

“...AS IF WE WERE REFUGEES. THAT IS,
PERHAPS, THE ULTIMATE FORM OF
NOBILITY.” *Emmanuel Levinas*

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*This article addresses the theme of marginalization in the light of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). His major works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, provide the main bases of this article's reflection on marginalization. They present Levinas' philosophical thought as a radical critique of modern philosophy's notion of subjectivity in terms of "I think" and "I can". In these times of modernity it is not modern philosophy's notion of subjectivity, rather the human person's humanity that is truly at stake. For Levinas, subjectivity means the **I** that is answerable for the Other, or that is "one-for-the-other." Ethics, according to Levinas, is the "first philosophy." It is, for that matter, **the** critic of theory and philosophy. It goes deeper than any social theory or political philosophy of marginalization. It is of utmost importance, "to know whether the state, society, law, and power are required because man is a beast to his neighbour (*homo homini lupus*) or because I am responsible for my fellow." In contrast to the Greek "love of wisdom" the Jewish experience of marginalization reminds us of a much older wisdom, the "wisdom of love."*

VENTURING INTO THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS

Where to start when we seek access to Levinas' philosophy is a daunting proposition. This is especially the case when we look at his philosophy in connection with the issue of marginalization and exclusion.

Diverging from the philosophizing tradition of classical philosophy, Levinas does not begin by considering the 'whole' (totality). The fundamental concern of classical philosophy, from early Greek thought (e.g. Thales of Miletus: "*Everything* is water") to the medieval philosophy (e.g. the great *summas*), seems all about totality.

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Classical philosophy therefore is concerned with ‘being’. It proceeds from the assumption that how things appear is not what they *are*. ‘What is,’ is stable. How things appear is always changing. Folk wisdom has always been inchoately diverse in its assertions about reality but the philosopher is after ‘what is’; in other words after what is ‘true’ or that which is unchangeable. Among philosophers the question of ‘being’ has had therefore a special weight. Aristotle, one of the greatest Greek thinkers, has come to consider the question of “being” as *the first philosophy*. There is, however, from the early beginnings of Greek philosophy the persistent issue on being’s fundamental characteristic. Is it movement or immutability? The Greek thinker Heraclitus makes the fundamental assertion that everything is movement. “One cannot step in the same river twice.” Everything is ‘becoming’. However else classical philosophy regards being, the question of being’s ‘totality’ is a constant consideration.

In *Totality and Infinity*, his first work major work in philosophy, Levinas deviates from classical philosophy’s fixation on philosophizing along initial terms of *totality*. One should take particular note of the word ‘and’ in the title. It indicates that even if Levinas distinguishes his thinking from philosophy’s tradition of starting with ‘totality,’ he does not deny the claim that in a certain sense ‘totality’ is implied in all ‘thinking,’ and for that matter, in all language. Everything is implied in everything. Whatever is thought or said requires some sort of reference to anything else that can be thought or said. When we think or speak, we do not just make arbitrary utterances. Language always refers, at least indirectly, to a greater whole, if not to *the* whole. Levinas, however, does not begin with ‘totality’ or with the potential whole of things. The word ‘and’ in the title of his first major work is therefore of great significance. What does it mean? Is there any possible way of breaking off from ‘totality’? Can we think or speak of anything without thinking or speaking, at least implicitly and indirectly, of all the rest? The answers might not be readily apparent but it is immediately clear that *Totality and Infinity* as the title of Levinas’ book is not about an either-or proposition between totality and infinity.

The word ‘and’ in the title rather suggests the question: Does it make any sense to speak of ‘infinity’ given the ‘natural’ tendency of the mind to think and speak of ‘totality’? If read in this way, the title

of the book appears to refer to a classic problem of theology, if not immediately to an original problem in Greek thought. How can we speak of God? How can we 'think' of God as God, if God is really to be God? Can there be any 'place' for God within human discourse, within a system of thought, if our speaking or thinking has to be coherent? This is a classic problem. We have only to be reminded of Aquinas' dictum that in the end we do not know what God is, but only what God is not. Does Levinas again take up this same long-standing problem?

Levinas is a modern philosopher. What we call 'modern' philosophy is that which has broken away from the classical thinking about 'being' as that which is behind what appears, or that which might be called objective 'reality.' Modern thought starts with the contrary term 'subjectivity,' as Descartes' *Cogito* or Fichte's 'primitive fact' of *Ich denke* (I think) indicates. Descartes' and Fichte's thought represents the rationalistic or idealistic movement of modern philosophy.¹

Modern philosophy breaks away from classical thinking also in another sense. It re-defines the notion 'whole' in terms of the empirical. This is a revolutionary departure from the classical 'realism' of medieval philosophy. Take for instance the word 'nature'. In classical philosophy 'nature' refers to the essential characteristic of an entity or substance. Modern thinking, from the sixteenth century onwards, speaks of 'nature' in a radically different sense. 'Nature' begins to be defined by categories of physical quantification and thus by a new understanding of the 'objective,' as its being able to be empirically and/or mathematically verified.

The nature of philosophy itself as a discipline has gradually changed into a foundational and methodological 'science'. Its rational discourse has moved to another level and has become differentiated according to classifications of the mathematical and physical sciences. Consequently, we see from the sixteenth century on a differentiation of the various fields or disciplines of science into astronomy, physics, biology, chemistry and so on. There is also in the nineteenth century

1. The question of *principium* (Gr. *arche*), 'beginning' and/or principle, has been a dominant paradigm of modern thinking.

the rise of other new sciences such as psychology, sociology and political science.

Thus an entirely new paradigm of thinking in regard to knowledge and science had developed. In the nineteenth century this new paradigm was further strengthened by the phenomenal rise of industrialization and technological advance. In turn, a two-fold revolutionary development ensued, namely, the modernization of industrialized and technologically advanced countries and their complete colonization of the rest of the globe.

It is, however, the bifurcation between the notions of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ that has always been the central issue in the history of philosophy. But it is only from the nineteenth century that this divide begins to develop along contradictory terms. From simple competing epistemological claims between rationalism and realism, the clash has developed into an all-out metaphysical war between idealism and materialism. In this contest, one notion cancels the other out such that human autonomy itself has become the prize at stake, if not the casualty.

Three ‘thinkers’ have been called the ‘masters of suspicion.’ Darwin seems to suggest that ‘man’ is a product of evolution. Marx seems to suggest that ‘man’ is a product of socio-historical (basically economic) forces and conditions. Freud finally undermines all human self confidence by suggesting that ‘man’ is a product of unconscious drives or forces. I say ‘seems’ because the meaning and import of their interventions have not really been clear from the start. Darwin during his travels has made many discoveries in the ‘natural’ world and has gradually developed concepts that hopefully would put some coherence on his findings, like that of the development of species through natural selection. This particular one upsets the classical stable world view of ‘definite species,’ but on hindsight it does not *per se* replace the old creation story. Darwin introduces rather a deeper questioning of what creation really means (an idea that contemporary ‘creationism’ still cannot accept²). Marx does more than surface an

2. Is the ‘theory’ of a divine design at the origin of creation? Or, is this ‘theory’ itself not a heresy as far as the traditional Christian notion of creation is concerned?

‘empirical fact’ when he states that social and economic conditions in which people live impact their relations as well as their thinking and imagination. He relates his ‘theory’ to a practice that has become established in social movements, and he does so as an ‘activist’ and as a revolutionary at a time when traditional forms of society are, as he says, ‘melting down’. He uproots classical philosophical as well as theological notions such that they lose their status as *ideas*. Inasmuch as they are now construed as social and economic realities, they become material realities. Marx therefore unmasks the truth in thinking and speaking and bares the fact that the construction of ideas has ideological roots. He thus seems to radically upset philosophy and theology by successfully introducing the notion that thinking and speaking are historical and social realities of people and groups/classes of people dealing with one another. Freud for his part does not only treat ‘patients’ mainly coming from the new and emergent class of the bourgeoisie. He also develops a ‘theory’ that thrusts bourgeois privacy and expressions of human intimacy, sex in particular, into the domain of public discourse and accordingly upsets the established Victorian norms of ‘polite and civilized society.’ The impact of this move would have only been felt several years after Freud’s death and would certainly prove difficult for many people to grasp or deal with.

In the middle of the twentieth century attempts are made to deal with these masters of suspicion from the angle of linguistics. Structuralism has been at forefront of these attempts. The underlying ‘theory’ is that language ‘functions’ because of the differentiation of signs that it uses. Language in this sense is a structure of differentiation. ‘Man’ is therefore also a ‘function’ in a structure. Even words like ‘I’, ‘thou’ and ‘he’ or ‘she’ have only meaning in as far as they function in a field of differentiations. Language as such does not have ‘meaning.’ In turn, structuralist thinking thus makes a big impact on neo-Marxist and neo-Freudian thought.

The cultural impact of these ‘theories’ cannot be underestimated. There are, however, other significant developments in the twentieth century that one should also look into – the two world wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945), the incredible technological developments within the century, and not to mention, the various forms of ‘social engineering’ (such as those in the bureaucratic totalitarianism of

Stalinist Soviet Union or its ‘softer’ version in the capitalist West), the rise of fascism and Nazism along with the Holocaust and its death camps, the Russian and Chinese revolutions along with the various totalitarian regimes they created or inspired.. And then, since the thirties, the word ‘masa’ has begun to surface as a neologism and eventually as a political term in accepted and popular usage.

