Levinas Studiekring

Mededelingen van de Levinas Studiekring
Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Levinas Society

XXI, december 2016

ISSN 2542-3894

The Balance of Enjoyment. The Truth of Hedonism in Levinas

Joachim Duyndam

Abstract
This paper focuses on enjoyment in Levinas, distinguishing it from the phenomenon of asceticism on the one hand and from the phenomenon of addiction on the other. Unlike common interpretations, I will stress enjoyment providing the subject with a certain measure of independence from being, which is necessary to meet the other as other. Enjoyment performs my part of what Levinas calls 'separation', whereas the other realizes his/her part of the separation by transcendence. Therefore, enjoyment is not so much conflicting with the other's appeal to me; it is the very condition of my openness to the appeal. This is what Levinas calls 'the permanent truth of hedonism'.

Introduction
To introduce the argument, let me first quote a stunning and evocative story recounted by Sogyal Rinpoche in his *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*:

> Asanga was one of the most famous Indian Buddhist saints, and lived in the fourth century. He went to the mountains to do a solitary retreat, concentrating all his meditation practice on the Buddha Maitreya, in the fervent hope that he would be blessed with a vision of this Buddha and receive teachings from him.
>
> For six years Asanga meditated in extreme hardship, but did not even have one auspicious dream. He was disheartened and thought he would never succeed with his aspiration to meet the Buddha Maitreya, and so he abandoned his retreat and left his hermitage. He had not gone far down the road when he saw a man rubbing an enormous iron bar with a strip of silk. Asanga went up to him and asked him what he was doing. "I haven't got a needle", the man replied, "so I'm going to make one out of this iron bar." Asanga stared at him, astounded; even if the man were able to manage it in a hundred years, he thought, what would be the point? He said to himself: "Look at the trouble people give themselves over things that are totally absurd. You are doing something really valuable, spiritual practice, and you're not nearly so dedicated." He turned around and went back to his retreat.

Another three years went by, still without the slightest sign from the Buddha Maitreya. “Now I know for certain,” he thought, “I’m never going to succeed.” So, he left again, and soon came to a bend in the road where there was a huge rock, so tall it seemed to touch the sky. At the foot of the rock was a man busily rubbing it with a feather soaked in water. “What are you doing?” Asanga asked.

“This rock is so big it’s stopping the sun from shining on my house, so I’m trying to get rid of it.” Asanga was amazed at the man’s indefatigable energy, and ashamed at his own lack of dedication. He returned to his retreat.

Three more years passed, and still he had not even had a single good dream. He decided, once and for all, that it was hopeless, and he left his retreat for good. The day wore on, and in the afternoon he came across a dog lying by the side of the road. It had only its front legs, and the whole of the lower part of its body was rotting and covered with maggots. Despite its pitiful condition, the dog was snapping at passers-by, and pathetically trying to bite them by dragging itself along the ground with its two good legs.

Asanga was overwhelmed with a vivid and unbearable feeling of compassion. He cut a piece of flesh off his own body and gave it to the dog to eat. Then he bent down to take off the maggots that were consuming the dog’s body. But he suddenly thought he might hurt them if he tried to pull them out with his fingers, and realized that the only way to remove them would be on his tongue. Asanga knelt on the ground, and looking at the horrible festering, writhing mass, closed his eyes. He leant closer and put out his tongue ... The next thing he knew, his tongue was touching the ground. He opened his eyes and looked up. The dog was gone; there in its place was the Buddha Maitreya, ringed by a shimmering aura of light.

“At last,” said Asanga, “why did you never appear to me before?”

