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Thodoris Kokkaliaris

Spectres of Kant

Tracing the Fact of the Other within the Fact of Reason

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With a Foreword by Prof. Emilios Christodoulidis

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Foreword

This is an exceptional dissertation for which the author deserves thorough congratulations. Let me say straight away that in a career of over 30 years teaching at Universities in the UK and internationally, I have rarely come across work of such intelligence and imagination. It is an erudite work, of a rare critical ilk, highly ambitious and conceptually adventurous in attempting to bridge theoretical paradigms that are typically seen as unrelated, even unrelatable, by more traditional philosophical approaches.

We might begin from the title. The term 'spectres' denotes the author's synthetic ambition toward the Kantian project and carries the inflection of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*. The term 'spectres' marks a profound debt to, and a decisive departure from, Kantian deontology. It is borrowed from the deconstructive method, if method does not overstate it, and the reference to 'fact' names the near-impossible bridging that Kant attempts between the near-anarchic promise of freedom harboured in the First *Critique* and the factual 'anchor' that might have embedded it in the phenomenal world.

The way in which Mr Kokkaliaris approaches the aporia of grounding morality in Kant shows an enviable knowledge of Kantian philosophy. At the most general level and the more conventional characterisation, Kantian ethics is depicted as an evacuation of a field of moral content in favour of a morality identified by form, a retreat from prescriptive codes of action pertaining to specific fields and extant situations, in favour of a criterion of proper subjectivity and motive. For the author, this marks the high point of Kant's philosophical offer. The problem, in a nutshell, is how to realise theoretical freedom, with

its sublime promise and unconditionality, in the 'factum' of practical reason.

The analysis proceeds through a careful reading of the role that the principle of 'self-love' plays in moral reason, the question as to whether we can take it as key to the structuring of agency, and its causal dependency on empirical conditions beyond individual control. This dependency makes it inevitable that the agent is 'never free at the moment when she is summoned to determine her action', thus inviting a 'rupture in the machinery of time and natural necessity', which is incarnated in what Kant calls '*freedom*'. The response to the 'antinomy of reason' – 'that freedom is conceptually impossible within the sensible world' – is to insist on the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. The way that the author puts this is to contrast two 'standpoints': the phenomenal, where the actor finds herself heteronomously bound by laws of nature, and the noumenal, where the intelligible world is grounded only in reason. It is in the latter that a categorical imperative – which represents an action as objectively necessary of itself – might be formulated. The answer to the foundational question 'What should I do?' must yield to conceptual 'form'. The author puts it succinctly: "This transcendental standing, our standing as the unconditional bearers of freedom under the dome of reason, a standing sculpted by the responsibility that the summons of the moral law awakens in us, is precisely what Kant calls dignity: the incalculable status of human beings regarded as *persons*, that is, as subjects of practical reason, by which we exact respect from all other rational beings in the world'.

The next chapter takes issue with the Second *Critique*, and surveys the various criticisms made of it by Kantian scholars. More specifically, the question is over the 'residence in our consciousness of the factum rationis', what that 'facticity' of the consciousness of the moral law means, in order that noumenal morality and freedom might become embedded in practical reason's activity. The conceptual analysis at this point is sharp, and the author takes the reader along in the twists and turns – the 'aporia', the 'petitio principii' and the 'blind spot' – of his

engagement with Kant. He pushes the argument in the direction of the 'Event' as what – originating outside the noumenal – might still endow reason with its 'practicality', taking a Derridean route out of the aporia, which is more systematically developed in the following chapter.

It is commendable that the author engages directly with Kant's texts and not, as one would expect, through secondary literature. That is not to say that a more systematic engagement with his references to Schopenhauer or Korsgaard's *Sources of Normativity* would not have benefitted the analysis, because it would. But there is something admirable about the courage to take on the critique head-on in this way. Where secondary literature is relied on, it is to forward the argument, and this is done very well, as in the introduction of Stephen Darwall's 'second-person standpoint' into the discussion. Darwall's introduction of the second person, and ultimately his failure (as it is argued) to provide a 'reformation of Kantian theory' on the basis of leveraging 'intersubjectivity' on the Kantian concept of dignity, allows the author to contrast his own, more adventurous, deconstructive reading on the 'hinge' that Darwall has supplied in the discussion. Darwall's weakness is that he pares back intersubjectivity to what 'takes place between agents who are autoposited, sovereign, already embodying a relation to the moral law, whereas it should be precisely their exposure to one another leading to the formation of the rational principle.' It is this failure that allows the author to launch the project in the direction of an understanding of the second person perspective in the radical otherness of Levinas' ethics.

Now it is nearly always the case that work of such combinatory and synthetic ambition will attract some criticism, leave some connections unresolved, and require extra vigilance. One issue that might be usefully developed in further work is the wager, framed in a language of striving and unconditional, sacrificial, and always inadequate openness, that Levinas invites his readers to entertain, a wager that leaves the question of institutionalisation at sea. What is less convincing, in other words, is how the asymmetry between the 'saying' and the 'said', the asymmetry between the ethical (second-person standpoint)

and the institutional (the 'third'), might be thematised in a productive way, or inform a deconstructive reading. 'Saying' carries the Levinasian injunction and the limitless responsibility to the other; the 'said' introduces the 'third', and the limit to the other. There is such a profound disconnect between the second-person and third-person perspective in Levinas, as to raise the question of the juncture that supposedly keeps the institutional perspective 'alive' to the injunction placed upon it by the ethics. Derrida skirts around this endlessly, in *Rogues*, in the 'unconditionality of the incalculable', etc. This is not new – the radical antinomian ethical viewpoint has arguably nothing to offer the law – and it is not clear how any form of 'synchronisation' might inform a disruptive reading at this point, of the kind that deconstruction invites with all the talk of upsetting hierarchies, and of 'dangerous supplements'. I would be fascinated to see how the author might, in future work, thematise the juncture of the institutional, and the more aleatory features that fascinate him in Derrida's 'traces'.

It will have become manifest by now how much I value and admire this work. It is a Masters dissertation that has masterfully developed an original, and ambitious, argument where central Kantian concepts have been invigorated to reach their full critical philosophical potential.

Emilios Christodoulidis, Fellow of the British Academy
Chair of Jurisprudence, University of Glasgow
October 8, 2025

Acknowledgements

This thesis took a great deal of time and effort to write – I hope this labour is not apparent to the reader. I began working without a very clear idea of what I actually wanted to say and, when I found out, I lacked the strategy to say it. It was thus a huge relief to have the necessary intellectual space to experiment in the process of constructing my argument, to fail, and, ultimately, arrive at something that could be 'said'. For this space, I am deeply indebted to my first supervisor, Prof. Emilios Christodoulidis (University of Glasgow): for encouraging me to explore, for his sharp questions that drove my argument forward, his generous feedback – even if his own work might not be fully in line with my approach – and his critical comments, most of which guide my doctoral research to this day.

Frankfurt is a great place for legal theory research – this is no secret. Having Prof. Klaus Günther as my second supervisor (and current Ph.D. supervisor) has been a great privilege, and I cannot help but feel grateful for the time he took to review my work and his insightful remarks. The support of Prof. Lorenz Schulz and Andrés Santacoloma Santacoloma has also been invaluable: not only in organising such a multifaceted LL.M. curriculum, but, above all, in creating an environment of unconditional academic freedom, thanks to which I felt comfortable developing my line of argumentation.

Yet, I was only able to make the most of the academic freedom I was given in Frankfurt because of an antecedent *gift*. Prof. Vassilis Voutsakis (University of Athens) exposed me to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, allowing me to read – and, perhaps more importantly, 'be read' by – a philosopher whose prose struck a deep, personal chord I was not aware of. Even though, as Derrida contends, true gifts must

remain outside the sphere of economic acknowledgement, I would like to thank him – knowing that such thanks is radically asymmetrical to the gift I received.

Last but not least: borrowing Virginia Woolf's words, I would never be able to 'flow' without the 'rooted' support of my parents; and I would not be able to engage seriously with what I am doing without this touch of lightness that my brother is always sure to provide.

Frankfurt am Main, September 2025

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1. Introduction

'A Guest + A Host = A Ghost'
Marcel Duchamp[1]

1.1. Encountering the Ethical Facticity

The *Night of the Hunter*, based on the titular novel by Davis Grubb and directed by Charles Laughton, is arguably one of the finest examples of the film noir genre. It tells the story of Reverend Harry Powell (famously portrayed by Robert Mitchum – perhaps in the best moment of his film career), a charismatic serial killer travelling along the Ohio River in West Virginia during the Great Depression. After being imprisoned for driving a stolen car, he learns that his cellmate, Ben Harper, who is sentenced to die, has left $10,000 with his family. Upon being freed, Powell visits Harper's family. His plan, obviously, is to find the hidden money and steal it. His means of executing the plan? Gain their trust – by claiming that he helped Harper spiritually in his final moments – and seduce them. In a bucolic-gothic scenery, a blurry world haunted by the absence of God – America of the Great Depression – Reverend Powell appears before the townspeople with his towering figure and his baritone, quasi-crooning voice and addresses them from a position of height. Among desolate creatures, perplexed in their struggle to find a balance between Good and Evil, Powell, this well-rehearsed charlatan, seems to possess a unique, sovereign standing, potentially promising to endow his audience with the same.

1 This pun by Marcel Duchamp was printed on the wrappers of candies handed out by the artist at the opening of a Parisian show in 1953. Marcel Duchamp, *A Guest + A Host = A Ghost*, 1953.

Festooned across his fingers are the words 'LOVE' and 'HATE', mirroring the internal strife of his audience (maybe his own as well?). His body signifies the fundamental *aporia* in discerning between the two, his preaching reverberates, sketching a passage towards overcoming the aporia, promising, thus, the much-coveted standing:

> Ah, little lad, you're staring at my fingers. Would you like me to tell you the little story of right-hand/left-hand? The story of Good and Evil? H-A-T-E! It was with this left hand that old brother Cain struck the blow that laid his brother low. L-O-V-E! You see these fingers, dear hearts? These fingers has veins that run straight to the soul of man. The right hand, friends, the hand of love. Now watch, and I'll show you the story of life. These fingers, dear hearts, is always a-warring and a-tugging, one agin' t' other. Now watch 'em! Old brother left-hand, left-hand hate's a-fighting, and it looks like love's a goner. But wait a minute! Hot dog, love's a winning! Yessirree! It's love that won, and old left-hand hate is down for the count!

Powell narrates the story of Good and Evil, a story in which – in quasi-teleological fashion – Good prevails. By pointing to this horizon of Good's final domination, he intends to fill his addressees with false hopes, enchant them, turn their heads towards a putative messianic future that will heal their wounds, and disorientate them from their present: that's how he will get away with the money. At the same time, however, his presence and acting per se constitute a performative refutation of the above: the fight between Good and Evil takes place in the *here and now*, in a present characterised by a chaotic heterogeneity of (evil?) intentions and interests, a *noir* present of suffering, vulnerability, and bleakness. What the demonic, deeply disturbing presence of Reverend Powell teaches performatively is that overcoming suffering, sheltering vulnerability, and, eventually, opting for Good, require an active, dynamic assertion of our standing under the empire of the 'noir' sun. As contradictory as it may sound, Reverend Powell teaches us through a negative gesture that the synchronisation of our – often – contradictory claims and the ostracism of any kind of abusive attitude in the present – such as the one reproduced by Powell himself – demands of us an ethical vigilance, the etching of a personal ground on the basis of which ethical decision-making is possible.

Taking a step back from the *Night of the Hunter* and reflecting overall on the film noir genre, we will notice that some of its reigning stylistic conventions, such as the unsettling camera angles or the dramatic use of shadow and light, are there to serve an environment of ethical ambiguity and murkiness.[2] In the setting of this environment – that can be explained with reference to the political instability of the era in which the genre flourished, between 1940 and 1958 – we can further observe the frequent employment of a narrative trick which sets the plot into motion: it is past midnight, cold and dark, except for the faint light of the stars,[3] when a *stranger* – as in the case of Reverend Powell – bursts into the scene. His[4] presence is enigmatic, elusive, as if roaming in a ghostly interspace between presence and absence: less than present, for he cannot be immobilised into a shaped object of understanding or sclerotised into a status, for he is intact, untouchable by our consciousness, rather overflowing it. More than absent, for despite being intact, he is nonetheless touching, not to say obsessing: look at the eyes of Reverend Powell's audience upon his mysterious arrival, their bodies that nearly tremble, their souls that shiver. How shall we explain the cinematic employment of this *mysterium tremendum*, of the uninvited guest, who, through a *double bind* gesture, by knocking on the door of my dwelling (Heim), *questions* its stability with his incomprehensible (non-) status, while simultaneously reaffirming its foundations – for retroactively the noir setting seems to have been

2 For an informative study of the ethical background of many central film noir oeuvres, see Aeon J. Skoble, 'Moral Clarity and Practical Reason in Film Noir', in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, ed. Mark T. Conrad (The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 41–48.

3 No wonder this is precisely the way Shakespeare (a film noir ancestor?) sets the scene for the encounter between Hamlet and the ghost of his father in front of the platform. No wonder the setting has to be ghostly since the stranger intruding is nothing but a *ghost*. See William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet,* ed. Edward Dowden (Methuen and Co., 1899), Act I, Scene IV, 36.

4 Historically, this role was played by male actors; the masculine grammatical gender follows that convention. In the remainder of this study, the feminine pronoun will be employed when referring to concepts such as 'person', 'subject', 'self', and 'other', with the exception of quoted passages, where the masculine forms used by the respective authors are maintained.

constituted only to welcome the Event of his arrival? How shall we approach this quasi-ghostly presence, *unheimlich* and *heimlich, guest* to the setting he intrudes upon and *host* to the narrative flow he initiates?

Our interest here is not to delve deeply into the cinematic language that enables the development of the aforementioned visualisation. It is the symbolic need to employ the visualisation itself that concerns us, the deep existential chord that this noir narrative technique – the *fact* of the stranger's arrival within a setting of ethical ambiguity and bleakness – strikes. Some hints have already been made regarding the demonic performance of Harry Powell: his arrival performatively highlights the moral murkiness of his times and addresses a demand to distinguish between Good and Evil, a demand to form a principle of practical reasoning according to which the various heterogeneous needs and claims can be brought to some kind of equilibrium. Harry Powell, this mysterious, poisonous *guest*, becomes an unexpected *host*, welcoming the townspeople through his demand to a new state of being: the standing to shelter their vulnerability, what we may call *ethical subjectivity*. This is precisely the deep existential chord that this convention strikes: the emergence of subjectivity.

Simon Critchley, drawing inspiration from Dieter Henrich's analysis in 'The Concept of Moral Insight',[5] argues that ethical subjectivity is constructed on the basis of what he calls 'ethical experience': the experience of a *demand* to which the ego gives her *approval*.[6] The essential feature of ethical experience is that 'the subject of the demand – the moral self – affirms that demand, assents to finding it good, binds itself to that good and shapes its subjectivity in relation to that good'.[7] The approval of the demand, according to the aforementioned structure, is not an autonomous rational choice, for subjectivity is precisely the

5 Dieter Henrich, 'The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant's Doctrine of the Fact of Reason', trans. Manfred Kuehn, in *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Richard L. Velkley, trans. Jeffrey Edwards, Louis Hunt, Manfred Kuehn and Guenter Zoeller (Harvard University Press, 1994), 55–87.

6 Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (Verso, 2008), 14.

7 Ibid., 17.

artifact constructed by the approval. On the contrary, the demand seems to slip in like a thief into the ego, causing the first subjective shiver, and the subject that has been formulated by spiralling around this demand, retroactively approves it, acknowledging it as the axis of her subjective structure.[8] The ethical experience described is not just one aspect of life that can be simply placed alongside other aesthetic, epistemic, or political aspects of it; as Critchley highlights, it shall be considered as what founds the subject, organising it around certain values and commitments.[9]

1.2. The Question(s)

If subjectivity is formulated as a *response* to a demand that imposes itself upon the self, a demand that summons her to stand in the world and take her existence in her own hands, organising the multiplicity of the flows of desire pulsating within her, it is implied that the material of her formulation is *responsibility*. My place in the sun, my authority to exact (a minimum of) respect and address claims, my standing within the community, my dignity, my freedom, presuppose my subjection to the facticity of a demand that holds me responsible for compliance. Identifying our subjective material is of course a good first step towards trying to elaborate on what it means to be a subject, to relate to myself and to others, but it is only this: a first step. We need to know more about the nature of this demand summoning us; we need to shed light on it. Where does this demand come from, who is it that addresses it to me, endowing me with my subjective status? Most importantly: what does this otherness demand of me? *What should I do?*

8 As Critchley explains, the concept of experience does not necessarily signify 'a passive display of externally received images in the theatre of consciousness'. It does not consist in a sheer passivity but in an activity, 'the activity of the subject, even when that activity is the receptivity to the other's claim upon me – it is an active receptivity'. Ibid., 14.

9 Ibid., 20–21.

What should I do? The first signifier of our subjective language seems to be the question of responsibility, the first subjective shiver within the realm of time consists in an *aporia* that commits us to respond. 'What should I do?', this is according to Immanuel Kant the fundamental question of practical reason,[10] and it seems that our thread of thought cannot help but get entangled with his work. We are not surprised: as Jean-Luc Nancy holds, Kant's response to the question of responsibility, the *categorical imperative*, is *haunting* our thought as an 'inalienable obligation'. Ignoring it, thus, or setting it aside is impossible since 'the notion of absolute commandment, its urgent tone, and coercive gesture' are an inescapable landmark in our thinking.[11]

In one of his most inspiring writings, the essay 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment', Kant defines Enlightenment as 'the human being's emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity'. Immaturity is defined as the 'inability to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another' and it is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in a lack of intellect, but rather in a 'lack of resolve and courage' to use it 'without the direction of another'.[12] In the practical field, the transition from the darkness of receiving guidance from another to enlightened emancipation is expressed in the basic principle of Kantian ethics,[13] *autonomy*: the only maxims upon which I should act are the ones I *rationally* give myself. It is exactly by virtue of this capacity to be guided by the internal voice of reason – a capacity equal to that of free action – that I acquire my standing as a moral authority: as a source of legislation, in other words, which shall not just act as an automaton, passively surrendering to external demands (articulated, for

10 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998), A805/B833. References to passages of Kant's texts follow the Berlin Academy pagination of his works.

11 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Kategorein of Excess', trans. James Gilbert-Walsh and Simon Sparks, in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford University Press, 2003), 133–134.

12 Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. Pauline Kleingeld, trans. David L. Colclasure (Yale University Press, 2006), 8:35.

13 The terms ethics and morality are used interchangeably within the text.

instance, by the monarch, tradition, or even one's desires) that are not acknowledged as binding by one's own intellect.

For Kantian ethics, rationality is the principle of humanity – what Rawls lyrically calls 'the aristocracy of all'.[14] It constitutes the quality that allows – and obligates – human beings to leave aside all *matter* in their deliberation – that is, any empirical object of desire – and guide their will solely by the representation of the mere *form* of the law, which, in Kant's thought, is necessarily *universal*. Universalisation ensures that the norm upon which I act is legitimate to the extent that it can be freely acknowledged as valid by every rational agent. The imperative to universalise is *categorical*, insofar as the morality of an action is not conditioned on any external end; the action is represented by one's reason as objectively necessary of itself. In legislating autonomously – that is, guided solely by one's reason – I am, hence, making a law of universal validity, since such a law is structurally consistent with the will of every rational agent; autonomy therefore entails universality. Such is, in a nutshell, the argument for the categorical imperative.

In his second *Critique*, Kant famously claims that the moral law is given as an apodictically certain *fact of pure reason*, a fact which 'forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic a priori proposition that is not based on any intuition', either pure (such as the command of an exterior entity like God) or empirical (for instance, a feeling), and is thus *unconditional*.[15] We can again detect here Critchley's schema concerning the emergence of subjectivity: in practically deliberating, I encounter a fact that places an overwhelming demand upon me and in relation to which I shape myself as a subject.[16] Humanity in my face is vindicated only insofar as I reflect rationally, purify my will from any phenomenal objects of desire, and act in accordance with the fundamental formal law of pure practical reason. The road towards becoming

14 John Rawls, 'The Moral Psychology of the *Religion*, Book I', in *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Harvard University Press, 2000), 306. Cited in Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 32.

15 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reaso*n, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5:31.

16 See Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 37.

a subject in the Kantian doctrine is a road of (painful) *ascension*: an ascension from the phenomenal to the noumenal by subordinating one's inclinations to the demands of reason.

On Kant's account, in directing my will and action according to the moral law, I attain my much-coveted place in the sun; by taking a liberating distance from the noir heterogeneity of my personal interests, needs, and inclinations, I am no longer an automaton, a link in the causal chain of the phenomenal world that is passively determined by them. On the contrary, the fact of reason makes me aware of my freedom, of my ability to transcend the deterministic causal series and initiate it anew each time as the site where the unconditional law of freedom breathes – as a self-legislator. In the moral bleakness of the noir phenomenal world, I acquire an inalienable sovereignty, *dignity* – the authority to address claims that are in reflective equilibrium with the respective sovereignty of others. It is the enlightened sovereign self that constitutes the transcendental condition of the intersubjective terrain of ethics; it is the moral law within me that enables me to stand and rationally evaluate the demands of others that surround me.

This is a faint sketch of the emergence from the darkness of self-incurred immaturity to the enlightened field of practical reason, which demands that the subject actively stand in the ethical terrain by refusing to passively surrender to the force of any heteronomous summons. We cannot help but admire the majesty of the Kantian critical project and the unconditional duty that arises from it: keep questioning everything that enslaves the subject, keep unveiling every dogmatism or transcendental illusion that obscures her incalculability, stay vigilant against any kind of totalitarianism; everything can and ought to become an object of rational reflection, of *critique*.

Is this really the case though? Can everything become an object of critique? Can we also include within our critical scope the transcendental conditions that enable critique itself? Would this imply that the structures of reason are themselves reproducing a kind of totalitarianism that needs to be unveiled? If so, what would be the standpoint from

which we could expose them by conducting this *critique of the critique*? And what would urge us towards such a move?

Posing questions in such a scattered and anxious way does little to advance our inquiry. We do have, however, some insights on the basis of which our thread of thought can unfold: Jacques Derrida has, throughout his work, given prominence to the fact that the tradition of Western logocentrism has historically shaped its symbolic space through the construction of bipolar structures in which '… we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand'.[17] The aforementioned symptom can be emphatically identified within the Kantian architectonic: reason against experience, activity against passivity, self against other. In the hierarchies marking the Kantian corpus, Emmanuel Levinas detects the manifestation of what he calls 'imperialism of the Same': autonomy, the capacity to *actively* give oneself a *rational* law without reference to any external force, implies a sovereign subject who, through her reflective authority, encompasses any kind of *otherness* in the quasi-autopoietic machinery of reason within her, thereby sacrificing the heterogeneity of *experience* and the other person's alterity – reducing, hence, the field of morality, responsibility, and interpersonal connection to the relation with a mediating, neutralising law.[18]

If this suspicion is valid, then a *critique of the critique* – may we say an *autoimmune critique*? – is more than necessary. What would it look like? If the object of such critique is the putative tyranny of the Kantian enlightened hierarchies, what we would need to attempt is to set them out of joint; not by reversing the terms of the hierarchy – an intellectual move that would leave the very structure intact – but by creating passages between them: annihilating the distance that separates them, contaminating their purity, showing that, in *quasi-transcendental* fash-

17 Jacques Derrida, 'Positions: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta', in *Positions,* trans. Alan Bass (The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 41.

18 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 47–55.

ion, each pole of the hierarchy contains its opposite as a condition of its possibility.[19] This necessary contaminating presence of an element of otherness within an identity can be called *trace*,[20] and the process of unveiling it – what we awkwardly named *critique of the critique* – is what we often gesture towards with the term *deconstruction*.[21]

This thesis aspires to offer a deconstructive reading of Kantian logocentric deontology. Upon announcing our intellectual aims, a persistent question echoes within us: why are we urged to attempt a deconstruction of Kant? This question, in turn, can be approached from two different angles: first, the object of our deconstructive reading, namely Kantian practical reason; and second, deconstruction itself as the quasi-method by which we engage with Kant's text(s). Regarding the first angle, we have already hinted at what makes our engagement with Kant unavoidable: Kant's approach to responsibility, subjectivity – to the extent that the former comprises the material of the latter – and intersubjectivity – insofar as our intersubjective commitments are founded on the fact of reason, the voice of the moral law within us – is a landmark in our thinking, shaping our perception of who we are and how we interact. This observation leads us to examine the second angle: why read Kant *deconstructively*? Paradoxical as it may seem, it is the 'Kantian' duty to emancipate subjectivity 'from her self-incurred immaturity' that inspires the deconstructive orientation of our approach. Whereas Kant strove through his critical projects to show that to be a subject means to be more than just a passive link in the causal chain, our ambition is an *ultra-defence of subjectivity*: to

19 On the contaminating function of the 'quasi-transcendental' structure, see Geoffrey Bennington, Jacques Derrida, *Derrida*, ed. and trans. Apostolos Lampropoulos and Eytychis Pyrovolakis (Nisos, 2018), 242–243, 258.

