

EMMANUEL LEVINAS ON SENSITIVITY (OR *MALASAKIT* AND *PANANAGUTAN*)

Ton Danenberg

This paper is an attempt to articulate the core of Levinas' philosophy via the concept of "sensitivity" in relation/contrast to Western philosophy, in relation/contrast, that is, to ontology: the understanding of what is. The paper explores moreover some implications of Levinasean thought for the understanding of the word "God" and of what is commonly called "religion." The paper does lastly make an attempt to make Levinas' philosophy understandable for the Filipino via the notions of "malasakit" and "pananagutan."

INTRODUCTION

Sensitivity means a sense for the concreteness or particularity of a person or a situation. Sensitivity dissociates itself from, or goes beyond, a mode of perceiving, of judging persons or situations in general or in the abstract. Being sensitive, it is assumed, creates more human, more 'ethical' relations between people. Sensitivity is often also a quality that makes people more practical and more effective in their work; it makes people inventive and prompt to discovery. It is practical and delivers results in science and efficiency in technology. For instance, in medical practice, sensitivity sharpens the 'clinical eye'. Sensitivity conduces to a 'human' quality which often has the impact of bringing about great teamwork.

But as a human quality, sensitivity, whether in practice or in human interaction, is a form of cognition that considers reality to be objective and rational. In philosophical terms, sensitivity figures within the general understanding of that *what is as it is*. In other words, sensitivity as a concept belongs to that realm of philosophy called ontology, the understanding of being as being.

Though the word seems modern in usage, it has strong links with the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of the virtue 'prudence', the Latin *prudencia*, which McCabe translates into English as 'good sense'.

However, when we introduce the word 'sensitivity' into an attempt to understand Levinas, we have to stress that the word is not to be taken in any of the sense described above. Levinas does not place sensitivity *within* the general understanding of objectivity and rationality of ontology. That does not mean that Levinas rejects objectivity or rationality. It means that he starts 'earlier', if I may use this term.

What does 'earlier' in this regard mean? Objectivity and rationality are not foundational concepts. Even as philosophy has always raised the question of truth, 'truth' is not the last and definitive word. If I may use the language of Immanuel Kant, Levinas is asking what the conditions of possibility are: What is it that makes objectivity and rationality possible? What makes 'truth' possible? 'Truth' is, in other words, not the ultimate word for meaning. There is something else, something prior or 'earlier' that gives meaning to meaning: the meaning of meaning.

Sensitivity is not a refinement of human relations that, as we say, are established and regulated by existing 'mores', moral norms, agreements and 'social contracts' and so on. For Levinas, it is the other way around. It is sensitivity, which makes 'relations', moral norms, agreements and 'social contracts' possible. It is sensitivity that is the condition of possibility not only for relations; it is also sensitivity that makes rationality and objectivity possible. But then, what do we mean by sensitivity?

Emmanuel Levinas

In *Hors Sujet* Levinas puts together a number of his earlier essays on 20th century thinkers who are often described as 'personalists.' These thinkers radically criticize modern rationalism by re-thinking human subjectivity and by emphasizing the originality of the human person. First, the human person is not to be thought of in terms of *genus* and *differentia specifica*, as in classical logic. Second, personalism conceives of human subjectivity as bodily existence with other persons. Third, it re-thinks thinking itself accordingly, that is, it re-

thinks thinking in terms of 'incarnation' and inter-subjectivity. Fourth, it also re-thinks man's relation with the Absolute, either in terms of relationship to the Other or the Thou; or it re-thinks the incarnate and inter-subjective human existence in terms of a radical atheism.