Maitreya spoke softly: “It is not true that I have never appeared to you before. I was with you all the time, but your negative karma and obscurations prevented you from seeing me. Your twelve years of practice dissolved them slightly, so that you were at last able to see the

> dog. Then, thanks to your genuine and heartfelt compassion, all those obscurations were completely swept away, and you can see me before you with your very own eyes. If you don't believe that this is what happened, put me on your shoulder and try and see if anyone else can see me."
>
> Asanga put Maitreya on his right shoulder and went to the marketplace, where he began to ask everyone: "What have I got on my shoulder?" "Nothing," most people said, and hurried on. Only one old woman, whose karma had been slightly purified, answered: "You've got the rotting corpse of an old dog on your shoulder, that's all." Asanga at last understood the boundless power of compassion that had purified and transformed his karma, and so made him a vessel fit to receive the vision and instruction of Maitreya. Then the Buddha Maitreya, whose name means 'loving kindness', took Asanga to a heavenly realm, and there gave him many sublime teachings that are among the most important in the whole of Buddhism.[1]

Asanga and Western Philosophy

Although this is a typical Buddhist story, beautifully recounting the ideal of a Buddhist way of life, the central character of it seems to act according to some motives that are familiar in western philosophy, too. At least three great western philosophers are present in this story.

First, one could say that Asanga is a Kantian. He retreats from other people and from the world of senses and enjoyment, by imposing a rule of law on himself. More specifically, he is acting in accordance with a law of *reason*. Living like an ascetic recluse, he despises and rejects the demands of bodily happiness. Unlike Kantian ethics, however, Asanga's acting is motivated by an end: being blessed with a vision of the Buddha and receive teachings from him. Though he may not be a *pure* Kantian, Asanga seems to represent perfectly Kant's ideal of autonomy. His will to resist inclinations and to act upon determination of reason is purely autonomous.

Unfortunately, Assanga's efforts are without result, but for a real Kantian results do not make any difference, at least not in a moral sense. According to Kant, the moral value of actions is neither assessed by results or success, nor by goals. The only thing that matters morally is whether an action, or more precisely the *maxime* of an action, is in accordance with the moral law of reason, the categorical imperative.

1. Rinpoche 1994: 191-192

Moreover, for an action to be moral, it should be done for the sake of the moral law of reason itself. Asanga nevertheless leaves his retreat and his ascetic way of life.

In the second instance, one might ask whether our hero turns out to be a Levinasian after his unsuccessful reclusion. The crucial change in the story occurs when Asanga is touched by the appearance of a poor creature. Not a widow or an orphan, as the other is sometimes evoked in Levinas[2], but the lowest imaginable creature, a half-dead dog, infects Asanga with compassion. Although Levinas does not interpret the relationship between the other and me in terms of compassion[3], it seems evident that Asanga responds immediately to the responsibility laid upon him. Furthermore, he is not charged with responsibility by somebody, by the other as an acting subject, but by the other as other, by the mere presence of the other in need. By the face, Levinas would say, despite the fact that here the 'other' is a dog. In defence of our interpretation, we might say that the occurrence of the dog in our story – instead of, for instance, a beggar – emphasizes Levinas's point that the other-as-other precedes the other as subject[4]. Prior to saying anything, or even having been able to speak, the other 'says', 'commands', 'invites' or 'invests' me, not as an action but as an effect of his otherness. The asymmetry and inequality between you and me precede the symmetric equality that we share as subjects[5]. Finally, Asanga's response to the challenge of the dog – the cutting off of a piece of his own flesh and the consideration he shows towards the maggots – can obviously be read as excessive generosity and self-sacrifice in Levinas's sense[6].

Not only Kant and Levinas appear in this Buddhist story, though, but also Heidegger, albeit in a somewhat hidden way. By favouring a solitary life, Asanga withdraws from the 'people', from the 'they' (*das Man*), as Heidegger would say[7]. A philosophical-anthropological reading of *Being and Time* shows the authentic way of life as a retreat from everyday ordinary life through resoluteness and conscience[8]. By everyday life Heidegger means the inauthentic life we live in the first place, in which one acts, thinks, judges, feels, etc., like 'they' act, think, judge, and feel. It is the average life of mediocrity and distraction, where all possibilities of being are levelled down and equalized. Heidegger emphasizes that living like 'they' live is not a matter of choice, let alone a moral choice, but that it is the way of life that we all usually and primarily lead. Although he expressly does not intend a moral understanding, Heidegger characterizes this average

2. TI: 77, 78, 215, 244, 245, 251

3. On the contrary, Levinas rejects compassion, as this would reduce the challenge of my consciousness (feeling) by the other to my consciousness of the challenge, which would reduce the appearance of the other to my consciousness of him (Levinas 2004: 123, 125, 128, 146). Levinas says: 'It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity' (Levinas 2004: 117, see also 166).

