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Exteriority as Law: Revisiting the Masochean turn within Levinas

Reuben Carias[1]

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Abstract
Adopting Kantor's Masochean turn within Levinas, this article challenges the anthropocentrically limited purview of Levinas's ethical relation. Incorporating Kantor's legalistic reading of Levinas, informed through his literary analysis of Sacher-Masoch's 'Venus in Furs', the article details the inescapable, legalistic plight that is to be the Levinasian ethical subject. Extending upon Kantor's introductory conceptualisation of the Levinasian subject through Masoch, reveals a subject for whom suffering and sacrifice must be embraced; necessary acts of penitence before an irrepressible Other who they adore. The Other is presented through Masoch's text as an insatiable, inescapable deity of Law who cannot be refused and demands subservience. A god manifest in Exteriority whose influence upon the subject extends beyond the frame of the interhuman relation and is a necessary component of the subject's existence and, more broadly, their world. The Levinasian subject's relation with alterity poetically portraying all the potency, affirmation and urgency of dear Severin's with his Venus, a relation which destroys, haunts and affirms the subject completely as only Law can.

Keywords Levinas · Sacher-Masoch · Law · Love · Subjectivity

Introduction

The earnest brutality of Levinas's ethics is laid bare even in the most cursory of glances upon his work. Expressed in the perspiration and blood which decorates the tired flesh of his subject, Levinas's philosophical writings present ethics in the most uncompromisingly beautiful and violent of language befitting of poetry. The ethical subject, the poor devil that they are, is to exist purely within the bonds of servitude. This portrays ethical subjectivity in the most austere of terms. Levinas's ethics, concealed by the density of his text, belies an unceremoniously torturous plight for

✉ Reuben Carias
r.carias@westminster.ac.uk

[1] University of Westminster, London, UK

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the ethical subject. An extension of the metaphysical relation of the Same to the Other, ethics is grounded in the subject's arduous exposure to the wondrous idea of the infinite. It is this idea of the infinite or 'absolute Other', which is manifest in human alterity, the human 'other' and which demands the ethical. Presented with the idea of alterity Levinas's subject is thus thrown into a state of dire, ethical subjugation derived from the innate Desire for the Infinite. Beholden to the Other through whom they exist, they are both of and for the Other, a servant and product of this metaphysical relation which chains and liberates them. The ethical position of the subject, as a consequence of its metaphysical formulation, is accordingly a predicate for its dire ontological manifestation. To be human, an ethical subject proximate and open to human alterity, is then necessarily to be ethical in the most violently sacrificial and remorselessly indulgent of terms.

The ethical relation extends beyond sentiment and is grounded in enthusiastic self-deprivation. 'It is not a gift of the heart, but of the bread from one's mouth, of one's mouthful of bread' (Levinas 1999, p. 74). To placate this demand one *must* be willing to suffer, to offer up oneself for the satisfaction of the Other. This is the only possible means to remedy the metaphysical as this exposure to alterity also inculcates an apologetic lucidity in reference to the violence of the *I*'s existence. In every action there is an innate violence bludgeoning the Other (Levinas 1969, p. 27). Every place I call my own, is a 'usurpation of places which belong to the others already oppressed or starved by me' (Levinas 2017, p. 129). Thus ethics is an obsessive imposition, a rapacious summons to contrition. Regardless, the Other is the *I's everything*. They are their reason for being, their end in absolute. Though patently abstract in formulation, this duty is not an abstract relation to the other in action. Everything about the other, every aspect and all the minutiae of their existence is the *I's* concern, as Levinas puts it eloquently, 'everything that in the other does not regard me, regards me' (2017, p. 150–151), there is no facet to the Other which escapes the remits of the *I's* responsibility, all of the *I*, must be for all that is the Other. The metaphysical thus instils a votive ethic within the subject, which may cost but also brings meaning to their life. The Other is thus presented as the source and remedy to the pain of existence, a 'lovely demon' (Sacher-Masoch 2006).

Plainly, the ethical consequence of the metaphysical relation amounts to the 'curse of being human' (Wolcher 2003, p. 106). Held 'hostage' (Levinas 1999, p. 117; 2017, p. 52; 53; pp. 150–151) to the idea of infinity before them. As Ricoeur (2004, p. 92) and Rajiva (2013, p. 144) have noted, this, quite rightly, can be perceived as a punishing, almost 'inhuman condition' from which the ethical injunction springs forth. The Levinasian ethical doctrine outlined is not a tepid canon of suggestions and gentle nudges toward virtue built upon mazing layers of oughts and shoulds. It is decidedly grievous in nature, it is 'painful' (Edelglass 2006, p. 24). It reads as a coarse, cumbersome chain cradling the neck of the ethical subject, binding them gleefully to the Other. A singular bind of an unmistakable, leaden absolute, a willing and dutiful subjugation to be revelled joyously in. Surprisingly so few theorists engage with this dramatic if not atrocious state at length. Perhaps, as to consider the 'lived', plight of the ethical subject is to move away from the metaphysical foundation of the relation and toward the dirty, fleshy reality of actual existence, in

essence a move away from Levinas. Conversely, I will argue it is this move, which will be considered in detail in the succeeding sections of this text, that brings life to the Levinasian subject. It is only when we begin to engage with the plight of the subject and accept the reality of their 'ethical insomnia' (Oliver 2012, p. 119), that we can not only come to appreciate and understand the ethical relation between the Self and the Other in new, visceral and fascinating terms, but also truly bring life to the relation which exists beyond the human Other, within the shared world of alterity and the obligations which are to be found and *felt* therein.

