I. Solitude and Existence (Part 1)

A. Levinas and Heidegger (39-42)

1. Why does Levinas believe Heidegger conceives of our solitude as “in the midst of a prior relationship with the other”? (40)

2. What does Levinas find flawed with Heidegger’s analysis of being-with-others?

B. Solitude and Hypostasis (42-57)

1. Solitude and Existence: What does Levinas mean when he writes, “Solitude therefore appears ... as the indissoluble unity between the existent and its work of existing”? (43) (Note: In speaking of the “existent”, Levinas is referring specifically to the human existent)

2. Hypostasis and Existing without Existents: Levinas defines “hypostasis” as “the event by which the existent contracts its existing”. (43) This is an odd way of speaking insofar as it seems to distinguish the human existent from its existence, treating its existence as something that could be treated independently of the existent which exists, as like a disease it “contracts”. A great deal of what Levinas is doing in part I is devoted to making sense of this peculiar idea.

a. Existence without Existents

(1) How does Levinas claim Heidegger’s account of the thrownness (geworfenheit) of human existence implies a sense of existence which precedes the existent?

(2) What does Levinas mean to stress in describing existence without existents as “the fact that there is”? (46) Is Levinas’s notion of the “there is” similar to Heidegger’s?

(3) How does insomnia, for Levinas, exemplify the way in which we are held by a sense of existence which precedes us over which we have no ultimate control?

(4) In what way does his analysis of existence without existents lead him to conclude that “Being is evil”? (51)

b. Hypostasis

(1) How does hypostasis, the event whereby a subject assumes or contracts existence, involve what Levinas characterizes as “a departure from self and return to self”? (52)

(2) How does our hypostatic assumption of existence establish us in a position of mastery over our existence?

(3) How does our mastery also involve a sense of solitude: “The price paid
for the existent’s position lies in the very fact that it cannot detach itself from itself.” (55)

(4) Why does Levinas insist that solitude is “not only a despair and an abandonment, but also a virility, a pride and a sovereignty”? (55)

II. Nourishment and Light (Part II)

A. Levinas and Heidegger at odds again: Why is Levinas so concerned to stress that “Solitude is not a higher-level anxiety that is revealed to a being when all its needs are satisfied. It is not the privileged experience of being toward death, but the companion, so to speak, of an everyday existence haunted by matter.”? (61) (58-62)

B. Why does Levinas believe, against Heidegger (once again!), that “prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments”? (63) (62-64)

C. Light and Reason (64-66)

1. How is my enjoyment of the world, for Levinas, also “light and knowledge”, an illumination and knowledge of the world?

2. Why does Levinas believe that our knowledge of the world involves us in a mode of transcendence which remains “wrapped in immanence”? (65) How does this lead him to conclude that “By themselves reason and light consummate the solitude of a being as a being, and accomplish its destiny to be the sole and unique point of reference for everything”? (65) Why does it not lead, instead, to a break with our solitude as we come into contact with objects that are not ourselves?

III. Death and Alterity (Part III)

A. Work, Suffering and Death (68-71)

1. How does the need to work for my enjoyment of the world introduce suffering into human existence?

2. In what way does suffering announce “the proximity of death”? (69)

3. In what way is our relationship with death a relationship “with mystery”? (70)

4. Why does Levinas disagree with Heidegger’s claim that death is “the possibility of impossibility”, preferring instead to speak of it as “the impossibility of possibility”? (70, note 43) How does this relate to his emphasis, again against Heidegger, of the passivity of our relationship to death?

B. Death, Time and Mystery (71-77)

1. Why, for Levinas, is death “never a present”? (71)

2. What does Levinas’s analysis of the impossibility of adopting a heroic attitude in the face of death add to his analysis of why death is never a present? “Death is thus never assumed, it comes.” (73)

3. In what way is death “the impossibility of having a project”? (74)
4. How is our relation with death a relation with “something that is absolutely other” which breaks our solitude with ourselves? (74)

5. Why does Levinas claim that “Anticipation of the future and projection of the future sanctioned as essential to time by all theories from Bergson to Sartre (and Heidegger as well, I might add - Hendley), are but the present of the future and not the authentic future; the future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us.” (76-77)

C. Alterity and the Other Person (77-79)

Levinas understands that “if (death) opens a way out of solitude” it does so only by coming to “crush this solitude, to crush subjectivity itself”. This leads him to look for a relationship with that which is other than the self that would also open a way out of the solitude of existence without crushing the subject. (77) It is our relationship with the other person that will fulfill these conditions, for him, as he analyzes it in the final part of Time and the Other.

IV. The Other Person: Eros and Fecundity (Part IV)

A. Vanquishing Death and Alter Egos (81-84)

1. Why do you think Levinas might mean when he speaks of “vanquishing death” not as a “problem of eternal life” but of maintaining “with the alterity of the event, a relationship that must still be personal”? (81)

2. Why is “the Other as Other” not my alter ego? (83)

B. Eros (84-90)

1. What does Levinas mean by “the feminine”?

2. What does Levinas mean by “the voluptuous”?

3. How is “the caress” the anticipation a “pure future without content”? (89)

4. In what way is this erotic relationship with the Other (person) the establishment of a site for what Levinas speaks of as “victory over death”? (90)

C. Fecundity (90-94)

1. What does Levinas mean when he claims “Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself ... (that I) do not have my child; I am in some way my child.”? (91)

2. How, for Levinas, does my relationship with my children constitute a “remission” from “the return of the ego to itself” and, consequently, a break with the solitude of the existing subject that does not crush the self? (91) How does this relationship to the Other that is, in a way, still myself constitute a kind of victory over death?