4. OB: 157-161, 166

5. TI: 53, 215

6. Duyndam 2006: 125-138

7. Heidegger 1978: 149-168

8. Heidegger 1978: 312

mode of existence as dependence and describes the 'they' in terms of dictatorship[9], which he opposes to authentic existence.

Because of Heidegger 's insistence upon the dependent and dictatorial nature of everyday existence, I would suggest to interpret this average mode of existence in terms of addiction. One is addicted to the choices, the thoughts, the preferences, the habits, in short the way of existence or 'potentiality-for-being' dictated by the 'they'. Heidegger does not say 'the others', because that would suggest that I am not included, whereas I am principally also part of 'they'. Neither is he speaking of 'each other', which would presuppose the plural presence of autonomous subjects related to one another. In Heidegger, *Mitsein* or Being-with precedes the (traditionally conceived) subjectivity. Before we may speak of a subject or of subjects related to one another, human beings are involved in *Mitsein*. This can be understood, according to Heidegger, in terms of the so-called 'ontological difference', that is, by not looking for *Seiendes* (beings), as traditional philosophy does, but for the *Sein* (Being) of *Seiendes*. The *Sein* of human beings is fundamentally *Mitsein*. Being-with is being addicted to the idle talk (*Gerede*), curiosity (*Neugier*) and ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) of 'they'. Being dependent on and dictated to by 'they' is being slave of 'they': under the complete control of 'they'.[10]

In line with my interpretation, Asanga is torn between addiction and slavery, on the one hand, and asceticism, on the other. As a real Kantian, he struggles for freedom, i.e. to be free from bodily inclinations and the temptation of happiness; and to be autonomous, i.e. to subsume his will under the law of reason. As a real Heideggerian, he tries to escape from addiction to ordinary life, from the dictatorship of the 'they', to follow the voice of conscience, which is the voice of being itself, and to reach authenticity. Seen from this Western philosophical view, autonomy and authenticity are the goals of his effort. But he failed to achieve these goals. Although Asanga may have reached a kind of autonomy and authenticity through extreme hardship, these states appeared to be not what he was really after, i.e. enlightenment, being blessed with a vision of the Buddha and receiving teachings from him. That only happened after he showed compassion towards the suffering dog. Genuine and heartfelt compassion enabled him to transcend his ego, whereas autonomy and authenticity only seemed to reinforce the ego – or should we say, the self?

9. In German: 'Botmäßigkeit' and 'Diktatur'. See *Sein und Zeit*, p. 126

10. In French, addiction is: '*asservissement*' (made slave); in Dutch: '*verslaving*' (being slave).

The solution of Asanga's struggle between addiction and asceticism suggested by the story seems to be a Levinasian one: going beyond the self by being addressed by the other as other (albeit a dog in our story). How is a self to be conceived that is simultaneously addicted to the world of the 'they' *and* autonomous by imposing a law of reason upon itself? And how is that 'self' able to accomplish the 'Levinasian solution', surpassing itself through and towards the other? It is well known that Levinas, in his first *chef-d'œuvre*, extensively describes the life of the subject as one of happiness and well-being, in which enjoyment is the key feature. I will elaborate on enjoyment here, distinguishing it from addiction, on the one hand, and from asceticism, on the other, following the suggestion made by our opening story. I confront what Levinas calls 'the permanent truth of hedonism'[11] with the sublime truth of asceticism, which most religions consider to be the way to God or salvation, on the one hand; and with the humiliating truth of addiction, which is commonsensically regarded as the excess of enjoyment, on the other.