In how far can we interpret Levinas' own thinking in these terms? Levinas certainly does not think concrete being (*ens*, entity, 'existant')¹ along terms of classical logic as sort and specification. He also thinks the bodily existence of the human being as incarnate, but then, for Levinas, to be incarnate means *primary enjoyment of life*. In other words, it means existing as 'separated.' Separation thus becomes a fundamental category (even to the extent of 'a-theism'). Togetherness with others and being as being-in-the-world, based on a thorough phenomenological analysis, are primarily thought in terms of life. This is a point of difference in Levinas' philosophy from that of Heidegger's. We may add that the category of 'life' is thought phenomenologically, outside of any form of modern rationalism, biologism or functionality. Hence, 'incarnation', (though a term Levinas does not use), or bodily existence, has a great variety of manifestation, enjoyment, fulfillment, house: intimacy and outside (*loob* and *labas*), need and thus care for the future, work, togetherness in collaboration; hence, division of fruits and labor: economy (in the primary sense of the word) and money in its original meaning, etc. But this 'separation', as it flowers in its concreteness, is not possible without language, not primarily language as 'naming' but language as relationship, that is, exposure to the Other. (Those who are familiar with *The Star of Redemption* will recognize here the voice of Franz Rosenzweig). Levinas breaks radically with the Idealism that thinks of the relation with the Absolute in terms of foundation, or in more classical terms, the Absolute as 'cause.'

Levinas also re-defines, as it were, his relation with his teacher Edmund Husserl. The transcendental consciousness or Ego is for Husserl the ultimate condition of possibility of rationality and objectivity, and thus, the ultimate condition of possibility of the humanity of human history. For Levinas, on the other hand, it is

1. One translator has tried to solve the problem with the English word 'being': 'The French *étant*, Levinas's equivalent of Heidegger's *das Seiende*, has been translated as "a being", or "beings" (but never just "being") throughout.

language as relationship with or exposure to the Other or obedience to the Face of the Other, which is the condition of possibility of the humanity of human beings.

The fundamental commandment 'Thou shall not kill' is for Levinas the place where we 'hear' the word God, the place where God comes to mind. This means that the real and basic condition of possibility is ethical. Ethics is thus the ultimate meaning of human spirituality. The (human) 'spirit' is not 'defined' by transcendental consciousness, or Ego, but by the concrete 'one-for-the-other' which transcends the search for 'being', or for truth. To do justice does not lie in the coherence (logic) of discourse, but in the justice done to the Other.

Taking the word "sensitivity" as goodness, one can say it is goodness that makes truth possible, and not the other way around. The question of truth, the age-old question in philosophy, does only arise from the 'question' of goodness. Goodness, or ethics, is the condition of possibility of 'truth'. As Levinas says in the introduction to *Hors Sujet*: "We are humans before we are learned and we will remain humans even after we have much forgotten."²

Western Philosophy and Beyond

In *God and Philosophy*, Levinas writes: "(F)or Western philosophy meaning or intelligibility coincides with the manifestation of being, as if the very doings of being (*l'affaire meme de l'être*) led to clarity, in the form of clarity, and then became an intentional thematization in an experience. ... Thematic exposure concludes the business of being (*l'affaire de l'être*) or truth."³

Philosophy is about 'being'; it is about understanding what is. It is about the self-manifestation of being, of what 'is', beyond what 'we' think that it is, beyond appearance (*doxa* in Greek). The history of philosophy is therefore the history of this understanding of being.

2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Hors Sujet* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1987), 11. The quote here is the author's translation from the original French.

3. Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), 169.

To illustrate the complexity of this history, I will give some examples, partly drawing from Nicholas Lash's *A Theology of Pilgrims*. I make three points. For the early Fathers of the Church as well as the medieval schoolmen, it went without saying that no one would ever dissociate memory from argument, narrative from explanation. (This is indeed also the case for the medieval schoolmen, though our understanding of them has been ill-informed by 19th century rationalism.) Like the Fathers of the Church, the medieval schoolmen wrote their *sacra doctrina* as a commentary on the Scriptures. Lessing and his contemporaries, on the other hand, had forgotten everything about memory. They could not think otherwise but that reason's truths are necessary and those of history are merely accidental. A further note, for Plato and his followers, mathematics is the example of what is eternal as is virtue. But this should not be interpreted in the way it is done by the neo-Kantians in the 19th century. Our problem after Heidegger, and, adds Lash, after Auschwitz and Kolymna, is that all claims that everything makes sense in the end are suspect. In secular society our killing fields, if ever they are mentioned, are seen as unfortunate episodes in an otherwise quite satisfactory tale. A certain careless atheism, Lash notes, supposes that it is 'religious' truth that has been called into question, not the tale itself.⁴

