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INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN EMMANUEL LEVINAS' PHILOSOPHY

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of San Carlos

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Philosophy

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by

Virginia L. Jayme

March 1974

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

No human being exists in a vacuum; rather, every man is concretely rooted in a situation, in a realm of beings that continually gives shape to the very fabric of his own being. As he unfolds his life from moment to moment, man weaves an intricate pattern of relations with things, with his fellow human beings, and in the case of the believer, with the transcendent reality of God. It is out of this network of interrelationships that man emerges as a distinct and unique being. And just as man's relation to what is other than himself moulds him into the unique person that he is, so also is the world of nonself moulded and structured according to its peculiar relation to man. Thus,

I am in the center of a continuous interchange of action and reaction. Nothing of what happens to me leaves me unaffected. At the same time, wherever I go or whatever I do, I leave behind me the trail of my own influence.<sup>1</sup>

The aforementioned relational structure of human reality was called into question with the rise of Cartesian philosophy. Jose Ortega y Gasset aptly

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<sup>1</sup>Engelbert van Groonenburg, Gateway to Reality (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 52-53.



remarked that "from the time of Descartes modern man had been left without a world."<sup>2</sup> Rene Descartes' philosophy of the immanence of thought has unwittingly blazed the trail of a tradition of philosophy marked by a strong inclination towards solipsism and individualism.<sup>3</sup> It is as a conscious reaction to this, among other reasons, that contemporary thinkers have given renewed emphasis on the relational structure of human reality. They have particularly directed their attention to an incisive study of the relationship between the self and the other self.<sup>4</sup>

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, a contemporary French thinker who is steeped in existentialism and phenomenology, represents one such attempt at a penetrating investigation into the self-other relation.

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<sup>2</sup>Jose Ortega y Gasset, Man and People (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., c1957), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. C. D. Rollins, "Solipsism," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1967), VII, 487ff.

<sup>4</sup>The relational structure of human existence is one of the fundamental themes of existentialism and phenomenology. Existentialists speak of this as man's being-in-the-world or situated existence. In phenomenological language, the same idea is conveyed in the view of human existence as openness-to-an-other, that is, as intentional. Cf. William Luijpen, Existential Phenomenology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, c1960), 14ff.; James Collins, The Existentialists (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., c1952), 226ff.

As John Wild observes, much of Levinas' thought is a "phenomenology of the other," that is, a description and an analysis of one's experience of the other person.<sup>5</sup>

But what is really the nature of the relationship between the self and the other self? Is the other person to be regarded as nothing but a mere instrument for self-aggrandizement, an object of one's cognitive and pragmatic conquest? Or is he rather to be treated in his intrinsic worth as a person and not for what he can offer to promote the selfish motives of the self? Is he a companion in one's journey through the labyrinthine path that leads to a free and authentic self-realization? Or is he rather a threat, a dangerous obstruction to the freedom of the self? Must one say, as Sartre had said with unwavering conviction, that "hell is other people,"<sup>6</sup> and that "while I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; that while I enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me?"<sup>7</sup> Or must

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<sup>5</sup>John Wild, "Introduction," Totality and Infinity (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, c1969), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "In Camera," in Three European Plays, ed. E. Martin Brown (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, c1965), p. 191.

<sup>7</sup>Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Washington Square Press, c1953), p. 446.

one assert with even more vigorous insistence that heaven is also other people and that to be with the Other in a mutually satisfying relationship is the very essence of joy?<sup>8</sup>

What is the essence of intersubjectivity? Is it communion or conflict? If it ever is humanly possible to arrive at a genuine meeting with another person, would it be worth all the risks, the hurt or the humiliation that one sometimes goes through in one's groping efforts to reach the Other?

In the light of the preceding questions and in the spirit of man's relentless efforts to authenticate his life by building a world where he can be truly himself without being alone, we think it profitable to re-examine the nature of intersubjectivity within the framework of the existential phenomenological philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. We believe that an insight into his philosophy will carry us along the way towards answering our questions.

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<sup>8</sup>Marc Oraison, Being Together (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., c1970), p. 14.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EMERGENT SUBJECT

Emmanuel Levinas defines his philosophy as a "defense of subjectivity."<sup>1</sup> Like most of today's philosophies,<sup>2</sup> it brings our attention from a speculative consideration of being as object to a study of man in his central and privileged position as a unique and an inexhaustible subject.

The present study is an inquiry into Levinas' idea of intersubjectivity, but any theory of intersubjectivity must be set within the framework of a theory of subjectivity. An insight into the modes of relationship between human beings demands an insight into the nature of man. Thus, in order to prepare the ground for an exposition of the theory of intersubjectivity which Levinas proposes, it is necessary to have an understanding of his notion of subjectivity. For this matter, we seek to discuss in this chapter the emergence of the subject in enjoyment as an egoistic being and describe his status as a separated being

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<sup>1</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Joseph Lebacqz, "Subjective and Objective," Heythrop Journal, VIII (1967), 191ff.

maintaining an economic existence. But before we go into these themes, we will consider first what it means to be a subject and thus provide a context for understanding Levinas' idea of subjectivity.

### Being a Subject

The term "subject" comes from the Latin expression "subjectum," which literally means "that which is put under." It is at the root of the idea "substance" which refers to a ground or foundation of the accidental determinations of a being. Closely related to the term "subsistent," it signifies that which endures and perdures despite all changes occurring in a being. To be a subject, then, in the etymological sense of the word, is to be a "supposit," a bearer or support of whatever is attributable to a thing.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, one can say of a cloud, a tree or a dog, that it is a subject in the sense of a subsisting being; but hardly would anyone speak of any of these realities as a subject in the sense in which the term is sometimes exclusively said of persons. The subject

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<sup>3</sup>See Byrne and Masiarz, Human Being and Being Human (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 212. See also Jacques Maritain, Existence and the Existent (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), pp. 62ff.

is not merely whatever subsists or exercises its own substantial act of existence. The subject, indeed, refers to a concrete subsistent but only to one which subsists in a special way. Being a subject, while certainly presupposing substantiality, takes much more than this.

In understanding the being of the subject we usually take it in opposition to the being of the object. Considered as the two indispensable and irreducible poles of knowing, the subject is the knower and the object the known. Here, the subject is conceived as a conscious being and as conscious, it must be conscious of something for to be conscious of nothing is not to be conscious at all.<sup>4</sup> This "something" of which the subject is conscious is the object of consciousness. Object, therefore, is taken widely in the sense of anything that serves as a noematic term of the conscious activity. Insofar as object is understood as anything that is knowable, the subject can likewise be an object. The subject can know another subject and in self-reflection becomes an object to itself.

But the subject-object distinction is not

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<sup>4</sup>See William Luijpen, op. cit., pp. 92ff.

confined to the opposition of being-as-knower to being-as-knowable. There is another opposition that is based on a differentiation between two modes of being--the personal and the impersonal modes of being.<sup>5</sup>

Being as object is impersonal being apprehended as a thing. It is pure datum and its reality is exhausted in the sum of actual determinations which mark it off from other existents. It is being without depth, without an inner reality that lies beyond the objective surface it presents to an observer. One can, therefore, find in the impersonal being no disparity between an inner source of activity and its outward manifestations. To know the impersonal being adequately is to know the totality of its actual determinations. As such, the being of the object, which is impersonal being, is fully transparent to a knower. The object can be conceptually defined; it can offer no resistance to any attempt at possession, manipulation or control.<sup>6</sup>

Being as subject, on the other hand, is personal being whose reality transcends the totality of formal

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<sup>5</sup>See Robert Johann, "Subjectivity," Review of Metaphysics, XII (December, 1958), pp. 200ff., for our distinction between subject and object as grounded on personal and impersonal being.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Johann, op. cit., pp. 202ff.

determinations by which it is conceptually definable. Beyond the objective face it presents to the world lies a whole dimension of interiority--an inwardness that is constituted by the being's free activity. It is not pure datum, but being experienced from within as the autonomous center and inexhaustible source of one's own activities. To attain fully to the being of the subject is to penetrate beyond the surface of actual determinations into the depths of its inner life.<sup>7</sup>

As a being capable of freely structuring his own world, man is a subject. And if one is to know man as a subject or as a personal being, it is not enough to recognize his specific determinations. To know man as a rational being is to know him merely as an object. Such knowledge is certainly incommensurate to the fullness of the reality of human subjectivity which is constituted by inner life or interiority.