To truly understand these emotive, ethical terms which demand the blood and bread of the Subject, this essay furthers Kantor's Masochean turn within Levinas (Kantor 1998; 1999) in arguing for the necessity of exploring Levinas's work within the literary space, in particular within that of Sacher-Masoch. Within the pages of Masoch's (2006) seminal work, *Venus in Furs*, life is breathed forcefully into the Levinasian subject as this foolish selflessness to the point of sacrifice, this need to suffer, the desire to endure all those perverse paradoxes which abound within Levinas's ethics are found incarnate in the tired, fixated eyes of Masoch's most famed protagonist 'Severin'. This foray into the literary landscape brings to flesh both the unrelenting burden of subservience which underlies Levinas's ethics whilst also inviting discussions and new understandings as to the benefaction which is felt as a consequence of the relation. Within this manically induced suffering, the subject is bestowed with the gift of affirmation, made anew by their Other, 'through' their Other, and thrown into a role which demands constancy in penance. Exploring this reading of Masoch with Levinas further, a new perspective is gleaned of the subject's plight, one which speaks not only to the arduous terms incumbent upon them, but of the fascinating back and forth of power, servitude and affirmation which forms the unique dynamics between the parties at play. It is in this discursion, we see that the relation present in both cases descends from the ethical into the absolute remits of the legal: an absolute indictment of debt which can never be paid and affirmation which cannot be refuted, portraying the Other as Law. Most poignantly though, presenting the often abstract discussions of Levinas's metaphysical relations within the tear-stained pages of Masoch's infamous work, invites readers to engage with the metaphysical in the unashamedly emotional terms. Within the doting, weary eyes of Severin, the relation is there to be felt: the ecstasy of affirmation, the insatiable lust for servitude, the cancer of subjugation. With Masoch, the metaphysical is no longer merely so. It *is* physical, and it *is* painful. However, it is here, in the exhausted cries and euphoric declarations of Severin, that (*a*) Levinas can be found anew. A Levinas not of abstraction nor obtuse obfuscation, but a Levinas liberated in literature. Here, embracing the emotionality of the literary subject's tortuous existence, the relation with alterity can be reborn as a legal relation founded upon guilt which extends beyond the presence or proximity of the Other, a Law which compels guilt in every aspect and corner of the subject's existence. A haunting Law of Exteriority which cries beyond the remits of the human Other, a love which plagues the mind of the lover.

Such conceptualisations which endeavour to extend the ethical duty beyond the remit of a distinctly human Face, by intent or application, have drawn a great deal of attention in recent years as ethical and ecological scholars alike have endeavoured to

overcome the chauvinistic, 'unapologetic anthropocentrism' (Herzog 2013, p. 360) of Levinas's ethics. Overtly interhuman, and socially oriented, for many modern 'posthumanist' commentators, the crudely Darwinian humanism of which his text is rife is 'unfashionable', if not 'deeply problematic' (Calarco 2019, p. 71). Restricting the ethical in conception and application to the purely human though well reasoned, given the times and life of the author, reads now as anachronistic within modern ethical discourse. Surprisingly, what invites such fervent debate and intrigues so many who wish to overcome this limiting of his theory, is the ambiguity which Levinas himself conspiratorially presents. When pressed in an interview, Levinas, somewhat unexpectedly states that 'the ethical extends to all living things, and that 'one cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal' (1990, p. 153). This, coupled with the poignant tale of Bobby the Dog who brought joy and saw humanity within Levinas and his fellow Jewish prisoners of Nazi Germany, detailed in the essay 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights', has been read as an invitation to take up arms and conceptualise the extension of the ethical relation beyond the out-dated limits of the interhuman relation to Bobby and other similarly befitting non-humans warranting ethical consideration.

Endeavouring to present an ecocentric iteration of Levinas's ethics, and faced with the incontrovertible anthropocentrism of his text, many theorists are often forcibly positioned at an impasse where they must either forgo the primacy of the metaphysical relation, or completely reinterpret the grounds and applications therein. This more often than not results in the ethical being re-presented, reconceived in a myriad of diverging Neo-Levinasian forms. Each approach united in its resolve to reconcile the perceived vulgarity of Levinas's anthropocentrism with the eloquence of his eloquent ethics. In recent years this has taken a number of different guises, varying from Atterton's (2018) reconceptualising of the 'the face', as generalisable to all which exhibit a capacity to suffer and express said suffering; Davy's (2007) reading of Levinas as a metaphor which mystically allows the relation to extend beyond the human indiscriminately to 'plants, rocks and other entities'; to Antadaze's (2019) presentation of the Other as an 'Unknown Other', whereby the anonymity of the Other affords the convenient extension of the relation to non-humans and to the ethical consideration of the non-human world. All such duets with Levinas make undeniably fascinating reading for all of a Levinasian persuasion and intrigue and inspire through the novel engagement with and extension of the ethical relation.

In spite of this, such perspectives stand in stark opposition to the distinctly human personality of the Masochean turn within Levinas advocated herein. As will be detailed, it is this turn which engages and unashamedly furthers the *human* personality and embraces the perceived 'narrowness' of the relation. In so doing, the turn celebrates the primacy of the relation and the necessary humanity of the Other from which the metaphysical relation expressly originates in the idea of the Infinite. However, I contend that this narrowness in conception need not necessitate a narrowness in the application of the ethical relation. Instead, in the latter section of this text, having sufficiently detailed and attempted to further flesh the Masochean turn in the former sections, I contend that the solution presented through the Masochean turn, in the embracing of the indulgent anthropocentrism of Masoch and

Levinas's texts, found in discussions of reason and language, offers the means to sincerely extend the relation with the Other as Law beyond the face without making concessions as to the primacy and terms of the relation. Exploring the relation of the subject with the world manifested through the Other, instead of attempting to make another Other of the world or a select number of its inhabitants, offers an intriguing if 'unfashionable', means to broaden the limits of the ethical. Extending the ethical through the Other, what has been presented is intended to be a reading of the Masochean turn which produces a distinct ethical relation felt by the subject with exteriority. A relation which, if successful, presents all exteriority to the subject as necessarily the Law of the Other. Tumbling down the Masochean turn, embracing the desperate emotionality found only in such Romantic literature, the subject's existence is framed against the inescapable articulation of asphyxiating alterity, of Exteriority as Law.