Against this backdrop, the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas emerges as a defense of subjectivity. Levinas does not speak of subjectivity in general or in the abstract, as in such discourse as the ‘subjective versus the objective alongside consciousness.’ He certainly does not mean ‘subjective’ in the sense of arbitrary or as opposed to the ‘objective’. For Levinas, subjectivity means the particularity of the ‘I’ which any human being can say of him/herself as I. One can ask where this ‘I’ comes from, what place it has in the ‘whole of reality,’ and so on. But these questions after all would not be of any consequence because whatever the answers would be, it is all in the end about ‘me’ as this unalienable *I* that matters. One cannot draw any conclusion about me but *I*. In other words, what I say about me does not apply to nor does it concern ‘I’ in general.

Levinas’ defense of subjectivity is not defense of subjectivity understood, for instance, in the sense of humanism of the Renaissance or that of the ‘autonomy of mature human rationality’ of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, Levinas takes explicit exception from Fichte’s idealistic *I*. The *I* that poses itself as the ego of ‘I think’ (“Ich denke”) is for Fichte the Ur-fact, by which freedom establishes itself not only over and against but also through the ‘non-I’ of nature.

... we are already on the road to Fichte, for whom the starting point of metaphysics is solely the ego in its autonomy. The material world is, for Fichte, instrumental in its realization of the ego; it is without significance independently of the ego; thus it is incapable of manifesting God. Spirit swallows up nature, and the non-human world is wholly subordinated to human self-fulfillment.³

3. Rowan Williams referring to Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit* III/I, 883-884 in *Wrestling with Angels* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 69.

Levinas does not refer either to the subjective *I* implied in 'This is my personal opinion'. 'I' for him is not the arbitrary *I* that has to prove itself in the field of public opinion; neither is it the subjective *I* that only establishes itself in the objectivity of scientific arguments, nor the moral, political or esthetic *I* that objectifies or, *casu quo*, justifies itself within the ethical, political or esthetic esteem.

What is this defense of subjectivity about? The most radical dimension of the 'Levinasian' subjectivity lies in what he calls its relationship to the *other*. Modern philosophy considers subjectivity as essentially characterized by 'freedom.' It also acknowledges that human beings are responsible but this responsibility is such only as it is based on freedom. We are responsible in so far as we are free. We take our responsibility upon ourselves in freedom and as expression of our freedom. Levinas spins the notion around and turns it upside down: I am free in as far as I am responsible for the other, in as far as I am answerable to or for the other. He becomes very radical in this position especially in his later works where he says that *my* answerability for the other is what defines *me*! We have to emphasize here the word 'I' because 'I' can never be applied as a statement to any other! This answerability does not even depend on the question whether or not *I* accept this responsibility.

To illustrate: if I am invited to a party it is up to me to say yes or no. It is this answerability which 'makes' me free. Modern political philosophy says that society's viability is based on a contract between free citizens. This is the dominant bourgeois political ideology. Similarly, accepting the invitation implies a 'contract' by which I engage my freedom. Levinas' argument for responsibility as the primary basis of freedom, however, leads to a political philosophy that is the opposite of this dominant ideology. Responsibility is for Levinas not a 'contract'; it is not even an ethical category of mutual decency. *My* being answerable for the other is simply the Ur-fact of *my* human existence. There is therefore more to this example of the invitation to a party. It is not only *when* the other invites me, for instance, to a party that I am answerable.

Levinas goes deeper because when there is an invitation I am still free to say yes or no. It is, he says, not just the other, who happens to invite me, which enables me to say yes or no. When the beggar asks me for bread, we have a very different situation. The begging of the beggar is not an invitation from someone who happens to be

my friend, my colleague or my neighbor next door. The beggar is not my equal. He or she is, Levinas says, the *other* in the strongest sense of the word. He or she is the other as *other*.

What does Levinas mean when he speaks of the other as *other*? This very question concerns in Levinas' thinking his defense of human subjectivity, which he pursues in his critical reflections on Heidegger's philosophy.

Levinas was a student of Husserl and Heidegger. His early works which later became classical essays were on these great German thinkers. But during his internment as a prisoner of war, Levinas also wrote an essay that took critical distance from Heidegger both as a philosopher and as an academic functionary of the German Nazi regime. Philosophically, Levinas refused to take 'the ontological difference' as the starting point, which Heidegger posited as his own starting point for 'the renewal of western philosophy.'

This essay of Levinas' on Heidegger resulted in an article that was published in 1946 in the French journal *Devaluation* and subsequently in the book *De l'Existence a l'Existant* in 1947. The title of the book means literally, "from existence to the existent," but has since been translated to English under the title *Existence and Existents*. Both the essay and the book give a key place to the notion of 'there is' (French: *il y a*). The notion 'there is' is for Levinas at the beginning of his reflection, but this does not mean that it *is* the beginning. Now, what does he mean by 'beginning'?

The notion 'there is' itself is a limit concept, a concept that does not stand by itself and cannot be conceptualized: it appears at the boundaries of human consciousness and has no meaning by itself. 'There is' is neutral and completely impersonal, without beginning or end. It is reminiscent of *tohoe-wa-bohoe* of the first line of the book Genesis: "the earth was a formless void" (Gen. 1, 2 NRSV). The 'beginning' is rather the rising above the anonymity and neutrality of 'there is.' The sensing of 'there is' is only possible where there is already an 'I' to note the weight of 'there is' that draws the 'I' down. Like the 'it' in *It rains* or *It is dark*, 'there is' has no subject. Levinas refers to a usual childhood experience where the child feels the silence of the bedroom like a 'rumbling' while life among adults goes on. When one thinks away all things, all entities, what is left is the weight of neutrality of 'there is.'

Here Levinas distances himself from Heidegger in a radical way. To appreciate this, we need first to inquire into what Heidegger's 'renewal of western philosophy' is.

Heidegger's claim to greatness rests on his attempt to go back to the origin of philosophy, which he calls the 'ontological difference'. This notion concerns the question of *being*. The word being, Aristotle has said, has many meanings. When we generally speak of 'entities' (things, persons, events and so on) as entities (*on* in Greek; *ens* in Latin), we say that they *are*. But what do we say, Heidegger asks, when we speak of being? 'That what is' *is*? What does the word 'is' mean in this sentence? Heidegger suggests that the "metaphor of the light" can help clarify this question. We do not really see illumination itself but only that what appears in the light. Similarly, we speak of 'Being' (as verb; *Sein* in German) as that what makes 'being' (as noun; *seiendes* in German) or 'that what is' *is*. This is the 'Being of being' (the *Sein des seiendes*), Heidegger says, which has however long been obscured or forgotten in Western philosophy. Ontology, literally the understanding of 'Being,' is the beginning of philosophy or marks its origin. The understanding of 'Being' is the light that makes 'things' (entities) *appear* in the gratuity of their being. Here Heidegger refers to yet another metaphor, namely that of 'gift'. The word 'Being' indicates that being is 'given'. It is in the forms of a material object (a jar is an example given by Heidegger), art (Van Gogh's *Peasant shoes*), or language (poetry in particular) where this wonder of illumination of 'givenness' *speaks*.⁴

4. I do not know how far there has been any connection between the American poet Wallace Stevens and Heidegger, but Stevens' poem *Anecdote of the Jar* illustrates for the English speaking reader Heidegger's 'ontological' difference. The jar is not a piece of pottery or utensil for sale. The jar reveals a world in and through the poem Tennessee is revealed as that world. See Wallace Stevens, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1953), 27.

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill..
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Nothing like else in Tennessee.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

The ‘Being of being’ (*Sein des seiendes*) is not just their factual ‘givenness’ or the *datum* of their being there and at hand. Heidegger has become a critic of what he calls the calculative thinking and consequently of technocracy, which takes ‘things’ as objects for calculation and manipulation. Things are not just out there or outside of us arbitrarily as givens. On the contrary, the Being (*Sein*) of ‘that what is’ is its *given*-ness. Being as generosity! The German expression for ‘there is’ (*es gibt*) suggests, according to Heidegger, the pronounced and strong meaning of generosity. Technique is for Heidegger *the* manifestation of the obscuring of ‘Being,’ of the *obscuring* of ‘Being of being.’ ‘Technology’ makes ‘things’ as givens or data. Heidegger considers the ‘world’ of technique a non-world, a mere container of objects of calculation and manipulation. Technique indicates therefore the height of the forgetfulness of ‘Being’.

It is here that Levinas becomes extremely critical, if not sarcastic toward Heidegger. “None of the generosity which the German term *es gibt* is said to contain revealed itself between 1933 and 1945. This must be said!”⁵ He does not reject Heidegger’s distinction between being as noun and being as verb but existence (Levinas’ French word for ‘being’) means ‘there is’ (*il y a*). Existence is not even a verb in the ordinary sense of a verb that has a subject, Levinas says empathically. The notion ‘there is’ is a limit concept. But it is not as light or generosity (Heidegger’s *Sein*) that appears at the horizon of consciousness. On the contrary, ‘there is’ is of horrible neutrality. It draws the ‘I’ of consciousness into darkness where there is no name, where even there is no awareness that there is no name.

Levinas ‘begins’ his thinking with the notion of ‘there is’. The word ‘beginning’ has, however, another radically different meaning from Heidegger’s *Being of being*. Any beginning begins somewhere. But that somewhere is not pure wonder or pure gift. That somewhere is the neutrality of the ‘there is’. “Beginning” as pure beginning, as pure origin is the *rising up* from the neutrality and anonymity of the ‘there is’.

5. Emmanuel Levinas, “Signature: A Brief Autobiographical Sketch,” *Difficile liberte*, trans. Sean Hand (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1963 et 1969), 375.