For Emmanuel Levinas, subjectivity likewise goes beyond mere substantiality or independent existence.<sup>8</sup> When he speaks of the subject, he takes it in the above sense of a personal being possessing an

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 206ff.

<sup>8</sup>Levinas, op. cit., p. 113.



interiority--an inner life that escapes full conceptualization and resists totalization.<sup>9</sup> He sees in this inner life a basis for the uniqueness and identity of the subject.<sup>10</sup> He considers the development of subjectivity precisely as a process of establishing an identity for the subject--an identity that would set it off as different from other subjects and thereby define the subject as a "separated being." The development of subjectivity, which is at the same time the constitution of an inner life, is synonymous with the realization of what Levinas calls "separation."

We shall now consider how this separation is brought about and how the inner life is gradually and continually constituted by the subject's legitimate search for enjoyment and economy of existence.

#### Becoming a Subject

Subjectivity is not something that is given at the moment of existence; it is rather something that man has to accomplish. One is not born a subject but becomes a subject and subjectivity originates in the autonomous experience of enjoyment.<sup>11</sup> As Levinas says:

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

The upsurge of the self beginning in enjoyment, where the substantiality of the I is apperceived not as a subject of the verb to be, but as implicated in happiness . . . is the exaltation of the existent as such . . . . One becomes a subject of being not by assuming being but in enjoying happiness, by the interiorization which is also an exaltation, an "above being."<sup>12</sup>

Let us examine what enjoyment entails such that it is constitutive of the emergence of subjectivity.

Enjoyment is an affective state of the subject.<sup>13</sup>

But it is an effectivity that is brought forth by an "other." Enjoyment, therefore, is a modality of intentionality.<sup>14</sup> To enjoy is to enter into a relation with what is other than the self and to derive therefrom the experience of inward satisfaction and happiness. This experience is made manifest in the subject's mode of relation with the things that make up life. "Enjoyment," says Levinas, "is the ultimate consciousness of the contents of life--it embraces them."<sup>15</sup> It is a mode of consciousness that is initially experienced in the satisfaction of the needs of life.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 127ff.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

Need and Living From. Life implies for the subject a need for nutriments, for air to breathe, for protection against the inclemencies of the weather. Arising from the subject's corporeity, these needs are experienced as a lack or an insufficiency and they move the self to reach out for things that would fill this lack. Engaged in a search for things that would maintain his life, the subject is truly an "economic" being.

The self finds in the world he inhabits things that answer to his needs. He faces the "otherness" of the things in the world but sees in these things a "relative" otherness for they fall under his power and can be reduced to the self.<sup>16</sup> They are at the disposal of the self for his enjoyment and possession. Levinas describes the subject's mode of being-in-the-world in the following passage:

The world, foreign and hostile, should, in good logic, alter the I. But the true and primordial relation between them, that in which the I is revealed precisely as preeminently the same, is produced as a sojourn . . . in the world. The way of the I against the "other" of the world consists in sojourning, in identifying oneself, by existing here at home with oneself. . . . In a world which is from the first other the I is nonetheless autochthonous. It is the very reversion of this alteration. It finds in the world a site . . . and a home . . . . Dwelling is the very mode of maintaining

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

oneself . . . . The site, a medium . . . . afford means. Everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is comprehended. The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same.<sup>17</sup>

The satisfaction of needs implies a reduction of the other to the self and entails an appropriation and an exploitation of reality. This other-reducing character of the self manifests itself in the acts of nutrition, labor and possession. An energy that is other, becomes in nourishment, one's own energy and strength.<sup>18</sup> In labor, the subject grapples with the material reality and transforms it into a property of the self. In the satisfaction of needs,

. . . the alienness of the world that founds me loses its alterity; in satiety the real I sank my teeth into is assimilated, the forces that were other than my forces, become me (and every satisfaction of need is in some respect nourishment). Through labor and possession, the alterity of nutriments enters into the same.<sup>19</sup>

To the subject's interaction with the world, Levinas gives the term living from.<sup>20</sup> To live from

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 110ff.

implies a dependence on the things that fill life. But this dependence provides at the same time a source of happiness. "What we live from," Levinas stresses, "does not enslave us; we enjoy it."<sup>21</sup> Although arising out of need or necessity, living from is not a harsh duty for the subject but a pleasurable commerce, an enjoyable engagement with the things in the world for "the attachment to the contents that fill [life] provides it with supreme content."<sup>22</sup> To Levinas' mind, man is happy to have needs for the happiness of enjoyment thrives on the "pain" of need. A being without needs is outside of happiness and unhappiness.<sup>23</sup>

What we live from, however, is not only that which maintains our existence. We live from objects as well as from acts--from food and drinks, from air, from labor, from ideas, from sentiments. "What I do and what I am is at the same time that from which I live."<sup>24</sup> If life is "living from" something, then,

The life that I earn is not a bare existence; it is a life of labor and nourishments; these are the contents which do not preoccupy it only,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 144ff.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

but which "occupy" it, which "entertain" it, of which it is enjoyment. Even if the content of life ensures my life, the means is immediately sought as an end, and the pursuit of this end becomes an end in its turn. Thus things are always more than the strictly necessary; they make up the grace of life. We live from our labor which ensures our subsistence; but we also live from our labor because it fills (delights or saddens) life.<sup>25</sup>

Freedom and Enjoyment. In enjoyment the self emerges as a free being releasing himself from the fetters of biological concerns into the disinterested joy of play. The things lived from are seen not merely as objects that fill a need but also as objects of enjoyment. To Levinas' mind,

The inversion of the instincts of nutrition which have lost their biological finality, marks the very disinterestedness of man. The suspension or absence of the ultimate finality has a positive face--the disinterested joy of play. To live is to play, despite the finality and tension of instinct, to live from something without this something having the sense of a goal or an ontological means--simply play or enjoyment of life.<sup>26</sup>

This capacity to enjoy for the sake of enjoyment elevates the subject from mere animal existence (which is bound only to biological concerns) and manifests a distinctively human trait. "To enjoy without utility, in pure

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 111-112.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

loss, gratuitously without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure--this is the human."<sup>27</sup> In the human being the concern for existence becomes also a concern for enjoyment. "The love of life," as Levinas puts it, "does not resemble the care for Being, reducible to the comprehension of Being, or ontology. The love of life does not love Being, but loves the happiness of being."<sup>28</sup>

We find that in Levinas' thought, the subject has an inclination towards hedonism.<sup>29</sup> He can make enjoyment the ". . . ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being--with its materiality. . . ." <sup>30</sup> He can make it the fundamental motive and end of his concern with things. Thus, things may be seen as meaningful by the self insofar as they offer themselves as possible objects of enjoyment. Levinas himself asserts:

Here lies the permanent truth of hedonist moralities: to not seek, behind the satisfaction of need, an order relative to which alone

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>29</sup>But we shall show in the following chapters that the subject is also able to transcend selfish enjoyment by recognizing the critique of the other subject.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

satisfaction would acquire a value; to take satisfaction, which is the very meaning of pleasure, as a term.<sup>31</sup>

In asserting that enjoyment embraces all relations with being,<sup>32</sup> Levinas contests Heidegger's position that the care for being is motivated by the usefulness of a being. Man's discovery of being, Heidegger claims, is always guided by a practical intent. Things are there as utensils.<sup>33</sup> But Levinas thinks that even utility is subordinated to enjoyment.

Every object refers itself to enjoyment, a universal category of the empirical--even if I lay hold of an object-implement. . . . The handling and utilization of tools, the recourse to all the instrumental gear of a life, whether to fabricate other tools or to render things accessible, concludes in enjoyment. As material or gear the objects of everyday use are subordinated to enjoyment. . . . Things refer to my enjoyment.<sup>34</sup>

And he adds that:

The enjoyment of a thing, be it a tool, does not consist simply in bringing this thing to the usage for which it is fabricated . . . but also in the suffering or rejoicing over this operation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>33</sup>See Versenyi, Heidegger, Being and Truth (New York: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 12ff.