20 Ibid., 115.

21 We would be very hesitant to give a firm definition of deconstruction or make an ontological statement of the form 'Deconstruction is x', for it is precisely the very ontological presuppositions of such statements that provide one of deconstruction's enduring objects. As Derrida contends, deconstruction 'takes place' wherever there 'is' something. See Jacques Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1–5.

designate, in other words, that to be a subject, to be responsible and to relate to others, consists in much more than merely encountering the voice of the moral law within one's breast.

If a text's destiny is to weave bonds – the term derives etymologically from the Latin verb 'texere', meaning 'to weave' – this text's goal is precisely to *trace* the bonds of the Kantian architectonic with the elements of Otherness it has persistently repressed, to pave the way for a ghostly return of the repressed Other, and pose those questions deemed crucial for liberating subjectivity from the shackles of logocentrism. Is it possible to conceive of morality and the ethical awakening of the self without a summons by a radically Other person? Shall we persist in the solid identity of a sovereign, autoposited subject, or can we trace within the sphere of the same an *always already* presence of the Other, which both locates and dislocates identity in terms of a double bind? If the self is indeed always already haunted by the fact of the Other's ghostly presence, how does this fact influence intersubjectivity and the legislation of the fundamental principles mediating the construction of the political community? These are the fundamental questions that we will address, mainly drawing inspiration from the ethical work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. Taking deconstruction as a gesture of respect towards its object – respect deriving from the Latin 'respicere', meaning 'to look back' or 'to regard', and thus to investigate what lies behind something's apparent intentions – our first step towards uncovering the unintentional possibilities within the Kantian moral system will be to reconstruct its fundamental tenets.

2. The Enlightened Architectonic of Practical Reason

'Quod petis, in te est, nec tu quaesiveris extra.'
Persius, Satirae[22]

2.1. Tracing the Origin of Morality

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant outlines the urgent challenge of his critical project in the practical field: in a world of moral ambiguity and bleakness, in a noir environment of personal and collective fluidity, moral philosophy needs to find a 'firm' standpoint, to construct a stable, objective position on which the self can determine her duties.[23] Defining the concept of *duty* as 'the necessity of an action from respect for law',[24] it follows that what is at stake is precisely the articulation of a law that can distinctly instruct our *will* – 'the capacity of rational beings to act in accordance with the representation of laws'[25] – towards determining our duties, escaping ambiguity,[26] and distinguishing between Good and Evil. Kant is adamant: 'if this law is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of our obligations, it must carry with it absolute necessity' by being valid for every rational being.[27]

Where shall we search for the source of this law, of this practical objective principle that can govern our 'subjective principle of volition' –

22 Cited in Karl Vorländer, *Immanuel Kant: Der Mann und das Werk*, *Vol. I* (Felix Meiner, 1992), 293.
23 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4:425–426.
24 Ibid., 4:400.
25 Ibid., 4:412.
26 Ibid., 4:405.
27 Ibid., 4:389.

our *maxim*[28] – in a modality of absolute practical necessity? If the law's aim is to subject the manifold of desires to a state of unity, the challenge Kant faces is to outline a common intersubjective ground on the basis of which a sound deliberative route can be sketched, a route capable of transcending the particularities of fragile human nature. Oddly enough, in pointing out that it is the particularities of fragile human nature that need to be brought to a state of reflective equilibrium, we have simultaneously established a commonality between the agents participating in the terrain of morality: their fragility, their vulnerability, their exposure to the stimuli of the *Lebenswelt*. Could this common ground provide the moral measure that the German philosopher is striving to identify? Could the object of transcendence provide the necessary means towards its self-transcendence?

Kant begins from a very humble perception of the human condition. As part of the sensible world, human beings are not self-sufficient since everyone depends on many things to live – or simply to survive – and, when those things are lacking, suffering increases: hence the constant ontological anxiety to procure the necessary things for one's self-preservation. The satisfaction of our needs and inclinations is a necessary object of our *desire* ('the being's faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations')[29] and, in fact, as Kant insists, pursuing this satisfaction and the *pleasure* it implies is the sole empirical object at which our desire can aim.[30] To avoid any confusion, this does not mean that the sensible self can only pursue the means of her, stricto sensu, self-preservation and well-being, without being inspired by feelings of altruism or sympathy for other beings: as social beings, we are physically and, more evidently, emotionally dependent on our interaction with others, so a certain degree of care and sympathy towards their suffering is natural. What is important to note is precisely that any attitudes of 'sympathetic sensibil-

28 Ibid., 4:401. See also *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:19.

29 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:9n. See also Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6:211.

30 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:21–22.

ity'[31] are an expression of our sensible, dependent nature, which, in this way, is the only source of our desire's objects, or – to put it in Kantian terms – of its 'matter'.[32]

Kant's humble perception of the human condition begins to take shape: since we depend on so many things to survive and live well, our inclinations constituting the matter of our desire are various and fragmented. The unity of our fragmented inclinations in one sum can be reflected in the idea of *happiness*.[33] Happiness is a necessary demand of our finite nature and 'an unavoidable determining ground of the faculty of desire'.[34] Admittedly, prima facie, it looks like a more than promising concept to serve as the much-coveted ground of moral legislation. If all human beings necessarily desire the satisfaction of their inclinations, and if the manifold flow of them can be united within the concept of happiness as a universal ideal of imagination,[35] then we seemingly have at our disposal an object of desire capable of providing us with a principle of practical necessity, that is, a principle universally applicable to all human beings: the principle of *self-love*. Can the principle of self-love constitute the practical law that will endow our faculty of desire with the necessary standing to transform into a *will*?[36] Can the pleasure that we derive from the maximisation of our well-being prove to be the ultimate determining ground of choice (Willkür)? In a nutshell: is it the *fact of self-love* that structures our agency?

Kant denies this possibility categorically: despite the fact that the concept of happiness necessarily underlies the practical relation between desire and its objects, 'it is such an indeterminate concept that, although every human being wishes to attain this, he can still

31 Ibid., 5:34.
32 Ibid., 5:21.
33 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:399. See also *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:124 and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:387.
34 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:25 and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:387.
35 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:418.
36 'The power of desire, insofar as it can be determined to act only by concepts, i.e., in conformity with the presentation of a purpose, would be the will'. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Hackett Publishing Company, 1987) 5:220.

never say determinately and consistently with himself what he really wishes and wills'.[37] The reason is that all the elements belonging to the concept of happiness – our fragmented inclinations and needs – are, without exception, empirical, while 'for the idea of happiness there is required an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in the present and in every future condition'.[38] Even for the most insightful – yet, still finite – being, it is impossible to determine for herself what she really wants. Kant's examples are more than vivid: if, for instance, somebody wills riches, it is impossible to predict whether this will actually make her happy, considering how much anxiety, envy, and intrigue this path might entail. In short, no one is capable of any principle by which to determine with complete certainty what would make her truly happy, because for this, 'omniscience would be required'.[39] One cannot therefore act on determinate principles for the sake of being happy, 'but only on empirical counsels … which experience teaches are most conducive to well-being on the average'.[40] In light of this, we cannot, strictly speaking, consider them imperatives, since they do not objectively present actions as practically necessary.

Determining universally our duties on the basis of self-love seems utterly insoluble, given that, as mentioned, happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting merely upon empirical grounds, incapable of determining an action by which the totality of a series of infinite results would be attained. The inadequacy of self-love to serve as an objective moral imperative becomes even more striking when we examine the heterogeneity of inclinations and interests not within the self, but among the members of the moral community. The variety of judgements regarding what each subject takes to promote her happiness would be infinite, so the principle can indeed give rules that are general, but not universal, 'that is, rules that on the average are most often correct but not rules that must hold always and necessarily'.[41]

37 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:418.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid. See also *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:26.
41 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:36.

Since this principle does not prescribe the same practical rules to all human beings, it lacks practical necessity; considering that practical necessity is a *sine qua non* for the law that Kant tries to identify as the firm standpoint of moral deliberation, it has to be dismissed.

This corollary places us in a practically problematic position. If happiness, as Kant insists, is a) the sole possible empirical object of human desire, and b) incapable of providing us with a law of absolute practical necessity, it seems that experience is not the proper terrain on which to look for such a law. Yet, our thrownness (Geworfenheit) in the sensible world is not something we can repudiate; since time is an a priori form of our sensible intuition, the causality of our desire's machinery unfolds within its wheel. Every object of my desire, which from a sensible perspective constitutes the cause of the representations that determine my action,[42] is itself constituted in time, necessarily conditioned by what has taken place in the past. Since, however, past time is not in my hands, every object I come to desire is determined by grounds beyond my control; that is, I am never free at the moment when I am summoned to determine my action.[43] Let's imagine a person whose main object of desire is wealth: the reason this object of desire has been constituted as such can be traced back to an endless series of conditions – her personal upbringing, the cultural environment and the values imposed on her, her sensible drives, etc. The existence of those conditions can in turn be traced back to an infinite regressive series of conditions, causally affecting simultaneously an endless progressive series of events. From a sensible perspective, the subject is just a link in the causal chain: she drags the ball and chain of a past that has been bequeathed to her, without her *consent*. The impossibility of consent in the sensible world is crucial: it means that the subject cannot take any distance from the series of sensuous representations imposed on her. The possibility of taking such a distance would imply that the subject is not solely a passive link in the flow of the causal chain, but has the opportunity to break free from it and initiate a causal chain on her

42 Ibid., 5:44.
43 Ibid., 5:94.

own. This elevation to the role of the initiating, *unconditioned* cause of a series, this gesture of spontaneity creating a rupture in the machinery of time and natural necessity, is what Kant calls *freedom*.

Our line of argumentation so far has led us to conclude that a) identifying a law of absolute necessity within the sensible world is not possible, and b) as sensible beings we cannot escape the causality of natural necessity and thus remain bound to the *heteronomy* of alien causes imposed on us and the moral ambiguity they entail (due to the heterogeneity of the objects of desire they produce). The assumption, however, that freedom is conceptually impossible within the sensible world *does not imply that it is conceptually impossible altogether*. On the contrary, it allows us to imagine another sphere in which freedom might be possible: a sphere where we could overcome the heteronomy of passively acting in response to sensible stimuli and the moral bleakness they create, a sphere where we could potentially identify the sound principle we are looking for.

Kant had already delineated this sphere in his first *Critique* with the introduction of the third antinomy of reason where he famously addresses the problem of freedom's possibility. Without being able to delve deeply into the architectonic of the third antinomy and its considerable intellectual stakes, we can nevertheless highlight certain key elements that will help us develop Kant's argument regarding morality. The third antinomy seeks to illustrate how all effects are linked to their causes and derive through synthesis a dynamic system of causal linkage. According to its thesis, 'causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived'. To explain these appearances, it is necessary to assume another causality as well: that of 'freedom'.[44] The antithesis claims that 'there is no freedom, but everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with the laws of nature'.[45] As we know, what Kant calls *antinomy* is a conflict of reason with itself, defined by its difference from *contradiction*, whose appearance it initially takes. The

44 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A444/B472.
45 Ibid., A445/B473.

two propositions initially seem to force reason into an impasse, since a contradiction is precisely the annulation of one judgment by the other: either freedom in the form of spontaneity exists or causality unfolds exclusively according to the deterministic mechanism of natural necessity. The contradiction could however be lifted if it could be shown that those two different modalities of causality take place simultaneously in two different spheres. This is precisely the way Kant resolves the antinomy and brings reason out of the impasse.

The fundamental tenet for understanding the Kantian resolution of the antinomy is the distinction between *appearances* and *things in themselves*. In Kant's words, if an object is represented to us as it appears to our senses – as a *phaenomenon* – we must assume that beyond its appearance there must also be *a thing in itself*.[46] Since things in themselves do not constitute objects of sensible intuition, we can assume for them a special kind of 'intelligible intuition';[47] they cannot be sensed and therefore cannot be understood through the use of the categories; they can only be *thought* – as *noumena*.

If appearances and things in themselves were the same, considering that all events in the sensible world are subject to the inviolable law of natural necessity under the dome of the a priori forms of intuition – time and space – the possibility of freedom could not be upheld in either appearances or things in themselves. If, however, as Kant notes, appearances are not equated with things in themselves, but viewed merely as representations connected to empirical laws, 'they must themselves have grounds that are not appearances'.[48] The fact that 'sensible intuition does not pertain to all things without distinction'[49] allows thought to make room for those grounds – namely, *things in themselves* –, a domain beyond the sphere of appearances and its causality.[50] By limiting 'the pretension of sensibility',[51] we can think of a

46 Ibid., A249.
47 Ibid., B307.
48 Ibid., A537/B565.
49 Ibid., A288/B344.
50 Ibid., A255/B310.
51 Ibid., A255/B311.

negative space beyond: a *noumenal cause* which, in not being subject to the mechanism of natural causality unfolding within the wheel of time, is potentially *unconditioned*. That is precisely what Kant suggests when he notes that 'such an intelligible cause will not be determined in its causality by appearances, even though its effects appear and so can be determined through other appearances'.[52] Whereas the causality of objects in the field of appearance – subject to the empirical laws of nature – is determined, the causality of this intelligible ground, this *thing in itself*, is not. This means that it is *potentially* capable of arising spontaneously, of halting an endless regress of causes by constituting the *unconditioned*, initiating condition.

The space opened by Kant in the first *Critique* is particularly important for his critical project in the practical domain. What we have tried to establish so far is that as sensible beings we are inescapably subject to the laws of natural necessity. We have also attempted to show that the principle guiding our sensible nature – namely, self-love – is inadequate to provide a law of practical necessity because of its contingency. The possibilities opened by Kant in the first *Critique*, however, allow us to think that as *things in themselves*, we might, alongside the laws of natural causality, be subject to a wholly different causality, untouched by the temporality of experience: *a causality of freedom*. If freedom can be loosely defined as *autonomy* – as giving oneself a law that transcends any alien causes – then the negative ground beyond phenomena, delineated in the first *Critique* as the potentially unconditioned cause of a series, is what Kant needs to articulate as an ontologically real law within his moral works. Since this law must not be conditioned on empirical facts in order to achieve the much-coveted practical necessity, the only adequate faculty for determining it is the one that allows us to enter this intelligible space outlined in the first *Critique* – the space of concepts for which 'no congruent object can be given in the senses',[53] the space of *ideas*: namely, the faculty of *reason*.

52 Ibid., A537/B565.
53 Ibid., A327/B383.

The moral law Kant tries to identify must be a law sculpted by the canons of rationality.

2.2. Articulating the Moral Law

Reason is the capacity that every human being finds in herself, by which she distinguishes herself from all other things, even from herself insofar as she is affected by objects of desire.[54] In view of this capacity, every human being has two standpoints from which she can regard herself. First, insofar as she belongs to the world of sense – as *homo phaenomenon* – she finds herself heteronomously bound by laws of nature. Second, insofar as she belongs to the intelligible world – as *homo noumenon* – she cognises laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical, but grounded merely in reason and its – conceptually possible – spontaneity. Considering that reason shows in ideas 'a spontaneity so pure that it thereby goes far beyond anything that sensibility can ever afford',[55] it is capable of providing us with the representation of an objective principle, an *imperative*, whose validity is not *hypothetical*, that is, it does not represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving an empirical – and therefore contingent – end. Reason, according to Kant, is the only faculty that can potentially produce an imperative that represents an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end: a *categorical imperative*.[56]

Insofar as the idea of a categorical imperative determines our duties independently of the heterogeneity of subjective desires, it constitutes the firm standpoint on the basis of which Kant seeks to develop his moral architectonic. Admittedly, it is hard to grasp how an empty law, an imperative denuded of any pre-conception of what is good or useful, can work as a sufficient compass for the fundamental question

54 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:452.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 4:414. See also *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:20.

of subjectivity: *What should I do?* In which way should I act if all possible objects of my desire have been excluded as a determining ground? Yet, this is precisely the point of the Copernican revolution Kant brings to the terrain of morality. If Enlightenment consists in man's emergence from her self-incurred immaturity, then to be an enlightened moral subject and actively stand in the world requires a release from the passivity of heteronomous desires – this sleepiness of noein. The path towards this liberation can be traced, according to Kant, within the mere concept of a categorical imperative, which may 'provide its formula containing the proposition which alone can be a categorical imperative'.[57] If the imperative contains the necessity that the subjective principle of my will provides a law of universal necessity, and if all matter has to be excluded from my will, then nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the *form* of the law as universal. There is, therefore, only a single categorical imperative to guide our action and this is: 'Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law'.[58]

Abandoning the matter of our volition as a groundwork of our duties does not mean that, as agents, we cease to be affected by the stimuli of the phenomenal world. As sensible beings, we are still subject to the laws of nature, meaning that the objects of our desire must be the causes of the representations that determine it. As intelligible beings, however, our will is to be the cause of these objects, 'so that its causality has its determining ground solely in the pure faculty of reason, which

57 Ibid., 4:420.

58 Ibid., 4:421. On the categorical imperative in the formula of universality, see also *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:30. Kant stresses that since the universality of law in accordance with which effects take place constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as regards its form) – that is, the existence of things insofar as it is determined in accordance with universal laws – the universal imperative of duty can be further articulated according to the following formula: 'Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature'. See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* 4:421 and *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:43.

can therefore also be called pure practical reason'.[59] This means that, whenever I am to make a morally crucial decision, I need to take a step back from the matter of my desire (and the causal flow it imposes on me) and reflect on whether it can provide a law of practical necessity, that is, a law that would be acknowledged by all rational beings in all similar cases. As Kant explains, 'the matter of the maxim can indeed remain, but it must not be the condition of the maxim since the maxim would then not be fit for a law'.[60] Hence, in the words of the German philosopher, 'the mere form of the law, which limits the matter, must be at the same time a ground for adding this matter to the will' – thus affording universality – 'but not for presupposing it'.[61]

Since the mere form of the law can be represented only by reason and is, therefore, not an object of the senses, it determines the will independently of all sensuous motives and the natural causality they impose. The property of the will, as a kind of causality, to be efficient independently of alien empirical causes determining it can be called *freedom*.[62] The aforementioned definition of freedom is just negative; there flows from it, however, a positive concept which, in Kant's words, is much richer and more fruitful: since the concept of causality necessarily entails a law according to which the causal mechanism unfolds, and considering that freedom is a property of the will that is not in accordance with natural laws, freedom cannot be lawless, 'but must instead be a causality in accordance with immutable laws but of a special kind'.[63] If, as analysed earlier, the independence from the matter of our desire (and its heteronomous summons) leaves our maxim with nothing to conform but the universal form of the law, then freedom in a positive sense is analytically reciprocal to the moral law as articulated through the concept of the categorical imperative.[64] The equivalence

59 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:44.
60 Ibid., 5:34.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 5:29. See also *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:446.
63 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:446.
64 Kant explains in the *Groundwork* that a mere analysis of either freedom or the moral law leads to the concept of the other, 'for a free will and a will under

between freedom and the moral law implies that our will can only be free when it is in all its actions a law to itself, when, in other words, 'it acts on no other maxim than that which can also have as object itself as a universal law': a will can be free when it is *autonomous*.[65]

Autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and duties defined in accordance with them. It is nothing other than what elevates a human being above her sensible nature, into an intelligible sphere accessible only to reason. Autonomy is nothing more than *personality*, that is, freedom and independence from the natural mechanism; insofar as we are a priori able to take a reflective distance from any heteronomous flows (regardless of whether they come from our desire, from God, from the monarch, etc.) and stand under the discipline of reason and its 'holy' imperative, we can transcend our vulnerable nature and constitute the initiating cause in the causal chain. This transcendental standing, our standing as the unconditional bearers of freedom under the dome of reason, a standing sculpted by the responsibility that the summons of the moral law awakens in us, is precisely what Kant calls *dignity*: the incalculable status of human beings regarded as *persons*, that is, as subjects of practical reason, by which we exact respect for ourselves from all other rational beings in the world.[66]

Dignity is the absolute moral worth of humanity, an inner value that we need not trace back to any external source such as God, natural, or cosmological balance. All we have to do is look *inside us*, to the majesty of reason residing in our breasts, to our capacity of being the author of the moral law. This capacity allows us to escape the heteronomy of

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moral laws are one and the same'. Ibid., 4:447. Similarly, in the second *Critique* he writes that 'freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other'. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:29. Allison has called this analytic identity of freedom and the moral law the 'Reciprocity Thesis'. See Henry E. Allison, 'The Reciprocity Thesis', in *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 201–213.

65 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:447. Accordingly, we have CI's formula of autonomy as articulated by Kant: 'So act that the will could regard itself as at the same time giving universal law through its maxim'. Ibid., 4:434.

66 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:435.

natural necessity and confers upon us, in Hohfeldian terms, an *immune* standing, correlative to the transcendental *disability*[67] – namely, lack of moral authority – of other rational beings to injure it; an immune standing that, in other words, provides us with an inviolable authority to address valid claims and demand compliance with them. And, if we closely look at the status of dignity – the unconditional core of our humanity – we will quickly find out that it is not a solipsistic existential ground, as Kant has often been accused of. If my dignity is grounded in my capacity to legislate according to the moral law, transcending, hence, the machinery of natural causality, the deliberative standpoint I occupy – that of the formal universality of the law – is a standpoint occupied by all human beings insofar as they are rational. In being autonomous, I necessarily respect the autonomy of all rational beings, since my legislating noumenal self is precisely mirrored in the rational nature of every human being. In being autonomous, I must never betray my humanity, that is, my rational nature, by treating it as a means towards achieving empirical, contingent ends (surrendering thus to heteronomy), and the same applies to the humanity of every agent, which must never be enslaved to a law that could not rationally stem from her own will. Based on the fact that all subjective material ends are relative and the only thing that has an absolute, unconditional worth is humanity (that is, our rational nature), being thus an end in itself that constitutes the limiting condition of all our subjective ends, Kant gives us the following – more intersubjective – formula of the CI: 'So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means'.[68]

If, as per the aforementioned articulation of the CI, all rational beings stand under the law that each of them is to treat herself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends

67 The Hohfeldian typology of the judicial correlation between immunity and disability has been employed at this point. See N. W. Hohfeld, 'Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning', *Yale Law Journal* 26, no. 8 (1917): 710, https://doi.org/10.2307/786270.

68 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:429.

in themselves, our thread of thought leads to a very fruitful concept, which probably constitutes the link between the Kantian moral and political philosophy: the *kingdom of ends*. Since laws determine ends in terms of their universal validity, if we abstract from the personal differences of rational beings as well as from all the content of their private ends, we shall be able, according to Kant, to think of 'a whole of all ends in systematic connection', that is, a whole both of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of her own that each may set herself.[69] This systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws, the *kingdom of ends*, does not correspond to any empirical reality; it constitutes a regulative ideal (as Kant employs the term in the first *Critique*). In the framework of the kingdom of ends, universal reason brings the claims of all rational agents into a state of reflective equilibrium, orchestrating them on the basis of the symmetrical a priori status that all agents share: their *dignity*, by which they can exact respect from one another, constructing therefore relations of *reciprocal* responsibility.[70] What enables human beings to participate in this systematic union is precisely their sovereign capacity to interact by adopting an impersonal deliberative standpoint from which they can rationally evaluate the reciprocal demands addressed to them; the standpoint of formal universality, the standpoint of their autonomy, that gives us the last formula of the CI: 'So act as if you were by your maxims at all times a lawgiving member of the universal kingdom of ends'.[71]

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69 Ibid., 4:433.

70 For a fruitful elaboration of the concept of the kingdom of ends and the reciprocity of relations within it, see Christine M. Korsgaard, 'Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Reciprocity and responsibility in personal relations', in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 188–221.

