

## Approaching Eroticism: An Alternative Fundamental Structure of Human Experience

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IN HIS ESSAY "Time and the Other," Emmanuel Levinas reminds us that what the lover seeks in the erotic experience is necessarily unknown. He reminds us that "the caress is the anticipation" of a "pure future without content, . . . opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable" (89). Levinas presents a fundamental structure of experience in which reaching out to the other defines human interrelations, a structure of experience which is not dependent on grasping, possessing, objectifying, mirroring, or violating the other. This structure of experience differs from the predominant subject-object structure of experience in that it does not require the ontological presuppositions that have been traditionally assumed as *given*.

The traditional subject-object description of experience is fundamentally a from-to structure, a relation between poles. It is the underlying structure in which all of the above mentioned gerunds are grounded. That is, without a from-to structure, grasping, possessing, mirroring, and so on would not make sense as descriptions of the self's relation to other. The problem with this structure is that it pre-establishes a relation between self and other that seems to be innocuous insofar as it seems to be symmetrical. Upon analysis of this structure, however, we find that in order for a from-to relation to exist between self and other, the epistemological and ontological—indeed also ethical—descriptions of the relation between self and other can only be logically developed as those in which the experiences of self and other exist independently of one another. Perhaps this may also seem to be innocuous, but if the experience

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of the other can be understood as independent of the experience of the self, then the implicit responsibility of the self's relation to the other is erased. This is precisely what makes the traditional structure of experience inherently violent. It is what causes any and all logical developments of the from-to structure to inevitably result in a violent relation.

Alternatively, the structure of experience that I see as more compelling is one in which the relation of self to other does not provide the fundamental premise that leads to valid arguments for violence. The structure of experience that I promote in this paper is one in which the inherent responsibility of the self for the other is made explicit. It accomplishes this insofar as it is a description in which the self and other necessarily define their experiences together. I draw upon Levinas' idea of human interrelations to develop this description with the hope of subverting the traditional paradigm of experience that justifies violence and promotes abuse. Specifically, by questioning the implicit and explicit assumptions at play in Drew Leder's proposed solution to abusive interrelations, I analyze the predominant structure as it is employed in the very task of defending the abused. Leder's solution fails in that it is developed in and perpetuates that dominant structure.

In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder approaches the problem of subjugation which he claims results from Cartesian mind-body dualism. Leder identifies an analogy between the alienation and subjugation of one's own body and the alienation and subjugation of others. He attacks "the Cartesian vision of the body as threat" in an attempt to find a way to eliminate "dehumanizing environments" (167). He supports his refutation by establishing that the view of the "body as threat" is a phenomenological byproduct of mind-body dualism; and he calls for recognition of "the body as experienter" (5). Drawing upon the concept of "lived-body" to establish the body as an integrated part of the subjectivity of experience, Leder argues against what he identifies as the concept of subjectivity in the Cartesian tradition: the mind as sole possessor of cognition and intentionality. "If the body as lived structure is a locus of experience, then one need not ascribe this capability [the labor of cognition and intentionality] to a decorporealized mind. The self is viewed as an integrated being" (5).

Leder proposes that by shifting the locus of subjectivity to include the body, the alienation of the body will dissipate. In this mode of

experience, he claims that the self is better prepared to realize the existence of others. He asserts that this existential shift will deflate “the hubris of the rational mind” and nullify “individualized mentality,” thereby dissolving “the illusion of the separated self, which blocks the realization of interconnection [between self and others]” (8). Leder hopes that this different relation of mind to body will accomplish a different relation of self to other, and that the possibility for subjugation can be eliminated. “For most of us, our separative ego and selfish desires seem far more real than any universal bonds. When one thus lives for oneself in denial of relation, there is no limit to the conflict and brutality that can result” (159).