<sup>34</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity, pp. 132-3.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



The range of things enjoyable is as wide as the range of being itself. One can enjoy one's work no matter how tiring or trying it may be. One can transform the pain of work into enjoyment.<sup>36</sup> One can even find joy in one's own suffering. Such is the case of the masochist. Such is the case of the person who willingly and gladly goes through pain and suffering for the sake of a noble cause. Indeed, everything can be enjoyed and one is by what he enjoys. "Happiness," says Levinas, "is a principle of individuation."<sup>37</sup> And,

The personality of the person, the ipseity of the I, which is more than the particularity of the atom and of the individual, is the particularity of the happiness of enjoyment.<sup>38</sup>

In the midst of the subject's enjoyment of things, however, there lurks the shadow of insecurity and anxiety. This insecurity of enjoyment manifests a limitation of freedom. Levinas thinks that the limitation of the freedom of the subject is not in the fact of his unchosen birth nor in his situated existence but in the insecurity of his enjoyment of things.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

For what one enjoys can come to be wanting; it can cease to be enjoyable. Some other being may snatch an object of enjoyment from one's possession. Some other subject may set limits to one's enjoyment. All this is due to the fact that enjoyment entails a dependence. "The uncertainties of the future that mar happiness remind enjoyment that its independence envelops a dependence."<sup>40</sup> But the fact that enjoyment is only passing or that it can be tarnished by the "concern for the morrow,"<sup>41</sup> does not make it illusory. Nor does it render useless the subject's search for enjoyment. The ephemeral nature of enjoyment moves the subject to a continuous search for the things that would offer him enjoyment. He works to get at the things which he thinks are enjoyable and he manages to surmount whatever would stand in the way to their attainability. When he gets hold of the thing which gives him joy, he takes every measure to safeguard the possession.

Separation as Living From. Enjoyment and living from establish the reality of the subject as a separated

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-4.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

being. Separation is

. . . the fact of a being that lives somewhere, from something, that is, that enjoys. The identity of the I comes to it from its egoism whose insular sufficiency is accomplished by enjoyment.<sup>43</sup>

To be separate is not to be bound up in a totality. But in order not to be lost in a totality, a being must possess and maintain an identity. This identity, however, is not to be sought in the place that the subject occupies in a system or totality.<sup>44</sup> It is an identity that must be sought in the subject himself. What Levinas speaks of as separation is nothing but the process of identification--of maintaining an identity for the subject. But this identification

. . . isn't a simple resaying of myself. An "A is A" of the Me is the "A anxious about A," or the "A enjoying A," always an "A stretched towards A." The outside of me seeks for this identification in the name of need: outside of me is for me.<sup>45</sup>

Separation, therefore, is not merely opposition to what the self is not. As a process of identification, it is the subject's mode of relation with the otherness of things in the manner we have earlier described as

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>45</sup>Levinas, "On the Trail of the Other," Philosophy Today, X (Spring, 1966), p. 34.

living from. To be separate is to be me, though being in the other. Separation, therefore, is made possible in the face of otherness.

The Egoism of the Subject

We have shown that the search for economy of existence is motivated by the intentionality of need.<sup>46</sup> As defined by need, the subject is totalistic and egoistic. The term of his thought and action is always the self and what is other is seen in the light of selfish interests.

Enjoyment, labor and possession manifest the centripetal movement of the subject in his effort to respond to his needs. All these activities have for their primary intention not transcendence, but the acquisition and exploitation of reality. It is true that in these acts there is a movement out of the self into the other, but it is a movement that returns to the self, for what is other is absorbed into the identity of the self. What is "outside of me is for me."<sup>47</sup> The freedom that emerges in enjoyment, the freedom that responds to the demands of the self as need, is a freedom that is defined by its propensity towards

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<sup>46</sup>See p. 12 of this paper.

<sup>47</sup>Levinas, "On the Trail of the Other," p. 34.

domination and appropriation.

In the concern for enjoyment, the self may be totally engrossed in his own being to the disregard of the other subject. He may rest in a spirit of complacency and contentment and become totally forgetful of the Other. As Levinas notes:

In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Other, not "as for me . . ."-- but entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate-- without ears, like a hungry stomach.<sup>48</sup>

But sometimes, somehow, someone would come and disturb the complacency of one's own existence. Some other being would call into question the egoistic moves of the self. Some Other would resist the ego's tendency to dominate and appropriate what it is not. Indeed, as we shall proceed to show, the Other, by the very fact of his being also a subject, resists the selfish moves of the ego.

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<sup>48</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 134.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EGOISTIC RELATION TO THE OTHER

Human existence is truly an "ek-sistence--a going-out-of-itself towards an 'other'."<sup>1</sup> It is therefore intentional and is inconceivable apart from this intentional structure. In the spirit of phenomenology, Levinas writes:

Every moment of life (conscious or even unconscious as consciousness divines it) is in relation with an other than that moment itself . . . every obscure thought of our being is also oriented towards something.<sup>2</sup>

The preceding discussion on the emergence of human subjectivity attests to the truth of this intentional structure of human reality. The subject emerges by engaging himself in an initial pursuit of things that are need-gratifying. The intentionality of need which is the dynamism behind this initial engagement with the things in the world is necessarily egoistic for it is an orientation towards an otherness with the view of incorporating it in the narcissistic circle of

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Kockelmans (ed.), Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 122.

the self. As Levinas describes this:

Need takes place in a world which is for me-- it returns to self . . . . Need is the return itself, the anxiety of me for myself, the original form of identification which we have called egoism. It is the assimilation of the world in view of its coincidence with myself or happiness.<sup>3</sup>

As defined by need, the self is driven primarily by self-interest towards the enjoyment and possession of things. He sees the things in the world as disponibles subject to his manipulation, domination and control. Whatever opposition these things offer to the self is surmounted by the imperialistic move of freedom. Inclined as he is to this narcissistic approach towards things, the self may take the other subject also as another object of enjoyment and possession. In the face of the other subject, however, the self encounters a resistance.

. . . if freedom situates me effrontedly before the non-me in myself and outside of myself, if it consists in negating or possessing the non-me, before the Other it retreats.<sup>4</sup>

While things are other than the self, "their alterity is . . . beabsorbed into my identity as a thinker or as a possessor."<sup>5</sup> It is only the other subject

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<sup>3</sup>Levinas, "On the Trail of the Other," pp. 38-9.

<sup>4</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

who can be, to use Levinas' expression, "radically exterior" or "absolutely other,"<sup>6</sup> for he resists the totalizing power of the self on the level of thought as well as of action. The Other is not merely what is known or what is used. To Levinas' mind, "the Other is neither initially nor ultimately what we grasp or what we thematize."<sup>7</sup>

In the following sections, we shall show that in the meeting with the other subject the self comes to the realization that enjoyment and possession are not the ultimate relations with being and that the egoism of the self as need does not define his final reality.

The Other as Resistance to Objectifying Knowledge

There is a spontaneous move in the self to approach the Other by thought, to encompass his being in a kind of knowing conceived as an objective gaze. To approach the Other in such a manner is to circumscribe his being in the sum of determinative qualities that are open to the vision of a spectator. To say that the Other possesses such qualities is to know him objectively. But to

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 172.



say that his being is exhausted in the totality of these qualities is to reduce his status to that of the object whose reality is identified only with this series of qualities open to an observer.<sup>8</sup> Such knowledge of the Other constitutes an objectifying knowledge.

Levinas does not often explicitly use the expression "objectifying knowledge," but the idea is implicit in his notion of "vision" as "an adequation of the idea with the thing, a comprehension that encompasses."<sup>9</sup> Knowing, conceived as vision, is

. . . essentially an adequation of exteriority to interiority: in it exteriority is reabsorbed in the contemplative soul, and, as an adequate idea, revealed to be a priori, the result of a Sinngebung.<sup>10</sup>

To take vision as a model in one's approach to the Other is to take the Other merely as the theme of an impassive contemplation.<sup>11</sup> It is to confine his being to the idea one has of him at the moment. Vision entails a reduction of the Other to a mere content of thought; it is the constitution of the other's being in terms of the self's preconceived ideas about him.