Throughout its history philosophy has also equated ethics, the question of 'goodness,' with the question of being, and the question of truth. Ethics, the question of how people behave and relate to one another, has been part of ontology, part of the understanding of being. It is rationality that establishes peace and harmony. Rationality, or *logos* (that is, the foundation of the understanding of being), is also the 'essence' of the meaning between us (*entre nous*). But take note that in the Platonic dialogues where what matters is the dialectical movement of the *logos*, the participants are, as Hegel points out, simply 'moments' in that movement. The participants have no 'face' in the dialogue.

Levinas in *God and Philosophy* continues: "Knowing is only understood in its proper essence when one begins with consciousness.... (However) it is (only) as a modality or modification

4. Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2008), 44.

of insomnia that consciousness is consciousness of... a gathering into being or into presence, which at a certain depth of vigilance whose vigilance has to clothe itself with justice is essential to insomnia.”⁵

It has always been understood that knowledge/consciousness is independent, that it is, as it were, ‘the’ place where ‘being’ is/becomes manifest, where consciousness is consciousness of However, Levinas remarks, before being consciousness of, consciousness has to awaken, as consciousness is a modality of insomnia. Consciousness is not something by itself. Consciousness as such (and what philosophical tradition ascribes to it as gathering into ‘being’, into presence, to use Heideggerian language) has to be awakened, before being conscious of ...What is this awakening? Is that a conscious act? What is it that awakes consciousness? It is here that Levinas speaks of the ethical.

Yet, Levinas warns at the same time not to think this ‘being awake’ again in ontological terms. “Here being awake is not equivalent to watching over... where the identical, rest, sleep, is sought after. It is in consciousness alone that the ‘watching’, already petrified (in French, *déjà médusé*, which literally means ‘already transformed into a mask of Medusa’), bends over toward a content which is identified and gathered into a presence, into a ‘move of being’, and is absorbed in it.”⁶

(*Entre Nous* does also use this word *médusé*. It is as if the self-evidence of the world as a state in which reason is contained paralyzed, Medusa-like, and petrified the reasonable life that “lives” this self-evidence.⁷)

Levinas, however, hesitates. The vigilance of insomnia is not a form of concentrated attention on what can be identified by name, a state of consciousness at rest or in sleep, as it were. It is not contemplation (*theoria*). Or, taking the word ‘being’ not as noun but

5. Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” *op. cit.*, 169.

6. *Ibid.*, 170.

7. “It is as if the naïve look, in its ontic intention, found itself obstructed by its very object, and spontaneously underwent an inversion or somehow “embourgeoised” in its condition, to use an expression from Deuteronomy *waxed fat*.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 82.

as verb, the vigilance of insomnia is not that form of attentiveness that moves, as it were, towards a 'move of being' (*geste d'être*). Take note of the reference to Heidegger in this remark. The being awake of vigilance that Levinas refers to is beyond, otherwise than consciousness; it is total vulnerability ('sensitivity') for what is other. The vigilance of insomnia is neither the physical/psychological event of waking-up. It is the event of being awake to responsibility, to being one-for-the-other.

In this connection, Levinas proffers an audacious formula, which we find in his later works in such curious formulation as 'otherwise than being or beyond essence'. The original event of consciousness 'takes place,' so to speak, 'otherwise than being' and 'beyond essence'. Metaphoric expressions such as hostage, substitution, being answerable before being conscious, etc. name this original, pre-ontological 'event'.