Enjoyment and Addiction

Addiction is increasingly dominating our present-day culture. Alcohol, drugs, smoking, gambling are notorious instances. But eating, watching television and even sex are also becoming addictive amongst a growing number of people. Most addicts experience serious problems as a result of their addiction, and often their social environment suffers as well, or even more. No wonder that the phenomenon is extensively studied, mostly from a medical or biological point of view.[12] A phenomenological analysis, however, can shed an interesting additional light on addiction, especially on some basic assumptions of current scientific approaches. The question I raised above – what is the self or the subject that it can be addicted to the 'they'; that it can be addicted to anything at all? – typically demands a phenomenological elaboration. I will clarify this by recalling briefly the history of the subject until Levinas.

Since Descartes, the relationships human beings maintain with the world or reality, including their own inner reality, have been articulated in terms of subject and object. Thinking, willing, perception, consciousness, acting, feeling, suffering, estimating, making sense, but also eating, drinking and gambling comprise such relationships. The notion of the subject is only a technical-philosophical concept, not so much referring to a human being as such but to the human being as the *centre* of knowledge, acting, evaluating, etc. The

11. TI: 134

12. There is a range of scientific journals on the subject, including *Addiction*, *The Journal of Addictive Diseases*, *The American Journal on Addictions*, etc. On the Internet I even found an 'International Society of Addiction Journal Editors', which is an alliance of only the (apparently numerous) editors of such journals.

opposite of the subject is the object, which refers to anything that is involved in one of the relationships with the subject just mentioned: the known, the acted upon, the estimated, etc. Being the centre means taking the initiative in the relationship with the object, not only in active acting but also in passive undergoing. Whatever happens, happens to *me*.

Seen from this classical modern subject-object opposition, addiction is hard to understand. Somebody who is addicted to something seems to have surrendered his or her central position as a subject. We all crave for something every now and then, but the addict is obsessed by it in everything s/he does. Essential to the traditional concept of the subject is a basic freedom. Even in the most deterministic circumstances, the subject retains its freedom to take position relative to these circumstances. Within this tradition, freedom is connected with responsibility. The subject is principally responsible for all it does, including its response to what happens to it. The addict seems to lack both responsibility and freedom. Not only is the word addiction in many languages closely linked to slavery[13], anybody who deals with addicts – even an addict him/herself – knows that they are barely capable of acting without being motivated by their addiction in some way, and what is more, that they cannot take responsibility for what they do. From a classical subject-object point of view, addiction is not comprehensible, or only negatively as un-free, irresponsible, etc. Addiction, therefore, is likely to be understood as insanity or disease, which is common currency in medical and physiological discourses.

From a phenomenological point of view, however, there is more to say. The basic notion of phenomenology, discovered by its founding father Edmund Husserl, is the intentionality between subject and object. Criticizing Husserl, Heidegger has deepened intentionality to being-in-the-world. This means that the subject and the object are embedded in a prior relation of inclusion or belonging, which encompasses the allegedly central subject and the allegedly adverse object of classical modern philosophy[14]. In line with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty interprets this prior relation of belonging as bodily existence. The subject does not stand outside or opposite the object, according to Merleau-Ponty, but both are related to one-another within my bodily existence. The bodily intentionality is mutual, i.e. it implies both the subject's involvement with the object and the object's involvement with the subject. The subject experiencing the object and dealing with it not only accords meaning to the object,

13. See note 10

14. Ricoeur 2002: 582

but the object also appeals to me with meaning. It attracts me or repels me. Subject and object are in Merleau-Ponty's view like the hungry and the food, the curious and the secret, the hunter and the prey, the music and the listener, the philosopher and the truth; involved in one-another in a tensed, quasi-erotic mode[15].

Seen from a Merleau-Pontian perspective, addiction is not incomprehensible or 'mad', but different from the normal situation only in degree. Being intentional subjects we are all attracted by some objects. Within the bodily existence of the addict, however, the attraction of some objects is so strong that s/he is completely ruled by it. The addicted subject's behaviour is completely determined by those objects. The various words for slavery express this unmistakably.