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<sup>8</sup>See p. 8 of this paper.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

Vision imposes or projects one's preconceptions on the Other. But vision, Levinas stresses, is not the way of the social relation. "Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings, exercises a power over them,"<sup>12</sup> for "vision appropriates the 'seen' to itself, integrates it into a world by endowing it with a signification, and, in the last analysis, constitutes it."<sup>13</sup>

Knowing the Other is not merely a matter of taking a look at him for there is certainly much more to his being than what meets the eye in vision. Over and beyond the sensible qualities that the Other manifests lies a dimension of interiority that is not open to a spectator. And this interiority can never be fully known for it is continually growing, developing and unfolding. As such, one's idea of the Other at a particular moment is never adequate to the Other's being. There can be no full possession of the Other in thought for his reality transcends any idea or image one can have of him. To this effect, Levinas says:

The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name the face. This mode does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum--the adequate idea.<sup>14</sup>

Since the Other's being exceeds any idea one can have of him, he cannot be totalized nor be fully conceptualized. He reveals himself to the self as an inexhaustible personal center open to a multitude if not an infinity of possibilities. He is, to use Kwant's description of the person,

. . . an ever-developing possibility to encounter things and people. He is always actualizing himself, but this actualization is always partial and never terminal. The possibilities present in an actual encounter are never all totally realized.<sup>15</sup>

In line with the foregoing view, Bergson speaks of the human being as an "immensité de virtualité," a measureless virtuality.<sup>16</sup> And in a similar vein, Sartre describes man as "a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is."<sup>17</sup> The point here is that one's being can never be exhausted in an existence in a particular historical moment. Hence, every encounter with

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>15</sup>Remy Kwant, Encounter (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>Henri Bergson cited in Kwant's Encounter, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup>Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 70.

the Other promises something new; it brings a new dimension to his reality and puts him in a new perspective. As such, it does not take only a lifetime, it takes more than a lifetime to say to any person, "I know you well."

The Other is beyond encompassing, beyond thematization and beyond totalization. Indeed, as Levinas repeatedly asserts: the Other is a revelation of infinity. "The presence of a being not entering into but overflowing the sphere of the same determines its 'status' as infinite."<sup>18</sup> With respect to the Other there can be no adequation of thought to being, and this non-adequation is due not to the obscurity of thought but to the infinity of the Other.

The more one probes into the depths of the Other's being, the more one realizes the impossibility of achieving full knowledge. Knowledge conceived as an objectifying knowledge--the adequation of thought to being--does not exhaust the relationship with the exteriority that the other subject is. It is precisely one of Levinas' main concerns

. . . to contest the ineradicable conviction of every philosophy that objective knowledge is the ultimate relation of transcendence, that the

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<sup>18</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 195.

Other (though he be different from things) must be known objectively, even if his freedom should deceive this nostalgia for knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

And Levinas points out further that:

The relationship with the Other does not move (as does cognition) into enjoyment and possession, into freedom; the Other imposes himself as an exigency that dominates this freedom, and hence as more primordial than everything that takes place in me. The Other . . . marks the end of powers. If I can no longer have power over him it is because he overflows absolutely every idea I can have of him.<sup>20</sup>

To sum this all up, it is the infinity of the Other that paralyzes the ego's attempt at an objectifying knowledge of the other's being.

#### The Other as Resistance to Violence

To objectify does not consist only in knowing the Other as an object but also in treating the Other in the same manner one deals with things, i.e., as objects. Objectification in the latter sense is the exercise of violence on the Other in order to force him to submit to the selfish motives of the self. The act of murder, which is the complete negation of another subject who happens to stand as a roadblock in the selfish projects of the self, is not the only form of violence. And neither is it, as we shall show later,

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

the extreme form of violence. According to Levinas,

. . . violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action.<sup>21</sup>

Violence, to Levinas' mind, is manifest in the exercise of power over another, the power that stifles the Other's autonomy and reduces him to a mere cog in the machinery of one's own life. It consists in treating persons like the pieces in a game of chess that one can move in the direction he likes. It also consists in viewing the Other as nothing but a mere tool recognized and valued only insofar as he fits well into the selfish projects of the self. Violence finds its highest expression in the act of inflicting pain and suffering on the Other in order to force him to betray himself and submit to another's will. This is a form of violence that is even worse than murder for in this way one experiences in his subjectivity his objectivity for others. In the words of Levinas himself:

The supreme ordeal of freedom is not death but suffering. This is known very well in hatred, which seeks to grasp the ungraspable, to humiliate from on high, through the suffering in which the Other exists as pure passivity.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

Hatred wills this passivity in the eminently active being that is to bear witness to it. Hatred does not always desire the death of the Other, or at least it desires the death of the Other only in inflicting this death as a supreme suffering. The one who hates seeks to be the cause of a suffering to which the despised being must be witness. To inflict suffering is not to reduce the Other to the rank of Object, but on the contrary is to maintain him superbly in his subjectivity. In suffering, the subject must know his reification, but in order to do so he must precisely remain a subject. Hatred wills both things. . . ; it is satisfied precisely when it is not satisfied, since the Other satisfies it only by becoming an object, but can never become object enough, since at the same time as his fall, his lucidity and witness are demanded.<sup>22</sup>

In deliberately inflicting pain or suffering on the Other, the self objectifies the Other but keeps him conscious of this objectification. What really makes suffering here more painful and humiliating is the consciousness of one's objectification before another subject and the consciousness that someone else is enjoying the suffering he is going through.

In consonance with Levinas' conviction that the highest expression of violence and power over another consists in wilfully making him suffer, George Orwell wrote in his novel, 1984:

The real power . . . the power we have to fight for night and day, is . . . power . . . over men. How does one man assert his power over

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

another? By making him suffer. Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his will? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of one's own choosing.<sup>23</sup>

Along the same line of thought, Erich Fromm says that "the desire to make a human being suffer, to torture him, and . . . eventually to destroy him,"<sup>24</sup> is the ultimate expression of

. . . complete power over another person, the power which makes him do what I want, feel what I want, think what I want, which transforms him into a thing, my thing.<sup>25</sup>

But "man is not a thing. He cannot be dissected without being destroyed. He cannot be manipulated without being harmed."<sup>26</sup>

In the last analysis, violence of power, be it on the level of knowing or of grasping, is one desperate attempt to reach the Other. But it does not really bring the self any closer to another. On the contrary, it makes real meeting between persons ultimately illusory.

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<sup>23</sup>George Orwell, 1984 quoted in Lionel Rubinoff's The Pornography of Power (New York: Ballantine Books, c1967), p. 108.

<sup>24</sup>Erich Fromm, "Man is not a Thing," The Saturday Review (March 16, 1957), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 9.



Instead of spanning the distance between separated beings, it would only succeed in widening the chasm. Instead of bridging the self to the Other, it would only succeed in creating a wall that would make difficult, if not impossible, any real meeting.

In the face of the other-reducing character of the self which shows itself again in the exercise of violence, the Other can offer a firm and resolute opposition. To the power of the self, he can oppose "a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not a force of resistance but the very unforeseeableness of his reaction."<sup>27</sup> This implies that the Other's will is totally outside of the self. Hence, one can never be sure what the Other may conceal. One can never foresee exactly what the Other will say or do. To quote Levinas:

The Other's designs do not present themselves to me as do the laws of things. His schemes show themselves to be inconvertible into data of a problem, which the will might calculate. The will that refuses the foreign will is obliged to recognize this foreign will as absolutely exterior, as untranslatable into thoughts that would be immanent in itself. Whatever be the extension of my thoughts, limited by nothing, the Other cannot be contained by me: he is unthinkable--he is infinite and recognized as such.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

Thus, the Other who resents selfish power may put up hatred as a defense and an inner expression of his opposition. In the hands of the enemy and in the face of defeat, one can always say: "You have conquered me but I reserve the right to hate you."<sup>29</sup>

The Other may also offer a different kind of resistance which is no longer a physical force but what Levinas calls an ethical force. This is the appeal of the Other, the moral summons which can be read in his face--the "you shall not commit murder."<sup>30</sup> This appeal calls the self to assume a life of responsibility and arouses his sense for goodness for, as we shall show in the following chapter, there is in the subject a capacity for transcendence which is as innate as his capacity for egoism.

In the encounter with the other subject we realize the limitations of egoism. The Other curbs the freedom of the self which in its relation to things has been defined by a strong inclination towards domination and control. But the presence of the Other does not only call into question the power of the subject but also provides a breakthrough for it paves the way to a

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<sup>29</sup>Rollo May, Man's Search for Himself (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., c1953), p. 129.