The notion of 'there is' has a central underlying role throughout all of Levinas' works. "My reflection on this subject starts," he says, "with childhood memories. One sleeps alone, the adults continue life; the child feels the silence of his bedroom as a 'rumbling....' It is something resembling what one hears when one puts an empty shell close to the ear, as if the emptiness were full, as if the silence were a noise. It is something one can also feel when one thinks that even if there were nothing, the fact that 'there is' is undeniable."⁶ It is "one of those strange obsessions which one retains from childhood and reappears at times when one cannot catch sleep and thus silence resonates and emptiness remains filled" [*Translation mine*].⁷ The phenomenon is like one's experience of sleeplessness at night where one is not at ease with oneself and thus cannot catch sleep. But it is not being awake either as in waking and getting up in the morning when the day is starting.⁸

One cannot think away 'existence.' When one thinks everything away - every *thing*, every happening and person and also all consciousness that perceives or 'thinks' them - what is left is not *nothing* but 'existence,' a silence that is noisy and an emptiness that is full. Existence does not exist. Only existents exist. *From existence to existent* (the literal translation of the French title of the book, *De l'Existence a l'existant*) indicates that 'existent' (that which exists) arises out of existence; it arises out of 'there is'. 'There is' is the core of

6. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997; first published in French under the title *Ethique et infini* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard et Radio France, 1982), 48.

7. "...l'une de ces étranges obsessions qu'on garde de l'enfance et qui reparaissent dans l'insomnie quand le silence résonne et le vide reste plein." See Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'existence a l'existant*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1978.), 9.

8. This reflection of Levinas reminds me of such an experience at the height of the storm "Milenio" in 2006. The storm was howling through the night around the highlands of Tagaytay. The windows of my bedroom upstairs that needed urgent repair seemed about to be blown away any time then. It was dark as there was no electricity. The night seemed endless and empty. I had this sense of 'there is'. There was nothing to think or to do, simply nothing. But this emptiness and nothingness was full. It was not quiet. My mind was busy with ... nothing, and yet it was impossible to let go. I could not 'think' and I could not surrender to sleep either. It was only when the morning light came that I regained some sense that the world out there did still exist and had meanwhile gone on its normal course.

materiality. ‘Existence,’ the mere ‘there is,’ the naked facticity of fact, is like a burden one has to take upon oneself, an unavoidable and inexorable burden. But existence exists at the boundaries of existents. Tiredness and laziness indicate philosophically that it is a burden to exist. They indicate how we are tied down to existence.

When one thinks away all things, what is left is the weight of neutrality of ‘there is’. The weight of tiredness and laziness indicates these are not just moments within the reality of healthy life of a human being. A phenomenology of tiredness and laziness demonstrates that these are not accidental psychological conditions. Tiredness and laziness draw the ‘I’ of consciousness and the sense of life itself down into the darkness of non-sense and nothingness. They have ontological significance. Tiredness and laziness are more than anthropological or social phenomena. To start to exist one has to take up its burden. That ‘moment’ of taking up one’s existence is, from within, one’s *origin*, one’s beginning.”⁹

Levinas uses passages from literature to illustrate ‘there is’ in its anonymity. For instance on the tales of Guy de Maupassant, a popular French nineteenth century novelist, he says: “...the calm and smiling horror of his tales do not only give, as is sometimes thought, a representation ‘faithful to’ or exceeding reality, but penetrate behind the form which light reveals into that materiality which far from corresponding to the philosophical materialism of the authors, constitutes the dark background of existence. It makes things appear to us in a night, like the monotonous presence that bears down on us in insomnia.”¹⁰

The horrible neutrality of ‘there is,’ of *being*, ‘existence’ in the French text, has pervasive impact. One may read it, for instance, in what Marx has described as the impact of capitalism during the early industrial revolution where a person’s real individuality was reduced to one’s basic biological functions of eating, drinking, sleeping and procreation — to those barest functions that would allow a person only enough strength to remain in the working force. Even sexuality is reduced to its simplest function of producing enough

9. Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'existence a l'existant* , 15.

10. Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), 32.

proles, offspring, to ensure the existence of a working force for the next generation.¹¹

In this age of contemporary globalization, the picture of millions of displaced people,¹² a mere reproduction of Marx's picture on a global scale, are among the many appalling symptoms of the same of marginalization and exclusion, where life and human independence are reduced to the mere neutrality of 'there is'.

Levinas wrote the book *From Existence to Existent* as a prisoner of war in a German camp during the war,¹³ even though he does not relate his essay on 'there is' to the experiences in the camp. He has a story about this dog ("...we called him Bobby...")¹⁴ that would accompany the prisoners when they would go to the forest to work. For this dog, there was no doubt that "we were men... This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives."¹⁵

From 'there is' the 'I' stands up. This moment of standing up is the 'beginning' of rising beyond the 'there is'. In the language of early Levinas, it is the movement *from existence to existent*. Levinas calls this 'standing up' *hypostasy* which, he says, constitutes the present itself. Here the word 'constitute' is of a peculiar usage that is derived from Husserl's phenomenology. The meaning of 'concepts' has to be discovered through the tracing of their 'constitution'. It is in the 'lived experience' of this 'standing up,' of *hypostasy* that terms of time ('now') and place ('here') are 'constituted'. These notions are not given through, or abstracted from, the senses or from sense *data*; they are 'constituted'. In other words, *here and now*, and also thus the possibility of time (that is, past and future) and of space (that is, of near and far), are 'constituted' in and through *hypostasy*. 'Standing

11. For this quotation see: Ton Danenberg, "Musings about Whats and Whos: Spirituality and Narratives," *Fired from Within* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia Inc., 2007), 293.

12. See Ulrich Engel, "Non-places: Refugee Camps, Mobility Politics, and an Empty Space in the Structure of Power," *Concilium*, 2007/2: 126-133.

13. Emmanuel Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Right," *Difficile liberte*, 152: "An extraordinary coincidence was the fact that the camp bore the number 1492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain under the Catholic Ferdinand V."

14. *Ibid.*, 153.

15. *Ibid.*

up’ or ‘standing on one’s own’ (with implicit connotations of independence) is the first and original happening.

Levinas not only uses the classical word *hypostasy* for denoting ‘standing up’ or ‘standing on one’s own.’ He also uses the term ‘solitude.’ It is in and through solitude that the “existent” *exists*. Solitude, he underlines, is a positive act. Solitude does not mean the negative isolation from others; solitude primarily means independence. Ontologically speaking, one is not alone because one is without others. Thus, being alone attests to one’s independence. It is because of this independence that the social arises.

TOTALITY AND INFINITY

The notion of *hypostasy* disappears in *Totality and Infinity* but it is now the notion of *separation* that emerges and takes a prominent place. Separation is the revolt of being against totality. Separation which revolts against the totalizing or synthesizing force of logic and of conceptualization is concretized as *psychism* or as egoism and in that sense it *is* independence.¹⁶ Separation is also called solitude as standing on one’s own independence. Separation is thus the resistance from within to being absorbed by the Infinite. It is atheistic. Yet, it makes relationship with the Infinite possible. Separation resists the absorption of the Infinite into another totality or a synthesis, be it a synthesis of knowing or a synthesis of history or politics.

The initial concretization of separation, as described in *Totality and Infinity*, is *living from... the enjoyment of life*. Levinas gives a rich phenomenological description of what he calls ‘*living from...*’ The water I drink, the food I eat and so on, are not fuel. They are not means for survival. They are not ‘things’ to be used. They are neither ‘things’ of which one has a representation as ‘things’ distinct from the ‘I’. I *live from* them. They are nourishment. They are more like the air I breathe, the sky I watch and the earth I walk on. They are elemental. They are not mere fronts without substance behind them. I live from them, I am nourished by them, I enjoy them and they are

16. The word ‘egoism’ is not moralistic. It only describes the psyche or the ego in its being itself, in its ontological meaning.

part of me. I am part of them but I am not them, and they are not me. They make me separate, but they make me separate only in as far as I enjoy them. The 'I' we are talking about here is beyond any particular personality, beyond egoism in the moralistic sense of the word, or beyond the introvert or the extrovert, or beyond asceticism or Epicureanism. The *I* of *living from* does not have any distinction. Neither is it in any way the abstract 'I' of idealistic philosophy (as the 'I' of Kant's or the 'I think' of Fichte's).

To live from... by itself means the self-fulfillment of the enjoyment of life. It also means independence from needs. The awareness of needs arises when the enjoyment of life is hindered. The things that make for the enjoyment of life become mere things that we need when they are lacking. As 'things' they are already socially constructed *as* enjoyable and *as* needs. But this social inducement does not undermine the original givenness of the lived experience of independent primacy of *to live from*.... "The limit case in which need prevails over enjoyment, the proletarian condition condemning to accursed labor in which the indigence of corporeal existence finds neither refuge nor leisure at home with itself, is the absurd world of *Geworfenheit*."¹⁷ The proletarian condition, as Levinas says in an indirect reference to Heidegger, is not an existential!

The independence of *living from*... which *is* posited in the enjoyment of life itself, or, one might say, which posits itself as enjoyment of life, or the ontological primacy of separation, *is* the "interiority of *psychism*". Levinas says with a daring image: "The imprisoned being, ignorant of its prison is at home with itself."¹⁸ *To live from*..., Levinas says, elevates therefore the "I" above instinct:

17. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 146-147.

18. Take note that the French *chez soi* ('with itself') has the meaning of 'at home'. That needed urgent repair seemed about to be blown away any time then. It was dark as there was no current. The night seemed endless and empty. I had this sense of 'there is'. There was nothing to think or to do, simply nothing. But this emptiness and nothingness was full. It was not quiet. My mind was busy with ... nothing, and yet it was impossible to let go. I could not 'think' and I could not surrender to sleep either. It was only when the morning light came that I regained some sense that the world out there did still exist and had meanwhile gone on its normal course.

