

Wojciech Majka

Living from... Levinas: on being separate

Emanuel Levinas tries to think of human identity as a self developing and gestal-tic process. The self, therefore, is not a thing but a phenomenon that establishes a narrative sequence of experience. Like Merleau-Ponty, Levinas wants to avoid the rationalist and empiricist understandings of selfhood. In other words, what his approach presumes is that identity is not so much the effect of the self's doing but rather of what is done to the self, i.e. the effect of the world that the self is initiated into. The initiation in turn happens through the self's relation with the other.

The self's identification with the other takes place through a schizophrenic process of recognition as well as differentiation when the self tries to identify with the other but, at the same time, remain separate from it. For Levinas human being is connected with separateness, for he avers that the "unicity of the I conveys separation. Separation in the strictest sense is solitude, and enjoyment – happiness or unhappiness – is isolation itself."¹ In other words, separated being happens always through the self's distentiality from the world.

The self's understanding of the other, subsequently, is a violence on the other, since in the process of understanding the other's uniqueness is generalized and appropriated to the epistemological categories of the understanding of the same. Perhaps, this is what leads Levinas to proclaim that the "I is not unique like

¹ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, (trans.) A. Lingis, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press 2007, p. 117.

the Eiffel Tower or the Mona Lisa.”² This means that understanding unveils only a partial (over-generalized) disclosure of the other, as the other side of its content is constituted by its own perceptive potential.

The idea of the other does not refer to anything that lies outside the self but only to another human self which is transcendent and always reaching out into complete alterity – the domain of metaphysics. Therefore, otherness is made possible by the face of the other that is always antecedent of the self’s own being. The face remains a mystery, as it cannot be either sensed or cognized; rather, it presents itself as an ethical *aperçu*. At the same time, the other that appears to us as a face appears as truth, since we cannot deny its call to the self, the call for acceptance. Of course, the presentation of the face happens through complete honesty, since the self can enter into relations with the other that are not honest but which are based on deception, yet in these cases the other does not really appear to us as a face, since the face is absolute truth and sincerity.

In an illuminating outline of Levinasian metaphysics, Edith Wyschogrod makes the interesting observation that the need to see things in an objective sense develops from the priority that is granted to our visual and tactile senses.³ The common mistake is that we often reduce perception to the sense of sight leaving the other senses as minor additions / modification of the sense of vision. Nevertheless, more than vision perception is based on the language through which reality is being unconcealed. Looking at the object always presupposes the background of light against which objects are represented or from the depth of which they are illuminated, i.e. the *il y a*. Light is the context where the meanings of various objects come together; in this sense light as unconcealment brings essents into being by disclosing the context in which relations between objects are possible. In a sense, the light of disclosure can be ascribed to consciousness as cognition that understands experience of the inside and the outside, i.e. the subject and the object.

The unification of the interior and the exterior happens in the sense of vision which is why Levinas thinks that vision is closely related to cognition. Vision unlike the other senses presents an immediate presence of the world, i.e. it is not as partial and fragmentary as the other senses that need each other’s presence for a clear and distinct picture of perception to emerge. Moreover, vision is direct in the sense that in seeing we do not have to think about what we are seeing, but we intuitively see an object and its contextualization. In other words, vision is the background of thinking, and it unconceals objects – that Levinas calls silhouettes – within its light, for he holds that, “[a]s silhouette and profile a thing owes its

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem, p. 21.

nature to a perspective, remains relative to a point of view; a thing's situation thus constitutes its being."⁴ In hearing, on the other hand, the different sounds must be put together for a harmonious melody to hold. In other words, the perceptions perceived by the other senses must be synthesized for meaningful perception to take place. That is why on account of the sense of vision we feel detached and raised above the surface of the world, i.e. we feel complete and independent from the world.

Levinas privileges human being by lifting it up beyond the elemental (the natural world); subjectivity itself is the effect of our enjoyment of the elemental. If a relation with the other is to be established, the I-hood of the self must be penetrated. The self, therefore, seems to determine the fate of the other. Additionally, on account of the fact that human being is privileged, it looks at the elemental as the resolution of hunger.

Whilst Heidegger based human existence on the notion of care and Merleau-Ponty on embodiment, Levinas for his part turns to ethics and the existential paradigms that exist between members of society. Additionally, I-hood for Levinas is not characterized by *ecstasis* (like for Heidegger), but it appears as a new beginning, i.e. a new event of being.