While Leder correctly summarizes the problem, he mistakenly identifies Descartes’ real distinction between mind and body as the source of the problem. Leder seems to assume that if we acknowledge the physical connection between self and other—through the realization that the subject is the subject-body—we can defeat “conflict and brutality.” But Leder only shifts the locus of conflict. By making this shift, Leder defeats possible solutions to brutality because 1) his structure existentially binds the self, and 2) his structure validates the paradigm of experience in which the individual exists as a subject of experience. He does not correctly identify the fundamental source of “our separative ego and its selfish desires,” and his failure to do so leads to inevitable conflict.

While Leder argues that the self is physically connected to the world and therefore to others, his argument forces him to take the position that the self’s experience is bounded. It exists only as the experience of the physically bounded individual. Without the ability to go beyond physical limitations, the self would be stripped of the ability to unify experience. Hence, the self would be stripped of any recourse to establish “universal bonds” or collectively defined experience that may serve as a way to eliminate de-humanizing environments.

Leder acknowledges this materialist interpretation of his argument, but he argues that “to challenge the doctrine of the immaterial intellect” does not lead to “naive materialism” (125). He claims that “the whole doctrine of the lived body, after all, undercuts the conventions of the materialist view” (125). Leder seems to be riding the horns of a dilemma. While he would like to appeal to the concept of “lived body” as opposed to “physical body”, i.e., *Leib* as opposed to *Körper*, he cannot do so without

embracing the *a priori* of anonymous subjectivity. He would like to appeal to the concept of the self's unified participation in the field of consciousness as well as the field of pure perception. However, he fails to explore the presupposition of this claim: that such a self exists as the construct of inner subjectivity. (Such a self exists as reflection of consciousness or, in Kantian terms, "transcendental unity of apperception.") If Leder embraces the doctrine of the lived body, he must acknowledge the question of the primacy of non-hypostatized consciousness; if he sidesteps this aspect of the lived body doctrine, his argument is materialistic despite his resistance. Since it seems that Leder's argument is directed against the primacy of consciousness, unless he can provide a more clearly defined defense against the existential limits imposed by materialism, his argument defeats the possibility of turning to a world-consciousness for a solution to conflict. His argument lacks the fundamental element that is required for the synthesis of perspectives; it lacks an explanation of the self's ability to work through different perspectives. Consequently, while Leder points to the recognition of our interconnectedness as a way to overcome our selfish tendencies, he doesn't provide an explanation of the means by which the individual can accomplish that recognition.

The second, and perhaps most important, reason that Leder's argument defeats possible solutions to the problem of conflict and brutality is rooted in his failure to establish the possibility of unity of experience. Unity of experience, i.e., experience as commensurable perspectives, requires the possibility of understanding the other's perspective. It requires sharing the other's experience and the sharing of experience stands in opposition to the subject-object relation of knowledge—the relation that Leder criticizes as mind-body dualism.

Although Leder approaches the deconstruction of this dichotomy in his critique of Descartes, he fails to address the relation of consciousness to physical being. He is, therefore, not able to extrapolate his hypothesis of unity to include sharing experience with another person. His description of the compassionate experience depicts his failure to maintain a view of unified experience while operating in a fundamentally materialist paradigm: "our bodily structure itself prohibits total identification" (162). For Leder, when the individual can "truly see" another's suffering, "compassion [makes] one body of [them]" (162). However, Leder points out that the singular "identities" must stay intact in order

to maintain the moment of compassion: "I feel *for* my friend; if I am completely taken over by her experience such that our identities blur, I can no longer speak of concernful relation....I am not my sick friend lying in her hospital bed, though I have incorporated a portion of her suffering" (162). His claim that he has "incorporated a portion of her suffering" does not, as he assumes, show that he is sharing her experience. Rather, it shows that he is *not* sharing her experience. His incorporation of part of her experience into his own shows that his experience exists independently of hers. That is, his experience remains phenomenologically distinct from hers. Compassion defines his experience; suffering defines hers.

In his approach to shared experience, Leder maintains the structure of the subject that Levinas describes as "like Ulysses" (271): the "I" returns to its island following its experience of adventure. Leder maintains an independent *subject* of experience—"the other person comes alive to me" (162) and the "me" remains static, physically and mentally unaffected except by way of being concerned. (The other's state exists apart from the "me".) Leder fails to identify that the problem with his approach is his description of compassion, namely, that he defines the relation between self and other as a "concernful relation."

