

**FOR THE OTHER:  
THE ETHICAL MEANING EVOKED FROM THE CORE OF EXISTENCE**

**POR EL OTRO: EL SENTIDO ÉTICO  
EVOCADO DESDE EL CORAZÓN DE LA EXISTENCIA**

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**Abstract:** After the era of nihilism, ethical issues have been gradually focused on how to rebuild a value of "Being". Thinkers tend to reaffirm the significance of one's own Being and try to find a way of existence in order to resist against nothingness. In such an epoch, Levinas contends that the ethics "for the Other" and the existence are inextricably linked. Furthermore, he notes that the value of existence is not revealed against the nihilism, but realized with the ethics "for the Other" in one's act of assuming the burden of existence. The meaning of "Being" is thus revealed in the effort of "for the Other" and in the noble will of making the sense of responsibility beyond ones' own Being to reach the Other.

**Key Words:** The Other, Levinas, Ethics, Existence, Heidegger.

**Resumen:** Después de la era del nihilismo, las cuestiones éticas se han ido enfocando gradualmente en cómo reconstruir un valor de "Ser". Los pensadores tienden a reafirmar la importancia del propio Ser e intentan encontrar una manera de existir capaz de resistir contra la nada. En dicha época, Levinas sostiene que la ética "por el Otro" y la existencia están inextricablemente unidas. Más aún, dice que el valor de la existencia no se revela frente al nihilismo, sino que se realiza en la ética "por el Otro" en el acto mismo de asumir la carga de la existencia. El sentido de "ser" es así revelado en el esfuerzo "por el Otro" y en la voluntad noble de dar sentido a la responsabilidad más allá del propio Ser para alcanzar al Otro.

**Palabras clave:** El Otro, Levinas, ética, existencia, Heidegger.

PREFACE

After Being is considered an important issue in the history of philosophy, nihilism, under the dichotomy of Being and Nihilism, can be regarded as the inauguration of the predicament of Being. The ethical issues have, after the age of nihilism, been addressed to the problems of how to reconstruct the value of Being. How to help one re-affirm his/her meaning of Being thus becomes a goal

to which most thinkers of the age dedicate themselves. But we have to ask, whether the theoretical constitution on the Being and Nihilism can pay any affirmative regard to one's existence? Whether the approach of enhancing the value of Being against nihilism leads one to any new possibility? How is the existence constituted? What is the schematization of existence evoked from the core of existence? In the paper, we would attempt to analyze the ethical meaning from the essence of one's existence in the light of Levinas' early thought.

First, I would quote one passage from the Preface of Levinas's *Existence and Existents* (2001) in order to distinguish "a being" in general (*l'étant en général*) from Being in general (*l'être en général*). By so doing, we are allowed to illuminate the meaning of the concepts concerning Being in general in early Levinas' thought, such as the existent (*l'existant*), existence (*l'existence*) and so forth.

What is the event of Being, Being in general, detached from beings which dominate it? What does its generality mean? It is certainly something else than the generality of a genus. Already the "something" in general, the pure form of an object, which expresses the idea of "a being" in general, is above genres, since one does not descend from it toward species by adding specific differences. The idea of "a being" in general already deserves the name transcendent, which the medieval Aristotelians applied to the One, Being and the Good. But the generality of Being — of what makes up the existence of an existent — is not equivalent to that transcendence. Being cannot be specified, and does not specify anything. It is not a quality which an object supports, nor what supports qualities. Nor is it the act of a subject, even though in the expression "this is" Being becomes an attribute — for we are immediately obliged to state that this attribute adds nothing to the subject. Are we not, then, obliged to see in the very difficulty we have of understanding the category according to which Being belongs to a being the mark of the impersonal character of Being in general? Does not Being in general become the Being of "a being" by an inversion, by that event which is the present (and which shall be the principal theme of this book)? But if of itself Being refuses the personal form, how then are we to approach it?