71 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:438. As Kant explains, the three fundamental formulas of the CI – that is, a) the formula of universality, b) the formula of humanity as an end in itself, and c) the formula of the kingdom of ends – are at bottom representations of the same law and each one of them unites the other two within itself. This reveals a progression, as through the categories of the *unity* of the form of the will (its universality), the *plurality* of the matter (of objects, i.e., of ends), and the *totality* of the system of these (the kingdom of ends). Ibid., 4:436–437.

At the beginning of the chapter, we highlighted the need to establish a firm standpoint on the basis of which we can soundly determine our duties as the main challenge of Kant's critical project in the practical domain. By managing to articulate the moral law in its different formulas, Kant admittedly provides us with a sound deliberative route, with a compass to distinguish between Good (Gut) and Evil (Böse) – as the only objects of practical reason, possible as effects of our freedom[72] – setting aside our empirical and, thus, contingent conceptions of our well-being (Wohl) and woe (Weh). In a noir environment of different and conflicting interests, in a bleak setting where discerning between Good and Evil (often, seemingly, fused into one another, as in the body of Reverend Powell), Kant paves an enlightened path which, admittedly, leads to the formulation of a *sovereign* subjectivity – able to transcend ambiguity and securely define her intersubjective duties.

2.3. Impact of the Moral Law

Our thread of analysis has so far traced the conceptual possibility that the subject finds within her a causality different from the one imposed by nature: the causality of freedom, which is analytically reciprocal to the imperative addressed by the moral law. An important point nevertheless still needs to be elucidated: in what way does the subject relate to the law, being affected by its causality? In other words: how does the moral law actually move the power of desire without the mediation of sensible motives?

Our sensible nature, as demonstrated earlier, cannot renounce its striving for happiness: we cannot help but desire the satisfaction of our inclinations, and the principle of self-love is, thus, an inevitable guide of our action. This is per se acceptable so long as the striving for our empirical ends takes place within the framework outlined by the imperative of the moral law. In fact, as Kant admits, the preservation of one's own happiness is a duty for, 'want of satisfaction with one's con-

72 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:57–58.

dition, under pressure from many anxieties and amid unsatisfied needs, could easily become a great temptation to transgression of duty'.[73] The problem, according to Kant, arises when the principle of self-love, despite its proven inadequacy to provide laws of absolute practical necessity, develops legislative aspirations; when, in other words, *self-love* turns into *self-conceit.*[74] If to be a subject means to act independently of the causality of nature (negative definition of freedom), that is, in accordance with the moral law (positive definition of freedom), then subjectivity, as the ego's relation to the law, presupposes that this relation is immanent, that the law does not simply exist outside the subject in a transcendent sphere, but actively affects it: the law's impact on the subject is called *respect* (Achtung).[75]

In respect Kant sees the unification of two moments, a negative and a positive one. These two moments acting together, *Achtung* as *attentio* and *reverentia*, correspond, according to Gabriela Basterra, to the two senses, negative and positive, he attributes to the notion of freedom: freedom *from* (our phenomenal nature) and freedom *to* (obey the moral law).[76] In a first negative sense, the moral law 'strikes down self-conceit'[77] and restricts the aspirations of self-love within the commitments stemming from the categorical obligation to universalise. This restrictive action brings about pain: it humbles and humiliates us.[78] It is precisely because of our finite, sensible nature that we may

73 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:399.

74 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:74.

75 Ibid., 5:73.

76 Gabriela Basterra, *The subject of Freedom: Kant, Levinas* (Fordham University Press, 2015), 94.

77 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73.

78 Ibid., 5:74. The humiliating effect of the moral law has been underlined by Béatrice Longuenesse when highlighting the proximity between the moral law and the Freudian superego. According to Longuenesse, for both Kant and Freud, 'the moral attitude has its primary manifestation in the feeling of guilt, which for Kant is the negative component in the feeling of respect for the moral law, and which for Freud is the experiential manifestation of the ego ideal/superego'. See Béatrice Longuenesse, 'Kant's "I" in "I ought to" and Freud's Superego', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 86, no. 1 (2012): 32, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8349.2012.00206.x.

feel respect for the law and its prevalence over our pathological inclinations; not only in the sense that the law has to prevail over something – otherwise we would be endowed with a holy will – but also because respect as a 'feeling' presupposes the very sensibility it restricts. This should not nevertheless lead us to believe that the sensation of respect is per se pathological; as Kant insists, 'the cause determining it lies in pure practical reason'.[79]

Beyond having the negative effect of restraining pathological motives, 'this law is still something in itself positive – namely the form of an intellectual causality, that is, of freedom'.[80] As the form of a causality through freedom, the moral law serves as the intellectual basis of a positive feeling that 'is cognized a priori' and 'the necessity of which we can have insight into'.[81] Unlike respect in the negative sense which affects sensibility, respect in the positive sense occurs within the limits of the noumenal self: the soul finds itself above its frail nature, and it is precisely the removal of this phenomenal hindrance that 'is esteemed equivalent to a positive furthering of its causality'[82] on the intellectual side.

Analysing the complex relation between the negative and the positive side of respect – *attentio* and *reverentia* – does not fall within the scope of our analysis.[83] What is important to emphasise, setting

79 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:75.

80 Ibid., 5:73.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 5:75.

83 In some passages (see the previous citation), Kant seems to imply a causal relation between *attentio* and *reverentia* in the sense that attentio, as a negative limitation, creates the space for reverentia, as a positive feeling. Close to this reading lies the perception of Dieter Henrich who claims that 'the positive factor in respect exists for feeling only mediately insofar as humiliated sensibility is the ground of a rational evaluation of worth'. See Dieter Henrich, 'Ethics of Autonomy', trans. Louis Hunt, in *The Unity of Reason*, 110. Basterra denies this, arguing that such a perception would reduce the Kantian doctrine to a theory of limited sensibility by interpreting the positive aspect of respect as a psychological reward for the elevation one experiences and, hence, as a sensible compensation. Instead, she maintains that those two 'moments' occur simultaneously within two heterogeneous standpoints located within subjectivity – the phenomenal and the noumenal

aside this more than interesting theoretical problem, is that Kant does not claim that respect is a feeling that functions as the incentive or motivating force behind the unfolding of practical reason, something that would create a disturbing paradox in his moral system in the sense that it would condition reason's activity on the pathology of sensibility. Respect is 'morality itself', and it is only from a subjective viewpoint that it is regarded as an incentive.[84] The immanent presence of the moral law within us and its impact – respect – are one and the same. This is precisely the reason behind Kant's insistence that if the moral law is going to serve as the groundwork towards *objectively* determining an action as practically necessary – as a *duty* – this determination must always take place on a *subjective* level from respect for the law. If, in other words, I just act *in conformity with my duty*, motivated, however, by my inclinations, then this action does not have any moral worth in itself and its sole value consists in its 'legality', in the fact that it is externally conformable.[85] Moral worth, on the contrary, 'must be placed solely in this: that the action takes place *from duty*, that is, for the sake of the law alone'.[86]

If respect is morality itself, regarded from a subjective point of view as an incentive, and if the only possible subject of morality is the human being as a rational being, Kant concludes that respect 'is always directed only to persons', never to non-rational things (such as animals).[87] What we respect in the other person and ourselves, according to Kant, is not our sensible vulnerability, our talents, or achievements. These traits can be objects of sympathy, of admiration, or appraisal, but never of respect: given that the aforementioned feelings are pathological, they cannot enter the field of morality. The source of respect when encountering another human being is her standing as an incarnation of the moral law; her capacity to direct her will autonomously, her dignity,

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respectively – safeguarding, hence, the non-sensible character of the intelligible sphere. See Basterra, *The Subject of Freedom*, 98–101.

84 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:76.

85 Ibid., 5:81

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., 5:76.

which consists in her ability to transcend her animality by standing as the initiating link in the causal chain, her authority to address valid claims stemming from her practical identity as the author of the moral law. Reason is the axis around which intersubjectivity spirals: it is the voice of the moral law within me and the relation to it through the feeling of respect it elicits – what we may call *transcendental subjectivity* – that enables my encounter with the other person who, despite our phenomenal differences, is an *alter ego*, given that we share the same transcendental status as ends in themselves. It is this status that allows us to orchestrate our coexistence by taming phenomenal heterogeneity and establishing a noumenal common ground characterised by symmetry and reciprocity.

2.4. Grounding the Moral Law

Duty, the practical necessity of an action from *respect* for the *law*. *Dignity,* the status of rational beings that enables them to exact respect from one another, a status stemming from their ability to transcend their animality and act *from duty*. *Respect*, the impact of the moral law on the subject, a sine qua non for the definition of our *duties* and the morality of our actions, a practical feeling that elevates our sensible nature to the noumenal height of *dignity*. *Autonomy*, the capacity of every rational being to determine actions of practical necessity, that is, *duties*, in accordance with a law of *universal* validity – and the feeling of *respect* this law elicits. The *moral law,* the imperative to act *autonomously,* that is, according to a maxim one can will to become a universal law. What we have attempted so far is a) to unfold the analytic threads between the aforementioned concepts, and b) to expose the texture of the moral architectonic these concepts weave, an architectonic located within the noumenal self. Our thought has been guided by the conceptual possibility opened by Kant in the first *Critique*: that as *things in themselves*, we *might* be subject to a causality different from the one imposed by natural necessity – a *causality of freedom*. If morality is analytically reciprocal to freedom, the possibility of the former has been

safeguarded by the possibility of the latter. The *conceptual possibility* that has been opened, however, is far from amounting to an *ontological reality*: what Kant has proved up to that point of our presentation is that if there is such a thing as morality, it must be incarnated in the voice of the categorical imperative. But he has not proved that morality actually exists. His moral architectonic and the concepts comprising it remain suspended, without an actual groundwork. How does Kant respond to this great challenge, a challenge that is crucial for the existence not only of practical but also of theoretical reason, since freedom constitutes 'the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason', both practical and theoretical?[88]

Kant makes various attempts throughout his work to ground the moral law. Whereas in his earlier works he tries to deduce morality from theoretical reason,[89] in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*, practical reason becomes the centre of his attention. These two works and the different argumentative itinerary Kant follows within them will constitute our point of focus in this part.

Kant ends the second section of the *Groundwork* ('Transition from popular moral philosophy to metaphysics of morals') by admitting that to show that morality – and with it the autonomy of the will – is not a 'chimerical idea' or a 'phantom' requires not merely an analytic but a synthetic use of pure practical reason.[90] He begins the third section ('Transition from metaphysics of morals to the critique of pure practical reason') with interrelated definitions of will as 'a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational' and negative freedom as 'that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it'.[91] Acknowledging the negative definition of freedom as inadequate for insight into its essence, he proceeds by giving us the positive definition: freedom, as a kind of causality independent of natural necessity, is not itself lawless, but guided by

88 Ibid., 5:3–4.
89 See Henrich, 'The Concept of Moral Insight', 74.
90 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:445.
91 Ibid., 4:446.

'immutable laws of a special kind'. Given now that freedom of the will – being independent of the mechanism of natural necessity – is nothing other than autonomy – namely, 'the will's property of being a law to itself' – he unveils another analytic equivalence, this time between positive freedom and the categorical imperative, to the extent 'that the proposition that the will is in all actions a law to itself indicates only the principle to act on no other maxim than that which can also have as object itself as a universal law'.[92]

The use of reason up to that point of Kant's argumentation is still analytic, with a circular set of definitions linking the will, (negative and positive) freedom, and the categorical imperative; they either stand or fall together. What actually allows us to break through the circle and ground morality is the idea that freedom must necessarily be presupposed as a property of the will of all rational deliberating beings – and this is exactly the central moment in Kant's argumentation:

> I say now: every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inescapably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy.[93]

Kant's strategy in the third section of the *Groundwork* is, in short, to a) establish the reciprocity thesis between autonomy and the bindingness of the moral law, and b) deduce the latter from the former to the extent that freedom is an inescapable condition of rational deliberation. His argumentative itinerary changes direction in the *Critique of Practical Reason,* where it is the moral law that becomes the gateway to the concept of freedom. He states in one of the most famous footnotes in the history of philosophy:

> …whereas freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For, had not the moral law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in *assuming* such a thing as freedom (even though it is not self-

92 Ibid., 4:447.
93 Ibid., 4:448.

> contradictory). But were there no freedom, the moral law would *not be encountered* at all in ourselves.[94]

The reversal in Kant's argumentative strategy is obvious: it is the moral law we encounter when practically deliberating – which reason presents as a determining ground outweighing sensible conditions – that leads to the concept of freedom and not the other way around.[95] Kant employs two examples to crystallise his point; in the first one, he urges us to think of someone subject to an irresistible inclination.[96] Would the person continue to surrender to his inclination if he were threatened with hanging on a gallows? Probably not. What this example reveals is that, however intense a desire may be, it can be disrupted and outweighed by a different one – potentially including the desire to act according to the representation of the moral law, namely, the rational will. This possibility is exactly what the second example touches on: now Kant speaks of someone whose prince demands 'on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext…' Perhaps he would not dare to assert whether he could 'overcome his love of life', as Kant admits. He must nevertheless 'admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.'[97]

Were the mechanism of natural causality the utmost horizon of one's existence, there would not even be a question about whether the person involved has a duty to refuse the prince's demands. But this is not the case: if the person involved is being honest with himself, he will encounter the voice of the moral law commanding him to treat the honourable man as an end in itself and not as a mere means towards his self-preservation. The echo of this voice is precisely what liberates

94 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:4n.
95 Ibid., 5:29–30.
96 Ibid., 5:30.
97 Ibid.

the hero of the example from his inclination towards his self-preservation; the noumenal self is what sets the phenomenal into question. Consciousness of the moral law, Kant claims, is an indisputable fact:

> … a fact of reason (ein Faktum der Vernunft), because one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason, for example, from consciousness of freedom (since this is not antecedently given to us) and because it instead forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic a priori proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical, although it would be analytic if the freedom of the will were presupposed.[98]

98 Ibid., 5:31.

3. The Blind Spot of the Fact and the Second Person

'Imagine closer the place where he lies. Within reason.
To its form and dimensions a clue is given by the voice afar.'
Samuel Beckett, Company[99]

3.1. Interpreting the Fact of Reason – Highlighting the Blind Spot

The 'fact of reason' doctrine constitutes Kant's final response to the problem of grounding morality and vindicating freedom. Its reception by the scholarly audience has generally been inversely proportional to the confidence with which the German philosopher purports to provide closure to the enterprise of practical reason and preclude any further debate on whether the moral law is a *high-flown fantasy*. If Kant's effort to justify morality in the *Groundwork* is almost unanimously conceived as obscure[100] and abandoned by Kant himself on the grounds that we cannot deduce morality from the non-moral route of transcendental freedom, the reversal attempted in the second *Critique* has sparked less than flattering comments: Paul Guyer sees the

99 Samuel Beckett, 'Company', in *Nowhow On* (John Calder, 1989), 25–26.

100 L.W. Beck for instance calls the deduction 'the most obscure part of Kant's ethical theory'. Lewis White Beck, 'The Fact of Reason: An Essay on Justification in Ethics', in *Studies in the Philosophy of Kant* (Bobbs–Merrill, 1965), 202. In similar fashion, Henry Allison has characterised it as 'one of the most enigmatic of the Kantian texts' noting that, despite the 'unanimity that the attempt fails, there is little agreement regarding the actual structure of the argument that Kant advances'. Henry E. Allison, 'The deduction in Groundwork III', in *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 214. Both of the above references are cited in Michael Kryluk, 'Gallow's Pole: Is Kant's Fact of Reason a Transcendental Argument?', *The Review of Metaphysics* 70, no. 4 (2017): 695, n. 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44806981.

strategy as relying on a good deal of 'foot-stamping',[101] Gerold Prauss did not hesitate to call it a philosophical 'act of desperation' (Verzweiflungstat),[102] whereas Allen Wood described it as a 'moralistic bluster' that makes Kant's position 'significantly weaker' than the argument advanced in the *Groundwork*.[103]

The aforementioned critical voices arise from different philosophical frameworks and seek to unveil different weak points of the Kantian argument, but begin from a common premise: that Kant indeed purports the factum theory to serve as a theory of justification, but fails to meet the standards he has set for himself. Such an interpretation of the Kantian intentions – and the corresponding centrality of the factum thesis within his argumentative line – is nevertheless not self-evident. Onora O'Neill and Paweł Łuków, for instance, de-emphasise its centrality or relocate its significance, interpreting it as offering an account of how practical reason – in the words of O'Neill – registers in 'ordinary lives and daily practice',[104] without it being part of the second *Critique's* main argument. On this view, Kant's argument does not deliver less than it promises, simply because it does not promise at all to provide a theory of justification. Łuków similarly holds that reading the fact of reason as a justification thesis would be equivalent to trying to find a quasi-metaphysical, arbitrary foundation – an Archimedean point on which Kant can rest his moral architectonic. Since this would constitute an unfriendly gesture towards Kant's critical enterprise to the extent

101 Paul Guyer, 'Naturalistic and Transcendental Moments in Kant's Moral Philosophy', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 50, no. 5 (2007): 462, https://doi.org/10.1080/00201740701612309. Cited in Pauline Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 61.

102 Gerold Prauss, *Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie* (Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1983), 67. Cited in Dieter Schönecker, 'Kant's Moral Intuitionism: The Fact of Reason and Moral Predispositions', *Kant Studies Online* 1 (2013): 5.

103 Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 135. Cited in Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', 61.

104 Onora O'Neill, 'Autonomy and the Fact of Reason in the *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft* (§§ 7–8: 30–41)', in Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft*, ed. Otfried Höffe, (Akademie Verlag, 2011), 71.

that 'Kant would not then be able to provide any critique of reason',[105] Łuków suggests that what Kant actually does is adopt a philosophical approach which we may call 'philosophy as defence'; if seeking a secure foundation for morality is beyond what we can actually achieve, the impossibility of giving prominence to the ground of its legitimacy shall not lead us to an abandonment of our acceptance of the moral law. What is crucial is that as ordinary people we can hear the voice of the moral law within us, that we have consciousness of it as authoritative and binding, regardless of how or whether it is or can be justified.[106] O'Neill's vivid supportive example sets the tone: 'to see what makes some episode of life or literature hilarious may require subtle analysis, but people constantly see jokes without any analysis.'[107]

The perception of the factum thesis as a passage to ordinary moral knowledge, instead of a justification theory, is undoubtedly intriguing and potentially elucidating. The problem lies in the fact that it explicitly misreads the letter of the Kantian text. In attempting to provide textual evidence for his argument, Łuków claims that the doctrine of the fact of reason is introduced for the first time as a Remark only after Kant – as he sees it – has shown how pure reason can be practical, i.e., how it can determine action independently of any empirical considerations.[108] This suggests that 'the doctrine of the fact of reason supplements rather than constitutes the main argument of the second *Critique*'.[109] This line of textual interpretation suffers from a fatal problem: as Pauline Kleingeld has accurately pointed out,[110] the fact of reason is actually introduced before the claim that pure reason can be practical,[111] and this latter claim is introduced as a 'Corollary' following the introduction of

105 Pawel Łuków, 'The Fact of Reason: Kant's Passage to Ordinary Moral Knowledge', *Kant-Studien* 84, no. 2 (1993): 208, n. 10, https://doi.org/10.1515/kant.1993.84.2.204.

106 Ibid., 221.

107 O'Neill, 'Autonomy and the Fact of Reason in the *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft*', 72.

108 See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:42.

109 Łuków, 'The Fact of Reason: Kant's Passage to Ordinary Moral Knowledge', 210.

110 Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', 61.

111 See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:31.

the fact of reason.[112] If the practicality of reason can be established only through the facticity of the moral law, then the latter cannot simply be seen as a complement to the former.

Besides, this approach by Łuków and O'Neill ignores an important passage in the 'Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason' that affirms Kant's intentions:

> But that pure reason, without the admixture of any empirical determining ground, is practical of itself alone: this one had to be able to show from the *most common practical use of reason,* by confirming the supreme practical principle as one that every human reason cognizes – a law completely a priori and independent of any sensible data – as the supreme law of its will. It was necessary first to establish and justify the purity of its origin *even in the judgement of this common reason* before science would take it in hand in order to make use of it, so to speak, as a fact that precedes all subtle reasoning about its possibility and all the consequences that may be drawn from it. But this circumstance can also be very well explained from what has just been said; it is because practical pure reason must necessarily begin from principles, which must therefore, as the first data, be put at the basis of all science and cannot first arise from it. But for this reason the justification of moral principles as principles of a pure reason could also be carried out very well and with sufficient certainty by a mere appeal to the judgement of common human understanding, because anything empirical that might slip into our maxims as a determining ground of the will *makes itself known* at once by the feeling of gratification or pain that necessarily attaches to it insofar as it arouses desire, whereas pure practical reason directly *opposes* taking this feeling into its principle as a condition.[113]

Here Kant speaks three times of the justification of the moral law: first, he insists that the practicality of pure reason, without the admixture of any empirical data, could be shown by confirming the moral law as a priori cognised. Then he stresses the necessity of establishing and justifying the purity of the CI's origin, and, finally, he refers to the justification of moral principles as principles of pure reason. In all three cases he appeals to the presence of the moral law within common reason or common human understanding; the intention behind the reference, however, is much weightier than the one attributed to Kant by Łuków and O'Neill. Perhaps the fact of reason is indeed, as Łuków

112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., 5:91–92.

claims, 'the link' which shows how 'actual finite rational beings have ground for trust in moral law',[114] but the invocation of its residence within the consciousness of ordinary people is intended, as per the aforementioned passage, a) to justify the purely rational origin of morality (there can be non-rational conceptions of morality as well), and b) to show that pure reason is practical of itself alone and that theoretical reason as well (what he calls 'subtle reasoning') is preceded by and grounded in this fact. From this perspective, we can think of the factum doctrine as the Archimedean point for a rational vindication of practical reason and so, given Kant's claim of the primacy of practical over theoretical reason, for his entire philosophy.[115]

Dispelling any doubts about the centrality of the factum thesis in the Kantian argument is of utmost importance. It is only through the justification of the moral law that the conceptual possibility of freedom becomes an ontological reality, and, if we recall Simon Critchley's schema as presented in our introduction, it is precisely the address of this fact that makes us aware of our freedom and endows us with our subjective status. The possibility of the Kantian architectonic is contingent upon the justification that the empty concept of the unconditional has an actual ontological weight. Hence, we need to be prepared: the most central passages of a philosopher's thought are necessarily the most difficult and resistant to interpretation – the fact of reason being no exception to this rule. Yet, they are also the passages most fertile for future philosophical developments.

The articulation is elusive, enigmatic, carrying the magnetic allure that every oxymoron entails*: a fact of reason.* In terms of philosophical

114 Łuków, 'The Fact of Reason: Kant's Passage to Ordinary Moral Knowledge', 216.

115 A counterargument can be formulated based on the passage where Kant claims that 'the moral law has no need of justifying grounds'. See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reaso*n, 5:47. Dieter Schönecker disputes this possibility by explaining that 'these grounds that the CI is said not to require should be understood as *deductive* grounds': the moral law cannot be deduced from another idea, it is firmly established of itself as a fact. According to Schönecker, this passage can be interpreted as an implicit self-critique by Kant of his earlier attempt to deduce the moral law from the idea of freedom in the *Groundwork*. See Schönecker, 'Kant's Moral Intuitionism', 8, n. 10.

precision and coherence with his critical endeavours, Kant really walks a tightrope here. Consciousness of the moral law may be called a fact, but it must be noted carefully that its facticity is not empirical. In what sense is it, therefore, a fact? Kant explains that it is a fact in the sense that one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason (such as freedom) and because it forces itself upon us as a synthetic a priori proposition. This *givenness* of the moral law shall not, however, lead us to think that it is based on any intuition, either pure or empirical: 'the moral law is the sole fact of pure reason[116] which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving'.[117] We, therefore, have two kinds of definition: a negative one, in the sense that it is not an empirical fact, nor based on any pure intuition, and a positive one: it is the sole fact of pure reason.

The positive definition, far more obscure and elusive than the negative one, is the one we will seek to shed light on. If the Kantian fact is neither an empirical one nor based on any pure intuition, how exactly are we to interpret it? The path we will follow towards elucidating its meaning consists in firstly exploring the linguistic use of the term 'factum', which, as the perfect participle of the Latin verb 'facere' (meaning 'to do' or 'to make'), can refer to both what was done ('the deed') and what was made ('the product' of the deed). As Kleingeld notes, the first meaning of 'Faktum' in Zedler's *Universallexikon* (1732–54) is 'That' (deed), followed by 'das geschehene Ding' (the thing that happened) and other ways of referring to the product of the deed.[118] By the end of the eighteenth century 'Faktum' was translated either as 'That' (deed) or 'Thatsache', a term that appeared after the second half

116 In some passages Kant speaks directly of the moral law as a fact of reason, instead of the consciousness of it. See, for instance, Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:47. Pauline Kleingeld claims that 'the designation of the law itself as a fact is best explained by pointing out that, insofar as the law is given to us, it is of course given in the form of our consciousness of it'. Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', 60.