As I stated above, the Heideggerian Being-with can also be interpreted in terms of addiction, in my view. Unlike Merleau-Ponty, however, the 'Heideggerian addiction' is not what some may have – the addicts, who only differ in degree from the normal – and some have not. Rather, it is what we all have in the first place. Basically because of the ontological structures of 'being-in' (*In-sein*) – especially being-in-the-world, 'being-alongside' entities within-the-world (*Sein-bei innerweltlich Seienden*) and 'being-with' (Mitsein) – we are principally not autonomous subjects, but absorbed in the world[16]. Answering the question who is being-in-the-world (being-in, being-alongside and being-with), Heidegger stresses that this is not the traditional subject who is centre of its world, but that the 'subject':

> as everyday being-with-one-another, stands in subjection [*Botmäßigkeit*] to others. It itself is not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. *Dasein*'s everyday possibilities of Being are for the Others to dispose of as they please.'[17]

But the others are no genuine others. As for me, I am not opposite or distinguished from others, I belong to them:

> One belongs to the Others oneself and enhances their power. 'The Others' whom one thus designates in order to cover up the fact of one's belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part 'are there' in everyday Being-with-one-another. The 'who' is not this one, not that one, not oneself [*man selbst*], not some people [*einige*], and not the

15. Merleau-Ponty 2002: 112-170, 178

16. Heidegger 1978: 149

17. Heidegger 1978: 164

> sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the 'they' [*das Man*].'[18]

Although the 'who' of existence is me [*jemeinig*], I am stolen away in the 'they' from the very beginning. I am lost in distantiality, averageness, and levelling down, as ways of being of 'they'.[19]

Levinas's position

Although Levinas explicitly criticizes intentionality in a Husserlian sense[20], it can be argued that the relationship between the self and the other is to be understood as Levinas's version of intentionality, taken as the prior relation of belonging as Ricoeur calls it[21]. My relationship with the other, i.e. my being called to responsibility by the other, precedes my subjectivity and my freedom. It actually precedes our being equal as humans; it precedes the 'they' in the Heideggerian sense. Levinas's notion of enjoyment is crucial to this understanding of my relationship with the other.

Enjoyment is the essential quality of the subjective life, as it is beautifully described in the extensive middle part of *Totality and Infinity*. It is the happy, rich, self-satisfied and egoistic life of the I, consisting of dwelling and working, eating and drinking, watching and sleeping, gathering and suffering. My acting in this 'interior life' – as opposed to the exteriority of the other – is not functional or purposive in the first place, for example, oriented towards survival, but is enjoyable in itself. Enjoyment is not a relationship with an object, for instance the piece of food I am eating; enjoyment is the relationship with this relationship:

> the relation with nourishment […] is a relation with an object and at the same time a relation with this relation which also nourishes and fills life. […] Enjoyment is precisely this way the act nourishes itself with its own activity. To live from bread is therefore neither to represent bread to oneself nor to act on it nor to act by means of it. To be sure, it is necessary to earn one's bread, and it is necessary to nourish oneself in order to earn one's bread; thus the bread I eat is also that with which I earn my bread and my life. But if I eat my bread in order to labour and to live, I live from my labour and from my bread. […] Even if the content of life ensures my life, the means is immediately sought as an end, and the pursuit of this end becomes an end in its turn. Thus things are always more than the strictly necessary; they make up the grace of life. We live from our labour

18. Heidegger 1978: 164

19. Heidegger 1978: 165

20. See e.g. E. Levinas (1967). 'La ruine de la représentation', in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Paris: Vrin; E. Levinas (1983). 'Beyond Intentionality' in A. Montefiore (Ed.). *Philosophy in France Today*. Cambridge/London: Cambridge University Press, pp. 100-115; A. Peperzak (1989). 'From Intentionality to Responsibility: On Levinas's Philosophy of Language' in A. Dallery & C. Scott. *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 3-21.