This work will be structured as follows: it sets out to approach the idea of Being in general in its impersonality so as to then be able to analyze the notion of the present and of position, in which a being, a subject, an existent, arises in impersonal Being, though a hypostasis. But these issues did not just arise by themselves. They seem to us to ensue from certain positions of contemporary ontology which have made possible the renewal of the philosophical problematic (Levinas, 2001, 2-3).

“A being” in general, as an absolute form of object or as an idea and supreme form, goes beyond beings and, in a form of “something” (quelque chose), emerges. This mode of beings can be regarded as the Greek signification of Ousia to embark on the discussion that follows. As for the generality of Being, of what makes up the existence of an existent is not tantamount to the transcendental “a being” in general, but the impersonal Being in general. Levinas attempts to divide the two concepts in order to illuminate the existence as a fact—such as hypostasis, being, subject, or existent—that emerges in a manner of impersonal Being in general. Alongside Levinas’s outline of thought, the paper begins with the discussion of the word Ousia to elucidate his concept of Being in general. Then, I would further examine what the impersonal Being, or Being in general is, and exhibit the existing fact in attempt to expound its ethical signification.

## I. THE DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN BEING AND NOTHINGNESS- FROM “A BEING” IN GENERAL TO BEING IN GENERAL

### 1.1. *The relation between nothingness and existence from “A Being” in general*

#### 1.1.1 *The mode of existence appeared in indolence*

The Greek word Ousia as truth, essence, and Being can be used to suggest the possession (avoir) of a property, in which the connection of Being and property entails the immanent relation between Being and something (quelque chose). It suggests that the meaning of Being appears in the image of a valuable thing that can be possessed, or the so-called “a being” in general. The meaning of a subject can be explained through the sovereignty of possessor<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> There is a famous fairy tale that aptly accounts for the subjectivity in the traditional philosophy as well as the relation between subject and object. There was once upon a time, a king with his golden finger was so happy to transform everything as golden object in the realm of his kingdom. Each object, once touched by his fingers, was transformed into his property. This made the king so happy and he avidly shared this pleasure with his beloved daughter. However, at the moment when the daughter was touched by the king, she became the property of the king’s possession. After this occurs, there will not be any other life, or any other person appearing in king’s life. The tale delineates the image of subject in the traditional philosophy, evoking images of solitude, isolation, fixation, opposition, and so on. These images mentioned above reveal the subject as the pale reason. The underlying relation between subjec-

After Parmenides' thought, the opposition between Being and non-Being has excluded the nothingness from the horizon of Being. With the consistent principle of Being and thought, the non-Being cannot be thought so that the subject cannot explain the non-Being by the logic of "possession" of the subject. Thus, nothingness in this regard is far from the nothing itself, but the "nothing" under the rationale of Being -- nothingness. The nihilism comes along with the thought's annotation of nothingness. In the experience of existence, we do not lack the understanding of "nothing", no matter whether it is the "nothing" of absence compared with the relation of the "having" of presence, or whether it is the inability of the subject's confrontation with the world after the destruction of the sovereignty. All these appear that people consider nothingness as the negation of Being. The subject of thinking constructs the epistemological system of nothingness by the concepts within the category of Being. Obviously the subject includes, it shows, the nothingness into the horizon of Being.

In his *Time and the Other*, after Levinas translates the Being (*l'être*) and being (*l'étant*) as the existing (*l'exister*) and the existent (*l'existant*) (Levinas, 1987, 24). He further advocates that:

Existing is always grasped in the existent, and for the existent that is a human being the Heideggerian term *Jemeimigkeit* precisely expresses the fact that existing is always possessed by someone. I do not think Heidegger can admit an existing (*un exister*) without existents (*sans existant*), which to him would seem absurd. (Levinas, 1987, 24)

Being and being, translated by Levinas from the perspective of existing and the existent, are not the transcendental being of "a being" in general, but the human being as a fact of human existence. The problem of Being and being to which Levinas devotes himself does not, however, concern the transcendental problem of being in the traditional context, but the care for the human existence.

tivity and the absolute sovereignty comes to the fore, if we rethink the tale in a philosophical perspective. Moreover, the tale suggests the subject excludes the Other with alterity. The ontology of identity based on one centre reveals the interior characteristics of the traditional philosophy

Based on the existence, nothingness, in the concept of "a being" in general, is not the nothing that departs from the Being of Parmenides' tradition, but the result from which the human beings negate themselves as the nihilists do.