117 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:31.

118 Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', 62–63, citing Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universallexikon* (Johann H. Zedler, 1732–54).

of the century and referred either to 'res facti'[119] – that 'which actually exists as a result of the activity of humans or nature' (according to Zedler's definition which predates the term 'Thatsache') – or 'factum' in its meaning as 'product'. We can actually find evidence of the interchangeability between 'Faktum' and 'Tatsache' in the second edition of the first *Critique*, in which Kant claims twice that our possession of synthetic a priori cognition is a fact, using the term 'Tatsache' in the first passage and 'Faktum' in the second.[120]

One might think that, in interpreting the fact of reason, we would need to follow one of the aforementioned semantic paths, either that of *deed* (Tat) or that of *matter of fact* (Tatsache). This would treat the two terms as contradictory, whereas they can be synthesised: something might have actual existence because it has been created. Such a synthesis constitutes the first (and most solid) way of interpreting the fact of reason. According to the approach proposed by Markus Willaschek, the 'Faktum' is both deed (Tat) and fact (Tat-sache) insofar as 'it is a fact solely as the outcome of an act of reason'.[121] Following Willaschek's insight, Kleingeld similarly reads the factum thesis as a consciousness that reason produces in rational agents; as she strikingly explains, 'the fact is then a fact of "reason" just as a decision can be "a decision of a king" or a painting, "a painting of Rembrandt"'.[122]

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119 Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', 63, citing Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, *16 vols*. (Hirzel, 1854–1960).

120 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B5 and B127–128. In the first passage, the pure use of our cognitive faculty is described as a *Tatsache*, whereas in the second as a *Faktum*. The reference to this important equation is due to Owen Ware, 'Rethinking Kant's Fact of Reason', *Philosopher's Imprint* 14, no. 32 (2014): 6, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0014.032.

121 Markus Willaschek, 'Die Tat der Vernunft: Zur Bedeutung der Kantischen These vom „Faktum der Vernunft"', in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant–Kongresses*, ed. Gerhard Funke, (Bouvier, 1991), 460. A similar approach has been adopted by David Sussman who also reads the fact as a deed of reason, even though his reading stands closer to Łuków's position. See David Sussman, 'From Deduction to Deed: Kant's Grounding of the Moral Law', *Kantian Review* 13, no. 1 (2008): 76–77, 81, n. 31, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415400001096.

122 Kleingeld, 'Moral Consciousness and the "fact of reason"', 65.

Admittedly, the perception of reason as actively producing consciousness of the moral law is the most consistent one, considering the evidence found in the Kantian text. We can indicatively highlight the passage where Kant mentions that the categorical imperative as a principle of morality is 'declared by reason'[123] or, most importantly, the famous passage at the beginning of the second *Critique's* chapter 'On the deduction of the Principles of Pure Practical Reason', in which Kant states that, by the fact, pure reason 'proves itself actually practical' or 'determines the will to deeds'.[124] Hence, Kant is consistent in justifying the validity of the moral law as a product of reason, in line with the endeavours of his critical project. Consistency is, nevertheless, not equivalent to convincingness; nor is it an unconditional philosophical virtue, especially if achieving it requires repressing those elements that do not fit with the coherence of the system.

In the first *Critique*, Kant opens the conceptual possibility of freedom and its analytic equivalent, morality, a possibility that could not be converted by theoretical reason into an ontological reality. What Kant claims in the second *Critique* through the factum thesis is that morality and freedom are not a mere possibility; moral consciousness is actual as a result of practical reason's activity. This way of grounding the ontological reality of morality seems insufficient to meet our expectations, especially given the central position that the fact of reason holds within Kant's critical enterprise, both practical and theoretical. In order to better grasp its insufficiency, let us briefly (if somewhat crudely) recapitulate the development of the Kantian argument so far: in the first moment of his argument, Kant proves that empirical reason, with its supposedly inescapable principle of self-love, constitutes a terrain inadequate to provide us with a law of absolute practical necessity. In the second moment, he shows that if every sensible object of our desire is ostracised as a ground of legislation, all that remains is the universal form of the law, which, as an object of non-sensible intuition, can only be represented by the faculty of reason; only such an imperative can

123 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:32.
124 Ibid., 5:42.

determine the will categorically. So far, we still find ourselves within the plane etched by the first *Critique*: if there is such a law, it originates in reason; its existence, therefore, remains in suspense. In the third and final moment, Kant confirms its ontological reality by claiming that the (consciousness of the) moral law is indeed actual as a fact of reason. We can see that the transition from the second to the third moment of Kant's argumentation is a bit abrupt and not entirely convincing, since the latter simply begs the question that looms over the former. If the moral law's binding character remains in question throughout the second moment, Kant's justification in the third verifies its bindingness as a fact (in the sense of *deed/product*) of reason, whereas reason's activity in producing it is left unaddressed by the text: it is an undeniable fact (in the sense of a *Tatsache*).[125] This is precisely the moment where the final curtain falls for the Kantian argument, without any further explanation.

Kant's *petitio principii* – his justification of the moral law as a fact of reason, whereas this is precisely what he ought to be proving,[126] how reason is actually practical in producing this principle – brings us back to the analysis of the factum thesis posed by Łuków and O'Neill, according to which Kant does not intend and maybe cannot ground the authority of the moral law, but this shall not stop us from accepting its bindingness: the so-called '*philosophy as defence*' approach. This approach indeed provides some important insights regarding the path Kant follows; it is no wonder, for instance, that Kant articulates in the second *Critique* the categorical imperative in the formula of universality[127] and grounds it as a fact of reason[128] only after he has tried to show through the gallows example that the moral law lies within us, humiliating our inclinations – even our self-preservation instinct – through the feeling of respect. This might be the path that Kant actually follows, but it is neither the one he should nor the one he intends to:

125 Ibid., 5:32.
126 As Kant emphasises in the 'Preface' of the second *Critique*, this work 'has merely to show *that there is pure practical reason*'. Ibid., 5:3.
127 Ibid., 5:30.
128 Ibid., 5:31.

the fact that the hero of the example has a voice within him that tells him not to lie against the honourable man, even if such an omission might cause his own execution, does not prove that the voice echoing in his ears is that of a rational principle. It might well be an internalised code of honour, the voice of God, or even a powerful death drive pulsating within him (to which, for instance, Žižek attributes the sacrifice of Antigone).[129] An invocation of ordinary moral consciousness is not sufficient, and this is what Kant explicitly recognises by repeating, as we pointed out earlier, that he needs to justify moral principles as originating in reason. The truth is that he just does not succeed in doing so, failing to tell us anything substantial about why reason even bothers to unfold its practicality, how it does so, or what the origin of its inspiration is.

The last point, reason's origin of inspiration, is actually one that Kant addresses in the second *Critique*. In various passages, Kant affirms that reason receives no inspiration in order to produce the moral law; it is practical of itself alone.[130] This is Kant's way of safeguarding his critical project from the danger of presupposing as a groundwork of reason's activity either sensible motives or any mystical intuition, such as God's will,[131] something that would imply a bastardisation of morality's rational origin and, hence, a heteronomy of motives. This is a pretty straightforward and firm response that intends to settle reason's self-sufficiency conclusively. At the same time, however, Kant cannot explain how reason's self-sufficiency arises: in his chapter 'On the Deduction of the Principles of Pure Practical Reason', when arguing about the vanity of seeking to deduce the idea of the moral law, vindicating simultaneously its self-establishment as a fact of reason, Kant admits that 'all human insight is at an end as soon as we have arrived at basic powers or basic faculties for there is nothing through which their possibility can be conceived, and yet it may not be invented

129 Slavoj Žižek, *Antigone* (Bloomsbury, 2016), xv.
130 See indicatively *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:21, 5:31, 5:42.
131 Ibid., 5:70–71.

and assumed at one's discretion'.[132] Similarly, in one of the concluding chapters of the *Groundwork* ('On the Extreme Boundary of all Practical Philosophy'), the German philosopher emphasises that it is beyond our capacities to explain how pure reason can be practical.[133] If reason took it upon itself to attempt such an explanation and justify convincingly its activity in producing moral obligation, it would 'overstep all its bounds'.[134] The categorical imperative, as he adds in the 'Concluding Remark', remains 'incomprehensible' (unbegreiflich), and this is 'all that can fairly be required of a philosophy that strives in its principles to the very boundary of human reason.'[135]

For Kant, the fact of reason is found at the limit of human insight, the point, to borrow Wittgenstein's metaphor, 'at which the spade hits bedrock and turns back on itself'.[136] This limit delineates the space in which we can think of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and what we owe to each other, creating a sense of *logocentric* conceptual closure. After the limit has been drawn, however, one not only sees the delimited area, but also guesses an exterior *beyond*, lying in the interspace between presence and absence. How shall we approach this *beyond*? Beyond that lies the unthinkable, what cannot be thematised or captured in the form of ideas, what remains transcendent to noesis and understanding. If, however, as we have been trying to demonstrate, Kant fails to convincingly show how morality is born as a product of pure reason's activity, if the autoposited rational subjectivity within his oeuvre remains in suspense, if the facticity of the fact remains in question, would it be vain to betray his spirit, make the salto mortale to the unthinkable, and seek inspiration for practical reason by 'a voice afar' – as Samuel Beckett's introductory phrase wonderfully encapsulates?

132 Ibid., 5:46–47.
133 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:461.
134 Ibid., 4:458–459.
135 Ibid., 4:463. The incomprehensible character of freedom is also highlighted in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:7.
136 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 91. Cited in Kryluk, 'Gallow's Pole: Is Kant's Fact of Reason a Transcendental Argument?', 723.

Would it be mad to explore this lieu of non-philosophy, to point to that which philosophy is unable to say, and question the boundary of logocentrism from a *spectral* point of exteriority? This is undoubtedly an attempt Kant would not appreciate, probably perceiving it as a symptom of mysticism of practical reason which 'puts under the application of moral concepts real but not sensible intuitions and strays into the transcendent'.[137] Yet, this is a route Kant has flirted with (if not succumbed to), according to some of his interpreters.

Our attempt to reconstruct Kant's argumentation regarding the justification of morality has focused so far on interpreting moral consciousness as actively produced by reason, an interpretation that seems to be the most plausible one based on the textual evidence provided. There are, however, certain passages in the second *Critique* that challenge its dominance. In his chapter 'On the Deduction of the Principles of Pure Practical Reason', after Kant has claimed that reason proves itself practical by the fact, i.e., by the creation of the moral law, he seems unexpectedly to reverse things: some paragraphs later, he claims that it is the moral law that 'provides a fact absolutely inexplicable from any data of the sensible world.'[138] Here the moral law serves as the subject providing us with a state of affairs – a *fact* – and it is obvious that the term 'fact' cannot be translated here as product or deed, but as something that has actual existence, a matter of fact, a *Tatsache*. Even though we could claim that the moral law that provides ('gibt an die Hand') us with this *res facti* is per se an artifact of reason, its position in the aforementioned passage as the subject that brings about the factuality of morality is hardly compatible with the assumption of a background presence of reason as the originary power of its praxis – and, in any case, such a reduction is not self-evident given the semantic ambivalence. Our suspicions are further strengthened by evidence found later in the same text, particularly in the chapter 'Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason', where Kant writes that 'this principle (the moral law) has long been present in the reason of

137 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:70–71.
138 Ibid, 5:43.

all human beings and incorporated in their being.'[139] Here the moral law seems to reside in the heart of reason, being embodied in the core of our subjectivity as a cryptic alterity within our identity, as an alien element which does not itself originate in the activity of our rational faculty, but is invaginated in it. How are we to approach these two passages, considering that they sketch an image of the moral law as a *factum brutum* that impinges on reason from the outside and the latter has to digest?

If we take the aforementioned passages seriously, we will conclude that Kant starts from a quasi-intuitionist claim to moral insight, employing the fact as an *Event*, an excessive imperative imprinted in the heart of reason which, as a condition, enables the possibility of its legislative activity. A similar perception of the moral law is taken up and developed by Jean-Luc Nancy in his noteworthy study on the categorical imperative, 'The Kategorein of Excess'. According to Nancy, the imperative 'befalls reason from the outside' as 'the practical mode of an a priori gift' that 'exceeds absolutely every self-positing act of reason' and endows it with its practicality: reason is able to actively unfold as 'affected' only because it has been enjoined to do so by this quasi-intuitionist principle.[140] The fact of reason (or may we say fact *for* reason?) constitutes a 'factuality heterogeneous to and incommensurable with reason',[141] in the heart of which it nevertheless dwells. Under this reading, the fact of reason starts to look a lot like the ghostly presence of the stranger entering the noir setting in our introduction: residing at the innermost level of our existence, our *Heim*, the moral law is at once deeply proximal (heimlich) and disturbingly peculiar (unheimlich), an incomprehensible, untameable alterity within us: a *ghost*, an excessive alterity enjoining reason to unfold as practical.

We have strong reasons to believe that this is not the meaning that Kant wanted to give to the factum thesis; constructing an interpretive

139 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:105.

140 Nancy, 'The Kategorein of Excess', 142–145. As Nancy highlights, the factum rationis is not an intellectual intuition, rather it occupies the place of the a priori forms of intuition, being 'the space-time of pure practical reason'. Ibid., 144.

141 Ibid., 145.

line on two passages, especially when those appear so contrary to the letter and spirit of his intentions, is not a philosophically responsible attitude. On the other hand, it is Kant's failure to show how reason can really be practical in producing the moral law that has led many philosophers to treat the fact as an intuition given to reason and, hence, as a betrayal of his austere critical philosophy. Karl Ameriks, for instance, holds the view that only 'some technical peculiarities' prevent us from labelling Kant's position in the second *Critique* as 'fundamentally intuitionistic'.[142] Schopenhauer sees the categorical imperative as a 'hyperphysical fact',[143] whereas Hegel characterises it as a 'revelation given to reason'.[144] The criticism that Kant has received for the aforementioned perception of his factum thesis has been vitriolic. Ameriks, following Schopenhauer who characterised the fact as a 'Delphic temple in the soul' that opened the door to 'philosophasters and fancy-mongers',[145] perceives it as a gateway to the 'mystical excesses' of Kant's idealist successors[146] and, therefore, as an encouragement to a kind of dogmatic metaphysics; Hegel famously described it as the 'last undigested lump in our stomach'.[147] If this quasi-intuitionist interpretation of the fact is correct, then, without a doubt, Kant's attempt to provide a groundwork for morality ultimately fails. But Kant's failure is not exactly the point we need to emphasise.

The point is that the factum thesis, whether we interpret it as a fact *of* reason (a product of reason's activity) or a fact *for* reason (an Event befalling reason from the outside), constitutes what Derrida would call

142 Karl Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 218–219. Cited in Ware, 'Rethinking Kant's Fact of Reason', 1, n. 1.

143 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, trans. Arthur Brodrick Bullock (S. Sonnenschein, 1903), 68–69.

144 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Vol. 3*, ed. and trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (The Humanities Press, 1974), 461. The passages of Schopenhauer and Hegel are cited in Henrich, 'The Concept of Moral Insight', 69.

145 Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, 68–69.

146 Karl Ameriks, 'Kant's Deduction of Freedom and Morality', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1981): 72, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/hph.2008.0501.

147 Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 461.

a 'blind spot'[148] for the Kantian text: a term that Kant employs, but whose logic is *veiled* to him. Whereas Kant might think he has found in the fact the *philosopher's stone* that will enable him to produce a closure to his critical enterprise, grounding morality and freedom within the space of reason, the fact itself is what proves impossible to be pacified within reason's economy, resisting closure, exceeding the orbit of reason's conceptual totality, constituting an alterity that runs counter to the text's intended meaning.[149] If we interpret it as a product of reason's activity, it demands of us a position of exteriority, one that inspires reason to unfold as practical. If we interpret it as an Event, it occupies the aforementioned position of exteriority. In both cases, reason is decentred by the *unthought*: not simply by what has not been thought, but by a radical Otherness which cannot be domesticated, which – with a single gesture – injures and inspires reason's activity, without being sclerotised as an object of its formulating glance, i.e., constituted as an idea: this is why it is called a blind spot. This scar of alterity breathing within the Kantian text is not something we can ignore or renounce; it forces itself upon us as a categorical duty to vindicate morality and subjectivity beyond logocentrism. Our deconstructive 'Yes' to this injunction, a 'Yes' passively uttered to the unnameable calling us, motivates the challenge undertaken in this text: to re-interpret the fact, to unveil the repressed, cryptic secret that lies within it. This impossible challenge – for genuine secrets can never be betrayed – is the one we will undertake from this point on.

148 On the concept of 'supplement' as a blind spot in Rousseau's conceptual apparatus, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 163.

149 The veiled logic of the fact as a blind spot might provide a response to Willaschek's question, prompting us towards an orthodox reading of the factum thesis, even if such a reading is intrinsically destabilised: 'If Kant meant only a fact for reason, why didn't he say it clearly?' Willaschek, 'Die Tat der Vernunft', 459.

3.2. The Primacy of the Self as a Kantian Symptom

In the last subchapter we attempted to demonstrate how Kant's project of grounding the validity of the moral law through the fact of reason doctrine a) is seemingly haunted by an element beyond the realm of reason, and b) ultimately fails. To avoid any confusion, it is not the *hauntedness* of the moral law that lies as the cause behind Kant's failure. Our argumentative line has rather been oriented towards the opposite direction: it is precisely the repression of this hauntedness that prevents Kant from convincingly showing how the voice of morality can truly echo within us. Failure, however, shall not be perceived as an intellectual death that numbs the movement of our thought; the challenge sketched at this point is to detect within Kant's justificatory failure any symptom that will allow us to overcome the impasse (formulated within the realm of reason) and revitalise morality and subjectivity.

As explained in the previous section, the factum thesis has been interpreted in two different – if not diametrically opposed – ways: a) as a principle actively produced by reason, and b) as an Event befalling reason from the outside, causing its unfolding. The reasons behind their failure are different: in the first case, Kant would need to show how reason becomes practical in producing the principle, a step he is unwilling to take since, on his account, practical reason would overstep its limits in doing so. In the second case, he seems to surrender to a metaphysical dogmatism, basing his critique of practical reason on a revelation reason has to digest. Admittedly, these interpretations (and the respective analyses of their failure) are incommensurable with one another. In juxtaposing them, however, we can monitor a common symptom, a symptom characteristic of Kantian morality: the centrality of the self as the lieu in which the game of morality is played. In the interpretation of the fact as reason's product, it is the noumenal self that actively produces this principle in her first-personal isolation, untouched by any exteriority. In the interpretation of the fact as an Event impinging on reason, it is again the rational self that acquires a first-personal, private, a-social access to an impersonal force residing

within her. As Nancy notes, the alterity of the law 'isn't the fact of some assignable other, whether a great Other or a small one, even though it determines the being-other of every other';[150] the encounter with any exterior other is conditioned on the self's encounter with the factual alterity of the law within.

Kant is adamant that the fact of reason allows us to find the unconditional without any need to go outside ourselves, by centring our attention on the 'supremely self-sufficient intelligence'.[151] This does not imply an image of the self as a continuous whole; rather, within the self we can identify the existence of a *second-personal structure*, consisting in the relation between the noumenal and the phenomenal, the legislating and legislated self, the self that critiques and the self-critiqued. As Korsgaard eloquently explains, 'duties must arise within one, rather than between two, and yet for them to arise, that one must be two'.[152] If morality is enclosed within the self, this means that all duties are fundamentally determined as duties imposed by and owed to my noumenal self,[153] namely, the voice of reason dwelling within me, which, in being universal, i.e., present in every rational human being, implies a duty to respect the noumenal self of every other human being. In simple words: the moral law within me and its analytic reciprocal, freedom, is taken as the starting point, whereas moral relations to others come as a result or expression of it. It is the first-personal summons (by the moral law within me) that stands as the transcendental condition of my responsiveness to any second-personal summons by the multiple others surrounding me. This is the strategy taken by Kant.

The problem is that this strategy does not pull off, since Kant fails to ground the moral law within the boundaries of the self and vindicate subjectivity as a transcendental condition of the relation to others. This is precisely the moment that encourages us to disturb the binary opposition between the *self* and the *other*, to overturn its poles, giving

150 Nancy, 'The Kategorein of Excess', 147.
151 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:32.
152 Christine M. Korsgaard, 'The authority of reflection', in *The Sources of Normativity*, ed. Onora O'Neill (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 104, n. 16.
153 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:417–418.

a temporary primacy to the subordinate term, only to ultimately forge them into a new conceptual logic in which the repressive hierarchy has been ostracised.[154] This liberating, deconstructive turn of the binary opposition allows us to set the questions that can potentially drive us out of the impasse in a more concrete way: can we imagine at the heart of subjectivity a pre-originary relationality so fundamental that it evades our conceptual glance (constituting a blind spot)? If yes, how can we speak of the modality of this relation, of its terms and their interaction? Most importantly: could it constitute the axis around which morality and subjectivity can be vindicated?

3.3. A Second-personal Interpretation of the Fact of Reason

Stephen Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* takes up the challenge of responding to the aforementioned questions in a way that, undoubtedly, constitutes one of the most stimulating reformations of Kant's moral theory. Darwall's entrance into the post-Kantian scene has been considerably invigorating, largely because of his subversive, quasi-deconstructive approach to Kantian deontology, an approach that emphasises the inherent relationality of subjectivity. According to Darwall, 'the very concept of person[155] is itself a second-personal concept',[156] in the sense that our standing in the realm of morality necessarily involves the relational address of claims both to and by a second person. To be a person means to be in relation (to a second person), and the perspective that we, as agents involved

154 This is the way Derrida outlines the 'two-phased' deconstructive turn taking place towards disrupting the binary logic of a text. See Derrida, 'Positions', 41–42. Christie McDonald has comprehensively summarised this in an interview with the French philosopher, particularly in regard to the hierarchical binarism between man and woman. See Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, 'Interview: Choreographies', *Diacritics* 12, no. 2 (1982): 70–72, https://doi.org/10.2307/464681.

155 The terms person and subject (and accordingly: personality and subjectivity) are used interchangeably.

156 Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 80.

in this relation, adopt in order to manage our reciprocal normative expectations – by making and acknowledging claims on one another's conduct and will – constitutes the *second-person standpoint*.[157]

Our aim in this chapter is not to delineate a full outline of the second-person standpoint's conceptual architectonic; that would be too ambitious – and unnecessary. We would rather give prominence to the way Darwall relocates the centre of his analysis from the first-personal Kantian consciousness of morality to the interpersonal encounter between rational and free agents and how this encounter leads to an elucidating re-interpretation of the fact of reason. The gallows example, employed by Kant in the second *Critique*, can prove to be a useful tool for navigating in the Darwallian system.

Most (if not all) of us will agree that the protagonist of Kant's example has a moral duty not to lie against the honourable man. This is precisely Kant's intention in employing the example: to affirm that the voice of morality does echo within us. What is not clear from the setting of the example, as demonstrated earlier, is how this duty arises – the reasons that constitute it. Could we, for instance, ground it in a utilitarian principle that, in pointing to an impersonal maximisation of happiness, would be agent-neutral and thus, as Rawls succinctly claims, 'would not take seriously the distinction of persons'?[158] From Darwall's perspective, moral obligations imply a distinct class of practical reasons – *agent-relative, second-personal reasons* – 'whose validity depends on presupposed authority and accountability relations between persons and, therefore, on the possibility of their being addressed person-to-person'.[159] The protagonist of the gallows example has the obligation not to lie against the honourable man because, in looking into his eyes, he can recognise and respect the latter's authority a) to demand that he refrain from doing so, and b) to hold him accountable (through the

157 Ibid., 3.
158 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 24.
159 Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 8.

relevant Strawsonian 'reactive attitudes')[160] should the former's instinct of self-preservation ultimately prevail.