The earlier work *Totality and Infinity* admittedly still uses an ontological language. It does so, Levinas says, in order to avoid creating the impression that its analyses are intended to question the *conatus essendi* of being and thus would fall back to the empiricism of psychology.⁸

Ethics and Rationality

In the Preface⁹ to *Entre Nous* Levinas says: "the main intent is to try to see ethics in relation to the rationality of the knowledge that is immanent in being, and that is primordial in the philosophical tradition of the West; even if ethics – ultimately going beyond the forms and determinations of ontology, but without rejecting the peace of reason – could achieve a different form of intelligibility and a different way of loving wisdom; and perhaps even – but I will not go that far – the way of Psalm 111: 10."¹⁰

8. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*: Preface to the German Edition, *Totalität und Unendlichkeit* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Karl Alber, 1987), as cited in Notes, *Entre Nous*, 248.

9. This 'preface' was published under the title "De l'être à l'autre" in *L'Europe de la responsabilité*, Conversations on Ethics conducted by Frederic Lenoir (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

10. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (NRSV).

In an interview (1982) found in the same book (*Philosophie, Justice et Amour*) Levinas says: "...the order of meaning, which seems to me primary, is precisely what comes to us from the inter-human relationship, so that the Face, with all its meaningfulness as brought out by analysis, is the beginning of intelligibility. Of course the whole perspective of ethics immediately emerges here, but we cannot say that it is already philosophy. Philosophy is theoretical discourse; I thought that the theoretical presupposes more. It is inasmuch as I have not only to respond to the Face of the other, but alongside him to approach the third party, that the necessity for the theoretical attitude arises."¹¹

In other words, it is because of the 'third party' that I start thinking.

"I don't like very much the word love, which is worn-out and debased. Let us speak instead of the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other. That is the 'vision' of the Face, and it applies to the first comer. If he were my only *interlocuteur*, I would have had nothing but obligations! But I don't live in a world where there is but one single 'first comer'; there is always a third party in the world: he or she is also my other, my fellow. Hence, it is important to me to know which of the two takes the precedence. Is the one not the prosecutor of the other? Must not human beings who are incomparable be compared? Thus justice, here, takes precedence over the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other."¹²

'Ethics' as Levinas speaks of it, that is 'in the Face of the other', is what the uniqueness of the 'I', of 'me' – what, if that is the right term, establishes the 'I'. The uniqueness of 'I' cannot be formulated in terms of classical logic through *genus* and *differentia specifica*, as if 'I' were a quality that gives the specificity of being to this person as a human being. Neither is the other to be qualified by any *differentia specifica* as distinct from any other. The uniqueness of the 'I' which makes the 'I' this I is a topic in personalism; for Levinas it is ultimately my responsibility for the other: one-for-the-other. But it is this uniqueness (or quoting verse 10 of Psalm 111: "The fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom") which is the beginning of wisdom,

11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 103.

12. *Ibid.*, 104.

the beginning also from which the political is to be thought. The political originates in ethics, unlike the thinking of 17th century political thinkers for whom the political ‘begins’ with the ‘social contract’ which elevates man beyond his original state of being wolf to the other.

Ethics and the Name

The reference to Psalm 111, verse 10 reminds us of Levinas’ Jewish writings, in particular Chapter 6 of *L’au-dela du verset* (translated into English as *Beyond the Verse*), “The Religious Use of Language and the Fear of God”. This article, dedicated to Paul Ricoeur, is a reading of some Talmudic texts. As a Protestant and philosopher, Ricoeur had devoted much of his work to the language of imagination through which we can hear the unheard-of, through which the unheard-of can intervene and be said. Do the texts of the Talmud speak of the unheard-of, and if so, in what sense?

The Talmud as a text reflects the teachings of the Jewish rabbis of old. Its many scrolls were composed during the period starting from the 2nd century to the 6th century of the Common Era, but they go back to an oral tradition, which according to Jewish belief, go as far back as God speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai. These ‘teachings’ (or Talmud) have the form of a constant dialogue. Over the centuries, these teachings have been the soul of the Jewish community, and even present day Jews do still partake in that same dialogue. The Jewish people as a community is ‘the place’ where transcendence ‘speaks’ through the constant ‘study’ of the Talmud.