People have to face the fact that we on the hand rely on Being, yet we negate it on the other hand. This fact not only leads to nihilism but also suggests the fatigue, an unalienable fact of Being which people have to face. This is the passive mode of Being, or, after Levinas's thought, indolence<sup>2</sup>. In his *Existing and Existence*, Levinas provides us an example concerning the relationship between my existing (exister) and "I": "Little John the simpleton, simple or innocent, in the Russian folktale tossed the lunch, which he was to carry to his father at work in the field, to his shadow, so as to slip away from it; but after he had dropped everything his shadow, like a last and unalienable possession, still clung to him" (Levinas, 2001, 38).

The relation between "I" and "my existing", as the example exhibits, resembles the fact that Little John can never escape his shadow. The "existing" appears to be the inescapable responsibility. Indolence expressly proffers the evidence of the "mineness" (Jemeinigkeit) of my existing and its irreplaceability. The fact qua "existing" suggests that indolence does not imply to give up the existence, but the tiredness of living. Indolence emerges with the impossibility of escaping from existence, and the impossibility invokes the absolute desire of escape. Indolence, thus, suggests not merely the passivity against existence, but its inactivity that sharpens the inescapable responsibility between "I" and "my existing".

The mode of "existing" in indolence exhibits the destiny of human being's Being: "my existing" is the fact without any choice. Hence, nothingness is not the fact that that determines the predicament of one's being, but the fact that Being is inescapable despite the attempts to negate his or her "existing".

<sup>2</sup> "Indolence is an impotent and joyless aversion to the burden of existence itself. It is a being afraid to live which is nevertheless a life, in which the fear of the unaccustomed, adventure, the unknown is a repugnance devolving from the aversion for the enterprise of existence. Such is Oblomov's, a radical and tragic indolence before existing told in the famous work of the Russian novelist. From the first page of the novel Goncharov presents his hero supine, and this existential *decubitus* will be the dominant image of the tale". (Levinas, 2001, 17). Indolence (as the withdrawal of the act of facing that suggests the dubiety of facing the existence or the indolent existence) as a more fundamental mode of perception is already internalized in one's responsibility toward one's life.

### 1.1.2 *The anxiety (Angst): the influence of Heidegger's nothingness toward the Being*

The concept of nothingness derived from "a being" in general becomes Heidegger's concept of anxiety (Angst). The anxiety suggests that death is no longer a point unknown in the future; it already functions in the present moment of existence. Thus, the Heideggerian death does not suggest the fact of destructing existence, but the negativity within the existence. This death appears like the nothingness in the existence, which is "opposite" to the existence. The death fails to efface the existence, and it, no doubt, disturbs and awakens the existents in order to get itself free (dégagent) from the quotidian life. Heidegger does not intend to comprehend the existence from the quotidian dimension, but affirms the meaning of Being by anxiety. But again, we have to ask, doesn't one's existence imply the existing fact in our quotidian life?<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of Being in Heidegger's philosophy has been ambivalently shrouded with the shadows of death, which already exhibits an atmosphere of negation to life. Facing the negativity of death underlying the existence, Levinas employs Epicurus's words<sup>4</sup> to distinguish the difference between the death in the philosophical sense and the death in the sense of destructive existence. The relation between "my death" and "I" remains permanently unknown and incomprehensible: the death conceived by the "I" at this moment is no longer the reality of "my death", but the mere imagination of "I" toward the death of myself. Based on the non-coexistent relation between my death and "I", Levinas excludes death from existence, and employs the reality of existence at this moment to explain the meaning of Being. The fact of existence is constituted by the events of existent's encounter. The events are not pre-designed for a definite end, but the contingency, which can never be pre-designed or predicted. That is, one can never predict the arrival of death. The reality of existence tends to accept the fact of unexpectedness of death as well as the fact that death can take one's life at its will or at any moment.