Additionally, much as Levinas follows Husserl in his understanding of the idea of consciousness, he also believes that consciousness can have a pre-cognitive variation about itself in which case it exists as pure instinct without representation. Instinctive consciousness experienced as enjoyment does not have an awareness of its own being or the being of the world. This is consciousness as instinct which we could in point of fact compare to Freud's unconsciousness that is composed out of instincts understood as thing-representations (*Dingvorstellungen*). In other words, instinctive consciousness is a form of existence that does not really know of its existence in the sense that it is incapable of representing existence to itself. For representation to occur thing-representations (*Dingvorstellungen*), as Paul Ricoeur observes, have to be changed into word-presentations (*Wortvorstellungen*).⁵ Consciousness in the Levinasian sense brackets the alterity of the world that exists beyond the scope of the self, i.e. the pre-facial world of the elemental that is the source of joy and suffering as well. In point of fact, suffering is the effect of the fact that the human self is at base the self as enjoyment; therefore, when enjoyment cannot be fulfilled suffering takes its place. Thus suffering is a privative

⁴ Ibidem, p. 140.

⁵ P. Ricoeur, "A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud", In: D. Ihde (ed.), *The Conflict of Interpretation*, London: Continuum 2004, p. 165.

mode of being. In suffering, as Levinas maintains, “life dissolves into a shadow.”⁶ The suffering of the shadow is that of ontological indifference. In other words, the shadow is an anonymous existence, i.e. an unemotional attitude to being where the self realizes the triviality of its own existence as in T. S. Eliot’s *The Hollow Men*, and it remains indifferent to its own being and the being of the world:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
*Not with a bang but a whimper.*⁷

⁶ E. Levinas, *Totality and...*, p. 112.

⁷ T. S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men”, In: D. Hunt (ed.), *The Riverside Anthology of Literature*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1988, pp. 963–964: 72–98.

The overall decadence that emanates from Eliot's poetics is brought about by the self's separation from its instinctive mode of being and its need to represent being (yet be unable to understand it). Cognition, therefore, appears as frustration. None the less, cognition adds a layer to instinctive consciousness and in itself it is brought into being by the realization of the externalized world. Thus cognitive consciousness sees the world as a phenomenon that stands outside of it; simultaneously, it allows the self to assimilate that which is external to it, i.e. the non-self.

Living instinct is changed into thought when the outside world manages to impose itself and penetrate instinctive consciousness in this way forcing it to respond to external stimulus, i.e. to a reality beyond the existence of that very consciousness. The coming together of the outside world and instinctive consciousness begins with the feeling of *thaumazein* (wonder) when consciousness directs itself to that which lies beyond its being. Wonder as a mood is the result of the feeling of freshness and puzzlement that we see in the gaze of a child; that is why thinkers like Merleau-Ponty believe a philosopher must be a "perpetual beginner."⁸ In other words, phenomenological thinking should bracket the natural understanding of the world and focus on the structures that make that thinking possible in the first place.

Instinctive consciousness that Levinas calls enjoyment lives on reality, appropriating vital energy. For Levinas eating, for example, is not just a way in which we keep ourselves alive but a way of actualizing our existential potential. The appropriation of the other that happens through the process of living from ... reality constitutes also our primordial relation to the otherness of totality. The separation of consciousness from totality and its living from... reality is experienced as joy. This leads Levinas to claim that:

Life's relation with the very conditions of its life becomes the nourishment and content of that life. Life is love of life, a relation with contents that are not my being but more dear than my being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun. Distinct from my substance but constituting it, these contents make up the worth [prix] of my life.⁹

The instinctive life of enjoyment is egoistic. In this state of being we are completely indifferent to the being of the other; our attention expires on the satisfaction of the egotistical needs. The pre-ethical world is, therefore, what we experience impersonally as need, as a source of enjoyment that we could compare

⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (trans.) C. Smith, London and New York: Routledge Classics 2008, p. XV.

⁹ E. Levinas, *Totality and...*, p. 112.

to the pleasure principle in Freud. Enjoyment also points to the fact that we are a separated form of being that lives at a distance from the world. Levinas states that the “I exists as separated in its enjoyment, that is, as happy, and it can sacrifice its pure and simple being to happiness. It *exists* in an eminent sense; it exists above being.”¹⁰ Much as we realize our distintiality from the world we, subsequently, realize our own completeness and totality. The distintiality of the world stands in for exteriority that inspires the mind with thinking, whereas the interiority of the mind makes the self appear as a totality to itself.

