression makes Levinas think about the political horror of the National Socialism. Consequently, he establishes his philosophy as a complete rejection of the history of Western philosophy which is ontology. The relationship between philosophy and politics is very clear in his words: "Political totalitarianism rests on an ontological totalitarianism."³⁴² And, he once says in one of his interviews: "My critique of the totality has come in fact after a political experience that we have not yet forgotten."³⁴³ Unfortunately, what Levinas concludes from the experience of totalitarianism is the affinity between war and politics. Through the memory of Nazi horror, he asserts that politics is nothing but a political ontology: It is the reduction of the other into the same who maintains itself against the other in order to ensure its freedom. Unlike the ethical relationship, politics requires reciprocity; it is a reciprocal relationship between people which implies the replaceable function of human beings for Levinas. It is a symmetric relation as opposed to ethics which is asymmetrical relationship. In such a symmetrical relationship, everyone is interchangeable. Interchangeability means to Levinas the elimination of the alterity. Such symmetry appears as the Hobbesian formula: the war of all against all. Levinas, rather, proposes the responsibility of the one for all.³⁴⁴

³⁴²Emmanuel Levinas, "Freedom of Speech," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990), 206.

³⁴³Emmanuel Levinas, "Secrecy and Freedom," in *Ethics and Infinity* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1982), 78- 79.

³⁴⁴See Cheryl L. Hughes, "The Primacy of Ethics: Hobbes and Levinas," in *Continental Philosophy Review* 31, (1998): 79-94. In this article, the author justifies why Levinas gives priority over politics through criticizing Hobbesian politics which is regulated by war, fear of death, self-interest and social contract. Hobbes is a distinct figure for the reduction of politics to evil. However, what seems necessary to me is not approve Levinasian approach to the evil of politics; rather to find the political elements in his philosophy which, I think, intrinsically exist.

That kind of symmetry is also criticized by Arendt who describes totalitarianism as the destruction of human plurality and the reduction of human beings into the animal-species man through which difference and uniqueness of human beings are destroyed ‘as if all of humanity is just one individual.’³⁴⁵ However, she does not take it as a given definition of politics; rather she develops a notion of the political in terms of the public engagement for the worldly affairs. On the contrary, Levinas seems identifying politics with Hobbesian formula, and he criticizes that politics and freedom have subordinated justice under the universal and impersonal foundation of the State. As I pointed out, ontology is a philosophy of power according to Levinas. In that sense, by subordinating justice, a philosophy of power appears as a ‘philosophy of injustice’ for him.³⁴⁶ Therefore, he puts forward ethics as against to ontology for the sake of justice. Howard Caygill specifies that Levinasian ethics ‘emerges as a fragile response to political horror.’³⁴⁷ Although Levinas seems apart from Arendt in terms of politics, it is still possible to think of Levinas with regard to the political. Actually, Levinas’s life and works are not so much independent from the political issues. He has lots of works dealt with the political issues such as National Socialism, the State of Israel and so on. But, Caygill asserts that it would be probably due to his fragile frame of mind that he subordinated politics to ethics. However, I will discuss the existence of a Levinasian political philosophy through which he does not subordinate politics to ethics in the following parts.

Consequently, I think that the theories of Arendt and Levinas are inseparable from the experience of the National Socialism. But I should emphasize that I do not

³⁴⁵Arendt, *Origins*, 438.

³⁴⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

³⁴⁷Howard Caygill, *Levinas &The Political* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

aim to reduce the thought of these thinkers to a historical fact. However, I believe that their theoretical and factual experiences can be better understood through considering how they examine totalitarianism. It seems interesting to me that they both start thinking with the totalitarianism. Although they develop their theories through the other, plurality and intersubjectivity, at the end, they radically differ from each other. While Arendt becomes a political thinker, Levinas becomes an ethical one. However, I think that such theories stemming from the experience of totalitarianism can be indifferent neither to politics nor to ethics. In that sense, I argue that Arendt's political philosophy is not separable from ethics and Levinas's ethics is not blind to politics. What binds them together is the significance that they attach to the notion of intersubjectivity and meaning. Modernity is usually described through nihilism and the loss of meaning. What will we do in this world in which the order of meaning has already collapsed? This is one of the main questions of the contemporary thought. Furthermore, Simon Critchley relates the tragedies that we experience in the modern age with the difficulty in accepting our limitedness -which is very similar to Arendt's argument. Then, he defines two forms of disappointment: One is religious and the other is political. According to him, the former one is the possibility of what if God is dead which leads to a question of meaning. Consequently, it creates a problem of nihilism. On the other hand, the political disappointment brings the question of justice: "What might justice be in a violently unjust world?"³⁴⁸ For Critchley, such a question is the direct indicator of the need for an ethics and ethical subjectivity. I believe that Arendt and Levinas have some similar words to say about a different constitution of the subject which can answer to the questions of nihilism, injustice, and also freedom. Therefore, I would like to

³⁴⁸Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 3.

continue with the relationship with ethics and politics through considering similarities and differences between the theories of Arendt and Levinas.

Situational Ethics vs. Universal Morality

I would like to begin to explain the difference between morality and ethics if there is. While ethics coming from the word *ethos* refers to the settled values and practices in a society, morality coming from the word *mores* is mostly related with principles which are transcending the given. In that sense, ethics is related to society and social norms; but morality finds its meaning in the individual and its rational capacities. Consequently, it can be said that the main difference between morality and ethics is that morality normatively can universalize itself through applying itself to all who can understand it. If we return to the construction of the modern subject, we see that the self-sovereign subject and its abstract constitution always have the claim that it has universal concerns which are applicable to all. The rational sovereign subject constructs morality which should not be violated in any circumstances through the reason. Briefly, in a very Kantian sense, all beings having reason can follow the same rule.

For Arendt, these universalities which are presented in an unconditioned and absolute form are, on the contrary, conditioned. To imagine a self who is independent from historical and social situation is impossible. Therefore, it is necessary to build up an ethics which shall get beyond the abstract position of the subject proposed by morality. That kind of ethics appearing in a plural world which includes all others shall be a situational ethics which is able to deal with contingency and alterity. Moreover, it shall show itself in the very concrete or performative action

of the self; not in her willing or in her dialogue with herself repeating permanently ‘I ought.’