<sup>3</sup> For Levinas, the human existence is the everyday life, the fact as existence: "Nowhere in the phenomenal order does the object of an action refer to the concern for existing; it itself makes up our existence. We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk. All that is not for the sake of living; it is living. Life is a sincerity" (Levinas, 2001, 36, 67).

<sup>4</sup> "If you are there, then death is not there; if it is there, you are not there" (Levinas, 2000, 19).

### 1.1.3 *To recapitulate*

From his example of indolence and his critique on Heidegger, Levinas discovers that the nothingness or death in the field of existence is neither nothing itself nor the death itself, but merely one's imagination about nothing and death. The nothingness and imagination about death conceived as "a being" in general disturbs the existence with their negativity. In indolence and anxiety, we can see how the one is able to live in the nothingness and more importantly, how it is influenced to construct the meaning of Being on this imagination. One's meaning of Being, according to Levinas, does not rely on the nothingness and the death in the context of "a being" in general. Levinas contends that the hypostasis, being, subject, and existent—all are exhibited in the impersonal Being in general, but, we may ask, what is Being in general? What is its relationship with the existent? This is, no doubt, a question to be discussed in the sections that follow.

### 1.2. *Being in general, te il y a (there is)*<sup>5</sup>

Being, derived from the concept of Ousia (both be and have), is the mutual relationship between "a being" in general and the inner relationship within the sovereignty, suggesting a certain object to be possessed under the light. In this sense, the night is excluded from Being. Thus, the concept of *il y a* (there is), as Levinas argues, challenges not only the relation between light and Being in Parmenides' thought, but also the concept of "possession" (*avoir*) in the sovereignty of the being in general (*l'étant en général*). Although the night as absence is not the visual object, but, in a manner of objective universalism<sup>6</sup>, it approaches the subject. Everything disappears at night—the night that devours everything emerges as a gigantic apparition. It can hardly be controlled by visibility, yet it surrounds where we are. The night, like air, surrounds the world, yet in a form of presence of universal absence. This is like Being in general

<sup>5</sup> The relation between the subject and the beings is that of possession; that is, "I" possesses "something". Levinas uses the *il y a (there is)* to conceptualize the general presence such as the air and the night.

<sup>6</sup> Object is relative to the subject. In the precondition of subject-object relation, the general form of the object can be regarded as "the being relative to the subject".

(l'être en général), who emerges everywhere<sup>7</sup>. The *il y a* (there is) announces the fact that the meaning of Being is no longer limited in the scope of light and visibility, but everywhere that cannot be controlled by the subject.

Subject's affectivity to the night replaces the traditional subject-object relationship based on the visibility. The night is neither the vacuum of the nothing nor the nothingness, but the inescapable compulsion in the affectivity. Levinas affirms the night as a mode of Being in the existence<sup>8</sup>. For him, the night and the day are the field of subject's existence, and the meaning of Being constructed by the theme of existence does not, however, concern the field of nothingness.

The existence is, as Levinas unravels, an inescapable presence, and it is a reality that cannot be escaped by negation. It is the *il y a* (there is) that we cannot have any alternative nor can we escape. The relationship with the *il y a* as if the "I" that dwells in the night or air, the incapable perceptivity surrounded by the dark night, and the "I" that needs the air to survive—these suggest that the "I" is no longer the owner of the sovereignty, but an existent appearing in the impersonal Being<sup>9</sup>. The meaning of Being evoked by the existence is not exhibited in the image of Ousia, but in the human existence. But, I would ask, how would Levinas exhibit the schematization of Being in the core of human existence?

<sup>7</sup> "When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. In the night, where we are driven to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not 'something.' But this universal absence is in its turn presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence". (Levinas, 2001, 52)

<sup>8</sup> There is no void in Levinas's philosophy. Instead, he employs the *il y a* (*there is*) *a* to fill in the gap of the void in the traditional philosophy. The *il y a* (*there is*), as Levinas describes as "the existing without existent", is not revealed in the schematization of thought, but merely experienced in the existence. He employ the insomnia as an example *experienced* between the existent and the *il y a* (*there is*).