<sup>30</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 199.

possible recognition of the self as a respons-ible subject rather than a subject bent on subjugating another freedom. The meeting with the Other brings to light a new aspect of subjectivity. This is the intentionality of Desire which lies at the basis of the subject's capacity to transcend egoism. It drives the self to explore the radical strangeness of the Other without, however, doing violence to his otherness. It inspires one to build with another a community wherein each recognizes and respects each other's freedom. The way to such a community is through a relation which Levinas describes as justice. We shall discuss the fundamental structure of such a relationship in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AUTHENTIC RELATION TO THE OTHER

In the preceding chapter we described the egoistic relation to the Other which considers the latter merely as another object subject to the self's spontaneous move in the direction of enjoyment and possession. We tried to show the self-contained subject concerned only with himself and involved with an "other" only insofar as this other ministers to his self-interests.

In the words of Levinas himself:

. . . we have a subject turned toward himself, who according to the stoic formula is characterized by the orpe or the tendency to persist in its being, or for whom, according to Heidegger's formula, "in his existence there is the question of that existence itself;" a subject who defines himself precisely by his concern for himself-- and a subject who in happiness accomplishes his "for himself."<sup>1</sup>

It was shown that for Levinas, although the Other is exposed to the egoistic moves of the self, this other opposes and resents this egoism. Even as the self exercises power over the Other, he realizes the impotency of his power. "Over [the Other] I have no power. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I

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<sup>1</sup>Levinas, "On the Trail of the Other," Philosophy Today, X (Spring, 1966), p. 39.

have him at my disposal. He is not wholly within my site."<sup>2</sup>

But the egoistic attitude is not the only attitude one can possibly assume. Levinas proposes another approach--one that does justice to the Other and respects his otherness. This mode of relationship is grounded on what he calls the intentionality of Desire which entails an "attention to speech or welcome of the face, hospitality and not thematization."<sup>3</sup> Levinas suggests that to the subject concerned solely with his own being,

. . . we oppose the Desire of the Other which proceeds from a being already full and independent, a desire which does not want for itself. The need of a person who does not have needs--this is recognized in the need for an Other who is Other, who is not my enemy (as he is for Hobbes and Hegel) nor my complement, as he is as yet in Plato's Republic, which is constituted because something is lacking in the subsistence of each individual. The desire for the Other is born in a being for whom nothing is missing or more exactly, this desire is born beyond all which could be lacking in him or could satisfy him. This Desire for the Other which is our sociability, is not a simple relation with being where according to the formula with which we began, the Other becomes the self.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>4</sup>"On the Trail of the Other," p. 39.

In this chapter, we will describe this non-ego-  
 stic relation to the Other. But we will consider first  
 what Levinas means by this Desire which is a condition  
 for the possibility of a mode of sociality that does not  
 terminate in power and violence.

### Desire

The intentionality of need does not exhaustively  
 characterize human reality. "Never satisfied with phy-  
 sical determinations, man desires always to go beyond  
 himself to ideal goals."<sup>5</sup> Thus, in addition to the  
 needs of the subject Levinas recognizes a higher-level  
 need which we have earlier identified as desire. How  
 does desire differ from need?

Need is a movement of immanence. It is based  
 on a lack or an insufficiency and a consequent reaching  
 out towards something that would fill this lack.<sup>6</sup> Need  
 is therefore centered on the self. Desire, on the  
 contrary, is a movement of transcendence. It originates  
 not from the self but is called forth by the Other.<sup>7</sup> It

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<sup>5</sup>Rudolph Gerber, "Totality and Infinity:  
 Hebraism & Hellenism--The Experiential Ontology of  
 Emmanuel Levinas," Review of Existential Psychology and  
 Psychiatry, VII (Fall, 1967), p. 182.

<sup>6</sup>See pp. 12ff. of this paper.

<sup>7</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 62.

is a stepping out of the narrow circle of the self, a concern for and a preoccupation with another being.

Thus:

Whereas his needs are turned inward, [the subject's] desires act as an e-ducatio or a-ttractio turning him towards beckonings from outside him.

Whereas need is incapable of arousing a true transcendence, desire evokes a positive attraction apart from the self, accessible only by going beyond and outside the totalitarian self.<sup>8</sup>

Desire, then, is the subject's openness to being. It defines the self as an adventurer, breaking out of self-enclosure, always venturing into the unknown, always responding to the call of further horizons. To quote Levinas:

. . . it appears as a movement going forth from a world that is familiar to us, whatever be the yet unknown lands that bound it or that it hides from view, from an "at home" . . . which we inhabit, toward an alien outside-of-oneself . . . , toward a yonder.<sup>9</sup>

"To posit being as Desire," Levinas further says, "is to decline at the same time the ontology of isolated subjectivity."<sup>10</sup>

This desire carries the self beyond any finite reality to infinity. It moves the subject to reach out

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<sup>8</sup>Gerber, op. cit., pp. 181-2.

<sup>9</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

to the Other, to know his being and in the very process to discover that there is so much more to know. Knowing no satisfaction, desire becomes a creative force sustaining a never-ending search for infinity. It relates the subject with the infinite, that is, with what cannot be fully contained in thought. To this effect Levinas writes:

That is Desire: to burn with a fire other than need, a fire which saturation would put out; to think beyond what you think. . . .

The idea of the Infinite--is Desire. It consists, paradoxically, in thinking more than is thought; while yet conserving it in its immeasurability in correspondence with thought, to enter into relation with what cannot be taken hold of, while yet fully, guaranteeing its cannot-be-taken-hold-of status.<sup>11</sup>

What Levinas calls desire amounts to the subject's limitless capacity to know which manifests itself in his relation to the Other whose being is never equalled by any knowledge one can have of him. It is also the subject's infinite striving for goodness and generosity, for

In [Desire] being becomes goodness: at the apogee of its being, expanded into happiness, in egoism, positing itself as ego, here it is, beating its own record, preoccupied with another being.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>"On the Trail of the Other," p. 42.

<sup>12</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 63.



In the last analysis, the object of the intentionality of desire is not the self but the Other.<sup>13</sup> It is in and through an authentic relation with another subject that this infinite outward dynamism of the self is called into being.

Desire and the Appeal of the Other

Levinas calls the meeting between subjects a face-to-face encounter. The subject is not so much a being with a body as he is a being with a face which is like a "looking glass" revealing somehow one's subjectivity and one's experience of another being. But what does the face essentially convey?

What we come to know in the face of the Other is a being that cannot and should not be met in terms of power. The face is such that it overflows any image or idea that we can have of it.<sup>14</sup> It expresses more than what can be explicitated and refuses to be appropriated. To quote Levinas:

The face resists possession, resists my power. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. . . . The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>See p. 27 of this paper.

power. . . . This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

The face is present, then, not as an object of impassive contemplation but as being open to desire.<sup>16</sup> What we see in the expression of the face is an appeal for a life of responsible subjectivity and to exercise power on the Other is to do him an injustice, for as Levinas says:

The existence of the Other does not concern us in the collectivity by reason of his participation in the being that is already familiar to us all, nor by reason of his power and freedom which we should have to subjugate and utilize for ourselves, nor by virtue of the difference of his attributes which we would have to surmount in the process of cognition or in a movement of sympathy merging us with him, as though his existence were an embarrassment. The Other does not affect us as what must be surmounted, enveloped, dominated . . . .<sup>17</sup>

The Other is rather someone who is

. . . situated in a dimension of height and of abasement--glorious abasement; he has the face of the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, and, at the same time, of the master called to invest and justify my freedom.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Totality and Infinity, pp. 197-8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 251. The influence of Judaeo-Christian thought in Levinas' philosophy is manifest

For Levinas, the self-other relation is not a symmetrical but an asymmetrical relation, for the Other is not seen as an equal to the self. Paradoxically, the being of the self is both more and less than that of the Other. Levinas explains this ambivalence in the following passage:

The face with which the Other turns to me is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face. To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but to posit oneself as responsible, both as more and as less than the being that presents itself in the face. Less, for the face summons me to my obligations and judges me. The being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy. More, for my position as I consists in being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other finding resources in myself. The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the Stranger, the widow, and the orphan to whom I am obligated.<sup>19</sup>

The appeal of the Other in his exile and destitution arouses the subject's inherent desire for transcendence towards goodness and generosity. It brings the self to the awareness of responsibilities and