If the relation between self and other in terms of the other's suffering is defined as a "concernful relation," then the self is in a position of superiority. In his relation with his sick friend Leder feels stronger and secure in his own bodily health. This is revealed in his language: "When another consents to form one body *even* with the ill body..." (163, my emphasis). Leder's language is unknowingly condescending. He continues to operate in what he describes as a "hierarchical onto-valuational structure" (154) that he correctly suggests "give[s] rise to hierarchical and oppressive social structures" (155).

Leder's "concern" for his friend defines a position of power—albeit a false position—and such "concern" is precisely the fuel for the oppression of "weaker" subjects of experience. While Leder claims that his compassion for his sick friend prompts him "to do what [he] can for her" (163), his experience of her illness remains phenomenologically distinct from hers. Consequently, what he judges to be best for her may be incompatible with what she may judge to be best for herself. This potential difference in judgment defines the suppression and marginalization of "weaker" subjects of experience. Leder wants to overturn the structure

of oppression by identifying the self and the other as belonging to one body, but his appeal to compassion in order to accomplish this fails because the dynamics of oppression remain operative. This unintended dynamic is inevitable because his description maintains the subject-object dichotomy of experience.

In order to manifest Leder's goal of the realization that "we" exist as one body, "we" must realize that experience is collectively defined. This is, in part, the point made by Levinas in his phenomenological description of *eros*. In this description, the "experience of the other" does not fall into the structure of "the experience of the other as I understand it." The "experience of the other" is "my experience" also. The subject-object experience does not exist; the "I" and the "you" do not exist as co-subjects of experience but as aspects of experience. This distinction is important because both aspects and co-subjects may exist in relation to one another, but to say "conflicting aspects" already shows that the possible "sides" are not in conflict ontologically; conflict is unnecessary.

Leder's argument for the replacement of mind-body dualism with a from-to structure of experience fails to accomplish this because, in the from-to structure, the independent subject of experience inevitably re-emerges. His establishment of the surface body as the locus of inter-subjective recognition fails to overturn the inherent structure of experiencer vs. object of experience upon which conflict is founded. His argument remains faithful to the paradigm of experience in which the self is established as a subject of experience through the absencing, the negation, of the other. Operating in this paradigm, Leder's argument is unable to overcome the logical foundation for the ontological necessity of conflict. That is, since his argument sustains the necessity of a subject of experience, it promotes the negation, the absencing of the other, and it thereby sustains violence against the other as well as the self. In order to sublimate conflict, in order to invalidate subjugation and rebuke mind-body dualism, the paradigm of experience in which conflict is supposed to be a necessary condition of existence must be sublated. The paradigm of experience in which the subject of experience stands in opposition to the object of experience must be dissolved.

Leder's argument may emphasize that the body shares a role in the subjectivity of experience, but it does not succeed in providing a relation between mind and body, or between self and other, that escapes the

structure in which conflict is validated. It is still based on the subject-object dichotomy. Leder's argument may not explicitly endorse the structure of the experiencer vs. the experienced, but it implicitly legitimizes that structure as a necessary element of experience by presenting descriptions of experience in this form.

In fact, Leder asserts that "lived experience has already laid the groundwork with its natural bias of attention toward the negative" (127). He points to the appearance of the body to the self in times of dysfunction—what he calls "dys-appearance"—as evidence of this groundwork. But Leder carelessly defines the bias of attention to the negative as "natural." Therefore, he does not accurately define the problem he wishes to overcome. Because "dys-appearance" of the body presupposes that 1) the body appears to a *subject* of experience as an *object* of experience, and 2) the body appears when it is malfunctioning. Leder inadvertently shows that (according to his description) communication between the body-object and body-subject is dependent on the body existing as object for the subject-body. Though Leder would deny that the body *should* exist as object, he validates this view of experience:

In experiential terms, one becomes aware of the recalcitrant body as separate from and opposed to the "I". Yet as Hegel correctly points out, this arises from an opposition *within* the organism, not between it and an ontologically separate thing. The self that takes note of the body remains a moment of the organism, an *embodied* self. As I look down on a paralyzed limb I may be struck by the alien nature of embodiment. But I still use my eyes in looking down, my nervous system in thought, my other limbs in compensation for the paralyzed one. Gazing upon the body-object is a body-subject, though the physicality of the latter may remain tacit. (88)

Leder posits that by acknowledging "the physicality" of the "body-subject" during moments of "dys-appearance," the experience of body as threat can be avoided. However, he simply shifts the locus of the subject from consciousness as pure consciousness to the subject as physical consciousness. Leder develops an inadequate position insofar as it maintains the subject-object definition of experience on which conflict is based. He continues to rely on the same structure of experience that he argues against (Leder 155).

The acknowledgment of the body as subject may alter a mind-body dualist ontology, but it does not, as Leder argues, alter the view of the body as threat. Since I still exist as a subject of experience, I, as subject-body or as mind, may continue to abuse myself. Regardless of who or what defines the subject of experience, if the subject-object structure defines the paradigm of experience, then the same problems of brutality and conflict will arise.

At this point the Cartesian mind-body paradigm—the *analytic* split between mind and body—shows its superiority to Leder's. Since abstract reasoning allows the identification of the subject-object structure of experience as a description of the structure of experience, the Cartesian paradigm provides a more accurate description of the problem. Moreover, it forces a recognition that to acknowledge a structure is not to validate it.

Within the Cartesian paradigm, the problem may be understood as one pertaining to the description of the structure of experience, i.e., to the description of consciousness. Since the Cartesian split between mind and body describes pure intellection as that which ultimately defines our experience, it shows that the structure of experience which sustains subjugation and abuse is a product of consciousness. While the Cartesian mind-body paradigm does not escape the dichotomous subject-object description of experience, it does show that simply because the structure operates in a particular world-view, that does not necessarily validate it. The Cartesian paradigm allows a transcendental analysis of particular descriptions of experience such that we can see the structure of the experience that underlies and maintains a particular world-view.

Leder's critique of Descartes fails to acknowledge the gift of the Cartesian legacy. His critique plays a larger role in his argument than he may realize or wish, and it does not support his effort. In fact, it undermines his effort in at least two ways. It disavows the power of analysis by casually dismissing it as a "geometrical" reduction, and it establishes the locus of its own truth in a predetermined historical view of experience. His critique is based on a few primary claims that appear most clearly in his chapter on "The Threatening Body."

If I seek to know what time of day it is I gauge the light outside my window or glance at a clock. How many people are in the



room? I look around. What kind of plant have we here? I gaze at it, smell, touch it, turn it around to examine the underside. On the face of it, it would seem that my body and its sensorimotor powers constitute the principle means whereby I know the world.

Why then does Descartes focus upon the body as a place of epistemological obstruction? This cannot be understood without reference to developments in early modern science.... The power of mathematics to reveal truth unavailable to immediate perception was further confirmed by the work of Galileo and Kepler. It is within this ambience that Descartes comes to regard material reality as *res extensa*, a substance wholly reducible to its geometrical properties. If this is true, the panoply of colors, smells, tastes, and sounds revealed by our body is a shadow dance, a seductive deception. (130)

First of all, Cartesian epistemology is grounded in deduction not geometry, because geometry is a product of reasoning, not reasoning itself.<sup>1</sup> While it may entail a holistic reduction of *material reality* to "geometric properties," since material reality does not exhaust all phenomena, such a reduction would not reduce ontology and epistemology to geometric sciences. Moreover, Cartesian epistemology is not grounded in a *reduction* but in a *synthesis* of consistent systems as methodology. In his "Discours de la Méthode," Descartes expresses discontent with the various branches of mathematics, i.e., logic, geometric analysis, and algebra. Recognizing the limitations of each, and wishing to "comprise all that is advantageous" from each, he proposes to construct a new method with which to discover truth (128). We now refer to this method as analytic geometry—the union of algebra and geometry with the rules of logic imbedded in its application. Briefly, this means Descartes synthesized problem solving in the physical realm with abstract analysis, thus