When the Jews speak of the fear of God, God is not some (supernatural) entity people are afraid of. The word God, (or *Diyos* in Tagalog, or *Dieu* in French, or *Gott* in German, or *Bog* in Russian¹³), does not exist in Hebrew. The name of God in the scriptures is always a first name, a proper name. “The word God does not exist in Hebrew!”¹⁴ Levinas emphatically says. The Talmud as it were wants

13. French, German, and Russian are languages Levinas is familiar with.

14. Emmanuel Levinas, *L’au-dela du verset: Lectures et discours talmudiques* (Paris: Les editions de Minuit, 1982), 147. The quote here is the author’s translation from the original French.

that Hebrew names in the Old Testament are proper names. When speaking about God, the Jew will say, the Holy One praised be He. A generic name for god in monotheism does not exist. Referring to Maimonides, Levinas quotes: “The foundation of the foundation and the pillar of wisdom consists in the knowledge that the Name exists and that He is the first being (*l'être premier*).”¹⁵

There is, however, something particular with first names. The words we use to indicate things or events or qualities and quantities have certain definite referents. As one knows the referent of the word ‘farmer’, or ‘plow’, or ‘iron’, or ‘kilo’, one understands what is meant. But that is not the case with a first name, or a proper name. The name Anthony or Miriam etc. has no meaning by itself. It may be useful on an ID, but then only as an indicator in public use, such as for some legal or official purpose within some sort of social structure or some sort of social contract. The real referent of a first name (I, you, he or she, we them or they), or a proper name (John or Mary), is ‘owned’ by the person who is addressed so or responds to it. The name refers to this concrete particular person who I am, whom I know, whom I address, who has significance for me, etc. We are actually using pronouns here, not nouns! Nouns can categorize because they ‘objectify’. They allow the rules of logic of generalization and particularization. Pro-nouns – I, thou, he/she, we, they – open relations, also to things (possession: mine, yours, ours, etc.) It is only within relationships – and in language as relationship, that the name gets, or has its meaning.

The name of God in the Bible is always a first name case. But so is the name of woman or man. Yet, there is this difference. In human relationship there is not only the relational, expressed in pronouns, in first or proper names. But man or woman is always also “somebody” who can be identified as Mr. or Ms. so and so about whom we talk using nouns. God, in Jewish understanding can never be identified by any noun, as ‘a’ god. God cannot be ‘named’ but only spoken of as “The Holy One, praised be He.”

It is here that we recognize what Levinas, together with Alphonse De Waehlens, calls the ‘pre-philosophical experience’ of philosophy.

15. *Ibid.*

We see here, on the one hand, Levinas' phenomenological analysis of human existence in terms of separation as found in *Totality and Infinity*. There is, on the other hand, his thinking in terms of the Other, and his phenomenological analysis of the Face. It is here also that Levinas in his later works philosophically speaks of 'otherwise than being and beyond essence'.

Levinas is very conscious that religious language is not to be categorized as a certain form of language, or as part of language in the abstract and in the formal sense of the word. Hence, the connection between 'religious language' and 'the fear of God'. It is 'the fear of God' which in Jewish understanding makes possible religious language. 'Fear of God' is not fear for some known entity, called God. 'Fear of God' is, in Jewish understanding, obedience before knowing. This raises the question of the Jewish understanding of revelation. Philosophically this is again the question of 'otherwise than being and beyond essence'; or, as a discussion on the work of Levinas calls it, the 'otherwise than knowing'.¹⁶ 'The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom' (Psalm 111, verse 10).

If religious language is not to be categorized as a certain form of language, religion¹⁷ likewise cannot to be understood as part of religion in general. 'Religion' is not a general or abstract notion to

16. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Autrement que savoir," *Les entretiens de Centre Sèvres* (Paris: Editions Osiris, 1988).