On the other hand, in the previous chapter, I tried to examine what is ethics for Levinas in detail. Ethics is a relationship between the same and the other in which the other cannot be reduced to the same since it is unpredictable in terms of the infinite possibilities of what it can do. Therefore, the other who is higher and lower than me at the same time is whom I have to respond. The radical alterity and the exteriority of the other are the main indicators of an ethical relation since they prevent to reducing the other into the same. However, although Levinas is known as the philosopher of the ethical other, there is equivocality whether he is talking about morality or ethics. When the other calls me, I am obliged to respond. Such a formulation of an ethical relation makes me ask where this obligation does come from. It is very similar to the Kantian categorical imperative which is universal and unconditioned. It seems to me why this imperative is unconditioned lies in the existence of God. It appears as the command of God to which everyone has to obey. God is very significant notion for Levinas’s philosophy since Levinas develops his notions of transcendence and infinity through the notion of God. When we come to the description of the other, it seems that there is a resemblance with the other and God. Through such questions, Levinas is mostly cited as a spiritual or theological philosopher who cannot answer our worldly and concrete problems. Although all of these question marks are still abiding for me, I believe that to criticize Levinasian ethics due to this equivocality may be unjust to him since his main emphasis is on the incomprehensibility and irreducibility of the other. Also, he does not establish his ethics through the rational, knowing subject who knows the truth; rather he points out the priority of the other.

Arendt also draws upon the Machiavellian duality of *virtu* and *fortuna*. Machiavelli has a unique position in the history of political thought according to Arendt. Machiavelli's theory is a challenge to the Greek and Christian conceptions of the good. In the former one, the examination of the good is related with nature; so, the good is always the 'good for.' With the invention of will, the Christian philosophy conceptualizes the good as the absolute goodness with reference to God. However, Arendt claims that anything absolute is not from this world. Indeed, these two conceptions of the good belong to the private realm for Arendt who is seeking for a political explanation. This is why she puts forward Machiavelli. According to Arendt, the glorious teaching of Machiavelli is that: Human beings should learn how not to be good.³⁴⁹ Following Machiavelli, she distinguishes politics from morality. Unlike the unworldly and apolitical character of goodness, Machiavellian *virtu* is a specific political human quality for Arendt. The relationship between *virtu* and the world is significant for Arendt:

Virtu is the response, summoned up by man, to the world, or rather to the constellation of *fortuna* in which the world opens up, presents and offers itself to him, to his *virtu*. There is no *virtu* without *fortuna* and no *fortuna* without *virtu*; the interplay between them indicates a harmony between man and the world.³⁵⁰

For Arendt, the absolute goodness is impossible in the public realm; it is also destructive of it. As badness corrupts the common world, goodness assuming a public political role also results in its own corruption. In *On Revolution*, Arendt refers to the book of Hermann Melville, *Billy Budd*. Why the absolute goodness is destructive shows itself in the story of Billy Budd who is the representative of the

³⁴⁹Arendt, *Human Condition*, 77.

³⁵⁰Arendt, "What is Authority?" 137.

absolute goodness. Billy Budd kills a man; then, he becomes a murderer. An absolutely good man is a murderer now. Consequently, the political problem arises: A good man has become a wrong-doer since he is a murderer. Then, can we still be able to speak of an absolute goodness? For Arendt, the answer is no. For Arendt, such an absolute goodness is the part of nature; therefore, it asserts itself forcefully and violently as nature does. Briefly, goodness beyond virtue as a natural goodness is outside society; even worse for Arendt, when the absolute is introduced into the political realm, it spells doom to everyone.³⁵¹ In the trial of Eichmann, Arendt argues that everyone wanted to believe that Eichmann is an evil or a monster. On the contrary, she asserts that the personality of Eichmann clearly showed that the evil is not something absolute or radical or can be defined through metaphysical terms. She uses the word 'the banality of evil' when she defines the characteristic of Eichmann: thoughtlessness rather than stupidity. What she tries to explain is that if we demand judging Eichmann through believing in his being a monster, we can lose all our capacities to think and to judge.

It is clear that Arendt and Levinas are opposing to each other at that point. When Arendt is strictly against to think of a political realm through absolute goodness, goodness beyond being is significant for Levinas. He develops his notion of infinity through Platonic Good beyond being and Descartes's notion of God who put the idea of infinite to us. In Levinas's lexicon, *beyond*, *transcendence*, *excellence*, and *metaphysics* are key terms to which Arendt usually opposes since she defends a political realm in the very concreteness of the world and in the very concrete web of relationships between human beings -in a relationship non-metaphysical and non-transcendental. However, I must clarify that for Levinas such

³⁵¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 84.

terms signifies the impossibility to comprehend, to grasp, and so to dominate the other in an ethical relationship. He knows very well the possibility of killing the other. What he emphasizes is that it is *better* not to kill. If we think in a Levinasian way, the word *better* points out the comparative form of the word; not the superlative and so the absolute one. There are always some '*better than*'s to compare, to judge and to think about it. I think that Levinasian ethics is not independent from the plurality of human beings which is governed by differences, contingency and spontaneity.

Arendt, in her article *Truth and Politics*, differentiates the truth and opinion from each other. For her, opinion belongs to the political realm within its plurality since truth has a despotic character and a coercive power on human beings. She gives the example of an old Latin adage: "Let justice be done though the world may perish." She does not accept such a viewpoint since the world and worldliness has a significant place in her theory. Consequently, it is unacceptable to follow the absolute truth at the expense of the destruction of the world. Such a morality which demolishes the world for the sake of truth or justice is not moral for Arendt. Dangerously, we may also fall into the categories of means and ends if we unconditionally follow an end. Arendt is very against to the means and ends categories in the realm of politics which is a consequence of the tradition of political philosophy since Plato. For her, the end always justifies the means which may lead to the destruction of our common world and our moral values. In that sense, she criticizes the ex-Communists who had used totalitarian means in order to fight totalitarianism itself through pointing out the social and historical circumstances. She mostly refers to that idiom used by the revolutionaries: "You cannot make an omelet

without breaking eggs.”³⁵² In other words, it is the end that commands the means. That is pathological in the sense that it is the subordination of acting to the making. However, what is at stake for Arendt is not the end and the justification of means. She says that ‘it is a breaking, not an omelet.’³⁵³

