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## Ontological fatigue and the limits of phenomenology in early Levinas

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## ONTOLOGICAL FATIGUE AND THE LIMITS OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN EARLY LEVINAS

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## I introduction: the problem of invisibility

It is possible to say, perhaps, that Emmanuel Levinas's commitment to the phenomenological method, or even any philosophical method, is ambiguous. In an interview, published in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas remarked:

there you have my response to the question of method. I would also say to you that I know no more about it. I do not believe that there is a possible transparency in method or that philosophy is possible as transparency. Those who have spent their lives on methodology have written many books to replace the more interesting books they would have been able to write. Too bad for the march in the sun without shadows that philosophy would be. (89)

We can read here a scathing critique on the pretensions of philosophy as transparency, as “the march in the sun without shadows that philosophy would be.” Interestingly, however, already in Levinas's early writings, we can conceive a distinctive approach to method, in which Levinas precisely seeks to rethink the relationship between themes such as the visible and the invisible, often conceived in terms as “sun” or “light” in opposition to “shadows” and “darkness.” It is my aim in this paper to show that the notion of ontological fatigue or exhaustion (I will use these terms interchangeably) plays a central role in the relation between visibility and invisibility. More

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## ONTOLOGICAL FATIGUE AND THE LIMITS OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN EARLY LEVINAS

precisely, for Levinas, ontological fatigue must be viewed as the effort to give a phenomenological description of that which is in essence outside the world of light or visibility (or: on the plane of phenomena). This is the case because fatigue points to anonymous existence as a domain of meaninglessness or non-sense. I investigate how this domain plays a role in phenomenalization. I claim that although paradoxical, Levinas's approach to and use of phenomenology is convincing in that it shows how meaning cannot but present itself through the interruption between what is visible and what is not.

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Levinas's philosophy and its relation to phenomenology and its method has received a lot of discussion. Often, his early work is conceived as a preparatory step towards his later account of ethical transcendence, conceived as the movement beyond intentionality (Burggraeve; Llewelyn; Peperzak). My aim in this essay is something different: I propose to read Levinas's account of fatigue not as one among many illustrations of his early ontology, but already as the very place where phenomenology is confronted with its own limits. This means that Levinas's account of anonymous being is not merely a negative or oppressive force. I am in agreement here with Daniela Matysová when she notes that the effect of the non-sense of being is the main theme of Levinas's early works. This effect however is often hidden under a focus on the "horror" of being (Matysová 80).

The structure of this paper is as follows: in section 2, I address the relation between light and invisibility in phenomenology to show how the task that phenomenology as a method has outlined for itself necessitates an investigation into its own conditionality. Secondly, through an analysis of the phenomenon of fatigue as developed by Levinas, I seek to clarify that fatigue is a bodily experience that first and foremost points to the domain of the ontological. Thirdly and finally, I argue that the specific temporality of ontological fatigue reveals a particular experience of presence that is an achievement and a burden, which, from a phenomenological perspective, is the condition for meaning. As such, fatigue shows that experience cannot but manifest itself within the interplay between visibility and invisibility. Ultimately, I argue that this relation is not a kind of revelation, nor a perceptual ambiguity, but a structural exposure to a non-phenomenal hiddenness that both constitutes and interrupts the meaningful present, thereby reconfiguring phenomenology beyond intentionality or disclosure.

## 2 phenomenology and visibility

The point of departure for phenomenology in the classical, Husserlian sense is the givenness

of different phenomena. This givenness however, and possibly contrary to what the term "phenomenology" seems to suggest, does not imply that phenomenology's subject matter is only what reveals itself from within the domain that can be illuminated; it is necessarily concerned with what cannot reveal itself. Phenomenology, concerned with the givenness of experience, must necessarily be concerned with what makes this experience possible. Fundamentally, it means that phenomenology has a twofold task: on the one hand, it must seek, as Merleau-Ponty states, consciousness of reason in contingency, and on the other hand, it is an awareness, or the "vigilance which does not let us forget the source of all knowledge" (*Signs* 110).

