On the Paradox of the Political/Transcendence and Eschatology: Transimmanence and the Promise of Love in Jean-Luc Nancy

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Abstract: The debate on the possibility of re-thinking transcendence at the so-called end or closure of the metaphysical tradition and its relation to the political is situated at the heart of contemporary continental philosophy of religion. This article engages the debate by reviewing what is to be thought or anticipated at the closure. Firstly, the problem of engaging with transcendence at the closure of metaphysics is outlined as a discussion on what is possibly meant by the end of transcendence and onto-theology. Subsequently, the question concerning the political and its inseparable relation to transcendence is sketched and denoted by the phrase "the political/transcendence". Secondly, Levinas' and Nancy's respective attempts at addressing the problem are explored in the form of a debate, with the outcome suggesting a possible gesture towards Nancy's reconception of transcendence as transimmanence, found in his notion of "the promise of love", on "how" to anticipate rather than "what" to anticipate in these end times.

Keywords: transcendence; the political; eschatology; transimmanence; onto-theology; Jean-Luc Nancy; Emmanuel Levinas; Martin Heidegger

1. Introduction

To attempt to speak today about notions like transcendence and, by extension, the political after thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, or Jean-Luc Nancy, amongst others who, in various, ways have traced and proclaimed their end or closure, leads one to face a paradox. The paradox may be considered on two levels. Firstly, from the Christian tradition, the end (Greek: *Eschaton*) times involve most relevantly the anticipation of the second coming and a *Vollendung* (completion or fulfillment) of transcendence. What rather comes to be in the end times of transcendence in Western philosophy entails the death of God replaced by humankind (Greek: *Anthropos*), as the Subject taking center stage. Transcendence, here is replaced by the domination of immanence; the beyond is given up for a focus on the world of *Anthropos*. The question that comes to mind here is; what can one anticipate in these end times? On a second level, following Arendt, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy, the paradox concerns the closure or end of the logic that constituted the metaphysical tradition of figurations including God, the Subject, and national identities, i.e., the onto-theo-logic. This closure of the metaphysical tradition culminates in the domination of the political in the form of totalitarianism, which paradoxically means the end of the political and transcendence, as alterity. Thus, a second question arises; can a transcendence be thought, after the metaphysics of onto-theology, that avoids a totalizing politics? The first part of this article outlines the problem of engaging with transcendence at the closure of metaphysics by

discussing what is possibly meant by the end of transcendence and onto-theology and further outlines the question concerning the political and its inseparable relation to transcendence denoted by the phrase "the political/transcendence". The second part explores Nancy's notion of transcendence as transimmanence in a debate with Levinas' notion of transcendence as the trace of the Other, as both are possible approaches to these two questions and revolve around their respective interpretations of Heidegger. From this debate *how* rather than *what* one may anticipate as a sense of transcendence in our end times is suggested as formulated in the notion of the promise of love in Nancy's text *Shattered Love*, which directly relates to the theme of this special issue of *Religions*, namely: "In Anticipation: Transcendence and Eschatology in Contemporary Context".

2. The End of Transcendence and Beyond

To better understand both Levinas' and Nancy's approach to the questions set out above, we might firstly turn to the following sub-questions: (1) How has transcendence come to a so-called end?; (2) Why has the need to rethink transcendence arisen?; and (3) Why can one not merely go back to traditional transcendence after the closure of metaphysics? On the one side, with reference to Nietzsche's ([1], p. 41) claim that God is dead and we killed him, man as *Anthropos* has dethroned God as the meaning giving entity; i.e., we do not any more need a reference to God to explain the world, man can do so himself through reference to itself. Hence, we live in what Jacques Derrida ([2], p. 115) simply calls a preoccupation with humanism or human-reality or in the *Anthropocene*, as designated in various ways more recently by thinkers like Bernard Stiegler ([3], p. 6) and Peter Sloterdijk ([4], p. 127), in which the epoch or era (Greek suffix: *-cene*) of man sees humanity as the most significant geological force and the question to be thought.

With man now as the one who has to provide meaning for itself, the system of thought that is the metaphysical tradition has been found to be inadequate to do so, has reached its limit, and therefore is coming to an end or closure. Or again, as Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe state: "But it seems to us as indispensable today to recognise that what completes itself (and does not cease to complete itself) is the great 'enlightened', progressivist discourse of secular or profane eschatology; that is to say the discourse of the re-appropriation of man in his humanity, the discourse of the actualisation of the genre of the human" ([5], p. 111). This epoch of man has thus brought about its own problems.