Consequently, she builds up her ethics through the care for the world which was here before us and which will be here after us. Searching for the absolute truth is hubris which is governed by an existential resentment to transcend the givenness of human condition for Arendt. To disregard the borders of human life is destructive since it carries the tendency to destroy every kind of borders in human life. Was not fascism the lack of borders while it had conquered both the private and the public realms? What is at stake is the world for Arendt, the care for the world in which we live with the other human beings. I think that this is the reason why Arendt was not opposed to the execution of Eichmann. It seems that she does not only judge him due to the murders that he played a big role; she also consented to his execution since he had destroyed the world in-between human beings. Eichmann was just one of those who did not choose to share the world with the others. Humaneness, for Arendt, reveals itself in the discourse of friendship which is ‘love of man.’ Arendt asks how ready we are to share the world with the others.³⁵⁴ Likewise Arendt, sharing world with the others is significant for Levinas. This is why he conceptualizes the ethical relationship through hospitality and welcoming the other. For him, it is ethical to know how to give what one has.

³⁵²Hannah Arendt, “The Ex-Communists,” in *Essays in Understanding: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. By Jerome Kohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 395.

³⁵³*Ibid.*, 397.

³⁵⁴Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1968), 25.

Arendt and Levinas differ from each other through the notions they attach importance in terms of sharing the world with others. What is significant is friendship for Arendt as ‘love of man.’ For Levinas, it is fraternity. He develops an enlarged ethical concept of fraternity as different from the classical Jacobin terms in order to prevent the exclusion and discrimination of human beings on the basis of their religions, ethnicities or gender.³⁵⁵ However, for Arendt, fraternity is an apolitical term since it is sentimental. On the contrary, humanity is exemplified in friendship which does not include personal intimacy. Such a friendship can make political demands and can persevere reference to the world.³⁵⁶ Arendt finds sentiment and intimacy irrelevant for politics; besides their irrelevancy, they are also not sufficient to develop a permanent public political realm. In other words, they are unreliable. This was one of the main points through which Arendt criticizes the mentality of the French Revolution when comparing it with the American Revolution. She claims that the former one is governed by misery, poverty, compassion, pity, conscience rather than a demand for constitution a free public political realm which is durable. On the other hand, Levinas gives importance to the sentiment and intimacy in human relationships. The welcoming the other is the actual experience of the intimacy with the other. As different from Arendtian definition of ‘love of man,’ he even changes the classical definition of philosophy, ‘love of wisdom,’ to the ‘wisdom of love,’³⁵⁷ which may not be so different the Arendtian version since it is also the wisdom of love the others and the world.

³⁵⁵Caygill, *Levinas & The Political*, 8.

³⁵⁶Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times,” 25.

³⁵⁷Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 183.

Now, I will continue with the Levinasian ethics and discuss the possibility of deriving a political approach from his theory although it seems that he has not developed a notion of the political particularly.

Is Politics Evil? A Levinasian Approach to Politics

Levinas opposes morality to politics through identifying the latter one with war and reason. This identification seems to restrain him to develop a notion of the political in a positive way. Unfortunately, he seems having similar viewpoints with the members of realist paradigm in the discipline of international relations who support the idea that the politics is evil. There are many discourses about politics which has become more common in the modern age as the effect and the cause of nihilism at the same time. Politics is usually identified with a dirty play in which persons who hold power dominates the others. At the first glance, Levinas seems to fall into the trap of this discourse while Arendt struggles with it through re-conceptualization of the political. However, I claim that Levinas has a political philosophy by following Robert Bernasconi.

Levinas mentions the existence of the third party which is different from the same and the other. Within the ethical relation between the same and the other, there is always a third party called as the others. According to Levinas, the encounter with the face is not a relationship only among two persons; contrarily, it represents the commonality among all humanity. The relationship between the same and the other is not a reactionary relation as it is assumed in a dialectical relation; rather, it is founded upon responsibility which is derived from 'response.' In other words, one responds to the other. The difference between reaction and response is that while the

former one is determined with regard to 'a thing,' the latter one cannot remain between the two. As Levinas says, 'everything that takes place here between us concerns everyone.'³⁵⁸ For Levinas, we see the third party in the eyes of the other; I see the call of the all humanity in the face of the other. In that sense, the third party is all others; it is all humanity. By this way, Levinas underlines the plurality in the human realm. What is more, through this plurality, the asymmetrical relationship between the same and the other has turned into a symmetrical relationship. That is called as fraternity rather than equality for Levinas.

In this context, Robert Bernasconi claims that Levinas does not subordinate politics to ethics as it is claimed most of the time. According to him, Levinas has a quite significant contribution to our understanding of the political through challenging the conventional sense of the political. He argues that in Levinas's philosophy, politics and ethics coexist in tension with the capacity to question each other. According to Bernasconi, there is no ethics without politics -a similar thought to Simon Critchley's. Consequently, Levinas is not blind to politics; rather, his philosophy cannot be assimilated to the conventional political philosophy for Bernasconi. What Levinas resists is the reduction of ethics to politics. By comparing Levinasian ethical relationship with Hegelian dialectical relationship, Bernasconi asserts that the recognition has the capacity to take form of submission; therefore, Levinas explicitly denies such a relation based upon recognition. In other words, Hegelian master/slave dialectics seems the reduction of ethics to politics. However, as opposed to the claim that Levinasian ethics is blind to politics, Bernasconi assures that it is absolutely within the political context. In other words, Levinasian ethics is

³⁵⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 212.

not abstracted from the political community; it has rather its impact within the context of political community.³⁵⁹

Secondly, I would like to continue with Levinas's ideas on freedom. While criticizing the history of Western philosophy, Levinas claims that it has always been a philosophy of power through which ethics and justice is subordinated to freedom. The priority of Being over the existents has made freedom obedient to Being. The consequence is that: "It is not man who possesses freedom; it is freedom that possesses man."³⁶⁰ At that point, Levinas also refers to the dialectical relationship between freedom and obedience as Arendt does and he claims that the reconciliation between the two signifies the primacy of the same which is the main direction of Western philosophy.