Such a shadow, or invisibility, takes on different roles for different phenomenologists. In Husserl's thought, for example, the fact that I can only perceive one side of a chair, does not mean its other sides are absent. The sides that are unperceived are co-present with the side that is perceived. When I move my body around the chair, the perceived and unperceived parts of the chair change according to a series of what Husserl, in *Ideas I*, calls *adumbrations* (92). Here, what does not appear, (like the side of an object) is situational and co-constituted in the perception of consciousness.

In the thinking of Heidegger, we find a similar gesture to that of Husserl. For Heidegger, what does not appear is the groundless ground that offers the manifestation of Being. Whereas Husserl seeks to describe the dynamical relation between visible and invisible, Heidegger focuses on the relation between appearing and hiddenness (as the fact that something can be "covered up"). Yet for both thinkers, phenomenology always relates to a certain invisibility. It is important to emphasize that this invisibility is not conceived in a fundamental sense. As Heidegger notes in *Being and Time*, "behind the phenomena of phenomenology there is essentially nothing else" (60). Because, phenomenologically, it would be self-contradictory to conceive, or let alone perceive, something outside relationality which would

amount to a thing-in-itself in Kantian terms. Because how could an object outside of any relation, ever be postulated? Yet, as Heidegger writes, since “the phenomena are proximally and for the most part not given, there is need for phenomenology. Covered-up-ness is the counter-concept to ‘phenomenon’” (60). Here, what is invisible is, in other words, situational and as such, there is no originary or transcendent invisibility to be found, since it is co-given in experience.<sup>1</sup> Since this is the case within phenomenology, what is invisible belongs to what appears “and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground” (59).

Invisibility allows phenomena to appear in the way they do. Or, to state it in negative terms, the totality of being (*Seiendes*) cannot show itself to the totality of Being (*Sein*). Thus, methodologically speaking, a domain of non-meaning must be presupposed, because the origination of new meanings cannot occur out of a vacuum. Or, in other words again: if there is such a thing as a phenomenon, there must be a *somewhere* out of which it appears. The phenomenological method does not display the invisible as the limit of what can possibly be experienced. Instead, it views that which does not show itself as the dynamic element of the relational essence of any experience. The phenomenological method points to the fact that, properly speaking, phenomenology is and should not only be concerned with thematization, but also with the conditioning of it.

Due to its concern with conditioning, phenomenology is necessarily a phenomenology of its limits, not only because there are phenomena at the limits of experience (sleep would be a good example, and the notion of the pre-conscious in Husserl’s phenomenology also), but also, and possibly more importantly because of the fact that the givenness of phenomena, however fleeting, cannot be viewed in isolation of their essential conditions of possibility. Thus, phenomenology is faced with the difficult task of recognizing its limit. It is phenomenology’s challenge not to turn into an idealism and integrate its limit into a structure of consciousness. Yet, as noted, such recognition of a limit must also entail that phenomenology

cannot afford itself to fall into the dogmatism of a Kantian metaphysics, where a thing-in-itself would operate as the unknowable source of meanings.

I suggest that a closer look at the early work of Levinas can shed light on the manner in which he thematizes the domain of invisibility that is supposed to serve as the condition for meaning in the world. As I will show through the analysis of fatigue, the specificity of the Levinasian account of invisibility lies in the domain of ontology, and reveals the fact that being a subject, before it is caught up in its intentionality or openness to the world, means being delivered over to existence itself, which is conceived in terms of an excess that is present, yet outside the domain of reflection.