One might keep in mind here the tale of Icarus who, in his ecstasy, flew too close to the sun, just to have his waxed wings melted and left him tumbling down to the sea. It is possible to view our time, then, as the continuous experience of the struggled flights of man to take the place of the sun to be reminded of what our ambitious and, one might add, arrogant attempts have brought about when the wax melts and the sea of what has transpired in the last century comes hurtling into view. What may be considered as the disastrous efforts of our *Anthropos* figurations on how to think transcendence beyond them have been attempted in various ways in the fields of art, theology, philosophy, and politics [6]. Our focus here is on the relation of the end or closure of metaphysics and the political, as most directly and rigorously described by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarth in *The 'Retreat' of the Political* ([7], pp. 122–34).

2.1. Transcendence and the Critique of Onto-theology

A critical thinker in understanding the end of metaphysics is, of course, Heidegger. According to Heidegger ([8], p. 64; [9], p. 54), Western metaphysics, which is the conceiving of a system of thought asking what beings are and how beings fit into a greater whole, has not asked the question of *Being*; that is, what it might mean to exist ([10], p. 3). Instead, the *Being* of beings has been provided as a double ground that serves as the ultimate reference point for meaning; a grounding (*ergründenden*) ground of the general unity of things that accounts for the *onto-* of onto-theology. At the same time, it is a grounding (*begründenden*) ground in the sense of the highest principle or first ground that unifies the whole and accounts for the *theo-* of onto-theology, answering the question: *Wie kommt der Gott in die Philosophie?* (How does God enter into philosophy?) ([8], p. 66). It is thus the logic of onto-theo-logic

that accounts for the *Being* of beings with the space, which is named by the *Being* of beings, that has subsequently been filled and replaced by various figurations like God, the Subject, National Identity, Man, etc. in the history of Western thought.

Moreover, what should be emphasised here is how onto-theology operates in terms of identity, or what would be better named as the metaphysical identity of the subject or, as Nancy and Lacoue-Larbarte ([5], p. 111) write, the identity or homogenisation of the social body, which functions in the same manner. In short, Heidegger explicates in *Identität und Differenz* ([8], p. 33; [9], p. 23) how the formula of metaphysical identity, namely A=A, reformulated by Fichte as I=I and by Schelling's Philosophy of Identity as "the identity, more precisely as the indifference of subject and object" ([11], p. 10), is constituted by the mediating syntheses of object to subject, the characteristic (*Grundzug*) of the *Being* of beings. This synthesising characteristic is no more than onto-theology. Restated, through the onto-theo-logic of the Subject, the object or world is synthesized back into the unity of the subject that is understood according to the categories of the subject. This analysis of the later Heidegger also reminds one of Levinas' similar critique of Western metaphysics, including the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, with the other that becomes synthesized into the Same, that is *par excellence* the knowing ego (*le Moi connaissant*) ([12], p. 89).

2.2. Transcendence and the Political

Taking a step closer to answering the sub-questions, the end of metaphysics and its relation to the political, which forms the central problem of the article, may be taken up. Where for Heidegger the critique of metaphysics lies in the fact that the tradition has forgotten to take up the question concerning *Being* because it has been occupied with a systematic building of meaning according to the onto-theo-logic and for Levinas the hubris of Western man has led to the subjugation of the other under the Same of the subject, so for Nancy these attempted flights of man to take the place of the sun have culminated in the domination of the political and the end of transcendence as alterity embodied in political systems of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe emphasise this point when echoing Sartre's formula on Marxism, stating that totalitarianism is "the unsurpassable horizon of our times" ([7], p. 126). Moreover, they identify two senses of the term totalitarianism. Firstly, following Arendt's ([13], pp. 437–59) analysis of the term totalitarianism, in such a state with the formation of various authoritative discourses, no new political questions that may correspond to specific transformations of the world have any chance to emerge. Instead, only political questions with a lack of "political specificity" may arise from inside the ideological phraseology that is accepted; for example, an ideology of class, the nation, the State, the meaning of history, the rights of man, and so forth. These are political questions that in no way hinder the totalitarian politics from being done ([7], p. 127).

The second sense of the notion is more "technical" and overlaps the first meaning. In a word, totalitarianism is here each time thought as the attempt at a frenzied re-substantialisation, a re-incorporation or re-incarnation, a re-organisation in the strongest and most differentiated sense, of the "social body". It may also be understood against Claude Lefort's ([14], p. 17) definition of democracy, which describes "the empty space of power" a space previously filled by a figuration of the social body, for instance Nazism, Fascism, Stalinism, etc. Accordingly, "totalitarianism is the response to or the attempt to get out of the impasse presented by, in and as what we might call 'democratic crisis': democracy as crisis. For instance, and at random: the disappearance of the authority—tradition—religion triptych, the disembodiment of power, the collapse of ground or the loss of transcendence (mythico-religious or philosophical: reason, nature, etc.)" ([7], p. 127). To add a last note on totalitarianism as understood by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, they distinguish what we have described above as new totalitarianism from classic totalitarianism: "if classical totalitarianism [. . .], proceeds from the incorporation and the presentation of transcendence (as the work of art in Nazism and as the reason of history in Stalinism), new totalitarianism would itself proceed from the dissolution of transcendence, and, henceforth, come to penetrate all spheres of life now devoid of any alterity" ([7], p. 129).