What Levinas opposes is the identification of freedom with power. If the spontaneity of freedom is not called in question, it becomes power which dominates the others for Levinas. Consequently, he gives priority justice over freedom. However, this does not mean that he disregards freedom. Rather, he has two senses of freedom. The first one is the freedom of the ego with no relationship with the others. Such freedom is bare which makes it destructive at the same time. The main characteristic of this freedom is its arbitrariness. It is arbitrary in its spontaneity through which it reduces everything to itself. This is what Levinas calls as power. Especially the inner freedom is always experienced in its infinite arbitrariness for Levinas; therefore, freedom cannot be justified by freedom. This kind of freedom is still significant for Levinas; or he accepts that it is an essential part of human beings.

³⁵⁹See Robert Bernasconi, "The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political," in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 30, no. 1, (1999): 76-87.

³⁶⁰Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45.

What he criticizes is the acknowledgement of this ‘partial’ freedom as the ‘whole’ of it.³⁶¹ For Levinas, this kind of conceptualization has resulted in an individualistic viewpoint both philosophically and politically. Cauchi compares Isaiah Berlin’s negative conceptualization of freedom with Levinasian one. If we turn to the contractarian theorists such as Hobbes and Locke, we see that their constitution of the state and society stems from the possible violent acts of the subjects through their arbitrary freedoms. Therefore, the main purpose for them is to protect the freedom of the individual from another’s freedom. For Cauchi, Levinas’s second version of freedom is intended to critique that viewpoint.

The second conception of freedom is grounded in responsibility for the other. The freedom of the subject implies responsibility since freedom is not justified by (arbitrary) freedom. However, it requires justification for Levinas. This justification comes from responsibility. This ‘finite freedom’ or the ‘invested freedom’ is put into question by the other which also puts one in a situation in which she is not alone and she is judged.³⁶² This responsibility for the other and the dependence on the others is not a constraint as like the negative conception of freedom –freedom from constraint– rather it is infinity if we remember how the other opens different ways for us through its radical alterity. Therefore, real freedom is nothing but ‘the novelty of the advent of the other.’³⁶³ In that sense, it can be said that Levinas has a highly political conceptualization of freedom.

John Wild also makes a political derivation from Levinasian understanding of freedom and responsibility. Through making an analogy with regard to the notions of

³⁶¹Mark Cauchi, “Otherness and the Renewal of Freedom in Jarmusch’s *Down by Law*: A Levinasian and Arendtian Reading,” in *Film-Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2013): 196.

³⁶²*Ibid.*, 304.

³⁶³Cauchi, “Otherness and the Renewal of Freedom,” 197.

totality and infinity, he proposes the notions of totalizers and infinitizers. He identifies the former with the conformism who are satisfied with the system and who are seeking for power and control. On the other hand, the infinitizers are dissatisfied and they look for the other than themselves and freedom. Therefore, there appears a political call in Levinas's thought:

The individual person becomes free and responsible not by fitting into a system but rather by fighting against it and by acting on his own.³⁶⁴

Consequently, freedom brings along plurality and responsibility in the sense of which it is limited and conditioned in a very Arendtian way. There is one more significant point that I would like to emphasize. Arendt and Levinas are so distinctive in terms of their conceptualizations of freedom that they can be reduced neither to the positive nor the negative conception of freedom. I think that they transcend that dichotomy. While negative conception of freedom means *freedom from constraint*, the positive conception of freedom is related with self-determination and it is *freedom to be/do*. While the former one is detected by the limits of coercion, the latter one is the source of coercion.

What is pathological is that these two conceptualizations of freedom lead to an understanding of politics with regard to obedience and coercion which is really a narrow definition of politics. Secondly, I think that these two viewpoints are individualistic. The negative one asks to what extent I am free to choose, that is to say, it is nothing but freedom of choice; the positive one deals with self-mastering and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, Arendt and Levinas develop a notion of

³⁶⁴John Wild, "Introduction," introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, by Emmanuel Levinas ((USA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 18.

freedom through the novelty of the other. Natality is one of the most salient features of action and human beings in Arendt's works. Natality is the second birth through which we insert ourselves into the world by words and deeds. It is the principle of beginning. When we act, we begin something new and we open new ways under the gaze of the others. This is novelty that brings freedom along for Arendt as well as Levinas. It is through natality for Arendt and it is through the novelty of the other for Levinas. Since freedom through natality and the novelty of the other is unpredictable and unexpected, it inserts newness into the world like a Godly action. As Cauchi draws attention, Arendt and Levinas have a theological doctrine of creation -*ex nihilo*- in their conceptualization of freedom.³⁶⁵ Interestingly, they both use the word 'miracle' when describing the novelty. For Arendt, every act is a miracle since it initiates something completely new. Levinas, on the other hand, defines society and plurality –the existence of the others, in a sense- as the miracle of moving out of oneself.

Going ahead with a possible Levinasian politics, I would like to refer Howard Caygill who argues that the political present is absent in Levinas's thought. According to Caygill, Levinas mostly deals with the unforgettable past of the Nazi horror and the unpredictable future of the State of Israel as the promise of politics.³⁶⁶ The former one leads him making a critique of ontology while the latter one directs him to think about the future and the promise of the future. I have discussed the first one through the critique of ontology. The latter one is also related with the State of Israel and its universal ethical prophetic politics.³⁶⁷ But first I must note that he

³⁶⁵Cauchi, "Otherness and the Renewal of Freedom," 197.

³⁶⁶Caygill, *Levinas & The Political*, 3.

³⁶⁷In order to see how Levinas thinks about the State of Israel, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990).

differs from Arendt who underlines the significance of the present. The conceptualization of the present in Arendt's work appears as the moment that one struggles against the past and future. She asserts that there is a gap between past and future; and this gap represents the discontinuity of time. Standing in this gap, one interrupts the continuity of time which is indeed a discontinuity. The present is the moment of speech and action in which one discloses her. Through the speech and action in the present time, Arendt emphasizes it is a gap between and against past and future. In order not to lose in this constant fighting, she proposes two human faculties: forgiving and promising. These faculties are to deal with the past events and misdeeds and to protect the world in a possible corruption that will take in the future.