“ignorance (of what is unconsciousness or what is implicit) is a detachment, incomparable to the self-ignorance in which things lie.”¹⁹ A detachment that constitutes the independence or separation of the ‘I’! This notion is definitely far and different from any Freudian notion of the unconscious, or from what existentialists call ‘implicit’.

In *From Existence to Existent* Levinas refers to hypostasy - standing up from the anonymity of the ‘there is’ - as the original event. In *Totality and Infinity* he speaks of separation or independence, which concretizes the original event as *living from...* The body is the primary concretization of psychism or egoism within the separation of *living from...* “Human egoism leaves pure nature *by virtue of the human body raised upwards*, committed in the *direction of height*. This is not its empirical illusion but its ontological production and its ineffaceable testimony.”²⁰ The word ‘production’ is here to be taken in its original meaning, not in the mechanical sense; producing, in the sense of the original event, means ‘emerging’ or appearing. In other words, the body is not primarily a given, a body among other things. It is not a mechanical or biological ‘given,’ and the “direction of height” has no specific reference to scientific terms of quantitative measurement. Mathematically speaking, ‘height’ is no different from depth or width! For Levinas, the ‘direction of height’ has ontological meaning: it establishes or installs the sense of ‘height.’ Without it the word ‘height’ would not have specific concrete meaning but would merely have at most a pragmatic sense. Ontologically speaking, the human body therefore emerges as ‘something’ that scientifically does not make sense or that is a mere empirical illusion.

Totality and Infinity expands the phenomenological analysis via a reflection on ‘the dwelling,’ ‘the home and the possession,’ ‘possession and labor,’ and again ‘the body.’²¹ What is at stake here again is the original or ontological meaning of what is ‘happening’ in ‘dwelling,’ ‘possession,’ ‘labor’ and ‘body’. This is not about the empirical state of things, which can be named and described in objective terms. In the Tagalog language, the distinction is made between *loob* and *labas*, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. The ‘inside’ of a house is different from its

19. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 54-55.

20. Ibid., 117.

21. Ibid., 152 ff.

‘outside’ but that distinction does not scientifically make sense. For the contractor or the bricklayer there is no distinction between the bricks of the outside wall or those of the future living room. However, ontologically speaking, house as dwelling *is* interiority or concretization of *psychism*, of human egoism. But not in the same way as enjoyment in its elemental sense. The interiority of dwelling makes for a concrete place, but not a place of rootedness, as that for a plant. The place of dwelling allows us to move, to go out through the door or to enjoy the outside from the security of the within, or indulge in the possibility of welcoming or providing hospitality to strangers. One can receive an outsider or greet a passer-by within that which is one’s own. This is not dialectic in the Hegelian sense. The original and elemental enjoyment remains: it is the original embedding of separation. It cannot be elevated to a system or totality of needs, or within any other conceptual framework. This and these other original ‘events’ break away from any totality. Thinking in terms of a whole stems originally from representation, that is, from language. But language is born from another event, as we shall see briefly.

The house is ‘home’ (*chez soi*): it is the original ‘event’ which I can call my own. As such it is intimately intertwined with interiority. The French expression for ‘at home’ (*chez soi*) literally means with one self. But ‘my own’ also introduces the economic consideration: my possession. My home, as my house, also has a value on the market. Yet, this is not the only consideration at stake. As the house has an inside and an outside, it has doors and windows. It lies on a street and is part of a village or a city. Going out of my home, I can ‘make’ other things also my own. I can work, and therefore I can own things that are not only of use to me but also have value for others. In either event, namely the event of my house as ‘my own’ or that event when I work and bring that what is ‘my own’ into the outside, I make my own representations of ‘things.’ By bringing them out, for instance to the market, I transform them into things that have value for others. They become instruments for common use. Furthermore, their value is objectified. It becomes money. It allows the exchange of what is mine for what is theirs. It allows the division of what is mine and what is theirs in an objective manner. But all this does not elevate the original enjoyment of life to original egoism. I

can, and hopefully so, enjoy my house, my possession, my work and even my money. Levinas is, however, deeply aware that this ‘original’ situation of *living from* and enjoyment is constantly socially circumscribed. Earlier we mentioned “the proletarian condition condemning to accursed labor in which the indigence of corporeal existence finds neither refuge nor leisure at home with itself.” But this, we also underline with Levinas, is not ‘the absurd world of *Geworfenheit*. This is injustice. Why?

Throughout the discussion of separation and interiority we have left out the dimension of language and of the *other*. So far we have mentioned language only vis-à-vis the notion of representation, i.e., language that makes for logic, systematization and totality, language that allows the possibility of scientific and logical articulation and discourse. It is such language that allows the naming of things and considering them in categories. But this language which allows us to speak in general terms and abstractions is also to be interpreted as articulation of what is ‘sense’ in a pre-predicative manner, of what is originally lived. It is such language which Husserl has demonstrated to be un-autonomous and rooted in lived experience and which Heidegger has spoken of as ‘being-in-the-world.’ Yet, for Levinas, language in this sense is still the language of what he calls the *Same*. Separation as breaking off from totality sets, so to speak, the stage for the *other*, for the relationship with exteriority, with the ‘and’ of *Totality and Infinity*. Language is not (only) ‘discourse about....’ Language is primarily relationship.

The house, Levinas reflects, indicates hospitality. Hospitality is not simply one of the dimensions of the house as concretization of interiority. It is also ‘discrete’ manifestation of a breakthrough into interiority’s separation from any part of the Same. It is also a manifestation of interiority’s ‘discrete’ relationship to the *other* as other. It is the concretization of the feminine.²² Levinas speaks about two ways of presence of the *other*: the critical (or indiscrete) and the discrete²³. (Take note that Levinas uses the impersonal expression of

22. Ibid., 154.

23. The Dutch translation of *Totality and Infinity* makes reference to two ways of divine presence according to Jewish tradition: God as commander and God as protector.

the feminine. This is to indicate what cannot be expressed in terms of being or not-being. In other words, it is not about the woman as empirical person.) One may also say hospitality is the discrete language of the *other*, like ‘Welcome!’ as language is a discrete word.

Language is primarily relationship. The concretization of it is the face. “Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers, and from the depths of defenseless eyes it rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution. The comprehension of this destitution and this hunger establishes the very proximity of the *other*. The epiphany of infinity *is* expression and discourse. In expression a being presents itself; the being that manifests itself attends its manifestation and consequently appeals to me.”²⁴ In this difficult text, Levinas says first that infinity presents itself as a face, but that means that it presents itself “in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers.” But what is the face? First, the face cannot be comprehended or taken as an object. For Levinas, the face is not that part of the body that can be manipulated by a plastic surgeon. Rather, the face is expression. But again what does that mean? Indeed the face *speaks*, it is expressive. But what is expression? Levinas turns the meaning of expression inside out. The primordial essence of expression does not reside in the information it supplies concerning an interior and hidden world. The face *is* expression. It is not expression of... It is *epiphany*. It speaks for itself. It is revelation, not revelation of ... but revelation itself. It presents infinity. Infinity presents as a face, Levinas insists, “in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers.” The face differs from any other sensible experience or datum. It resists all comprehension. This resistance presents itself as ethical resistance. It speaks from the depths of defenseless eyes. It speaks as commandment, “Thou shall not kill!” The face *speaks* before all language that speaks about... Language is primarily relationship: Levinas calls it solicitation, “a solicitation that concerns me by its destitution and its Height.”²⁵

24. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199-200.

25. *Ibid.*, 200

The face cannot be named as this or that. It is expression in the strongest sense of the word. It is concretization of the *other* as other. “The being that expresses itself by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity - its hunger - without my being able to be deaf to that appeal.”²⁶ That is its richness and, at the same time, its poverty. It expresses more than any language or discourse can express or say. That is its richness. But it is, for that same reason, its poverty; it has no other power than its nudity and destitution to impose itself. The face commands. But as a piece of lead can enter the head and kill, thus the face is as vulnerable. In the biblical metaphor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger stand for the other as other, without power or right to rely on. Yet long before there was thought of any social contract, to do justice to the widow, the orphan and the stranger was the *beginning* of justice. The comprehension of that destitution is not an intellectual or intentional act; it is a response that is ethical. It is proximity. It makes possible the feeding of the hungry without calculation. As if the other is my judge! Clearly, the jargon may be different but this notion is spoken of by Jesus in the Parable of the Last Judgment in Mathew 25.

We can say this one is so and so, but by saying so we at once neutralize the face. The essence of the face does not reside in the information that is provided as when we identify someone as so and so. Even such kind of information does not provide any clue to the other’s interiority as, for instance, being sad or pensive, enterprising or whatever. In expression a being expresses itself. But a thing does not fully express *itself*. It has always a hidden side that it subsequently reveals when it is used or talked about. A crate, Levinas says, is made of wood and may be used to make a table, but it does not make any ethical demand on us. When we speak of the face, we use expressions to indicate that a being presents itself. It speaks, in the strong sense of the word, for itself. It demands. “In expression a being presents itself; the being that manifests itself attends its manifestation and consequently appeals to me.”²⁷ It puts me in the order of “responsibility, where the gravity of ineluctable being freezes all

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid

laughter... The ineluctable (though) has no longer the inhumanity of the fateful, but the severe seriousness of goodness.”²⁸ Relation to the other—language— *is* justice! The Later Works

Levinas says in “Signature: A Brief Autobiographical Sketch,” “Since *Totality and Infinity*, it has been possible to present this relation with the Infinite as irreducible to ‘thematization’.”²⁹ This is to say it is possible to present the relation with the Infinite as irreducible to other words: “the infinite richness of the *said*, fixed and admirably mobile, in our books and our traditions, our sciences and our poetry, our religions and our conversations...”³⁰

The later works of Levinas, in particular his second major book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, are about this radicalization of presenting the relationship with the Infinite. The words *otherwise* and *beyond* in the title of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* indicate on the one hand the direction this irreducibility will take. It also implies a radicalization of Levinas’ critique of subjectivity.