To recapitulate, the end of transcendence equals the effacement of the figure of God, most recently by the modern Subject, meaning not only the end of the traditional notion of transcendence, i.e., God, but also keeping the onto-theo-logic of metaphysics in place, leading to the end of transcendence as that which transcends the Subject or Social Figuration that functions in the same manner, namely alterity. Hence, rethinking the question of transcendence today is intertwined with the question of the political; that is, the question of the relation to the other, of alterity. Moreover, the notion that onto-theology as the will-to-figure is considered an original contribution of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe ([15], p. xx). But, as we have seen, this is not just a matter of the effacement of the figure since there is a constant urge to replace the figure or space of power with another figure, as with new totalitarianism at the impasse of democracy. This process of constant tension of the figuration and effacement of the figure also alludes to Nietzschean a sense of nihilism ([16], p. 180). Hence, the question could also refer to the problem of meaning after transcendence: Is meaning still possible without referring back to an onto-theological figuration?

Yet another way of describing the effacement of the figure of God, i.e., the end of transcendence, refers to what Nancy calls immanentism, and that may be understood as an immanent figure endowed with transcendent significance, of course, according to onto-theo-logic. As mentioned, the result of immanentism concerns the political form of totalitarianism, i.e., the total domination of the political. Therefore, the will-to-figure at the heart of Western thought is at the same time a political figuration, denoting that metaphysics is intertwined with the onto-theological and political figuration, as onto-typo-logy, or onto-politi-ology ([15], p. xxiv). In other words, we live "in the epoch where the political is completed to the point of excluding every other area of reference" ([5], p. 111). The immanent identity of the "social body" is given transcendent signification, made immortal, and made to rule every aspect of the totality of everyday life with the telos of creating a utopia in the form of homogeneous society. Here, transcendence as alterity ends paradoxically in the reign of the transcending immanent social identity. An identity that operates in the same way as the subject. One might recall Heidegger's analysis of metaphysical identity, as well as Levinas critique of Western thought, with the subjugation of the other to the Same of the subject. Restated in the words of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, "in this reign or under this domination, the completion of the philosophical, and of the philosophical primarily in its modern figure, the one outlined by the philosophies (or, at a push, the metaphysics) of the Subject" ([7], p. 126). This domination and intertwining of the metaphysics of onto-theology and the political is indicated in this article by the phrase the "political/transcendence", also meaning that when one refers to the political the question of transcendence is already implied and vice versa.

Thus, to basically answer the second sub-question; the need to rethink or retreat the political/transcendence is due to the loss of alterity under the reign of the Subject. And why can we not simply return to the traditional transcendence? Because, as might have become apparent already, traditional transcendence, i.e., the figuration of God, has also been thought according to onto-theology, which in turn has given rise to the subsequent onto-theological figurations and the program of thought that stands at its closure. The overhanging consequence of such figurations with reference to the one-origin, is a matter of exclusion ([17], p. 24); that is, the exclusion of everything that does not fit into the identity of the one-origin, or, in a reversal of terms, the included as excluded. Restated, for Nancy ([17], p. 111), this exclusion proceeds in the denial of finitude in reference to the infinite absolute origin, where finitude refers to the question of relation and alterity. For Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, this amounts to the closure of the political/transcendence as alterity. What is thus needed, is to re-think transcendence that aims to avoid onto-theology in order to re-think the question of relation.

2.3. The Retreat of the Political/Transcendence

The notion of retreat, for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, has a double function. The first meaning comprises what we have described above as the closure or end of transcendence. Retreat here means the withdrawing of the political, in a sense the obviousness of politics, i.e., that "everything is political"

that describes the enclosure in which we find ourselves, in the closure of the political. It is the second sense of retreat, which will be discussed in the latter part of the article and also sets the prerogative of the question of rethinking transcendence at the closure of metaphysics. The second sense conveys the "re-tracing of the political, re-marking it, by raising the question in a new way which, for us, is to raise it as the question of its essence" ([5], p. 112). In short, this denotes rethinking the question of relation or that of the "social bond", which is not (and is impossible) to be deduced from an initial subjectivity, i.e., the onto-theological figuration of the Subject ([5], p. 117). In other words, in the second sense, the retreat concerns transcendence or again the retreat of alterity, which, to re-emphasise why one cannot merely go back to traditional transcendence as the beyond of humanity, "clearly does not mean that it is for us a matter of repeating the appeal to a transcendence, whether it be that of God, Man or History: these are the transcendences which have installed totalitarianism or those in which it has installed itself, converting them into the total immanence of life-in-common" ([7], p. 129). Hence, "the question of the retreat is not one of "regaining" a remote transcendence but of wondering how the retreat compels us to displace, re-elaborate and replay the concept of 'political transcendence'" ([7], p. 129).