For Levinas, as for Arendt, the notions of promising and forgiving are significant. These two terms are also related to the same phenomenon, that is to say, to the insertion of novelty through plurality for both thinkers. Forgiveness is a capacity to reverse the time as if a misdeed had not been done. The achievement of forgiving is to release the doer of the misdeed from her sinful past and to give her a new beginning or at least a possibility of a beginning.³⁶⁸ If an action (Arendt) and the other (Levinas) are not reducible which signifies their irreversibility and unpredictability, such a faculty as forgiving is something that keeps us together which makes it necessary also. It is a way to a future or to the promise of future. What is significant in the faculty of forgiving is that this 'recommencement' or this new birth comes from the other since it is always the other who forgives us. Clearing past in order to keep going makes recall Nietzsche's noble morality. Nietzsche

³⁶⁸Christopher R. Allers, "Undoing What Has Been Done: Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas on Forgiveness," in *Forgiveness: Promise, Possibility & Failure* ed. by Geoffrey Karabin and Karolina Wigura (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011), 171.

argues that resentment is one of the characteristics of slave morality in which one cannot get rid of the effects of past event and resented; so, one becomes stuck in that moment which is a life-negating activity. Then, he proposes the abandonment of the past through forgetting for the sake of a further development. However, what is the difference in Nietzsche is that he formulates the abandonment of the past in a very individualistic way as opposed to the views of Arendt and Levinas on forgiving which is already relational.

I prefer to keep out Levinas's thoughts on Israel since it is about another level of politics in terms of the state, religion and history. However, I must emphasize that Levinas's reading of the State of Israel shows that he contradicts himself as the philosopher of the other. For the Israel-Palestine war, he justifies the acts of Israel against to Palestinians who were murdered whose land was invaded. Instead of the thoughts on the State of Israel, what I want to argue is that Levinas does not discredit politics as usually accepted. On the contrary, he emphasizes the existence of a direct connection between ethics and politics. However, politics has always its own justification for him. Therefore, politics can have a place only alongside ethics which means that politics is secondary to ethics. It seems that Levinasian approach to politics is the reflection of his thoughts about Israel. Yes, there is a direct relation with ethics and politics; but since politics needs its own justification, sometimes we can justify our political misdeeds since it is politics. Consequently, he seems approving the violent acts of Israel toward Palestine through the claim that 'in alterity we can find an enemy.'³⁶⁹ Judith Butler summarizes Levinas approach in a very striking way: "The Palestinian has no face and hence, their human vulnerability

³⁶⁹Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and Politics," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Sean Hand, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 294.

can be the ground for no obligation not to kill.”³⁷⁰ In that sense, the way to read Levinas is possible only through reading him against himself for the political possibilities he opens up for Butler.³⁷¹ However, I think that there is no need to read Levinas as against to him due to his ‘fatal’ thoughts on Israel and Palestine. Because, I believe that this is a fatal contradiction within not Levinas’s theory, but his own political standpoint which is not the concern of this thesis. Although I completely agree with Judith Butler on that issue, I still believe that Levinas has distinct political viewpoints which lead us think for the sake of the other.

Jacques Derrida is one of those who try to derive a notion of the political Levinasian ethics. He asks whether an ethics of hospitality can be able to found a politics of hospitality. He examines three notions of Levinas’s thought: fraternity, humanity and hospitality. Gathering these three terms together, Levinas’s main argument is shaped under the notion of the welcome of the other as a neighbor and as a stranger. Derrida appreciates the philosophy of Levinas since it is newer than any theory due to bringing the absolute anteriority of the face of the other. According to Derrida, Levinas directs us toward what is happening in the world today in terms of the refugees. Every kind of immigrants with or without citizenship is being forced to leave their homes. At that point, Derrida refers to Arendt’s analysis on the decline of the nation states. Arendt argues that the World War I and the following civil wars had created migration of group who were welcomed by nowhere. Then, the disintegration of the nation states has begun. With the invasion of the state by the nation, the nation states have encountered with the problem of the refugees who belong to other nationalities. These stateless persons are to bring the end of the

³⁷⁰Judith Butler, “Precarious Life and the Obligations of Cohabitation” (paper presented in Nobel Museum, Stockholm, and May, 2011).

³⁷¹Ibid., 6.

nation states and the Rights of Man for Arendt since the principle of equality has already broken down through the discriminatory policies. The Rights of Man was founded upon the notion that 'Man', not God will be the source of universal human laws. However, Arendt argues that it was never man or it was a conceptualization of an abstract human being; but nation or people were the image of man. Briefly, the refugees are the main indicators of the decline of the nation-state founded upon the sovereignty and the general will of the people and the corruption of the Rights of Man founded upon the abstract equality of human beings. But, equality is not abstract and natural for Arendt; rather, to signify once more, it is artificial since 'we are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights.'³⁷² Therefore, it should be 'citizenship' rather than kinship or nation that bonds us together.

Arendt puts the notion of citizenship as a political norm which is the guarantor of the public sphere, public political action and most importantly political culture. This citizenship is constructed through the political quality –the equality of unequals and it includes the active engagement of citizens to the affairs of their community. On the other hand, Levinas has an uncompanionable attitude toward the notion of citizenship. For him, this term is one of the means of the State in order to generalize. Therefore, the ethical subject cannot be same with the civic one. It can be said that citizenship is not related with to have right. It is rather a question of power. It is not a signifier in itself; on the contrary, it depends on political power. Although they differ from in terms of the notion of citizenship, both Arendt and Levinas reject the nation-state paradigm which denies the existence of the others. Derrida inspired by Levinas calls for searching a new international law and a borderline politics for

³⁷²Arendt, *Origins*, 301.

the millions of the homeless and the stateless.³⁷³ This can be possible only through Levinasian way of welcoming the other.