The Other as Law: The Masochean Turn

While the majority of commentaries and discussions upon the Levinasian subject focus their attention on the ethical applications of the metaphysical relation, or as will be seen in later sections debate who the relation may extend to, Kantor's seminal Legalistic Masochean reading of Levinas (Kantor 1998; 1999) orients the discussion at a profoundly personal level. The metaphysical is abandoned for the allure of the physical and sensual interwoven with Law. Many writers when considering the relation of Levinas to Law often endeavour to incorporate the ethical relation into applications of Law itself, largely in ecological/posthuman (Atterton 2018; Davy 2007; Antadze 2019), human rights or refugee circumstances (Stone 2016). For all these endeavours, it is a flagrant failing of the discourse itself that so seldom seek to engage with the ethical relation or present it in legal terms, as every step from Levinasian doctrine invites critique and arguments of misinterpretation or misappropriation (lest one be charged with having fallen prey to the dreaded Levinas effect (Alford 2004)). And, while there is undeniably a tremendous deal of merit present in the intent to stay, 'true', to the page of Levinas, particularly in such circumstances as the present where he himself penned many discussions on Law as distinct from the ethical, in daring to brazenly re-conceptualise and re-position the relation, we allow for a greater understanding and engagement with the original text. In particular, the Masochean/Legal turn Kantor takes with Levinas, and in whose stead this text follows, invites the reader to challenge the idealised martyrdom of the ethical relation and presents it as something else entirely, something joyously miserable.

Kantor's reading of Levinas and in particular his subsequent adorning of the Subject with Masochean characteristics are both predicated upon the creative legalising of the ethical relation. As detailed, the ethical relation is often presented within Levinas's texts as the expression of a complete and arduous 'responsibility' felt toward the Other (Levinas 1969, p. 174; 247; 2017, p. 16; 100; 150). This in practice is an unattainable responsibility amounting to the willing offering of the subject for

the benefit and placation of the Other. In parts, Levinas himself reduces the ethical relation to legalistic parlance, stating that the relation is derivative of the original interhuman ethical edict, that 'Thou shalt not commit murder' (Levinas 2017, p. 133). And yet such formalising or reductions of the ethical relation have failed to instigate much intrigue among commentators. For Kantor though, this notion of responsibility, coupled with its absolute terminology, beckons the Legal suitor at our gates. Diverging from traditional readings of Levinas, the Masochean turn (Kantor 1999, p. 366) presents responsibility as something *greater* than that which is ethical, something which aspires to be more than an abstract, metaphysically conceived obligation, more than the 'curse' of existence: a 'felt', debt that is to be paid. This debt accrues exponentially, as though an entity of its own, growing ceaselessly with each act which is inescapably marred by the violence which necessitates one's being. Conscious of this tangible guilt, the subject is compelled to feverishly act in moralistic recompense. It is in this exchange of debt and act, or more appropriately put in the synonymous, in this context, terms of adherence and punishment that the subject begins to be entangled in Law:

> Before the Law one is always already guilty. That is, one does not need the Law in order to be guilty. One is guilty, as such. [...] One cannot but know the Law in terms of pain and suffering; there is nothing but pain, even physical pain, when one faces the Law. (Kantor 1999, p. 368)

Reconceiving of the ethical guilt as the strain of Law, the legalising of the ethical relation, even in these most abstract of terms, the relation is now positioned within the horizon of the Self. As Law, as pain, it is a Law which is found and felt by the subject. Law, as with its ethical forebear, is found in and derived from the Face of the Other. In this shift of course from the metaphysical to the legal, the 'face is the Law' (Kantor 1998, p. 508). The position of the Other, once the transcendental harbinger of the Infinite is now presented transparently in direct and brutalist terms. Within this Masochean articulation, the Other *is* Law; a sublime, magnificent deity of normativity before whom all one can feel is guilt and the dirty, flawed nature of their own existence. In this reading of the Other, all interhuman subjectivity amounts to Law—a relation of ethical imposition and crippling existential contrition. And while this may appear as the immodest descent of Levinasian text into the Neo-Levinasian gutter, the value of such a perspective lies in its capacity to present the ethical relation in a sensorial, palpable fashion. Unlike the original pre-ontological formulation of the relation, and many of the iterations which followed, this presents the relation as something which is experienced, which follows and pulls upon the subject, bound to them in perpetuity, inescapably. One does not know this Law, but one 'feels' it as a pressure, a weight upon one's chest (Kantor 1999, p. 509). It delineates subjectivity. It is the Law, the Other, which defines and asserts the limits of one's being, which confronts the self and its egoistic perspective of the world as possibility as a firm rebuttal. In feeling this Law of/as Other one experiences 'the horror of limitation' that is the legalistic asphyxiation of alterity. Or, to return to Levinas's own parlance, 'To be in relation with the other face to face—is to be unable to [*x*]' (Levinas 2017, p. 9). The Law/Other, for they are one and the same, affirms and limits the subject, it defines and discharges by definition. Confronted

with Law, the Self finds meaning in its bondage, and in doing so is liberated from egoism. Liberated by a voluptuous, tortuous menace whose embrace is felt on the flesh as cast iron and without whom the Self is lost. Consequently, this reading, although a marked departure from an earnest re-articulation of Levinas's ethics, is not necessarily Neo-Levinasian, it is Masochean. For each foray from Levinas is taken boldly into the tumultuous pages of Masoch's flawed characters whilst maintaining the primacy of the relation to the Other which underlies Levinas's texts. It is a proud reading of subjectivity made within the synchronous texts of both Levinas and Sacher-Masoch.

