

## ARCHÉ AND RESPONSIBILITY IN TOTALITY AND INFINITY

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**Resumo:** O conceito de anarquia ética é exaustivamente elaborado por Levinas nas suas obras do fim da década 1960 até a publicação do seu livro *Autrement qu'être* em 1974. Esse conceito de anarquia é bem conhecido nas interpretações recentes das obras levinasianas, sendo corretamente percebido como um dos conceitos chave no cerne do seu projeto depois de *Totalité et Infini*, de 1961. Contudo, o vocábulo anarquia aparece já em *Totalité et Infini* e serve como parte fundamental da crítica levinasiana à Heidegger. No artigo aqui desenvolvido, pretendo examinar as referências à anarquia em *Totalité et Infini* a fim de demonstrar como Levinas percebia tanto o projeto de Heidegger, bem como seu conceito de ser-em-geral, como anárquicos. Esse ataque à Heidegger se apresenta como especialmente agudo porque o conceito de arché estava fortemente presente nos seminários de Heidegger em Friburgo nas décadas 20-30, inclusive na época em que Levinas estudou sob sua orientação. A responsabilidade, nas suas obras da juventude, serve como papel *árquico* contra essa anarquia heideggeriana da qual se exclui qualquer princípio de individuação. Uma leitura dessas primeiras obras levinasianas revela um conceito radicalmente diferente da anarquia em relação ao que se apresenta nas obras tardias e mostra a influência permanente de Heidegger nas obras de Levinas. Pretendo resolver esse conflito através de uma análise do conceito de anarquia e do duplo sentido de arché que Heidegger enfatizou como origem/princípio (*Prinzip*) e ordenamento/domínio (*Verfügung*).

**Palavras Chaves:** Heidegger, Ontologia, Anarquia, Arché, Gíges

Anarchy is a central characteristic of Emmanuel Levinas's concept of responsibility in his second great work, *Otherwise than Being (OtB)*. There, he develops this anarchic dimension of responsibility against the theoretical framework of Henri Bergson's account of anarchy as disorder. For Bergson, anarchy is effectively impossible because in its attempt to resist the order of arché, disorder becomes elevated as a new archic order. While Levinas seems to agree with Bergson that disorder necessarily is another order, he maintains that ethical anarchy is not doomed to collapse into merely another kind of order. In what is perhaps his best known description of anarchy, Levinas notes "Anarchy troubles being over and beyond these alternatives. It brings to a halt the ontological play which, precisely qua play, is consciousness, where being is lost and found again, and thus illuminated." (LEVINAS, 1998, p. 101) Levinas develops his innovative terminology in *OtB* in order to express this anarchic responsibility through terms such as substitution, persecution and obsession. Because ethical anarchy resists and interrupts the ontological play of consciousness, it becomes arguably the key philosophical concept in all of Levinas's later work.

Thus it is interesting to note that Levinas's early work employs the language of anarchy in a radically different way. In this paper, I will examine how Levinas uses the concept of anarchy in *Totality and Infinity (TI)* in order to criticize the absence of responsibility in Heidegger's fundamental ontology. In his earlier works, Levinas regards this absence of res-

possibility as the anarchic spectacle of being in general or what he calls the *il y a*. Rather than seeing responsibility as the anarchic disruption of ontology as he develops in *OtB*, Levinas originally viewed anarchy as the fundamental characteristic of Heideggerian ontology itself. A careful reading of *TI* shows that Levinas employs the language of anarchy not only to denote a disruption of order, but as a fundamental deprivation of any ordering principle. This relies on Levinas's understanding of Heidegger's appropriation of the Greek double meaning of *arché*, which was a recurring theme in many of Heidegger's early seminars during the time that Levinas studied under Heidegger at Freiburg.