<sup>1</sup>For examples and demonstrations see the "Regulae" and "Discours de la Méthode" in *Descartes' Philosophical Writings*, edited and translated by Norman Kemp Smith. (Macmillan, London and Basingstroke, 1952.) See pages 17-21 and 128-31 for a quick view. We should also note that Descartes is historically criticized by other mathematicians for his refusal to acknowledge the truth of induction.

allowing clear and distinct understanding of those physical concepts that are not easily visualized. He explains this connection in some detail in his Sixth Meditation by citing an example of the differentiation of "imagination" and "pure intellection." Descartes identifies the difference as "a particular effort of mind in order to effect the act of imagination, such as [is] not require[d] in order to understand" (Cummins 28). This means that he believed his method to be capable of producing accurate results for problems that fall outside the scope of the physically apparent—beyond what can be imagined or pictured in the mind's eye, which means beyond a particular perspective.

Second, and more importantly, Cartesian epistemology does not imply that "the panoply" provided by our senses is *necessarily* a "seductive deception." Rather, it implies that the deficiencies of such a "panoply" can be overcome in the pursuit of knowledge. Cartesian epistemology relies on the ability to abstract a proposition or argument from situated experience such that it may be considered without prejudice or presupposition. Cartesian epistemology is not founded on a claim that the content of experience is a "seductive deception" (although this may be the case, for instance when we experience "dys-appearance"), rather it is established on a recognition that the content of experience is necessarily perspectival.

Since the *content* of experience is perspectival, a description of a particular experience necessarily reflects a particular, historical perspective. Since the description of the structure of experience is essentially an experience (it is the way we experience our experience), it implies that a description of the structure of experience also reflects a particular, historical perspective. Since any description of the structure of experience is relative to the particular, historical perspective from which it is generated, Cartesian epistemology is the only recourse to validity. What is more, this recourse occurs purely in the abstract, i.e., in consciousness. The structure of experience must be based on the fundamental core of conscious experience.

In this light, Leder's critique does a gross injustice to the Cartesian legacy.<sup>2</sup> What is more, it fails to feed upon the fruits of Descartes' labor.

<sup>2</sup>For those readers who may think that I present Leder's critique in its worst light, I will refer you to his *ad hominem* argument against Descartes developed

By failing to acknowledge the foundation of Cartesian epistemology, Leder's critique fails to fully recognize the far reaching ramifications of Descartes' fundamental claim: the content of experience is perspectival and should therefore be subjected to abstract analysis in hope of sifting through the "facts" in search of validity. While Leder's critique acknowledges the perspectivity of experience, it denies the Cartesian hope of transcendental analysis. Leder would like to claim the universality of the structures of experience, but since such a claim is only verifiable through transcendental analysis, his critique of Descartes undermines rather than supports his own argument.

Since the ontological claim that experience is dependent on a violent structure rests on the fundamental structure of experience described as a relation between subject of experience and object of experience, and because Leder's paradigm of experience implies a subject-object structure of experience, Leder's paradigm implies that experience is dependent on a violent structure. Unless we both deny the possibility of transcendental analysis and validate the structure of experience that allows brutality and conflict (as well as any other structure), the fundamental structure of experience cannot be described as a relation between experiencer and object of experience.

Leder neglects the crux of the problem he approaches. The paradigm of experience that Leder attributes to the Cartesian model does prevail in "contemporary society" (8), but the paradigm cannot be overthrown through a shift in the locus of the subject of experience. The paradigm which is grounded in violence can only be overthrown by relinquishing a description of experience that is dependent on subject of experience vs. object of experience. It can only be overthrown by appealing to transcendental analysis in order to analyze the description of the structure of experience that sustains violence. Since an analysis of experience is really an analysis of some description of experience, the paradigm of experience that Leder wishes to sublimate can only be sublated by reexamining the description of the structure of experience.