Severin's existence, the embodiment of the Masochean plight, as with that of the Levinasian subject is that of an 'otherwise than Being' (Kantor 1999), his servitude emerges rapturously as an antagonist to an egoistic being. In the pain and suffering of servitude, the Masochean ontology, Severin is liberated from being. He suffers willingly, necessarily and revels in this despair desperately in the naively foolish hope that it may please, placate or even amuse his Other, Wanda, who looks on dispassionately as though the embodiment of Law itself. For Kantor, the parallels that run between the protagonist of Masoch's masterpiece and that of Levians's ethics are inseparable to a point of synchrony whereby, 'there is no other way to read Levinas than with Sacher-Masoch' (1999, p. 372). This dramatic parallel serves to humanise and develop the unfortunate ethical subject of Levinas, putting face (for lack of a more appropriate term), to their plight whilst also maintaining the reverence befitting of the Infinite in the Other. The ethical when spoken by Severin unearths the torturously asymmetrical legalistic reality, if not simply the madness of the subject's condition. Having discerned the madness which grounds the subject's being, through a cursory glance of Kantor's initial discussions, the text maintains an intention to not merely bathe in the reverence of this work but to also further expand and extend this foundational foray which warrants far greater attention. It is this intention which the following sections present. The immediately succeeding section offering a gentle extension and furthering of the subject's plight through the re-incorporation of Masoch's text, seeking to imbue the subject with yet more personality still, as Kantor's foundational discussions by necessity maintain an abstractness necessary when engaging overtly with Levinas's works. This literary grounded extension is then followed in the final section of the essay by an overt re-conceptualising of the relationship between the subject and exteriority, re-orienting the initial legalising of the ethical relation discussed presently of the Other as Law into a more broad, sensorial relation with Law as Exteriority: the Masochean articulation of a Levinasian Lawscape.

The Self as Severin: Extending the Masochean Subject

Where Levinas in cold abstraction asserts that the subject exists 'through and for the Other' (Kantor 1999, p. 114), our corporealised Severin offers the realised expression of this sentiment in his declaration: 'I love you more than myself, I am utterly devoted to you. In all seriousness you do what you wish with me, whatever your whims dictate' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 186).

It is here, in the spoken words of the Masochean archetype that life is given to the words of Levinas. In this outpour of overwhelming sentiment, Severin presents a Masochism which engages with Law on two distinct, torturous levels. In practical terms, the above declaration is the articulation of the contract which he signs, offering himself in servitude to his beloved, in this light it is the oral instantiation of the contract. More profoundly though, this declaration speaks to an ontological Law, the Law which Love has thrust upon him. Before it is manifest in the legal document, this Law is present, Severin exists as her doting servant long before this relation is formalised, he is obedient pre-consciously, 'receding the hearing of the order' (Levinas 2017, p. 135). This is the true law of the Masochist, and that of the Levinasian subject, not of contract but of uncompromising, sacrificially altruistic sentiment. Severin is bound by his very being as *for* Wanda from the moment he first succumbs to the wonders of alterity she embodies, it is the Other of Wanda which induces this other than being. Wanda/Other induces a state of subjugation for the subject, it is not words which compel them, but this Law of necessity, alterity and Otherness, a Law unseen yet experienced as an 'urgent call which I am powerless to resist' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 156). This powerlessness itself mirrors the ethical 'freedom' of Levinas's subject as they 'may not abandon the Other, but […] *can* do so' (Burggraeve 2006, pp. 640–641). Freedom means nothing to our subject who is bound by the Other as Law, the trivial fact that they *can* depart is meaningless when the harsh reality is that they *must* not leave, they *will* not leave. And consequently, it is here with this poor subject as/of Severin, that I develop Kantor's initial forays, hoping to explore this subject's plight in greater depth. Accordingly, this section details, fleetingly, a number of key aspects of the Masochean turn, which are expanded upon in the more broad conceptualisation of exteriority as Law in the final section. Working toward this ambition, the present discussion furthers Kantor's foundational analysis of identity within the Masochean turn by approaching this pivotal aspect of the relationship from a more explicit literary perspective. Building on both his and Levinas's writings, this details a relationship with the Other with profoundly damaging yet alluring metaphysical consequences brought to life in the irrational, infatigable struggles of Severin. Following and furthering this overt interplay with Kantor's reading alongside Levinas and Masoch, the section then moves to fleetingly outline further aspects of the relation with the Other which are yet to be fully explored within this tradition, namely the affirmation of the relation and the subsequent comments which may be inferred on the nature of the power dynamic that this alludes to. The relation to alterity, increasingly revealing itself at the mercy of much of the critiques which is found at the door of the infamous protagonists which corporealise it. A relation which consumes the Subject and lover, Severin, completely.

Moving beyond the potency of the compulsion felt toward the Other as Law, reading Levinas alongside Sacher-Masoch portrays the Levinasian subject in a number of sympathetic and corporal ways. Some of these invite fleeting, yet still profoundly personal insights, and others, as will be outlined in the succeeding section of the chapter, warrant a great deal more attention. An often overlooked aspect of the Subject's plight within ethical subjectivity is that of the forfeiture of their identity. When one's existence is both contingent upon and necessarily in

service to the Other, the notion of identity is evidently fraught and problematic. While the reward of affirmation, this gift of purpose and direction, is bestowed upon the subject limiting their being to that of servitude, in the extreme this is more than a merely physical sacrifice of it is more than merely, 'the bread from one's mouth', (Levinas 1999, p. 74), or one's pained perspiration and freely offered blood, but is most painfully a metaphysical surrendering of identity to Law. The benefaction of both *what* and *who* they are. This is not manifest as a reduction of the Self to the Same by the Other, an inversion of the cardinal sin of Levinasian metaphysics, as the subject maintains their irreducible faculties. Instead, it arises as the loss of the Self to their 'duty'. Prima facie this assessment is a non-event in accord with that outlined by Levinas, as the ethical duty is detailed as one which is 'imposed beyond the limits of being and its annihilation, beyond death' (Levinas 2006, p. 7). However, this faithful interpretation inspires no sympathy. Conversely, in embracing the Masochean turn we may adorn this abstract event with corpus. In this instance, it is not Severin's consignment to the Romantic which we shall reference, instead it is the fanatical demise of his identity and body to Law.