21. Ricoeur 2002: 582

> which ensures our subsistence; but we also live from our labour because it fills (delights or saddens) life. The first meaning of 'to live from one's labour' reverts to the second […]. Life's relation with the very conditions of its life becomes the nourishment and content of that life. Life is love of life, a relation with contents that are not my being but more dear than my being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun.[22]

Levinas stresses this character of enjoyment to explain that enjoyment gives us a certain independence. In enjoyment, I secure a degree of independence from what I depend on most: the food I eat, ground beneath my feet, and the home in which to live. Therefore, enjoyment is paradoxical: although we depend on food, lodging, and other material things for survival, in this very dependency we remain independent owing to our enjoying the things we are dependent upon: the food, the water, the air, the sun. Obviously, it is not a complete or an absolute independency; it is a certain independency within or through our dependence. Furthermore, it is not a spiritual independency, such as the basic freedom the traditional subject holds even in the most determining circumstances; neither is it superior abstinence nor disengagement, let alone asceticism. My independence through my dependency is bodily and material. It is the independency of physical enjoyment of the things the body needs and depends on.[23]

The significance of enjoyment in Levinas is that it accomplishes what he calls separation.[24] Throughout *Totality and Infinity* Levinas underscores the separation of you (the other) and me (the subject) in the preceding relationship mentioned above. You and I are not species within an overarching genus such as 'humankind', or 'being'. The distinction between you and me is not a relative one, as if it were defined from an external point of view, but the difference is radical or absolute. The difference is so radical that even the way you and I differ is different. You are absolved from the relationship by transcending. In a certain way, transcendence is the 'essence' or the 'definition' of the other, of you. But from my side I also keep a distance through enjoyment. It is through enjoyment that I do not coincide with the totality of the world that results from my being a totalizing subject. So, while the other keeps separated from any totality by transcending it, I remain separated through enjoyment. Separation is crucial for the other to be really the transcendent other, and for me to be sincerely me, capable of

22. TI: 111-112

23. TI: 113-120

24. TI: 142

meeting the other as other, i.e. to be responsible.[25] Enjoyment completes, so to speak, my part of the separation. The importance of Levinas' interconnected notions of separation and enjoyment can be further explained as follows.

It is because of separation, and consequently because of enjoyment, that responsibility is articulated in Levinas through the famous notion of the face. Levinas appeals to the notion of the face to make clear that the appeal to responsibility can only be inferred in direct relationship with the other. It is no ordinary demand, arising from an ethical theory and aimed at everyone. Levinas is not formulating a general order or universal call to responsibility. It's all about me. *I* have been chosen for responsibility; it has been imposed on *me*. How do I know? I see it in the other's face. I become aware of it when the other looks at me. To be sincerely me, to be open to the appeal of the other, I must meet him or her directly, in a relationship of separation. To be sincerely me, is to revel in enjoyment.

Consequently, enjoyment is not incompatible or conflicting with responsibility, it is my part of its necessary condition. Although the other disturbs or interrupts the enjoyment of my happy life, it is precisely because of my enjoying that I can meet the other in the face. *So it is because of my enjoyment that I can be responsible*. Voilà Levinas's truth of hedonism! Unlike interpreters like Adriaan Peperzak, who seem to identify enjoyment with the economy of my egoistic life, and with being addicted to my world of consumption[26], I would emphasize the fact that enjoyment is essential for the attainment of independence, which, in turn, is necessary for responsibility. It is not enjoyment *or* responsibility; it is enjoyment *and* responsibility. It was actually Adriaan Peperzak himself who taught me that *and* is the most important word in the title *Totality and Infinity*, if not one of the most important and intriguing words of philosophy as such.[27]

Enjoyment Between Addiction and Asceticism: The Moral Meaning

In addition to the theoretical argument of separation developed above, a more practical one can be developed in this context. The important moral consequence of the paradoxical independency implicated in enjoyment is that I can give what I possess. Thanks to the relative independency of enjoyment, I am not addicted to my possession. This relates to what Levinas calls the material character of my responsibility. He rejects concepts of morality being a matter of good

25. TI: 115, 117, 139, 147

26. Peperzak, A (2009): 55-66.

27. I am deeply indebted to my great teacher, Adriaan Peperzak who not only introduced me to philosophy, but above all to philosophizing. To this, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of *and*, referring to Hegel who in his all-embracing systematizing work displayed a 'methodical' allergy to (the single use of) *and*. "Saying *and* raises the question what kind of connection is meant, and by that it opens the argument. Concluding with *and* is the refusal to think any further", Peperzak used to quote Hegel.