In eating physical distance disappears, i.e. in eating we see that the food that we eat literally becomes us. Levinas notes that:

[n]ourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me. All enjoyment is in this sense alimentation. Hunger is need, is privation in the primal sense of the word, and thus precisely living from... is not a simple becoming conscious of what fills life. These contents are lived: they feed life.¹¹

Living from... for Levinas marks the primordial quality of the being of consciousness, i.e. it precedes representation. In living from... consciousness does not only live according to the causative principle of need and satisfaction of need, but it remembers the need during moments of replenishment which is why we experience pleasure from the satisfaction of needs; i.e. we receive pleasure from remembering the need that is being satisfied.

Happiness, however, is an animalistic feeling as well as the source of temporality that in itself is the result of the satisfaction of needs. Levinas states that, “[e]njoyment is made of the memory of its thirst; it is a quenching.”¹² Thus Levinas paints a vision of the human self as a satisfied being that is at home with itself; what causes the self to suffer is the disruption of the primordial satisfaction. Without need our existence would be ataractic in the sense that it would be incapable of reacting to being.

Therefore, much as our being is determined by need, it does not make us fully human, as need only understands the world that we are rooted in as a source of replenishment. Human existence, however, is characterized by transcendence which in itself is tied closely to the experience of the other.

¹⁰ E. Levinas, *Totality and...*, p. 63.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 113.

Levinas distinguishes the idea of need from that of desire. In itself desire is to be distinguished from need by the fact that it cannot be satisfied. Wyschogrod claims that to “desire is to need without consuming”¹³ which she thinks is the essence of representation. In other words, we represent what we cannot consume and, therefore, whatever is not consumed is cognized and turned into an object of thought. Thus need is linked to – one might say – the Merleau-Pontyan kinesthetic being, whereas desire to the idea of cognition. In other words, much as need consumes the object or at least rearranges its properties, desire is purely cognitive.

For Levinas need is the foundational disposition of the detached self. Need implies that we are detached from the environment that we live on as in breathing, drinking, eating, etc. The detachment from the environment is converted into the idea of time that emerges as the consequence of the intervals separating the satisfaction of needs. Nevertheless, this only implies that the self cannot exist as a being that is completely and always satisfied. Rather, loss just as need also marks the primordial constitution of the self which, at the same time, is connected with the idea of anxiety that is tied to the self’s inability to see into its own future in order to ascertain the satisfaction not only of the self’s present needs but the future ones as well. Therefore, anxiety is a mood that is not created by the idea of death as in Heidegger but by the fear of the fact that the self’s future needs will not be satisfied. Additionally, anxiety gives birth to the idea of power, since the self tries to conquer its future by subduing the environment, as in this way it discharges itself of lack.

Generally speaking consciousness in Levinas’ thinking is to be understood as the *époche* of the body. Automatically, therefore, consciousness appears to be a detached being; in other words, at the same time, consciousness is always consciousness as time, since time is the consequence of detached being. The goal of the self’s detachment is to control time, as in controlling it the self thinks that it can master being. The experience of the elemental and of time also gives birth to the idea of freedom that is the background of the self’s being, since the self tries to control its time in a variety of different ways that emanate from its freedom. Once the self manages to subdue the elemental and create a safe world for itself – in the Freudian sense – paradoxically it also loses its freedom, since its world is not that of inanimate possibility but appropriated scheme. In other words, the self no longer looks at the elemental but at a world that is abstracted from the elemental, i.e. the self sees the structures that its embodied being is imposing on the elemental.

¹³ E. Wyschogrod, *Emanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*. New York: Fordham University Press 2000, p. 63.