Throughout Masoch's *Venus*, Severin descends further and further, enthusiastically so, into the 'abyss' of his love, to the tragically comedic point of self awareness whence he notes that 'nothing can save me now' (1991, p. 169). This descent is marked poignantly throughout the text, building in severity as his Other punishes him and in so doing erodes his former egoistic identity, casting and sculpting his new facade. This takes place, as with Levinas's plight on both a profoundly metaphysical and mercilessly physical medium. The latter expressed in the increased severity of the floggings he willingly subjects himself to. Each strike and thrust of the whip inflicted upon him embodies the forthright exertion of Law. As Kantor puts it simplistically, 'the whip is the Law' (1999, p. 372). The pleasure of servitude undercut by each strike which serves to test the resolve of the servant, mercilessly condemning passivity. The crack of the whip against the flesh is heard as the ethical call; a summons to be for the Other which is inflicted until its intent is achieved, namely that the Other, Law, is all. This graphically elucidates the simultaneous expression of 'horror and joy' (Kantor 1998, p. 509), which the Subject feels when mesmerised by Law.

These pleasure laden exercises of resolve can be seen as simultaneously accompanied by a metaphysical assault on his person. Having articulated in words, body and by his signature the solemnity of his devotion to the Other, one must forcibly concede that more still is asked of our subject. The Other demands that they lose themselves in servitude. This is expressed plainly when Wanda declares to our subject, '[f]rom now on your name is no longer Severin, but Gregor' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 205). This declaration denotes the formal dismantling of the subject of egoism, and the subsequent formation of the ethical subject. The relationship between Severin and the Other incurs a heavy toll. Ethical subjectivity as servitude necessitates the foregoing of the ego, Severin. All that can remain is that which emerges after the exposure, a subject of subjugation, a subject of Law. Fittingly, this transformation is expressed by the change in title as the new subject 'Gregor', must be willing to endure and suffer in ways Severin could never have comprehended let alone endured. And Gregor will. This iteration of the subject is materially manifest

'through the other and for the other' (Levinas 1999, p. 114). There is no scope for interiority nor egoism, no space for the individual's preconceived notions of ethics nor politics. The noise that is the cacophony of wants, desires, hope and dreams which formulate the complex romantic personality of Severin, of the ethical subject, would merely linger inconveniently as obstacles to this singular mission. They must all be forgotten, purged until nothing remains but purpose, the desire for Other as Law. Severin himself articulates this movement concisely when in reference to his affection he states, '[w]orshipping you made me forget two thousand years of history' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 144). This is the affirmation of the Other as Law in action. The only 'reason', logic or science which is permitted to persist is that of the Other. All else must be forgotten so that Law can be held in ultimate revelry.

Through the relation with Law the subject is formally defined, made 'human'. By the grace of their Master, the subject is bestowed with not only purpose but a name, an identity befitting of their fatal compulsion. And yet, in this exchange which is an ascension to humanity in Levinasian terms, there is undeniably a loss, a loss of freedom, personality and identity. Severin is lost so that Gregor may take his stead. This is a necessary transition, for the relation with the Other to persevere. For as Severin, he is but a man, fallible and weak, an ungainly assemblage of flesh and lusts, doomed to inevitably fail to uphold his fealty before the Law. Though as Gregor, he is no longer an egoistic man. He transcends such a fickle form, he is a triumphantly ethical 'spirit' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 192). This itself presents a quandary which warrants reference for the Levinasian or, in this instance Masochean convert as it expresses the remorseless idealism of such ethics. Outside of the romantic fantasy this portrays a more tangible expression of both love and ethics as a suffering (Wolcher 2003) which is to be endured willingly, if not enthusiastically. The loss of egoism, is in many ways a loss of sanity, as one is overcome by the 'madness' of the relation. One cannot help but fleetingly consider if the salvation of the subject lies furtively in the egoistic maintenance of the Self, that if either were 'less virtuous [they] would be perfectly sane' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 188). Even this notion of sanity is a perfidious sanctuary, visible only to that absent hypothetical soul which is not enchanted by the Other. It offers only an insincere amnesty, invisible to those it would offer salvation. As to speak of reason beyond that which calls the subject to the Other, in both instances is to adopt a foreign tongue. Whilst those outside of the relation may look stoically on, aghast at their lascivious acts of idolatry as absurd, it is in the Other, the Law found therein, that our dear subject feasts on the 'reason' found regardless of the suffering it incurs. All that is conceivable and material is filtered chauvinistically through the lens of their 'fatal passion' (Prevost 2008, p. 43).

The asymmetry present within such movements of extreme passion is overtly apparent. Be it, that of the lover and their beloved, or that of the Self and their Other, in romance and ethics the asymmetrical imbalance of the relation is what demands the doting, diligent subservience of the subject. In both instances, it is the lofty 'height', of the Other which compels the sacrificial relation. Levinas's Other exhibits the divine grace of the 'Infinite'. They transcend all that is knowable, they are the very allure of foreignness, a presentation of difference which calls into question the being of the subject (Levinas 1969, p. 171; 194). In

the presence of such absolute alterity, notions of reciprocity are comical. Alterity is a gift to the subject, wresting them from their egoistic being. Similarly, for Severin, his Other embodies an unknowable alterity. Wanda is not merely *another* for Severin. Even to address her by this name which could be seen to brazenly denote a mutual recognition of parity is offensive. She is not 'Wanda', she *is* 'Isis', a 'goddess', 'Venus'. She *is* 'Divine'. And, in this recognition of untouchable, unknowable divinity there is the simultaneous concession as to the egoism of his former existence and the hope that by her grace he may aspire to something other than such being, to become that unattainable, inconceivable being worthy of her.