The words *Being* and *Essence* in the same title, on the other hand, indicate what is most basic to all philosophy – the fact that we name ‘this *as* that.’³¹ It is at the core of western philosophy that we name ‘this *as* that.’ Being’s essence, Levinas says, is not that which is between genus and species, which is the formula of classical logic, “but the recuperation and identification of ‘this as that’ in retention, memory, tales and books.”³² Western philosophy is articulation, explicitation, discourse, logic, system. Or in the context of Heidegger’s discourse on ontological difference, philosophy is light or givenness. It is what Levinas refers to in *Otherwise as said*.

But there is no said without saying! All philosophy ‘plays’ therefore within this inextricable connectedness between saying and said. The implication of this is that the relationship with the Infinite also ‘plays’ within this interconnectedness between saying and said. We name the Infinite! Or, to refer again to *Totality*, we identify the

28. Ibid.

29. Emmanuel Levinas, “Signature: A Brief Autobiographical Sketch,” *Difficile liberte*, 375.

30. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 184.

31. Ibid., 35.

32. Ibid., 34.

other person as Mr. or Ms. so and so, describe him or her in terms of character, position, family and so on. The person hides behind or is covered by one's personage or mask. The phenomenology of the face in *Totality* precisely exposes the other as *other* without mask, Levinas insists. The face says, “Thou shall not kill!” But where does this place the subjectivity of the *I* who encounters the other? It is because of this question that Levinas seeks saying without the said, or in the words of the title of the book: *otherwise* than being and *beyond* essence. But what could that mean? How can we ever *talk about* saying without the said? Is ‘saying saying saying itself, without thematizing it’³³ possible? What language would that be? Is it not ‘an abuse of language’?³⁴ No, but one seemingly has to do violence to language to ‘trace’ this saying!

‘Saying without said,’ Levinas says, *is* human subjectivity; it is human subjectivity as *the-one-for-the-other*. (But take note, the word ‘is’ is here beyond ontology!) ‘Saying without said,’ different from what is said, is, he says, “the frankness, sincerity, veracity of saying. It is an exposure without holding back, exposure of exposedness, expression, denuding itself of its skin, sensibility on the surface of the skin, at the edge of the nerves, wholly sign, signifying itself.”³⁵ This *is*, though not in ontological sense, human subjectivity, namely as relationship with the Infinite. It is the face of the other! To name this relationship Levinas uses figures like proximity, signification and also inspiration. Through these figures, the relationship with the Infinite is named. These figures are “saying saying saying itself, exposing it, but without thematizing it.”³⁶ For each of these figures Levinas develops their difference, their differing from the said in distinctively clear analysis. Proximity, for instance, is set off in a detailed analysis against nearness with its basically spatial meaning. In nearness, as in nearness of the neighbor, I am in debt beyond *Sollen*, beyond the *Sollen* of Kant's moral philosophy. My indebtedness is inscribed in nearness itself as sensibility, vulnerability and contact: “The adversity (of indebtedness) is assembled *in corporeality* [*emphasis mine*] which is susceptible to pain

33. Ibid., 143.

34. Ibid., 156.

35. Ibid., 15.

36. Ibid., 143.

called physical, exposed to outrage and wounding, to sickness and aging, but adversity is already there in the fatigue of the body's first efforts."³⁷

NOTE ON EXPLOITATION

Because "my exposedness to the other is physical pain itself," Levinas adds, "I can be exploited."³⁸ But exploitability falls within the categories of cause and effect. It enslaves. It already is beyond nearness. Nearness, the one-for-the-other, is *not* slavery or exploitability. Nearness is passivity, more passive than passivity.³⁹ Nearness is neither initiative nor freedom. Exploitation is in the ontological order of the *conatus essendi*, Levinas says, referring to Spinoza. (But one may also think of Fichte as discussed above). In other words, the other is not *someone* with power, neither am I in relationship with the other as *someone* with power. In nearness, the other is other. And I am *I*. "There is *nothing* that is named *I*."⁴⁰ As one-for-the-other, the uniqueness of the *I* is to be-for-the-other, despite oneself.

Solidarity among the exploited is not slavery. It is one-for-the-other. 'One-for-the-other in its corporeality is patience: "despite oneself, to take bread out of one's own mouth to nourish the hunger of another with one's own fasting."⁴¹

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INFINITE: MY UNIQUENESS AND IRREPLACEABILITY

The relationship with the Infinite *is* vulnerability before any active intervention of reason or of the will. It is the face of the other. This is not a play of words ('a word-play'⁴²). Subjectivity is being turned inside out, as in 'stripping beyond nudity.'⁴³ It is, Levinas illustrates

37. Ibid., 55.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 54.

40. Ibid., 56.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 5.

43. Ibid., 15.

with an image, ‘a concave without a convex.’⁴⁴ One *is* ‘despite oneself.’⁴⁵ Subjectivity is ex-ception. The one-for-the-other is my uniqueness.

Levinas gives ‘substance’ to the words, exposure, sincerity, exhibition, witness, prophecy, proximity and inspiration through a radical phenomenology of patience, corporeality, maternity, mortality, aging, and sensibility.

The twist he gives to the word ‘signification’ is of particular relevance. *I* is not being signified by a noun. There are no nouns to signify *I* as “this as that” or as Mr. or Ms so and so. *I am* being signified by being assigned. In other words, he says, one-for-the-other is signification!

The absoluteness of one-for-the-other (its pre-originality and utopian saying) remains what Levinas calls inspiration. This is far from a vague ‘spiritual’ term. The word has to be taken literally. One-for-the-other means the holding of breath, of inhaling and exhaling, in awe and respect: “...*breathlessness of the spirit*, or the spirit holding its breath.”⁴⁶

That the one-for-the-other cannot be said has to be taken literally. It ‘defines’ the uniqueness, the irreplaceability of *I*. The subjectivity of *I*, its being ‘subject’, is that which makes *I* the one-for-the-other. Drawing from his knowledge of Hebrew, Levinas makes this linguistic clarification. The word *I* in western languages indicates, because of its nominative form, authorship. The Hebrew word for *I*, which is *hineni*, has the accusative form (‘Here I am’, 1 Sam 3: 5, Isa. 6:4). On the other hand, it does not only imply answerability; it also articulates an “accusation preceding the fault.”⁴⁷ It is precisely *this* uniqueness of the word *I* that does not allow it to be said within the language of consciousness. *I* in the nominative case has its ‘place’ within discourse: I say, I think and so on. In terms of ethics: I am answerable for what I know and have chosen. But *I*, or rather me, in *hineni*, the ‘here I am’, is answerable for what I do not know and for what I have not chosen. *I am* answerable for the other. But again this is saying without said: otherwise than being and beyond essence.

44. Ibid., 49.

45. Ibid., 51 ff.

46. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 5.

47. Ibid., 113.

The I of *hineni*, of the 'here I am' cannot speak for itself. It cannot speak in the language of consciousness without falling into the trap of 'bad conscience' – the consciousness of a culture that is impervious to guilt, a culture that is not answerable at all for the other. One-for-the-other 'defines' the uniqueness, the irreplaceability of the I. That the one-for-the-other cannot be said has to be taken literally. The subjectivity of being 'subject' makes the I, or rather *me* as one-for-the-other. This point is what Levinas wants to clarify with such linguistic help from Hebrew.

CONCRETIZATION

Levinas makes use of this sort of ('abstract') language (or terms like 'saying and said,' 'proximity,' 'one-for-the-other' and so on), for reasons that have to do with Husserl's phenomenology. The real point though in Levinas' thought is 'concretization.' We saw in the discussion of *Totality and Infinity* that separation was the underlying concept behind 'living from.' There is, in the same manner, interconnectedness between concepts and 'concretization'. In *Otherwise* Levinas speaks for instance of a "quotidian extraordinariness."⁴⁸ Saying without said is like making a greeting, like saying *bello*, which is "apparently a 'speaking as to say nothing,' a sign I make to another of this giving of signs."⁴⁹ John Llewelyn comments: "...the utterance of this is not merely a conventional tic, but is the exponential exposition of myself, that is to say, exposition not only of my visible body, but exposition of myself as one whose corporeality is produced... as the way by which to serve another without being his or her serf."⁵⁰

A study on how some languages express greeting is instructive on this point. The French word for goodbye is *À Dieu*; the German word for greeting is *Gruss Gott*. The Gaelic word, when you meet someone, is *Dia dhuit* (God be with you), and the other responds, *Dia is Muire dhuit* (God and Mary be with you), and when you are leaving somebody, you say *go gcoinne Dia thu* (may God keep you).

48. Ibid., 141.

49. Ibid., 143

50. John Llewelyn, *The Genealogy of Ethics: Emmanuel Levinas* (London: Routledge, 1995), 191-192.

These words place the other in a space that is a no-site (*u-topia*). Levinas emphasizes the non-intentionality (the corporeality) of this exhibit, in other words, of not having chosen it. Greeting, or what is called hospitality in *Totality* is, he says, ‘not a gift of the heart, but of the bread from one’s mouth, of one’s own mouthful of bread.’⁵¹ It is material; it has corporeality. Otherwise, it would be a false gesture.