If we explore the structure of this imaginary *tête-à-tête* – between the honourable man as addresser and the man in the moral dilemma as addressee of the claim not to lie – we will quickly arrive at the conclusion that it takes place under the dome of a multilevel reciprocal recognition, a stance which, according to Darwall, can only be taken if we transcend ourselves and adopt the shared perspective of the *second-person standpoint*. In addressing a claim of honesty, the honourable man treats the man in the dilemma as a person who has the capacity to guide his will according to reasons stemming from the authority of all human beings to exact a minimum of respect, thereby transcending his own instinct of self-preservation. This capacity is defined by Darwall as *second-personal competence* and is equivalent to the Kantian autonomy of the will.[161] At the same time, in addressing a demand stemming from his practical authority as a free and equal member of the political community – an authority that, on Darwall's account, corresponds to the person's inalienable status of *dignity*[162] – a demand which can therefore be rationally acknowledged and accepted by the addressee, he also seeks to guide the latter through his own self-determining choice. This means that he refrains from any coercion by threats[163] and thereby

160 In his famous essay 'Freedom and Resentment', P. F. Strawson describes reactive attitudes as emotional responses arising from our perception of how others conduct themselves towards us. P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (Routledge, 2008), 1–28. Darwall is particularly interested in the reactive attitudes essential to human practices of moral accountability in response to an agent's wrongful conduct (resentment on behalf of the victim or indignation on behalf of the political community, for instance). He reads them as entailing an intrinsically second-personal character insofar as they can be interpersonally addressed only within a framework in which both the addresser and the addressee of the attitude regard each other as free, equal, and mutually accountable for their actions. See Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 67.

161 Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 35.

162 Ibid., 119, 243.

163 This is, for instance, the attitude adopted by the prince in the example, who, by addressing this command to the citizen, suffers from the conceit that he has a

respects the addressee's standing as free and equal. Turning to the second pole of the tête-à-tête, the man confronted with the decision whether to obey the prince's command, by finding himself in the midst of a moral dilemma and considering sacrificing his life, acknowledges the honourable man's dignity and the valid demand stemming from this status. In acknowledging the demand as valid, he freely makes the same demand of himself. If, according to Darwall, to be a person is to have the competence and standing to address demands to other persons and be reciprocally addressed by them within a community of mutually accountable equals,[164] the roles of the addresser and the addressee of a normative demand are *interchangeable*;[165] the addresser of a claim can demand of another person only what she would second-personally demand of herself (noetically adopting the stance of the addressee), whereas the addressee can be put under obligation and be held accountable only if she rationally makes the same demand to herself (noetically adopting the stance of the addresser).

Darwall's reformation of the Kantian moral theory begins to take shape: whereas for Kant the scope of morality is located in the first-personal relation of the self to the moral law (that enables the relation to every other rational human being), Darwall describes morality as a circle of interdefinable, second-personal concepts (authority, competence, claim, reasons, accountability) whose transcendental condition is the encounter between agents possessing two symmetrical normative qualities: second-personal authority (dignity) and competence (autonomy). This shift towards an interpersonal perception of morality is obvious in the way Darwall reads the factum thesis. The American philosopher holds that the factum thesis does not rule out an intu-

normative standing that others do not have just because of his power – a standing which, of course, cannot be rationally acknowledged and respected.

164 Ibid., 126.

165 The interchangeability of the roles has been highlighted by Steven G. Crowell, 'Second-Person Reasons: Darwall, Levinas, and the Phenomenology of Reason', in *Levinas and Analytic Philosophy: Second-Person Normativity and the Moral Life*, ed. Michal Fagenblat and Melis Erdur (Routledge, 2020), 6.

itionist interpretation[166] and sets the equal dignity of persons as the fundamental moral notion in which he attempts to ground the moral law: if dignity is a status universally possessed by every human being we encounter, a status that allows us to exact respect from one another, then the only reasoning process that allows us to orchestrate our duties in a way that respects the dignity in the face of each human being is the categorical imperative as articulated within the formula of humanity: 'So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means'. As Darwall claims, 'it is a commitment to the equal dignity of persons in this irreducibly second-personal way that brings along with it a commitment to autonomy of the will and the CI, rather than vice versa'.[167] In view of this reading, dignity becomes the ratio cognoscendi of the moral law, whereas the moral law becomes the ratio essendi of dignity.

3.4. The (Im)possibilities of Darwallian Kantianism

Darwall's second-personal interpretation of the fact of reason seems at first glance to provide a very convincing justification of how morality actually dwells within subjectivity. He designates that at the heart of the categorical imperative lies an encounter of the self with the second person whose status must be unconditionally respected; at the heart of the categorical imperative as a fact (in the sense of product/deed) of reason lies a summons by the second person, what we may call *fact of the other* (in the sense of an Event). This is precisely the point at which Darwall seems to abandon a fundamental tenet of Kantian morality, the fact that, in order to hear the voice of the moral law, we need not step out of ourselves. Without being able to delve deeply into the intellectual relation between Kant and Darwall, we can note the double bind marking it: Darwall 'betrays' Kant by analytically prioritising intersubjectiv-

166 Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 239.
167 Ibid., 245.

ity over first-personal intelligence. This betraying move, however, is carried out with an eye to supporting Kant's compelling moral theory, which, according to Darwall, needs the second-personal account to be fully vindicated.[168] Darwall considers Kant a philosophical ally and it is no wonder that the second-person standpoint is primarily constructed from Kantian materials, something that also explains its robustness and philosophical tidiness: morality is conceived as 'equal accountability'[169] between agents who possess a symmetrical status, their dignity.

Dignity is the key concept around which the architectonic of the second-person standpoint is developed. The plausibility of Darwall's justification of the moral law lies precisely in his conception of it as the deliberative route employed to orchestrate the relations between agents who have the right to reciprocally demand a minimum of respect, a conception belonging to our most considered convictions about the nature of intersubjectivity. Even though, however, this justification appears tidy and satisfactory, the Kantian spirit of critical vigilance expressed in 'What is Enlightenment?' does not allow us to rest content. If dignity is the concept embodying the most significant normative weight, how are we to justify the validity of this moral quality? The first path that can be followed (the one actually followed by Darwall) is to classify it as a *fact* that requires no further justification, employing the strategy '*philosophy as defence*': since it belongs to our most considered convictions that human beings possess this status, we need not (and perhaps cannot) expand our argumentation beyond the horizon of this fundamental value. Our critical vigilance cannot rest on this assumption, nor does it need to, since Darwall himself provides a way to penetrate further into the concept: in two of his most central chapters, 'Respect and the Second Person'[170] and 'Dignity and the Second Person: Variations on Fichtean Themes',[171] Darwall establishes dignity as the key concept of his architectonic by citing the

168 Ibid., 213–242.
169 Ibid., 101.
170 Ibid., 119.
171 Ibid., 243.

definition given by Kant in *The Metaphysics of Morals*: 'A human being regarded as a person, that is as a subject of a morally practical reason, … possesses a dignity … by which he exacts respect from all other rational beings in the world.'[172]

In this passage, it is clear that what makes us worthy of respect is our noumenal nature that allows us to transcend our inclinations and guide our will autonomously. According to the reciprocity thesis, however, to legislate autonomously is analytically equivalent to deliberating and acting in accordance with the moral law, which, on Kant's account, resides within us as a fact of reason. May we simplify the schema? We possess the status of dignity as noumenal beings only because the moral law is a fact. In view of this, dignity, the fundamental tenet of Darwall's justification, already presupposes the validity of the law it is meant to ground. We therefore have a vicious circle, for what needs to be proved is already smuggled into the premises of Darwall's argument. The intersubjective encounter he envisions takes place between agents who are autoposited, sovereign, already embodying a relation to the moral law, whereas it should be precisely their exposure to one another that leads to the formation of the rational principle. Even though the American philosopher makes a bold philosophical move by giving prominence to the intersubjective nature of morality, he proves reluctant to escape the outline of transcendental subjectivity and sketch an encounter constructive of responsibility and subjectivity (since, as we have tried to expose from the beginning of this text, it is responsibility that constitutes the very subjective material). Darwall's attempt to ground the moral law from the second-person standpoint fails – vindication of morality and subjectivity remains unsettled.

If Darwall's second-personal interpretation of the fact of reason fails, it remains unclear why it is employed as a moment in our argumentative line. The answer is pretty straightforward: because he fails better than Kant. Because he fails more revealingly, in the sense that

172 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:435.

he (temporarily) throws the Kantian blind spot into relief,[173] pointing to an interpersonal encounter as the cryptic groundwork of morality. Because he fails more inspiringly, to the extent that the impossibility of grounding morality in the relation between sovereign, autoposited agents sharing a symmetrical status (a status endowed by the presence of the moral law in them) simultaneously opens an exciting possibility: in order to avoid Darwall's circularity, we would need to think of an encounter that lies beyond the vicious circle, outside the totality of practical reason, an encounter not subject to any form, unmediated by the very principles we are seeking to justify. Would we dare to sketch an *ethical experience* prior to and beyond the transcendental predicates of the Enlightenment discourse and the architectonic symmetry they sculpt, an ultra-transcendental, pre-reflective summons that transforms the transcendentally denuded self into subject by inscribing responsibility on her skin and mind? Would we dare to abandon all self-sovereignty, to passively surrender to a heteronomous, an-archic touch? That would be *madness*. But it is this madness, this anarchic tête-à-tête, that we will approach in the next chapter through the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

173 I am indebted to Prof. Emilios Christodoulidis for his observation that Darwall's 'better' failure actually constitutes a 'more revealing' failure.

4. The Fact of the Other or Encountering the Infinite

'Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin'.
Paul Celan, Lob der Ferne[174]

4.1. Beyond Reason's Totality: Deconstruction's Ethical Imperative

In the last chapter of the *Groundwork*, 'On the Extreme Boundary of all Practical Philosophy', Kant insists that reason shall not attempt to seek an explanation of its practicality in any exterior force: the question of what motivates its legislative activity belongs outside the scope of practical philosophy, and determining this scope is of utmost importance:

> ... so that reason may not, on the one hand, to the detriment of morals search about in the world of sense for the supreme motive and a comprehensible but empirical interest, and that it may not, on the other hand, impotently flap its wings without moving from the spot in the space, which is empty for it, of transcendent concepts called the intelligible world and so lose itself among phantoms.[175]

In this passage, Kant appears as a kind of enlightened exorcist: he ostracises any exterior shadows that would pose a threat to the integrity of his moral architectonic to the (non-) lieu of non-philosophy, the space of the intellectually intact, the *ghostly*. He is thus able to secure the putative closure of his moral system, thanks to which the internal relations between the key concepts that constitute it do not owe their articulation to any external element irreducible to the totality of the system itself. The enthronement of reason as the absolute field within

174 Paul Celan, 'Lob der Ferne', in *Mohn und Gedächtnis: Gedichte* (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1994), 29.

175 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:462.

which philosophical investigation takes place exemplifies what we may call *logocentrism*[176] and is expressed through a desire for a mastery of the (philosophical) limit, 'a desire to command one's frontiers and thereby regulate the traffic that moves in and out of one's territory',[177] maintaining, therefore, a robust distinction between the inside and the outside, philosophy and non-philosophy.

Delving into the philosophical tradition of logocentrism, from Plato to Rousseau and Kant, would undoubtedly elucidate the intellectual dimensions of this significant symptom of Western thought; we lack, however, the capacity for such an investigation. What we would rather bring into focus is how this desire for mastery of the limit operates within the Kantian practical field and what it actually accomplishes. As our preceding analysis has shown, Kant intends to construct a firm moral standpoint from which agents can orchestrate their coexistence by solidly defining their duties. Such definition is possible for Kant only through a philosophical gesture of taming the plurality of the manifold of desires into the unity of reason, of reducing the alterity of the involved subjects to the sameness of their rational nature. Such is the command uttered by the moral law: only those desires are normatively valid that can be transformed into reasons rationally acceptable to the agents to whom they are addressed, precisely because they are in equilibrium with the universal status shared by both the addresser and the addressee – their *dignity*, which stems from their capacity to act as the *unconditional*, initiating link of the causal chain, a capacity

176 In her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak defines logocentrism as 'the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word …, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness'. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* xviii. Derrida argues within *Grammatology* that logocentrism is inseparable from phonocentrism to the extent that the Western philosophical tradition privileges voice as providing immediate access to thought; such a seeming coincidence of speech and meaning ultimately secures the subject's self-presence. By contrast, writing, as Rousseau calls it, appears as a mere 'supplement' to speech: an external, derivative aid that also risks corrupting the supposed natural immediacy of the spoken word.

177 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 74.

that can be itself traced back to their consciousness of the moral law as a fact of reason. The voice of reason within each agent is what endows her with her inalienable transcendental standing, her *sovereignty*, i.e., her authority to demand a minimum of respect by self-determining her will. Reason constitutes the centre from the heart of which a sequence of concepts arises: unconditionality, sovereignty, symmetry, and the moral values spiralling around them. Anything deviating from this centre is not worthy of the name of philosophy; it is, in the words of Derrida, a 'debauchery',[178] *a luring off the straight path, to the phantoms, to the non-lieu beyond.*

The deconstructive approach of the Kantian discourse we have taken up so far has tried precisely to locate within Kant's text – following Derrida's working paradigm – 'a non-site or a non-philosophical site',[179] from which to interrogate the stability of his architectonic: such is the disruptive function we have attributed to the fact of reason. As an attempt to attain a point of exteriority to logocentrism,[180] deconstruction may be understood, as Critchley highlights, 'as the desire to keep open a dimension of alterity which can neither be reduced, comprehended, nor, strictly speaking, even *thought* by philosophy'. In his words, 'in question is an other to philosophy that has never been and cannot become philosophy's other, but an other within which philosophy becomes inscribed'.[181] In our words, what is at stake is a questioning and bastardising of the sharp bipolar distinction between the spaces of philosophy and non-philosophy, as established by Kant.

How are we to understand the spirit breathing within this deconstructive desire? Shall we approach it as a subtle sophistical rhetoric, a playful fluidisation of solid structures, a light-hearted hide-and-seek from the strict logocentric demands, or a love for the ineffable? If we

178 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 2005), 19–20.

179 Jacques Derrida, 'Deconstruction and the Other', in Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (Fordham University Press, 2004), 140. Cited in Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 29.

180 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 161–162.

181 Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 29.

adopt the Kantian vocabulary, such a perception of deconstruction would classify it as a hypothetical imperative, a means towards the end of a narcissistic intellectual pleasure. Was this the motive behind the present work? Emmanuel Levinas begins his seminal work *Totality and Infinity* acknowledging that 'it is of highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality'.[182] What urged us towards this deconstructive reading of Kant was precisely a certain suspicion that we might indeed be duped by morality; that, in other words, the strict logocentric deontology and the binary hierarchical oppositions it produces form a tyrannical intellectual machinery which, in presuming to endow subjectivity with a place under the moral sun, sacrifices her singularity by reducing it to the mere relation to an impersonal law. Our suspicions intensified throughout our roaming into the central Kantian concepts: as we tried to display in several moments of our analysis (especially in the subchapter 'Impact of the Moral Law'), the object of respect in ourselves and the other person is just the idea of the moral law, an idea that Kant fails to justify, trapping (inter)subjectivity under the overarching dome of an impersonal, groundless force. In the wonderful articulation of Iris Murdoch, the sole object of respect seems to be '*universal reason in our breasts*',[183] an axis that tames heterogeneity and provides a measure by which humanity in our face can be calculated and thematised. This is a point particularly emphasised by Levinas in his critique against idealism: contrary to what Kant proclaims as the incalculable character of the dignity of humanity, Levinas insists that, within idealism, 'the Other and the I function as elements of an ideal calculus',[184] as interchangeable moments in a system that subsumes our singularity under a noumenal totality.

In light of the above, the motive of our deconstructive gesture becomes clearer: our response to the vocation of the unnameable, our

182 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 21.

183 Iris Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter Conrad (Penguin Books, 1999), 215. Cited in Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 131.

184 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 216.

response to an alterity that can neither be excluded from nor digested within logocentric conceptuality – a tension explicit in our analysis of the fact of reason doctrine – comes as an unconditional categorical imperative to defend subjectivity and morality, a defence that can only take place through the transcendence of transcendental idealism's totalising discourse. Where does this transcendence, this breaking out of the rational form lead us? To the non-lieu of the face of the Other person, to an encounter with the radical alterity of the Other, which, in being irreducible to a common mediating genus (such as the Kantian rational nature), in overflowing the intentionality of objectifying thought, is expressed by the term *Infinite*.[185] In radicalising the valuable Darwallian insights demonstrated in the previous chapter, we will attempt to show – employing insights from the work of Levinas and Derrida[186] – how subjectivity can be vindicated only in the framework of a non-allergic relation to the Other, a traumatic exposure to an unconditional responsibility that obsesses the self prior to and beyond her autonomy and sovereignty. The first step towards carving this heteronomous, unmediated summons of the self by the Other consists in denuding the self of any transcendental predicates that would predetermine and, hence, neutralise this relation, in exposing the pre-subjective fabric

185 Ibid., 24–30.

186 The 'ethics of alterity' front that Levinas and Derrida seem to form in this text against and beyond Kantian logocentrism should not mislead us into thinking that the work of the two thinkers is identical. What gives us the right to synthesise moments of their work is that both Levinas and Derrida, despite their differences in idiom or philosophical origins, emphasise the disturbing presence of an element of alterity within every identity. Critchley has convincingly argued that Derrida's deconstructive problematic has developed significantly vis-à-vis the question of ethics in the Levinasian work, an ethical demarcation of deconstruction that constitutes the spirit of this study as well (see Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 9–13). Borrowing Critchley's words, we do not want to 'Derridianise' Levinas nor turn Derrida into a Levinasian; we cannot silence the fact, however, that Levinas comes considerably closer to Derrida in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* – written after Derrida's deconstructive reading of *Totality and Infinity* in 'Violence and Metaphysics' – whereas Derrida constructs on central moments of the Levinasian ethical discourse after his so-called 'ethical turn'. For an illuminating study of this intellectual exchange, see Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 107–187.

that enables subjectification through the encounter with the Other. To perform this step, we will explore the Levinasian concept of *separation*.

4.2. The First Person: Separation

How shall we approach the *separation* of the self, a concept so crucial to understanding her encounter with the Infinite? To better grasp it, we need to underline, once again, what is at stake: Levinas attempts to articulate a relation between the self and the Other in which the two terms will not approach each other as mere individuations of a common genus or an overarching totalising force like Reason or Being. Ethics, on Levinas' account, is the 'royal road' of the relation with the radical alterity of the Other'[187]– an alterity which resists the closure of totalising schemes. The self and the other must, hence, remain asymmetrical, transcendent to one another, without common frontiers, *strangers*.[188] Let's not underestimate the strangeness of the Other, a point on which Levinas insists: it is not a strangeness naïve or temporary – until the self retrieves her cognitive control and domesticates it through the intentionality of her consciousness, elucidating and taming its disturbing aspects. It is not the strangeness of an object of desire which at first excites the lacking self, only to surrender later to her lusts and fade away. The interface with the Other does not begin centripetally, from a lack of the individual soul (as for instance Lacanian psychoanalysis would read it), a move that would absorb her alterity within the machinery of the self's imperialistic desire. This is why Levinas is very careful to sketch an image of the self as closed upon herself, without any dialectical or ethical reference to the Other stemming from overarching logical structures or an unfolding of the self's desire. Exteriority must come as an absolute Event, and the concept that Levinas employs to articulate this ambiguous double possibility – of an inwardness that can be exposed to an exteriority, of an exteriority that does not emerge dialectically from inwardness – is *separation*.

187 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 29.
188 Ibid., 39.

In the beginning there was *enjoyment* (*jouissance*). Levinas pays particular attention to explicitly parting ways with the Heideggerian perception of the subject as *thrown* (geworfen) into the world, anguishing and striving for the preservation of her Being, a perception which in the end subordinates the relation with someone who is an existent (the ethical relation) to a relation with the impersonal Being of existents.[189] In the beginning we are beings gratified, 'citizens of paradise',[190] passively receiving the grace of the natural elements. The sun that warms us, the water that quenches our thirst, the air we breathe, the soup we eat – these are not 'means of life', their existence is not exhausted in the utilitarian schematism that delineates them as nothing more than tools or implements for the survival of an impersonal Being that absorbs personality in its unfolding.[191] We do not live *through* the sun, through the air and the water, but *with* them, *enjoying* the touch of the rays, the rustle of the wind, the abundance of the flowing water. Life, Levinas claims, 'is not the naked will to be, an ontological Sorge', but love of life, a relation with contents 'more dear than Being': eating, sleeping, warming oneself in the sun.[192]

In this state of anarchic enjoyment, independent of any order of a priori conditions giving it meaning, the ipseity of the ego arises, which consists in the particularity of her happiness or enjoyment.[193] As Levinas emphasises, 'in enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude … Not against the Others … but entirely deaf to the Other, outside all communication and all refusal to communicate – without ears, like a hungry stomach'.[194] Immersed in the subtle shades of her enjoyment, the ego withdraws into herself, into the singularity of her psychism and corporeality, into the secrecy of her interiority, unbound by genera or

189 Ibid., 45.
190 Ibid., 144.
191 Ibid., 110.
192 Ibid., 112.
193 Ibid., 115.
194 Ibid., 134.

any kind of thematising forms: this is what the radicality of separation consists in.

The egoistic happiness of enjoyment that takes place through the passive reception of the elemental flows – the sun, the water, the wind – carries with it, however, a certain sense of disquietude: the burn that the sun may cause, the cold of the wind, the vehemence of the water, create in the vulnerable ego a need for self-protection.[195] Faced with the threat posed to her existence – a threat that is, per se, a modality of enjoyment and does not undermine its independence of ontological care – the person undertakes the duty to stand in the world and tame the menace of the elements by organising her *dwelling*.

What does this organisation involve? It involves the construction of a *habitation*, within the four walls of which the ego can find a refuge and set into motion her economic existence.[196] As Levinas underlines, the ego's recollection within her dwelling constitutes a suspension of immediate enjoyment in favour of a greater attention to oneself and one's possibilities.[197] The suspension of the uncertain future that the elements of nature embody for human existence is called *labour*;[198] the labouring body of the subject, her hands that shape the material centripetally, in accordance with human needs, eradicates the danger of the environment and, in this sense, postpones the threat of death that looms over.[199] To be a body, to be a labouring body, means, on the one hand, to be threatened by the muffled rustling of the elements and, on the other hand, to undertake the duty to stand, to master them, and prolong life.[200] This ambiguity of the body, this passage from the insecurity of life to 'the perpetual postponement of the expiration in which life risks foundering', to the harbouring of a secure present (through the representation and control of the elemental flows) and the pursuit of its harmonious unfolding within the temporal flow – the

195 Ibid., 143–144.
196 Ibid., 152–154.
197 Ibid., 156–157.
198 Ibid., 158–159.
199 Ibid., 165.
200 Ibid., 164.

future – opens, according to Levinas, the very dimensions of *time* and *consciousness*.[201]

4.3. The Second Person: Infinite Responsibility

To live in enjoyment, to dwell, to work – all these are nothing but aspects of the separated being: her inwardness, her secret – non-thematisable from a totalising third-person perspective – psychism. In the transition, however, from the former to the latter – from the passive reception of the elements to the active bodily standing in the world – the separated existence already finds herself in the field of *sociality*. The act of delimiting a part of this world and closing it off in order to construct my habitation, the possession of things through labour, the standing and roaming of my body within this territory, all inevitably entail my encounter with the face of the Other: her habitation, her body that enjoys and suffers, her roaming.[202] How shall I perceive her mysterious presence that potentially disturbs my freedom to roam in the world and appropriate its resources? How shall I treat the stranger who, in film noir fashion, knocks on my door in the middle of the night? Is there anything that differentiates her from the elements of nature which are sculpted centripetally according to the ego's needs? Shall I treat her as a means of enjoyment or self-preservation? Shall I delimit her in the form of an alter ego, pacifying her alterity, treating her as I would treat myself? *What should I do?*

This question, the question of responsibility – or, to be more precise, the question of the measure of responsibility – traverses this text from its very beginning. From the introduction onwards, we have tried to emphasise that subjectivity begins in time with an *aporia*: the aporia of how to translate her responsibility into duties, how to act. The very articulation of the question – as the initiation of an internal deliberation – implies a primacy of the self: a certain sovereignty, the autonomy

201 Ibid., 165.
202 Ibid., 146.

to determine one's duties with respect to the encounter with the Other without necessarily stepping out of oneself, the authority to become the author of the moral law (regardless of its content or form) and sclerotise the presence of the Other person and the responsibility it evokes under its schema. Like a wave hitting the rock again and again, we stumble upon the same impasse: an autoposited subject who cannot truly relate to anything other than herself, since the moral medium of relating to the Other arises seemingly from the internal operations of her moral consciousness, from an internal reflective freedom. Even if Levinas intends separation to be nothing but the fabric that enables the subjectification through the encounter with the Other person, the fabric seems too thick or too formulated to allow a genuine, unmediated encounter. Since the dimension of time opens within the stage of separation (the moment the ego postpones death, seeking to actively preserve her corporeal being by representing the world and shaping it in accordance with her needs), and since the dimension of time is guarded by the panopticon of the ego's consciousness which seeks to disclose the *truth* of her Being (in order to preserve it) as it unfolds within the temporal flow through a *synchronisation* (by recuperating its past aspects and projecting the future ones),[203] if the encounter with the Other person takes place within the scope of the temporal flow, then her presence – and the responsibility it evokes – will be immobilised as an object of the ego's intentionality. Responsibility towards her thus collapses into one more expression of *egology* – an instance of what we have called *imperialism of the Same*.