Surreptitiously, this Masochean relation of asymmetry belies an uncomfortable inconsistency found within the power dynamic therein. Echoing the recognition which underlines the Hegelian master–slave dialectic, the power dichotomy of the metaphysical relation when dissected on a corporal, personal level upsets the serenity of the asymmetrical relation. There is an unspoken need for each party of the relation to play their assigned role with evangelical conviction. The earnest masochism of Severin is not thrust upon him in his willingness to endure the violent flurries of passion exacted upon him, but it is his own doing. It is he who softly pleads she wields the whip through which he will realise the erotic punishment of Law. The relation of asymmetry which facilitates such a grotesque imbalance is the exercise of his power upon the Other of his being. Petrified by the uncertainty and unknowable mannerisms of his Other, his sordid relation is established not by love but instead by his pusillanimous desire to exert some superficial control over his fate. The true orientation of the relation is expressed plainly when Severin presses his wants upon his Other, '[y]ou may do as you will with me, only never send me away' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 182). This conveys the truth of the Masochean dynamic, that the power is never truly divested from the Subject, it is simply bestowed in the most arduous of terms upon the Other. The Other as Law, is the Desire of the Subject. In many ways this casts the other in a sympathetic light, as the Subject's reverence for the Other as Law, liberates and fascinates them. Read as such, the subject profits from and indulges in the titillating privilege of 'unfreedom': autonomy foregone in exchange for the foreign pleasure of an Otherwise than Being. Conversely, the Other is thrust unto a pedestal from which they can only descend. From on high, she may only fall.

Rising from these discussions of Levinas within Masoch, the requisite scope emerges to conceive of the Other as Law beyond the immediate proximity of the Face. To this end, within the remainder of this text, I present a spatio-linguistic reading of ethical subjectivity which is the most overt and explicit extension of the Masochean turn contained herein. Through further reference to Severin's plight as presented in Masoch's famed text, I contend that the Law of the Other is not merely found in the gaze of the Other, but is to be found in all exteriority, extending the scope and applications yet considered of the Masochean turn, beyond the abstract limits of Kantor's initial reading. Within this iteration of the Masochean turn within Levinas, Law is spoken to the subject in the cooling of the breeze, felt in the warmth of the sun, inscribed boldly in the cracks and

wrinkles of the ground. All exteriority abounds with reference to the Other. All is Law. The relation with the Other is of such profound severity that the subject engages not merely with a world of the Other, but through the Other. A world in which the Other is felt in all exteriority, and all exteriority is 'felt' as Law.

Exteriority as Law

The Masochean turn adopted, manifest most clearly in the presentation of the Other as Law, presents a deeply personal conception of the ethical discourse. Exploring the plight of the Subject as analogous to that of Severin, both bound fantastically by the Other as Law, offers a compelling re-telling of the ethical relation. The applications of this analogous reading of the relation however, extends far beyond the dramatic unfurling of the subject's identity and being before the Other. The ramifications rebound across the fields of their existence, impacting the subject profoundly beyond the immediacy of their ethical/romantic discourse. The 'presence' of the Other is not simply felt in their sublime gaze, but is internalised by the subject, taken with them, corrupting them. Ontologically re-directed, the subject always feels the Other as Law, there is no 'outside' of the relation for the subject. This variant of the Masochean turn I present, contends that within this reading of Levinas, the Other is always found, the foundation of reason, the purpose and vessel of language, the Other dominates their existence beyond the call of the ethical. The Other, through their bequeathments of reason and language, extend in their application beyond the mere servitude of the Other. For the subject, the Other is not merely the summons of Law, they embodied in this legalistic guise pervade and penetrate the subject's being. They are space, they are epistemology, they are language, they are the tools through which the subject engages all exteriority. The Other is the Law of the subject's being and as a consequence, all that the subject experiences, every mode of exteriority is the Other, exteriority is Law. Without these gifts of service, the world is lost to the subject as they are reduced to the simplistically egoistic pleasures of conatus. What the subject knows through such existential implements is accordingly framed by the relation with the Other—a suitably romantic notion. Consequently, the subject presents once more as distinctly Masochean, existing in a servitude beyond the Face, a servitude which is found in the world as it beckons and summons the return of the subject to the Other. This reading presents all entities and objects as united ominously in chorus, speaking the debt that is owed to the Other. In the world experienced through the Other, exteriority itself, in all its guises, is felt as Law. There is no *without*, the Other is always present, 'shown in its absence' (Kantor 1999, p. 501).

Foundationally, exteriority is encountered through the utilisation of language. For the Levinasian subject, language is founded in the aftermath of the face to face relation with the Other. The face of the Other brings forth the 'first signification, establishes signification itself in being' (Levinas 1969, p. 207). For the subject, language is then imbued with the alterity of the Other. All things the subject designates within language are accordingly designated to the Other. To speak itself is to open oneself up, expose oneself in naked vulnerability to 'make the world

common' (Levinas 1969, p. 76). The relation the subject maintains with the objects of its existence is limited by the Law of the Other. Enjoyment and possession may only be exercised with reference to the Other and the duty that is owed. One cannot speak of egoism and selfish wants and pleasures, as every expression uttered by the coarse, dry lips of the subject must be in servitude of the Other (Levinas 1969, p. 183). As Davy notes this is a necessary step for the ethical discourse as it 'forces' the subject to see the world beyond the sanctity of one's own vision (2007, p. 53). One must not be naive to the violence of their being, to which the world through the language of the Other demands penance.

