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The ethical dimension of the face in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

البعد الاتيقي للوجه في فلسفة إيمانويل ليفيناس

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Abstract:

Due to the advancements achieved by philosophical thought in contemporary Western philosophy, a decisive bridge has been formed for the emergence of a new project by the Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. This project aims to critique modern rationality in all its conceptions and domains, which are based on the ontology and centrality of the self, an orientation that marginalized the Other. Instead, Levinas proposes a new vision based on an ethical ethics that manifests through the sacred revelation of the human face of the Other. This vision is grounded in Levinasian responsibility, which the self bears toward the face of the Other who calls upon it not to reduce, kill, or abuse him. The ethics of the face, according to Levinas, founds a morality of alterity, one that liberates human beings from conflict and war, hatred and resentment, and redirects them toward empathy, sacrifice, hospitality, and respect for the Other. The ultimate goal is to realize this vision in the everyday human reality, in order to achieve lasting peace and shared coexistence in a world governed by love, kindness, and harmony.
Keywords: Self ; Ego ; Other ; Face ; Ethics ; Responsibility; Sacrifice.

الملخص:

بفعل التطور الذي حققه الفكر الفلسفي في الفلسفة الغربية المعاصرة،يعتبر الجسر الحاسم لظهور مشروع جديد لدى الفيلسوف الليتواني إيمانويل ليفيناس، هذه المشروع يهدف من خلاله إلى نقد العقلانية الحديثة بكل تصوراتها ومجالاتها القائمة على أنطولوجيا الذات ومركزيتها، التي همشت الآخر إلى تصور وبناء جديد قائم على اتيقا أخلاقية وهي التجلي المقدس للوجه الإنسانوي الآخر، المبني على المسؤولية اللفيناسية التي تلتزم بها الذات نحو وجه الغير الذي يناديها بعدم اختزاله وتحريم قتله وتعنيفه، باعتبار أن اتيقا الوجه هي التي تؤسس إلى أخلاق الغيرية التي تحرر الإنسان من الصراع والحروب، ومن الكراهية والحقد إلى التعاطف والتضحية من أجله وضيافته واحترامه، ومحاولة تحقيق ذلك على الواقع اليومي الإنساني، بهدف تحقيق السلام الدائم والعيش المشترك في عالم تسوده المحبة والطيبة والسلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذات- الأنا- الآخر- الوجه- الاتيقا- المسؤولية- التضحية.

1. INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of self-foundation and its crystallization in the modern era represented a decisive turning point in the history of Western thought, beginning with Cartesian philosophy, passing through Kantian philosophy, and culminating in the Hegelian stage. These philosophical systems elevated the value of the human ego, granting it a central and self-enclosed position in the universe at the expense of the Other, whom they reduced, dominated, and erased, thereby denying their human personality that defines their identity in existence. This provoked the intervention of several philosophers who sought to reconsider and critique this rationality centered on the glorification of the ego and the marginalization of the Other. Among them is the Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who shifted away from the ontological interpretation grounded solely in self-being, toward a new project founded on ethical ethics (éthique) based on the acceptance and hospitality of the Other. This is articulated through the face, which determines the mode of relation between the ego and the Other, within the framework of a moral obligation rooted in ethical responsibility, one that brings the self closer to the Other and embraces them. Levinas's philosophy thus emerges as a reaction against preceding philosophies and schools of thought, by establishing a new project: a primary ethical philosophy grounded in the ethics of the face between the self and the Other.

Hence, we pose the following problematic question: How did Emmanuel Levinas conceive his project based on the ethics of the face between the self and the Other?