## HEIDEGGER AND THE DOUBLE SENSE OF ARCHÉ

In his seminars from the 1920s and 30s, Heidegger emphasizes a double meaning of *arché* which oscillates between the Aristotelian concept of *arché* as origin or principle (*Prinzip*) and a pre-Socratic notion of *arché* as ordering or dominion (*Verfügung*). In a 1939 paper on Aristotle's *Physics*, Heidegger makes clear what is at stake with this distinction:

The Greeks ordinarily hear two meanings in this word (ἀρχή). On the one hand ἀρχή means that from which something has its origin and beginning; on the other hand it means that which, *as* this origin and beginning, likewise keeps rein *over*, i.e., restrains and therefore dominates, something else that emerges from it. Ἀρχή means, at one and the same time, beginning and control. On a broader and therefore lower scale we can say: origin and ordering. In order to express the unity that oscillates between the two, we can translate ἀρχή as originating ordering and as ordering origin. The unity of these two is *essential*. (HEIDEGGER, 1998, p. 189)

It is the unity of double meaning as originating ordering and ordering origin that Heidegger finds compelling about the way *arché* is used in Greek metaphysics. One of the common themes of Heidegger's philosophical approach is to rethink concepts which are taken as static states and reorient them as active engagement, as with his account truth as the Greek *aletheia* as opposed to the Latin *veritas*. Heidegger's preoccupation with Greek thought, and resistance to the tendencies of modern philosophy, is unmistakable throughout his work. In "My Way to Phenomenology" Heidegger describes the fundamental connection between Greek thought and his own reinvention of phenomenology:

The clearer it became to me that the increasing familiarity with phenomenological seeing was fruitful for the interpretation of Aristotle's writing, the less I could separate myself from Aristotle and other Greek thinkers. Of course I could not immediately see what decisive consequences my renewed preoccupation with Aristotle was to have. (HEIDEGGER, 2003, p. 73)

This preoccupation with Greek thought certainly extends beyond his early encounters with Aristotle as a student of Husserl. In *Being and Time*, as Thomas Sheehan observes, “Aristotle appears directly or indirectly on virtually every page.” (SHEEHAN, 1975, p. 87) This is important for understanding the way in which Heidegger approached the project of fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* since, ultimately, the quest for the meaning of being is not simply a search for a universal principle which is shared by all beings, but an attempt to unveil the *arché* of being in its double sense of originating ordering and ordering origin.

In other writings based on his seminars from this time period, Heidegger connects *arché* with *Grund* (reason or ground). He notes in his lectures on Schelling: “The key term for what we call “ground” is the term *arché* in Greek metaphysics in the double meaning of beginning and dominance; in modern philosophy, on the other hand, the term *ratio* (*principium rationis sufficientis*, *grande illud principium*, Leibniz).” (HEIDEGGER, 1985, p. 181) This theme of the double meaning of *arché* appears repeatedly and clearly functioned at the center of Heidegger’s thought during this period, especially during the crucial seminars that Levinas attended around the time of the Davos encounter with Cassirer. For Heidegger, the recuperation of the double sense of *arché* in Greek metaphysics against Leibniz and modern philosophy’s *ratio*, was vital to his early philosophical project. It is in this context of *arché* as a central theme in Heidegger’s thought of the 20s and 30s that pervades the way Levinas employs the language of anarchy (*an-arché*) in *Totality and Infinity*.

## LEVINAS AND ARCHIC RESPONSIBILITY

The first significant reference to anarchy appears near the end of Section 1, in the subsection “Truth Presupposes Justice”. This passage appears just a few paragraphs after Levinas’s emphatic declaration “We therefore are also radically opposed to Heidegger who subordinates the relation with the Other to ontology... rather than seeing in justice and injustice a primordial access to the Other beyond all ontology.” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 89) Levinas then refers to the myth of Gyges as it appears in Book 2 of Plato’s *Republic*. According to that particular telling of the myth, Gyges was a shepherd who discovers a ring which turns him invisible. He then uses the anonymity granted by the ring to seduce the queen, then kill and replace the king. For Glaucon, who relates the myth in the *Republic*, any individual, regardless of their moral worth, would use such a power for evil because individuals only act justly under compulsion or fear of retaliation. Beyond the grasp of any law or retribution, Gyges, or anyone in his situation would act unjustly. For Levinas, this situation of perfect liberty to act without the possibility of accountability necessarily means the situation of Gyges is *an-archic*. He explains:

... a world absolutely silent that would not come to us from the word, be it mendacious, would be *an-archic*, without principle, without a beginning. Thought would strike nothing substantial. On first contact the phenomenon would degrade into appearance and in this sense would remain in equivocation... (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 90)