Deriving language from the relation to the Other, Levinas can be seen to once again interweave the metaphysical relation into the logical, corporal existence of his subject. Doing so in a violently Masochean manner. Through language, the world beyond is 'thematized', by the presence of the Other. This act of thematizing under the language of the Other is often interpreted by theorists to portend to the 'reduction' of all nonhuman Others (Davy 2007, p. 54; 56). Such readings contend that that which is thematized, namely the nonhuman, is reduced to a mere 'possession', something which may be enjoyed, exchanged and discarded beyond the remits of the ethical or legal. This position is itself made apparent by Levinas when he writes of 'Things', in a rather curt manner: 'Things have no face; convertible, "realizable", they have a price. They represent money because they are of elemental nature, are wealth. Their rootedness, their accessibility to physics, and their signification as tools are thus confirmed' (Levinas 1969, p. 140). It is in excerpts of this nature that the accusation of Cartesian dualism laid against Levinas (Kendall-Morwick 2013, p. 101) is most apparent as it clearly distances the nonhuman from the ethical relation. However, to those of a Masochean disposition I consider this reading to be decidedly simplistic and reductive as it fails to articulate the weighty relationship the subject maintains with exteriority persisting in the absence of the Other.

For the Masochean subject, 'Things', are never rooted elementally, their physical properties are inconsequential. 'Things' are rooted, as the subject is, in servitude to the Other. To the Masochean reader of Levinas, 'All' that *is*, in the aftermath of the Face to Face relation, is by virtue of the Other. Everything is perceived by the subject through, 'the fanatical, burning eyes of a martyr' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 148). Blessed with meaning to the subject through language, 'Things' are not afforded the privilege nor ethical consideration of she who reveals a Face. This, though, does not absolve them of being privy to the relation, for they are the embodiment of it. They 'emanate' from the relation, constructing the material environment upon which this tragic affair is to be played out. They do not speak the Law of the Other, but they are inescapably legal instruments, vessels through which the Law is experienced, encountered and felt. Every instantiation of the nonhuman is an illusory reduction of the irreducible, a reference to she who rejects thematization. In so doing, each nonhuman articulation of exteriority speaks to the subject of the violence of its existence. Every which object or creature who may have incited enjoyment through possession or consumption instead presents an opportunity for service, an opportunity for sacrifice. Exteriority is accordingly not reduced by its

proximity to the relation but is raised through it. Thematized by the relation, exteriority acts upon the subject like 'music, like poetry' (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p. 236), compelling the subject to feel the presence of the Other, to feel she who is experienced as 'guilt' before Law. Accordingly, exteriority offers no reprieve, confronting the subject with the unsalvageable brutality of its being. In the world of the Other, Levinas's subject is drowned, submersed in exteriority speaking the burden of the Other. Every 'Thing', is a means of servitude, a tool to be wielded in the name of the Other. There is no opportunity for egoism, no pleasures of the Self, no Severin. *Only* Gregor, *only* servitude, *only* the Other, *only* Law. The world offers not respite, only rope. So that the subject may remind themselves of their subjugation, so they may *feel, suffer* and *celebrate* the asphyxiating affirmation of alterity beyond the presence of the Other, the insidious cradling of Law.

Patently, this 'world offered […] in the language of the Other' (Levinas 1969, p. 92), is not for the subject a utopia of romantic idealisation, it is a bleakly Masochean, Levinasian 'Lawscape' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013). Offered in language, draped in the summons of the Other, the world is experienced claustrophobically as the utterings of a debt, the haul of ethical normativity. Exteriority abounds with Law. The subject is exhaustedly inundated with the forthright accusations of the ethical injunction found carpeting the world it endures. The subject cannot escape the relation, Gregor cannot deny his love, for to do so would undermine his very being. They are charged with the unenviable condition of hostage, servant and victim to the Other's whims wherever they dare to stray. There is no solace to be found, no beyond within which the persecution of the Other as Law may be avoided, even for the most fleeting of moments. The dirty concrete which paves the tracks of the city, the dimly lit back rooms of sordid bars, the tranquil rivers which scythe through countryside, all their ignorant inhabitants cry, sing and scream in unsettling harmony of the Other's need for service. A need the subject can never placate, a need the subject *must* placate. In all exteriority, the Other is found as Law persecuting the subject's titillated being incessantly. For the subject, the Other has forever altered the atmosphere of their world. The air itself is heavy, warmed by the heat the Other's breath bequeaths, a breath the subject revels in. Through language, which simultaneously defines and accuses the subject, the Other as Law seeps into all the cracks and crevices of space, positioning the subject assertively within an erotic lawscape which exercises the ethical duty. Exteriority is thus adorned with a distinctly legal character. The Other as Law is felt in all space, found upon the facade of all beings, all that is, is the Other and the Legality by which the subject is bound to them. All is for *her* and by *her*. All *is* Law.

Language does not only serve to clothe alterity in the mask of the Other, presenting exteriority as Law, but in this expression dictates reason for the subject. Inundated by the burdensome swathes of alterity laid forth in language, the Subject is not permitted to speculate of a logic nor rationale which challenges the call of the martyr he finds beyond the confines of himself. This language of subjugation 'is reason' for our subject (Levinas 1969, p. 207). Commonality before alterity is merely the opportunity for sacrifice. The Other extends far beyond the reaches of the ethical, or the ontological but penetrates deep into the epistemological sanctity

of the Subject. All that is known is the Other as Law—Exteriority as Law. Reason, being, everything inevitably returns the subject to the Other. This, as Burggraeve succinctly defines it, is the 'mystery', of the subject's being, that its ill-fated destiny has been played out before them, and they are left, slack-jawed and penitent, standing 'irreversibly […] turned toward the Other', inescapably facing Law (2006, p. 648). Indeed, it is this very reason, the reason of the martyr, which is brazenly devoid of economic sensibility. The truth of Levinas's observation that '[m]an is an unreasonable animal' (1988, p. 172), is laid bare. His life, his actions, his being and his reasoning all are offered in worship to his Other. Our dear subject is no longer a man in every narcissistic or economic sense, he persists, painfully as 'a romantic spirit' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 192).