First – Conceptual Clarification:

The Concept of the Face:

The term "face" is considered the distinctive concept in Levinas's philosophy, as described by **Alphonso Lingis**, who refers to it in the introduction to Collected Philosophical Papers by Emmanuel Levinas. **Lingis** states that the concept of the face constitutes the central moment in Levinas's phenomenology. Levinas starts from a phenomenological discourse that places the face at the center, granting true meaning to existence. The face defines the identity and impression of the self and conveys deep meanings that words fail to express. It is through this that the ethical relationship between the essence of the self and its connection with others is established. For Levinas, the face is not to be understood as a mere external form. It is not a superficial phenomenological analysis of appearance, besides such a reduction would turn the face into an object of knowledge and thus something containable or graspable, which Levinas rejects.

The face, rather, is that which cannot be reduced; it points to the Other as the genuine expression of the otherness of the Other. For, according to Levinas, the ethics of the face cannot be founded by isolating or reducing the Other but through acceptance, coexistence, and distancing the self from its egocentrism. (Mahmoud Khalifa, 2021, p. 455) The face represents a living, ever-present reality that resists reduction and always remains open to perception and

contemplation

3. Second Subtitle

The Concept of the Ego (the Self):

Levinas establishes the concept of being as a being-in-relation with the Other (L'autrui), based on the idea that all that characterizes human existence is only fulfilled when there is a kind of invasion or interruption of the universal by the Other. The Other is not simply an object like other objects in the universal; rather, it is that which escapes all expression. Moreover, it is not merely another or an opposite of me, the presence of the Other in the universal disrupts my comfort and self-indulgent egocentrism. (Hamdouni) According to Levinas, the ego does not encompass only itself; it necessarily extends toward the Other. When we think, we do not think solely of ourselves, in the very act of thinking, we are also thinking of the Other who constitutes an essential part in the formation of our human identity. Thus, the relationship between the ego and the proximate Other begins fundamentally from a space of dialogue and reciprocity, wherein the Other is recognized as a subject of shared value.

The Concept of the Other:

The Other (autrui), as we know is the starting point and central subject of a philosophy that can rightly be called the science of the Other. For, the classic scholastic formulation "from the self to the Other through the self" may be reversed into "from the Other to the self through the selfhood of the Other." This reversal marks a slow but deliberate philosophical shift, where the presence of a third party becomes the axis and foundational point of Levinasian thought. This third party is neither solely the self nor merely the Other, but rather both, the non-self and the selfhood of the Other together. For Levinas, philosophical reflection is grounded in the self's reception of the Other, who constitutes the very essence of existence. Yet this existence is not ontological, but ethical, rooted in a responsibility that defines the nature of the ethical relationship with the Other, a relationship of human hospitality. Furthermore, Levinas's philosophy of the Other is what liberated this concept from the epistemological dilemma that plagued earlier thinkers, he also criticizes his predecessors including Husserl for reducing the Other to a mere object of consciousness, thereby failing to affirm the Other's absolute alterity. Over and above that, Levinas thinks that the Other in the most radical sense that exceeds "me", and exceeds any conceptual totality in which "I may" attempt to contain it (Tahir, p. 6). It is precisely in this exceeding that the Other provokes the fundamental question of ethics. Thus, the primacy of the Other becomes the foundation for the precedence of ethics over ontology. In addition, Levinas sought to move beyond both ontological and epistemological traditions that centered the self and reduced the Other (Tadhundarsh, p. 36). Besides, he proposed a new ethical philosophy grounded in openness toward the Other and not merely recognizing their existence, but welcoming them through the human face, which becomes the medium of their irreducible presence.

The Sacred Manifestation of the Face in Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophy:

If the face represents the essential starting point for building every humanistic relationship between the self and the Other, within a moral and human principle that calls upon the ego to accept the Other, then can this principle