17. "The word 'religion' has its own history. In the Middle Ages 'religio' was a virtue, a kind of justice. Religion is the virtue of giving God God's due. In the 15th century the Latin word 'religion' moved into English. It was used to name communities of men and women whose lives were specifically devoted to the virtue of religion. Thus, 'the religions of England' at that time refers to the religious orders. A final, fatal shift occurred as an outcome of the struggles usually known as the "Wars of Religion". The title is anachronistic because these were not 'religious' but were conflicts necessitating the emergence of the 'State' to keep the peace; they were in fact the birth pangs of the state ... for what was at issue in these wars was the very creation of religion as a set of privately held beliefs without direct political relevance. In contemporary religious studies the word 'religion' carries a range of meanings all the way from Durkheim's definition: 'the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself' to the incoherent, but still wide spread, survival of seventeenth-century attempts to 'privatise' the notion." Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2008), 14.

begin with, whether in the idealistic sense of the absolute spirit (Hegel) or in the rationalistic-scientific sense of *Wissenschaft* (science). But religion is not to be defined in terms of a 'confession', or of a 'denomination' either. These terms are in the first place socio-historical categories that only developed after the European 'wars of religion' and during the ensuing time of rationalism.¹⁸

For Levinas, religious language does only 'exist' in the concrete (i.e. Jewish) community. As a Jew, Levinas says, the word God is to be heard primarily as a command or in terms of fear of God; and it is in that context that God is to be addressed in prayer, or that God can even be talked/ thought about within the community of the Jewish people. On the other hand, Levinas speaks about Christianity as well as community. When he spoke during a conference on Jesus Christ, Levinas spoke before this audience of Christian theologians about "A God Man" (the title of his lecture). In the introduction he said: "How can I deal philosophically with a notion that belongs to the intimate sphere of hundreds of millions of believers – the mystery of mysteries of their theology - that for nearly twenty centuries has united people whose fate I share, along with most of their ideas, with the exception of the belief in question here this evening."¹⁹ What 'the fear of God' is for Judaism is for Christianity this 'mystery of mysteries' of its theology, 'A God Man'. Those familiar with *The Star of Redemption* will again recognize here the voice of Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929).

Sensitivity in Western Philosophy

Going back to the notion of sensitivity, Schopenhauer identifies love with compassion, and he makes of justice a moment of love. Levinas says in an interview on this: "Aside from the fact that for me the suffering of compassion, suffering because the other suffers, is only a moment of a relation of responsibility that is much more complex and entails in its entirety much more."²⁰ What is sensitivity

18. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007).

19. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 53.

20. *Ibid.*, 125.

in this (philosophical) context? On the one hand, there is a certain tradition, which considers sensitivity as the ground from which rationality sprouts (Adam Smith, Schopenhauer, Nussbaum, the existentialists). On the other hand, there is also the tradition, which places consciousness and subjectivity at the heart of philosophy. This latter tradition, which dominates modern thought, has opened ways to re-think inter-subjectivity. To explore a greater sense for 'sensitivity' has been the consequence of a reaction against rationalism, capitalism and technocracy.

Filipino Afterthoughts on Sensitivity: *Malasakit and Pananagutan*

The Filipino reader of Levinas may associate the word 'sensitivity' as discussed in this paper with the Filipino words *malasakit* and *pananagutan*.

I leave it to Filipino anthropologists to elaborate on the words *malasakit* and *pananagutan* in this connection. (I made an attempt in this direction in the book *Fired from Within*).²¹ But my sense is that for the Filipino reader of the works of Levinas both terms can be helpful. For the Tagalog-speaking, the deeper *malasakit* (care for) is rooted in the *loob* (inside) from which the stronger sense of *pananagutan* (responsibility) comes. If *malasakit* is *labas*, it sounds more like sympathy in the modern sense or compassion in the sense of charity. The more superficial (*pang-labas*) the sense of *malasakit* is, the less the sense of commitment to take real responsibility for the other, in the sense of *pananagutan*, would be. If *malasakit* is superficial (*pang-labas*), it connotes more 'sympathy' in the modern sense or 'compassion' in the sense of charity, i.e. a 'feeling' towards the other with hardly any sense of responsibility for the other.