intentions or clear conscience. High-minded ideas and a cleansed soul are not wrong, but they do not suffice. Morality, according to Levinas, is giving what you have, giving way to the other, and making space in your own place. Responding to the other's appeal with only good intentions or a generous consciousness equals no response. In such a case, I would persist in totalization. Totality is broken open by my responding to the other's appeal concretely and materially. In Levinas, my responsibility is not inferred from a general ethical theory, as I stated before. Therefore, Levinas's philosophy is no ethics in the usual sense of the word– but it generates from my immediate experience of the other's face, which is a moral experience, the experience of morality. Thus, morality as such comes from *both* radically separated sides of the relationship: the appeal from the transcendent other *and* (!) my breaking open of totality made possible by the independence of enjoyment.[28]

The concept of the enjoying I in Levinas can be strengthened by contrasting it once again with the addict. Unlike the relative independence of me, the addict is totally dependent on his or her fix (alcohol, drugs, gambling, or whatever s/he is addicted to). The life of the addict, i.e. everything s/he does and everyone s/he is dealing with, revolves around getting a fix. Unlike the one who enjoys, the addict retains no independence in his dependency. This implies, first, that the addict cannot enjoy at all, which is obvious as we look at their obsessed gobbling, swilling and smoking. But what is worse, further, is that the addict is deaf-blind to primary responsibility, let alone capable of taking on responsibility towards others. Because s/he lacks the independence of enjoyment, s/he cannot have a real relationship with the other as other; therefore, s/he cannot receive the other's appeal. S/he is fundamentally isolated. Moreover, because of his complete dependency he cannot give what s/he has. Indeed, the practice of addicts furnishes us with much evidence in support of Levinas. Addicts usually only take advantage of others. They use others as means to get their fix, by cheating, blackmailing, robbing them, or worse. This means they are not able to meet the other as transcendent other, for whom one can be responsible.

In a culture that seems increasingly addicted – addicted to consumption, to sensational excitement, to television, to status, to celebrity – it is no wonder that a desire of retreat emerges. One may empathize with the Asanga of our opening story. The recluse, the hermit, the ascetic – they seem to be diametrically opposed to the persuasive distraction, su-

28. Duyndam & Poorthuis 2003

perficiality and boredom of present-day culture. Whereas the addict appears to be the victim and the loser, the ascetic conquers consumption, diversion, and tedium. But does the latter really win?

The ascetic resists the temptations of the world by reinforcing the self. Autonomously bringing his or her will under the law of reason, the ascetic relies entirely on him/herself, draws all power from him/herself. The stronger the self, the better the subject can stand firm against the things it wants to keep free from, or so seems to be the presupposition of asceticism. But from a Levinasian perspective, the ascetic appears to be mistaken. By relying solely on him/herself and drawing all power from him/herself, s/he seems to overlook a crucial point: the other as other. Not only Asanga and the ascetics do so, also Heidegger does by situating the escape from the dictatorship of the 'they' in authenticity, which may be 'genuine' life in proximity of Being itself, guided by conscience and resoluteness, but deeply solitary.

Conclusion

To demonstrate the Levinasian solution of responsibility, between addiction and asceticism, I will conclude by following and interpreting a beautiful example provided by the French-American thinker René Girard. In his well-known theory on mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism, Girard explicitly adopts Heidegger's concept of being-with.[29] According to Girard, being-with is the sphere of mimesis, where one desires whatever *because* others desire the same. Desire is never authentic; it always has a model. It is the sphere of belonging-to, which is unfortunately constituted partly by the throwing-out of the scapegoat.[30] Girard considers the Bible to provide a counterforce against this discordant aspect of human nature, by discovering, unmasking and condemning the mimetic scapegoat mechanism.