be truly seen as embodied in Levinas's philosophy? As Levinas asserts, "The face is the imprint of the personality is what distinguishes its uniqueness and particularity, its features and expressions. Moreover, It embodies the reality of the human being. Furthermore, There are no public, interchangeable faces, except when they are masks such as masks of actors on a stage." (Baghiani, 2020, p. 122) For, the face carries expressions that convey the deepest emotional states, rendering it unique and irreplaceable. It is the foundation of all communication, and Levinas sees the face as the basis of all discourse, and it is from it that every ethical relationship between the self and the Other is established. He writes, "We interpret it because every interpretation begins from it." The meaning of the face, therefore, unfolds in a dual movement that may initially seem contradictory, and also represents both resistance and invitation. Hence, this means that the ethical relationship to which the face calls me is inseparable from a resistance to other forms of relations, ones which ethically speaking are deficient because they are based on power and domination, and the face grants presence to the Other and compels the self to accept the Other in all their human traits, without reducing or violating them, offering instead a human and ethical interpretation (Mabrouk, 2016, pp. 29, 30). As he explains, "The face is the way the Other presents himself, and it signals the priority of being-for-the-Other over being, Its externality does not call for possession or control, nor can it be reduced." (Levinas, Time and the Other, 2014, p. 20)Thus, the self must perceive the Other's face in its nakedness, poverty, and vulnerability, and respond through an openness grounded in shared human openness. Speaking about Thought, when attentive to the face, or moved by it is directed toward an irreducible difference, It is not a "thought of" the Other, but a "thought for" the Other, an ethical attentiveness that breaks with the spirit of indifference or equality detached from care. Besides, it is not defined by the presence of two eyes, a nose, a forehead, or color, but extends beyond form to infinite meanings of identity, It attempts to uncover the hidden essence of the Other, analyzing its depth and significance (Levinas, p. 9). **Levinas** insists: "The face is the one who speaks and through whom dialogue and speech begin. Its utterance is 'Thou shalt not kill', a command as if issued by a higher being." He describes the call of the face as one that imposes a demand for service, as if the self becomes indebted to the Other upon encountering them (Ilham Qarni, 2023, p. 294), and the relationship between the self's face and the face of the Other determines the nature of their dual relationship. Through communication and dialogue, the self begins to understand the Other and grasp their intention, and this can only be achieved through a face-to-face encounter. "The nakedness of the face is the uprooting from the context of the world, a world full of meanings and functions. The face here is, in the strictest sense, that which produces the original event." (Levinas, p. 09)Levinas calls for an uncovering of the hidden meanings behind the Other's face, it is not an image or a form but rather something far deeper, a reality that must not be killed or reduced. "The nakedness of the face," he writes, "is a stripping away, a lack of cultural ornamentation, not shaped by aesthetic norms, and The face enters our world from a strange and unfamiliar dimension, a melted, formless

matter. It is the very name of radical strangeness." (Lévinas, p. 52)Levinas rejects any reading of the face that limits it to its external features, he seeks instead to delve into its inner depths, which cannot be reduced or fully grasped. "The face is inviolable. These two eyes, completely unprotected, are the most vulnerable parts of the body," (Butler, 2014, p. 170)he writes. Moreover, he urges us not to violate the face of the Other for it is not merely appearance, but a moral and human source that evokes respect, responsibility, and the sanctity of their irreducible existence. In encountering the Other, we are faced with something that can never be reduced, not merely an image of difference, but an embodiment of humanity itself and what lies beyond the visible face, for Levinas is not simply what is revealed through sight, but rather what is discovered phenomenologically through this encounter. If language is the medium through which humans speak, the face is the most truthful language, the most expressive and responsive (Helmy, 2022, p. 920). The face thus holds moral significance, it determines the starting point of every human discourse between the self and the Other, through a structure of language that fosters openness and proximity. Levinas ultimately affirms: "My relationship with God begins with the Other, as a moral obligation that emerges from the awareness of the self, a response to a divine command inscribed on the face of the Other or perhaps out of fear of God Himself." (Helmy, 2022, p. 925)The divine becomes manifest in the face-to-face encounter, transforming the recognition of the Other into a sacred call that the self is ethically bound to heed.