Judith Butler also deduces a global ethics from Levinasian ethics through not considering proximity in its spatiality. Levinas does also not define proximity in terms of space; however, when he speaks about Palestinians, he argues that the other for Levinas is Israeli persons who are his relatives. Palestinians appear on the stage as a threat to his neighbor; therefore, Levinas feels responsible for the Israelis, not for the Palestinians. Therefore, Butler underlines the Levinasian meaning of proximity which signifies the otherness of the other. We are bound to others not by virtue of their sameness, rather of their otherness.³⁷⁴ She constitutes the idea of global ethics through Levinasian notion of asymmetry. For Levinas, the ethical relationship is an asymmetrical relationship in which the other has always priority over me. The other is who I have to respond even if she does not have to respond to me. If one wonders why I should be obligated to the other who does not reciprocate in the same way to me, Levinas answers reciprocity cannot be the basis of ethics. Butler also answers ethics is not a bargain.³⁷⁵ Consequently, Butler proposes that since we are bound to each other, we should concern for the lives of each other. At that point, Butler directs toward Arendt and she interconnects Arendt and Levinas. For her, these two reject the classical conception of liberalism which assumes:

...individuals knowingly enter into certain contracts, and their obligation follows from having deliberately and volitionally entered into agreements with one another...that we are only responsible for those relations,

³⁷³Derrida, *Adieu*, 101.

³⁷⁴Butler, "Precarious Life," 6.

³⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

codified by agreements, into which we have knowingly and volitionally entered.³⁷⁶

Arendt emphasizes the conditioned character of human beings which is unchosen. We are ethically and politically conditioned since we live in plurality. We are not only responsible for those with whom we have entered into a certain contract. As if it is, we were not be able to judge to Eichmann due to the fact that he has contracted with the German State as against to Jews. No, he could have done otherwise! As Butler draws attention, one of the reasons why Arendt did not oppose to the death sentence of Eichmann is that:

He had already destroyed himself by not realizing that his own life was bound to those he destroyed, and that individual life makes no sense, has no reality, outside of the social and political framework in which all lives are equally valued.³⁷⁷

Consequently, for both Arendt and Levinas, we are bound to each other and responsible for each other. This is not something subjugating us; rather it is our very humanity. There can be no individuality outside plurality. Moreover, an ethical obligation comes from this unchosen cohabitation. This is Butler's way to engage Arendt and Levinas in a dialogue due to the fact that the life of the other should be protected from genocide for Arendt and from murder for Levinas.³⁷⁸ Amal Treacher also points out the distinctness of Arendt and Levinas through their ethical stance. She compares their thought with the psychoanalytical conceptualization of the other.

³⁷⁶Ibid., 11.

³⁷⁷Ibid., 12.

³⁷⁸Ibid., 18.

As she argues, the dominant psychoanalytical view assumes that we are separate to each other and at the same time we are dependent on the other human beings for our identity. The separateness and the connectedness seem similar to the viewpoints of Arendt and Levinas. However, they also build up this connectedness through responsibility. For Levinas, I am responsible for the other before myself which means that I am even not a self without the other. Arendt, on the other hand, rejects the notion that responsibility is a cognitive act. Rather, it is an activity which makes us human alongside promise and obligation.³⁷⁹ Briefly, the other is part of us for Arendt and Levinas in a constitutive relationship with it.

The Other in-between Ethics and Politics

Intersubjectivity and Meaning

One of my main motivations in writing on Arendt and Levinas together is to show that ‘the other’ is both an ethical and a political question. Although these thinkers are claimed to subordinate them to each other, I claim that they are inseparable. ‘Arendt lacks a notion of morality’ and ‘Levinas lacks a proper recognition of politics’ are frequently heard objections as Robert Bernasconi mentions. Moreover, there is a common method to read these thinkers as against themselves. This is the way Butler reads Levinas with regard to the lack of politics in his philosophy and Benhabib reads Arendt with regard to the denial of morality in her political thought. On the contrary, besides the fact that there are possibilities to derive some political and

³⁷⁹Amal Treacher, “Something in the Air: Otherness, Recognition and ethics,” in *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community* 20, no. 1 (2006): 36.

ethical points respectively from their ideas; there is another claim that their theories are blind to neither politics nor ethics. In the previous part, I tried to unveil the ethical stances in Arendt's thought and the political stances in Levinas'. Simon Critchley's statement was an inspiration to me as he is inspired by Kant: "If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind."³⁸⁰ This is also why I name this study as 'The Deconstruction of the Modern Subject' since deconstruction is not independent from ethics according to Derrida and so politics according to Simon Critchley. Rather than making them fight with one another, I prefer to collocate them in order to see how they can help us re-conceptualize the politics in terms of plurality and the otherness which does not sink into the problem of the othering which gives way to the notion of 'a political ethics of intersubjectivity.'³⁸¹ Topolski argues that the political which is rooted in intersubjectivity (Arendt) creates a space for an ethics (Levinas) through approaching the other in a positive way. By emphasizing the impossibility of reconciling their thought, she claims that 'the bridge between Arendt's notion of the political as rooted in plurality and Levinas's ethics of alterity' is in intersubjectivity.³⁸² I would like to recall one more notion beside intersubjectivity which is meaning. So, in this part, I will examine what kind of subjectivity Arendt and Levinas propose in terms of intersubjectivity which makes sense through meaning.

As I discussed throughout this study, the subjectivity can be experienced only through the relationship with others, that is to say, in plurality. In such a relationship,

³⁸⁰Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 13. The Kantian version through which he synthesizes rationalism and empiricism is that: "Concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind."

³⁸¹Anya Topolski, "The Ethics and Politics of Teshuvah: Lessons from Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt," in *The University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought* 2, (2011).