Adopting a Levinasian point of view allows us to see that the body is responsible for sensual experience. At the same time, the self's detachment is at base a corporeal detachment, i.e. the detached self is a bodily self which means that the body is the seat of intentionality both as enjoyment and representation. Thus the idea of exteriority is kept in place not only through representation but living from ... as well, since eating is necessary for survival. The body as need signals the fact that there is a surplus of reality. At the same time, we must state that Levinas' approach to the idea of the body is incorporated into the Merleau-Pontyan understanding of phenomenological corporeity. Therefore, following Merleau-Ponty what must be stated is that much as we experience the biological body sensually, the phenomenological body is "a body which rises towards the world."¹⁴

Through enjoyment we manage to detach essents from the elemental, i.e. we transform the occurrent into the available. Much as the elemental is appropriated to a variety of functions, its elemental essence remains constant. In other words, naturalized objects do not disappear when they are turned into cultural ones; a tree does not disappear when it is transformed into paper. This allows us to adopt an interesting approach to the phenomena of life and death, since if life is corporeal, then corporeality is the appropriation of the elemental; in other words, life itself is nothing more than the functionalization of the elemental. At the same time, if the essence of life is to be reduced to the elemental, death itself as nothingness does not exist, since the elemental cannot stop being what it is at base. Of course, one cannot help noticing the biblical influences here that stem from the belief that human life derives from the earth, and it returns to it, i.e. the appropriated returns to the elemental. Subsequently, this thinking, of course, brings us close to the idea of the eternal return of the same.

The elemental cannot be perceived without its functional appropriating, which means that it cannot be thought about in its pure elemental form. The elemental is the background of all biological life; it is the source of the pulse of being, nevertheless, the source itself cannot be cognized, since as we have mentioned before the elemental cannot be cognized in its purity but only through appropriation. This means that the elemental is lived as feeling that constitutes the pre-representational attunement to the world. Thus feeling is the reality of the self as lived experience and not representation. What is more, the elemental is also the source of pleasure that the self obtains on account of appropriation.

In Levinas' understanding atheism precedes the affirmation or denial of God's existence; it is a mode through which the self posits its own being against the back-

¹⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. (trans.) C. Smith, London and New York: Routledge Classics 2008, p. 87.

ground of the pre-divine elemental that has the form of faceless matter. Theism for Levinas is not so much a matter of feeling but of thinking, i.e. the first state of the self is atheism and the self must be later trained to think about the infinite, i.e. God. The atheistic self assumes responsibility for the other as well as for itself through the questioning of being which automatically implies that being reaches out beyond the perceivable.

By dwelling in the world we inhabitate the elemental in the sense that we adjust it to our needs, desires and purposes. Simultaneously, habitation is related to possession that is the effect of the appropriation of the elemental; thus habitation is the black hole that sucks the elemental turning it into the available; it is the horizon of mental life, since all representations are the effect of the type of habitation that is making it possible. Habitation is also closely linked with the feminine that represents for Levinas the tranquility and intimacy of being. This is so on account of the fact that habitation points to the idea of intimacy that Levinas patriarchally associates with intimacy. Femininity allegedly pulls the self out of the structures of the *polis* and in this way it constitutes the foundation of the interiority of being that expresses itself in private, not public experience. Moreover, femininity grounds virility. Jeffrey Bloechl notes that:

Thanks to the feminine other, I am (always already) more than “sensibility” – more than enjoyment of the elements. I do not start from nothing, and need to carry on forever. It is thanks to her and not to my own efforts that I have already addressed the fear that shadows life at its most primitive, causing me to take charge of my own future, to represent the world to myself, and so to banish every uncertainty or lack of determination.¹⁵

In other words, much as man's existence is detached from the environment, woman plants man in the ground of the elemental. Man's consciousness of detachment is made up for by woman's emotive link with the elemental. Since man's detached existence is qualified by work, femininity points to idleness, the mere pleasure of being. Therefore, much as habitation serves as a shelter from the elemental, it also is the hearth of mental life. In other words, habitation is the starting point of representation and labor; it is only on account of the fact that we inhabitate that we feel the need to work and represent. Thus we live in a world that is constituted by lives happening in homes. The home is the foundation of work and representation, since on account of the fact that we work we start changing the elemental into the available, i.e. the available gains an identity for itself only on account of the fact that we inhabitate the world. Therefore, the available itself

¹⁵ J. Bloechl, *Liturgy of the Neighbor*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 2000, p. 199.

is to be understood as the effect of skill and effort. The whole world is in fact the effect of work based on skill and effort. However, our own future is really dependent not only on our work but on how this work is interpreted. At the same time, work turns us into truly historical beings.

Work suspends the elemental and exposes the available. Wyschogrod states that, “work begins when satisfaction can be delayed.”¹⁶ Work, therefore, is the pre-reflective way in which we are in the world although it is not as primordial as embodiment for Merleau-Ponty or attunement for Heidegger. Work turns the atheistic self that confronts the facelessness of the elemental into an ethical and theistic being.