### 3 the *there is* and ontological fatigue

Although Levinas inherits phenomenology as conceived by Husserl and Heidegger, he nevertheless transforms it in a profound sense. Levinas is well known for his later ethical metaphysics of alterity as presented in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. Oftentimes, his early works, such as *On Escape* and *Existence and Existents*, are read as a preparatory investigation into the way in which this alterity must be articulated. Yet, the early Levinas, whilst being heavily immersed in the vocabulary of classical phenomenology, already seeks to describe a modality of subjectivity that cannot be conceived as a transcendental ego, or as an openness to the world that is full of meaning. Instead, for the Levinas of *Existence and Existents*, subjectivity is delivered over to the weight of presence before it is openness or intentionality. As I show, for Levinas the understanding of this presence as nameless, heavy, and dark makes up the elemental form of existence in terms of which the invisibility of phenomena is conceptualized in a paradoxical manner.

To conceive of presence as heavy and dark reveals that first of all existence is tiring; a burden and oppressive; it pushes us down.

Conscious, intentional existence in the world, is an achievement of ontological separation from this domain, just as much as it is a condemnation to existing as such. The presence that Levinas describes is named the *there is* and can be viewed as the effort to describe a duality of existence that does not take as its point of departure the confrontation with a possible nothingness (as in Heidegger's *Being and Time*) as an impossibility of existence. Whereas for Heidegger, being and nothingness are co-positioned, Levinas finds that the tragedy in being is not the possibility of non-being, but rather the fullness of being itself in which we as human beings participate. In *Existence and Existents*, he writes: "for where the continual play of our relations with the world is interrupted we find neither death nor the 'pure ego' but the anonymous state of being" (44).

The *there is* is described as "impersonal," and as "being in general" (Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 52) which is present beyond or before subjectivity and a horizon that delineates a world full of meaning. There is, however, a kind of meaning to be found in the experience of the *there is*: namely the heavy weight of pure presence. As Catherine Chaliel points out, Hamlet famously called being into question: "to be or not to be?" For Levinas, there is no such possibility, since "being [...] is without limits" (Chaliel 121). This being is what escapes the world of phenomena, but leaves its trace in the world.

In the night, for example, we do not reflect on existence, but are exposed to it instead:

In the night, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer this or that; there is not "something." But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse. Nothing responds to us but this silence. (Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 53)

Some phrases by Maurice Blanchot might be helpful to illuminate this nocturnal presence.

Blanchot, Levinas's close friend and collaborator, to whom Levinas expresses his admiration in *Existence and Existents*, writes the following: "when everything has disappeared in the night, 'everything has disappeared' appears. This is the *other* night." Night is this apparition: "everything has disappeared" (Blanchot 163). Furthermore, Blanchot remarks: "*in* the night one can die; we reach oblivion. But this *other* night is the death no one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest" (163). As such, both Levinas and Blanchot make the point that the darkness of the night absorbs meaning into non-meaning, which is not a nothingness.

An experience of such a dark night and its non-meaning can be found in the phenomenon of insomnia. When suffering from insomnia, the subject is delivered over to a form of being oneself that is not part of the world of light, and of knowledge and intentionality. But beside insomnia, the *there is* can be accessed phenomenologically through the experience of fatigue. A closer look at fatigue, or the experience of being exhausted, can clarify the way in which this peculiar phenomenon opens to the darkness that is on the other side of the world of phenomena. It can do so since it illuminates the unbreakable relation between a subject and the fact that it exists. Fatigue, or exhaustion, points not so much to dreading a particular situation, nor to a physical state, but rather to existence itself. Levinas writes that "to be weary is to be weary of being" (*Existence and Existents* 24). Fatigue delineates the profoundly personal attachment of existence, as well as its limits, in reminding us of "a commitment to exist, with all the seriousness and harshness of an unrevokable contract" (12).