In the traditional philosophy, light is the image of thought. This image in the life does, however, not reflect the eternity, but the turns of nights and days, like the ephemeral flashes of the fireworks, if we employ the image of thought in the daily life context. The light of thought as a metaphor expresses the enlightenment from the innocence and obscurity; the thought as a metaphor of the turns of nights and days presents a regional thought that traces back the dwelling of the origin. The clarity of thought to the beings is akin to the light and existent. However, the thought of the existent is not a permanent conscious: the inner relation between body and conscious will reveal and the conscious must return to its sleep for a rest, once the fatigue weakens the dominant power of the conscious. Sleep is a homecoming experience of the conscious; the conscious that returns to the body is its return to the dwelling of the origin. What the insomniac experience is the inability of an existent inundated by the existing—which is like the hostage captured by the Being itself—after the conscious becomes loose and slack. The insomniac prostrates on the bed, and loses the control of Being. Facing the imminent profoundness of the dark night, the insomniac can hardly fall into sleep, escape...

<sup>9</sup> This is the concept of "position" in footnote 2: "It sets out to approach the idea of Being in general in its impersonality so as to then be able to analyze the notion of the present and of position, in which a being, a subject, an existent, arises in impersonal Being, though a hypostasis".



## II. THE EXISTING SCHEMATIZATION CONSTRUCTED FROM THE CORE OF EXISTENCE

The existing feature of the existent is, as Levinas indicates in his *Time and the Other* (Levinas, 1987), the closure of the monad, which describes the existent's solitude of "unexchangeability of existence". In this book, Levinas presents an existing schematization of the existence as a core from the analysis of solitude, but we may continue to ask, what is the meaning of solitude in Levinas's thought? Can the solitude from the lack of the Other (*Autrui*)<sup>10</sup> not suffice its meaning of essence? How would Levinas exhibit the existence through the interpretation of solitude?

### 2.1. *The relationship between the solitude and other*

The association of the solitude with Robinson Crusoe suggests a general conception on the sense of solitude; most critiques conceptualize the relation of "being-with-others" as a counter argument for Robinson's solitude, being deserted and isolated. We cannot know whether Heidegger's relationship of "being-with-others" between Dasein and the other addresses the above solitude, which is the impact of the general conceptualization. However, surely, "being-with-others" is Heidegger's a priori structure that interprets the relation between Dasein and the other.

Being-with is the essential rule of Dasein; the meaning of being-with suggests not merely others' accompanying of "being-with". Also, it suggests that Dasein comes along with the ontological structural a priori, even without the presence of others. Thus, the ontological structural a priori does not need to have an isolated subject first and then, the relationship with others is consolidated. Instead, only in the sociality can the meaning of Dasein be disclosed. A passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) accounts for the relation between Dasein and others:

But, according to the analysis which we have now completed, being-with-others belongs to the being of Da-sein, with which it is concerned in its very being. As being-with, Da-sein "is" essentially for the sake of others. This must be understood as an

<sup>10</sup> I would henceforth translate Levinas's *l'autrui* as "the Other" in English.

existential statement as to its essence. But when actual, factual Da-sein does not turn to others and thinks that it does not need them, or misses them, it is in the mode of being-with. In being-with as the existential for-the-sake-of-others, these others are already disclosed in the Da-sein. (Heidegger, 1962, 115-116)

Being-with discloses the inner connection between Dasein and the others; Dasein becomes what it is according to the truth of "for-the-sake-of-others". The existing structure of Dasein is inseparable from the others due to the fact that the meaning of Dasein is just defined within the relation with others. The meaning of the self in the world and that of the others are never two separated themes. Heidegger thus suggests:

One belongs to the others oneself, and entrenches their power. "The others", whom one designates as such in order to cover over one's own essential belonging to them, are those who are there initially and for the most part in everyday being-with-one-another. The who is not this one and not that one, not oneself and not some and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the they. (Heidegger, 1962, 118-119)