Much as the elemental is appropriated through work, it is also changed by art. Art, however, does not point to the mystery of being, i.e. it does not penetrate the surface of everyday life; instead, it is a dangerous substitution for the real. Art transpires through images which stand in for objects that they represent. Thus there is a form of doubling involved here in the sense that when we are looking at a work of art, we are aware of the object that is represented as well as the image that is making it possible. Nevertheless, images are dangerous, since they are not communicative (unlike concepts). Images turn us into passive entities fully in control of their content like introverted works of art for Jung. For Levinas, therefore, art does not show the true face of reality; all that it does is reveal reality as a caricature, a distortion which is why it is not only useless but also dangerous, since it promotes “irresponsibility that charms as a lightness and grace.”¹⁷ One cannot help noticing that in this thinking Levinas comes very close to Plato who also alluded to the a-social character of art.

The detached self exists within an economy that is the effect as well as the context of human labor. Life as economy culminates in the idea of totality which is a phenomenon that really oppresses the life of individuality. Totality for Levinas is a nexus of relationships that exists between selves which in turn gives birth to the idea of the world. For Levinas as well as for Hegel spirit materializes itself in political life that finds its pronouncement in social institutions. Levinas notes that:

Objective judgment is pronounced by the very existence of rational institutions, in which the will is secured against death and against its own perfidy. It consists in the submission of the subjective will to the universal laws which reduce the will to its objective signification. In the respite that the postponement of death, or time, leaves to the will it relies on institutions.¹⁸

¹⁶ E. Wyschogrod, op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁷ E. Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow”, In: S. Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing 1989, p. 141.

¹⁸ E. Levinas, *Totality and...*, p. 242.

Nevertheless, institutions depersonalize experience, as they look at life from the an external perspective unaware and helpless in terms of the life of interiority. Thus I-hood appears as a weakness in the face of totality as well as its own death. To maintain itself alive, the I must transcend this weakness through the idea of will that is the expression of subjectivity which Levinas understands not in a quidditative sense but as an event, i.e. as the unfolding of the responsibility for the other.

In itself totality is the work of history, i.e. when something dies it is incorporated into the totality of history. History understood in the traditional way, therefore, establishes a chronology of being; nevertheless, the history of being is suspended by the being of individuality that brings with itself its own history. On the other hand, historiography “recounts the way the survivors appropriate the works of dead wills to themselves;”¹⁹ in other words, historiography is the term that Levinas uses to refer to the ends that the works of dead wills have been put to, i.e. the way in which they have been interpreted by the living wills that are lived as corporeal being. To put it in a different way, we can opine that the body is the expression of the will. Therefore, to be a body is to possess a pre-cognitive awareness of the world and of finitude.

The interiorized being of individuality is what Levinas calls psychism that in itself tries to fight off the perspective of totalization and incorporation into the so called objective history of being. The being of psychism happens through the detachment from the *il y a* and as such it is always experienced as a new beginning. Individuality penetrates the objective flow of history and through memory it questions history somewhat like Heidegger’s *Dasein*. In terms of the idea of the questioning of being, Wyschogrod makes the interesting observation that the “mode of being of the being who puts the totality into question is being as a face. That is why the Absolute is a person.”²⁰

Ethics designates a form of being beyond theory and practice. This mode of being is what we experience, for example, in prayer. Additionally, social reality as such is the result of the surplus of the other, of the fact that the other cannot be fully conceptualized. Unlike for Heidegger for whom *Dasein* is a being that questions being, ethics in the Levinasian sense puts the being of the self into question. Nevertheless, *Dasein* derives from the same, and it questions the same which is why *Dasein*’s questioning from the Levinasian point of view is not authentic, since true questioning can come or be revealed only by the other.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 228.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 108.

Wyschogrod makes the pivotal observation that the life of consciousness is a first person experience, whereas birth and death are third person experiences.²¹ In other words, much as we live for ourselves, we are born and we die for the other. Levinas in this sense is right to state that the being of the other always pre-exists the being of the self. Death – in the Levinasian sense – cannot be understood historically in the sense that we cannot – like in Christianity – think that the self can survive its own death and in a sense be elevated to a higher level of being.

Therefore, Levinas rejects Heidegger's understanding of death as the private experience of *Dasein*, an experience the possibility of which determines *Dasein*'s whole being. Instead, Levinas points to the social aspect of death, i.e. as it was mentioned above, in dying we do not die to ourselves but to the other.