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in pp. 132-48, especially p. 140 in which Leder claims that Descartes' poor health promoted his distaste of the body thereby functioning as the foundation of Descartes' thesis. Of course, Leder may have a point, but his point does nothing to disprove Descartes' argument.

If experience of the other is viewed as a recognition of moments within an infinite whole, then the other is not established as an "object" for the self. Consciousness of the other exists as a relation. Therefore, to be conscious, to experience, does not necessitate the existence of "objects" for the conscious "subject." Consciousness only requires a field in which to relate, and that field is experience created by the presence of the other.

This does not entail death, negation, absence, or objectification. It only entails the *presence* of alterity—absolute otherness, other than otherness.<sup>3</sup> Consciousness is a relation that requires the presencing of otherness. It is relating to the other that can never be reduced to the same, an other that nevertheless shares a field. To be conscious is to recognize the futurity of alterity in consciousness in a common field. This field constitutes experience. It dissolves the anonymity of existence by establishing the beyond that is sought for in the caress.

This description of conscious experience is founded on a structure of an infinite reaching out to alterity that may best be expressed as continuous acceptance of the other in its otherness. Consciousness of others does not necessarily exist as a violent relation. The violence against the other is only necessary in a subject-object description of experience because only in this relation is it necessary to reduce the other—be it my own consciousness, my own body or those of another—to an "object" for my consciousness. Consciousness described as an open relation provides a structure of experience that replaces the role of violence with the role of alterity. In this respect, this description of experience is superior to Leder's. It undermines the inherently flawed structure of the subject as experiencer and object as experienced that Leder's analysis failed to undermine; hence, it undermines the justification for violence.

What Leder's analysis *does* accomplish is parallel to what Levinas accomplishes in his analysis of eros in *Totality and Infinity*. Both analyses present phenomenological descriptions of experience which allow us to

<sup>3</sup>I have borrowed this term from Levinas. "Other than otherness" does not constitute the negation of otherness such that the other is reduced to the same; rather, it constitutes the other which is not the Absolute Other. It constitutes the other beyond Otherness.

cultivate possible counterexamples to the necessity of the structure of experience in which alterity is mistaken for violence. More important than the acknowledgment that the other exists as a subject, Leder's phenomenological description provides the material to base a dis-acknowledgment of the other as object with respect to the self as subject insofar as it shows that the "subject-object" relation is a coextensive relation between others. That is, because it shows that the subject and the object are coextensive in the relation that defines experience, it shows that subject and object must at least be analyzed with respect to one another. Any analysis of the relation that defines experience can only entail a conceptual distinction between the subject and object. To put this more simply, we can never conduct a controlled experiment in which one can be isolated from the other. This is important because it shows us that any description of the relation that defines experience is purely conceptual. In this way, Leder's phenomenological description shows that experience presupposes self and other. Levinas' description is superior insofar as he not only shows that self and other are interdependent, but also, by rejecting the subject-object structure, he provides a perspective in which the implicit responsibility of the other is made explicit. Levinas' description provides a perspective in which the radical distinction between mutual recognition and conflict cannot slip by as simply a dialectic movement within the same experiential structure.

Leder explores experience with respect to the function of the body, and Levinas explores experience with respect to the function of the other. Although in different ways, both philosophers explore the phenomenon of mutual recognition as it exists in intimate relations and the fundamental role that it plays in human experience. The phenomenon of mutual recognition in intimate relations needs to be fully explored but not as recognition as such. Rather, it should be explored as a necessary relation for the existence of conscious experience—a relation not defined by recognition between subjects, but as a relation defined by the inescapable act of relating.