The they (or the on in French, and das Man in German) concealed in others is inauthentic; it is the "other" without face<sup>11</sup>. If Dasein becomes what it is with the truth of "for-the-sake-of-others", then Dasein of "for-the-sake-of-others" is not, however, for any others. The meaning of "for-the-sake-of-others" does not designate the human communication among the people. Instead, it is the social life that coherently underlies a relation of "one-with-the-other" (l'un-avec-l'autre). This relation ignores the privacy of the existence as well as the fact that the meaning of Being cannot and will not be exhausted with the relation of being-with. The Dasein of "for-the-sake-of -others", in its very essence, always fails to regard the face of the other; instead, it is a heart closed, a loner "without" heart in people's communication.

The schematization of Dasein, for Levinas, portrays the meaning of solitude in Heidegger's thought. However, Levinas, who regards solitude as the core of existence, is never satisfied with Heidegger's ontological conceptualization. In his *Time and the other* (Le temps et l'autre), Levinas contends that: "Thus from

<sup>11</sup> According to Levinas, face is the sign of the Other (*Autrui*), from which the frame of bones are composed to reveal the singularity of the Other. The characteristics of the Other are synthesized by difference and singularity, and it can never be thrown into the identity of the subject.

the start I repudiate the Heideggerian conception that views solitude in the midst of a prior relationship with the other. Though anthropologically incontestable, the conception seems to me ontologically obscure" (Levinas, 1987, 18).

The Heideggerian solitude suggests the lack of human interaction, and this sort of solitude without the humans has already preexisted in Heidegger's Dasein. In Heidegger's context, the other Dasein is not the Other (Autrui) which is marked as alterity, but the other exteriority of myself (l'autre extérieur à moi). The other, after abstracted from the alterity, is only a formalized presence without face. Once Heidegger erased the face of the other Dasein (l'autre Dasein), the Dasein destiny of the essence of being-with of "for others" has been, at the moment, portrayed by the solitude without the human interaction. Heidegger, it seems to suggest, discloses the reality of social life. But we have to interrogate: whether the meaning of existence based on "being-with-the-other" touches the profoundness of Being. Levinas is not satisfied with the meaning of existence disclosed by the solitude; further, he comments on the meaning of solitude in the domain of existence, except for the structure of being-with proposed by Heidegger<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.2. *The relation between solitude and existence*

Solitude cannot be interpreted as the "lack of the relation with the other"; its meaning comes from the "irreplaceability of the existence": "All these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the other. But I am not the other. I am all alone. It constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or relationship" (Levinas, 1987, 42)

Levinas delves into the meaning of solitude based on the contention of "the inexchangeability of existence". When the existent is born from Being in general (or the *il y a*), the individuals who are given by the lights (or the consciousness) with the form has taken the destiny of solitude. Solitude is already immanent in the existence: I cannot be you, you cannot be I, and I can only be myself, without any other alternatives. The fact of my Being as existence intim-

<sup>12</sup> "The preposition *mit* (with) here describes the relationship. It is thus an association of side by side, around something, around a common term and, more precisely, for Heidegger, around the truth. It is not the face-to-face relationship, where each contributes everything, except the private fact of one's existence. I hope to show, for my part, that it is not the preposition *mit* that should describe the original relationship with the other" (Levinas, 1987, 19).

idates me; I have to take the burden alone, or I cannot but take it all alone. Like in the pain of illness, the acuity of the illness exhibited from the existence can merely be inscribed upon the existence of one's self, even though one is surrounded by the others and others' greetings. It cannot be transmitted; it cannot be exchanged, and cannot even be comprehended. The being-with others appears in the pain of existence, which is so unbearable. It seems to suggest that the "I" in this world is envired by the people of the world beyond, and that the distance between us is an incommensurable gap. The sort of solitude also emerges with the expectation of taking the burden for those in pain and disease. For example, parents would bear the child's pain by their body rather than the child suffers themselves. However, the undeniable fact of "inexchangeability of existence", like a sharp sword, separates the distance between parents and children. The children are born from Mother's body, but the existence has presupposed the permanent separation between parents and children. The fact that one would use his/her body to suffer children's pain on their behalf suggests one's immanent solitude in existence<sup>13</sup>.