The ‘speaking as to say nothing’ of greeting (*A Dieu; Gruss Gott* and so on) has no limits. My ‘hello’ says ‘here I am’: ‘I posit myself deposed of my sovereignty.’⁵² Levinas speaks in this connection of ‘holiness not, as he emphasizes, to preach some way of salvation, but “in order to understand on the basis of the supreme abstractness and the supreme concreteness of the face of the other man.”’⁵³

Levinas stresses, over and against the ontological language of philosophy, that “the biblical notion of the Kingdom of God must not be conceived as an ontic image of a certain ‘epoch’ of the ‘history of Being.’”⁵⁴ “The Kingdom of God signifies in the form of subjectivity, of the unique one assigned.”⁵⁵ “Paradoxically it is qua *alienus* – foreigner and other – that man is not alienated.”⁵⁶ It is, to use the language of this paper on marginalization and exclusion, as marginalized and excluded that *I am* not alienated and excluded. But this is nonsensical in the language of consciousness. “In consciousness it is an anarchy.”⁵⁷

T. S. Eliot stresses the same point:⁵⁸

In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.

51. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 74.

52. *Ibid.*, 59.

53. *Ibid.*, 54.

54. *Ibid.*, 52.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, 59.

57. *Ibid.*

58. T.S. Eliot, “The Four Quartets,” III, 138-141 in *Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), 181.

Jewish tradition is, in all of Levinas' philosophical works, the non-philosophical source for this ethical turn of the subjectivity and the self. In a Talmudic Lecture of 1989, Levinas discusses the theme "Who is oneself?" The background is the question whether human life still remains the expression of a person, whether it still answers our authentic intentions amidst the junctions of the multiple physical, psychological, social causal series among the anonymous forms that carry it: heredity, climate, milieu, tradition, press, politics, and so on. . . . It is the time of structuralism at its height in French intellectual life! The Talmudic Lecture is a rabbinic meditation on Genesis 18: 27 where Abraham says, "Lord, I am but dust and ashes." Abraham, "the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17: 4), looks at *himself* and calls *himself* "dust and ashes."⁵⁹ This prayer is part of a strong plea with the Creator of the world in favor of the perverse Sodom, a dispute on divine justice. 'Dust and ashes' is one's mortality. Jewish tradition announces a complete new way of transcending and enlarging the existence for one-self. Otherwise than being, beyond essence.

TWO STRATEGIES

Self-concern is concern-for-the-other: one-for-the-other. It is "saying saying saying itself, without thematizing it."⁶⁰ In order to say this, however, Levinas adopts two strategies, according to Paul Ricoeur.⁶¹ Both strategies rest on what Levinas calls *Dedire*, that is undoing or disembarassing saying from the said so that saying recaptures itself. In other words, they seek a way of speaking 'otherwise' or 'beyond'

What does *Dedire* mean? This is essential to what Levinas calls the otherwise and the beyond in the title of his book. Saying is normally expressed in what is being said. Saying may not completely express itself in the said because there is never the last word! But it is assumed

59. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nouvelle Lectures Talmudiques* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), 83.

60. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 143.

61. Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas, penseur du temoignage," *Repondre d'autrui Emmanuel Levinas*. Texts reunis par Jean Christophe Aeschlimann (Boudry-Neuchatel, Editions de la Baconniere, 1989), 32.

that one cannot separate the saying from the said. The strategies are meant to disengage saying from the said and thus to establish this *otherwise* or *beyond*.

One strategy is that of *retreat*; the other is that of *hyperbole* or *exaggeration*.

Retreat is *en-deca*, to retreat to this side, as in “to retreat to this side of beginning or to this side of the *arche*,” which leads to the word an-archy. If *I* in modern philosophy (*Cogito* or *Ich denke*) means origin or *arche*, then Levinas’ *I* as in “Here I am” (me-being-answerable) is *an-archic*. The idea of a past older than any recollection is another example. All thinking of the past is a recollection; that is to say, a bringing back of the past into the present. We form a representation of what has happened in the past so that we know our past! The idea therefore of a past older than any recollection sounds a paradox, to say the least. Can thought retreat into this side (*en deca*) of what has passed? What does that mean?

The Greek *arche* or the Latin *principium* (both meaning ‘beginning’ as well as ‘principle’) was for classical philosophy already a philosophical term. In modern thought subjectivity has become both the beginning and the principle. The idea of beginning though becomes more problematic in modern sciences (history, archeology, and politics). For instance, how do we think the idea of beginning as far as the universe is concerned?⁶² Or, to take another example, where does the *beginning* of a nation stand both in history and in political philosophy?

It is against this background that one has to hear the idea of an-archy, of a past older than any recollection! Levinas calls the idea of the *an-arche* “this incomprehensibility with consciousness, which becomes a trace of the *who knows where*.”⁶³ The idea of a past older than any recoltable past, and therefore not susceptible to being re-integrated into any present consciousness, the idea of an “antecedence prior to all representable antecedence: immemorial,”⁶⁴ is exemplified

62. The idea of ‘beginning’ is problematic. The ‘Big Bang’ is a theory about the beginning of the physical universe. It is an imaginative presentation of the ‘beginning’ but only in as far as the physical reality is concerned. Reality is something else, even if we take the ‘theory of evolution’ into account!

63. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 100.

64. *Ibid.*, 122.

by the notion of creation. If the assumption of all the questions raised regarding beginning, and of the examples given above, is that the past as well as the beginning can be made present, that all of it is presentable, and thus memorable, then *an-archy* means irrepresentable. And so does creation!

Then there is the example of passivity and of retreat to this side (*en deca*) of passivity. What does that mean? For consciousness all passivity has its reverse in activity. Passivity always entails an undergoing. When Levinas speaks of a passivity on this side of passivity, he means a passivity that is not an undergoing “a passivity more passive than passive: the idea of a conjunction of passivity and responsibility in an on this side of any memory (passivity of an attachment that has already been made, as something irreversibly past, prior to all memory and all recall).”⁶⁵

Moral consciousness has been determined by the philosophy of consciousness in terms of responsibility for what one knows and has freely chosen. One-for-the-other, Levinas says, is on the other hand not a choice. I *am being* chosen! It is not a commitment. It is “a freedom other than that of initiative.”⁶⁶ It is “answering without a prior commitment.”⁶⁷ Passivity on this side of consciousness! Or again, one-for-the-other is the paradoxical idea of “the anachronism of a debt preceding the loan,”⁶⁸ the idea of an “accusation preceding the fault.”⁶⁹ That I *am* answerable (‘here-me’) is not an innocent state of being. It is already a state of *being* accused and *being* in debt.

Even though we use the word ‘being’ here, one-for-the-other cannot be said. It is saying without said; it is the anarchy of saying. It is witness, sincerity, the sincerity of pure exposure; it is exteriority. It is Height or Glory of the Most High, “glorified by the subject’s coming out of the dark corners of the ‘as-for-me,’ which, like the thickets of Paradise in which Adam hid himself upon hearing the voice of the eternal God traversing the garden from the side from which the day comes.”⁷⁰

65. Ibid., 104.

66. Ibid., 114.

67. Ibid., 116.

68 Ibid., 112

69 Ibid., 113.

70 Ibid., 144.

The Height (*Hauteur*) of what precedes us, the Height of the Infinite – which is not to be thematized, which is witnessed to by saying without said, which is ‘reached’ through this strategy of the retreat (*en-deca*) – is repeatedly evoked by Levinas in terms of creation and in terms of the status of being creature, a ‘status’ which cannot be thought in the manner of ontology. From the ‘on this side’ of consciousness it is passivity more passive than passive. The ‘relation’ of creation, and of the creature in relation to the Infinite, is not a relation of activity and passivity, it is not an undergoing. It is indeed passive more passive than passive. “In the concept of creation *ex nihilo* there is the concept of a passivity that does not revert into an assumption.”⁷¹

Yet, as we will see briefly, it has to be emphasized that *the said* is essential for justice, namely for justice beyond the one-for-the-other, for justice within society as society where ‘the third one’ comes in, where I am among many others. If saying without the said – the one-for-the-other – stands for the uniqueness of the *I* and for the un-sayability of my responsibility for the other (singular), the said stands for responsibility of the *I* in the midst of the others (plural). If the un-sayability of the one-for-the-other stands for ethics as first philosophy, the *I* of the said stands for social justice and for political order (the state).

But we have first to turn to the second strategy which is characterized by an accumulation of *excessive*, *hyperbolic* expressions, designed to shake up common thought as if the wood of habits had to be bent (Ricoeur).⁷² These expressions aim to confront, for instance, the exteriority that assigns me to responsibility, the exteriority of the other, or *obsession* of the other, or *persecution* by the other. *Hostage* or *substitution* – these words “surmounting this sequence of excessive expressions, of hyperboles”,⁷³ says Ricoeur, are like a psychosis of the *I* of ‘Here I am.’

One has to take note in this context that terms like psychosis or *obsession* sound like terms of psychoanalysis but they are not. Levinas

71 Ibid., 113.

72. Paul Ricoeur, “Emmanuel Levinas, penseur du temoignage,” *Repondre d'autrui Emmanuel Levinas*. 33.

73. Ibid., 33.

makes this ironic remark during an interview: “One speaks about someone as ‘having had one’s Oedipus’ as having done his first communion.”⁷⁴

Obsession of the other is obsession that is not to be thematized. *Persecution* by the other, says Ricoeur, is an extreme, scandalous hypothesis or an excess or hyperbole. It means that the other is not the master of justice who tells me, “Thou shall not kill,” as it is the case in *Totality and Infinity*, but the other is the offender who requires from me no less than a gesture of forgiveness and expiation. On top of this sequence of excessive expressions and hyperboles is that of *substitution* of me for the other.