For Gyges, the world would exist as pure spectacle, wherein his liberty goes uncontested and his just actions would go unheralded while his unjust actions go unpunished. This pure uncontested liberty, which Glaucon insists would inevitably be used to his own benefit and to the detriment of all others, renders Gyges in all respects to be “like a God among men.” Anarchy, the way Levinas uses it in relation to this myth, consists of Gyges God-like condition of perfect liberty beyond any accountability other than the call of his own conscience. Thus, we can say that anarchy is synonymous with what Levinas more frequently calls “interiority” in TI. He notes earlier in the text: “The myth of Gyges is the very myth of the I and interiority, which exist non-recognized. They are, to be sure, the eventuality of all unpunished crimes, but such is the price of interiority, which is the price of separation.” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 61) Interiority, then, is a kind of anarchy in which the individual remains separated from the call of responsibility. Gyges represents the case of liberty *par excellence* in which his actions have no possible consequences other than his own conscience, which Glaucon insists will not be sufficiently compelling for any human being in such a situation. The central preoccupation of TI is how the call of the face of the Other, responsibility, ruptures this condition of anarchic interiority.

At this early stage in TI, Levinas describes this rupture in terms of language and speech. In the second noteworthy appearance of the concept of anarchy, also in the subsection “Truth Presupposes Justice”, Levinas notes: “Speech introduces a principle into this anarchy. Speech disenchant, for the speaking being guarantees his own apparition and comes to the assistance of himself, attends his own manifestation.” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 98) This is a remarkable moment in Levinas’s earlier work, when seen in light of his later emphasis on the anarchic dimension of responsibility. Here, anarchy signifies the interiority of the self that is undone by the event of speech and the appearance of the face of the Other. While Glaucon views Gyges as unbound by morality, since he exists beyond the reach of punishment, Levinas contends the event of speech, or more abstractly in the appearance of the Other, disrupts that perfect liberty in a more fundamental way than the threat of retribution. While in the Republic both Glaucon and Ademantius stress the impossibility of justice in this state of perfect liberty, for Levinas this wrongly subordinates responsibility to accountability. In his view, at least in TI, responsibility emerges against the anarchy of perfect liberty by introducing a principle, an *arché*, as speech which orients and grounds the ethical subject. But crucially, this orientation is a disenchantment, a disruption of the pure spectacle of the Gygean interiority unbound by consequence.

That Levinas sees the solipsism of the spectacle of Gygean liberty as a kind of anarchy in TI is remarkable in light on how he presents anarchy in his later works. And yet, there is a clear continuity in that responsibility cannot be archic in the sense of an obligation guided by principle. While for Glaucon, Gyges cannot possibly choose to be moral, there is a sense that for Levinas true ethical responsibility can only be understood in this Gygean state of perfect liberty, beyond the practical realm of consequences that might be imposed by Gods or men. If, as Levinas maintains, the possibility of injustice is the basic condition of man, Gyges gives us an extreme example of the basic human condition that lies at the heart of this egoism. It is

in transcending this egoism, by responding to the ethical demand which emanates from the face of the other that Levinas understands as “disinterestedness” or more simply as “goodness”.

This disinterestedness is what overcomes the anarchy of Gygean liberty, which Levinas also refers to as “separation”. He notes in TI:

Gyges’ ring symbolizes separation. Gyges plays a double game, a presence to the others and an absence, speaking to “others” and evading speech; Gyges is the very condition of man, the possibility of injustice and radical egoism, the possibility of accepting the rules of the game, but cheating. (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 173)

Here again we see that Levinas considers Gyges in terms of his separation from the call of responsibility, and that the anarchic spectacle of Gygean liberty is seen as the basic condition of human existence. The myth of Gyges, or the myth of interiority, gives the illusion of separation and justification of interiority. What makes this myth so interesting for Levinas, and why he returns to it repeatedly over the course of TI (and once in OtB), is that liberty produces interiority as separation. What this means is that according to the myth, Gyges was not a cruel or selfish individual prior to encountering the ring. It is the ring, the key to perfect liberty, which creates his separation and solipsism.