Etymologically, *mala* means somewhat similar or like something; *sakit* means pain or suffering. Thus, *malasakit* literally means the ability of one to suffer like the other person (*kapwa*). It can be loosely

21. See interview with Joan in: Ton Danenberg, *Fired from Within*, Research on Spirituality Series no. 2 (Quezon City, Philippines: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, 2007).

translated as sympathy in English. In sympathy, however, it is the commonality of experience among persons that makes understanding possible. On the other hand, *malasakit* connotes the quality of a person who understands a fellow human being, a *kapwa*.

One should take note, though, that in European languages the words 'sympathy' and 'compassion' are words that have taken a peculiar development course within social, moral and cultural history. The original meaning of the Greek word 'sympathy' and of the Latin word 'compassion' clearly indicates a 'suffering with,' a capacity to share in the suffering of the other from within, and consequently a capacity to be responsible for what happens to the other. Yet, social, moral and cultural development, especially that one leading to the industrial revolution, has effected drastic changes in the meaning of such words as sympathy, compassion, charity and justice. 'My sympathy' has become a civil expression of condolence over someone's death. 'Charity' has lost the depth of the historical Christian meaning of *caritas*. As the new demands of the 'social contract' upset the sense of communal responsibility with the rise of new economic realities during the industrial revolution, 'charity' becomes a word for merely supererogatory and voluntary 'duty'. It is up to outsiders of the economic system to intervene where the labor market fails. It would take a long time before the notion of 'social justice' enters the social scene to take the place of 'charity'.

Pananagutan happens when one realizes that the *kapwa* (other) is also like him/her, a *kapwa*. In this regard, we can relate to the notion of *utang na loob*. It is not something of a debt that we need to pay back but is a notion grounded on the recognition that the other person is also me. In a way, *pananagutan* is the embodied *utang na loob*.

Malasakit, as well as *pananagutan*, is thus rooted in *kapwa*, the self in the other. The self is revealed through the other. All Filipino values are rooted in this relation. There is a strong sense of the other, which can be viewed both positively and negatively. Hence, selfishness (*makasarili*) is the most despised negative character among Filipinos. *Makasarili* is the opposite of *kapwa*. The one who will win in the coming election is the one who can project to the people that he is a *kapwa* and not *makasarili*.

These two words *malasakit* and *pananagutan* are thus dynamically intertwined. The intensity of the one, or the lack of it, defines also

the depth of the other. This dynamic interconnectedness becomes more obvious when one hears the words in resonance with that other well-known dyad, more familiar to Filipino anthropologists, *loob* (inside) and *labas* (outside). *Loob* and *labas* are partners. We call it in Filipino *magkatambal*. What is *loob* (inside) is mirrored in *labas* (outside). The *pang-labas* is the entry point in knowing the *loob*. *Labas*, however, is not the same as surface or superficiality. *Malasakit* cannot be faked through the outside. The outside shall mirror accurately what is in the *loob*. It is detected through *pakiramdam* (a deep/inner sensing sometimes related to intuition). Superficiality perhaps is not *pang-labas* but *pakitang-tao*. The *loob* cannot be 'seen' or known by itself; neither can the other see or know it. In other words, one is unable to see/know the other as 'other' but from the outside, as if the *loob* is already *labas* when we speak of it. Yet, the word *malasakit* indicates a sensitivity, which 'knows' (about) the other, what is 'other,' beyond the outside. It is through *malasakit* that one 'knows' the other in a sense, which goes beyond what can be known in terms of *labas* or in terms of objectivity. This sensitivity, or 'knowing' beyond knowing, creates an interconnectedness between one and the other that cannot be articulated in words in the way they name 'things' but only in terms of 'caring for' or 'taking care of,' or *pananagutan*. Though it cannot be seen, known or 'named' the *loob* is nevertheless not an 'empty' space or nothingness (in the way Western philosophy, e.g. Hegel or Sartre, defines consciousness). One is tempted to say, for the Filipino *loob* is the 'I'. But that is true only in the sense of the 'I' as 'feeling with' or as 'caring for' the other. Furthermore, this way of construing would still be in terms of the Western notion of consciousness. If we pursue this manner of construing, then we realize that there is no concept of 'I' or *ako* in the Filipino worldview. Filipinos do not think of themselves as *ako* or 'I' but as *kapwa*. Everything is construed in this perspective. This is reflected in all Filipino values, practices, rituals, etc. The words *malasakit* and *pananagutan* in their dynamic interconnectedness are to be construed as well in terms of *kapwa*. That is why it is not enough to think of the other; we need *pakiramdam* to see the authenticity of the phenomenon that appears before us. In *pakiramdam*, we can never be deceived as we can be deceived in thought. Thought is already a