Finally, before turning to the various approaches of Levinas via Critchley and Nancy to the challenge of rethinking transcendence, which is inseparable from the political after or at the closure of metaphysics, two "criteria" may be mentioned concerning the "something new" that appears at the closure. Firstly, there is the importance of avoiding onto-theology, or "the exigency of getting away from the metaphysical ground of the political, from a transcendent or transcendental ground, for example in a subject" ([7], p. 132). Secondly, in opposition to the onto-theological motif of ground and the subject, we have the motif of finitude that is the question of relation or alterity.

3. Rethinking the Political/Transcendence After Onto-theology: A Debate

Having outlined the problem of thinking the political/transcendence at the end of metaphysics, and identifying two "criteria" for what might open after this closure, we may look at two approaches that directly attempt to address the problem as sketched above. Simon Critchley [18] has also directly taken up the question raised by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in *The Retreat of the Political* [7] by advocating the thought of Levinas, at the expense of Nancy's own attempt to engage with the question as a "neutralizing of ethical transcendence". Thus, the two approaches that will be explicated in a moment may be regarded as entering into a debate between Levinasian and Nancian thought on thinking an alternative sense of transcendence that allows for a politics of alterity. The debate hinges on the interpretation of Heidegger's notion of being-with (*Mitsein*). Also, as a counter to Critchley, a Nancian critique of the Levinasian approach to the problem will be advocated by highlighting Nancy's relation to Levinas as not escaping the urge of a re-figuration, i.e., leaving the door open for an onto-theology of Love, something Critchley overlooks in his critique on Nancy by fixating only on his Heideggerian link.

3.1. Transcendence as the Trace of the Other

Bearing in mind the way in which the onto-theological figuration of the Subject's metaphysical identity operates, i.e., synthesizing the other into the subject or the Same, we start off with Levinas' rejection of Heidegger's notion of being-with. In Levinas' *Time and the Other* ([19], p. 43), the relationship that is prescribed by the preposition *mit* concerns an association of side by side, around a common term, that fails to be the face-to-face relationship from where the ethical command may take place. Moreover, *mit*, functioning merely as a juxtaposition, "runs the risk of embodying a violent movement: a crowd walking side by side, the vicious rustling of a march" ([20], p. 128). In other words, the rejection of Heidegger's *Mitsein* can be understood in relation to Levinas' mistrust of any notion of community thought in terms of the *with*, which will in an onto-theological fashion, lead to a single-minded destiny that leads to the mastery of the individual by a surrender to the Same (the identity of the community). In short, Heidegger from a Levinasian perspective does not ensure the

ethical relation to the other with the designation of being-with as a mode of existence of *Dasein* and thus does not overcome the constraints of the metaphysical identity as set out in his later work.

Instead, Levinas turns to Martin Buber to formulate in a more ethical fashion the relation of meeting with the other. Most significantly, Levinas finds in Buber the notion of a meeting in which reciprocity is possible that is both mutual and symmetrical. From this notion, Levinas eventually developed his concept of the "asymmetrical" relation with the other, based on the idea that responsibility lies before any experience and not in speaking out to the other in a symmetrical fashion. Responsibility, here, is not triggered by any event nor mediated by language but rests in the original difference as the original ethical relation ([20], p. 130). Thus, what comes first is not the question of *Being* as with Heidegger and the subsequent mode of being-*with*, but rather the face-to-face relation, i.e., the question of ethics. Instead of the distance between the Same, or *Dasein* in Heidegger's case, and the Other being reduced where their opposition fades, "now, the Same is called into question by the other (*l'Autre; to heteron*) or, to use Levinas' word, [called into question by] the 'alterity' (*altérité*) of that which cannot be reduced to the Same, that which escapes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject" ([21], pp. 4–5), and therefore transcends the subject. The ethical is then understood as the location of a point of alterity. Levinas calls this "exteriority" that which cannot be reduced to the Same. ([21], p. 5). This exterior being is named the face (*visage*) and defines "the way in which the other (*l'Autre*) presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me" ([22], p. 50). Restated, the face of the other is the site of alterity, which initiates the ethical relation that is not synthesizable to the metaphysical identity of the subject. Hence, the relationship between the subject and the other, which was previously asymmetrically skewed towards the subject, is now asymmetrically skewed towards the other because of the alterity of the other that transcends the subject.