³⁸²Anya Topolski, "In Search of a Political Ethics of Intersubjectivity: Between Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, and the Judaic," in *Ausgabe* 1, band. 4, (2008): 1.

what makes us contact with others is not the similarities between us; rather it is difference. The difference is also the source of meaning. As Arendt asserts:

If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood.³⁸³

Meaning lies in the alterity of the other for Levinas as well. This alterity or the desire for alterity is actually what rescues us from our spiritual and existential imprisonment to our being. The other renews us through her alterity. The modern philosophy pointed out the 'Man' as the source of meaning instead of God; but a god again by means of artificial limbs, in Freudian sense, a prosthetic god. As having Godly feature, such human is always lonely. Then, Weber defined the modern age as 'the disenchantment of the world' in which there is no meaning anymore which leads to nihilism. That kind of nihilism has created a popular return to the inner realm where everyone seeks for meaning special for his/her. What differentiates Arendt and Levinas to me is something more than their emphasis upon plurality. Actually, there are many theorists who are referring to the dependence of human beings. However, Arendt and Levinas deepen this plurality through attaching it a meaning. They point out the relationship with the other as the source of meaning. The meaning also shows the degree of the intersubjectivity which gives an answer to the very popular postmodern question: 'Can we speak on behalf of others?' In the next part, I will discuss this issue through making speak Arendt and Levinas on behalf of each other.

³⁸³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175-176.

Can We Speak on Behalf of Others?

Although Levinas is one of the most critical thinkers about totality and totalitarianism, he is subject to some criticisms which claim that his ideas on responsibility are even more dangerous than any totalizing effort. Levinas frequently quotes Alyosha's words from *Brothers Karamazov*: "We are guilty for everything and everyone and, I more than all the others."³⁸⁴ He uses this statement interchangeably with 'we are responsible for everything and everyone and, I more than all the others.' Levinas is frequently asked how one can be responsible for everyone and for the acts of the other. Michael Morgan asserts that one single obligation as such may create a new totalization through destructing any otherness.³⁸⁵ Žižek also, underlines the same possibility. He claims that if I am more responsible than all the others, how we can prevent that this claim will not lead to 'I am the only one who is responsible?'³⁸⁶ Does this not assign a privileged position who feels responsibility for everyone? Is it not the whole modern legal totalizing discourse shaped by the notion of responsibility? The answer can be 'yes' in the level of state, institutions and the international relations. However, I think that Levinas calls us from a very different viewpoint. He completely refers to the plural realm of human beings. Moreover, such a call is a kind of rebellion against to the rising nihilism and cynicism in the modern world. Not to be blind and deaf to the suffering of the others whom we do not encounter even! To be non-indifferent to the call of the others whom we do not see!

³⁸⁴Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 146. Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 105.

³⁸⁵Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 239.

³⁸⁶Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Ethical Violence," in *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1, no. 1, (2004): 10.

As I mentioned, Levinas builds up that kind of a relationship from a very sentimental motivation. On the other hand, Arendt has a very similar viewpoint from the faculty of judgment. At that point, it can be said that Arendt has a supportive argument of Levinas as against to those who accuses him of having a totalizing possibility. For Arendt, we have the capacity to judge which is our most political faculty. She claims that there can be found a political philosophy of Kant not in his political writings, but in his Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. For her, Kant has discovered an entirely new human faculty which is judgment. Unlike thinking activity which tends to generalize, judgment deals with particulars; in that sense, it is much closer to the world and relationship between human beings. One of the main characteristic of judgment is its dependence upon the other fellows. But, how?

According to Arendt, in a story, we have the spectacle and the spectator on the one hand, and the actor, on the other. Since the actor is a part of the story, she is partial; so, she never knows what it is all about. The position of a spectator who is there to judge enables her to see the whole. In that sense, she is impartial. Consequently, the actor is dependent on the opinion of the spectators; in other words, the actor is not autonomous. That is the political effect of the judgment. Arendt also explains it with regard to the philosophy of mind.

Arendt claims that 'taste' is the main vehicle for judgment since it is related to the particular qua particular. Although it is not communicable due to its immediacy, it is still the proof of intersubjectivity through imagination and reflection. Through imagination which is 'the faculty of having present what is absent'³⁸⁷ and reflection which is 'the actual activity of judging something,'³⁸⁸ we

³⁸⁷Hannah Arendt *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The Univ. Chicago Press, 1992), 66.

liberate ourselves from our private conditions and attain a relative impartiality. By assuming that everyone has senses like us, we communicate to each other. Consequently, the main characteristic of the faculty of judgment is intersubjectivity; we need the existence of others in order to judge unlike the thinking activity which is experienced in solitude.

Arendt also refers to the notion of ‘enlarged thought’ which is to enlarge our mind in order to take into account the thoughts of others. Why judgment is so significant for Arendt lies in its dependence of intersubjectivity. As Ronald Beiner emphasizes, the faculty of judgment is the source of meaning through which ‘we are able to make sense of the world to ourselves.’³⁸⁹ By putting ourselves in the position of everyone, which is to say through enlarged way of thinking, we transcend the individual limitations and find meaning in the relationship with others. Unlike Levinasian intimacy, Arendt does not build up the notion of enlarged thought through empathy. Rather, it is ‘making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement.’³⁹⁰

As Seyla Benhabib emphasizes, this is not the only one perspective of Arendt on judgment. There is one more point that Arendt is interested in the faculty of judgment. For her, judging is also a moral faculty since it is the capacity to tell right from wrong.³⁹¹ This is the point where Arendt supports Levinas’s argument, I think. Levinas is accused of having totalized responsibility through the possibility of one’s

³⁸⁸Ibid., 68.

³⁸⁹Ronald Beiner, “Hannah Arendt on Judging,” in *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* by Hannah Arendt, (Chicago: The Univ. Chicago Press, 1992), 100.

³⁹⁰Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 220.

³⁹¹Seyla Benhabib, “Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt’s Thought,” in *Political Theory* 16, no. 1, (1988): 30.

being only responsible person. However, it seems to me that the opposition of this is to ask: ‘Who am I to judge and to feel responsibility for everyone?’ A question that summarizes the nihilistic character of the modern age to which Arendt and Levinas are strictly opposing! For such a question, Arendt has a strict answer which calls us to engage with others: If you ask yourself ‘Who am I to judge?’, it means you already lost.³⁹²

Consequently, Arendt and Levinas are defending the inevitability of intersubjectivity among human beings over which responsibility and judgment as such reign. As a refutation of cynicism, we can judge each other, we can judge through visiting the minds of each other, and with the hope to come an agreement with each other, we can speak on behalf of others as moral beings without destructing the alterity of each other and without totalizing each other.