At this point it becomes clear that Levinas is dealing with an explicitly political vocabulary of liberty and anarchy even while stressing the priority of the ethical. Since he understands Gygean liberty as “the possibility of injustice” which is “the very condition of man” one might be tempted to interpret his position as naturalizing solipsism. However, he makes clear that this condition of man refers not to solipsism, but for a potential to become solipsistic. It is important to remember that Levinas’s interest in the myth of Gyges is not in how the ring allows natural and latent solipsism to emerge, as Glaucon would have it, but rather how “the myth of interiority” is created through liberty and freedom from consequence. Overcoming this myth and avoiding the potential for solipsism, is not possible, however, within the political realm. Rather it is only the ethical dimension of human life that allows this transcendence.

In attempting to elucidate this ethical dimension, Levinas’s primary preoccupation in TI is to describe the phenomenological structure by which the call of the Other precedes an ontological state of selfhood or political subjectivity as citizenship. But this precedence is not chronological, but rather the task of ethics as first philosophy undermines these concepts of selfhood or citizenship. Instead of viewing ethics as one activity among others in which autonomous agents find themselves engaged, Levinas understands the priority of ethics in a fundamentally phenomenological sense. This means that the primary phenomenological datum of human existence is an attenuation to call of ethical responsibility. The self, rather than being an object which engages in ethical choices, is the subject which is called into being through ethical responsibility for the Other. Thus anarchy, in the sense of Gygean liberty, is

not chronologically or ontologically prior to ethical responsibility. The ethical, for Levinas, precedes and exceeds the liberty to act or the self which is the site of agency.

And yet, responsibility implies and depends on a self which has free will, otherwise Levinas would fall back into the anarchic Gygean spectacle. It is here that we must understand the Levinasian ethical subject as a kind of transcendence. This is not the transcendental subject of Kant or even Husserl, but transcendence in the sense that Levinas adopts from Plato as “surpassing the totality” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 103). In this way, Levinasian ethical transcendence differs from Buber’s I-Thou, which considers relation to be purely symmetrical and reciprocal. For Levinas, subjectivity must be transcendental because it is made possible through the exteriority of the absolutely other, whereas Buber’s transcendence would only signify the creation of a new closed totality. Levinas’s transcendence is always incomplete because a completed transcendence would thematize and reduce the other to merely another part of my interiority. It is in this sense that he understands ethics not as the creation of an archic system, but as critique in the sense of “that which does not reduce the other to the same...” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 43)

This understanding of transcendental subjectivity, as the concrete self that is called into question through the disruptive presence of that which lies beyond our totality, lies at the core of why Levinas views anarchy in TI as a condition of ontology rather than a condition of responsibility. Levinas notes: “The presence of the Other dispels the anarchic sorcery of the facts: the world becomes an object. To be an object, to be a theme, is to be what I can speak of with someone who has broken through the screen of phenomena and has associated me with himself.” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 99) It is only through the catalyzing event of encountering exteriority that the world outside of my own totality can be understood as an object. But since speech is a kind of transcendence for Levinas, it allows for the overcoming of “the imperialism of the same” (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 39) without reducing the Other to an object that I can comprehend as just another part of my totality. This means that the exteriority of the other is not reducible to my comprehension of its alterity, which always escapes and exceeds my attempts to encapsulate the Other as an object. It is this unthematizability of the Other, the impossibility of reduction to sameness, that brings the self into question. The event of speech, or the face of the Other, presents a call of exteriority which refuses synthesis into comprehension as transcendence. By emphasizing ethics as first philosophy, Levinas takes exteriority not as the condition for the possibility of the transcendence of a subject, but the event in which the subjectivity emerges as transcendence. TI, at its core, is an attempt to describe responsibility as the way in which order is introduced into the chaos of the anarchic spectacle of being as interiority.