We find here the "model" of how Levinas aims to meet the criteria for thinking after metaphysics, namely avoiding onto-theology by rethinking the question of the political/transcendence. For Levinas, this "model" of the one-to-one relation holds for a sense of community as well, which does not reduce difference. In *Totality and Infinity* [22], Levinas states that the ethical relation itself already constitutes the relation to a third, *le tier*, which is the ethical relation to other forms and thus the "model" according to which the relation to all others is formed. Restated, "the third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other—language is justice" ([22], p. 213), and hence my ethical obligation to the Other does not stay with the face to face relation but opens up to the question of justice for humanity as a whole ([21], p. 226). Also, the passage from the ethical (face-to-face) to the political is not a chronological matter, but rather the ethical for Levinas is already the political. Restated: "The ethical relation does not take place in an a-political space outside the public realm; rather, ethics is always already political, the relation to the face is always already a relation to humanity as a whole" ([21], p. 226).

Moreover, the relation to a third brings in the notion of equality and symmetry. Whereas I am in an asymmetrical ethical relation to the Other, this relation at the same time opens up to a symmetrical relation to humanity as a whole and the double structure of community in Levinas' terms. It is the relation to the third, which is the communal bond we share among equals, i.e., in Critchley's ([21], p. 227) words, "a commonality among equals which is at the same time based on the inegalitarian moment of the ethical relation". Levinas names this "human fraternity" and it is an attempt to decenter the metaphysical identity of the modern subject and community. The asymmetry skewed toward the Same is reverted to the Other; "subjectivity is ultimately described as a 'hostage' (*ôtage*) to the Other" ([23], p. 112). The subject is now preoccupied with the responsibility to the Other, before being preoccupied with itself.

How does the notion of transcendence relate to Levinas' ethical, which is at the same time political, relation to the Other and/or a third? The answer, as we shall also see with Nancy, is the alternative sense of transcendence that enables the decentring of the subject or avoids onto-theology and the rethought relation to the other. Levinas does often refer directly to God, but this should not be understood as a reference to the traditional sense of transcendence that is the God of onto-theology. Instead, as Critchley points out, "after the death of that god, the ethical subject is able to discover the

sense (*sens*: both direction and signification) of transcendence that was lost or reified in metaphysics: the transcendence of the Other" ([21], p. 113). Thus, God is the transcendence of the Other, which is located as a trace in the face of the other, as the movement of infinity. God or the Other, for Levinas, is an enigma that escapes comprehension or any form of thematisation, i.e., "the otherwise than Being" ([21], p. 114). The question of community or the political is also directly intertwined with Levinas' notion of transcendence. Its through *mono-theism*, for Levinas, which the human fraternity that refers back to the approach of the Other (God) through the face of the other, is possible: "'thanks to God' that I am an Other for the others" ([23], p. 158). It is due to the trace of the Other (God), Critchley outlines in arguing the case for Levinasian thought, that the community is prevented from becoming wholly immanent and therefore totalitarian. How does the Levinasian perspective answer the questions set out at the beginning of this article? In brief, on the question of what to anticipate in the end times, the response will entail more of a preoccupation than an anticipation; that is, the preoccupation with the responsibility of the Other. It is through this preoccupation that addresses one as the trace of the Other in the face of the other, that the movement of transcendence as infinity escapes comprehension, which also answers the second question by rethinking a notion of the political/transcendence after metaphysics that keeps open alterity. Thereby, through the notion of the relation to the third as common bond, a totalitarian sense of community is avoided.

3.2. Transcendence as Transimmanence

In contrast to Levinas, Nancy argues for the re-appropriation of Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein*: "Philosophy is, in sum, the thinking of being-with; because of this, it is also thinking-with as such" ([17], p. 31). In other words, to think the question of relation that becomes imperative at the closure of metaphysics starts by retreating the analysis of *Dasein* as always already existing *with*-others; that is, an existence *with* others, which needs no justification or comprehension from an already constituted subject. In this move, Nancy already indicates the program of decentering the Subject as the onto-theological figuration of modernity that comes to an end in the political form of totalitarianism. But, in placing being-with at the heart of his thinking, Nancy does not uncritically follow Heidegger's analysis in *Sein und Zeit*. For Nancy, the analytic of *Mitsein* remains nothing more than a sketch, and, although *Mitsein* is coessential with *Dasein*, it remains in a subordinate position ([17], p. 93). *Mitsein* becomes subordinate because the focus falls on *Dasein's* choice of being authentic or inauthentic, resulting in the dissimulation of *Mitsein* under the notion of *Das Man*. Hence, "as such, the whole existential analytic still harbors some principle by which what it opens up is immediately closed off" ([17], p. 93). Nancy calls for a reopening of the analysis of *Mitsein*, which would neither lead to a completion thereof nor sets up *Mitsein* as a principle. For, in principle, being-with escapes completion and the taking up of the place of a principle.