“Already the position of the subject is a deposition, not a *conatus essendi*. It is from the first a substitution by a hostage expiating for the violence of the persecution itself. We have to conceive in such terms the de-substantialisation of the subject, its de-reification, its disinterestedness, its subjection, its subjectivity.”⁷⁵

“My substitution – it is as *my own* that substitution for the neighbor is produced. The Mind is a multiplicity of individuals. It is in me – in me and not in the other, in me and not in an individuation of the concept Ego – that communication opens.”⁷⁶

Yet, “(I)o say that the ego – is a substitution is then not to state the universality of a principle, the quiddity of an ego, but, quite the contrary, it is to restore to the soul its egoity which supports no generalization.”⁷⁷

“It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple “After you, Sir.”⁷⁸

WHERE DO THESE STRATEGIES LEAD US?

According to an ancient Talmudist tradition,

...the world reposes upon thirty-six Just Men, the Lamed-Waf, indistinguishable from simple mortals But if just one of them were lacking, the sufferings of mankind would

74. Ibid., 14.

75. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 127.

76. Ibid., 126

77. Ibid., 127

78. Ibid., 117.

poison even the souls of the newborn, and humanity would suffocate with a single cry. For the Lamed-Waf are the hearts of the world multiplied, and into them, as into one receptacle, pour all our griefs.⁷⁹

Levinas repeatedly cites Dostoyevsky in *Brothers Karamazov*. ‘Each one of us is guilty before everyone and for everyone, and I more than the others.’⁸⁰

The philosopher Raymond Gaita once worked in a mental hospital in Australia. He writes:

One day a nun came to the ward. In her middle years, only her vivacity made an impression on me until she talked to the patients. Then everything in her demeanour towards them – the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body – contrasted with and showed up the behaviour of those nobel psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this.⁸¹

The strategies Levinas adopts speak of one-for-the-other as the pre-original or the pre-conscious, the u-topian or pre-place (Heidegger’s *Da-sein*), the de-substantiated *ipseity* of the *I*, the self as un-selfish. If according to Talmudic tradition the world rests on the *Lamed-Waf*, it is the one-for-the-other which is the basis, the ‘foundation,’ so to speak, of the world. Levinas expresses this in a later article in more philosophical terms where he speaks of ‘ethics as first philosophy’. That is not a moralistic lesson. It does not say that we have to behave ethically. The Talmudic *Lamed-Waf* do not

79. Andre Schwarz-Bart, *Le Derniere des justes*, as quoted by Mark R. Lindsay in his book review “The Last of the Just (Le Dernier des Justes).”

80. Feodor Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, quoted by Emmanuel Levinas in *Otherwise Than Being*, 146.

81. Raymond Gaita, *Common Humanity*, quoted by Timothy Radcliffe, OP in *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* (Cornwall: MPG Books Ltd., 2005), 123-124.

even know that they are among them. It is a philosophical critique of the philosophy of subjectivity.

In these words *obsession*, *persecution*, *hostage*, *substitution*, there is paradoxical unity of “identity and alterity.”⁸² Levinas calls this expiation. I expiate for the other. But one has to hear these words carefully. They are not the language of the said. They are words from *otherwise* or from *beyond*. Again these words speak from ‘this side of consciousness.’

While these strategies speak through ‘this side’ and through excessive and hyperbolic expressions, they do not only speak **about**, they *speak ‘this side’*. They *speak excessive and hyperbolic expressions*. (Commentators emphasize the significance of the fact that it is Levinas’ philosophical writings that speak!)

‘FROM SAYING TO THE SAID, OR THE WISDOM OF DESIRE’⁸³

The pre-original or u-topian saying, or saying without the said, stands for the one-for-the-other. It stands for the relationship to the other, the relationship to the Infinite. Yet, in this relationship, the one is the unique one despite oneself, and is not to be subsumed under any category. And the other is other, not to be subsumed under any category either. The other speaks because of his/her face, but face, says Levinas in his phenomenological analysis in *Totality*, cannot be ‘objectified’. It speaks by itself. In other words, the one-for-the-other is not an encounter between *personae*. On the empirical level, however, one might say, the one-for-the-other is always a concrete person who encounters another concrete person, the third party, who is in concrete need (“orphan, widow, stranger,” taken as concrete persons or symbols of classes of people, and not as biblical metaphors). While the appeal of the other as other is absolute in the sense that my responsibility always prevails over *my* needs – to give does not rest on a weighing on *my* part over and against the needs of the other as other – the fact that there are others (in the plural) that have their needs implies, too, that I *have to weigh*. In other words, the absoluteness of the one-for-the-other implies on the empirical

82. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 118.

83. *Ibid.*, 153.

level that I have to weigh the concrete needs of the others. I have to weigh who among the others has priority. There is a necessity of distributive justice. But this does not do away with the pre-original and u-topian one-for-the-other. Levinas states that it is sometimes important to know if society is being built on a fight of everyone against everyone, as Enlightenment philosophers have so theorized, or on the ethical ‘demand’ of one-for-the other. But he underlines as well that the entry of the third party is not an empirical fact, and that my responsibility for the other does not find itself constrained by “force of things.”⁸⁴

So, how do we get from saying to the said? Levinas says already in *Totality*, “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other.”⁸⁵ In *Otherwise* he says, “We have to follow in signification or proximity or saying the latent birth of cognition and essence, of the said, the latent birth of a question, in responsibility.”⁸⁶ In other words, we have to go back to the basic and original question, why there is something like philosophy.

Levinas did not believe in a philosophy of history. “I have no philosophy of history,” he said in an interview. He did not believe in a sense of history⁸⁷, and least of all in a philosophy of progressivism. In the first paragraph of the introduction to his book *Noms Propres* (Proper Names), he writes: “World wars - and local wars - National Socialism, Stalinism – and even de-Stalinization – camps, gas chambers, nuclear arsenals, terrorism and unemployment, — all these are too much for one generation, even just to witness them.” [Translation mine]⁸⁸

We have to go back to the basic philosophical question: where does philosophy come from? Why is there a question? Why is there consciousness? Descartes starts from the *Cogito*. Fichte starts from

84. Ibid., 158.

85. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

86. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 157.

87. Levinas in *Repondre*, p. 15

88. “Les guerres mondiales - et locales - le national socialisme, le stalinisme - et meme la destalinisation - les camps, les chambres a gaz, les arsenaux nucleaires, les terrorisme et le chomage - c’est beaucoup pour une seule generation, n’en eut-elle ete temoin.” See Emmanuel Levinas, *Noms Propres* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1976), 9.

the auto-positional 'I think'. Levinas speaks of the "latent birth of cognition and essence, of the said, of the latent birth of a question, in responsibility."⁸⁹ The I that speaks does not come out of the blue. It speaks from its being put in its place by the responsibility for the other: one-for-the-other *before* the "as for me." The I of my 'self' is 'defined' by responsibility before I enter into the discussion. Levinas confronts the question, where consciousness or where philosophy comes from, in terms of the "humanism of the other man" in another book of the very same title, *Humanism of the Other Man*. While highlighting here the Jewish roots of (western) civilization, Levinas indicates quite clearly the difference between his own ethical thought (*Otherwise than Being*) on the one hand and modern west European humanism (from the Renaissance on) on the other.

Levinas' emphasis on the singularity of the individual, the separateness of the psychism, and of the 'I' is, in its pure phenomenological approach, in stark contrast to the Christian understanding of the human person and history. For instance, for St. Augustine living amidst the "wasteland" of history, Christ, the Scripture and the Church form the principal authority that will deliver mankind out of the anonymity of the 'there is' (to use the term of Levinas). It is Christ, the Scripture and the Church that are the sources of consciousness and conscience of the new community, the City of God. The expression 'wasteland' refers to the famous poem *The Wasteland* of T. S. Eliot. An analysis of Eliot's poetry, including that of *The Four Quartets*, shows that his conversion to the Anglican Church is similar to that of St. Augustine's in that a fundamental, one might say 'ontological,' shift in outlook on history, society and culture becomes evident.

It must be clear by now that Levinas extensively appropriates Judaism. But at the same time he insists that his philosophy does not depend on his Jewish faith. This insistence has certainly to do with his understanding of Jewish faith, which is quite different from the common Christian understanding of 'faith.' For such kind of understanding one has to go deeper into the issue of what is commonly seen as the bifurcation between faith and reason or between theology and philosophy.

89. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 157.

Judaism is not a faith or a confession one can choose to adhere to. It is, in the first place, the materiality of Jewish existence. It is existence and therefore a burden that is there to be borne. Materiality has its basis in the ‘there is,’ the *tohoenabohoe*, the primordial chaos. This is, however, not merely a primitive and mythical notion; it is rather a limit notion that is ‘real’ in the here and now, from sleeplessness to laziness and tiredness, to the reality of the working day of the millions upon millions of displaced persons, the non-persons living in no-places, as Marx so describes.

Life, enjoyment, the ‘I’ of *living from*... the house, possession, work, and economy are to be understood from within as self-sufficiency. They are not marginal for life. But, on another level, when it concerns the hunger of the other, then house, possession, work, and economy are the very basis of the human rights of every human person. From that perspective – and the-one-for-the-others is more than a perspective! – I, my needs, are marginal. I am answerable to the other. The hunger of the other is a fact of injustice.

This other level now comes with the consideration of language. Levinas discusses the Infinite, which from a Jewish perspective connotes a relationship with the *other*. This relationship cannot be captured in the “language about...” This relationship with the Infinite *is* language, says Levinas. It is *language* as exposure, as vulnerability, as being one-for-the-other. Or, in the language of *Otherwise*, it is saying without said. One has thus to go into what has been said above about language: on the one hand language as logic, as speaking about, as information and so on; and on the other, language as relationship. Levinas discusses the Infinite from a Jewish perspective as relationship with the *other*. But as we have tried to clarify, just because this relationship cannot be captured in the “language about...” does not mean that the Infinite is something irrational or that it is, in the terms of classical philosophy, of the order of ‘opinion.’ The subject’s relationship to the Infinite is ethical and reflection on it is “first philosophy”. First philosophy *is* ethics. Ethics is basic to all ‘philosophy.’