By viewing responsibility as the introduction of ordering into the spectacle of being, Levinas’s position in TI must be understood as maintaining that responsibility is fundamentally archic. But, to return to the central distinction of the double meaning of arché in Heidegger’s view, Levinasian responsibility is archic in the sense of *Verfügung* as ordering rather than the sense of *Prinzip* as origin. Here, at least, Levinas is not yet affirming that responsibility is the origin of self, but rather that responsibility introduces order in the anarchic chaos of the spec-



tacle. Later on in TI, Levinas does seem to emphasize archic responsibility as the origin of self in the sense of *Prinzip* against the impersonal solipsism of Heideggerian being-in-general.

## THE ANARCHY OF THE *IL Y A*

In these later passages in TI, Levinas connects anarchy with his concept of the *il y a*, or the *there is*, which Levinas had developed in his earlier book, *Existence and Existents*. In that 1947 work, Levinas develops his account of the *il y a* in order to explicitly highlight the solipsism of Heidegger's *es gibt*. The interiority that Levinas sets out to critique from the opening pages of TI must be understood in relation to this aspect of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology. As with the Gygean anarchic spectacle, Heidegger's understanding of being is laid out in terms of the pure interiority of *Dasein*, which is to say being lacks the ordering introduced by responsibility. We might say that for Levinas, if it were not for the transcendence of the face of the other, or more concretely the event of speech, Heidegger would be right to understand being in terms of pure interiority. But for our purposes here, it is important to highlight the way in which Levinas's work is indebted to Heidegger's understanding the relation of self and world. For Heidegger, being-in-the-world does not imply the condition of being-in as a property of *Dasein*, but rather it is a fundamental characteristic of Being itself. (HEIDEGGER, 1962, p. 84) One key to understanding Levinas's concept of anarchy in TI is the way in which he appropriates elements of this Heideggerian project in developing his own ethical phenomenology. For Levinas, the ethical relation is not a property or activity in which the self may or may not be engaged. Rather, as with being-in for Heidegger, it is the fundamental characteristic of existence. To put this another way, we might say that if Heidegger's great insight is that *Dasein* is never not in the world, Levinas's appropriation of this insight is that the self is never not responsible for the other. Thus the anarchic world of facts is not chronologically prior to the ethical as a kind primordial demiurge out of which responsibility emerges. Rather, for Levinas, interiority is not chronologically or ontologically prior to call of exteriority which introduces order but rather they are, in Heideggerian terms, equiprimordial.

But in order to properly analyze Heidegger, in his attempt to go beyond or escape Heideggerian philosophy, Levinas must engage directly with the account of being as interiority, which leads him to the vocabulary of the *il y a* in *Existence and Existents*. There Levinas defines this concept in dramatic and ominous terms:

Cette <consumation> impersonnelle, anonyme, mais inextinguible de l'être, celle qui murmure au fond du néant lui-même, nous la fixons par le terme d' *il y a*. L' *il y a*, dans son refus de prendre une forme personnelle, est l'<être en général>... Nous n'en empruntons pas la notion à un <étant> quelconque – choses extérieures ou monde intérieur. L' *il y a* transcende en effet l'intériorité comme l'extériorité dont il ne rend même pas possible la distinction. (LEVINAS, 1947, p. 93-4)

Levinas's cryptic tone reflects not only the conditions in which the work was written, in a German prison camp, but his profound disillusionment and resentment with Heidegger's thought. This "horror" of the *il y a* is carefully distanced from Heideggerian anxiety or being-towards-death. For Heidegger, our mortality or finitude is what gives our existence meaning, or rather, our selfhood emerges against the inevitability of death. Importantly this is not against inevitable death in general or an abstract conception of how death relates to human beings, but my own personal death, which is not relatable or knowable through the death of others. This authentic solitude of death, the non-relational interiority of the finitude of existence, is possibly the most fundamental insight in all of Heidegger's great work. Thus it is important to note the way in which Levinas rebels against this authentic interiority of being-towards-death in TI: "The solitude of death does not make the Other vanish, but remains in a consciousness of hostility, and consequently still renders possible an appeal to the Other... A social conjunction is maintained in this menace." (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 234) The sociality of death, and the fact that my own death is fundamentally an event which "I" will never be able to experience, leads Levinas to reject the solipsism at the heart of Heidegger's project. Phenomenologically, the only death I will ever have the possibility of experiencing will be the deaths of others, and this sociality is what informs my own experience of my own mortality rather than the dread or anticipation of an event which is beyond the possibility of experience.