What is necessary, then, according to Nancy "is that we retrace the outline of its analysis and push it to the point where it becomes apparent that the coessentiality of being-with is nothing less than a matter of the co-originarity of meaning and that the 'meaning of Being' is only what it is (either 'meaning' or, primarily, its own 'precomprehension' as the constitution of existence) when it is given as with" ([17], p. 93). Hence, differing from Levinas, Nancy does not place the emphasis in a reversal of the position of preoccupation from the Subject to the Other. Rather, the decentering of the subject lies in the move to co-originality of the subject and the other in being-*with*. The essence of *Being*, re-appropriating Heidegger ([10], p. 42), which is not a substance but "to exist" (*Zu-sein*), for Nancy is being-with; *being singular plural*. And it marks an absolute equivalence: "Being does not preexist its singular plural. To be more precise, Being absolutely does not preexist; nothing preexists; only what exists exists" ([17], p. 29). With this re-appropriation of Heidegger into his own terminology, Nancy aims to avoid onto-theology "because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, each designates the co-essence of the others" ([17], p. 37). Correspondingly, every other is seen as an origin, from where the world is co-created; the world occurs at each moment of the world, as each time of Being in the realm of being-with of each time with every other time ([17], p. 20). There is thus no

set example, origin, or identity according to which to model others. Each time of Being constitutes a singularly unique origin of the world, making up the plurality of origins.

Moreover, Nancy, similar to Levinas, argues it was Heidegger's analysis of the everydayness of being-with that lead him to base the notion of *Das Man* on the domination of common as average or mediocre ([17], p. 82). This analytic of *Mitsein*, Nancy holds, does not do the measure of the *with* justice because it conceals the essential common-with. It is rather from the everyday being-*with* where the other is encountered as a unique origin with whom the world is co-created, differentiated as a singularity in the plurality of origins. Therefore, "Heidegger confuses the everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical" ([17], p. 9). The ordinary is now re-defined as always exceptional, even though we may understand little of its character as origin: "What we receive most communally as 'strange' is that the ordinary itself is originary. With existence laid open in this way and the meaning of the world being what it is, the exception is the rule" ([17], p. 20). Furthermore, the *with* of being-*with*, which lies between the I (subject) and the other, belongs to neither. The *with*, instead, exposes one to an-other. The *with* or *cum* in Latin is nothing as in no-thing, not a substance, identity, history, value, and so on that may be made into a figuration. Nor is it a category of the subject. It is rather the exposure to our ontological mode of existence as *Mitsein*.

It is this experience of the ontological co-originality of the subject and the other, through the *with*, which transcends us, cutting across, as Nancy puts it, the I and the other, exposing one to the immanence of the other, that composes Nancy's notion of transcendence as transimmanence. In typical Nancian fashion, the prefix *trans* from transcendence is rethought/"retreated" to bring about a word play with an alternative sense of the notion: "within the discourse about alterity, a general mode of trans- (transport, trans-action, transcription, transfer, transmission, transformation, transparency, transubstantiation, transcendence) continually runs along-side the mode of *cum*, but it will never be able to eclipse it or replace it" ([17], p. 78). Most notable, *trans* as designating a movement is used in relation to transcendence as the movement of *with*, the cutting across. The movement that is transcendence, however, goes nowhere outside of the world, but rather stays in the immanent world, not as a substance, but by going (moving) to an-other, as circulating, i.e., movement as *transimmanence*. Rephrased, this is the "outside within" that Anné Verhoef ([24], p. 10) writes about in his contribution to this special issue of *Religions*, or better still the "outside-within-between"; meaning "that cannot be divorced from the plurality of singular bodies" ([25], p. 97). The movement comes and goes and is not fixed (inside or outside the world) nor is it infinite. It is finite but occurs infinitely. In sum, transimmanence refers to the occurrence of sense that happens each time between a subject and an-other; sense occurs coextensively as the experience of being-*with*, cut across, exposed to one an-other. "Roughly speaking, sense passes along being without issuing from within it or from outside it; it slides through social relations without substantializing them. It makes them meaningful without giving them a (reducible) meaning" ([25], p. 167).

Along these lines, Nancy's notion of community can also be unpacked. Community, for Nancy, is inoperative. A sense of community, therefore, never becomes fixed. There is a constant construction and destruction (autoproduction) of the meaning of community. Thus, the place of power in totalitarianism that becomes the empty space Lefort refers to in democracy either constantly becomes filled with a new figuration of community that replaces the previous one or emptied. From another perspective: community is not a group of people who have some-thing in common, that share a common-being. It is rather a place where people are (being) in common Being-in common as being-*with*. But, since this being-*with* transcends both the subject and other, this "'in-common' cannot be controlled by them and so eludes them" ([26], p. 37). This implies that anything can happen, peace or violence, order or disorder, and so on, depending on the figuration of community. Hence, a community is possible where the "forgetting" of human value takes place by a figuration that fills the place of power rather than keeping the space open as Lefort writes on democracy. The co-creation of the world does not ensure a positive (or negative) outcome. Anything may transpire, because "the being-in-common is a condition and not a value (nor counter-value)" ([26], p. 38).