One may say ‘ethics’ *is* reflection on the relationship of the ‘I’ to the Infinite. In order for us to contemplate this relationship to the Infinite we have to start from the separateness of being. That means a radical re-thinking of personal responsibility, a radical re-thinking

of history and politics, a re-thinking of worldview and ideology, a re-thinking of dogma and doctrine.

MARGINALIZATION AND EXCLUSION: A SECOND LOOK

The modern world is above all an order, or disorder, in which the elites can no longer leave peoples to their customs, their wretchedness and their illusions, not even to their redemptive systems, which, abandoned to their own logic, are implacably inverted. ... We find the agglomerations or dispersions of peoples in the deserts without manna of this earth. But each individual of these peoples is virtually a chosen one, called to leave in his turn, or without awaiting his turn, the concept of the ego, its extension in the people, to respond with responsibility: me, that is, *here I am for the others*, to lose his place radically, or his shelter in being, to enter into ubiquity which is also a utopia.⁹⁰

‘Destruction’ is a key notion in Heidegger’s philosophy. Since ontology or understanding of Being implies an ontological difference between Being (*Sein*) and being (*seiendes*), ontology also demands a *destruction* of the concept of being (*seiendes*). The word ‘destruction’ has here the literal meaning of undoing a structure. In this regard, Heidegger has had great influence on postmodernism and, particularly, on French philosophy of ‘deconstruction’.

Through linguistics postmodern thinking has absorbed the subject into the structures of language, culture and politics. The subject has, for instance, become a function of linguistic structure: the word *I* is a function in a sentence.

Postmodern thinking, on the other hand, is the philosophy of consumerism. Consumerism makes the subject a function within the system of consumption. In globalization the subject becomes a function in the growth of the economy. Hegel has given this definition of economy:

90. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 184-185.

What the English call ‘*comfortable*’ is something endless and inexhaustible. Every condition of comfort reveals in turn its discomfort, and these discoveries go on forever. Hence the new want is not so much a want of those who have it directly, but it is created by those who hope to make profit from it.⁹¹

It is in this context of globalization and its philosophical articulation in postmodernism that recent developments in Latin American liberation theology deserve our attention. An Austrian friend of mine who attended a course in Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones (DEI) in San Jose (Costa Rica) writes:

In this uncertain period, liberation theologians in Latin America are beginning to respond to the new situation with greater maturity and realism. Their analysis has become more nuanced, but not less any sharp or idealistic.⁹²

I highlight the portion:

The criticism of utopia and the new discovery of the subject. A new awareness has emerged that no ideal society could ever exist. One should not seek utopia, but focus on one’s concrete responsibilities toward others. One moves from (self-) criticism of utopian thinking toward a reflection on an “ethic of the subject” and an “ethic for (concrete) life.

In other words, a person has his or her own place in a greater network of connections. One belongs to a family, a generation, a nationality, a class and so on. In religious terms, one is a child of God or is created in God’s image, and finally one is, in modern terms, a citizen of the world. But no single individual can definitely be made part of a greater design as if he or she were a part or branch or unit of a bigger machinery, system or organization. This

91. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), No. 19, 102.

92. Gunther Prueller-Jagenteufel, Unpublished Paper, “Today, he says, the main themes in liberation theology are: (a) *The notion that poverty includes the*

means that, in philosophical or political terms, subjectivity should never disappear in any ideological or political construction.

Modern times have elevated human subjectivity to become the center of the universe. Postmodernism has for this very reason criticized humanism. Modern humanistic subjectivity, it says, is a myth. The construct of modern subjectivity is in for a radical de-construction. Yet it is observed that post-modernism as a philosophy only reflects the neo-conservative and individualistic consumerist version of capitalism.

In recent developments in liberation theology, a totally different subject is rediscovered. It is the subjectivity of those who have become non-persons, victimized as they are by the marginalization and exclusion brought about by modernity. Their very life or telling the story of their life is for them the re-construction of their very own subjectivity. Their stories are acts of defiance and resistance. It is the stories of the others, meaning the marginalized and the excluded, which kindle the fire from within. We only get a glimpse of what the real thing is by walking on the *rough* grounds of practice⁹³ and passing through the *narrow* passage (*imbudo*), as Nestor (one of the interviewees in a recent research) calls it, of people's narratives.⁹⁴ It is here that Levinas' thinking of the-one-for-the-other has to be heard.

marginalized and the excluded. More people become superfluous as the economy has no longer any use for them either as worker or consumer; (b) *The ecological question*; (c) *The social question, which has become more concretized into social sectors such as women, youth, refugees and so on*; (d) *The criticism of utopia and the new discovery of the subject*; (e) *Criticism of the neo-liberal ideology of globalization* (which is also a "utopia"), an ideology that seeks to present itself as natural law, though, in fact, it is created by human beings and represents only the interest of certain classes of people.

93. Daniel Franklin Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Methods with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005)

94. Story telling by the victims has been the basis for a research on spirituality in the (Philippine) social movement. See Ton Danenberg, Carlos Ronquillo, Sr. Emelina Villegas, Jose de Mesa and Maurice Piers, *Fired from Within* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia Inc., 2007).

Each individual of these peoples is virtually a chosen one, called to leave in his turn, or without awaiting his turn, the concept of the ego, its extension in the people, to respond with responsibility: me, that is, *here I am for the others*, to lose his place radically, or his shelter in being, to enter into ubiquity which is also a utopia.⁹⁵

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Michael Levinas, famous musician and youngest son of Levinas spoke to the *Jerusalem Post* in an interview in 2006.⁹⁶ When he was six years old, Levinas recalled, he and his father were sitting in a train car that had been stopped for hours.

I remember a very short dialogue that took place between him and a woman seated across from us. The lights went out, there was no heating, and in the dark I heard the voice of this French woman addressing herself to my father: ‘Monsieur,’ she said, ‘this is unbelievable – it seems as if we were refugees.’ My father responded – he had the accent of a refugee, a Russian accent, and there was this fugitive quality to his voice: ‘Madame,’ he said, ‘that is, perhaps, the ultimate form of nobility.’

There was something in my father that I attributed to this nobility of the refugee. There was always this sense of being there, but being on the margins. He gazed at the intellectual life in Paris from outside the game, as if he was on another plane - it was another kind of exile. There was a phrase he always repeated when his writing was lauded in later years – repeated not as a means of self-effacement or false modesty, but as an expression of survival: ‘Who would have believed it?’ he used to say. ‘There must be some sort of misunderstanding. I’ve just gotten off the Kovno-Paris train.’

95. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 184-185.

96. “Interview: Michael Levinas,” *Jerusalem Post*, 9 February 2006.

Marginalization and exclusion have always been for the Jew the concrete and historical experience of what Levinas' son Michael here calls "this sense of being on the margins." Particularly in the radical ethical philosophy of Levinas' later works, we can sense indeed this "nobility of the refugee."

As theme of any conference, even this one, marginalization and exclusion tend to be discussed 'from the viewpoint of the center' and from that viewpoint, as primarily a sociological and economic, if not a political problem. Only then it might become a theological problem. Eventually it might even become a discussion matter of interdisciplinary competence. The fact of Jewish existence, however, and particularly the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, call into question this manner and process of viewing the issues.

Can theology have anything to contribute if it does not base itself on the marginal position of what Levinas calls one-for-the-other? What does it mean, however, if theology would not be in the center? Modern theology has struggled over the past centuries with the problems of autonomous subjectivity and with the problem of secularization. Theology from the margins certainly does not mean that theology would have to go along with post-modernist neo-conservatism of consumer society or with the more recent critique of subjectivity. Levinas reminds us of the incredibly cruel events of the last century, which quite clearly has brought to our realization that our engagement with marginalization and with the marginalized is an issue of ethical responsibility before it is an issue of competence. Levinas insists on this outlook for theology and for what is called its interdisciplinary character.

Levinas insists that it is the other who makes me responsible or answerable beyond my self-sufficiency (enjoyment, house, possession, work, economy). The (face of the) other, the one-for-the-other, is the place where God's self-revelation occurs. If the Jew as Jew has no choice, it has to be said as well that *I* have no choice where the other speaks through his or her face from near or far. That is *my* marginal position!

One of the reasons, according to Talmudic discussions, why the Scroll of the Book of Esther had to have a place in the Bible is this: what Esther and Mordecai did was a necessary step on the

“ . . . As if we were refugees. . .

way to truth and peace. As Levinas says in the typical language of his later writings, particularly that of *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, the *essence* of the human person is the call to be a saint.

Christian tradition has ‘known’ this all along in the Didache, in St. Francis, St. Jean Baptiste de La Salle, St. Vincent the Paul, F. D. Maurice of the Anglican tradition,⁹⁷ and many others. Rowan Williams says:

In *Ps. 140* .7 Augustine says that the two texts that provide the key for the understanding of the whole of Scripture are the words to Paul on the Damascus road, ‘Why persecutest thou me?’ and the parable of the Great Assize in Matthew 25 (‘In as much as ye have done it...’). In these sayings is affirmed the absolute unity of Christ with his suffering people; and this principle of God’s identification with humanity is the clue to the whole of revelation.⁹⁸

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97. A. N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Arrow Books, 2003), 151: “The only cohesive opposition to the march of capitalism in the 1840s and 1850s came from communism - or its watered-down equivalents - and Christianity.”

98. Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1979), 83.