Explicating this position of Reason and Language within the bounds of the Masochean subject adorns the abstract with an uncomfortably human disposition. Our dear subject, formerly the egoistic Severin, now the constant Gregor, reaches an undesired point of utter fatigue. Having foregone himself to servitude and been rewarded in the exercise of the most ardent and treacherous emotional and physical punishment, the subject reaches a point of existential despair. A wounded, beaten babe, they are lost. To ensure their own existence they desire escape, but they cannot for this defies the direction of their being. Here, the Other is seen most lucidly by our diligent fellow, no longer protected by the lofty pedestal upon which they were once placed, they are seen in truth, as she who the subject feels an equal desire to 'abominate and adore' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 256) (is there a more appropriate response to Law?). The only escape, the only reprieve for the Subject lies in the false solace of death. And yet, theirs is a duty which is imposed 'beyond the limits of being and its annihilation, beyond death' (Levinas 2006, p. 7). It is this tragic contemplation, the culmination of the subject's relation with Law which Masoch articulates lucidly in his portrayal of Gregor's futile attempt to end his servitude and escape his relation to the Other. The subject is found fatigued and broken, allowing himself to slide into the 'yellow waves', of the Arno, longing to be saved from his 'sorry affair', with Law finds no liberation, only the call of the Other. Alone, cradled by the waves, it is in this moment that the Other is seen in the world, hovering above him, kissed by the sun. She smiles through exteriority and in this image, the subject once again is called back to his beloved. The river, the sun, the muddy waters all reaffirm the duty of the subject. The Law of the Other is to not only serve but to endure in servitude. The alleviation of pain found in escaping the ethical bind of Law is trivial when compared to that which is lost in abandoning the Other. In a world thematized by the Other, a world adorned with meaning and purpose by the Other, the question of departing such an existence seems cruel. Law chastises and mocks the subject for entertaining these notions: '"So you do not want to go?*", "I cannot"*' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 257, own emphasis). The subject must persist, stifled by Law.

Conclusion

Such adoptions and developments of Kantor's Masochean turn as I have articulated will inevitably invite critique from the ardently traditional reader of Levinas. Each step away from that which is steadfastly metaphysical in conception is easily presented as a movement away from doctrine. Such a contention should in no way deprive the allure of this voyage. Though, what is presented herein, is itself a reading of a patently Neo-Levinasian theory, and openly susceptible to critique. This criticism was not unfairly levelled at this reading for its divergence from its ancestral text, just as it does from its more immediate inspiration. For each reading is in itself a movement away from what precedes it. The merit of this approach, and that from which it draws so much inspiration, is the comprehension and engagement it invites. Levinas's theory, though fascinatingly compelling and ruthlessly uncompromising, is to many, presented in text which is 'too abstract' (Saldukaityte 2019), and often 'downright obtuse' (Manderson 2005, p. 295). Conversely, this grounding of the metaphysical within the physical, the literary personality which the Masochean turn affords invites a lucid understanding and engagement with the formerly 'mystical'. In particular with the novel experience of the Other as Law, which is the lynchpin of this thematic amalgamation.

Fantastically abstract and indulgently personal, the Masochean reading of exteriority as Law I have outlined embodies the paradoxical nature of Levinas's ethics. Conceived of in a literary fashion, the theory is most found at home in application within ecological discussions of Levinas's work. It is here that the question of the extension of the ethical beyond the Face of the Other has been most contentious as to successfully open the subject to greater alterity would exhibit substantive ethical ramifications, positioning the formerly humanistic subject as an ecological entity. One which appreciates the, 'complex network of relations with other beings, both human and more-than-human' (Calarco 2019, p. 77). Whilst the position presented does not express this intention, harbouring no desire to remedy the disproportionate esteem of the human figure, the reading of exteriority as Law does invite such discussions. Read from an ecological perspective, the subject's exposure to exteriority as Law could be presented as the human 'guilt', felt before the crumbling furnace of the anthropocene. The insatiable desire to remedy the violence of the human subject's act, so that the Other may endure. For while this reading maintains a distinctly human character, relishing in this to a tremendous degree, I willingly concede that how this ethical need is to be interpreted and acted upon itself remains unclear and open to interpretation, as seen in ecological readings of the Other mentioned earlier in the text.

Conversely, maintaining the primacy of the Other, as this reading does, necessitates the primacy of the 'Human'. As a result, this reading does not engage with the environmentally inclined question of 'who or what can be included in the face-to-face' (Boothroyd 2018, p. 774), as the only Other is the beloved Other of our Masochean perspective. However, this need not remove such a reading from discussion, as the maintenance of the Cartesian duality to many is still a necessity. The posthuman is '*not* post-power' (Braidotti 2016, p. 21), and what is made clear

in this theory above all is the potency and primacy of the ethical relation. The responsibility felt as legal impetus by the subject regardless of where it is to be found. An ethical theory predicated upon language and the interhuman relation will always maintain a power dynamic with the non-human which may be distasteful to the modern ethical palette, as it presents the human as 'outside' (Atterton 2018, p. 724) the natural order, this distance though is perhaps misread. The distinction of the human-nonhuman expresses not the lofty altitude of transcendent human ontology, but the depths of the insatiable pit of despair which is to be human, the burden felt by the human subject under Law. The human subject gazes upon the *conatus* with ideas of envy, the master of its own being, as they are cursed to live devoid of reason, devoid of egoism, as little more than a 'pitiful amateur', a 'fool', a 'miserable slave' (Sacher-Masoch 2006, p. 206), bound by Law.

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