The shadow of being, which Levinas draws out in a long passage on Macbeth in EE, lies in this withdrawal into Heideggerian interiority, which gives rise not to anxiety in anticipation of death, but horror. He notes:

L'horreur de la nuit, en tant qu'expérience de l'*il y a*, ne nous révèle donc pas un danger de mort, ni même un danger de douleur. Point essentiel de toute cette analyse. Le néant pur de l'angoisse heideggerienne, ne constitue pas l'*il y a*. Horreur de l'être opposée à l'angoisse du néant ; peur d'être et non point pour l'être ; être en proie, être livré à quelque chose qui n'est pas un <quelque chose>. La nuit dissipée au premier rayon du soleil, l'horreur de la nuit ne se définit plus. Le <quelque chose> apparaît <rien>. (LEVINAS, 1947, p. 102)

There is a clear parallel here between the horror of the *il y a* and what Levinas developed later as anarchic spectacle of Gygean liberty. Levinas views the *il y a* as impersonal and non-substantive event, "being in general" which is detached from responsibility. The horror of being in general, the central threat of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, is that responsibility becomes thematized as one aspect of self or simply another part of "imperialism of the same". Heidegger is certainly not alone in this reduction of responsibility to an aspect of self, and this is a central characteristic of Levinas's general critique against western philosophy, but his critique is especially pointed when addressing the way that Heidegger understands being as being in general or the *il y a*.



Levinas makes a clear link between this concept of the *il y a* and his conception of anarchy near the end of TI. He notes:

The absolute indetermination of the *there is*, an existing without existents, is an incessant negation, to an infinite degree, consequently an infinite limitation. Against the anarchy of the *there is* the existent is produced, a subject of what can happen, an origin and commencement, a power. (LEVINAS, 1969, p. 281)

The individuated self is produced through responsibility against this anarchy of the *il y a*. This is a crucial point for understanding Levinas's early thinking on anarchy because it is only through overcoming anarchy that the ethical subject emerges. In Heideggerian terms, this equates to viewing responsibility as an originating ordering (*Verfügung*) while the emergent ethical subject must be understood as the ordering origin (*Prinzip*) of individuation. This means that while responsibility is not reducible to an aspect of selfhood, the origin of the self lies in this encounter with what lies beyond the totality. But since this does not indicate a chronological progression, the anarchy of the *il y a* is not simply primordial precondition out of which ethical subjectivity emerges, rather it is a constant tendency or gravitational pull towards the solipsism of Gyges. The production of the ethical subject, the commencement which gives order to the anarchic spectacle of perfect liberty, shatters this indetermination. But the crucial point is that this rupture does not emanate from the self, rather the self is produced via the rupture, via the call of responsibility which emanates from the face of the Other.

## CONCLUSION

Levinas's use of the term anarchy in TI differs greatly from the more elaborate and systematic way the concept is employed in his later works. The language of anarchy in TI draws attention to the absence of responsibility in Heidegger's fundamental ontology and deliberately appropriates Heidegger's own reading of the Greek *arché* in an attempt to undermine the Heidegger's phenomenological project. By viewing the role of responsibility as archic, as giving order to chaos, Levinas risks an overdetermination of the identity of the self, which presents the central problem he attempts to overcome in his later works that view responsibility as anarchic and embraces the indetermination of the self. In the concluding remarks of TI, Levinas himself begins to problematize this archic view of responsibility and self, especially in the passages describing the self in fecundity that persists beyond one's own temporality.

By using the vocabulary of anarchy to critique Heidegger's concept of being-in-general, as well as Glaucon's thought experiment utilizing the myth of Gyges, Levinas draws an unmistakable connection between Heideggerian individualism and the solipsism of unrestrained liberty. While Levinas's later work presents his concept of anarchy against Bergson's disorder, it is clear that his earlier engagement with Heidegger's complex rendering of the

double sense of arché is a motivating force behind Levinas's vocabulary of anarchy. It is this explicitly Heideggerian vocabulary, especially as it appeared in his early seminars, which Levinas uses to explicitly attack the project of fundamental ontology as lacking the crucial archaic dimension of responsibility.

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