This is the dead end to which the question '*What should I do?*' seems to point: the annihilation of the Other's alterity before the self's reflective authority, the former's objectification under the panopticon gaze of the latter's consciousness. A more detailed examination, however, might actually bring us out of the impasse. The reflective freedom to specify one's duties seems to rest on a prior, non-negotiable responsibility, an *unconditional* fact: what is at stake is not whether

203 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 26–30.

one ought to act, but how she ought to act. This query, posed by our consciousness in the present, presupposes that, at some point in the past, a responsibility was undertaken by the self. If this responsibility was undertaken at a past moment within the temporal flow – namely, a moment once present before its succession – then it would constitute an object of the ego's consciousness, exemplifying the ego's spontaneity in thematising the world and interpersonal relationships. Responsibility then would not be an unconditional fact – the ego could repudiate it at will, enjoying a naïve freedom without duties. If we trust, however, the intuitive force of the question *'What should I do?'* when we imagine or actually experience the encounter with the Other person, responsibility constitutes the source, but never its object: it cannot be disputed or repudiated. And, if we take this proposition seriously, we are confronted with a scandal for the autonomous self: an eerie responsibility seems to be *always already* invaginated into our present existence, a responsibility which we never chose autonomously within the unfolding of the temporal flow, a responsibility which, in other words, was not, is not, and will never be an object of our consciousness since it befalls its intentionality from the outside, not partaking in the temporal flow, not being part of the human essence as it stretches out in time, not being, thus, thematisable. To signify such a responsibility, one would have to think the impossible: a lapse of time which cannot be recuperated by memory and consciousness, a time *out of joint*, to use the words of Hamlet as often quoted by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*.[204]

In one of the most important works on ethics within the 20th century, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas undertakes the radical task of dislocating time and thereby deposing the rational self as the origin, the *arche* of ethics. To vindicate ethics, to free responsibility from the realm of ontology and the corresponding imperialism of consciousness, to make the encounter with the exteriority of the Other possible, Levinas suggests that 'in the temporalization of time, in which, thanks to retention, memory and history, nothing is lost, everything

204 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, 2006), 1.

is presented or represented …, there must be signaled a lapse of time that does not return, a diachrony refractory to all synchronisation, a transcending diachrony'.[205] The diachrony Levinas has in mind is precisely 'the refusal of conjunction', a dimension of time non-totalisable by the synthetic activity of consciousness and, in this sense, *Infinite*.[206] It consists in a past immemorial, unrepresentable, which 'cannot be recuperated by reminiscence not because of its remoteness, but because of its radical incommensurability with the present'.[207] This *transcending diachrony*, this non-lieu sculpted by Levinas, untouchable by consciousness and its intentionality, consists in the *responsibility for the radical alterity of the Other.*

Perhaps this is a rather narrative, almost epic, way of speaking. Levinas surrenders at times to expressive hyperbole,[208] because he needs to express through the limited means of (ontological) language an experience that is transcendent to the realm of ontology and reason, because he must put into words what he regards as 'the very task of philosophy':[209] the *unsayable*, a hither side of time and consciousness, a debt contracted before any freedom, the unresolvable paradox of responsibility. I am 'chosen without assuming the choice',[210] obliged and ordered towards the face of the Other without this obligation having begun in me, as though an order 'slipped into my consciousness like a thief'.[211] Responsibility is the bond to this imperative order; the response to a *heteronomous* summons to stand and recognise not the form, but the force of the *face* (visage) of my neighbour – her radical alterity that consists in her separated incarnate existence, her non-thematisable, singular needs. Responsibility, as the modality of my

205 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 9.
206 Ibid., 11.
207 Ibid.
208 For an illuminating discussion of how Levinas uses language to speak the unspeakable, see Theodore de Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence: Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (J. C. Gieben, 1997), 56–82 and Michael L. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300–335.
209 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 7.
210 Ibid., 56.
211 Ibid., 13.

relation to the call of the frail Other – a call Levinas names 'Saying' (le Dire) – embodies the constitutive moment of subjectivity. To be a subject means to be from the very beginning through the Other and for the Other, committed to responding to a summons that overflows my existence. To be a subject is to be answerable, persecuted, always in a state of dramatic exposure to the pre-originary Saying of the Other: '*Me voici*!', I am here to respond to your needs (or, to be more precise in terms of translation, '*here is me*' to respond to your needs). As the wisdom of the French expression reveals, in responsibility for another, 'subjectivity is only this unlimited passivity of an accusative which does not issue out of a declension it would have undergone starting with the nominative'.[212] Everything is from the start in the accusative, in accusation and persecution, such is the exceptional unconditionality of the self: a 'Yes' saying to Otherness not stemming from an a priori spontaneity, an ultra-transcendental exposure preceding and enabling the a priori conditions of existence.

Retroactively, the difficult concept of separation, on which Levinas insists in *Totality and Infinity*, is elucidated in a deeper, more convincing way. It is only through separation, through denuding the ego of any transcendental totalising predicates, that Levinas enables the unmediated face-to-face encounter and the subjectification through the responsibility[213] this encounter evokes: as Levinas explains, 'responsibility in fact is not a simple attribute of subjectivity, as if the latter already existed in itself, before the ethical relationship'.[214] It is only through *being for the Other* that I am constituted as a subject. What remains

212 Ibid., 112.

213 Derrida stresses, in an interview, the significance of separation as the condition of the social bond in the sense that it is only through separation that we can think of the paradox of a *relation without relation*: an ethical relation, in other words, in which the parties cannot invoke any prior ontological, moral, or logical kinship that brings them together, thereby annulling their alterity. Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy,* ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (Routledge, 1999), 71.

214 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Duquesne University Press, 1985), 96.

unclear is how those two counterbalancing moves – immersion in egoism's interiority and emergence into subjectivity through the touch of exteriority – intertwine. Doesn't the former necessarily precede the latter, leading to a first subjective shiver without the mediation of exteriority? Doesn't my body, my possessions, my house – the articulations of my separated existence – stand without the summons of the Other, which follows? The only way to avoid the inconsistency is by committing to Levinas' idea of transcending diachrony: within my harboured inwardness, there is always already a scar of exteriority; my inwardness is at the same time closed and open.[215] This is what Levinas means when he claims that '… a separated being fixed in its identity… contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its own identity'.[216] If we recall the film noir setting on the basis of which we worked in our introduction, the Other is already inside my house before knocking on its door; my body is bound to her summons before I am even bound to it.[217] Even if my consciousness tries to recuperate the moment this order was articulated, there is an obedience before the order has been comprehended, as though I find myself obedient to the law before it has even been pronounced. The face of the Other and its ghostly presence inside me can never be tamed under a phenomenal form: 'this way of passing, disturbing the present without allowing itself to be invested by the *αρχή* of consciousness, striating with its furrows the clarity of the ostensible, is what we have called a *trace*'.[218]

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215 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 148–149.

216 Ibid., 27.

217 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 76.

218 Ibid., 100. The perception of the face as a 'trace' constitutes, according to many scholars, a development in the thought of Levinas from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. In the former, Levinas, in attempting to designate the absolute transcendence and independence of ethics from ontology (or any kind of totalising discourse), identifies the face of the Other as an absolute exteriority. In *Otherwise than Being*, the strict dualisms appearing in *Totality and Infinity* (Being against existent, interiority against exteriority, self against Other) are transformed into a dynamic entanglement according to which the exteriority of the Other, coming from a diachronic past, is necessarily imprinted as a trace in the present of the self's interiority, being, and rational structure. On the development of the Levinasian perception of the face, see Bernhard Waldenfels, 'Levinas and the face

If the inspiration of this text has so far been driven by the duty to vindicate the ethical responsibility towards the alterity of the Other, it still remains vague what this alterity consists in. Shall we, for instance, following Jean-Luc Marion's stimulating question, assume that the face of the Other can ultimately be traced back to an appeal made by God[219] – a view that would subsume the Other's singularity under the veil of an abstract metaphysical entity? In a discussion with Jean Wahl (among others), Levinas insists that it is only in the experience of responsibility for the Other person, an experience that elevates the subject to an ethical height beyond her ego, that God is revealed. Our ethical encounter with the Other is not the incarnation of our encounter with the Word of God; on the contrary, there can be a discourse about God only if one

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of the other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63–81. This change of tone within the Levinasian oeuvre has been largely attributed to the deconstructive reading of *Totality and Infinity* by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics', where he claims that the ethical overcoming of ontology attempted by Levinas (and the binarisms it implies) is itself dependent on the totalising discourses it sought to overcome, namely Husserlian phenomenology, Heideggerian ontology, and Hegelian dialectic. See Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79–153. On the attribution of Levinas' development to Derrida's deconstructive reading, see Ronald Paul Blum, 'Deconstruction and Creation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46, no. 2 (1985): 293–306. Whereas the themes of the trace and of the diachronic past are not central in *Totality and Infinity*, we can see in many passages that the exteriority of the Other is already inscribed within the separated identity, prior to the opening of time and consciousness, an idea that prepares the ground for the later development of his thought. Levinas, for instance, claims that 'the passage from instantaneous enjoyment to the fabrication of things refers to habitation, to economy, which presupposes the welcoming of the Other'. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 146. The observation that these themes are already present in the thought of Levinas is compatible with our perception of separation (a concept mainly used in *Totality and Infinity*) as the pre-subjective material on which the exteriority of the Other is always already imprinted, leading to the emergence of subjectivity.

219 Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Voice without Name: Homage to Emmanuel Levinas', in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (Fordham University Press, 2000), 227–228.

begins from the 'here and now' of the face-to-face relation.[220] How shall we sketch this 'here and now', the worldly appearance of the Other that elicits my responsibility in an immediate way? According to Levinas, the alterity of the Other consists in her unrepeatable earthly standing: a standing of 'flesh and blood',[221] her separated embodiment and the physical agony this embodiment entails – an agony irreducible to an impersonal Being, which would subordinate ethics to ontology. The face of the Other is 'pure vulnerability' and 'exposure unto death',[222] a vulnerability at once cryptic and non-thematisable, yielding a tragic and unshareable individuality. The suffering of the Other is a setting apart, a tragedy of solitude beyond the community of the common, a radical singularity that awakens the ego's responsibility by engraving her interiority, her enjoyment, her own individual suffering.[223] Levinas puts it succinctly: 'the "one-for-the-Other" has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood'.[224]

The *Saying* of the vulnerable Other penetrates the very heart of the 'for-oneself' that beats in enjoyment, in the life that is complacent in itself. The interruption of the self's solitary existence is so deep that the *for-oneself* is transfigured into a *despite-oneself*.[225] The language that Levinas employs to describe the subject's Infinite responsibility for the suffering of the Other becomes dramatic, with a tension betraying that responsibility overflows the scholarly consciousness struggling to immobilise it under conceptual schemas. Responsibility for the Other, according to Levinas, goes beyond and even against the preservation of

220 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Robert Bernasconi, and Simon Critchley (Indiana University Press, 1996), 29. The same idea appears in Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78–79.

221 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 74, 77.

222 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Diachrony and Representation', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (Columbia University Press, 1998), 167.

223 Particularly illuminating is the analysis of the Other's corporeal alterity developed by Kevin Houser, 'Facing the Space of Reasons', *Levinas Studies* 11, no. 1 (2016): 123–128. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lev.2016.0019.

224 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 74.

225 Ibid., 51.

the subject's being: to be a subject is to be persecuted by the vocation of the Other, obsessed by her suffering, placed under an inescapable, traumatic ethical thraldom. The (diachronic) moment my neighbour knocks on my door, I ought to let her in, exposing myself to an unconditional hospitality that knows no limits: to the point of the absolute expropriation of my dwelling, to the point my dwelling becomes hers. The moment I encounter the suffering body of the Other, I ought to take upon myself her suffering and make it mine, to the point of denuding myself of my skin, to the point of 'hemorrhage' and 'sharing one's bread with the famished'.[226] To be a self means to be ready to sacrifice myself in the face of my neighbour's suffering; this is the humanism Levinas defends, a humanism of absolute disinterestedness, an ultra-ethics addressing a demand of *holiness*.[227]

The knot around which subjectivity is woven, responsibility – this an-archic passion in the heart of the self – implies a subject never at rest in her existence, breathless, unable to coincide with herself, never standing in the sovereign nominative of an 'I', never finding shelter in the inalienable normative ground of a status (like Kantian dignity) or identity. The Infinite that glows in the face of the Other obsesses the self to the point that she is responsible even for the persecutions she undergoes at the hands of the Other, responsible even for the Other's responsibility! Constituting herself in the very movement whereby responsibility for the Other falls upon her, subjectivity advances to the point of *substitution*:[228] answering in the Other's place, even to the point of expiating for her. This might sound like a scandalous, inhuman conception. Nevertheless, we shall not read it outside its theoretical context: Levinas insists that our humanism lies precisely in

226 Ibid., 74.

227 In his affectionate *Adieu* to Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida remembers one of his conversations with him in rue Michel-Ange, when Levinas confessed: 'You know, one often speaks of ethics to describe what I do, but what really interests me in the end is not ethics, not ethics alone, but the holy, the holiness of the holy'. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 1999), 4.

228 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 100.

an unconditional ethical vigilance, in living 'as if one were not a being among beings',[229] in absolute disinterestedness – *otherwise than being or beyond essence*. In breaking out of one's own being, in releasing oneself from the ontological bonds, one experiences the most human of *freedoms*:[230] the Infinite freedom inspired by the alterity of the Other within the self's identity (what Levinas calls 'psyche'),[231] this malady of identity which is always in motion, rupturing the outline of selfhood, never coinciding with itself, as Paul Celan's wonderful lyric captures: 'Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin'.

If the suffering of the Other evokes my Infinite responsibility, what about my suffering? Shouldn't it, too, be endowed with a normative standing equal to the Other's suffering? Isn't, in other words, the Other also responsible in my regard? Attempting to formulate a symmetrical relation of reciprocity with the Other (as, for instance, Darwall's second-person standpoint suggests) would imply that the subject rises to a transcendent height from which she can attain a panoramic overview of her face-to-face encounter with the Other. From there she could establish a paradoxical commonality of the uncommon: both my suffering and that of the Other are singular and incomparable and, in this sense, they are common in their singularity. Taking up this third-person perspective would be equivalent to immobilising interpersonal relations under a totalising glance, to thematising them, perceiving them as mere moments in a system – precisely the totality that Levinas wants to rupture. The Other's suffering obsesses me with an unprecedented immediacy, in an urgent 'here and now' that overflows my noetic horizons, leaving me no space to thematise. Of course, I am an Other to

229 Ibid.

230 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 115. Kevin Houser emphasises this crucial aspect of freedom as freedom from oneself. See Kevin Houser, 'Levinas and the Second-Personal Structure of Free Will', in *Levinas and Analytic Philosophy*, 143. Derrida defines free decision in a similar way, as a leap from one's consciousness, towards the summons of the Other. See Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (Verso, 2020), 68–69.

231 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 67–72.

the Other, transcendent to her, but this is not something I can claim; it is entirely her affair to recognise my vulnerability. As Levinas stresses:

> … I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subject to the Other; and I am 'subject' essentially in this sense. It is I who support all. You know that sentence in Dostoyevsky: '*We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others*'.[232]

The debt is Infinite: 'the more I answer, the more I am responsible'; the more I approach the neighbour that knocks on my door, the further away I am.[233] That is the glory, the glory and the pain of the Infinite, which breaks apart any thematising form that attempts to schematise it.

4.4. The Third Person: From the Saying to the Said

Refractory to thematisation and representation, not shapable into an object of intentionality, the alterity of the neighbour calls for the irreplaceable singularity that lies in me: I carry the burden of the world on my shoulders, I have to substitute everyone, yet no one can substitute me – a non-interchangeability that constitutes the supreme dignity of my subjective (non-) identity. In the transcending diachrony of the Other's Saying, the subject is overwhelmed with an Infinite responsibility, placed under an inescapable state of ethical obsession, a 'passivity more passive than all passivity'.[234] At the non-moment the Other knocks on my door – even if her intentions are evil, as in the example of Reverend Powell employed at the beginning of the text – I ought to open it, to unconditionally offer my body, my possessions, my dwelling, to the point of absolute expropriation: to the point of wounding, of bleeding, to the point of an unreserved self-sacrifice. In the immediacy of the exposure to the Other, the subject has neither the time nor the space to reflect, to measure the Infinite, to call into ques-

232 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 98.
233 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 93.
234 Ibid., 14.

tion, to stand outside the tidal wave and ask 'What should I do?': the Other's suffering obsesses me, exceeds any activity, keeps me hostage.

By the (out of joint) time, however, the Other summons me by knocking on my door, I can already discern within her eyes the *third party*: 'the Other than my neighbor, but also another neighbor and neighbor of the Other'.[235] The expression of the Other mirrors the whole of humanity which looks at me:[236] all those Others who, in their absolutely unique, incomparable suffering, evoke my Infinite responsibility. According to Levinas, the third party introduces a contradiction in the Saying, which, articulated in the face-to-face relation with the Other, went in one direction: if I encountered only the face of the Other, then my responsibility would take the non-form of the obsession we described earlier. Given, however, that I owe everything – or more than everything – to more than one person, to all those radical alterities surrounding my existence, to all those singularities crying out for justice, I must suspend the obsession I endure from the Other in order to be able to offer my house, my possessions, my existence, to all of them. This is precisely the moment where the question 'What should I do?' is articulated: the moment at which I need to reflect, measure, calculate, to *compare the incomparable ones*[237] in order to determine my duties towards them in a just and sound way – in a way that brings their unique suffering into a state of reflective equilibrium. It is the moment when the passive heteronomy of the Saying must necessarily lead to an intelligible system within which the asymmetrical terms are synchronised – what Levinas calls the *Said* (le Dit).[238] The moment of the Said is the moment of *justice*.[239]

The moment of justice can be characterised as the 'Kantian moment' within the ethics of alterity discourse. It is the moment reason comes into the foreground in an attempt to secure the coexistence of asymmetrical terms, the coherence of the one and the other des-

235 Ibid., 157.
236 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.
237 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 158.
238 Ibid., 153–175.
239 Ibid., 150.

pite their radical alterity, their unity within a system. My an-archic responsibility towards every alterity surrounding me must be limited by a certain *arche*, a principle, a regulative ideal which guides us by synchronising, re-presenting, establishing a common ground between the radical singularities – by *universalising*. In constituting the groundwork of a common space, the relation with the third party works as an 'incessant correction of the asymmetry'[240] detected in the responsibility towards the Other. It constitutes a *betrayal* of the anarchic obsession, but also a new relation with it: singularities are fixed into a common symmetrical status, acquire reciprocal rights and duties based on this status, become equal. The moral community is constructed, according to Levinas, in the image and likeness of a 'fraternity',[241] a social space of plurality in which the participants acquire rights and are able to rationally demand respect from one another only because they must retain a minimum of personal integrity to continue offering their being, their body, their dwelling, to their neighbours. In other words? The only reason I have the authority to become the author of the moral law, to demand a minimum of respect, to rationally demand to be treated as equal, is the *fact of the Other*: the voice of the Other within me *commanding me to command*.[242] Autonomy, dignity, sovereignty – the old enlightened semantics we examined in the second chapter – become possible only on the condition of an irreducible heteronomy, an inspiration by the Other's presence within me, what Levinas calls *psyche*.

The betrayal of the pre-original Saying and its formulation within the Said – a coherent system of symmetrical interpersonal relations – in no way constitutes, according to Levinas, 'a degradation of obsession, a degeneration of the for-the-other, a neutralization of the glory of the

240 Ibid., 158.

241 Ibid., 159. This is a point at which Levinas and Derrida explicitly part ways insofar as Derrida attempts to deconstruct the Greek, Jewish, and Islamic privileging of the figure of the brother in ethics as the expression of a masculine authority that excludes the feminine from the political sphere. See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 277–281 and *Rogues*, 58.

242 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

Infinite, a degeneration that would be produced in the measure that for empirical reasons the initial duo would become a trio'.[243] A certain point might need some further clarification: the entrance of the third party is not just a random fact alienating the purity of the Infinite, forcing us to dirty our hands in organising the political community. The third party is *always already* there, which means that there is no immediacy of responsibility without questioning, there is no Saying without Said. From the first moment I stand in this world, from the moment the dimension of time opens, I am connected through a bond of responsibility to all Others, each of whom demands from me infinitely, forcing me to reflect, to measure, to synchronise the diachronic responsibility burdening me. This is what leads Critchley to assume that, for Levinas, 'ethics is ethical only for the sake of politics',[244] in the sense that the pre-original responsibility towards the Other is, first of all, inevitably engraved as a *trace* within the political community and, more importantly, must be taken seriously for the sake of its just organisation.

On the one hand, hence, 'the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of the two': what moves justice is a forgetting of egoism, 'the equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights'.[245] The very rationality of reason, what inspires it to legislate – what makes it in other words practical – is responsibility for the Other,[246] a responsibility that is not reducible to reason's structures, but nonetheless dwells within them. On the other hand, if the Infinite responsibility remained ethereal, without being incorporated and systematised, it would remain a mere *marivaudage*: an elegant, sophisticated discourse without any actual practicality. Ethics

243 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 159. Identifying with the Levinasian perception of the third party's entry, Derrida describes it as a 'perjury' (parjure) to the face-to-face anarchic responsibility – a perjury that, however, is not accidental and secondary, but is 'as originary as the experience of the face'. Derrida, *Adieu*, 33.

244 Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, 223.

245 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 159.

246 Ibid., 160.

can be ethical only when rationally invested, whereas reason can be truly rational only when ethically inspired. No Saying without Said, no Said without Saying, and this is precisely the point at which we face the paradoxical *quasi-transcendental* structure of the ethics of alterity: whereas reason's practicality is conditioned on the pre-original responsibility for the Other residing within its structure as a trace, responsibility itself is conditioned on rationality in order to be justly allocated within the political community.

Let us summarise the development of our thought so far: our deconstructive engagement with the Kantian logocentric architectonic was inspired by a desire to defend subjectivity and a certain suspicion that the Kantian moral system suppresses subjective singularity. Identifying the fact of reason as a blind spot, we demonstrated that the Kantian architectonic is internally haunted by an element beyond reason, an element whose repression led to a failed justification of morality and a suspension of the validity of the concepts comprising the system. Employing the valuable insights of Darwall's second-person standpoint, we assumed that the element Kant repressed was an interpersonal encounter, analytically prior to the formation of the moral law. The circularity of Darwall's argument led us to a radicalisation of the encounter, a radicalisation mirrored in the work of Levinas and Derrida. Retroactively, we come to develop the hypothesis that what blocks the closure of the Kantian practical architectonic through the rational justification of the moral law is precisely the repressed, non-thematisable trace of the pre-reflective responsibility for the Other, residing always already within the law of universality and the rational self producing it. In other words, the transcendental *fact of Reason* – the law of universality as a product of Reason's activity – can only be vindicated if reinterpreted as veiling what resists thematisation: the self's spectral, pre-reflective openness to the summons of the Other – what we have called *fact of the Other* – standing as universality's ultra-transcendental condition. It is the Saying that is antecedent to the Said, it is the vocation of the Other that leads to the formation of the system. But what makes us think, as the title of the text suggests,

that the Saying lies still within the Said as a trace after the latter's production?