Levinasian Responsibility:

Levinas grounds his ethical project on a new paradigm based on Levinasian responsibility, which calls upon the self to renounce its self-centeredness, merge with the Other, and fully commit to a moral and humanistic obligation. But how did Levinas embody this notion of ethical responsibility between the self and the Other? Levinas states: "My responsibility always exceeds the responsibility of the Other, I do not expect anything in return, for the moment I do, I lose all morality. Morality lies precisely in this non-expectation of reciprocity. This infinite responsibility toward the Other places the self in a state of recognition." (El-Din, 2014, p. 122)The bond that ties the self to the Other is not one of exchange or reciprocity, but rather a pure ethical responsibility that arises from a benevolent self open to receiving and welcoming the Other. The responsibility of the ego is not confined to any specific task or duty; rather, it extends toward responding to the suffering of the Other and attempting to find solutions for them. Levinas writes: "The self is, at its core, for the Other before it is for itself whether by choice or by obligation. In Otherwise than Being, Levinas explores the uniquely human capacity of the self, which is first and foremost marked by responsibility." (Marcus, 2008, p. 42)This ethical responsibility aims at approaching the Other with love, peace, and moral respect. As he puts it, "The human being is responsible for the Other. I am not in a relationship imposed by society alone, nor am I simply in a relationship of respect and acceptance, I am responsible in my relation to the Other." (Mahmoud Khalifa, 2021, p. 456) In Levinas's view, responsibility is the key to understanding the human Other, and not merely an obligation of

the self toward the Other but it is a foundational element of human existence itself. Besides, the responsibility for the Other precedes even the self's responsibility for itselfit is an absolute and infinite concept. He writes: “To suffer with the Other appears, at first, as the opposite of being burdened with responsibility but in fact it is the very voice of the Other that imposes this responsibility.” (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 377)The existence of the Other emerges from an ethical datum, revealed in the self’s immersion into their reality and their suffering. What gives existence its true meaning is this responsibility toward the Other. For Levinas, once the face of the Other is revealed, it cannot be ignored, reduced, or marginalized. It must be ethically and humanly accepted. The face of the Other, when revealed, awakens a human imperative within us a moral necessity to accept, welcome, and assume responsibility without awaiting compensation. He writes: "To be (I) means being unable to escape responsibility... Not that this responsibility strips the self of its identity or autonomy, rather it affirms its very unity. No one else can answer in my place." (Verzo, 2021, p. 514)Since the face of the Other calls upon the self and commands it, the self is obligated to respond and to become responsible for the life of the Other. Levinas views responsibility as a moral relationship carried out by the self for the sake of the Other. What grants ethical depth and meaning to human existence is precisely this responsibility toward the Other person. It is this responsibility that bestows dignity, value, and moral grandeur upon human life. Thus, when the Other reveals their face, they are not merely presenting their image but they are calling out to my responsibility. And it is in that very moment, in responding to that call, that the self defines itself in relation to the Other (Verzo, 2021, p. 513). Levinas conceives of responsibility as an ethical imperative the self must fulfill bearing the suffering and pain of the Other, without expectation or condition. Hence, Levinasian responsibility is therefore a fundamental structure of the self’s very existence, one that directs it away from egocentrism and toward openness, coexistence, and the shared experience of human life.

Sacrifice for the Other:

Levinas sought to construct a new ethical paradigm for the relationship between the self and the Other, a relationship that transcends ontological thinking, which centered the ego upon itself, toward a moral dimension rooted in ethical openness, acceptance of the Other, and sacrifice for their sake to ensure their continued existence. What is Levinas’s vision of the self–Other relationship as grounded in human sacrifice?