The inexchangeability of existence reveals the impossibility of being unified with the Other (*l'autrui*). I can imitate or imagine other's feelings, but the unbridgeable gap between my imagination and the other's perception reveals the devotion of rapture rather than sharing. The monadology of existence negates the experience of the union with the Other (*l'autrui*)<sup>14</sup>.

#### CONCLUSION: THE ETHICAL MEANING EVOKED FROM THE CORE OF EXISTENCE

Solitude is the unique irreplaceable oneness that links the existent to the existence; solitude embodies the relation between the existent and the exist-

<sup>13</sup> Levinas employs the closure of the monad to depict the solitude of the existent, which is the "inexchangeability of existence":

"One can exchange everything between beings except existing. In this sense, to be is to be isolated by existing. Inasmuch as I am, I am a monad. It is by existing that I am without windows and doors, and not by some content in me that would be incommunicable. If it is incommunicable, it is because it is rooted in my being, which is what is most private in me. In this way every enlargement of my knowledge or of my means of self-expression remains without effect on my relationship with existing, the interior relationship par excellence" (Levinas, 1987, 42).

<sup>14</sup> We can unite the other, such as the relation between the existent and the food. When the existent eats the food, food becomes the one within the existent. But the union of the existent with the other possibly comes from the existent's digestion of food. Food as the favorite other of the existent is destroyed (the act of eating by the existent) becomes one part of the existent. This to some extent explains the relation between the existent and other beings, but never can it be explained in the context between the humans.

ence. The profoundness of the meaning of solitude shouldn't be interpreted by the relation with the other, but the existent's inquiry to the essence of its existence.

Solitude lies in the very fact that there are existents. To conceive a situation wherein solitude is overcome is to test the very principle of the tie between the existent and its existing. It is to move toward an ontological event wherein the existent contracts existence. (Levinas, 1987, 43)

Solitude discloses that the existent is the only bearer for his/her responsibility of existing. Probably I can die "for" the Other, but I can't die "on behalf of" the Other. Thus, the highest value that the relation with the Other achieves is only "for" the Other, instead of "on behalf of" the Other. The inexchangeability of existence suggests two dimensions of meaning of solitude: (1) one's inescapability that he/she has to bear for the existence of his/her own and (2) the impossibility of being the Other. The former presents the ontological system in terms of the existent as the subject<sup>15</sup>, while the latter unravels Levinas's ethics "for the Other" (*pour autrui*). Due to the fact that I cannot die "on behalf of" the Other, the responsibility to the Other suggests the ultimate proximity of the Other's sufferance<sup>16</sup>. The responsibility "for" the Other comes from the fact that one cannot die "on behalf of" the Other, or as the guilt of survivor's.

This is the most touching scene that attracts all the attention and admiration from Levinas's ethics. The most attractive part in Levinas's philosophy is nothing other than "the infinite desire" that exhibits transcendence as well as the ethical issues constructed by the relation with the other. The relation between transcendence and ethics is the very issue that is constantly thought together. Levinas suggests that "Now ethics, when proposed as a modality of

<sup>15</sup> The solitude that evokes the ontology is what Levinas contends "certain positions of contemporary ontology which have made possible the renewal of the philosophical *problematic*", as I noted earlier in footnote 2 (Levinas, 2001, 2-3).

<sup>16</sup> Sympathy and compassion, to suffer for the other or to "die a thousand deaths" for the other [*I'autre*], have as their condition of possibility a more radical substitution for an other [*autrui*]. This would be a responsibility for another in bearing his misfortune or his end *as if one were guilty of causing it*. This is the ultimate nearness. *To survive as a guilty one*. In this sense, the sacrifice for another [*autrui*] would create an other relation with the death of the other: a responsibility that would perhaps answer the question of why we can die. In the guiltiness of the survivor, the death of the other [*I'autre*] is my affair. *My death is my part in the death of the other, and in my death I die the death that is my fault*. The death of the other is not only a moment of the mineness of my ontological function. (Levinas, 200, 39)

transcendence, can be thought on the basis of the secularization of the sacred” (Levinas, 2000, 163). Then, how would he regard the transcendence disclosed from the ethics?