In fatigue, we want to escape existence itself, yet the experience of it is "the impossible refusal of this ultimate obligation" (Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 12). Being itself is threatening, and we cannot depart from it without drawing it forth. Fatigue concerns a "one must" that cannot be broken. Chaliel offers these helpful lines:

being riveted to being, to the impossibility of shrugging off its weight, and being riveted to the self, in the impossibility of untying the self, are bound together in that being is a weight in itself, but a weight equally indissociable from the being that bears it. (122)

Thus, the fact that we are bound to existence shows for Levinas that there is already a duality implied in existence; an “essential lack of simplicity” (*Existence and Existents* 16), and reveals that existence “drags behind it a weight” (17). As such, existence “is bent and caught up in itself, showing that the verb ‘to be’ is a reflexive verb: it is not just that one is, one is oneself (on s’est)” (17). Being oneself is already a being *with* oneself in such a way that we bring ourselves along in any experience we might have; every mode of being in the world includes as its condition being with oneself, that is outside the domain of phenomena.

With the gesture of invoking a domain without meaning, Levinas shifts the question of ontology away from the horizon of disclosure. For him, nothingness is not the negation of Being but the interruption of openness to the world. The limit of the phenomenal field appears in this interruption, which in turn proves to be the condition for meaning. Exhaustion discloses ontology by showing that the weight of being oneself already exists outside intentionality and openness. Subjective existence itself is experienced as an interruption of the droning omnipresence of the *there is*.

In contrast to Heidegger’s ontological project, the phenomenon of fatigue demonstrates the impossibility of equating being with openness to it. Because fatigue shows that being cannot be reduced to an openness toward it, but is instead marked by interruption and burden. The ontological reconfiguration that Levinas presents also demands a reconfiguration of temporality: if existence is experienced in terms of heaviness and delay, then temporality can no longer be ecstatic but must be interpreted differently: through the

specific account of duration that is disclosed in fatigue.

#### 4 the time of fatigue

Fatigue reveals temporality not as ecstatic openness, as Heidegger conceived it, but as the weight of duration. Time appears here as delay, suspension, and weariness. In fatigue, the present is no longer grasped as a horizon of possibilities but as the heaviness of persistence itself, where existence continues without release. As Jeffrey Bloechl writes for Levinas, fatigue discloses the temporal aspect of existence, since “time is the fabric of being” and, simultaneously, the “pulsation of being generates time” (78). As such, the analysis of fatigue displays a particular experience of temporality. This experience shows that the presence of the subject is conceived as not in terms of a linear flow, but an interruption that is as much an achievement as it is a burden.

As noted above, fatigue is a condemnation to presence. An analysis of the temporal aspect of this condemnation, however, reveals a double movement: on the one hand a condemnation is a subjection to being, but on the other, fatigue involves an element of stiffening, withering up, “breaking with the sources of life” (Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 24). Levinas offers the example of a hand that is lifting a weight, not letting go but carrying on “as it were abandoned to itself, counts only on itself” (25). The hand is abandoned, not by an exterior element, but by a being that is “out of joint” with itself. Here, the “I” finds itself dislocated, not being able to catch up with itself in the instant to “which it is nonetheless committed for good” (25). Fatigue thus also shows the profound disruption at work in the instant itself, and reveals that existence cannot be commanded by the subject.

The double movement of fatigue further reveals itself in effort and labour, that together make up fatigue. Because, as Levinas writes, both phenomena contain a corporeal dimension, and “presuppose a commitment in which we are already involved” (*Existence and Existents* 19). Effort takes place step by

step, it “takes on the instant, breaking and tying back together again the thread of time” (23). In doing so, it struggles “behind the instant.” Yet, effort is also somehow already implicated *within* the instant, since, it is committed to it, because the time of a subject itself can only be experienced as “stoppage and positing” within anonymous duration. Hence, Levinas writes, “effort is the very effecting of an instant” (23). More precisely, it means that fatigue refers to “lagging behind the present.” The interval in the present “opens a distance in which a relationship takes form” (23), indicating that there is a distance or interval between being oneself and time that makes possible a relationship between two terms:

Here, the taking up of existence in the instant becomes directly perceptible. Fatigue is to be sure not a cancellation of one’s contract with being. The delay it involves is nonetheless an inscription into existence, but what is peculiar to this inscription, its sort of hesitation, enables us to surprise it, to catch sight of the operation of assuming which the existence that is taken up already always involves. (25)

The presence of the present is absolute in the sense that it is an interruption or interval to duration, and the bringing about of a *here*. The taking on of a present is just as much a subjection as it is a manifestation. It is fitting that the relationship between existence and subjectivity is called an “upsurge” by Levinas (25). Thus, the present, *my* present, as a subject consists in me being forced to take charge of it. “To be” means to take up being, and it is in this fundamental sense that the existence of an existent is an activity.

Existence then, in its active sense, is a kind of positioning that is the first step in the direction of intelligibility and the main condition for meaning. This can be so because the positioning of the subject is perceived as an interruption that allows for the chain of differences that is the necessary precondition for meaning in the world. Or, in other words: meaning occurs to the subject once it is itself, and individuated with regards to

anonymous existence. Now, it can distinguish between a here and a there, a self and what is different from it, and thus it enters a world that can be experienced in a meaningful sense.

## 5 subjectivity as interruption

The problematization of the givenness of consciousness, as experienced in fatigue, shows how subjectivity cannot just be taken as a starting point, but is conceived as a task and achievement. As such, the analysis of fatigue points towards a radically different conception of subjectivity, that is a departure from the way in which identification is thought in logical or idealist terms. Because in those instances, the “ontological event” of it is overlooked (Levinas, *Existence and Existents* 88). Levinas makes the point that identity cannot be merely interpreted as belonging to the verb “to be,” but must be attached to “that which is, to a noun that has detached itself from the anonymous rustling of the there is” (88). What is the relationship between a being and the fact that it exists? For Levinas, this relationship, as a positioning is as much inevitable as it is spontaneous. In this way, he seeks to describe the process of identification as the actual production of identity and not only its result. The analysis of the instant as the moment of emergence of presence, as shown in fatigue, reveals first that for Levinas, existence itself is not an object for consciousness. Because the point is the fact that the subject must not be viewed in objective terms, but rather as a transformation: from an event to an identity. In this way, identity is neither a thing, nor an event, but is interpreted as the relationship between object and event.

Later, at the time of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will call this event an atheism (53). “Atheism” might be an unconventional term in this context, since it is not concerned with the question of the existence of God, but what is emphasized is the fact that the self-containment of subjectivity is the result of ontological separation of the *there is*. As such, Levinas’s account of identification means a profound

critique on classical phenomenology, which takes the congruence between the givenness of the world of phenomena and the givenness of subjectivity both for granted and as its point of departure.

Fatigue reveals what Levinas calls the elemental: to be oneself is first of all a passivity and the experience of being exposed to a domain of Being that is fundamentally dark and anonymous. Levinas writes the following: “Being is essentially alien and strikes against us. We undergo its suffocating embrace like the night, but it doesn’t respond to us. There is a pain in Being” (*Existence and Existents* 9). In this way, the emergence of subjectivity is not an intentional act or a willed decision. It is, in other words, an interruption that occurs to being, and not something that is done within it. The emergence of subjectivity is not explained in mechanical or causal terms: the interruption of the there is is irreducible. The philosophical reason for this irreducibility is located in the fact that Levinas has barred himself from conceptualizing the emergence of subjectivity in terms of a logical necessity or a function of being. If he would have taken such a route, this emergence would precisely affirm the kind of thinking that conceives being in terms of a totality. Instead, what we can say about the irreducibility of this event is that subjectivity is resistant against reduction, exhaustion, or conceptualization. A consequence of this irreducibility is that phenomenology itself must be reconfigured: description is no longer designated to intentional sense, but must engage precisely with the resistance to disclosure that fatigue reveals. Let us now take a closer look at what this irreducibility means for phenomenology.