The relation between self and others should be explored as a unified experience. In this different description of recognition, to overlook the other's perspective is analogous to closing one's own eyes in the subject oriented description. Subjugating the other's perspective places a false limit on our understanding. It limits our own perspective. Acknowledging that my eyes see the stars as very small does not establish

the truth of their size, but it forces me to consider that phenomenon. Likewise, acknowledging the other's perspective as part of our own does not thereby validate it, but it forces it to be considered.

The exploration of the interdependence and interaction of selves engaged in intimacy provides the necessary insight that will allow us to understand how our perspectives are unified. But this exploration demands that we view ourselves as differing moments within a larger function not, as Leder's analysis would prescribe, as a dialectic from-to relation. It demands we view ourselves as moments that are affected by each other as in the erotic experience or as in the relation between mind and body. As Levinas points out in his phenomenology of *eros*:

*Eros* does not only extend the thoughts of a subject beyond objects and faces; it goes toward a future which is *not yet* and which I will not merely grasp, but I *will be*—it no longer has the structure of the subject which from every adventure returns to its island, like Ulysses. The I springs forth without returning, finds itself the self of an other: its pleasure, its pain is pleasure over the pleasure of the other or over his pain—though not through sympathy or compassion. Its future does not fall back upon the past it ought to renew; it remains an absolute future by virtue of this subjectivity which consists not in representations or powers. (*Totality and Infinity* 271)

Drew Leder approaches the concept of shared experience in his discussion of mind and body (between consciousness and material reality) insofar as he wants to show that the function of the "I" must only be considered as a description of a function with respect to other functions. However, he fails to maintain a view of unified experience because he fails to escape the dichotomous structure of experience. A description of the structure of unified experience must acknowledge what Levinas calls the "anonymity of the *there is*"—existence prior to the existent. By utilizing the erotic experience as a guideline for a better description of the structure of experience, we can defeat the claim to ontological necessity of conflict.

The erotic experience is defined by ecstatic inter-subjectivity, i.e., the transcendence of the self to meet the other in a field of anticipation. This unity of experience is rooted in and rests upon the other's otherness; it rests upon recognizing being beyond one's own immediate existence.

The self stands before the other with question and acceptance of questioning. In this relation the self and the other exist in a shared field without which experience could not exist. The "I" and the "you" are created in this field and the truth of the dependency of each on the other is simply forgotten. Each exists only as an aspect of the relation, "an incessant recommencement" (Levinas 270). Alterity is maintained; the questioning is infinite.

This is accomplished by the structure of the erotic experience, i.e., the actualization of experience that is both beyond the self and defined by the self, that is both encompassing the self and within the self. More specifically, the erotic experience is defined by ecstasy which is the transcendence of the self for the other in an act of love. It is defined by an infinite reaching out to give and to receive until the giving becomes the receiving. Subject oriented experience is grounded in an invalid structure, and the paradigm of experience in which the subject is necessary represents the actualization of this false idea. In order to remove the justification for brutality and subjugation of others, the actualization of conflict (which is none other than the actualization of the false idea of the subject) must be reversed. Levinas describes this as "a characteristic reversal of the subjectivity issued from position, a reversion of the virile and heroic I" (270).

The "I" that thinks, writes, and attempts to share "its" ideas is nothing more than a relation that exists within the dynamic forces of "its" culture. "I" do not present "my" ideas. "You" are not reflecting on those ideas. What exists is a relation that is only obstructed by a culturally constructed empty desire to limit that relation. The relation is obstructed by a false description of consciousness that inspires a false experience of fear or repulsion. This fear that motivates the empty desire is fear of the other that is rooted in the very idea of the death of the subject. While the subject may be simply a cultural construct, it inspires the desire for individuality that makes us, sadly, individuals—not, as Leder would like to imagine, jewels. The willing subject, the subject of experience, is a poor model of a dynamic relation that exists infinitely, in Infinity.

If infinity is the net of Indra, as Leder describes it, then the jewels are the relations that bind it and the "I" is simply a moment of a relation—at very best a brief sparkle, a tiny reflection of the relations. While the "I" may be seen as a sparkle, it should not be mistaken for something as permanent or precious as a jewel.

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