4.5. Auto-co-immunity or The Seed of Folly within Reason

In the penultimate chapter of *Rogues* ('Teleology and Architectonic: The Neutralization of the Event'), Derrida speaks to us about an internal whisper resounding within him: 'Perhaps it would be a matter of saving the honor of reason'.[247] This study does not have such high aspirations – that would be presumptuous. What we have tried to do, with or without success, is to show through the lens of the ethics of alterity that the fact inspiring the very practicality of reason does not lie within reason: responsibility is not a rational predicate, it comes from a non-lieu prior to and beyond rational activity, constituting the motivating force behind the formation of practical ideas and concepts. The first moment of ethics consists in the pre-originary obsession of the self by the Other – but it is not the last: the anarchic touch with the exteriority of the Other must be rationally synchronised within a system in which the demands of the multiple Others comprising the community will resonate in harmony. The rational process of the self's traumatic exposure to the multiple Others is an inevitable moment for the articulation of her responsibility towards the community. Yet, should we suppose that it is the final? Should we think that the singularity of the Others is absorbed into the engine of a system, that the trace of the Infinite in their faces fades away, that their anarchical suffering is once and for all sclerotised into a form, a strict universal arche? This would mean that the secret (Geheimnis) of the diachronic, traumatic relation to the face of the Other served as nothing but a mere justification of principles and was then forgotten, incorporated in the self as though in a successful work of mourning, becoming familiar (heimlich). This would mean that the Saying would perfectly coincide

247 Derrida, *Rogues*, 118.

with the Said, that, in following the principles of the latter, one would entirely satisfy the demands articulated by the former.

Such a coincidence between the Saying and the Said would undoubtedly constitute an object of desire for our consciousness, which would thereby be able to shelter itself against the heterogeneity and intensity of the multiple demands, to find a place of rest within a fixed rational norm. The solution to the aporia 'What should I do?' would be merely a matter of specifying a formal principle according to the data of each concrete case – something that, of course, raises methodological and interpretive challenges, but still, as Derrida emphasises, 'relegates' ethical decision-making to the 'simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem'.[248] Why does Derrida use the verb 'relegate' to describe the supposed harmony of employing a universal principle in ethical decision-making? If singularities are indeed successfully incorporated into a system, why should the use of a principle to accommodate their demands be considered a 'relegation'? The response can be traced back to a simple etymological analysis of the term 'aporia': in Greek, aporia consists in a lack of resources (α + πόρος), in experiencing a certain impossibility of living up to the demands. Following this etymological insight, we can assume that the aporia of responsibility, the *'What-should-I-do?'* pulsating within us, consists in an experience of the impossible, of the radical insufficiency of principles to serve as the absolute horizon within which decision-making takes place.

The reason behind this insufficiency is already faintly discernible: in the words of Levinas, within the heart of reason, within the commonness of the community, within the activity of formal thematisation, we can detect an incomprehensible 'seed of folly'.[249] This 'madness' or 'an-archy' within our coexistence consists in the fact that, despite our contemporaneousness, the trace of the Infinite in the face of each Other around us does not cease to glow. Despite the common principles that guide us, despite the enlightened values such as autonomy, dignity, and

248 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 24.

249 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 142.

equality that serve as a compass orchestrating our reciprocal duties, the suffering of the Other carved in the expression of her face can never be formulated or wholly alleviated: the face of the Other constitutes the only ideatum that surpasses its idea, exceeding the plastic form that tries to measure it.[250] This is the insurmountable aporia of being with the Other(s), of being for the Other(s): 'tout autre est tout autre',[251] every other is wholly other, and the instant I respond to the demands of one of them, I necessarily sacrifice all the Others. The instant I equate them through the application of a universal principle, I am being unjust to everyone. At the same time, I am the most moral and most immoral, for my debt is Infinite, for the more I attempt to come to terms with it, the more I sense the radical impossibility of its fulfilment.

The unresolvable aporia of responsibility, even within the framework of the moral community, seems to haunt us as a paralysing force. Why should I even attempt to be moral, knowing that, however hard I try, I will have failed to fulfil my duty? Doesn't this lead the subject to a state of bad conscience or psychic disinvestment from her obligations? There are two interrelated points that distance us from this conception: first of all, as Derrida admits, the reservations raised earlier concerning universal regulative ideas should not be interpreted as an unconditional rejection.[252] 'For lack of anything better', regulative ideals, principles, universal laws, remain a last resort with a 'certain dignity', insofar as they do not become a mere 'alibi'.[253] What would it mean for them to risk becoming an alibi? Derrida and Levinas are particularly attentive to what the latter calls 'drowsiness of the mind':[254] an absolute reliance on ideals sculpted by reason. Such a reliance becomes an alibi when it epitomises a forgetting of the Other's transcendent suffering. It is from this perspective that Derrida criticises the Kantian *good will* – the one acting not merely in conformity with the law (in accordance with duty), but from respect for the law (out of duty); not only because

250 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 49–51.
251 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 68.
252 Derrida, *Rogues*, 83.
253 Ibid.
254 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy and Awakening', in *Entre Nous*, 83.

it appears inscribed within an a-moral economy of exchange – to the extent that acting out of duty implies the existence of a *debt* to be paid back – but, perhaps more interestingly, because such good will implies the blind subordination of action to a known norm or programme.[255] 'Pure morality', according to Derrida, 'must exceed all calculation, conscious or unconscious, of restitution or reappropriation',[256] and this is precisely where the second encouraging moment lies: to avoid drowning in herself and in the schemata produced by her rational faculty, the subject must retain a certain undecidability, hesitation or *epoché* with respect to rational principles, keeping her ears and eyes open to face every Other with a 'fresh judgement', whether this judgement reinvents, improves, or simply conforms to the existing principle.[257] The force of the Other's demand is precisely what prevents the subject from being paralysed within her internal rational boundaries; it keeps her vigilant, always on the move, ready to abandon her body, her home, her being in order to make space for the Other and her suffering.

What we have attempted to demonstrate through our analysis so far is that communities are (or should be) interrupted by an internal scission, a non-coincidence with themselves. If responsibility for the Other is the element around which a community's principles are centred – the axis around which the symmetrical normative status of the agents is woven – it is precisely this secret, non-immobilisable centre that destabilises the very principles it produces, unravelling symmetry, poisoning internally the solidity of the community's identity in an *autoimmune* fashion. We may therefore speak of communities as,

255 Giovanna Borradori, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides – A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 133

256 Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"', trans. David Wood, in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Blackwell, 1992), 26.

257 Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (Routledge, 1992), 22–29.

in Derrida's words, *'auto-co-immunities*',[258] sensitive to the whisper of the secret lying in their foundations, open to the exception, to the very dismantling of the universal principles that sustain them. The categorical imperative resounding within us as subjects of those communities – an imperative allergic to forms – can be articulated as follows: keep *tracing*, keep your eyes and ears open to the suffering of the Other, do not rest on Kantian transcendental certainties, let reason be inspired by the Other's Saying, keep spiralling between the impossibilities of the Infinite and the possibilities of rationality, allow the former to infect the latter and vice versa in a constant process of negotiation between the enigma of alterity and its non-totalisable rational thematisation. This mutual infection is what we will attempt to trace in the last chapter, unveiling a) the way the language of the ethics of alterity is infected by fundamental Kantian concepts, and b) the way it invigorates them.

258 See Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (Routledge, 2002), 87 and *Rogues*, 35.

5. Encore: Inheriting Enlightenment, Betraying Enlightenment

'There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in'.
Leonard Cohen, Anthem[259]

5.1. Mapping the Spectrographic Movements

Spectres of Kant: the title of a text is supposed to crystallise the point where the internal movements constituting its flow interlace. The title of a text is itself a text, that is, a product of weaving ('texere' in Latin means 'to weave'), a knot formed by the resonance of the argumentative lines developed progressively or through implicit overlap. If we indeed perceive the title as a text, as a *point de capiton* in which different argumentative threads interlace, which threads comprise the knot of this title? *Spectres of Kant*: how are we to understand this urge towards a spectrography? A certain ambiguity seems to lurk within the title's texture, an undecidability as to whether we should read 'Kant' as an objective genitive (as haunted by spectres) or as a subjective genitive (as the incarnated spectre that haunts). The subtitle (*Tracing the Fact of the Other within the Fact of Reason*) seems to encourage prioritising the first reading: it is the Kantian *fact of reason* within which we have tried to unveil a repressed encounter with the Other, it is the Kantian vindication of the moral law that seems haunted by a trauma of exteriority – the *fact of the Other* – irreducible to the canons of rationality. This spectrography can be summed up in three consecutive moments, which we will now outline.

259 Leonard Cohen, 'Anthem', in *The Future* (Columbia Records, 1992).

In the first moment, we aimed to reconstruct the Kantian moral architectonic (what we may, in Levinasian terms, call *Said*). Following Kant's dismissal of the terrain of experience and its natural causality as inadequate to provide a law of absolute practical necessity – owing to the contingency of empirical data – we explored the conceptual possibility opened in the first *Critique*: the possibility of directing our will as intelligible beings according to a special causality, independent of empirical conditions, the causality of *freedom*. Elaborating on the philosophical corpus of freedom, we established its analytic reciprocity with the moral law in the form of the categorical imperative, articulated the latter's different formulas, and proceeded to exhibit the analytical connections between the key conceptual tenets of the Kantian system – *autonomy*, *dignity*, *duty*, and *respect*. Having designated the joints of the system, we examined Kant's different attempts to ground its validity: in the idea of freedom as an inescapable presupposition of deliberation in the *Groundwork*; as a fact of reason in the second *Critique*.

In the second moment, we attempted to show that the factum thesis constitutes not only a failed grounding of morality, but also a blind spot in Kant's critical project, to the extent that it embodies a relation to a space beyond reason. Identifying in both dominant interpretations of the fact – as deed of reason and as quasi-intuitionist Event – the self as the par excellence locus of morality's articulation, we detected this primacy as the main symptom of Kant's failure. This insight impelled us, in quasi-deconstructive fashion, to reverse the hierarchy and look for a vindication of morality in the self's encounter with another person, outside her sphere of control. Inspired by the exciting possibilities of this reversal, we brought to the fore Darwall's second-personal re-interpretation of the fact of reason, a re-interpretation which, due to its circularity, further stressed the need to break the barriers of the transcendental ego. Radicalising Darwall's insights, we emphasised, through Levinas and Derrida, that morality can be vindicated only within the self's unmediated exposure to the alterity of the Other, an exposure traumatic insofar as it elicits an unconditional, Infinite responsibility beyond her sovereignty. It is this traumatic summons by

the corporeal vulnerability of the Other (her *Saying*) that stands as the ultra-transcendental – repressed from the logocentric tradition – condition of morality.

In the third moment, we were compelled to examine how the always-already-there 'third person' and her claims necessarily lead to a calculation of the Infinite responsibility and its channelling into the construction of rational principles that mediate the coexistence of all those irreducibly singular Others surrounding the self within the political community. On the one hand, it is the ultra-transcendental fact of the Other that enables rational legislation; on the other hand, such fact cannot be thought except in the (non-) form of a trace, insofar as it is inescapably embodied within the structure of a rational system. In this light, we can claim that the ultra-transcendental is also quasi-transcendental in the Derridian sense, for it is conditioned on what it conditions: no principles can be formulated without the pre-originary summons by the Other, no summons can be addressed uninfected by the mediation of the third person and the need for a certain reflective equilibrium. The necessity of reason shall not lead us to the misconception that the trace of the transcendent Other is completely absorbed: its grace does not cease to glow, demanding that we always retain a deconstructive stance towards the universality of rational principles, making them vulnerable to the singular summons of the Other and the exceptions this singularity might call for (what we may call a *traumatised Said*).

Three moments thus seem to have outlined the course of our thought so far, tied together by two threads: a deconstructive shift from the principled Kantian *Said* to the immediacy of the Other's *Saying* as articulated within the ethics of alterity discourse; a reconstructive move from the an-archic *Saying* towards a traumatised *Said* that incorporates the non-thematisable scar of the Other's trace. But what, we must ask, inspired those three moments and their interweaving within a textual structure? What served as the source of our motivation to reverse the strict Kantian binarisms (self against other, reason against experience, activity against passivity) and forge them in a new conceptual, quasi-

transcendental logic in which the hierarchy entailed within them has been suspended? Our approach was set in motion by a desire to defend subjectivity and morality, to disengage them from the totalising sphere of the logocentric tradition that annuls the singularity of the subject by approaching it solely through the mediation of rational predicates. In a world of moral bleakness, complexity, and heterogeneity, we claimed that the emergence from our self-imposed immaturity – what Kant calls 'Enlightenment' – can only be achieved if we break out of the intellectual security sculpted by the false rational symmetry of the fact of reason, if we take the philosophical risk of encountering difference, of facing the multiple – often contradictory – demands of the singular Others, remaining open to their calls, sensitive to the repressed fact of the Other. In other words: we sought to conceptualise a new modality of subjectivity as embodying a dynamic relation to the fact of the Other, we sought to '*uncondition*' her singularity beyond the structures of logocentrism, to articulate a new kind of *respect* towards her irreducible alterity, to define our *duties* in a way that embraces her *incalculable dignity*.

These are the demands motivating the synthesis of this text, the ethical moment inspiring the spectrographic reading of the Kantian *fact of reason* and the tensions it inserts into the heart of logocentrism. Given, however, that the transgression of the logocentric tradition has been set as the intellectual aim of this study, we are confronted with a disturbing paradox: the emancipation of subjectivity from reason's totality – through the vindication of her *unconditionality*, through the invocation of a *dignity* not stemming from the neutralising voice of the categorical imperative, through the determination of our *duties* on the basis of a *freedom* itself freed from the impersonal canons of rationality – implies that the path we are following towards rupturing logocentrism's dominance is itself paved with an employment of the very linguistic resources of the tradition we wish to overcome. As we sought to display in our analysis of the Kantian architectonic, the aforementioned concepts – *unconditionality*, *dignity*, *respect*, *duty*, *freedom* – signifying the transcendence of the Other in the discourse of Levinas

and Derrida are, at the same time, the fundamental moral tenets of the enlightened logocentric deontologism that we wish to transgress. Does this paradox castrate our ambition to move beyond Kantianism?

In 'Violence and Metaphysics', his deconstructive reading of Levinas' attempt in *Totality and Infinity* to speak of an ethics radically untouchable by the ontological tradition it sought to transcend, Jacques Derrida showed that the Levinasian discourse on alterity was itself dependent on the totalities it sought to overcome – namely Heideggerian ontology, Husserlian phenomenology, and Hegelian dialectic. Derrida's point becomes relevant to our approach insofar as we are obliged to confront the impossibility of entirely uprooting ourselves from the Kantian discourse we wish to overcome. The only way forward is to come to terms with the following paradoxical double bind: since there is no thought outside or beyond language, the only possible route towards breaking through the logocentric language we have inherited is to remain within its tradition and attempt to etch ruptures through the very linguistic resources we already possess. The question of simultaneously belonging to a tradition and rupturing it is what Derrida defines as the question of 'closure' (clotûre),[260] and it is precisely this delicate balance that forces the deconstructor to follow 'an oblique and perilous movement, constantly risking falling back within what is deconstructed',[261] belonging to the same tradition she wishes to overcome.[262]

The exposure of our inescapable bind to Kantian logocentrism – the very lieu we sought to overcome through the ideas of Levinas and Derrida – highlights a thread traversing our text from its very beginning; a thread so deeply ensheathed in our thought that it becomes indiscernible at times. 'Might not the categorical imperative be something that we can no longer avoid?'[263] wonders Jean-Luc Nancy; might it not be a gift we have passively received and cannot now ostracise from

260 Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', 110.
261 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 14.
262 For an excellent discussion of the problematic of closure within Derrida's work and its place in Derrida's readings of Husserl and Heidegger, see Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 59–106.
263 Nancy, 'The Kategorein of Excess', 133.

our logos, a gift that has poisoned (vergiftet) our language? On such a view, if we take a look back at the title of the thesis, the 'Spectres of Kant' refer not only to the hauntedness of the Kantian system by the trace of Otherness, but also to the way the Kantian spirit haunts the very discourse that seeks to deconstruct him: 'Kant', in the title, functions simultaneously as objective and subjective genitive – as a *haunted spectre*.

Giving a full overview of the way the Kantian heritage has left its mark on the work of Levinas and Derrida does not fall within the scope of our analysis. What matters for the further unfolding of our argument is that they both explicitly understand their thought as inheriting the categorical character of morality, yet both feel compelled to radicalise this heritage – to *betray* it – by moving beyond its logocentric grounding. Levinas explicitly acknowledges his philosophical debt to Kantianism to which he feels 'particularly close'[264] insofar as it finds a meaning in the human without measuring it by ontology and outside the question 'What is there here…?'.[265] The sharp distinction between 'ought' and 'is', the liberation of *Persönlichkeit* from the latter and the manifestation of her freedom only through the former – namely the voice of morality echoing within her (a manifestation which, as we saw, was not possible through an appeal to theoretical consciousness, justifying thereby what Kant calls the primacy of practical over theoretical reason) – constitute the firm terrain on which Levinas develops his own philosophical variations.[266] Similar is the Kantian influence on Derrida's thought: 'I am ultra-Kantian. I am Kantian, but more than Kantian',[267] claims Derrida, who inherits from Kant – among others – his faith in the unconditional (a word that Derrida uses 'not

264 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', in *Entre Nous*, 10.

265 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 129.

266 On the Kantian primacy of practical reason over theoretical and its proximity with Levinasian ethics, see Peter Atterton, 'The Proximity between Levinas and Kant: The Primacy of Pure Practical Reason', *The Eighteenth Century* 40, no. 3 (1999): 244–260, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41468195.

267 Richard Kearney, 'On Forgiveness: A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida', in *Questioning God*, ed. John Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Indiana University Press, 2001), 66.

by accident to recall the character of the categorical imperative in its Kantian form')[268] and his allergy to moral relativism,[269] an allergy that, as in Levinas' case, can be traced back to rejecting the reduction of morality to a conflict of ontological interests.

Our intention is not to present Levinas and Derrida as anarchic heirs of Kant: even though such an approach to their relationship would be of great philosophical interest, it lies beyond the reach of this study. Turning back to the intellectual aims of this text, considering the exhaustion of logocentrism – its inability to provide convincing answers for the vindication of subjectivity within the totality of reason – we will attempt to show in the remainder of this chapter how central Kantian concepts can be invigorated and reach their full philosophical potential through their reiteration with a difference within the ethics of alterity discourse; through, in other words, the invagination into their intellectual corpus of a cryptic trace, the fact of the Other's summons. Recalling the words of Leonard Cohen in *Anthem*, it is only by etching a crack in the closure of reason – the crack of Otherness – that the light can get in. Paraphrasing Derrida: *Perhaps it would be a matter of saving Enlightenment.*

5.2. An Invigoration of Enlightened Concepts

What drove this study from its very beginning was an *unconditional* desire to defend subjectivity: to release her from the prison of any discourse that hijacks her singularity by reducing it to an interchangeable moment within a system; to re-personify her by delineating a standing not endowed by any overarching impersonal forces – such as God, Power, or Being – a standing *unconditional*. Kant's attempt to

268 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff, (Northwestern University Press, 1988), 152.

269 Derrida persistently renounces his characterisation as a relativist, despite the fact that deconstruction is not compatible with pre-articulated sound norms, on the argument that respect towards the singularity of the Other is an absolute command, itself not subject to relativistic disputes. See Derrida, 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility', 78.

defend the unconditional – a cause that is itself uncaused – leads us back to the third antinomy of reason, as presented in the first *Critique*. As explained, this antinomy seeks to establish a dynamic system of causal linkage, illustrating how all effects are linked to their causes. The thesis affirms the existence of an exceptional element that, while being present in the series as a condition whose effects may be perceived in the world, is itself unconditioned: the existence of this unique element is equivalent to what Kant calls 'freedom'.[270] According to the antithesis, there is no freedom, but 'everything in the world occurs solely according to laws of nature'.[271] Kant resolves this seeming contradiction – and thus preserves the possibility of the unconditioned, namely, of freedom – by distinguishing two standpoints within subjectivity. As sensible beings, we are inescapably bound by the laws of nature; as intelligible beings, however, we may be subject to a different causality, the causality of freedom.

If theoretical reason maintains the possibility of freedom – as the existence of a cause that is itself uncaused – it is practical reason, on Kant's account, that enables the subject to stand against the phenomenal causal flow, endowing her with the 'power to begin'. According to the schema adopted by Simon Critchley, the core structure of what we call ethical subjectivity is brought about by an *ethical experience*:[272] an encounter with an incomprehensible fact that evokes her responsibility. The fact that, according to Kant, makes us aware of our freedom – its 'ratio cognoscendi' – and thereby constitutes us as subjects is the voice of the categorical imperative residing within us: the sole *fact of reason*, which imposes itself on us as a synthetic a priori proposition.[273] The imperative, denuded of any sensible motives that would make it a conditioned/hypothetical means towards achieving a certain end, ultimately enjoins rational beings to guide their will only according to the universal form of the law so that absolute practical necessity can be

270 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A444/B472.
271 Ibid., A445/B473.
272 Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 9.
273 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:31.

achieved. Universalisation is an obligation, and it is precisely this obligation that animates the causality of freedom embodied in the subject – by demanding that she transcend her phenomenal inclinations and the deterministic causal flow they impose. The capacity to be an agent, namely the capacity of self-determination, is inherent in the subject, endowed by the a priori command of reason that resides within her. Given that responsiveness to morality as the obligation to universalise is an a priori predicate of the self, the Kantian agent occupies the space of the unconditioned cause without any reference to external forces – she is autoposited.

Our deconstructive reading of Kant aimed to disrupt the a priori self-certainty of the Kantian subject by exposing how the fact of reason implants within reason's economy a trace of excess, an exteriority imprinted within reason's thematising activity. In re-interpreting the factum thesis – employing Darwall's second-personal account as a stepping stone – we developed the position that reason's activity in producing a principle like the categorical imperative is itself conditioned on the ego's encounter with the Other and her non-conceptualisable vulnerability: prior to and beyond any command addressed by reason in the form of a principle, the ego has *always already* been commanded by the Other person. At this point, to borrow Levinas' words, 'we are trying to express the unconditionality of the subject, which does not have the status of a principle',[274] that is, the unconditionality of a 'Yes' to an exposure prior to spontaneity,[275] the non-sovereign 'unconditionality of being a hostage',[276] or, in Derridian terms, the unconditionality of a gift which 'does not obey the principle of reason', remaining thus a stranger to formal morality.[277] Disputing the subjective autoposition as arbitrary, Levinas and Derrida allow us to sketch the outline of a decentred agency that obtains her unconditional standing not 'in

274 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 116.
275 Ibid., 122.
276 Ibid., 128.
277 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (The University of Chicago Press, 1992). 156.

the auto-affection of a sovereign ego',[278] but only as a response to an ultra-transcendental ethical obsession by the Other – what we have called the *fact of the Other*.[279]

The unconditional exposure to the frail Other is not an Event that can be thematised or re-presented by consciousness, precisely because it never belonged to the realm of temporal succession: the order has been 'breathed in unbeknownst to me',[280] like a thief, during a diachronic past that cannot be recuperated because of its incommensurability with the present.[281] The obsession of the self by the Other reveals itself only retroactively in the non-form of a *trace*, of a trauma in the corpus of every identity which at once inspires and destabilises it. The fact of the Other constitutes the ultra-transcendental condition of the fact of reason, yet it can only be crystallised as a disruption within reason: *the conditioned conditions its condition*, the ultra-transcendental is, therefore, also – as noted earlier – quasi-transcendental. The disturbing presence of the Other's incalculable alterity within the sameness of reason – what Levinas calls *psyche* – would not be, as Derrida underlines, an 'irrationalism', but 'another way of keeping within reason, however mad it might appear'.[282] Even though we cannot and must not forgo Enlightenment – what imposes itself as a desire for elucidation, for critique, and reflective vigilance – we must nonetheless

278 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 123.

279 On the way Levinas and Derrida radicalise the Kantian unconditional through the pre-originary exposure of the ego to the Other, see Mark Cauchi, 'Unconditioned by the Other: Agency and Alterity in Kant and Levinas', *Idealistic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2015): 125–147, https://doi.org/10.5840/idstudies20161441 and Dylan Shaul, 'Faith in/as the Unconditional: Kant, Husserl, and Derrida on Practical Reason', *Derrida Today* 12, no. 2 (2019): 171–191, https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2019.0208.

280 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 148.