creation of the mind while *pakiramdam* is the raw energy flowing out of the *loob*.

If the Filipino sense of *loob* has thus a particular 'sensitivity' that resonates with Levinas, we have first of all to realize that the words *malasakit* and *pananagutan*, or *loob* and *labas* for that matter, are certainly quite far from the Cartesian notion of 'consciousness.' Whether it is about a building, a house or a person, *loob* and *labas* are intertwined. *Loob* and *labas* cannot be put side by side; neither can the one be added to the other. They are not like the *res cogitans* and *res extensa* of Cartesian thought. Even when it is about a house the *loob* and *labas* do not fit within one's neutral geometric 'space.' There is no such a thing as a neutral 'space' or *res extensa* in which both, 'inside' and 'outside,' have a place. For the Tagalog sensibility there is no such neutral space, where the *loob* and the *labas* of a building are different. There is certainly no place here for Cartesian dualism, which radicalizes the distinction between inside and outside through a distinction of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* like in the case of the human person.

A correct translation of the word 'sensitivity' appears to be *pakiramdam*. It is the very fabric of Filipino human relationship, which means to have a deep feeling for the situation of others. It is not something created but is the very primordial condition of human relationships. Filipinos have the *hiya* of verbalizing their real situation. The deep sense of feeling toward others is the key to understand it. So the clue here is not to think about the others' situation but to feel along with it – *makiramdam*. There is a superiority of feeling over the cerebral. This may sound irrational to some extent but we need to bear in mind that feeling is the primordial expression of the *loob*; hence, it is the most authentic.

But in the end we still have to ask the question: do the words *malasakit* and *pananagutan* indeed reflect what Levinas means by 'sensitivity' as discussed in this paper? For the Filipino, to speak of the relation of the one to the other is ultimately to speak of one's relation to the other who is one of us, a *kapwa*. It is absorbed within a 'we,' distinct from a 'them.' Does this mean that ultimately the other ('the orphan, the widow, the stranger') is not *kapwa*? In Levinas the dimension of the other is moreover the Face. That means that the other in his/her nakedness is at the same time my teacher, my judge. In the language of Levinas' later works, this means that I 'am'

answerable in the radical sense. In other words, I am ‘the-one-for-the-other.’ But it should be noted that this ‘I’ is the Hebrew expression *hineni* (here-I-am), in contrariety to the strong Western I of ‘I think,’ ‘I will,’ ‘I can’. With the Hebrew expression *hineni*, Levinas indicates the Jewish biblical sense of the prophetic texts, for instance 1 Sam. 3, 4: “Then the Lord called ‘Samuel, Samuel! And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Or, Isa. 6,8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for us? And I said, ‘Here I am; send me.’”

Can we ultimately then hear *hineni*, too, in the words *malasakit* and *pananagutan*? The “I” is, for the Jew Levinas, ultimately a refugee, an exile.²² The question for the Filipino anthropologist may then be: can the sensibility of the Filipino identify or, at least, resonate with that of Levinas’, despite centuries of colonization and especially in these times of consumerist globalization?

Ton Danenberg
c/o Laguna BelAir School
Laguna BelAir
Sta. Rosa, Laguna
ahdanenberg@yahoo.com.ph

22. See Ton Danenberg, “As if we were refugees. That is, perhaps, the ultimate form of nobility – Emmanuel Levinas,” *Hapag*, vol. 5, 2008, 79-138.