## 6 fatigue and the phenomenological method

Levinas’s phenomenological analysis of fatigue and the anonymous being to which it points can be read as a profound departure from the phenomenological tradition. For Levinas, the attachment to existence must certainly not be

conceived as a mode of reflection, judgement, or theoretical position. Here thus, being oneself is different from the Kantian “I think” or Husserl’s experience of time-consciousness, or Heidegger’s Da- of Dasein. These “events” take place within the light, or: on the phenomenological horizon.

Classical phenomenology as conceived by Husserl would be incapable of reflecting on the relation between existence and existent in the manner Levinas does. Because for him, the weight of presence can be juxtaposed to the account of presence that comes to light in the example of the duration of a melody. Husserl’s famous example of the melody in the treatment of time in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, shows the fact that a melody is experienced by consciousness in its totality and as a unity, instead as a set of random tones. According to Husserl, this is possible because the structure of consciousness is protentional and retentional: the present for consciousness already carries certain absences that are part of the flow of time. For Levinas, the melody serves as an example that shows that the Husserlian account of presence is incapable of reflecting on the weight and condemnation to existence that the present moment entails before it takes on an ecstatic structure. Levinas reflects on Husserl’s example of the melody by stating that the notes of the music seem already freed from the present; “transported and swept away by it” (*Existence and Existents* 23).

It must be noted however that, despite Levinas’s departure from Husserl’s account of temporality, his prioritization of the instant is reminiscent of Husserl’s interpretation of the primacy of the embodied present over the past and the future as modified versions of it. Thus, although Levinas criticizes intentionality, the emphasis on presence echoes the privilege that Husserl grants to the present. As such, the description of the instant also amounts to a return to Husserl. It is a return to a transcendental ego that serves as the source of intentionality. Not however in the service of a project

## ontological fatigue

in Husserl's vein: investigating the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, but rather as an attempt to describe the weight of the instant as an opening to the ontological domain that remains outside theoretical reflection.

The Heideggerian schema and its reformulation of intentional consciousness to the openness of Dasein is also ill-equipped to analyze the instant. Because as Heidegger shows in his analysis of temporality in *Being and Time*, the possibility of Dasein's presence of meaning is temporal, which means that "*temporality is the primordial outside-of-itself in and for itself*" (377). The point in question for Heidegger is that the Da- as the "there" of Dasein is constituted by ecstatic temporality, and as such the Da- of Dasein means that to be with oneself in the present moment is to be away from oneself. Consequently, in Heidegger's schema, the significance and possible weight of an instant can only be viewed as an example of the metaphysical understanding of time as articulated in the philosophical tradition.

So Levinas agrees with Heidegger that phenomenology points to Being, but not in the way Heidegger conceives. More specifically, for Levinas, presence is conceived as an affective interruption that calls into question the relation between Being and its meaning as assumed by Heidegger. Levinas's gesture means that, in other words, the focus on interruption as the origination of meaning is phenomenologically distinctive from Heidegger in the sense that the invisibility revealed in fatigue operates as a non-phenomenal background that resists any kind of integration into the domain of phenomenality. Thus, where for Heidegger the interplay between concealment and unconcealment is ontologically structural, for Levinas, there is nothing revealed: the weight of being itself has no further content.

Moreover, whereas the Merleau-Ponty of the *Phenomenology of Perception* focuses on the ambiguous nature of perception, the invisibility that Levinas invokes as the *there is*, is outside of the domain of vision. Instead, it delineates an

affective exposure to existence itself. As such, the invisibility of Merleau-Ponty can be characterized as embodied and phenomenal, while Levinas's account of hiddenness is a confrontation with impersonal existence itself.