281 Ibid., 11.

282 Derrida, *Rogues*, 153. For Derrida's invigorative approach to reason, especially in *Rogues*, see Neil Saccamano, 'Inheriting Enlightenment, or Keeping Faith with Reason in Derrida', *Eighteenth Century Studies* 40, no. 3 (2007): 405–424, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2007.0031 and Peter Gratton, 'Derrida and the Limits of Sovereign Reason: Freedom, Equality but not Fraternity', *Telos* 148 (2009): 141–159, https://www.doi.org/10.3817/0909148141.

betray reason's unconditionality and restore our faith in the trauma inscribed within its surface. It is by keeping faith with the crack of the Other that we can keep faith with reason.

Our brief analysis of the unconditioned condition within the causal flow compels us now to re-examine the texture of the causal chain's initiating link. Kant's negative definition of freedom in the *Groundwork* as a form of causality other than the one *heteronomously* imposed by the mechanism of natural necessity[283] is converted into a positive one by pointing out that freedom is itself not lawless; if the will is to avoid the heteronomy of sensible motives, it must be its own condition by legislating its own law, by being, in other words, *autonomous*.[284] Autonomy, in turn, as the property of the will to begin a series of occurrences from itself, is rendered possible only when the subject strips her subjective principle of volition of any sensible inclinations and is, hence, left with nothing to guide her will but the universal form of the law that can only be represented by the faculty of reason.[285] Hence, we arrive at a threefold analytic equivalence: to be free as autonomous is to abide by the law of universality (as articulated in the categorical imperative), which, in turn, is equivalent to acting according to the ends set by the voice of reason within one's breast.

The way Kant revolutionises our perception of freedom is not to be underestimated: counterintuitively, freedom does not correspond to an ontological naïveté, to the frivolity of a being that wanders in the world having the power to solipsistcally appropriate its resources, transgressing any external boundaries that would hinder such appropriation. Kantian freedom – reason's spontaneity in determining one's action – manifests itself as a power to obligate. As Mark Cauchi observes, 'the law which the will must obey in order to be properly free (i.e., autonomous) is a law which obligates the subject to consider others (and so is equally a *moral* law)'.[286] But in which sense is the subject

283 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:446.
284 Ibid., 4:447.
285 Ibid.
286 Cauchi, 'Unconditioned by the Other: Agency and Alterity in Kant and Levinas', 127.

necessarily considering others when deliberating autonomously? It is because, as Cauchi continues, 'my pure reason and pure will … are structurally equivalent to the pure reason and pure will of all others'.[287] This means that, whenever I set ends autonomously, I necessarily deliberate consistently with the ends set autonomously by all others, for the voice determining those ends – the voice of reason – is a priori present within all agents.[288] The fact, however, that autonomy allows the moral interface with the rational claims of others shall not urge us to think that it is inherently intersubjective: if a subject is to be free, she must not be motivated by anything outside herself. Her relations to others belong to the realm of experience and have no influence on the sovereign, transcendental status of the agent who actively directs her will deaf to external summonses – namely, summonses that are not mediated by the voice of the moral law within her.

Whereas Kant's reading of autonomy as essentially encapsulating moral obligation has undoubtedly worked as a source of inspiration for Levinas and Derrida, at the same time, the sovereign power to begin, the self's autoposition and capacity to actively manage her passions without stepping out of herself, is precisely the point where the ethics of alterity discourse parts ways with Kantian deontology. 'What must be thought', writes Derrida in the closing pages of *Rogues*, 'is this inconceivable and unknowable thing, a freedom that would no longer be the power of a subject, a freedom without autonomy, a heteronomy without servitude, in short, something like a passive decision.'[289] It is this thinking of the impossible that motivated the exposure of logocentrism's exhaustion within this study, its inability to provide convincing responses on how the self-constitution of the subject is possible – its hauntedness 'by a voice afar'. It is this imperative to think of the unthought that forced us to trace in the very heart of the sovereign subject a passion, a trauma, a *heteronomous* call by the Other's suffering, subjecting the ego to the point of obsession and constituting her thereby as a subject.

287 Ibid.
288 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:427.
289 Derrida, *Rogues*, 152.

And it is indeed an oxymoron that the defence of subjectivity we have attempted through the lens of the ethics of alterity ultimately speaks of an identity in the state of an irrecoverable malady, 'restlessness, insomnia',[290] and persecution. Yet, it is precisely this restlessness that, according to Levinas' hyperbolic conceptual gaze, drives the subject 'out of the nucleus of her substantiality',[291] preventing her from being riveted to her own being.

The order of the Other, addressed to me in a transcending diachrony incommensurable with the present, is an order I find within me 'anachronously'.[292] The moment I stand in the world, the moment I encounter all the Others and their irreducibly singular demands that surround me, I find within myself a law gifted to me beyond my consent, inspiring me to legislate. The moment I come to distance myself from the obsession I endure from the Other in order to rationally synchronise the claims of the multiple Others in an intelligible system, the pre-originary heteronomy reverts into autonomy.[293] Autonomy, according to Levinas, consists in the possibility of 'receiving the order out of myself'[294] and saying it by 'my own voice'.[295] In my voice however, in my voice that becomes the legislator of rational principles within the framework of the moral community, it is the voices, the plural demands of the singular Others, that resonate – demands that require me to bring them in a state of equilibrium. The self (autos) legislating could be described as the lieu where the multiple Others (heteroi) and their claims reverberate, a fact that never allows the subject to withdraw within the enclosure of her being, a fact that allows us to speak about a reconciliation between autonomy and heteronomy,[296] to the extent that, as Derrida contends, it is this heteronomy that 'opens autonomy

290 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 64.
291 Ibid., 142.
292 Ibid., 148.
293 Ibid.
294 Ibid.
295 Ibid., 147.
296 Ibid., 148. Basterra describes this reconciliation with the term 'auto-heteronomy'. Basterra, *The Subject of Freedom*, 131.

on to itself', being 'a figure of its heartbeat'.[297] Given that the Others within the self can never be absorbed in the synchronicity of a rational system, to be really free, even within the framework of the community, means to never totally become enslaved to the rationality of impersonal principles, to have the courage to abandon them, to decide without the mediation of a standard deliberative route, deconstruct and reconstruct them with an eye to serving the unconditional demand for justice. It is precisely because the self (autos) lies in the limit between the law of Infinite responsibility and the rational law into which the former must be channelled – or, as Basterra elegantly puts it, 'between inspiration and expiration'[298] – that autonomy must always stay in a state of creative undecidability, of hesitation, and negotiation between the unconditional and the conditional.

The idea that it is the voice of the moral law within us that 'unconditions' us, that frees us from our sensible nature and endows us with our standing in the world, elucidates the concept that most clearly crystallises this standing: *dignity*. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant defines dignity as the status possessed by human beings regarded as *persons*, that is, as subjects of practical reason, by which they can exact respect from all other rational beings in the world.[299] What allows persons to demand a minimum of respect is precisely what Sussman calls the 'authority of humanity':[300] their ability as rational beings to sacrifice their inclinations and interests, to transcend their phenomenal nature, and be elevated to the noumenal sphere which is revealed through the command of the moral law echoing within them. If dignity is, within Kant's architectonic, grounded in autonomy[301] – the ability of rational beings to obey no other law than which they give to themselves – it follows as a corollary that dignity is not a normative quality that can be weighed, put in a calculus and, compared to other values – be, in

297 Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 69.
298 Basterra, *The Subject of Freedom*, 134.
299 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:435.
300 David Sussman, 'The Authority of Humanity', *Ethics* 113, no. 2 (2003): 350–366, https://doi.org/10.1086/342856.
301 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:436.

other words, treated as a means towards achieving another end. As Kant highlights, dignity has no price:[302] it is *incalculable*, of absolute worth, inviolable, in the sense that it provides the condition of moral coexistence, a condition itself unconditioned and, thus, transcendentally immune from injuries to its status. Humanity in our faces must categorically be treated as an end in itself, untouched by calculation, however noble the opposing end might be.[303]

If dignity can be grasped as the normative quality stemming from our capacity of self-determination, it is no wonder that Kant, as Catherine Chalier accurately points out, 'never evokes the dignity of the particular individual (Würde des Menschen) or human dignity (menschliche Würde), but only the dignity of humanity (Würde der Menschheit)'.[304] Since dignity elicits the feeling of respect, the object of respect in the face of the other is not her alterity, but that which makes her similar to the self: her *humanity*, that is, her capacity to be the author of the moral law. By taking a step back from her phenomenal interests, the Kantian agent identifies the other as an *alter ego* – an end in itself – establishing a symmetrical relation of reciprocity under the force of the moral law's command as a fact of pure practical reason. To possess the status of dignity means to have the competence to acknowledge the dignity of the other – both grounded in the moral elevation established by the universal voice of the moral law. Our sovereign capacity to interact by adopting a firm deliberative standpoint from which we can rationally evaluate the reciprocal demands addressed to one another is what, in Kant's thought, enables the construction of the moral community in the image of a *kingdom of ends*, a systematic uni-

302 Ibid., 4:434–435.

303 Intuitively, one thinks of Jean Genet, the (in)famous French poet who chose to become an outlaw not merely to satisfy his needs, but from a deeply rooted disregard for society's conformist values. Would a revolution of social sleepiness justify violating a person's integrity? From the perspective of Kant's doctrine of the incalculability of dignity, undoubtedly not.

304 Catherine Chalier, *What Ought I to do? Morality in Levinas and Kant*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cornell University Press, 2002), 17.

on of rational beings, who, by transcending their particularity, organise their coexistence according to common objective laws.[305]

The incalculable character of humanity is an Enlightenment ideal that has decisively shaped the normative self-perception of Western political and legal communities. At the same time, however, it is haunted by an irresolvable paradox: while dignity is conceived by Kant as incalculable – not subject to being weighed against other values – its deduction from the *fact of the moral law* raises doubts. Perhaps the very impossibility of measuring humanity depends on a violent measurement: a deprivation of singularity, an imposition of an a priori symmetry based on the fact of reason, which, under our deconstructive reading, resembles a rational imperialism. In view of the above, the *dignity of humanity* seems like a transcendental mask, a *persona*, that absorbs the subject's singularity within an impersonal discourse. This is precisely the spirit of the Levinasian critique against transcendental idealism according to which 'the Other and I function as elements of an ideal calculus … and approach one another under the dominance of ideal necessities which traverse them from all sides'.[306] If what is at stake for Levinas is to give subjectivity back her 'highest dignity',[307] given her own 'disappearance' as a moment necessary for the manifestation of a structure,[308] such a vindication can occur only by transcending the very discourse that consumes her.

'Pure morality must exceed all calculation',[309] writes Derrida, outlining the direction of this transcendence. If dignity, within the Kantian architectonic, takes the form of the right to demand respect, grounded in the capacity to sacrifice one's sensible interests before the imperative of the moral law, the ethics of alterity discourse pushes the notion of sacrifice to its logical extreme: in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas describes the encounter with the face of the Other as demanding an

305 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:433.
306 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 216.
307 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Humanism and An-archy', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 130.
308 Ibid., 129–130.
309 Derrida, *Passions*, 26.

expropriation of one's existence to the point of haemorrhage, while Derrida portrays the self's bond to the Other's singularity as entailing the risk of absolute sacrifice.[310] Dignity, under this perspective, shall be conceived as the absence of every calculus, as the self's election[311] and overflowing by the anarchic responsibility for the vulnerability of the radically Other that cannot be measured or defined by any a priori principles. The incalculability of morality stemming from the absence of a priori principles measuring responsibility implies that the status of the agents is radically asymmetrical: my dignity commands me to sacrifice everything towards the dignity of the Other without expecting any reciprocity.[312] Even when, through the Other's eyes, I discern the glance of the third person crying out for justice and thereby temper the thraldom I endure from the Other in order to obtain what Levinas calls 'the dignity of a citizen',[313] this status never hardens into an inviolable form. Precisely because the Other's demand cannot be fixed in a rigid mould, I can never claim to have done enough, never withdraw into the secure possession of a status. Within my subjective structure glows and will glow the disturbing trace of the *incalculable*: of a responsibility for the wholly Other that endows me with my standing and at the same time requires its sacrifice in *autoimmune* fashion.

The exploration of the concept of dignity inevitably leads us to another crucial concept: *respect*. Nancy understands respect as the very alteration of the subject's position and structure, that is, the way in which the ego responds to the alterity of the law within, thereby becoming a subject.[314] Kant's notion of respect expresses the impact of the law's imperative on the subject: it is a unique feeling, 'brought about by an intellectual ground', one that is not of empirical origin,

310 Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 68.
311 Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Philosophical Determination of the Idea of Culture', in *Entre Nous*, 187.
312 '… pure ethics, if there is any, begins with the respectable dignity of the other as an absolute unlike, recognized as non-recognizable, indeed as unrecognizable, beyond all knowledge, all cognition, and all recognition…' Derrida, *Rogues*, 60.
313 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Peace and Proximity', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 168.
314 Nancy, 'The Kategorein of Excess', 147.

but 'cognized a priori'.[315] But in what way does it alter our subjective position? It does so insofar as 'it lets us discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence',[316] while at the same time 'striking down self-conceit'.[317] Respect thus intertwines two moments: an elevation to the intelligible sphere (or: a freedom *to* obey the moral law) and a humiliation of empirical reason's ambition to legislate (or: a freedom *from* our sensible motives).

Kant is adamant that 'respect is always directed to persons, never to things'.[318] What is it in the face of the other that elicits my respect? Shall we, for instance, assume that the object of our respect is the other person's vulnerability, her physical exposure to wounds and pain? In Kant's thought, the sensible immediacy of the other's presence might produce various feelings such as sympathy, yet those remain pathological and, as such, cannot enter the field of morality. Only the moral person's inner certainty that, in standing before the other, she is in the presence of another moral agent elicits respect in her. In other words: what I respect in myself and the face of the other is our common capacity of self-determination, our ability to guide our will according to the imperative of the moral law residing within us, our ability to sacrifice our empirical interests and deliberate rationally. Respect shall not, therefore, be considered a contingent feature of morality, a feeling merely accompanying the imperative of the moral law without constituting an essential feature of it. Respect is the way the objective moral law – to treat every rational agent as an end in itself – is internalised subjectively, and, in this sense, the moral law and its impact on us are one and the same. This is why Kant insists that the morality of an action consists in its execution *from* duty (aus reiner Pflicht), i.e., because it is practically necessary out of respect for the autonomy of the agents involved. If, on the contrary, an action is externally conformable – that is, in accordance with one's duty (pflichtsmässig) – but has not

315 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73.
316 Ibid., 5:88.
317 Ibid., 5:87.
318 Ibid., 5:76.

been executed out of the subject's respect for the law, then it has no inherent moral worth; its only value consists in its mere legality.[319]

Re-examining retroactively the intentions of this thesis, it seems that an invigoration of the notion of respect constituted its invincible centre. If we look into the etymological origin of the term, we will see – as already noted in the introduction – that it comes from the Latin word 'respicere', which means 'to look back' or to 'regard'. Does not giving regard to the fact of reason imply exploring the unintentional possibilities within it, burrowing into it until – to borrow Beckett's expression – 'that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through?'[320] What lurks behind, according to our deconstructive reading, is the face of the Other, lying in a ghostly interspace between presence and absence and haunting the structures of transcendental idealism. In respecting the Other, we would need to look behind the transcendental mask created by the materials of the Kantian moral personality, to disengage her alterity from the machinery of reason, in order to re-personify her and re-attribute her irreplaceable singularity to her. Respecting her would thus not be tantamount to recognising an empty form, but to acknowledging what cannot be acknowledged: her transcendence, her suffering that eludes the philosophical glance trying to pin it down as an object of knowledge, her unique standing, irreducible to a priori predicates. In a nutshell: respect for the Other, as sketched in the ethics of alterity discourse, does not mean recognising a moral form shaping her personality, but being obsessed by her sensible force that overflows the noumenal self.[321]

319 Ibid., 5:81.

320 Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. I: 1929–1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 519.

321 Paying an unfaithful tribute to the categorical imperative, Levinas claimed in an interview to *Le Monde* in 1980 that he particularly likes the categorical imperative in the formula of humanity ('Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end'), in the sense that within this formula 'we are not in the element of pure universality, but already in the presence of the Other'. See Christian Delacampagne, 'Emmanuel Levinas', in *Entretiens*

Of course, as we have striven to make clear several times throughout this text, the anarchic respect for the alterity of the Other must necessarily inspire practical laws, principles, calculation, universality: we need to construct a regulative ideal according to which we will be able to determine our duties – what we owe to each other. This does not mean, however, that within the moral community respect for the law or, in Kantian terms, 'acting from duty' becomes the utmost horizon of our thought. Forgetting the Other's transcendence, entombing it under a monological rule, stifling it under a normative economy of symmetrical relationships – Derrida, citing in *Passions* the etymological analyses of Benveniste and Malamoud, highlights the rootedness of duty in debt in certain languages[322] – might be an object of desire for our finite consciousness, which would thereby recede into itself, protected from its exposure to what exceeds it. Whereas we need laws, these laws must be respected insofar as they provide the route towards respecting the Other. Given, therefore, that responsibility for the Other is not absorbable in the universality of a principle, the rule fetishism of 'acting from duty' has to remain the object of a certain deconstructive vigilance. For it is not the law that we respect in the Other, but the trace of the Other that we respect in the law.

avec 'Le Monde'. 1. Philosophies (La Découverte/Le Monde, 1984), 146. Cited in Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 58, n. 58.

322 Derrida, *Passions*, 27–29. A comprehensive study of Derrida's reading of Kantian morality can be found in Jacques de Ville, 'The Moral Law: Derrida reading Kant', *Derrida Today* 12, no. 1 (2019): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2019.0194.

6. Conclusion

'Nothing is built on stone. All is built on sand,
but we must build as if the sand were stone'.
Jorge Luis Borges,
Fragments of an Aporcryphal Gospel[323]

Conclusion. The title of the chapter declares that the text is coming to an end and we cannot help but wonder: what does it mean to conclude a text? What is it like – what should it be like – to bring a text to its end? A certain rigour is demanded, a certain decisiveness, a certain self-assuredness: the writer must articulate her thesis, develop her argument coherently, and make a point that can withstand criticism – a point, in other words, clear, enlightened, and enlightening, one that will convince the reader of its solidity. Of course, it all depends on the promises the writer gave, on the questions that traverse her text and that she undertook to pose already in the introduction, promising to provide a solution to a certain theoretical or practical problem. The conclusion seems to be nothing but the keeping of a promise: the text comes full circle, seeking closure, claiming to have responded to the challenges it set from the introduction onwards by forming a rigid, argumentative architectonic – a homogeneous totality whose internal elements are systematically interconnected. All in all, to write a conclusion is to perform an act of mastery: the ideas were tamed and successfully communicated from writer to reader, convincing the latter of their validity from a perspective both addresser and addressee share, their rationality, which enables them to engage in communicat-

323 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Fragments of an Apocryphal Gospel' ['Περικοπές ενός απόκρυφου Ευαγγελίου'], in *Poems* [*Ποιήματα*], trans. Dimitris Kalokyris (Patakis, 2014), 127.

ive interaction. If a text consists in such a communicative interaction, conclusion appears as the seal of its success.

The question traversing the whole of this text, providing its heartbeat, is the question of responsibility: 'What should I do?' It was identified from the beginning not simply as a supplement to an already formulated subjective basis, but as its very material, as the axis around which subjectivity spirals, endowing her with her unique standing. What urged us towards the deconstructive reading of the Kantian fact of reason was an unconditional desire to vindicate subjectivity and morality, to expose that subjectivity is something more than the voice of reason echoing within her. Those were the questions and the intentions that constituted the horizon of this thesis. And now it is time to conclude: to review our argumentative line, to be decisive, to provide a clear response concerning the measure of responsibility, especially to the extent that this measure is determinative of the subjective knot's texture. Admittedly, the present of our conclusion finds us in a state of hesitation, of suspension of judgement, of epoché. If, throughout the text we sought to show that subjectivity constitutes the *only ideatum that surpasses its idea,* if responsibility for the Other cannot be pinned down within the structures of a symbolic system, how can we master the limits of this text, given that the text per se is haunted by a trace of Otherness resisting thematisation, that a remainder of responsibility, non-absorbable by the argumentative sequence, prevents its closure – the coincidence of the beginning with its end, the utterance of a definite response to the questions posed? How are we to face this conclusion without conclusion? Shall we consider the text's non-coincidence with itself a failure, a failure to make a point, a failure to settle things by saying something substantial about subjectivity and her responsibility?

The hyper-aporetic idiom of the ethics of alterity has often been marked as an object of criticism of Levinas and Derrida, in the sense that they both do not seem to provide satisfactory (that is, definite) solutions to the question of responsibility.[324] Doesn't surpassing the

324 See Stelios Virvidakis, 'Deconstruction and undeconstructible concepts of moral philosophy' ['Αποδόμηση και μη αποδομήσιμες έννοιες της ηθικής φιλοσοφίας'],

Kantian transcendental certainties and abandoning the unconditionality of the categorical imperative create a sense of uncertainty which looms over the way we interact in the here and now of our everyday life? Doesn't the putative autoimmunity haunting the identity of the subject essentially traumatise her status, hurt her self-determination, sketch an image of subjectivity as morally homeless, wavering eternally between Good and Evil without any actual guiding thread on what to decide? Doesn't the practical impossibility of retreating into an inviolable sphere expose the subject to the danger of what is 'to come' ('à venir'), to an inability to find shelter against the Other whose demand cannot be weighed through the employment of sound normative criteria? What if the person knocking on our door is Reverend Powell, the demonic preacher from the *Night of the Hunter*, whose summons is more than capable of leading us astray? Aren't our communities doomed to be transformed into environments of an unresolvable moral ambiguity if every regulative ideal we put forward remains deconstructable under the gaze of the Other? *Perhaps*.

Perhaps. The response seems highly troubling, as if echoing a certain indifference towards the here and now of our everyday life, as if deconstruction consisted in a nuanced marivaudage, in a process of blurring the limits for the sake of a narcissistic enjoyment. Such a reading of 'perhaps' would justifiably make us think that the ethics of deconstruction leads to nothing but a destruction of the fundamental norms enabling and guiding our intersubjectivity. In this thesis, however, we have striven to designate the exact opposite: that responsibility for the Other is excessive, that it is not reduced to the impersonal structures of reason, that the Other person is not just a mirroring of ourselves, that she is a stranger, a total stranger, whose strangeness must not be repressed for the sake of a coherent discourse, a stable axiomatic of values, a definite conclusion in regard to what we should do. The price we have to pay for unveiling the ultra-transcendental responsibility destabilising moral principles might indeed be moral

in *The political and ethical thought of Jacques Derrida* [*Η πολιτική και ηθική σκέψη του Jacques Derrida*], ed. Gerasimos Kakolyris (Plethron, 2015), 294–295.

ambiguity, the echo of 'perhaps'. Yet this is a risk, a philosophical risk, a personal risk, a political risk, that we will have to take: to think in terms of difference rather than in terms of an imperialistic sameness, to attempt to construct our principles on the groundless ground of what breaks out of its form, to be constantly ready to etch lines of escape when those principles become repressive, to transgress them and restore them over and over again. The non-form of the Other's demand makes the articulation of a conclusive principle impossible, but this does not need to paralyse our reflexes. Jorge Luis Borges' words resound in our ears as a cryptic categorical principle, as a conclusion without conclusion: *It is our duty to build upon sand, as if it were stone.* It is our duty to dare to construct upon the formless, to decide without drowning the Event of the decision in pre-articulated norms, to decide, however, without being discouraged or castrated by the formless material of our construction. May we treat this as the concluding principle of this thesis?

It is time to conclude. To conclude without conclusion, to defer (and differ, as in *différance*) conclusion, by opening subjectivity, intersubjectivity, community to what is *to come*: to a future that will not be just a reduplication of the present, to a future radically incommensurable with it, precisely because it embodies this trace of the diachronic past of responsibility. How shall we approach this strange future? It is the unexpected arrival of the Other whose summons cannot be immobilised under our conceptual glance, an arrival that haunts our present, for we are always already – from an immemorial past[325]– responsible to welcome her, sharpening our ethical reflexes in the here and now. This is the challenge, the spectral challenge posed by the ethics of alterity discourse: to keep the autoimmune community alive, to be constantly open to the unexpected arrival of the stranger, to retain a *difficult freedom*, a freedom itself freed from the shackles of consciousness and sovereignty, a freedom to face the singular Other without pre-mediating principles. Isn't it a fine risk to take?

325 In this sense, Derrida underlines that the 'to come' is 'more ancient than the present, older than the past present'. See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 37–38.

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