3.3. A Levinasian Critique of Nancy

In making a case for Levinas, Critchley also puts forth a critique against Nancy on why his attempt at thinking alterity falls short. The critique may be understood as a continuation of Levinas' rejection of Heidegger discussed above. In other words, because Nancy re-appropriates Heidegger, the same Levinasian critique against Heidegger does not escape the work of Nancy. For Levinas, the question of alterity is only a moment in the existential analytic of *Being and Time* ([10], p. 118; [27], p. 111) and Heidegger ultimately fails to account for it as the question of the meaning of Being takes prominence. Subsequently, from this standpoint, Critchley holds that Nancy's first philosophy of being-with re-joins the philosophical tradition of ontology with its suppression of ontic plurality and multiplicity. "Thus, even given the radicality of Nancy's rewriting of *Being and Time*, his conception of being-with constitutes what one might call *a neutralizing of ethical transcendence or a flattening of the structure of ethical experience*" ([18], p. 65). Critchley fears that with Nancy's conception the stranger or widow is not faced in the asymmetrical relation of height but rather comes to stand next to a person as a colleague or comrade. "That is, I do not see in the other person that dimension of surprise, separateness or secrecy that continually defies my attempts at comprehension and appropriation" ([18], p. 65). Moreover, having only being-with is a pre-determination and over-determination of a positive sense of community, and what is lacking in Nancy is a negative, a negative sense of a relation to the other, a without, which in turn may permit the positive epiphany of the face Critchley ([18], p. 66).

3.4. A Nancian Reply, Critique, and Rethinking of Levinas

Nancy, in addition to his explicit relation to Heidegger's thinking, may also be considered in connection with his critique and re-appropriation of Levinas' thought. This most notable in the text *Shattered Love*, something Critchley overlooks in his critique. Nancy himself, writing on love, acknowledges his debt to Levinas: "Every philosophical inquiry on love today carries an obvious debt toward Levinas, as well as points of proximity, such as are easily detected here. For Levinas cleared the path toward what one can call, in the language of *Totality and Infinity*, a metaphysics of love, to the point that this metaphysics commands, at bottom, his entire oeuvre" ([28], pp. 104–5). But Nancy, in a Derridean ethical manner, does not merely return the gift through eulogy, but rather disseminates Levinas' ethics through a critique and elaboration ([29], p. 452). Nancy's critique begins with explicating how, for Levinas, love remains equivocal and thereby reduces it to self-love, i.e., egotism. To love in this way is to love oneself within love, which means a return to the self (the Same). Correspondingly, love's transcendence lifts the equivocation only by transcending itself into fecundity, filiation, and fraternity ([28], p. 105). In other words, this perplexity leads Levinas to distinguish between two types of love; *Agape*, the love of the ethical face-to-face relation that preserves the love for the other, and *Eros*, or erotic love which comprises egotism. This distinction, additionally, contains an implied hierarchy, namely *Agape* above *Eros*. Moreover, there is a movement in the hierarchy enabled by the trace of the Other that decenters the subject (self-love) toward the discovery of the ethical responsibility, which to recall the earlier discussion, is at the same time the passage to politics. This movement, Nancy holds, is teleologically determined: "This teleology proceeds from the first given of his thought, 'the epiphany of the face': love is the movement stressed by this epiphany, a movement that transcends it in order to reach, beyond the face, beyond vision and the 'you,' the 'hidden-never hidden enough-absolutely'" ([28], p. 105). More importantly, the moment of hierarchizing teleology leads to another moment where Levinas overcomes, briefly, the ontic dialectic of the face-to-face, he holds to be primordial. This moment is when the erotic self-loving relation to the other is sublated in paternal and fraternal love, after which the face returns once more. The ontic has to be overcome, although briefly, in the moment of Love. Finitude is overcome to reach infinity, beyond the subject as the trace of the Other. Thus, the primordiality of the ontic is challenged. In contrast, for Nancy, what is primordial is the ontological being-with as love. Love deconstitutes the subject; or again, the relation to the ontic face that constitutes a subject comes second for Nancy and is perhaps also why Levinas requires to overcome it, briefly, to reach what is more primordial, i.e., love.

Restated, love, for Nancy is the movement of transimmanence: "Transcendence will thus be better named the crossing of love. What love cuts across, and what it reveals by its crossing, is what is exposed to the crossing, to its coming-and-going-and this is nothing other than finitude" ([28], p. 98). Finitude, as being-with, is the site of co-originarity and the co-creation of meaning. Hence, for Nancy, there cannot be a hierarchy of love, but only the infinite plurality of singular loves, which Nancy calls the shatters of love: "There are no parts, moments, types, or stages of love. There is only an infinity of shatters: love is wholly complete in one sole embrace or in the history of a life, in jealous passion or in tireless devotion. It consists as much in taking as in giving, as much in requiring as in renouncing, as much in protecting as in exposing. It is in the jolt and in appeasement, in the fever and in serenity, in the exception and in the rule" ([28], p. 105).