From this perspective, Girard brilliantly interprets the famous passage from the Gospel according to St. John about the adulterous woman.[31] Girard points out that, in Jesus's formulation – 'let he who is without sin throw the first stone' – all the emphasis rests on the first stone. This echoes on in the deafening silence that follows after these words are spoken. Because the first stone to be thrown lacks precedent, i.e. has no model, it forms the last obstacle to the stoning, says Girard. Once the first stone has been thrown, subsequent stones would follow easily because they would be cast mimetically. Girard says that the fact that Jesus's words have become proverbial and symbolic proves that the

29. Girard 1986, chapter 12 (p. 149-164) 'Peter's Denial' (on Peter's Denial as recounted in the Gospels: Matt 26:69-75; Marc 14:66-72; Luc 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27).

30. see e.g. Williams 1996

31. John 8:3-11

mechanism is just as alive and virulent as it was 2000 years ago.[32]

From Levinas's point of view, one may say that by placing the emphasis on the first stone, Jesus makes each of the accusers responsible themselves. Each accuser holding a stone in their hand is holding the first stone. This makes each 'the only one', unique. There is, after all, but one first stone, even though each of them might have it in their hand. What we see happening here is the making singular, the individualising of responsibility. Being sincerely me means being chosen for responsibility by the other. Being chosen for responsibility might sound like a grave and profound calling, but it can happen in the twinkling of an eye. All of a sudden you are called to account for your responsibility. And you are suddenly the only one. Being singled out as the one (in Levinas: me) breaks up the *Mitsein* of the hordes, to which we belong first and foremost, according to Heidegger. The hordes fall apart through the uniqueness of responsibility. Jesus too withdrew himself from the *Mitsein*, of which the Pharisees wanted to make him a part. By bending down and writing in the sand, before and after his words about the first stone, he does not look at his challengers. In this way, even though he is acting as a substitute for the adulterous woman, he avoids being sacrificed as a scapegoat in her place. After all, the intention of the whole scene was to trap Jesus, to place blame either on him or the woman.

Far from being addicted and one of the 'they', on the one hand; far from the loneliness of both the ascetic and the scapegoat, on the other; the truth of hedonism encapsulates both enjoyment and responsibility.

References

Duyndam, J. & Poorthuis, M. (2003). *Levinas*. Rotterdam: Lemniscaat.

Duyndam, J. (2006). Exzessives Geben. Freigebigkeit bei Levinas und anderen. In F. Miething & C. von Wolzogen (Hrsg.). *Après vous. Denkbuch für Emmanuel Levinas 1906-1995* (p. 125-13). Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik.

Duyndam, J. (2009). Sincerely Me. Enjoyment and the Truth of Hedonism. In B. Hofmeyr (Ed.), *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas* (Library of Ethics and Applied Philosophy, 20) (pp. 67-78). Springer Science + Business Media.

32. Girard 2001: 49-61

Duyndam, J. (2014). Girard and Heidegger: Mimesis, Mitsein, Addiction. *The European Legacy*, 20 (1), 56-64. doi: 10.1080/10848770.2014.976933

Girard, R. (1986). *The Scapegoat*, transl. Yvonne Freccero. London: The Athlone Press.

Girard, R. (2001). *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, transl. James G. Williams. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books.

Heidegger, M. (1978). *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Levinas, E. (2000). *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, transl. Alphonso de Lingis. Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press [cited as **TI**].

Levinas, E. (2004). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*, transl. Alphonso de Lingis. Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press [cited as **OB**].

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith. London: Routledge.

Peperzak, A (2009). Sincerely Yours. Towards a Phenomenology of Me. In Benda Hofmeyr (ed.), *Radical Passivity. Rethinking Ethical Agency in Levinas* (Library of Ethics and Applied Philosophy, 20) (p. 55-66). Springer Science + Business Media.

Ricoeur, P. (2002). Phenomenology and Hermeneutics. In D. Moran & T. Mooney (eds.). *The Phenomenology Reader* (p. 579-600). London/New York: Routledge.

Rinpoche, S. (1994). *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, edited by Patrick Gaffney & Andrew Harvey. San Francisco: Harper.

Williams, J. G. (ed.) (1996). *The Girard Reader*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.