Levinas challenges the traditional philosophical view of war and peace as opposing moments within a closed system. He writes: “Peace is niether the end of wars, nor the reconciliation of enemies after separation, but rather the unity of multiplicity. In war, there is a re-alignment between being and itself; there is no victory or defeat, but a productive relationship in an infinite time.” (Bakay, 2012, p. 312)Thus, Levinas calls for the abandonment of violence and conflict, urging instead the merging of the human self with the Other, regardless of race or form accepting, embracing, and recognizing them with dignity. He adds: “Sacrifice does not belong to a system divided between truth and falsehood. Does not the relationship with the Other, within the framework of sacrifice, where the death of the Other occupies the

concern of human existence even before the self's own death lead us beyond ontology or even pre-ontology, into a space of responsibility for the Other?" (Levinas, 2003, p. 71)In this vision, Levinas proposes a human "I" that is not defined by an essentialist identity or by the subjectivity of being, but rather a self chosen to respond to the nearness of the Other, a self constituted in its willingness to give itself up for the Other. Levinas devotes significant space in his philosophy to a reflective and distinctive treatment of the ethics of relating to the Other, he aims to plant the seeds of tolerance, the rejection of violence, and the condemnation of war particularly those that destroy both the land and humanity, he also seeks to replace the logic of violence and domination with a moral principle based on hospitality, forgiveness, and the prohibition of killing, committing the self to protect the Other from all harm both internal and external. He poses the question: "Is there a sacrifice greater than replacing the death of the Other with the death of the self?" In short, the self is hostage to the Other, sacrificing itself on their behalf. Levinas builds his ethical philosophy upon a relational dynamic of friendship, love, and human generosity, imbued with goodness and kindness. His philosophy resonates with Jewish ethical traditions that oppose totalitarianism and egocentricity. Hence, he takes a firm stance against war and injustice, championing peace and justice instead (Bakay M. , p. 280). Influenced by his Jewish background, Levinas envisions ethics as openness and sacrifice for the Other, rejecting all ideologies rooted in war and domination. Furthermore, he firmly believes that the human being bears profound responsibilities toward the Other responsibilities that begin with the preservation of their life and dignity and culminate in the prohibition of their harm. He emphasizes that the command "Thou shalt not kill" is not merely a moral prohibition, but a foundational statement for the very emergence of the human condition (Bakay M. , p. 290). It is an alert state, a perpetual ethical vigilance against any violent action that could destroy the Other. Levinas ultimately calls upon the ego to renounce its centrality and move toward the Other, whether close, distant, or intimately near with a sense of unconditional responsibility, expecting nothing in return. This responsibility is ethical and human, grounded in love, respect, and sacrifice for the sake of preserving the Other's dignity and sanctifying their existence.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alterity and the Everyday:

In light of the ethical and biotechnological transformations shaping today's world, several philosophical issues emerge in the contemporary era chief among them is the question of alterity, and the extent to which it can be realized within everyday human reality. This opens a space for genuine encounters between the self and the Other through a horizon of ethical openness and reciprocal recognition. Levinasian thought invites us to ask: To what extent is alterity connected to the fabric of daily life? "Philosophy of the everyday," as some thinkers affirm, "is a philosophy of the human being; it rests on respect for human life in its diversity, the richness of its cultural expressions, its cognitive manifestations, and emotional expressions. simultaneously, it directs all of this toward grounding the human in their humanity." An everyday philosophy that borrows from ontology the idea of the unity of existence, and