Nor can love be reduced to only erotic egotism: "It is sexual, and it is not: it cuts across the sexes with another difference (Derrida, in *Geschlecht*, initiated the analysis of this) that does not abolish them but displaces their identities. Whatever my love is, it cuts across my identity, any sexual property, that objectification by which I am a masculine or feminine subject" ([28], p. 105). In the cutting-across the subject is also broken into, returned to itself, fractured, decentered. To think love, then, would "demand a boundless generosity toward all these possibilities, and it is this generosity that would command reticence: the generosity not to choose between loves, not to privilege, not to hierarchize, not to exclude" ([28], p. 83).

Finally, we can ask what one may anticipate in these end times in Nancy's terms. One might, as Critchley ([18], p. 65) claims, expect a positive over-determination of with, in the sense of community, but to merely equate the critique from Levinas against Heidegger, is not convincing. In contrast, Nancy's insistence on a "boundless generosity" of what might happen in the mutual exposure of one to an-other, in the attitude of reticence, of holding open the question, in keeping the tension of the dialectic, and in avoiding the path down the road to an onto-theology by setting up a hierarchy of love with *Agape* as the highest and grounding principle and figuration; the analytic of being-with is effectively redirected in evading a figuration of community. The crossing of love exposes finitude and not something infinite (the Other): "Because the singular being is finite, the other cuts across it (and never does the other 'penetrate' the singular being or 'unite itself' with it or 'commune'). Love unveils finitude. Finitude is the being of that which is infinitely inappropriable, not having the consistency of its essence either in itself or in a dialectical sublation of the self. Neither the other nor love nor I can appropriate itself nor be appropriated ('Infinity of one and of the other, in the other and in the one'—Valery)" ([28], p. 98).

The attitude of reticence also reveals the ethical imperative with which one is confronted in every exposure to the other, better described by what Nancy calls the "promise of love". Take the formulation "I love you" in Nancy's terms. Love, of course, serves here as the *with* of being-with, the movement of love as transimmanence, which mutually exposes the *I* and the *you*—one to an-other. The exposure of love does not predetermine the outcome; rather the exposure of love is the promise of love, a risk. The risk lies in that the other does not love me back or that I do not keep the promise of my love. The exposure of love reveals the promise of love, which is a risk because the promise has to be kept: the *I* have to go on and love the *you*, and the *you* the *I*. And perhaps one of them fails in keeping the promise.

From another position, because the movement of love does not become fixed, it comes and goes; the "I love you", names nothing and does nothing. It is finite. It only reveals the promise of love, the law which is the ethical imperative that love must arrive, and that nothing can suspend the rigor of this law ([28], p. 100). However, here again we see the counter to over-determination; the promise cannot assure the completion of this ethical imperative because it does not "anticipate or assure the future is possible that one day I will no longer love you, and this possibility cannot be taken away from love—it belongs to it. It is against this possibility, but also with it, that the promise is made, the word given" ([28], p. 100). Moreover, the imperative is that the promise must be kept, but if it is not kept, this does not mean that there was no love or that there was not love. Love is only faithful to itself, meaning that love is not the promise (which must be kept) plus the keeping of that promise; not

the revealing of the ethical imperative plus providing the ethical act *par excellence*. Hence, with the risk of the promise of love anything can happen—as with the inoperativeness of the community. The co-creation may lead to peace or war, to the ethical act or the forgetting of human value, but once more, this does not mean that love was not there touching, cutting across, and exposing the one to an-other. "What" to anticipate, accordingly, becomes a "how" to anticipate; an attitude, which is an attitude, on the one side, of reticence in terms of constructing absolute re-figurations. And on the other, that we may only allude to here, of *adoration* [30].

4. Final Remarks

The temptation to answer the question of what might one expect in these end times of not only the metaphysics of onto-theology but also the political/transcendence with another figuration and a teleological value system seems almost inevitable. Indeed, Levinas may also have succumbed to the temptation in re-figuring the Other in an onto-theological gesture [31], although the aim was to avoid such an endeavour. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe also acknowledge that a grounding gesture might not be totally avoided ([7], p. 133). We suggest that what might be possible in rethinking the question of the political/transcendence at the closure of onto-theology is to change "how" we anticipate, i.e., with an attitude of reticence, keeping open the question, and avoiding Icarus' hubris, so allowing the plurality of singular possibilities of meaning to play themselves out in the promise of love. We propose an attitude of reticence rather than an anticipation or preoccupation with a "what" due to the latter's risk of leaning into the temptation of constructing figurations and over-determining meaning according to a model, even the model of Love.

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