It is important to emphasize the peculiarity and paradoxical nature of Levinas's gesture in invoking a domain of unintelligibility outside the world of phenomenality that we nevertheless experience. His loyalty to phenomenological description leads him to describe fatigue as an experience outside intentional subjectivity and the world of light. Thus phenomenology is required to account for an experience that resists relational sense and is, in essence, beyond its own domain. Such a gesture can be questioned from the perspective of phenomenology's own demands. In other words, by invoking a domain of non-meaning as the condition of the world, and inaccessible to intentional consciousness, can the charge of idealism and Kantian dogmatism be rebuked?

I think that the analysis of fatigue as an ontological phenomenon shows that there is a way of experiencing being that cannot be viewed in terms of intentionality, but rather as a kind of non-intelligibility that can avoid the accusation of idealism, because anonymous being both precedes and exceeds the subject. As such, it cannot serve as an object for representation and is outside the domain of meaning. It means, in other words, that the very structure of being itself is that which cannot be idealized.

Yet, the fact that anonymous existence cannot be represented does not mean that it resembles the Kantian thing-in-itself and falls into dogmatism. The fundamental difference is the fact that although representation is impossible, the analysis of fatigue shows that it is passively endured and undergone. As such, anonymous being is not a thought that is beyond experience, but something that is experienced, albeit in a non-intentional manner. In this way, anonymous being is pre-phenomenal, an excess and disturbance within the domain of lived experience, and not transcendent in the Kantian sense. Furthermore, anonymous being does not operate as an ontological foundation: it does not function as a

metaphysical source of experience. As such, the specific kind of conditioning at work should not be interpreted in a logical or chronological manner, but as the necessary form under which phenomenal experience presents itself.

## 7 concluding remarks

Tracing the phenomenon of ontological fatigue as presented in the early work of Levinas, reveals that phenomenology is faced with a certain impossibility: it gestures beyond the jurisdiction that it has outlined for itself to give an account of its own conditionality. As such, Levinas's ontological fatigue points to the double task for phenomenology: 1) an inquiry into how subjectivity is capable of a meaningful relation with its world, while at the same time, 2) inquiring into the origination of meaning itself. Fatigue, in this respect, demonstrates that meaning cannot be understood only in terms of manifestation or visibility, but must be seen as arising in relation to an impersonal invisibility that both constitutes and interrupts the present. In this sense, the interplay between visibility is not "just" a methodological concern but the process through which subjectivity and phenomenal meaning can emerge.

More precisely, through fatigue, Levinas shows that subjectivity does not originate in intentional openness to the world, but in a passivity: a being exposed to existence itself. As such, fatigue discloses the subject not as the independent origin of sense, but as bound to an inescapable weight of being that it cannot abandon. This weight, experienced as both burden and achievement, problematizes the givenness of consciousness and challenges phenomenology to describe an affect, rather than what appears.

The temporality of fatigue both exemplifies this insight and makes it concrete. The instant of fatigue is not a simple present but an interval and a delay that disrupts and grounds meaning. Because in being exhausted, the subject is forced into presence, but this presence is interrupted, exposing the subject's dependence on an anonymous existence that

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precedes it. Meaning thus arises from the tension between visibility and invisibility, or from manifestation and interruption.

As a consequence, Levinas's analysis of fatigue leads to a transformed conception of subjectivity. Subjectivity emerges not as an act of self-positing but as a radical passivity, an interruption from the *there is*. Identity is not a pre-given essence, nor simply an intentional act, but the ongoing and irreducible relation between being and the fact of existing. This account amounts to a critique of classical phenomenology in the sense that it calls into question the equivalence between meaning and openness or intentionality. Instead, the analysis of fatigue demonstrates that phenomenology must reckon with a dimension of invisibility that resists incorporation into the light of disclosure. Levinas offers a distinctive phenomenological insight: meaning emerges not only through what can be made manifest, but through a relation to what resists appearing altogether.



## disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## note

1 As the most classical example of Husserl's approach to an invisibility can serve his remark that "a physical thing can be given only 'one-sidedly'" (*Ideas I* 94).

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