Transcendence signifies a movement of traversing (trans) and a movement of ascending (scando). In this sense, it signifies a double effort of stepping across an interval by elevation or a change of level. Before any metaphor, the word is therefore to be thought in its sense of a change of site. In an age in which movement toward the heights is limited by the line of the summits, the heavenly bodies—stars fixed in their positions or traveling along closed trajectories—are intangible. The sky calls for a gaze other than that of a vision that is already an aiming and proceeds from need and to the pursuit of things. It calls for eyes purified of covetousness, a gaze other than that of the hunter with all his ruse, awaiting the capture. Thus the eyes turned toward the sky separate themselves in some fashion from the body in which they are implanted. And in this separation the complicity of the eye and the hand, which is older than the distinction between knowing and doing, is undone. Raising itself toward the sky, the gaze thus encounters the untouchable: the sacred. (The untouchable is the name of an impossibility before being that of a taboo.) The distance thus traversed by the gaze is transcendence. The gaze is not a climbing but a deference. In this way, it is wonder and worship. There is an astonishment before the extraordinary rupture that is height or elevation within a space closed to movement. Height thus takes on the dignity of the superior and becomes divine. From this spatial transcendence, crossed by vision, idolatry is born. (Levinas, 2000, 163-64)

The gaze, turning to the sky, excludes the bodily movement of the obsessive object, the existence. The pure gaze dissociates itself from the burden of body, and then destructs the most primitive complicity between the eye and the hand, which is prior to the division between knowing and doing. The gaze that turns to the sky is the pure gaze with the untouchable sacred, and the very non-crossable relationship is transcendence. For Levinas, the idolatry worship was thus born in the spatial transcendence, which is visually crossed. The idolatry symbolizes the secularization of the sacred. Levinas is thus not, as Jacques Rolland contends, a thinker of the sacred, but the opposite of the thought (Levinas, 2000, 190). Hence, if Levinas contends that the ethics can be extracted from the transcendent mode, or be conceptualized from the secularization of the sacred, it does not merely suggest that Levinas does not affirm

“the spatial transcendence visually crossed”, but reveals that he disagrees with the ethics which is disclosed by this transcendence.

Levinas’s ethics is not the ethics to the untouchable and divine worship, but the agitation and the restlessness toward the death of the other, as he exhibits in *God, Death, and Time*. Most researches on ethics have been dedicated to transcendence, to the relation between the pure gaze and the untouchable sacred (the being in general), but they, I want to argue, fail to address the authentic meaning of the ethics. Once Levinas’s philosophy is read as the subject dissociating from itself to the infinite transcendence, the relationship with the other, in the transcendent context, can be regarded as an ethics independent itself from the existence. This would distinguish the relationship between ethics and the fact as existence from that between “for the Other” and “self-preservation”. The fact as existence revealed by the “solitude” of the “irreplaceability of existence”, as Levinas advocates in *Time and the other*, presents the inseparable relation between ethics and existence.

The existent inscribed by the “irreplaceability of existence” demonstrates the relation with the Other. For the existent, the existence is the burden hardly to be warded off. The existent, in face of the pain of the Other, cannot, however, bear the pain on behalf of the Other, but merely bear the pain for the Other—this is the guilt off which the existent can hardly ward. For Levinas, the Being of the humans or the existence is not only schematized by the solitude, from which the ethics, too, resides. Each individual can only bear the fact of his own existence, despite his profound affectivity for the Other. One can discern the existent’s will of the meaning of responsibility to transcend the scope of his own Being and noble will of arriving at the Other’s field through taking the responsibility of “for the Other”. The subject born from one’s responsibility for the Other does not suggest a subject who acts or does for the humans, but the one trapped in the predicament of the existence of himself with deep affectivity for the Other.

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