from phenomenology the idea of unified meaning, offers an effective framework for approaching this domain. While preserving the necessity of diversity as an existential property of the everyday, it affirms the imperative of living together based on freedom and human dignity (Al-Tariki, 2009, p. 81). Thus, the philosophy of the everyday has a significant impact on the human being it calls for a renewed ethical attention to the human, a reverence for their existence, a respect for their sacredness and freedom. It urges the merging of the self and the Other in shared lived experience, abandoning war and conflict in favor of compassion and human solidarity for the sake of survival. “In this way,” writes one commentator, “life is constructed on the principle of loving the Other, who shares existence with us. Living for others becomes a moral duty—one that enables the ethical development of human existence and every self must, therefore, submit to the logic of difference and diversity.” (Miloud, 2010, 2011, p. 149)Contemporary philosophical thought has replaced the instrumental reason focused on self-centered subjectivity with a communicative reason grounded in openness, diversity, participation, and the revalorization of the Other. This includes embracing the principle of coexistence and recognizing the Other, for the self cannot inhabit the world alone. Its salvation lies in the idea of living together. A powerful example here is the concept of hospitality, which encompasses a rich semantic field friendship, estrangement, travel, hosting, and the desire for coexistence all rooted in the right to be acknowledged as Other. Levinas insists on the need for openness to the Other, coexistence, hospitality, and full acceptance of their presence as an indispensable being in a world that demands communal living to preserve life and its sacredness. He writes: "Ethics if we dare say it this way is existence and its meaning. If understood seriously as something other than mere morality, ethics is the crossing of humanity itself within the self; it is the gaze of the self upon the Other in their alterity." (Miloud, 2010, 2011, p. 149)In this relation, the meaning of being is determined, because the Other is never alone; he is always already two, by necessity. Levinas proposes that daily existence offers a platform to understand the continuous processes that shape human life. Over and above, the philosophy of the everyday becomes a way of understanding the modes and patterns of events we encounter in the world, events that shape how we manage and live our lives. From the perspective of everyday experience, the world is a shared reality between selves and Others. According to Levinas, alterity precedes existence, in that the self cannot fully define its being unless it is related to the human Other. Alterity can therefore acquire a peaceful form in which mutual relationships are grounded in rights, respect, and rationality. This defines the self–Other relation as one of affection and fellowship, what Levinas calls "living together in dignity." Under such principles, responsibility, freedom, and human respect, the concept of humanistic alterity emerges. For Levinas, the relationship between the self and the Other is primarily ethical, even before being political. It is a cultural project, rooted in the ethics of proximity rather than identity, and it is irreducible to sameness. (Levinas, 2003, p. 30)Levinas reminds us that alterity defines the very nature of ethical relationships, and if philosophy aims to critique the human

condition, then alterity is the signature of ethics, it marks the space where the self and Other coexist, where openness and acknowledgment replace alienation and conflict, helping us navigate the complex events of daily life.

3. CONCLUSION

Through the themes discussed, we have arrived at a set of key findings and recommendations, which can be summarized as follows:

Emmanuel Levinas proposes a new ethical-philosophical project that stands as a critique of modern rationalism in all its foundations and dimensions, especially its glorification of self-centeredness and marginalization of the Other and their identity. In contrast, Levinas presents a vision of ethical openness through which the Self turns toward the Other.

The concept of the face is the essential core of Levinasian philosophy. It serves as a unique imprint of identity and personality. The connection between the Self and the Other is only made possible through the face in its nudity and vulnerability which conveys the ethical discourse that invokes in the Self a moral obligation toward the Other. This ethical connection is mediated by language, which defines the nature of their relationship.

The human Self must respond to the sacred divine call that is embodied in the face of the Other, a face that commands the prohibition of violence, killing, and reduction. he primary source from which Levinas draws his phenomenological ethics is the ethics of the sacred face, through the encounter with the Other, the Self is morally bound to renounce its egocentric closure and take responsibility, in the imprint of the face lies the revelation of meanings of brotherhood, respect, and human kindness.

Levinas seeks to construct an ethical framework grounded in humanistic love for the Other, and in sacrifice for their sake within an ethical paradigm that restores to the Other their dignity, authority, and right to existence.

He calls for coexistence between Self and Other, especially in light of the transformations and challenges of contemporary human reality, this coexistence must rest on ethical principles that cultivate brotherhood and love of the Other.

Emmanuel Levinas's project is a constructive philosophical and ethical endeavor based on the primacy of ethical alterity a concept that redefines the relational dynamic between the Self and the Other through the face-to-face encounter. His project marks a decisive break from previous philosophical traditions that exalted the Self and denied the Other, instead urging a reevaluation and full recognition of the Other.

Although Levinas's project of a face-based ethics between Self and Other has yet to be fully realized in practical terms, there remains hope that it may find application in the future.

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