³⁹²Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: for Love of the World*, (London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 152.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the very beginning, my main motivation in writing this thesis was a sentimental and intuitive relation through which I engaged myself with the philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas. The question of the subject was not only a theoretical question to me; it was also an existential one. When I try to collocate Arendt and Levinas in mind, the rareness of the studies which has associated these two thinkers was also very surprising to me. That was something making my motivation higher. That rareness led me to focus on this study more deeply. I must note that there are indeed many works which are comparing and contrasting Arendt and Levinas; however, they are usually supporting of one's primacy over the other. In this respect, as this study carries a very deep theoretical concern in terms of claiming the possible relatedness of Arendt and Levinas, it is fueled by the existential motivation which looks for answers about subjectivity as well.

In this study, I aimed to present a different conceptualization of the subject which is significant for the existence of a possible relationship between human beings which is gathered around the notion of plurality. In that respect, I examined Arendtian and Levinasian conceptualization of subjectivity. They both are against the self-standing subject as the source of all possible action and knowledge. This kind of subject is dangerous for the plurality of the human beings since it has always tendencies to dominate everything outside of itself which is a very destructive capacity for togetherness of the human beings and the permanence of the world.

In the very beginning, I examined the construction of the modern subject through the claim of its being a historical construction. Then, in order to give a background for the discussions of subjectivity, I dealt with what kind of criticisms has been directed toward that construction. However, at that point, there appears a dichotomy here between the self-referential subject and subjected subject. The reason why Arendt and Levinas are taken into consideration is their being distinct from the terms of this dichotomy. Hereby, in the second chapter, I explored in what sense Arendt deconstructs the modern subject without subjugating it. She firstly criticizes the notion of sovereignty which is based on will, and then she criticizes that alongside its being oppressive, the notion of sovereignty also leads to an abstract constitution of the subject. Such an abstraction is one of the main pathologies of the modern age which has led to the loss of the world. The worldlessness is the most dangerous fact which prevents us to gather and act together. Therefore, after analyzing the pathologies of the modern age, what Arendt proposes is the recovery of the public realm. To recover a public realm in which the subjects of action and world come together and judge each other is significant for the sake of politics and the future of the world. For her, the human condition of politics is plurality which means that human beings are dependent on each other. Only within this plurality, one can disclose her uniqueness; otherwise, she has to live in a dark realm with which no one can engage. Indeed, Arendt makes a call to us for engaging with political action which is initiatory. This is a significant call since it promises for the new possibilities.

After exploring Arendt's ideas on subjectivity, I preferred to examine Levinas in his own way since the paths they follow are very different. Levinas's main concern is the hegemony of ontology in the whole history of philosophy. For him,

ontological issues which deal with existence itself are dangerous since they have resulted in the imprisonment of the existent –the concrete body- and also they have paved way to the reduction of the other into the same. In that sense, Levinas argues that since one is imprisoned to her existence which becomes nausea later and the other which transcends the categories of existence, the first relation with the other is an ethical relation. In other words, what constitutes us a subject is ethical relation that engages us to a relation with the other. By this way, Levinas who mostly opposes to the oppression of the same decenters the place of the subject without subjugating it. Although there are some interpretations of Levinasian subject as a subjected subject to the other, I think that it is not a subjected subject since Levinas strictly emphasizes the separateness of the selves. Therefore, it is always an unrelated relation, and consequently inevitable. In this context, what is to be learnt from Levinas is the impossibility of reducing the other into the same and the transcendent element in her. This is politically significant in a world where many of differences are tried to be assimilated into the sovereign identities or structures. This is a call for answering to any other different call coming from the other. It is a lesson that teaches we are not same all which is something to be preserved. The existence of others, or intersubjectivity is the source of all possible meaning in this world.

In the final chapter, I discussed the possibility of collocating Arendt and Levinas. It is clear that one of their main concerns is self-standing and self-referential subject which is historically constituted. I must note that this construction was not only a theoretical one. As a historical fact, the subject who is mastering over herself has a tendency, and capability –worse than the first- to become the master of the other. This capacity has revealed itself in a very clear way in the experience of the Nazi horror. Besides, within the formation of nation-state, which is not an old

phenomenon as claimed, the conflicts resulted from the ethnic differences cause to the wars, murders and massacres all over the world. For example, if we think of the main ideological discourses of the nation-state such as national sovereignty, national will, or the sacrificing one's existence for the nation's existence³⁹³ which are ideologically good-working, we can remember the ideas of Arendt on sovereignty and will, and the emphasis of Levinas on the destructive capacity of existence and presence. In Turkey, we have in war for forty years since the Kurdish political movement is considered as a threat to the sovereignty of the state, to the national will, to the Turkish existence. In Arendtian sense, it can be said that because of the practices of the Turkish State, Turks and Kurds have lost the common world in-between them for years which supports her argument that claims the destructive capacity of the notion of sovereignty when it functions. In Levinasian sense, Kurds do not have even face to be treated responsible.

When thinking of different identities such as nations, ethnicities, gender, and so on, what I conclude from Arendt and Levinas is the significance of intersubjectivity creating a space for political action and ethics. They both call us for approaching other in a positive way. We all must be aware of the inevitable relationality between us. This relationality does not have to be rooted in similarities; rather, it gains its meaning through the differences which are worth to give ear.

Arendt and Levinas, even if they do not mention the state paradigm, ideologies, hegemonic processes, class struggles, or political economy which are the main issues of the political science, teach us how to approach the other, how to think politically

³⁹³ Turkish Oath is an illustrative example which includes all this discourses. "I am a Turk, I am righteous, I am hard working / My principle is to protect my minors, is to respect my elders, is to love my country and mat nation much more than my own self / My law is to rise, is to go forward / O' supreme Atatürk, the creator of our today, I swear that I will walk non-stop on the path you opened, on the target you pointed out, on the ideal you founded / Let my existence be bestowed upon the Turkish existence / Happy is the one who calls himself a Turk.

and how to act ethically. It seems that such a call surpasses all understanding of the political science since it is not a science. It is a political and ethical call for politics and ethics themselves. It is nothing but a promise for all of us. If it is asked how this promise can change the world, I would answer as it is the promise of change; or, it is the change itself since it puts the subject as the initiator of something new.

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