Thus death appears to be a phenomenon that we experience in reference to the other. Additionally, when thinking about finitude we can adopt the view which says that life itself is the bracketing of finitude. All this boils down to the fact that the life that "still remains" is really one's life happening on the background of the anticipation of death. For Levinas death is not the end of being but the unknown, for he thinks that death "is a menace that approaches me as a mystery."²² Subsequently, death is a phenomenon that we try to conquer through fecundity.

Levinas uses the term fecundity to talk about the future that is made possible through the sexual acts which culminate in the birth of a child. Through fecundity the self manages to transcend itself and become the other; in this way fecundity allows the self to defend itself against death. Much as the self dies, its transcendence continues; nevertheless, each continuation is a new beginning thus selfhood is always an inception. The self manages to continue existing against the face of death, yet not substantially but worldly, as each new self is put into a world that has been left for it by the antecedent self; in this way the existence of selfhood is transcendence and continuity. At the same time, we must concede that Levinas manages to break with being understood as a monistic concept that is so characteristic to Parmenides and Hegel. In other words, being exists as the multiplicity of selves that die and are born and the world is, therefore, what is passed on between the different generations of selfhood.

In the Levinasian sense there is a great difference between the way in which we experience the face and other essents that basically appear to be anonymous. Much as we can appropriate the elemental and thus provide it with a meaning, we can never find the meaning to our interiorized existence that is why human being is structured around the idea of the quest for meaning, for a face. Wyschogrod

²¹ E. Wyschogrod, op. cit., 86.

²² E. Levinas, *Totality and...*, p. 235.

makes the helpful observation that, “[i]t is thus possible for Levinas to use the term “face” as nearly synonymous with such terms as “meaning”, or “teaching”, or “justice.”²³ In other words, what we learn from Wyschogrod’s interpretation is that there is an ethical depth to the understanding of the idea of the face.

The face exists beyond the sphere of sensation and cognition; it emerges as a personalized calling within the detached self; therefore, the face transcends the sensual as well as the cognitive. It is connected with tolerance, since much as we can neutralize the being of other essents by depriving them of certain qualities and furnishing them with new ones, the being of the face cannot be changed, it is static and, therefore, it must be accepted for what it is; if not, then the only other possibility is murder and Levinas very strongly affirmed that the face underscores the idea of the murder prohibition. Moreover, the face of the other brings language with itself; however, language is not an abstract net of epistemological relationships but a system of being that allows the self to respond to the call of the other.

As it was mentioned above, the face is the origin of ethics whose values fall outside of sensation and cognition. Nevertheless, values do not descend from some metaphysical order, but they are the effect of the self’s confrontation with the face of the other. In other words, values are the links between one self and another.

In conclusion we can state that the face of the other carries with itself the idea of the infinite. That is why the other’s proximity to God is greater than our own and that is why her / his position is privileged; we owe more to the other than we do to ourselves. The other is the envoy of the infinite, and we experience its being through desire, i.e. the mode of being that cannot be satisfied by cognitive and sensual being. Therefore, desire assumes the existence of absolute alterity which is what metaphysics is all about, i.e. it tries to think the absolute other.

Metaphysics as consciousness that tries to posit the infinite is always consciousness as failure, as it tries to contain that which exceeds its cognitive potential. For Levinas the idea of the infinite is placed in us, since it is inconceivable, i.e. the infinite must exist beyond the categories of consciousness. The infinite is the effect of our relation with the other who remains an entity that is exterior to the being of the self. Levinas states that the “idea of infinity, the metaphysical relation is the dawn of humanity without myths. But faith purged of myths, the monotheistic faith, itself implies monotheistic atheism.”²⁴

²³ E. Wyschogrod, op. cit., p. 106.

²⁴ E. Levinas, *Totality and...*, p. 77.

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Key Words: Living from..., Consciousness, Separation, Face, *Il y a*, Enjoyment, Need, Desire

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Happiness, however, is an animalistic feeling as well as the source of temporality that in itself is the result of the satisfaction of needs. Levinas states that, "[e]njoyment is made of the memory of its thirst; it is a quenching." Thus Levinas paints a vision of the human self as a satisfied being that is at home with itself; what causes the self to suffer is the disruption of the primordial satisfaction. Without need our existence would be ataractic in the sense that it would be incapable of reacting to being.