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in this recognition of the Other as the poor one or the stranger. See the following biblical passages in which the Hebrews are enjoined to do justice to "the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan": Exodus 22:20-21, 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19, 24:17-22, 27:19; Jeremias 22:3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

obligations outside himself. Thus, the Other's presence "does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness."<sup>20</sup> To respond to the Other's appeal is to institute a relationship which "implies a radical alterity of the Other whom I do not simply conceive by relation to myself, but confront out of my egoism."<sup>21</sup>

One cannot be deaf and blind to the Other's appeal. But he can choose to respond or refuse to respond. He still retains the freedom to shut himself up against the Other or to meet him with a spirit of genuine hospitality. But if the subject is to be faithful to his nature as desire and transcendence, he cannot but answer this call by establishing a community with the Other through a relation which has been earlier intimated as justice. "This is the primary sociality," Levinas says, "the personal relation is in the rigor of justice which judges me. . . ." <sup>22</sup>

#### Justice as Response to the Appeal

To respond to the Other's call through justice is to transcend egoism and totalitarianism. As an

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

expression of the self's desire for transcendence, justice "accomplishes an exterior movement towards the Other which severs self-totality and all the while respects the identity of the self and the alterity of the Other."<sup>23</sup>

Justice places the subject in a situation in which he is no longer alone and no longer sufficient unto himself. It shifts the direction of his concern from the self to the Other. It puts the self at the service of the Other and binds him to obligations and responsibilities outside himself. The Other is no longer seen as a freedom that one must bend to his own will, but a master to whom one must render service.<sup>24</sup> What matters now is not so much the good of the self as it is the good of the Other, such that the self is willing to sacrifice enjoyment and possessions for the Other's sake. Justice is goodness, and, to Levinas' mind, goodness consists in this:

The I, which we have seen arise in enjoyment as a separated being having apart, in itself, the center around which its existence gravitates, is confirmed in its singularity by purging itself of this gravitation, purges itself interminably,

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<sup>23</sup>Gerber, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>24</sup>Totality and Infinity, pp. 75-6.

and is confirmed in this incessant effort to purge itself. This is termed goodness.<sup>25</sup>

Putting it more simply, Levinas says that "goodness consists in taking up a position in being such that the Other counts more than myself."<sup>26</sup>

The relation to the Other, however, does not amount to a mere subservience of the self to another subject. It is the task of the Other to respond to the needs, wants and desires of the self just as it is the task of the self to attend to those of the Other.<sup>27</sup>

". . . I myself can feel myself to be the Other of the Other."<sup>28</sup>

As grounded on desire, justice consists in an initial willingness and readiness to move out of the insularity of one's existence and to hold oneself open, receptive and responsive to the Other's presence. The willingness to open demands a forgetfulness of self in order to make possible an attention to the Other in all his radical strangeness. This implies that one should detach himself from all preconceptions, biases and prejudices which may color his vision of the Other. Hence,

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 244-5.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>27</sup>Gerber, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>28</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 84.

there is always a need to approach the Other as a stranger and to let him be for what he is. Apart from this desire to open, there can be no real meeting with the Other, for the latter cannot impose his presence on the self. Otherwise, he would be forcing entrance into the well-guarded door of someone else's world.

The subject expresses his willingness to open by maintaining an inviting approach towards the Other. This welcome is a manifestation of the unquenchable desire for the Other.<sup>29</sup> Welcome consists in the recognition of the Other as a stranger, searching for his place in the world the self has built for himself, waiting for an invitation to become a part of this world and to take a share in the wealth of possession that the self has accumulated for himself. To welcome the Other is to recognize in him a hunger--a hunger which is not so much for what one has as it is for what one is. To welcome, then, is to come to the assistance of the Other in his exile and destitution.

But there can be no interhuman relationship outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands or closed home.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in a gesture of

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

hospitality and generosity, the self opens his world to the Other and meets him with all the resources of his being. "I welcome the Other who presents himself in my home by opening my home to him."<sup>31</sup>

If egoism consists basically in selfish enjoyment and possession, justice consists in setting limits to enjoyment and possession for the Other's sake. Justice is essentially an act of dispossession and donation.<sup>32</sup> It curtails the imperialistic move of freedom for the subject is now more concerned with giving rather than with getting. He divests himself of his world of possessions and places it at the disposal of the Other. As Levinas says:

The relation with the Other puts me in question, empties me of myself and does not drain me, by uncovering for me ever new resources. I do not consider myself especially rich but I no longer have the right to keep anything.<sup>33</sup>

But the relation to the Other is not confined only to gift-giving on the material level. Real communion and community are made possible through language or conversation which makes room for mutual self-revelation. Levinas thinks that "the surpassing of phenomenal

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>33</sup>"On the Trail of the Other," p. 39.



or inward existence does not consist in receiving the recognition of the Other, but in offering one's being."<sup>34</sup> Community is established by taking the initiative of offering one's world as a gift to the Other.<sup>35</sup> And in language, one puts one's world in words and offers it to the Other. Such gift of self in language constitutes the only true gift.

To offer one's world to the Other, however, is a risky venture. Language, says Levinas, is a discourse between free thinkers with all the risks of freedom.<sup>36</sup> Revealing oneself means placing oneself at the disposal of the Other, putting one's trust in him and making him privy to one's interiority. It entails a transcendence of the self towards what cannot be totally foreseen-- the freedom of the Other that is capable of safeguarding or destroying such interiority. To reveal oneself is to expose one's self in all its shabby imperfections, inadequacies and arbitrariness, and thereby face the possibility of being judged worthless or being cast out in disgust or contempt. It means possibly the experience of shame and humiliation in the

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<sup>34</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 183.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

consciousness of one's unworthiness before the Other. There can be no shame of self before oneself. Shame is always shame of oneself before the Other. To reach the Other one has sometimes to go through risks, hurt or humiliation. Indeed, it takes much more courage to give oneself than it does to assert oneself.

Justice demands a renunciation of self-sufficiency and a submission of the self to the judgment and criticism of the Other. As a critique of freedom, justice provides a way out of the narrow self-centeredness and subjectivism into which an unquestioned freedom readily sinks. But to submit freedom to the censorship of the Other is not to limit it; to question it is to justify it.<sup>37</sup> If the self and the Other do not question each other's freedom, if one simply accepts blindly what the other says or does, then the relationship ends up in a slavish adoration of another being.

Levinas sums up the preceding themes we have discussed in the following passage:

An order common to the interlocutors is established by the positive act of the one giving his world, his possession, to the other, or by the positive act of the one justifying himself in his freedom before the other, that is, by apology.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

Just as one holds his world as a gift to the Other, so does the Other hold his world as a gift to the self. There can really be no interhuman relationship without mutual gift-giving even if at times one has to offer only his attentive and intelligent silence. Language, which ". . . puts in common a world hitherto mine,"<sup>39</sup> is precisely the disclosure of one's uniqueness and the revelation of the Other's otherness. Hence, language accomplishes a pluralistic relation wherein beings do not lose their identity and are not reabsorbed into each other while being in relation.

If the Other must be recognized as "other", then he must reveal himself on his own terms and must be taken for what he is. One must not attempt to force him or to trap him into revealing something, for a gift of self to be truly a gift must be given freely. To approach someone stealthily would be, to Levinas' mind, a kind of "burglary" whereby the Other "is surprised in his intimacy."<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the encounter in conversation, the self cannot really reach the Other. It is only through language that one somehow gains entrance into the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-7.

Other's world and gradually pierces through the strangeness and mystery that envelop him. "The knowledge that absorbs the Other," Levinas says, "is forthwith situated within the discourse I address to him. Speaking . . . solicits the Other. Speech cuts across vision."<sup>41</sup>

But is there really no other access to the Other's interiority aside from language? Levinas himself asks:

But is not interiority manifested on the outside by works? Do not works succeed in breaking through the crust of separation? Do not actions, gestures, manners, objects utilized and fabricated recount their author?<sup>42</sup>

It is quite possible to know the Other through his works because to a certain extent one's works bear the stamp of one's interiority. But through his works, the Other is poorly and inadequately heard. "If his works deliver signs, they have to be deciphered without his assistance."<sup>43</sup> There is therefore plenty of room for misinterpretation. One can read into a work what is not actually there or fail to grasp correctly the message contained there.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 175-6.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

The self may also know the Other by keenly observing the latter's expression. But again there is a possibility for misinterpretation. The Other may mean by an expression something other than that for which we take it. In fact, much of the misunderstanding, the confusion and the conflict that so often pervade the person-to-person relationship arise from this failure to read correctly somebody's expression. Too often, encounters end up in blank walls because one misunderstands the Other. This is a failure which may be lessened if one approaches another in open and honest conversation. For in language, the subject speaks for himself and is present to attest to the truth of his expression. Speech is "an ever renewed promise to clarify what was obscure in the utterance."<sup>44</sup> Even if there is a possibility that one would tell a lie, there is also an opportunity for verification and clarification. As Levinas says:

To manifest oneself in attending to one's own manifestation is to invoke the interlocutor and to expose oneself to his response and his questioning.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

Even as the self penetrates gradually into the Other's world, he realizes the impossibility of knowing the Other exhaustively. Every meeting with the Other brings with it an element of novelty and places him in a new light. The Other's revelation is a perpetual unfolding, sometimes displacing whatever idea or image one has of him. As Levinas incessantly stresses, the being of the Other exceeds any conceptual knowledge one can have of him, for his being is inexhaustible, that is, infinite.<sup>46</sup>

But to enter into a relation with the Other whose being transcends his successive revelations and consequently cannot be fully contained in thought is to have the idea of infinity. Thus, "the idea of infinity is produced in the opposition of conversation, in sociality."<sup>47</sup> This, Levinas thinks, is the primordial teaching of justice as a mode of relationship with the Other. The Other is not only a master to whom one must render service; he is likewise a teacher. The Other can teach the self a lot of things which the latter would not learn if he remains in the prison of his own subjectivity.

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<sup>46</sup>See pp. 27ff. of this paper.

<sup>47</sup>Totality and Infinity, p. 197.

In opening his being to desire, the subject emerges from a life of egoism to one of generosity, from power to justice, from self-sufficiency to docility. In opening his world to the Other and transcending the narrow confines of his home, the self enriches his world and broadens his own horizon. In transcending his finite reality he opens up himself to infinity. The things in the world satisfy the needs of the subject but it is only the Other who brings him fulfillment of his being as desire. Levinas writes that:

When I seek my final reality, I find that my existence as a "thing in itself" begins with the presence in me of the idea of infinity. But this relation already consists in serving the Other.<sup>48</sup>

And he points out further that:

As long as the existence of man remains interiority it remains phenomenal. The language by which a being exists for another is his unique possibility to exist with an existence that is more than his interiority. . . .<sup>49</sup>

#### Authenticity as a Demand for Justice

To be authentic is to be true to oneself. If the subject's being is desire and transcendence, then to be truly himself he must exist as a response to what

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-9.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

is beyond himself, that is, he must welcome the appeal of infinity.

But the subject can remain in a spirit of complacency and self-sufficiency in the face of the call of infinity and refuse to welcome the appeal. That he can possibly ignore this appeal shows that the subject can exist in an unauthentic way. The self can lock himself up in his own interiority in total forgetfulness of the Other, and like the mythical Gyges, exist non-recognized, isolated and separated from the Other.<sup>50</sup>

To quote Levinas:

. . . the separated being can close itself up in its egoism, that is, in the very accomplishment of its isolation. And this possibility of forgetting the transcendence of the Other-- of banishing with impunity all hospitality (that is, all language) from one's home, banishing the transcendental relation that alone permits the I to shut itself up in itself--evinces the absolute truth, the radicalism, of separation. . . . The relation with infinity remains another possibility of the being recollected in its dwelling. The possibility for the home to open to the Other is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and windows. . . . Gyges' ring symbolizes separation. . . . Gyges is the very condition of man, the possibility of injustice and radical egoism.<sup>51</sup>

Far too many people are like Gyges. They are totally lost in a preoccupation with their own being

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 51; See Plato's Republic, II, 359ff. for an account of the myth of Gyges.

<sup>51</sup>Totality and Infinity, pp. 172-3.



that they never step out of their limited world. Instead of extending a welcoming approach, they approach the Other with feelings of reserve, mistrust or calculation. Instead of immediately bridging the insularity of their lives, they spontaneously build walls that preclude any genuine meeting. Instead of answering to the call to openness, they recoil into their well-guarded home. Such an attitude speaks of an inner lack of availability and an inhospitality of the heart.

But, Levinas asks, "Why do shivers run through me when I pass indifferently beneath the gaze of the Other?"<sup>52</sup> The answer to this is not difficult to find. To ignore the Other, not to hearken to his invitation, to refuse to listen to his call or to be deaf to his appeal, is to stifle one's being as desire. It is a stubborn insistence to persist in the narrow horizon of one's limited world; it is a failure to fulfill man's potentialities for transcendence. Johann has made a similar observation:

[Man has a] passion for security. It is truly a frightening thing to be homeless, to have no fixed place to lay one's head, no familiar and cozy corner to which one can always retire. It is not surprising that man should prefer to settle down and fortify himself against the future than to be always venturing into the unknown. The

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<sup>52</sup>"On the Trail of the Other," p. 39.

only difficulty is that settling down means settling for the less than fully human. It means betraying man's native vocation, which is always to be a pilgrim. It means stifling the call of Transcendence which continually comes to man wherever he is and bids him move on into a strange country.<sup>53</sup>

Whatever be the reason for closing one's life to the Other, for maintaining what Levinas calls the phenomenal life of separation, such a posture, in the light of the subject's inherent drive towards transcendence, is an injustice not only to the Other but also to the self.

To recapitulate, Levinas' point is that the subject has a capacity for egoism as well as for justice. But if he is to rise to authenticity, he must give expression to his being as desire and transcendence. This means existing as an appeal and a response to the Other. This demands an openness to the Other in the face-to-face in conversation which Levinas describes as justice. The essential thing in this relationship that is marked by justice is the concern for the being of the Other. And this concern manifests itself in welcoming the Other in truth. The conversation which is the basis of the just relation consists in telling the Other the truth as it is given to the self in his his experience and reflection.

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<sup>53</sup>Robert Johann, Building the Human (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 127.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Our study had for its aim the systematic presentation of Levinas' theory of intersubjectivity. But an insight into intersubjectivity is inseparable from an insight into the subject. We have approached our goal, then, via Levinas' notion of subjectivity.

We have shown that for Levinas, the subject is a unity of need and desire. In the development of his inner life, the subject responds to needs as well as to desires. As defined by need, the subject is prone to an egoistic and totalitarian approach towards things that are need-satisfying. Enjoyment and possession are the distinguishing features of the intentionality of need.

Inclined as he is to an egoistic and totalitarian approach towards things, the subject has the tendency to treat another subject also as an object of enjoyment and possession. This gives rise to a mode of intersubjectivity that is marked by violence and power over another.

But as defined by desire, the subject exists as openness to the Other and as transcendence of egoism towards goodness and generosity. Desire is the ground

for the possibility of a mode of sociality that Levinas describes as justice. Welcome of the Other, generosity, openness in language, and subjecting freedom to the critique of the Other constitute the modalities of the intentionality of desire.

The Dual Structure of Intersubjectivity

We find in Levinas' conception of the subject as a unity of need and desire the philosophical basis for the opposing modes of relation between subjects--one marked by egoism, and another by justice. For Levinas, then, intersubjectivity is defined neither by conflict alone nor by communion alone, for the subject has an equal capacity for justice as well as for egoism. One can exist only for himself in total unconcern and disregard of the Other, or he can renounce himself in order to be nothing but total openness and availability to the Other. Man can relate himself to the other man in either way but he realizes himself authentically when he surpasses his egoistic and totalitarian tendencies and assumes a life of goodness and generosity.

It is to Levinas' credit to have given a true picture of the human being in his existential reality in this recognition of the opposing tendencies in man and consequently of the opposing modes of the person-

to-person relationship. Levinas' vision of the dual structure of the intersubjective relation is an antidote to the lopsided view of some thinkers who find either in conflict or in communion the only mode of interpersonal relation.

### The Primacy of Justice

While recognizing the dual structure of intersubjectivity, Levinas gives primacy to the relation of justice. This, we think, is justifiable not only because of the self's inherent capacity for transcendence but also because of the transcending presence of the Other whose infinity--his irreducibility to one's thought and possession--checks the egoistic and totalitarian moves of the self.

Levinas' thought represents a critique of any philosophy of totality or egology which gives primacy to the self and fails to recognize the transcendence of the Other. In particular, his philosophy is a critique of Sartrean philosophy which finds in conflict alone the essence of intersubjectivity. To Sartre's philosophy of power and violence, we oppose Levinas' philosophy of justice. Indeed, anyone who reads Sartre will have to read Levinas, too.

In maintaining that openness to the Other and that generosity and language are the basic modalities of the authentic relation to the Other, Levinas joins the rank of such dialogal philosophers as Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber. But he adds a whole new dimension to the philosophy of these contemporary thinkers since he accounts for, in his notion of subjectivity, a life other than that of communion with the Other-- and that is, the legitimate engagement in the search for enjoyment and economy of existence.

As a whole, Levinas' thought is a contemporary tribute to man as a unique existent recognized and valued for his own identity and worth as a person. It emphasizes the individual without being individualistic for the individual exists not only for himself but also for the Other. It defends subjectivity without ending up in subjectivism for it makes room for a community of men wherein each exposes himself to the criticism of the Other. In Levinas' thought, there is no place for an ultimate relation with being conceived as an egology, totality or tyranny.

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A P P E N D I X

## APPENDIX

### The Man--Emmanuel Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas figures as one of today's French thinkers with a thorough background in existential philosophy and phenomenology as well as in the Jewish tradition. But on account of a relatively skimpy literature on him, he remains rather obscure and unknown. We think it profitable, then, to include a sketch of his life and thought in this paper.

In the following passage from his work, Difficile liberté: essai sur le judaïsme, Levinas himself outlines the main events in his life. This will give us a glimpse of Levinas' personal history.

The Hebraic Bible since my earliest childhood in Lithuania; Fouchkin and Tolstoi; the Russian revolution of 1917 experienced at the age of eleven in the Ukraine. Then, in 1923, the University of Strasbourg where Charles Blondel, Halbwachs, Pradines, Carteron, and a little later, Gueroult, were teaching. Friendship with Maurice Blanchot and, through teachers who had been teenagers during the Dreyfus affair, a vision, strange and bewildering for a newcomer, of a people who are equal to humanity and of a nation to which one can feel attached in mind and heart as strongly as through roots. Sojourn in 1928-29 at Freiburg and apprenticeship in phenomenology, begun a year later with Jean Hering. Leon Brunschvig, the Sorbonne, and the philosophical Saturday nights of an avantgarde at Gabriel Marcel's. The intellectual and anti-intellectual refinement of Jean Wahl and his generous friendship found again after a long captivity. Since 1947, regular lectures at the Philosophical College. Pedagogical service at the head of the Israelite Oriental Normal School which, for almost a hundred years, has been forming French teachers

for the elementary schools of the Universal Israelite Alliance of the Mediterranean Basin; finally, close association with a phenomenal--and ruthless--teacher of exegesis and Talmudic themes, in the daily communion with Henri Nerson.<sup>1</sup>

As a thinker, Levinas voices a strong opposition to any philosophy that apprehends totality as the ultimate structure of reality. In a totalistic philosophy, the individual existents lose their identity and are neutralized and comprehended under a common term. This, to Levinas' mind, has been the pattern of the whole of Western ontology. Bouchaert sums up Levinas' critique of Western ontology in the following passage:

. . . Western philosophy is generally an ontology, a grasping of reality which implies at the same time a reduction of the "Other to the Self." The thinking subject collects all phenomena in their unity and distinction on a horizon. It reduces the multiplicity of the existents to a common ground that bears everything: history, logos, matter, the highest existent, being itself. Since this totality is centered in the thinking subject, Levinas calls it at times the Self, and he speaks of Western philosophy both as a philosophy of totality and as a philosophy of the Self.<sup>2</sup>

Against any philosophy of totality which, as other-reducing, is essentially a philosophy of egology, Levinas proposes a philosophy of pluralism whereby the

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<sup>1</sup>Levinas, "Signature," Philosophy Today, X (Spring, 1966), pp. 31-2.

<sup>2</sup>Luk Bouchaert, "Ontology and Ethics: Reflections on Levinas' Critique of Heidegger," International Philosophical Quarterly, X (Summer, 1970), p. 403.

uniqueness of existents is recognized. In a pluralistic conception, the Other is recognized as irreducible by the Self. And this irreducibility of the Other characterizes him as infinite.

Levinas' critique of totality, then, is premised on the idea that the human being is infinite. But the infinity of man dawns on the self in and through his relation to the Other. Thus, Levinas launches his critique of the totalistic philosophy from an intersubjective or ethical base. Levinas asserts that his philosophy is a "defense of subjectivity apprehended not at the level of its egoist protestation nor in its anguish before death but as founded in the idea of infinity,"<sup>3</sup> which is produced in the peaceful encounter with the Other.

### The Problem

This study is not a critique of Levinas' philosophy. Our task here is not to validate Levinas' claim that the whole of Western ontology is a philosophy of totality, nor to justify his attack on Heidegger's thought as the epitome of Western ontology.<sup>4</sup> Our concern is rather directed to a study of the dimension

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<sup>3</sup>Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Bouchaert, op. cit.

of intersubjectivity in Levinas' thought and to bring to the fore a mode of relationship wherein the interiority of the self and the exteriority of the Other are not undermined.

Our goal, then, is the systematic exposition of Levinas' theory of intersubjectivity. Specifically, we aim at showing that within the context of Levinas' thought there can be a mode of interpersonal relation which does no violence on the person's unique existence. First, we disclose the philosophical basis for such a relationship and then, move on to explicitate its fundamental structure.

#### The Method of Study

Since the thesis is primarily expository in character, the analytic method is used predominantly in this study. For its data, this study relies much on Levinas' single though representative work, Totality and Infinity. The work is thoroughly read in order to arrive at a sympathetic understanding and a faithful interpretation of Levinas' thought. We likewise subject it to a careful analysis in order to gain insights pertinent to the study. We cite the ideas of other thinkers insofar as we think they clarify what Levinas is trying to say or confirm some of his insights.

The Organization of the Thesis

In order to achieve the goal of the study, we have organized the materials in the following manner:

Chapter I gives a brief introduction to the study.

Chapter II discusses the emergence of subjectivity in enjoyment and defines the egoistic approach to the things in the world.

Chapter III discusses the attempt of the self at an egoistic approach to the other subject and his realization of the resistance that the Other offers to this egoistic move.

Chapter IV describes justice as the genuine way of relating oneself to the Other.

Chapter V sums up the main points of the thesis and points out Levinas' contribution towards a philosophy of intersubjectivity.

Review of Related Literature

We are aware of only two works which treat briefly of the idea of intersubjectivity in Levinas' thought. In the article, "Ego-Psychology and the Meeting Face-to-Face in Psychotherapy,"<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Beets

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<sup>5</sup>See N. Beets, "Ego-Psychology and the Meeting Face-to-Face in Psychotherapy," Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, VII (Spring, 1967), pp. 72ff.

includes a short presentation of Levinas' idea of the face-to-face encounter and its possible value to psychotherapy. In another article, "Totality and Infinity: Hebraism and Hellenism--The Experiential Ontology of Emmanuel Levinas,"<sup>6</sup> Rudolph Gerber draws up the main themes, one of which is the self-other relation, in Levinas' work, Totality and Infinity. In these articles, however, the theme of intersubjectivity in Levinas' thought was only summarily discussed. We hope to have dealt at length with the same theme in this study and filled the need for a comprehensive exposition of a philosophy of intersubjectivity which, as John Wild suggests, comes "close to life."<sup>7</sup>

If apart from a difference in the expression used, Levinas' insights into the intersubjective relation agree with those of some other thinkers, this should not be mistaken for lack of originality on Levinas' part, but a further confirmation of the wisdom that truth is one although the paths that lead to it are as diverse as the minds that hopefully strive to reach it.

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<sup>6</sup>Gerber, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>John Wild, "Introduction," Totality and Infinity, p. 20.



As a final word, we would like to stress that we make no claim of having uncovered exhaustively in this study Levinas' insights into the person-to-person relationship. To claim otherwise would be to run counter to the very spirit of Levinas' philosophy, for it is precisely one of his theses that man is infinite. Hence, it is impossible to capture the infinity of his thought. In line with the spirit of Levinas' philosophy, therefore, we must view this thesis as an open-ended study subject to future re-consideration.

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